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Curiosity has a dark twin, and researchers are dying to know what drives it
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Curiosity Has a 'Dark' Twin

With Christmas knocking on the door, researchers are turning their attention to the dark and twisted side of curiosity, which is usually a healthy habit until some take it to extremes. Generally, experts think of curiosity as a positive thing, driven by noble goals, but which can sometime go awry.

For example, specialists agree that stimulation and knowledge are among the main reasons that drive people when they are curious. Simply put, they want to learn more about something, and try their best to find that out.

Learning and the love for new things are also important aspects of healthy curiosity. But what experts are more fascinated about is by the dark side of curiosity, the one that revolves around terms such as "I'm dying to know what's in that box."

Most people who experience this type of curiosity say that it resembles an itch which they find extremely difficult to appease. Scratching, so to speak, is the only way you can get rid of it.

"It's the difference between, 'Oh, that's cool,' and 'Aha!' To get there, you have to go through, 'Oh, dammit, it's bothering me!'" explains research scientist Jordan Litman.

The expert holds an appointment as a psychology investigator at the University of South Florida (USF), [LiveScience](#) reports. Litman adds that investigations into curiosity's dark twin have been underway since the 1960s.

Initially, experts referred to curiosity as the drive animals (including humans) have to reduce the level of uncertainty they have about their environment. However, this explanation could not account for why we tend to seek out mysteries that boost our curiosity levels directly.

"The problem there is that optimal arousal involves always approaching the unknown to increase stimulation, but never resolving it," explains Litman. The expert proposes instead that curiosity is driven by the fact that we are aware of gaps in our knowledge.

The scientist gives the example of a trivia night. People who almost know the answer are the most curious and frustrated, whereas those who don't know it at all show no such signs.

"One of the greatest ways to seriously piss someone off is to throw out some trivia question at them and just don't tell them the answer. It will seriously drive them insane," adds Paul Silvia.

The expert holds an appointment as a psychologist at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. He does not necessarily agree with Litman, saying the gap theory could be only one piece of the puzzle.

"That's kind of the small stuff, because most learning, people are doing for its own sake. It's not because they feel bad because they don't know it," Silva explains.

"Humans will go out of their way to see something awful that will give them nightmares," Litman explains, saying that knowledge tends to outweigh the desire to avoid becoming upset.

"It's a more complex model, because it forces you to understand that the brain is oriented to make sense of the world even if the result is unenjoyable," the expert adds.

"It may have to do with basic elements of the human brain that desire coherency. The closer you are to a coherent thing, perhaps it's more troubling when you can't get to the coherent whole," he concludes.