The Role of Nonperformance Factors on Job-Related Relocation Opportunities: A Field Study and Laboratory Experiment

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Two studies examined the role of employee gender, marital type (single-earner, dual-earner), and parental status in understanding differential access to job opportunities requiring relocation, as well as possible perceptual processes underlying these effects. A large-scale field study (Study 1) found that married women and employees in dual-earner marriages were provided fewer relocation offers than married men and those in single-earner marriages. A laboratory experiment (Study 2) extended Study 1 by examining the perceptual process by which these nonperformance factors affected relocation opportunities. Again, married women and employees in dual-earner marriages received lower recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation compared

The field study portion of this research was funded by Right Management Consultants, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. An earlier version of this research was presented at the 1997 meeting of the Southern Management Association in Atlanta, Georgia, and received the award for Outstanding Paper in the Human Resources Track. This research also received the Best Research Paper award from the Georgia Psychological Association. Thanks to Jacquelyn S. DeMatteo for her assistance with Study 1 and to Jennifer Matthews for her assistance with Study 2. Appreciation is also expressed to Charles E. Lance, Daniel R. Ilgen, and an anonymous reviewer for providing constructive feedback on the manuscript.

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to married men and single-earners, respectively. Further, decision-makers' perceptions of an applicant's willingness to relocate, family resistance to moving, and ease of adjustment to a geographic move partially mediated the relationship between these nonperformance factors and relocation opportunities. Implications for research and applied practice are discussed.

Access to job opportunities requiring relocation is an important part of employees' career development since geographic mobility often provides the chance to develop new skills, work on high-visibility projects, and obtain promotions (D.C. Feldman, 1988; Pinder & Walter, 1984). With job-related relocation representing a potentially important developmental experience, unequal access to such opportunities has been suggested as a contributing factor in gender differences in career attainment (Markham & Pleck, 1986; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). Further, recent research indicates that men and women have differential access to some types of developmental experiences. Specifically, there is some evidence that women receive fewer developmental job assignments (Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994; Van Velsor & Hughes, 1990) and have lower international (Lyness & Thompson, 1997) and domestic mobility rates (Stroh et al., 1992) than men.

Explanations for gender differences in geographic mobility often allude to two additional nonperformance factors: marital type (single-earner versus dual-earner couple status) and parental status. For instance, interpretations of lower mobility rates for women often mention that husbands' jobs are given primacy over wives' jobs or that women in dual-earner marriages are less likely to accept mobility opportunities because they have less decision-making power within the family (e.g., Deitch & Sanderson, 1987; Felmlee, 1984; Markham & Pleck, 1986; Powell & Mainiero, 1992). Similarly, since having children is often associated with career interruptions for women and moving off the “fast track” (Powell & Mainiero, 1992), parental status has also been used as an explanation for differential geographic mobility among married men and women (e.g., Felmlee, 1984; Markham & Pleck, 1986). However, we are aware of very little field research which has examined whether marital type or parental status exerts main effects on employees' mobility opportunities. This is surprising given anecdotal reports that employees in dual-earner marriages are very reluctant to relocate due to resistance from a working spouse (Hall & Hall, 1978; Linders, 1991; Ricklin, 1991; Sunseri, 1991; Trippel, 1985), which in turn could lead decision-makers to overlook them when making relocation offers. Anecdotal data also suggest that married employees with children will have a particularly difficult time with a geographic move (Flynn, 1995; Gullotta & Donohue, 1982; Herring, 1989; Stuart, 1992) and that they are less committed to advancing their careers than those without children (Morris, 1997). Thus, it seems plausible that not only women, but also members of dual-earner marriages and parents, may have unequal access to relocation opportunities due to implicit assumptions and stereotypes associated with these groups.
A large-scale field study (Study 1) and a carefully designed laboratory experiment (Study 2) were conducted to determine if married women, members of dual-earner marriages, and parents have less access to geographic mobility opportunities and if so, why such differences exist. The field study examined mobility opportunities reported by married employees, building on previous field research (e.g., Lyness & Thompson, 1997; Stroh et al., 1992) in several ways. First, in addition to employee gender, marital type and parental status were examined in the current study, as were interactions among these three variables. Second, since explanations for mobility differences often center on differences in access to relocation opportunities, we examined the number of geographic-mobility opportunities offered rather than self-report measures of the number of job-related moves accepted (Stroh et al., 1992) or archival mobility data (Lyness & Thompson, 1997).

Study 2 extended Study 1 by exploring the perceptions and implicit assumptions that decision-makers may hold based on employees' gender, marital type, and parental status, as well as how these perceptions impact relocation offers. This is important because if discrepancies in relocation offers do exist on the basis of nonperformance factors, isolating the reasons for these differences is an important step in devising strategies to rectify this inequity. Drawing from research on cognitive information processing and prototypes of the "ideal employee" (cf. J. M. Feldman, 1981; Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, & McKellin, 1993; Motowidlo, 1986), Study 2 examined three different types of perceptual biases: decision-makers' perceptions of an employee's willingness to move, beliefs that an employee will experience resistance to moving from his or her family, and perceptions regarding how easily an employee will adjust to a geographic move. Since no research to date has examined the cognitions that may be cued by gender, marital type, and parental status in the context of relocation decision making, Study 2 makes a unique contribution to the research by isolating the psychological processes that may be driving differential relocation opportunities.

STUDY 1

While very little, if any, field research has examined differential access to relocation opportunities, related research illustrates differences in geographic mobility rates that are not easily explained by rational factors such as performance differences, personal investments in training and education, or self-selection. Most notably, Stroh et al.'s (1992) ground-breaking study of the career progression of 1029 managers found that women lagged behind men in geographic mobility, even after several competing alternative explanations such as human capital differences and self-selection were ruled out. Deitch and Sanderson (1987) found a similar pattern of results; 79% of the career women in their sample had moved at least once for their spouse's career, compared to 23% of the career men, yet men and women differed very little in terms of the number of times they personally declined a "good" job opportunity because it required a move (10% of women and 14% of men). While neither study directly
tested the prediction, both studies suggest that differences in mobility rates may be due to differential access to job opportunities requiring relocation based on decision-makers' perceptions that female employees are less suitable candidates for such positions.

