Moving for their first job or staying put? Predictors of high school students’ attitudes towards geographic mobility

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Abstract

In a fast and rapidly changing labor market, the willingness to relocate may be crucial for a successful vocational career. This is increasingly true for high school graduates entering the job market. However, studies about adolescents’ readiness to move for job-related reasons are scarce. In order to better understand the factors that influence adolescents’ mobility attitudes, a questionnaire study with $N = 392$ high school students was conducted one year before their graduation. Individualism-collectivism, perceived parents’ and friends’ attitudes towards moving, and uncertainty tolerance were hypothesized to be predictors of the adolescents' mobility proneness. Vocational goals and number of previous relocations were controlled. Mobility proneness was higher for adolescents with an individualistic attitude and when parents’ and friends’ attitudes towards mobility were perceived to be more positive. Uncertainty tolerance and strong vocational goals were also found to increase mobility proneness. In contrast, mobility proneness was lower for adolescents with a collectivistic attitude and firm plans for vocational training. The number of prior relocations has been identified as an influential factor in other studies, but did not prove significant here. The results support the notion that individualism and parents' and peers' attitudes, in particular, can be identified as adolescence-specific predictors of a positive attitude towards mobility and should be investigated further.

Key words: attitudes towards geographic mobility, adolescence, vocational training, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty tolerance
Moving for their first job or staying put? Predictors of high school students’ attitudes towards geographic mobility

Adolescents reaching the end of their school career face a decision that will probably affect their whole life: Which job or vocational training program should I choose? Often, this decision is accompanied by another question: Should I stay in my hometown or move elsewhere? In tight job markets, this decision equates to that of whether to move away to get a job or to stay at home without one. The question is now also gaining importance in less severe economic situations. Mobility is an increasingly sought-after feature in future employees. In today’s era of the “global village,” few people remain in one company or at one location throughout their working life. Inter- and intra-organizational transfers have become a common element of many corporate philosophies. For the organization, this kind of policy may lead to increased sales or innovation potential. For the individual, numerous costs and benefits, both monetary and emotional, need to be considered. Although several studies have examined adult mobility (Brett, 1981; Brett & Reilly, 1988; Landau, Shamir & Arthur, 1992; Noe & Barber, 1993; Myers, 1999; Spieß & Wittmann, 1996; Stilwell, Liden, Parsons, & Deconinck, 1998; Wagner, 1989), very few have investigated the mobility of adolescents, and none have focused on mobility at the transition from school to the job market (Elder, King, & Conger, 1996; Neto & Mullet, 1998). The present study is a first attempt to examine what influences adolescents’ attitudes towards mobility for their first job.

**Mobility**

Scientists from different fields define the term mobility in different ways. In the present study, we consider mobility to be the transition of individuals from one geographic area to another. An important factor in defining mobility is time. We do not wish to research people’s traveling behavior, and thus only include permanent transitions, i.e., moving house. Another distinction needs to be made between mobility as an attitude, mobility as a completed act, and the possibility of being mobile, also called motility. In the following, we study attitudes...
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towards mobility. Whenever we use the term mobility, we mean the attitude towards mobility. In short, in the present study we examine adolescents’ attitudes towards moving from one geographic area to another.

**Predictors of mobility**

The reasons for moving are multifarious. People move to get a better job or to be nearer their family; they move to improve their living conditions by relocating to a better area or house; they move to live in the city or in the country; they move to more affordable places. One of the most important reasons for moving to another city is for work. As the job market changes, people move for their own benefit. An early theory to explain this phenomenon was the wage or income differential thesis (Hicks, 1963), which states that people move to regions where they can earn more for the same work than at their present location. The number of jobs in a given region can also be of importance, however. The job vacancy thesis (Orsagh & Mooney, 1970) predicts movements based on the number of job offers in an area. Together, the wage differential thesis and the job vacancy thesis can at least partly explain why people move. However, other factors also seem to be important. In addition to wages and job offers, people seem to base their decisions on whether to move on factors such as housing, social networks, property, and leisure activities. Broader theories of moving include these cost-utility principles (Wagner, 1989). Such macro-economic theories integrate job-related factors and social factors and predict moves on the basis of several variables. Psychological theories also use this kind of multi-factorial approach.

