Teaching Current Directions in Psychological Science

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C. Nathan DeWall, University of Kentucky, and renowned textbook author and APS Fellow David G. Myers, Hope College, have teamed up to create a new series of Observer columns aimed at integrating cutting-edge psychological science into the classroom. Each column will offer advice and how-to guidance about teaching a particular area of research or topic in psychological science that has been the focus of an article in the APS journal Current Directions in Psychological Science. Current Directions is a peer-reviewed bi-monthly journal featuring reviews by leading experts covering all of scientific psychology and its applications and allowing readers to stay apprised of important developments across subfields beyond their areas of expertise. Its articles are written to be accessible to non-experts, making them ideally suited for use in the classroom.

Moving Expenses

Morality Matters

Moving Experiences: Teaching Students About the Costs and Benefits of Residential Mobility

By C. Nathan DeWall


Modern cultures offer people many opportunities to explore themselves and the world. We have different opportunities for mobility: People switch career paths, transition through friendships, and alter their belief systems. More recently, people began to embrace their ability to shift their geographic location. No longer confined to one place, moving became a natural part of life. Moving can be an exciting process in which people seek to escape their worries, experience the unfamiliar, and soak up all that a new location has to offer. For psychological scientists, there are opportunities for research exploration as well: If moving is linked to excitement, might frequent moving benefit individual well-being? Improve relationships? Enhance societal welfare?

According to APS Fellow Shigehiro Oishi and Thomas Talhelm (2012), the answers are: No, no, and no. They show that residential mobility increases anxiety instead of happiness, boosts loneliness instead of social acceptance, and diminishes helpfulness instead of making people model citizens. Frequent moving also relates to poor physical health, especially if you have a personality that makes it difficult to build a new social network. In one powerful example, introverted adults who moved often during childhood died sooner than did introverted adults who did not move frequently as children. Nomadic extraverts didn’t suffer physically compared with extraverts who were more geographically settled,
presumably because they possessed the skill and motivation to form new relationships to stave off the anxiety and social isolation that accompanies frequent moving.

Residential mobility offers an ideal teaching topic because it affects many college students. To be sure, some students remain in their childhood homes throughout college. But many students venture out to live in their own apartment, a new town or state, or even a foreign country. Teaching students about the realities of residential mobility can help them appreciate how the mind and body respond to residential shifts, often in ways they do not predict.

When discussing residential mobility, Oishi asks students the following question:

What percentage of Americans have moved (changed their main residence) in the past 5 years?

A. 0–10%
B. 11–30%
C. 31–40%
D. 41–50%
E. 51–60%

To illustrate the widespread nature of American residential mobility, he then shares the answer (D). In effect, almost the majority of Americans live in a different location than where they lived 5 years ago.

Why might a Starbucks coffee shop thrive in Florida more than in Pennsylvania? Having knowledge of residential mobility can uncover hidden motives behind our preferences and purchases. For example, Oishi and colleagues (2012) showed that experimentally manipulating thoughts of residential mobility caused people to prefer familiar objects to unfamiliar objects. This preference for familiarity may help explain why American national chain stores dominate the market landscape of mobile states (Florida, Nevada) more so than in states where people show less mobility (Pennsylvania, New York).

To bring this scientific finding to the classroom, instructors may ask students to consider their most exotic vacation or their last residential move. Ask them if they caught themselves shopping at national chain stores more when they entered these new environments than when they were in familiar territory. For students who have spent time outside the country, ask if they shopped at US-based chains. Next, encourage discussion regarding what benefit they gained from preferring similar foods and stores when they entered a new environment. If you have relevant experience, feel free to share it. I (CND) often tell students that I eat Kentucky Fried Chicken far more often when I am outside of the United States than when I am in my home state of Kentucky. Does distance make the heart grow fonder — or simply fonder of what is familiar?

Cultures vary widely in their residential mobility. How might these differences relate to cross-cultural differences in how people see themselves? To illustrate cultural variation in residential mobility, Oishi asks students the following question:

What percentage of Japanese have moved (changed their main residence) in the past 5 years?

A. 0–10%
Next, he shows them the answer (B), which demonstrates that Japanese have lower levels of residential mobility than Americans. He also encourages students to read essays from *Unrooted Childhoods: Memoirs of Growing Up Global* (Eidse & Sichel, 2003).