Two experimental studies more directly examined the role of nonperformance factors on access to relocation opportunities. Both studies used a fictitious “paper person” employee and manipulated various employee characteristics through a short memo contained in an in-basket exercise. Taylor and Lounsbury (1988) examined the effect of employee marital type and gender on offers to relocate geographically, finding no significant main effects for either variable. In contrast, LeLouran and DeCotiis (1983) found that being a member of a dual-career couple reduced the chance of being offered a job opportunity requiring relocation. Possible reasons for these discrepant results are the publication dates of the two studies and the fact that Taylor and Lounsbury examined geographic mobility in the context of a commuter marriage arrangement. In terms of parental status, we are aware of no empirical research examining this variable as it relates to relocation opportunities.

While the empirical evidence is limited and in some cases mixed, the anecdotal literature mentioned previously suggests that married women, dual-career employees, and employees with children may be viewed by decision-makers as less suitable candidates for jobs requiring relocation, and in turn they may have less access to job opportunities requiring a geographic move. Given this voluminous anecdotal evidence, empirical field-based research is needed to determine if gender, marital type, and parental status do indeed influence employees' access to mobility opportunities. To accomplish this objective, Study 1 surveyed a diverse sample of married couples who had experience relocating and were employed in a variety of functional areas, industries, employment sectors, and geographic areas of the United States and Canada. Several competing explanations for why access to relocation opportunities may covary with gender, marital type, and parental status were considered prior to interpreting main effects. This provided a strong test of the role of nonperformance factors on relocation opportunities in a highly generalizable setting.

Consistent with previous research (Lyness & Thompson, 1997; Markham & Pleck, 1986; Stroh et al., 1992) several variables that represented human capital explanations for differences in access to relocation opportunities were used as control variables in Study 1. Since human capital theory proposes that certain types of individuals (i.e., men, single-earners) may experience different career opportunities and outcomes because they have made more investments in their careers (Gould & Werbel, 1983; Stromberg & Harkess, 1978), we used education level, job type, and pay level as controls. We also controlled for age, organizational tenure, and employment sector because certain types of individuals may be older and have more tenure in the organization (e.g., men) or be clustered in certain employment sectors (e.g., dual-earner couples may be more highly represented in the public sector due to more relaxed nepotism policies; Reed & Bruce, 1993). Family power, evidenced by one's contribution to the family income, was also held constant because married women and
individuals in dual-earner marriages tend to have less family power (Heer, 1963; Stroh et al., 1992).

Finally, to help control for self-selection effects, the employee's self-reported willingness to move in the future was also included as a control variable. This was important since employees' willingness to relocate may be a proxy for motivation to advance one's career (Stroh et al., 1992), and some research exists linking willingness to relocate to gender (women less willing) (e.g., Landau, Shamir, & Arthur, 1992; Markham & Pleck, 1986), marital type (employees in dual-career marriages less willing) (e.g., Kirschenbaum, 1991), and parental status (employees with kids less willing) (e.g., Landau et al., 1992). In summary, it was proposed that:

**Hypothesis 1:** After employee education level, job type, pay level, age, organizational tenure, employment sector, percent contribution to the family's income, and expressed willingness to move are controlled for, married women will be offered fewer job-related relocation opportunities than will married men.

**Hypothesis 2:** After employee education level, job type, pay level, age, organizational tenure, employment sector, percent contribution to the family's income, and expressed willingness to move are controlled for, individuals in dual-earner marriages will be offered fewer job-related relocation opportunities than will those in single-earner marriages.

**Hypothesis 3:** After employee education level, job type, pay level, age, organizational tenure, employment sector, percent contribution to the family's income, and expressed willingness to move are controlled for, married individuals with children will be offered fewer job-related relocation opportunities than will married individuals without children.

There may also be multiplicative effects among gender, marital type, and parental status. For example, in dual-earner marriages it is common for the husband's career to have primacy over the wife's career (Markham & Pleck, 1986; Shaklee, 1989). Thus, offering a relocation opportunity to a dual-career male may not be perceived as particularly risky, whereas decision-makers may think twice before offering the same relocation opportunity to a dual-career female. Likewise, the potentially biasing effect of having children on employees' career outcomes may depend on whether the employee's spouse is also working and on the sex of the employee. For example, assumptions that women have primary child-rearing responsibilities, coupled with a working spouse, may make married female employees less attractive choices than their male counterparts for job opportunities requiring relocation (Deitch & Sanderson, 1987; Felmlee, 1984). Due to the lack of research on such complex effects, the following research question was posed:

**Research Question 1:** After employee education level, job type, pay level, age, organizational tenure, employment sector, percent contribution to the family's income, and expressed willingness to move are controlled for, will there be interactions among gender, marital type, and parental status in predicting job-related relocation opportunities for married employees?

**Method**

Participants and Procedure

The participants for Study 1 are part of a larger study of job-related relocation (Eby & Allen, 1998; Eby, DeMatteo, & Russell, 1997). A human-resources
consulting firm with offices throughout the United States and Canada provided
names and contact information for organizations in their areas that might be
interested in participating in Study 1. Once identified, organizations were sent
a cover letter briefly describing the study and advising interested companies
to contact the first author. The objective of this sampling strategy was to
maximize external validity by obtaining a sample of organizations that was
diverse in terms of size, annual revenue, industry base, and employment sector.

Seventy-six organizations agreed to participate in the study. They varied in
terms of size (M number of employees = 29,887, range = 55–750,000), annual
corporate revenue (M = $6.6 billion, range = $854,000–132 billion), industry
e.g., telecommunications, energy, banking, manufacturing, insurance, health
services), and employment sector (public, private, government, nonprofit). Sur-
vey packets were sent to 4850 randomly selected employees that had relocated
within the last 5 years. Each survey packet contained an employee and spouse
survey, along with two postage-paid envelopes addressed to the researchers.
Usable surveys were returned by 1767 employees (36% response rate) and 998
spouses (29% response rate after adjusting for employees without spouses).
Response bias was assessed by comparing characteristics of the total sample
with characteristics of those who returned surveys. This comparison yielded
minimal evidence of response bias. For the purpose of the present study, we
were interested in a subsample of survey responses: married couples (N = 872,
N men = 773, N women = 96, N missing = 4). Background characteristics of
this subsample are shown in Table 1 and correlations among study variables
are shown in Table 2.