Most studies on mobility have been conducted in fields other than psychology, with the main focus being placed on groups of people. Researchers in the fields of sociology, geography, and business administration are interested in the patterns of movements of social groups or members of a particular profession and in the explanation of such patterns. Consequently, no person-specific factors (the main focus of psychology) are researched. Moreover, most of the
existing studies come from the US, where the level of mobility is among the highest in the world (Gober, 1993), and few have dealt with mobility in other countries. Mobility itself has only become a topic of scientific interest in the past 15 years, and there are few studies on the predictors of mobility. Previously, interest focused on the effects that moving has on the individual, and not on the predictors of such moves. In 1992, Landau et al. (p. 667) stated that: “While several studies (e.g., Brett, 1981; Friedman & Friedman, 1989; Pinder, 1989) have investigated the effects of relocation on employees, only a handful of published studies have explored the factors influencing employees’ willingness to relocate.” One of the early studies (Brett & Reilly, 1988) examined potential predictors of the attitude towards mobility, and used this mobility attitude as predictor of actual relocation. Four out of eleven demographic and work-related variables significantly enhanced the willingness to relocate. These were a low number of children in the household, the specific function at work, high job involvement, and a positive attitudes towards moving. Several other variables (such as age, wife working, number of prior moves, wife’s willingness to move) did not have a significant impact on the mobility attitude. The mobility attitude did significantly predict actual relocation (beta = .32).

Later studies took the attitude-behavior relation for granted and only examined predictors of the mobility attitude (Myers, 1999; Landau et al., 1992; Noe & Barber, 1993; Stilwell, Liden, Parsons, & Deconinck, 1998). The most important predictors across several studies were demographic variables (such as age, gender, marital status, number of children, income, number of prior relocations), social variables (leisure activities, community ties, number of friends and relatives in the community), and work-related variables (job involvement, career goals, career commitment and satisfaction, organizational tenure). Yet even though most of the studies included the same potential predictors, their results differ. Some found a positive effect of prior relocations (Noe & Barber, 1993), others did not (Landau et al., 1992); some
found an effect of career satisfaction (Stilwell et al., 1998), others did not (Brett & Reilly, 1988). One possible explanation for these discrepancies could be different operational definitions of mobility, e.g., whether or not respondents were given information about the potential destination, and whether or not vocational incentives at the destination were listed.

Some results indicated that different reasons for relocation are predicted by different variables. Landau et al. (1992) found that relocation for career enhancement or company needs was mainly a function of individual (age, gender) and social characteristics (children, elderly relatives living close), whereas relocation to remain employed was mainly a function of attachment to the organization (career development satisfaction, propensity to remain). Stilwell et al. (1998) specified for example, that in cases of career regression, only friendship ties showed effects. Noe and Barber (1993) showed that various characteristics of the new community were also relevant. Predictor sets for moves to similar and dissimilar communities differed, with career aspects being more influential for relocations to dissimilar communities. Furthermore, people were more willing to relocate to a similar community than to a dissimilar one.

Potential predictors of adolescents’ attitudes towards geographic mobility

Returning to our question of what determines the mobility of adolescents, few answers can be derived from previous studies. Because only adults participated in these studies, the results do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about adolescent mobility. Moreover, most of the variables used are not suitable for surveying adolescents. Variables such as age, marital status, organizational tenure, and number of children in the household simply do not apply to those about to enter the workforce for the first time. Thus, we shifted our focus from biographic predictors to personal predictors of geographic mobility. Adolescence itself is a time of
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preparation for adulthood. Developmental theories regard the process of defining vocational interests and making educational choices as among the most important tasks of adolescence (e.g., Erikson, 1989). Another developmental task, forming relationships outside the family, falls in the same time period. It is important that studies examining the predictors of mobility in adolescence take these aspects into account. Because the question of what influences adolescents’ mobility attitudes remains largely unresolved, we conducted a questionnaire study with adolescents approaching the end of their high school education. We hypothesized that three variables are especially important in predicting adolescents’ attitudes towards mobility: individualism-collectivism, the attitudes of peers and parents, and the uncertainty tolerance of the school leavers.

