

surveys that White southerners are more likely to endorse violence than are northerners when the violence is used in response to insult or in response to some threat to home, family, or property.

In laboratory studies, they showed that southern U.S. college students were more likely than northern college students to respond in an aggressive manner when they were insulted. The insult involved an experimental confederate who bumped into the experimental participant as he was walking down the hallway and then called the participant an expletive. Southern students were more than twice as likely as northern students to become visibly angry at the insult (85% vs. 35%). They were more cognitively primed for aggression, completing scenarios with more violent endings. And they showed surges in their levels of testosterone (a hormone associated with aggression, competition, and dominance) and cortisol (a hormone associated with stress and arousal) after the bump. Additionally, southerners also became more aggressive as they subsequently walked down the hallway and encountered another experimental confederate (who was 6 feet 3 inches tall and weighed 250 pounds).

Finally, the researchers also showed that the laws and social policies of the South were more lenient toward violence than those of the North. This is important, because social policies may be one way the culture of honor is carried forward, even after the originating conditions (the lawless environment of the frontier South) have largely disappeared.

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**See also** Aggression; Culture; Masculinity/Femininity; Threatened Egotism Theory of Aggression

### Further Readings

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## CURIOSITY

### Definition

Curiosity is a pleasant motivational state involving the tendency to recognize and seek out novel and challenging information and experiences. Curiosity differs from other positive emotions by the strong desire to explore and persist in the activity that initially stimulated an individual's interest. Although curiosity and enjoyment tend to go in tandem, sometimes there is a conflict between curiosity and other positive emotions because curiosity can lead to the pursuit of new, uncertain, and complex activities that are aversive. With curiosity, the rewards appear to come from the process of integrating varied and complex information and experiences rather than simply the positive affect associated with it.

### Individual Differences in Curiosity

All human beings have moments of curiosity, as it is a universal characteristic that begins to emerge during infancy. Yet, individuals differ in the preference for novel and challenging activities; the tendency to find themselves in, or actively search for, these activities; the breadth of activities that stimulate their interest; the threshold to experience curiosity; and the intensity, frequency, and chronicity of curiosity. Individuals also differ in their willingness to take physical, social, financial, and legal risks to satisfy their need for varied, uncertain, and complex experiences and avoid the pain of boredom. This is a variant of curiosity called *sensation seeking*. Sensation seeking not only includes more socially desirable activity, such as taking a walk in a cold breeze, using aromatherapy, and trying exotic foods, but also less socially desirable activity, such as gambling, cliff diving, ingesting consciousness-expanding drugs, or having a fascination with death and violence.

The degree to which people become curious or interested appears to be a function of recognizing the potential novelty, complexity, uncertainty, and conflict in the object of one's attention. Some of the primary qualities that induce curiosity include (a) novelty—newness relative to prior experiences and expectations, (b) complexity—the more variety or less integration of components within the scope of attention, (c) uncertainty—the presence of multiple outcomes and

possibilities with little knowledge of which will occur, and (d) conflict—the presence of competing response tendencies such as being motivated to approach or avoid the same activity. Each of these qualities can point to a gap in one's preexisting knowledge and capabilities, or representation of the self, world, or future. Strong feelings of curiosity can be expected when individuals are aware of discrepancies between what is known and not known and when they find it desirable to make the unknown known. An individual's curiosity is not only affected by evaluations of how novel and challenging an activity is, but also by personal abilities to cope and feel a sense of control. These appraisals (of novelty and coping potential) have an inverted-U function on curiosity and exploratory behavior. For example, high levels of novelty, complexity, uncertainty, and conflict can lead to undesirable feelings of anxiety and confusion, whereas moderate levels appear to be ideal for creating and sustaining curiosity and interest.

Despite these general factors that affect whether a person will be curious, the specific information and experiences that interest one individual can be boring or anxiety-provoking to another. That is, when you begin to examine interests and judgments, individuals with the same tendency to be curious may be interested in vastly different information, knowledge, and direct sensory experiences. For example, one highly curious person may be extremely interested in playing chess and solving complex, mathematical formulas while another highly curious person may find puzzles to be boring and be primarily interested in gossip and meeting new people. Among other psychological processes, the experience of curiosity in a given activity helps explain why individuals develop longstanding interests in one thing and not another.

## Context and Importance

Curiosity is relevant to nearly all human activity ranging from leisure, creativity, decision making, and social relations to education, sports, work, and clinical therapy. By being fully engaging in varied and novel activities, a curious individual is guaranteed of stretching or expanding his or her knowledge, skills, and competence. Upon investing time, effort, and energy in activities that are intrinsically valued, curiosity facilitates personal growth and learning. In addition to these personal resources, feelings of curiosity can build

social bonds by promoting behaviors such as engagement, responsiveness, and flexibility to others' varied experiences and perspectives. These behaviors are desirable in interpersonal transactions and the formative stages of relationship development. On average, people enjoy spending time and developing friendships with people who are interested in them and what they say and do.

Another value of curiosity is its role in motivating and sustaining interest in important, but boring or tedious, activities. If an activity induces curiosity, an individual is likely to persist and the process is likely to be as enjoyable as (or even more so than) other goal-related outcomes. If an activity does not induce curiosity but there is a good reason to continue (such as having to take calculus to graduate high school), individuals can transform activities by making them more interesting (such as completing projects with someone else or with good music in the background or trying to make a game out of it). Attempts to self-generate curiosity in mundane activities leads to sustained motivation and increased effort and performance.

What makes an individual curious and interested is a large determinant of the career choices they make and, on a smaller scale, activities chosen when options and time are available. Individuals who are generally more curious tend to achieve and perform better in academics, work, and sports (even after accounting for how intelligent or athletic they are). They also adjust better to school and job-related changes and are generally more satisfied and have better relationships with others in school, work, and other settings.

Curiosity is associated with a wide range of desirable psychosocial outcomes. This includes greater well-being, intelligence, creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, goal effort and progress, preference for challenge in work and play, perceived control, and less perceived stress, negative emotions, and reliance on stereotypes and dogmatic thinking. A few provocative studies have even shown that more curious older adults live longer than their less curious peers even after accounting for the usual suspects such as age, gender, and physical health.

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*See also* Intrinsic Motivation; Sensation Seeking

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**Further Readings**

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