Measures

Employees were characterized as either having children living at home
(N = 616) or not having children living at home N = 256, N missing = 1). Marital type was operationalized according to Hall and Hall's (1979) definition
of a dual-earner couple, “two people who share a life-style that includes an
ongoing love relationship, cohabitation, and a work role for each partner.” Since
all employees had work roles (they were currently employed), questions from
the spouse survey were used to categorize couples. The spouse survey contained
a measures of the spouse's current work status (currently employed/currently
unemployed), work status prior to the most recent relocation (worked/did not
work), and desire to work in the future (yes/no). Based on this information
employees were categorized as members of single-earner couples (N = 351) if
they met one of the following conditions: (a) the employee worked and the
spouse was not currently seeking employment and did not work prior to the
move or (b) the employee currently worked and the spouse did not work prior
to the move but desired employment. In both of these situations, the spouse
did not currently have a work role. Employees were categorized as a member
of dual-earner couples (N = 489, N missing = 33) if they met one of the following
conditions: (a) both the relocated employee and the spouse currently worked or
(b) the employee currently worked and an accompanying spouse had worked
prior to the move and had not secured a new job but desired reemployment. In these latter two situations both employee and spouse had a work role.

The employee survey contained the control variables. Table 1 provides the response options for the categorical control variables education level, job type, pay level, and employment sector. Nonsense coding (J. Cohen & P. Cohen, 1983) was used for the categorical variables job type and organizational type since

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>Sample Characteristics from Study 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>39.6 (7.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure in the previous community</td>
<td>8.1 (8.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children living at home</td>
<td>1.3 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest education level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee salary level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $35,000</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,001–$50,000</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001–$75,000</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,001–$100,000</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $100,000</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of relocations</td>
<td>3.1 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of relocation offers</td>
<td>4.2 (4.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current job type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/admin. support</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General management</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources/training</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales/marketing</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information systems/technical</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications/public relations</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering/research</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical/other health care</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g., graphic artist, lawyer)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>04.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>03.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on employee–spouse couples. Employee N = 861–872 due to missing data. Spouse N = 322–870 due to nonworking spouses and missing data.
TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables: Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Employee education level</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employee pay level</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Employee age</td>
<td>39.58</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employee organizational tenure</td>
<td>10.66</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.50*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Contribution to family income</td>
<td>85.70</td>
<td>18.31</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Willingness to move</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.86*</td>
<td>-1.4*</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>-0.36*</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Marital type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.58*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>-0.21*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parental status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.15*</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>-0.07*</td>
<td>-0.15*</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Relocation opportunities</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
<td>0.13*</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.09*</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 872–790 due to missing data. Gender coded: 0 = male, 1 = female. Marital type coded: 0 = dual-earner, 1 = single-earner. Parental status coded: 0 = no children, 1 = children. Job type and employment sector are not included since they are coded using nonsense coding. * p < .05.

we were not interested in interpreting the effects associated with these variables. The employee’s contribution to the family’s total income was computed by subtracting the percent contribution to the family income provided by the spouse from 100%. Willingness to move was assessed by a seven-item measure developed for this study (e.g., “I would welcome an opportunity to relocate,” α = .90). To determine employees’ access to job opportunities requiring a geographic move, the following question was posed: “During your entire work history, how many job-related relocation opportunities have you been offered?”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hierarchical regression was used to test Hypotheses 1–3 and answer Research Question 1. In the first step the nine control variables were entered. Using these control variables allowed us to determine if the nonperformance factors of interest accounted for significant variance in relocation opportunities over and above that associated with differences in education level, job type, pay level, age, organizational tenure, employment sector, contribution to the family income, and willingness to move. In Step 2, the main effect variables of sex, parental status, and marital type were entered and the increment in R² computed (J. Cohen & P. Cohen, 1983). In Step 3, the two-way interactions were included (sex × marital type; sex × parental status; parental status × marital type), and in Step 4 the three-way interaction term was added (sex × marital type × parental status).

As shown in Table 3, several control variables predicted the number of relocation offers, illustrating the importance of taking these variables into account.
### TABLE 3
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses: Study 1 (Dependent Variable: Relocation Opportunities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Cumulative multiple R</th>
<th>Cumulative $R^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Controls</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>13**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee education level</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee job type</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee pay level</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee age</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee organizational tenure</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment sector</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to family income</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to move</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Main effects</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.02**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.10**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital type</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental status</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Two-way interactions</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender $\times$ Marital type</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender $\times$ Parental status</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital type $\times$ Parental status</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Three-way interaction</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender $\times$ Marital type $\times$ Parental status</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Gender coded: 0 = male, 1 = female. Marital type coded: 0 = dual-earner, 1 = single-earner. Parental status coded: 0 = no children, 1 = children.

** $p < .01$.

Prior to interpreting main effects. In Step 2 the increment in $R^2$ was significant ($\Delta R^2 = .02, p < .01$), allowing main effects to be interpreted. Supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2, married women received fewer relocation offers than did married men ($\beta = -.10, p < .01$) and employees in dual-earner marriages were given fewer relocation opportunities than were employees in single-earner marriages ($\beta = .13, p < .01$). The parental status variable was not significant; hence, Hypothesis 3 was not supported ($\beta = -.04, ns$). Answering Research Question 1, no interactions were significant at Step 3 or Step 4 (see Table 3).