The very few studies about the mobility of adolescents include an extensive longitudinal study (Elder et al., 1996) conducted in the economically troubled rural Midwest of the USA to find possible predictors of adolescents’ mobility. The job situation in this area in the 1980s meant that many adolescents were forced to become mobile. Eighth and eleventh grade students responded to questions about their future prospects, their school performance, their community, their religious activities, and their family and friends. Their mobility attitude was assessed in terms of preferences expressed for living near parents, relatives, or in their home community. Several predictors of the mobility attitude were found. Strong identification with parents, high religiosity, a positive perception of the job situation, and low educational aspirations were associated with a more negative attitude towards mobility, i.e., the wish to remain close to the parents. Similar results were found for preferences for living near relatives and in the home community. Moreover, it is important for adolescents to find a pre-existing network, e.g., of family or friends, at the destination to help them come to terms with the cultural challenges of moving, especially when they move abroad (Neto & Mullet, 1998).
In sum, family, friendships, and community ties have proved to be important for mobility decisions. In adolescence, this implies good and stable relationships with parents and friends and a rewarding social network. However, existing social relationships may have two opposing effects. People may conclude either that these networks will continue to exist even after a move, or that they will be able to find new friends quickly. Furthermore, one of the major tasks of adolescence is to build stable friendships with peers outside the family. Because work on this task is still in progress, friendships at this stage may be fragile. Thus, a better way to measure the influence of social ties is not to evaluate existing friendships and familial bonds, but to assess the general importance of close ties with friends and family. This can be done within the individualism-collectivism framework (Triandis, 1994).

Individualism is characterized by loose interindividual relationships, whereas collectivism is characterized by the firm integration of the individual in a group. In individualism, everyone is responsible for themselves, and individual differences are stressed. In collectivism, every member is protected by the group. The group has top priority, and loyalty is central. This categorization on a cultural level has been adapted to the individual level (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988), and further differentiated by the concepts of vertical and horizontal alignment. Vertical alignment is characterized by clear status differences and competition between individuals. Horizontal alignment is characterized by cooperation rather than competition, or at least a lack of power-motivated interference with others’ goals, and few status differences. Thus, in horizontal individualism, the individual is autonomous, but not of higher or lower status than any other individual. In vertical individualism, the individual is again autonomous, but a clear hierarchy structure exists between individuals of different status. Similarly, in horizontal collectivism, group membership is most important and all group members share the same status. In vertical collectivism, group membership is again most important, but there are clear status differences.
between members of a group. We hypothesize that strong individualism fosters mobility. Because of their loose interindividual relationships, individualists are more focused on getting ahead than on getting along and will thus move if offered better opportunities elsewhere. In contrast, strong collectivism is expected to hinder mobility. The collectivist focuses on close relationships within the group. Moving away widens the gap between oneself and other group members.