Having illustrated cross-cultural variation in residential mobility, instructors can review classic theory and research that suggest that people from North American cultures include traits in their self-concepts that differentiate them from others (independent self-construals), whereas people from many Asian cultures include others in their self-concepts (interdependent self-construals) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Instructors can then encourage students to find a similar connection between residential mobility and independent and interdependent self-construals, such as the finding that people who move often define themselves in terms of their unique abilities instead of how they relate to others.

A final activity involves having students list the number of times they plan to move in their lifetime. Write the names of the places where students plan to live on the board, which will give students an idea of their classmates’ plans and goals. Also write the number of places where students plan to live. Ask students to consider their number in relation to what they know about residential mobility. Discussion can center on how students can identify an ideal amount of moving in their lifetime, in which they can savor their experiences and minimize the negative consequences of residential mobility.  

**References**


**Morality Matters**

*By David G. Myers*


Psychological scientists — from William James to Hugh Hartshorne to Jean Piaget to Lawrence Kohlberg to Carol Gilligan to Walter Mischel to Jonathan Haidt — have pondered how we discern right from wrong, how we develop the moral muscles for doing the right thing, and how well moral thinking prompts moral action.
In “Integrating the Streams of Morality Research,” Jesse Graham, Peter Meindl, and Erica Beall identify distinct tributaries of morality research:

- **Humans differ in moral judgments**
  - *Cultures differ:* Easterners are more concerned about loyalty and respect than Westerners are”; “liberals are more concerned about care and fairness and are less concerned about loyalty, respect, and sanctity than conservatives are”; and “women are more concerned about care, fairness, and sanctity than men are.
  - Individuals differ: Some people more than others have an intense moral identity. People for whom moral concerns are central to their self-concept indeed act more morally (for example, generously).

- **Immediate situations influence moral judgments**
  - Disgust cues, such as bad odors, can prime more severe moral judgments.
  - Positive mood inductions decrease moral severity. (We are reminded of earlier research that links feeling to doing good, in which situational happiness boosts helping [Salovey, Mayer, & Rosenhan, 1991]. Receiving a gift increases willingness to relay a phone message.)

- **People and situations interact.** For example, conservative individuals are more sensitive to disgusting stimuli.

Graham, Meindl, and Beall are curious about the links between moral thought and action, and we think students will be, too. When are thought and action consistent? When is moral hypocrisy (inconsistency) likely?

Issues of morality are well-suited to the teaching of both moral development (in introductory and developmental psychology) and attitude-behavior relations (in introductory and social psychology). Students could be asked:

- What examples come to mind of people walking their talk — of moral attitudes feeding moral actions? Perhaps of someone professing honesty and resisting an easy opportunity to cheat?
- What examples come to mind of moral hypocrisy — of cheap talk not lived out? Perhaps someone espousing concern for climate change but living otherwise?
- Can you think, perhaps from your own life, of times when your character and conduct, your words and deeds, made sweet harmony — or didn’t?
- Do your own moral intuitions — your gut emotions before any moral reasoning — clue you in to right and wrong? Students can be offered several of Haidt’s (2012) scenarios that evoke immediate (“It’s wrong!”) responses. An example includes cooking and eating a family dog that has been killed by a car.
- Are there factors that differ between those examples of moral integrity and moral hypocrisy? Perhaps something that reminded you of who you are or situational pressures that overrode your better judgment?
  - In social psychological research, attitudes are especially likely to affect behavior when external influences are minimal and when the attitudes are stable, specific to the behavior, and easily recalled (Glasman & Albarracín, 2006).
  - Daniel Batson (2011) offers another reason for commonplace moral hypocrisy: many people’s egoistic motivation to *appear* moral exceeds their motivation to actually *be*
Batson’s experiments suggest to him that principled moral integrity is rarer than we might wish and that society therefore needs “to tap nonmoral resources” (such as social norms and civil laws, we infer). Nevertheless, students may be inspired to consider striking examples of moral heroism. Scott Allison and APS Fellow George Goethals document some in their book *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them* (Oxford University Press). And APS Fellow Philip Zimbardo’s “Heroic Imagination Project” offers educational resources and stories. For a TED lecture by Zimbardo, and for inspiring stories of people whose moral judgments have engendered moral courage, see [www.heroicimagination.org](http://www.heroicimagination.org).

**References**