While the effect sizes are small, the results of Study 1 are consistent with Stroh et al.'s (1992) conclusion that differences in mobility rates may be due to discriminatory attitudes toward certain types of employees which manifest in unequal access to relocation opportunities. It is also important to question why gender and marital type had an effect at all after many alternative explanations for the pattern of findings (e.g., human capital, family power, industry differences) were carefully controlled for. One explanation is that, consistent with the empirical and anecdotal evidence discussed earlier, these effects may be due to decision-makers' perceptions and implicit assumptions about certain types of employees (J. M. Feldman, 1981; Ilgen et al., 1993; Motowidlo, 1986). Study 2 explores this possibility.
STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was twofold. The first objective was to reexamine the nonperformance effects revealed in Study 1 under highly controlled conditions and to do so directly from the decision-maker’s perspective. The second, and more important, purpose was to examine the perceptual processes that may be cued by various nonperformance factors, which in turn may influence decision-makers’ endorsement of individuals for jobs requiring relocation. Several perceptual variables were hypothesized as important mediating mechanisms of the relationship between the nonperformance factors studied and relocation opportunities. This included decision-makers’ perceptions of the applicant’s willingness to move, the expected resistance that the applicant is likely to face from his or her family, and how easily the applicant is expected to adjust to a pending move.

With regard to the first objective, Study 1 provided evidence that gender and marital type were related to relocation opportunities after numerous variables were controlled for. However, the possibility still remains that factors not accounted for in the field study, such as individuals’ job performance, specific job experiences, and credentials, could have influenced Study 1’s findings. Further, marital type and parental status may change over time and the cross-sectional nature of Study 1 means that conclusions about these variables remain somewhat tentative. A laboratory study provided an optimal situation to further examine these nonperformance factors. If results similar to those of Study 1 are obtained in Study 2, stronger evidence will exist that nonperformance factors such as employee gender and marital type can influence relocation opportunities among married employees. While null results were found in the field study regarding parental status, given previous research that children can have an effect on career-related outcomes (e.g., Schneer & Reitman, 1993; Stroh & Brett, 1996), we continued to examine parental status in Study 2. The following main effects, similar to those in Study 1, were proposed:

**HYPOTHESIS 4:** Married women will receive lower recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation than will married men.

**HYPOTHESIS 5:** Individuals in dual-earner marriages will receive lower recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation than will individuals in single-earner marriages.

**HYPOTHESIS 6:** Married individuals with a child will receive lower recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation than will married individuals without a child.

While testing Hypotheses 4–6 will bolster (or weaken) confidence in the results of Study 1, to simply demonstrate that access to jobs requiring relocation varies as a function of gender, marital type, or parental status is not enough. What is needed is an understanding of the psychological mechanisms that may be driving the relationship between these nonperformance factors and relocation opportunities. By understanding the mediating perceptual processes that may be cued by gender, marital type, and parental status, a more comprehensive understanding of the relocation decision-making process will emerge.
Since no research to date has focused on these perceptual processes from the decision-makers’ perspective, the primary objective of Study 2 was to address this gap in the existing literature.

The role of perceptual biases in personnel decision making has been studied extensively (cf. J. M. Feldman, 1981; Ilgen et al., 1993). While it is beyond the scope of this research to review the relevant literature, Motowidlo (1986) cogently summarizes how job-irrelevant characteristics such as gender can cue perceptions and implicit assumptions on the part of decision-makers, which in turn influence employee outcomes. This occurs when decision-makers hold a prototype of an “ideal candidate” for a position which distorts judgments of the suitability of an individual for a particular type of job (Motowidlo, 1986). Personnel decisions can be influenced by these prototypes, with the decision-maker being fearful that he or she will select an unacceptable or unsuccessful candidate if the candidate does not conform to the decision-maker’s perception of the ideal candidate. While Motowidlo (1986) discusses the role of such prototypes in the context of employee selection and performance appraisal, it seems reasonable that decision-makers may likewise hold a prototype of the ideal employee for a position requiring a job-related move. Statistics indicate that employees who relocate for the organization do in fact tend to conform to a rather well-defined prototype: a married man who is unencumbered by a working spouse and/or by children (C. E. Cohen, 1994; Collie, 1989; Employee Relocation Council (ERC), 1991). Therefore, consistent with Motowidlo’s (1986) discussion of how certain job-irrelevant characteristics (e.g., gender) can activate stereotypes, we expect that deviations from the prototype of the “ideal mobile employee” may trigger perceptions and implicit assumptions by decision-makers. These perceptual biases then serve as mediators in transmitting the effect of nonperformance factors on the likelihood that an individual will be offered a job requiring relocation.

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that gender, marital type, and parental status may influence the perceptions that decision-makers form regarding the suitability of others for career-related opportunities. For example, research on sex-role stereotype theory indicates that men are consistently perceived as more similar to a “successful manager” than are women (e.g., Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989). In addition, societal stereotype theory asserts that the ideal family structure is built around a married man with children and a stay-at-home spouse (Russo, 1985). Likewise, the organizational career model is structured around the expectation that higher level jobs will be held by men with wives that manage household tasks (Nieva, 1985). Kanter (1977) also proposes that the careers of married men benefit from the support provided by spouses. Finally, Brett (1997) recently concluded that the family structure that appears to provide the best support for advancement in a managerial career is one with a male head of household and either no children or children plus a wife who is at home caring for the children.

The specific assumptions and perceptions that we expected to be cued by gender, marital type, and parental status were based on existing research. Each type of perception is based on assumptions that may be invoked by
decision-makers when considering an employee for a job requiring relocation. The anecdotal research reviewed earlier (e.g., Hall & Hall, 1978; Morris, 1997; Stuart, 1992) suggests that one commonly held belief is that married women, dual-career couples, and parents are unwilling to relocate. As such, it is expected that:

**Hypothesis 7**: Perceived applicant willingness to move will mediate the relationship between nonperformance factors and recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation.

Relocation opportunities may also be influenced by decision-makers' implicit assumptions concerning the degree of resistance by his or her family that an employee is likely to encounter if offered a job requiring relocation. While a job change involving geographic relocation may be a positive career move for the employee, it may have negative consequences for the accompanying spouse, particularly if the spouse works outside the home (Deitch & Sanderson, 1987). Thus, decision-makers may anticipate that employees in dual-earner marriages will encounter substantial resistance from their spouses when contemplating a relocation offer. Moreover, married women may be assumed to be more likely to buckle under to family resistance because, in contrast to men, women are expected to place family before work and to de-emphasize the importance of their own career (Cook, 1994; Powell & Mainiero, 1992). Expected resistance may also escalate when employees also have parental commitments. Aware that relocating with children includes the consideration of issues such as obtaining appropriate child care and maintaining the continuity of educational experiences (Munton, Forster, Altman, & Greenbury, 1993; Pinder, 1989), decision-makers may assume that the presence of children in the home will increase family resistance to the move. Taken together, perceptions of family resistance to relocation may influence decision-makers' judgments about suitable candidates for jobs requiring relocation. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 8**: Perceived family resistance will mediate the relationship between nonperformance factors and recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation.