According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), subjective norms are an influential factor in forming intentions. Subjective norms are people’s beliefs about how other people they care about will view the behavior in question. Studies on adult mobility have used variables such as the spouse’s attitude towards moving to capture such social influences (Brett & Reilly, 1988). In adolescence, two groups are especially important and influential: parents and friends. However, the extent to which these two groups influence adolescents’ decisions remains a matter of dispute. Although some believe peers, and not parents, to exert the major influence on adolescents’ development (Harris, 1995), there is also considerable evidence that parents do influence their children's vocational decisions. Two longitudinal studies have shown that parents are far more supportive than peers when it comes to looking for a vocational training program (Briechle, 1988; Lukesch-Tormann, 1978). Additionally, parents have been found to play a major role in the decision-making processes of their adolescent offspring (Kracke, 1997); this influence is, of course, not tapped in studies with adults. Therefore, we expect perceived parents’ and friends’ attitudes towards moving to affect the adolescents’ own attitudes. We hypothesize that the more positive parents’ and friends’ attitudes are perceived as being, the more positive the adolescents’ attitudes towards moving will be. In sum, we considered family and peers simultaneously, and we tried to differentiate the importance of familial bonds and friendships by investigating the role of the perceived mobility attitudes of family and friends, on the one
hand, and the general importance of close social ties, namely high collectivism and low individualism, on the other.

Uncertainty is given in personally important (Budner, 1962), complex situations, where a person does not know what will happen next or which would be the right actions to take. Moving always creates uncertainty. The search for a new home and new friends needs to be instigated, with uncertain results. Once the move has been completed, the individual has to acclimate to a new city, new neighbors, new colleagues, and so on. People respond differently to uncertainty, and their reactions depend on their level of uncertainty tolerance. Some people, the uncertainty tolerant ones, prefer such situations. Others, the uncertainty intolerant, avoid them. For example, uncertainty tolerant people choose experimental conditions in which they can learn something new about themselves (Sorrentino & Hewitt, 1984; Sorrentino & Roney, 1990), or engage in diagnostic situations such as health prevention examinations (Brouwers & Sorrentino, 1993; Dalbert, Kulla, & Samer, 2002). Uncertainty intolerant people tend to avoid uncertain situations or, if this is not possible, try to end such situations at the earliest opportunity. For example, uncertainty intolerant people do not like to work in groups (Huber, Sorrentino, Davidson, Eppler & Roth, 1991) and, when forced to do so, finish their group work as soon as possible (Schmidt, 1997). Moreover, the more uncertainty intolerant students are, the more likely they are to reduce their uncertainty about passing exams by doing course work earlier in the term (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). We hypothesize that higher uncertainty tolerance will be associated with greater readiness to move.

A recent investigation (Myers, 1999) examined the influence of frequent relocation during childhood on the mobility attitudes of adults. The more moves children had experienced, the more likely they were to move as adults. However, the effect of the number of moves during childhood was smaller than the overall effect of the similarity between parents and their adult
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offspring. Parents who moved a lot with their children had certain characteristics that made them do so, and they passed these characteristics on to their offspring, meaning that their children were now also likely to move a lot. Again, the study did not use data from adolescents, but from adults reporting information on selected childhood experiences. We asked the participating students how often they had already moved house with their families to control for the impact of prior relocations.

Research with adults has shown that career goals are another predictor of mobility. Adolescents do not yet have a career. However, they face the challenge of successfully entering the workforce and avoiding unemployment. Thus, their career goals still consist in basic vocational goals. We expect these vocational goals to influence mobility and hypothesize that goal specificity, in particular, enhances mobility. Examples of an unspecific and a specific vocational goal would be “to find a full-time job” and “to become a car mechanic in a small garage,” respectively. The reasoning behind this is that people will be more willing to invest in – and probably make certain sacrifices for – specific, clear-cut goals. Thus, we assessed several dimensions of adolescents' vocational goals, namely how specific their vocational goals are, their investments in these goals (e.g., practical training), and whether they already had firm plans to start a vocational training program.

Age and educational level, two other variables that may influence mobility, were not included in the predictor list. We were only interested in the mobility attitudes of students moving directly from high school to their first jobs. All of these students make this transition at the same time and (roughly) the same age, and the same educational level. Thus, there was little (age) or no (educational level) variation in our sample where these variables were concerned, and they could thus be excluded from the analyses.
A questionnaire study was thus conducted with school students one year before graduation to test the following hypotheses: Adolescents' attitudes towards geographic mobility can be expected to be more positive (a) the more individualistic the adolescents are, (b) the more positive they perceive their parents' and peers' attitudes towards mobility as being, and (c) the more uncertainty tolerant they are. Finally, (d) these relationships can be expected to hold when controlling for the number of prior relocations and the adolescents' vocational goals.