A final perception that decision-makers might hold which could negatively affect the chance that an individual is offered a job opportunity requiring relocation is how well the individual is likely to adjust to a geographic move. Since relocation can be a stressful event for employees and family members (Cooper & Makin, 1985; Munton et al., 1993), individuals who do not fit the mobile employee prototype may be perceived as less likely to adjust well to a pending move. Specifically, due to sex-role stereotypes that women are more emotional and less competent than men (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Jackman & Senter, 1981), married women may be viewed as having a more difficult time adjusting to a job-related move than married men. Research also indicates that others perceive that dual-career employees will have a more difficult time adjusting to a pending move than single-earners (Shaklee, 1989). Likewise, employers often fear that when
a dual-career employee accepts a job assignment requiring relocation his or her spouse's search for employment will be a distracter for the employee and may increase the time it takes for the employee to get up and running at the new location (LeLouran & DeCotiis, 1983). Finally, employers may speculate that individuals with children will have difficulty adjusting, as they may be preoccupied dealing with child-related issues and concerns. Therefore, we proposed:

**Hypothesis 9:** Perceived ease of adjusting to a move will mediate the relationship between nonperformance factors and recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation.

**Method**

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 160 male and 160 female undergraduates at a large South-eastern university. The average age of participants was 20 years ($SD = 1.54$). Forty-four percent of the participants reported that they were currently employed and 42% indicated that they had some supervisory experience. Participants had moved to a different area of the country an average of 1.4 times, with 55% of the sample moving at least once. All participants received course credit for their participation.

Upon arriving to the study participants were informed that the purpose of Study 2 was to identify characteristics of successful applicants for postdoctoral teaching fellowship positions. Participants were led to believe that they were participating in a collaborative study with another university and that they would be evaluating an actual applicant who was applying for a position that required relocation to a host university. Participants were also told that their feedback would be used to enhance the competitiveness of the university's fellowship applicants. The information used to evaluate the applicant included detailed written information and a videotaped segment of teaching performance. Participants were informed that all identifying information on the applicant they would be rating was removed from the application materials to maintain the "real" applicant's anonymity. To control for order effects, the presentation of the video and application packet was counterbalanced within conditions. After reviewing the stimulus materials, participants made judgments of the applicant's willingness to relocate, predictions of the extent of family resistance that was likely to be encountered by the applicant, judgments of how easily the applicant would adjust to the relocation, and an overall recommendation as to whether the applicant should be offered the position. Finally, a background form which included the manipulation check items and ratings of the applicant's attractiveness and teaching performance was administered.
Stimulus Materials and Design

The study was a 2 (male, female) × 2 (single-earner marital type, dual-earner marital type) × 2 (with child, without child) completely crossed, between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental conditions. All information in the eight stimulus conditions was held constant except the manipulations. The manipulations were embedded throughout an application packet which contained the following: (a) postdoctoral teaching fellowship application form, (b) personal statement, (c) resume, (d) personal information vita, (e) external letter of recommendation on university letterhead, and (f) statement of teaching philosophy. As an illustration of how the nonperformance factors were manipulated across experimental conditions, the manipulations for the female/dual-earner/with child condition are summarized below.¹

Gender, marital status, and parental status were manipulated in the postdoctoral teaching fellowship application. The application form included an affirmative action compliance information section, and in the female/dual-earner/with child condition the applicant denoted her gender as “female” (gender manipulation) and her family status as “having children” (parental status manipulation). This application form also included a section where the applicant could request information from the chamber of commerce at the new location. In this experimental condition the applicant checked the box requesting information on child care (parental status manipulation) as well as job-related information for the spouse (Marital type manipulation). A gender-neutral job was chosen for the spouse (public relations specialist) based on current Department of Labor statistics, and this same job was held constant across the male and female dual-career manipulations.

In the applicant’s personal statement, marital type and parental status were manipulated. In the female/dual-earner/with child condition the final paragraph of the personal statement read:

I believe that my greatest personal strength is my ability to manage multiple tasks simultaneously. As a graduate student, mother [parental status manipulation], and wife of someone who is also career-oriented [marital type manipulation], I have developed the ability to prioritize and complete many tasks at once.

Similarly, in the personal information vita the female/dual-earner/with child applicant stated, “In my free time I enjoy exercising and spending time with my husband, a public relations specialist [marital type manipulation], and 3-year-old son [parental status manipulation].” Finally, the letter of recommendation from an external source stated:

She [gender manipulation] also appears to be able to handle multiple responsibilities well. She is on track to finish our Ph.D. program in a timely manner while taking classes, gaining

¹ A complete set of the stimulus materials used in all eight experimental conditions is available upon request from the first author.
research experience, and managing the responsibilities of parenthood [parental status manipulation] and a dual-earner marriage [marital type manipulation]. These personal qualities suggest that she is prepared for the challenges of a post-doctoral teaching fellowship.

No manipulations were introduced in the resume or statement of teaching philosophy. These sources of information were included to increase the realism of the task. In addition to reviewing the application packet, participants viewed one of four 10-min videotapes that showed a sample of the applicant's teaching performance. Permission was obtained by Allen and Rush (1998) to use these videotapes. The content of the videotapes was the same; however, four different actors (two male and two female) presented a lecture on the topic of work motivation. The four actors were advanced doctoral students with experience teaching and role-playing in training and/or assessment center contexts. Two male and two female actors were used to rule out the possibility that the obtained effects were due to the unique characteristics of a particular actor rather than to the manipulations. Additionally, to help control for other forms of bias, the actors wore the same type of clothing and were trained to display similar mannerisms and demeanor. Pilot testing indicated no differences in performance ratings across the four actors. The interested reader is referred to Allen and Rush (1998) for more detailed information regarding the development and pilot testing of the videotapes.