METHOD

Sample

The participants were 392 ninth grade students from German mid-level secondary schools (“Realschule”). After 10 years of schooling, the majority of Realschule students go on to vocational training in various occupations, while a minority of exceptionally high-performing students move to the academic track to prepare for a university education. The ninth grade, which is one year before graduation, is the time when choices about future professions have to be made. Gender was balanced in our sample, with 195 girls and 196 boys (one person did not indicate his or her gender). The mean age was 15.1 years (SD = 0.61).

Procedure

Study participants were guaranteed anonymity. All ninth grade students from 12 of the 14 schools in an East German school district were recruited, and 69% agreed to participate. The assessment was conducted in the classroom during lesson time. Written consent was obtained from students and parents prior to data collection.

Measures

Our assessment of the mobility criterion was twofold. General geographic mobility was assessed with the 10-item Geographical Mobility Scale (Dalbert, 1999b) that addresses mobility for job-related reasons (Cronbach’s alpha (Alpha)² = .81; r_est = .30; sample item: I would move to another city for a better job). In addition, the attitude toward mobility for incentives was measured with a newly constructed eight-item scale (see Appendix), which
Students’ attitudes towards geographic mobility examines the willingness to move when specific incentives are offered (Alpha = .83; r_{est} = .38). These two scales are related, yet different (r = .34; p < .001). Geographic mobility captures a general attitude towards moving for vocational reasons, whereas mobility for incentives is more specific and measures the attitude towards mobility under given conditions.

To assess the relative importance of friendship and family ties, we used the horizontal and vertical scales of individualism and collectivism (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; German translation by Dalbert & Grob, 2000). These are four scales of eight items each: horizontal individualism (Alpha = .65; r_{est} = .19; sample item: I like my privacy), vertical individualism (Alpha = .69; r_{est} = .22; sample item: Winning is everything), horizontal collectivism (Alpha = .71; r_{est} = .23; sample item: I feel good when I cooperate with others), and vertical collectivism (Alpha = .63; r_{est} = .18; sample item: I hate to disagree with others in my group). Parents’/friends’ attitudes towards moving were elicited from the participants using two parallel scales of four items each (parents’ attitude: Alpha = .72; r_{est} = .39; sample item: My parents think it is OK if I move for my vocational training; friends’ attitude: Alpha = .73; r_{est} = .40; sample item: My friends think it is OK to move for vocational training). The adolescents’ uncertainty tolerance was assessed with six items of the Uncertainty Tolerance Scale (Dalbert, 1999a; Alpha = .63; r_{est} = .22; sample item: I like to try things out, even if nothing comes of it). The number of prior relocations was assessed by one question, “How often have you and your family moved so far?” with the response categories “none,” “once,” “twice,” and “more than twice.” Three features of vocational goals were assessed. Future plans for the time directly after graduation were assessed with the single question “What will you do after graduation?” with the response options “vocational training,” “higher school education,” “one year of community service,” “I don’t know,” and “other.” The variable was later re-codified into a dichotomous variable “vocational training,” with 1 = “yes” and 0 = “no.” The specificity of vocational goals was assessed by asking participants to list their two most
important vocational goals (procedure: see Little, 1983) and to indicate how detailed their vision of these goals on 6-point rating scales from 1 = “no detailed vision” to 6 = “very detailed vision.” The average of the two goals’ ratings was used as a measure of the specificity of vocational goals ($r = .41; p < .001$). To assess preparations for vocational training, students were presented with 10 statements, each describing an activity involved in the preparation for vocational training (e.g., I have gathered information about schools offering vocational training), with the response options Yes and No. Each Yes was counted as 1 point, each No as 0 points. An index summing up all points—i.e., ranging from 0 = “no preparation at all” to 10 “10 preparation activities”—was used as an indicator of preparation for vocational training. Sex was coded with 1 = “female” and 0 = “male”. Unless otherwise specified, all items were rated on 6-point Likert-type scales, where 1 indicated “strongly disagree,” and 6 indicated “strongly agree,” and scale means were used as variables. When the response to more than one item on a given scale was missing, the whole scale was defined as missing for that person. The minimum list-wise sample size was thus $n = 370$.

RESULTS

The results are presented in two parts. First, the bivariate correlations are presented; second, the results of multiple regression analyses are described.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 shows the bivariate correlations of all variables. The correlation between the two mobility dimensions was of medium height ($r = .34$). Individualism, parents’ and friends’ attitudes towards mobility, and uncertainty tolerance correlated with both mobility dimensions in the expected direction. The same was true for the three variables describing the adolescents’ vocational goals. In contrast, a higher number of prior relocations and higher
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vertical collectivism were significantly related only to higher general geographic mobility. Horizontal collectivism and gender showed no significant relationship with either mobility dimension.

Multiple regression analyses were run for each mobility dimension separately in order to identify the unique variance explained by each predictor. All twelve possible predictors were entered in one block in the multiple regression. Table 2 shows the results.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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For general geographic mobility, five out of the twelve predictor variables were significant and 29% of the total variance was explained. The more positive the attitudes of their friends and parents, the stronger their horizontal individualism, the better prepared they were for vocational training, and the weaker their vertical collectivism, the more positive the students’ general attitudes towards geographical mobility. For specific mobility for incentives, five variables were significant and 18% of the total variance was explained. The stronger their vertical individualism, the more specific their vocational goals, the more positive the attitudes of their friends, the higher their uncertainty tolerance, and if they had no plans for vocational training, the more positive the students’ attitudes towards mobility for incentives.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the predictor sets for each of the mobility dimensions had a great deal in common. The general importance assigned to close ties with friends and family, measured within the individualism-collectivism framework, and parents’ as well as friends’ attitudes towards moving were central to both dimensions of mobility.
In general, it emerged that individualistic attitudes enhanced both dimensions of mobility, whereas collectivist attitudes only restricted general geographic mobility. Adolescents who score high in horizontal individualism believe that the individual is autonomous, but not of higher or lower status than any other individual. They do not feel that they are dependent on the people in their environment, or that other people they meet will be dependent on them or control them. Thus, they are free to move. In line with our hypotheses, high horizontal individualism--focusing on the self but not on competition with others--enhances general geographic mobility, and strong vertical individualism--focusing on competition with others--enhances mobility for incentives. Also consistent with our hypothesis, vertical collectivism limits general geographic mobility. Adolescents who score high in vertical collectivism may believe that leaving the group will have negative consequences for them. However, we did not find any effect of collectivism on mobility for incentives. Overall, these results indicate that the importance of social ties is a significant predictor of adolescents’ mobility. Whether this general tendency is replicated in real friendships and family relations and thus reflects the actual social situation of adolescents, we cannot say. Nevertheless, it seems that we have identified an important factor impacting on adolescents’ mobility that is independent of their current social situation and may, therefore, be a more stable measure than the existing friendships and family ties--the variable used in previous research.