The design used in Study 2 helped overcome the primary limitation of previous laboratory research on relocation decision-making (LeLouran & DeCotiis, 1983; Taylor & Lounsbury, 1988), specifically, the overreliance on “paper people” and short vignettes describing situations (Gorman, Clover, & Doherty, 1978), as well as designs where the participants are informed that the individuals they are rating are fictitious applicants. Study 2 avoided these limitations by providing participants with multiple forms of detailed information on an applicant being considered for a job requiring relocation, including a videotaped segment of an applicant's on-the-job performance, and by leading participants to believe that they were rating a real applicant who was applying for a postdoctoral teaching fellowship.

Measures

Three items were developed to measure the participant's perceptions of the applicant's willingness to move (e.g., “All things considered, there is a very high probability that the applicant will move to the new area to participate in the fellowship program”; $\alpha = .75$). Four items assessed perceptions of the applicant's family resistance to the move (e.g., “The applicant will get strong resistance to moving from their family”; $\alpha = .75$) and three items measured the perceptions of the applicant's ease of adjustment to the move (e.g., “If selected for a fellowship, the applicant will probably have very few difficulties making the transition to a new location”; $\alpha = .70$). The participant's overall recommendation of the applicant was measured with three items (e.g., “The applicant is deserving of a fellowship and should be selected”; $\alpha = .81$). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
Manipulation checks. After subjects provided ratings on the dependent measures, several questions were asked to assess the effectiveness of the manipulations. Subjects were asked to indicate the gender of the applicant, whether or not the applicant's spouse was currently employed (marital type), and whether or not the applicant had a child (parental status). In addition, to provide evidence that any of the observed effects were due to the nature of the manipulations and not to performance or other unique characteristics of the actors, an overall assessment of the applicant's teaching performance and his or her attractiveness were also obtained. Five items were developed to measure the applicant's performance (e.g., “The instructor was very effective in terms of explaining the concepts presented in the lecture”; $\alpha = .87$) and one item assessed applicant attractiveness.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Overall 90% of the applicants correctly identified all three manipulations. Specifically, 100% correctly identified the applicant's sex, 96% identified the applicant's parental status, and 95% identified the applicant's marital type, suggesting that the manipulations were effective. Only subjects who passed all manipulation checks were included in subsequent analyses ($N = 320$). Due to missing data on some survey items the sample size for subsequent analyses was reduced to 309. The manipulation checks also indicated that the teaching performance ratings given to men ($M = 3.83, SD = .74$) and women ($M = 4.07, SD = .55$) differed significantly ($t = -3.35, p < .001$) and that there were significant differences in applicant attractiveness ratings ($M = 1.51, SD = .51$ for the male and $M = 2.01, SD = .34$ for the female applicants; $t = -10.15; p < .001$). Thus, teaching performance and attractiveness ratings were used as covariates in all subsequent analyses.

The adjusted means and standard errors associated with the process variables and dependent measure for the three nonperformance variables are presented in Table 4. Analysis of covariance assessed differences in applicant recommendation ratings. Consistent with the results of Study 1, main effects were found for applicant gender ($F(1, 303) = 7.13, p < .01, \eta^2 = .01$) and marital type ($F(1, 303) = 4.09, p < .05, \eta^2 = .01$), supporting Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5. Specifically, married men received significantly higher recommendation ratings ($M = 3.82$) for jobs requiring relocation than did equally qualified married women ($M = 3.64$). Similarly, individuals in single-earner marriages ($M = 3.79$) were rated significantly higher than those in dual-earner marriages ($M = 3.67$). Also consistent with Study 1, no main effect for parental status was found; thus Hypothesis 6 was unsupported ($M = 3.73$) for both parents and nonparents. While no interaction effects were expected given the findings of Study 1, a post hoc analysis of interactions among applicant gender, marital type, and parental status was also conducted. As in Study 1, no significant interactions were found.
TABLE 4

Adjusted Means and Standard Errors across Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Relocation recommendation</th>
<th>Willingness to move</th>
<th>Family resistance</th>
<th>Ease of adjustment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant marital type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-earner</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual-earner</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No children</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means are adjusted for the two covariates.

Mediator analyses were conducted to determine if the three proposed perceptual process variables (perceived willingness, perceived family resistance, perceived ease of adjustment) accounted for the relationship between the nonperformance factors studied and recommendation ratings for a job requiring relocation. The criteria for conducting a mediator analysis (i.e., significant correlations among the independent variables, proposed mediators, and dependent variable) were met for the variables of gender and marital type (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Since no main effects were found for parental status, a mediator analysis was not conducted for this variable. Three regression equations were computed for each of the proposed mediators, following Baron and Kenny’s (1986) recommended procedure. Figures 1–3 present these results, with the

FIG. 1. Mediated model for perceptions of the applicant’s willingness to relocate, gender coded (0 = male, 1 = female) and marital type coded (0 = dual-earner, 1 = single-earner). Coefficients in parentheses indicate the effect of nonperformance factors with the mediator included in the equation. *p < .05, **p < .01.
coefficients in parentheses representing the effects of gender and marital type on recommendation ratings with the mediator included in the regression equation. Variance accounted for by the full equations were $R^2 = .49$ (Fig. 1), $R^2 = .49$ (Fig. 2) and $R^2 = .48$ (Fig. 3).

A consistent pattern of effects emerged from the mediator analysis. In all three analyses, partial mediation was found for applicant gender and full mediation was found for applicant marital type (see Figs. 1–3). Applicant gender appeared to cue decision-makers' perceptions in the expected direction (i.e., women perceived as less willing to move, more likely to encounter family resistance, and less likely to adjust easily), which in turn impacted recommendation ratings. However, applicant gender continued to exert a direct effect on
recommendation ratings, evidenced by the finding that the path between gender and recommendation ratings did not become nonsignificant when the mediator was included in the analysis (see parenthetical coefficients associated with gender in Figs. 1–3). Evidence of full mediation was found for marital type. Examination of Figs. 1–3 suggests that the direct effect of marital type on recommendation ratings is attenuated to nonsignificant when the perceptual process variables (mediators) are included. This suggests that perceptions of willingness to move, family resistance, and adjustment fully transmit the effect of marital type on recommendation ratings in the expected direction; being in a dual-earner marriage cues perceptions that the applicant was less willing to move, more likely to experience family resistance to the move, and less likely to adjust well to the relocation.