Both parents’ and friends’ attitudes had a major positive influence on the two dimensions of adolescents’ mobility. This supports our hypotheses that the more positive parents’ and friends’ attitudes are, the more willing the adolescents will be to relocate. Previous research has discussed whether parents or peers (Harris, 1995) are the more important sources of support in adolescence. Our results show that both parents and peers are important sources of advice and support in vocational decision-making. However, friends’ attitudes were consistently related to both dimensions, whereas parents’ attitudes only predicted general
geographic mobility. During the transition from childhood to adulthood, the parents’
influence--which had been very pronounced in childhood--lessens in favor of peer influences.
Adolescence is a stage in which both factors are of equal importance for a relocation decision.
Elder et al. (1996) found that strong identification with the parents lowers adolescents’
 mobility. We differentiated this result and showed that both parents and friends influence
adolescents’ mobility, and that the attitudes of these persons are of particular importance. The
more peers and parents were perceived as having a positive attitude towards mobility, the
better the adolescents’ own attitude towards mobility. What seems to diminish at least general
geographic mobility is the general importance of social ties, namely vertical collectivism.

As hypothesized, the higher their uncertainty tolerance scores, the more positive the students’
attitudes towards mobility were. On a bivariate level, uncertainty tolerance correlated with
both mobility dimensions. In competition with alternative predictors, uncertainty tolerance
only survived in the prediction model for mobility for incentives. The more uncertainty
tolerant the students were, the more willing they were to relocate when offered incentives
such as promotion. This supports research by Sorrentino and Hewitt (1984) and Sorrentino
and Roney (1990), who found that uncertainty tolerant people choose uncertain situations
where they can learn something new about themselves.

Mobility for incentives shows a somewhat different pattern when compared to general
geographic mobility, with the influence of parents’ attitudes failing to reach significance. The
predictor set for mobility for incentives contained more personal and job-related factors such
as uncertainty tolerance on the one hand, and specificity of vocational goals and firm plans for
vocational training on the other, with individualism and specific vocational goals being the
strongest predictors. Vertical individualism, the strongest of all predictors, is related to
competition. People high in vertical individualism see themselves as independent, but also
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perceive a clear social hierarchy, and are determined to move up the ladder. Thus, material and idealistic incentives that promise a secure job and perhaps prestige and wealth are gladly welcome. Overall, a strong orientation towards competition, as indicated by vertical individualism and an emphasis on vocational goals, may typically promote mobility for incentives such as promotion and economic gains. Furthermore, these orientations overrule the impact of the parents’ attitudes towards mobility; this, too, only seems to be typical of mobility for incentives.

We assessed three indicators describing students’ plans and preparation for their vocational future, and both mobility dimensions were predicted by at least one of these three vocational descriptors. Preparations for vocational training only enhanced general geographic mobility. The more the adolescents had already invested in preparations for a vocational training program, the more positive their general attitude towards geographic mobility. This may be interpreted as indicating that the more the students had invested in preparing for their vocational training, the more important was it for them to find a good job and, as a consequence, the more willing they were to invest further in this job – if necessary, by being geographically mobile. In the same vein, the specificity of vocational goals enhanced the mobility for incentives. Adolescents who know what they want are more willing to move if given good reasons to do so. These results are in line with the analyses of Friedel, Otto, and Dalbert (2003), who showed the importance of vocational goals to be a significant predictor of different mobility dimensions within a representative sample of German adolescents and young adults. In contrast, but in line with our hypothesis, firm plans to begin vocational training had a negative influence on mobility for incentives. Obviously, a concrete plan to start working restricts a mobility decision. Our interpretation is that at least part of these adolescents may already have been promised a job in the local job market and were therefore unwilling to move. Students with other plans, e.g., continuing in education or doing a year of
low-paid community service, were more mobile. Future studies should be careful to
differentiate between students who have already been allocated a place on a vocational
training program and those who wish to start vocational training after school, but do not yet
have a concrete opportunity to do so. It may be that mobility is only low for those who have
already been promised a job. Overall, our results indicate that the intensity and amount of
preparation for vocational goals seem to be important predictors of attitudes towards mobility.

Finally, the number of prior relocations, a predictor that had been found to be important for
adults in some studies (e.g., Landau et al., 1992), did not yield significant results for
adolescents. The reason might be that the variance in number of moves is too small among
adolescents aged 15. Additionally, the adolescents may have experienced most of these moves
from a more passive perspective. Relocation experiences that were actively organized by the
subjects themselves may have more of an impact on their attitudes towards mobility.

Several theoretical and methodological limitations apply to this study. Firstly, caution should
be taken when interpreting the cross-sectional findings. Although the structural model
suggests causality, further longitudinal studies are necessary before causal connections can be
assumed. Moreover, some might argue that the observed relationships are a result of both
mobility and the independent variables being measured through self-reports. Thus, the
correlations may be inflated by our participants’ tendency to answer in a consistent manner.
Furthermore, because our sample of ninth grade German students was drawn from a single
school track, the results may be limited to this population. The age at the transition from
school to work depends on the school type. The results of students in academic-track schools
might differ from those of students in intermediate-track schools, or indeed those of adults.
Thus, further studies with adolescents and young adults from different school tracks and with
different professional aspirations are needed. Finally, research on mobility behavior is needed
to learn more about the personal predictors of such behavior, and to understand when mobility proneness leads to mobility behavior and when it does not.

CONCLUSION

This is one of the first studies dealing with the personal predictors of adolescents’ attitudes towards mobility. The results lend support to our hypothesis that it is possible to identify adolescence-specific personal predictors of a positive attitude towards mobility. In particular, these are the subjective importance of close ties with friends and family, i.e., individualism, and--equally importantly--perceived families’ and friends’ attitudes towards mobility. In a tight labor market, mobility proneness may be decisive for a successful vocational biography. To fully understand this phenomenon during adolescence, the interaction between when and how adolescents enter the labor market and how adolescents are integrated into their social surroundings should be monitored.
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Psychologie, 27, 246-251.


Footnotes

1 In Germany, young people of 16 years or older can volunteer for one year of low-paid community service to gather experience, serve the community, and take time to decide on their career goals.

2 Cronbach (1951) showed that alpha is dependent on the number of items, and introduced $r_{est}$ as an index of homogeneity which is independent of test length. For example, a test with 16 items with a “rule of thumb $\alpha = .80$” has a $r_{est} = .20$. 
Table 1

Bivariate correlation, mean (M), and standard deviation (SD) of all variables

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<td>0.22***</td>
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<td>0.11*</td>
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</table>
| 14 Mobility for incentives | 4.73 | 0.89 | 1.00 | 1.00

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, sample size varies from 376 to 392 due to missing data. Variables were coded as follows: sex: 1 = female, 0 = male; number of prior relocations: from 0 = “none” to 3 = “more than twice”; future plans: 1 = vocational training, 0 = other; preparations for vocational training: from 0 to 10, a higher number indicating more preparations; all other variables on a scale from 1 to 6, with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of the variable.
Table 2

Regression of attitudes towards mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td><strong>4.331</strong></td>
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<td>.29</td>
<td><strong>6.032</strong></td>
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</table>
Students’ attitudes towards geographic mobility 28

continue of Table 2

### Mobility for incentives ($F_{\text{total}} = 6.541$; $df = 12/358$; $p < .001$; $R^2 = .18$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td><strong>2.211</strong></td>
<td><strong>.028</strong></td>
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</table>
APPENDIX

Items of the “Mobility for incentives” scale

Imagine you had two good job offers. One is in your hometown, the other is 450 km away.

How likely would you be to accept the offer 450 km away?

I would accept the offer if...

... I earned more money there.

... the company there offered me a room in a fully equipped dorm with TV, free internet access, and a gym.

... the company there offered me a new workplace with excellent equipment.

... the company there offered me tenure.

Imagine you had two good job offers. One is in your hometown, the other involves a change of location within the country every 3-4 months. How likely would you be to accept the offer where you change locations?

I would accept the offer if...

... I earned more money there.

... the company offered me a room in a fully equipped dorm with TV, free internet access, and a gym at every location.

... the company offered me new workplaces with excellent equipment at every location.

... the company offered me tenure.