In summary, consistent with Study 1, Study 2 found that married women and dual-earners received lower recommendation ratings for jobs requiring relocation than did married men and single-earners, respectively. Moreover, Study 2 isolated three important perceptual processes that were cued by gender and marital type, which in turn impacted how strongly decision-makers recommended an applicant for a job requiring relocation: decision-makers' perceptions of a potential employee's willingness to relocate, perceived resistance from the family, and ease of adjustment to a pending move. This is an important finding since this is the first empirical study to examine the perceptions that are triggered by applicant gender and marital type in the context of relocation decision-making. Study 2's findings are in line with Motowidlo's (1986) and J. M. Feldman's (1981) notion that job-irrelevant factors can cue perceptions and implicit assumptions based on stereotypes decision-makers hold about certain types of individuals, which in turn influence important personnel decisions, in this case who is offered relocation opportunities.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Given the important role of geographic mobility opportunities on an employee's skill diversification and development, promotion rate, and long-term career success (Pinder & Walter, 1984; Stroh et al., 1992), the finding that certain types of employees may have less access to such opportunities represents an important contribution to the relocation and career-management literatures. A compelling and consistent pattern of results emerged from Study 1 and Study 2—being a married female or member of a dual-career couple had a negative impact on access to job opportunities requiring relocation, whereas being a parent did not. Previous research has found differences in mobility rates among males and females (e.g., Stroh et al., 1992), but prior to the current study very little was known about differential access to job opportunities requiring relocation based on the nonperformance factors that we studied. The results of Study 2 also indicate that decision-makers form perceptions based on applicants' personal characteristics, and these perceptual biases are important mechanisms linking applicant gender and marital type to relocation opportunities. Since this is the first empirical study to isolate the perceptual processes...
involved in decision-makers’ assessment of the suitability of applicants for jobs requiring relocation, these findings are particularly noteworthy.

In terms of the process by which recommendation ratings are affected, Study 2 illustrated that gender and marital type cued decision-makers’ perceptions that the applicant was less willing to move, would receive more resistance from his or her family, and would be less likely to adjust well to the move. This provides strong support for Stroh et al.‘s (1992) supposition that decision-makers may be apprehensive about offering relocation opportunities to certain types of employees due to judgments that some individuals (i.e., women and dual-earners) are less acceptable candidates by virtue of their gender and marital type. Our findings are also in close alignment with Motowidlo’s (1986) and J. M. Feldman’s (1981) assertion that job-irrelevant characteristics such as gender can put in motion a perceptual process which ultimately leads to differences in job-related outcomes among employees.

Although Study 2 provided an initial glimpse at the nature of these perceptions, other questions remain. For instance, on what basis do decision-makers believe dual-earners are less willing to move? Is it because of their spouses’ job situation? Or are dual-earners perceived as less committed to pursuing their own career goals? Or is it because dual-earners are perceived as having qualitatively different career goals than single-earners, perhaps goals which are not as dependent on internal mobility within the organization? Answering these questions may require some creative research methodologies. For example, a variation of protocol analysis could be used in which decision-makers are asked to verbally provide a “stream of consciousness” while making relocation ratings. Additionally, to better understand perceptions of the “ideal mobile employee,” decision-makers could be asked to identify individuals within the organization who are good candidates for relocation and then provide specific justification and examples to substantiate their nominations. Finally, Heilman et al.’s (1989) methodology for examining requisite managerial characteristics could be utilized, whereby descriptors of the ideal mobile employee are compared to those associated with the most traditional type of employee (male parent with stay-at-home wife) and the most nontraditional type of employee (female without children but with a working husband).

It is also noteworthy that decision-makers’ perceptual processes fully mediated the effect of applicant marital type on recommendation ratings, whereas partial mediation was found for applicant gender. This suggests that gender may cue perceptions and implicit assumptions about women that were not fully captured by the perceptual process variables examined in Study 2. Gender bias in personnel decision-making has been researched extensively in the performance evaluation (e.g., Pulakos, White, Oppler, & Borman, 1989) and promotion potential (e.g., Landau, 1995) literatures. Future researchers may want to draw upon this rich body of research and explore other ways in which gender may impact relocation recommendations. Moreover, two additional research questions are particularly important given the findings of Study 2. First, are these perceptual biases on the part of decision-makers conscious or unconscious? Research using measures such as reaction time and free recall (e.g.,
DeNisi, Robbins, & Cafferty, 1989) may be useful in answering this question. Second, to what extent are these perceptions generally accurate? While there has been some research examining differences in willingness to relocate between men and women (e.g., Brett, Stroh, & Reilly, 1993; Markham & Pleck, 1986), between dual-earners and single-earners (e.g., Brett et al., 1993; Landau et al., 1992), and between employees with children and those without (e.g., Brett & Reilly, 1988; Landau et al., 1992), much of this research evidence is mixed. Future research is needed to help reconcile these conflicting research findings in attempts to understand why decision-makers may hold the perceptions that they do about certain types of employees.

Interestingly, parental status was not related to relocation opportunities in either Study 1 or Study 2. Perhaps parental status is a less salient characteristic than gender or marital type when decision-makers are reviewing individuals for job opportunities requiring relocation, since residential mobility is a common experience for children (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1997). Alternatively, the dichotomy of having children versus not having children that was used in the present study may not have been sensitive enough to detect differences. It may be that more specific factors, such as the age of the child or the circumstances surrounding the move (e.g., moving from a rural to metropolitan area, time of year when the move occurs), come into play when decision-makers are making relocation offers. It is also possible that Study 2 did not find an effect for parental status because the stimulus condition described a 3-year-old child, and decision-makers may think that children who are that young will pose less of a complication in a pending move. Since this is the first study to investigate how employees with children are perceived and evaluated by others, it seems premature to abandon this line of research without further inquiry.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the present research suggest several strategies that organizations could adopt to help reduce bias in relocation decision-making, as well as steps employees can take to increase the chance that they will be offered job opportunities requiring relocation. Given the finding that certain nonperformance factors cue decision-makers’ perceptions, a discussion of stereotypes associated with individuals in different family arrangements could be incorporated into existing training programs for managers. This information could be integrated into several different types of training including workplace diversity (e.g., “diversity in family structures”), performance management (e.g., “stereotypes and rating biases”), and interpersonal skills training (e.g., “recognizing personal biases,” “getting to know your employees”). Decision-makers could also be required to document in writing the rationale for their decisions to offer a job opportunity to a particular individual and note the specific performance-related criteria that were used in the process. This may lead decision-makers to think carefully about the skills and abilities necessary for the position rather than make quick judgments about employees based on nonperformance factors. Alternatively, the criteria used to make relocation offers should be made
available to employees so that they are aware of the types of skills and experiences that will make them attractive targets for job-related relocation offers. Employees are also encouraged to engage in a variety of active career strategies to increase their skills and visibility within the organization (Gould & Penley, 1984; Greenhaus & Callanan, 1994). This might involve opportunity development where the employee lets decision-makers know of his or her interests and aspirations and takes the initiative to find out about different opportunities within the organization. Image building, whereby the employee attempts to communicate the appearance of acceptability, success, and potential to decision-makers, might also be useful. Networking and building developmental alliances with powerful organizational members (e.g., mentors) may also be useful to an employee to increase visibility and learn how to make himself or herself attractive for job opportunities requiring relocation. Finally, if an employee declines a relocation offer yet is open to being considered for future moves, his or her willingness to move in the future should be communicated clearly and repeatedly to decision-makers and managers.

Limitations

There are two primary limitations of this research as a whole, the scope of the research and the amount of variance accounted for by the nonperformance factors studied. We limited our focus to married employees for two main reasons. First, since most employees targeted for relocation are married (ERC, 1991) and most parents are married (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996), understanding relocation-related issues for this population has practical and theoretical significance. Second, with the number of dual-earner couples on the rise there has been a lot of recent interest in this population in the career literature (e.g., Eby et al., 1997; Stroh & Brett, 1996). Nonetheless, future researchers may want to examine how parental status and gender impact relocation opportunities among single employees. It should also be noted that the amount of variance accounted for by sex and marital type is consistent with other research on gender differences (e.g., Pulakos et al., 1989), yet is admittedly small. However, the real question is why there was any effect for gender and marital type on relocation opportunities at all. Further, since relocation often affords the chance to move into high-visibility jobs characterized by more challenge and higher pay, even small differences in access to relocation opportunities can translate into substantial disparities over time (Stroh et al., 1992).

In terms of the lab study there is the issue of whether students’ decisions are comparable to those of managers. However, few studies have found differences between students’ and managers’ decisions when sex-role stereotypes are the subject of study (e.g., Rosen & J erdee, 1974). Research has also illustrated the external validity of using students as decision-makers in simulated employment contexts (Mullins, 1982), finding, in fact, that bias against certain types of employees (e.g., racial minorities) may actually be greater in the field than in the lab (Ilgen & Youtz, 1986). We also took great care to make the task intrinsically interesting and realistic and to increase students’ accountability
for their ratings (i.e., students were led to believe that the application packet belonged to an actual applicant and that their ratings would be used to provide feedback to that applicant on how to better market him- or herself for a postdoctoral teaching fellowship).

In terms of the field study, the use of a single administration of a survey poses several potential problems. Most notably, we assessed only employees’ current status on the marital type and parental status variables, and these variables may change over time. Future research using longitudinal designs would be useful in this regard. Notwithstanding this limitation, it is important to note that the same pattern of results emerged for marital type and parental status in Study 2. Another limitation is that while we tried to control for a variety of alternative explanations for differences in access to geographic mobility opportunities, as in most field research we could not control for all variables that might be operating (e.g., performance differences). The use of a single-item measure of access to relocation opportunities is also a limitation. However, we were interested in an actual count of the number of times a relocation offer had been made to an employee rather than in a qualitative assessment of relocation opportunities, so the current measure seemed most appropriate. Perhaps such perceptual measures could be included in future research to see if discrepancies exist between perceptions of opportunities (e.g., “I feel as if I have been passed by for relocation opportunities in my organization”; “Other employees have been offered the chance to relocate rather than me”) and the reported number of offers to date.

We were also unable to assess decision-makers’ actual perceptions in Study 1 due to logistical concerns (e.g., no access to actual decision-makers) as well as issues related to socially desirable responding (i.e., decision-makers are not likely to admit to the use of job-irrelevant criteria for personnel decision making, particularly criteria that could pose legal problems such as gender). In fact, this is the very reason Study 2 was conducted, to assess perceptual biases in relocation decision making. Finally, one of the concessions associated with obtaining a large and diverse sample of employees was that all employees had experience moving. This raises the question of whether or not similar results would be found among employees who had not moved for the organization. On a positive note, sampling individuals who had experienced moving actually provided a strong test of Hypotheses 1–3; even though married women and employees in dual-earner marriages had done “all the right stuff” (Stroh et al., 1992, p. 257) in terms of moving for their organization, they still had less access to relocation opportunities than their male and single-earner counterparts.

**Conclusion**

In the current research we found that after performance differences, educational disparities, variability in job-related experiences, age and tenure effects, variability in family power, and differences attributable to being in diverse types of jobs were controlled for, married women and individuals in dual-career marriages still had less access to job opportunities requiring relocation.
Moreover, Study 2 indicated that gender and marital type raised a perceptual "red flag" for decision makers, cueing assumptions that these individuals are less willing to move, will experience stronger family resistance to moving, and will not adjust as well to a move, which in turn impacted access to jobs requiring relocation. As noted by Judge and Bretz (1994), past research on careers has been dominated by rational theories predicated on the establishment of career systems and promotion strategies that reward the most qualified and productive employees. Given the results of this research, it seems prudent to turn our attention to how not-so-rational organizational phenomena influence personnel decisions (Motowidlo, 1986), particularly in the context of access to relocation opportunities.

REFERENCES


Received March 12, 1999