

**The Societal Push for Novelty: How Embracing Neophilism Benefits Us**

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### **Abstract**

This literature review examines the intersection of social influence, novelty-seeking, and well-being, emphasizing neophilism as a strategy for balanced engagement with new experiences. Elements of society such as American culture, media, and literature frequently encourage novelty and sensation seeking behaviors, which are often framed negatively. This paper argues that societal influences can lead to both risks and benefits, highlighting the role of intentional decision-making in finding positive outcomes. Foundational theories, including Self-Determination Theory, Social Learning Theory and research by Marvin Zuckerman and Carol Ryff, are used to understand the psychological and social dimensions of novelty seeking. The review also explores the impact of novelty on cognitive, social and physical health and its subsequent effects on creating psychological and eudaimonic well-being. The paper introduces potential action steps, particularly for individuals with sensation-seeking tendencies, encouraging them to choose activities that can facilitate personal growth and resilience. This paper advocates for a mindful approach to curiosity, enabling individuals to navigate societal pressures while maximizing their well-being. Recommendations for future research include exploring the effects of novelty across the lifespan and within non-Western, collectivistic cultures, to see how novelty-seeking can support flourishing in broader cultural contexts.

Life offers each of us a plethora of opportunities to step outside what is familiar and embrace something new. For some, trying something novel can look like taking a new route to work, sampling a limited-edition potato chip flavor, or picking up supplies for a budding hobby. For others, it may even mean more substantial changes, like starting a new business or even switching careers entirely. From the earliest stages of life, it is evident that humans contain an innate curiosity (Gallagher, 2012) and an inherent drive to explore our world, motivated by the mere existence of compelling objects and experiences seemingly within our reach.

This paper will explore the complex nature of novelty and how new experiences can be thrilling, frightening and even essential for growth. By examining the powerful social and cultural forces that shape our openness to change, it will reveal how fostering an affection for novelty may be rewarding for our lives.

**Part I** will examine the core concept of neophilism and introduce the different theoretical perspectives that seek to answer what novelty and sensation seeking is, and where our desire for curiosity comes from. This will highlight how our natural cognitive and social inclinations shape our openness to influence and prime us for novelty. **Part II** of this paper will cover how American culture, media, and literature strive to push us towards novelty seeking and sensation seeking. It will answer the question of how these elements of society influence our decisions, sometimes without us even realizing. **Part III** will investigate the myriads of benefits that can come from embracing this societal push for novelty, focusing on how neophilism, leaning into curiosity, with awareness and good decision-making, can enhance one's well-being. Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate how healthy and informed engagement with cultural pressures toward novelty can positively influence our psychological and eudaimonic well-being.

### **Part I: Background and Theoretical Context**

Understanding the concept of neophilism is central to understanding this paper's exploration of how we can harness our biological and socially cultivated attraction to novelty. The term "neophilia" is widely understood as a general enthusiasm or love for new and novel experiences, stemming from the Greek roots "neo," meaning new, and "philia," meaning love. Neophilism is different, as the inclusion of the suffix "-ism" shifts the focus from a simple preference for novelty to a more intentional and active life practice. Neophilism can be described as a way of living that embraces curiosity and the pursuit of new experiences, not just as a passive attraction but as a deliberate and ongoing commitment. We get to take advantage of the fact that life presents a multitude of opportunities to get excited about things, explore them, and then confidently begin a new pursuit (Gallagher, 2012). Life is an ongoing cycle of curiosity, exploration and forward momentum towards new horizons. Understanding the components that affect our ability to act on neophilism is crucial. Since this paper will cover how society pushes us towards novelty it will be important to explore what novelty and sensation seeking are, as well as what researchers have theorized about the intersection of intrinsic curiosity and external social influence. Once we understand these origins and the nature of novelty seeking, we can better appreciate the benefits that following the ideals of neophilism can bring.

### **Novelty and Sensation-seeking Behaviors**

When exploring the concept of neophilism we should start with how novelty-seeking and sensation-seeking have been defined. In psychological contexts, novelty-seeking is defined as "a personality trait characterized by a strong interest in having new experiences" (APA, 2024a). It often implies a desire to explore new environments, activities or ideas. Similarly, the American Psychological Association (APA) defines sensation seeking as "the tendency to search out and engage in thrilling activities as a method of increasing stimulation and arousal" (APA, 2024b). This behavior is frequently associated with individuals who engage in thrilling activities that

may contain elements of danger. Marvin Zuckerman, a leading figure in sensation seeking research, offers a more comprehensive definition: “the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (Zuckerman, 1994, p. 27). Sensation seeking comes from the individual’s desire to constantly engage with new stimuli and can be explained through four distinct behavioral categories: (1) thrill and adventure seeking, (2) experience seeking or sensation variety, (3) disinhibition, wanting to be unrestrained often resulting in unconventional or illicit behaviors, and (4) boredom susceptibility, or the dislike of repetition or routine (Zuckerman, 1994, p.31-32). Each of these areas can offer individuals positive rewards, such as increased sociability, providing insights into vocational interests, encouraging physical fitness, or even simply being enjoyable. However, when extreme impulsivity or a failure to observe risks are present, these behaviors can lead to negative consequences, such as increased physical and financial risks (Zuckerman, 1994). As a result of biological needs for novelty, individuals may have different preferences as to the type of sensation-seeking behavior they engage in and fall along a spectrum from low to high impulsivity. Those who score above average in sensation seeking may act recklessly, either by engaging in behaviors from the disinhibition category or by taking activities from other categories to higher extremes, potentially endangering their safety and well-being while perceiving such actions as enjoyable.

Research shows that sensation-seeking behavior, a concept closely related to curiosity, arises from intrinsic neurological needs for optimal levels of stimulation, shaped by factors such as early childhood environment, personality traits, and even genetic predispositions (Zuckerman, 1994). Over time, the study of curiosity and sensation-seeking has continued to evolve, with variables like ethnicity, religion, marital status, gender, birth order, and levels of anxiety all shown to influence our tendencies toward exploration and curiosity (Zuckerman, 1994). These

complex factors combine to create a diverse range of motivations and inclinations for novelty-seeking behaviors, from small daily changes to life-altering decisions.

### **Curiosity and Social Influence**

To fully understand how individuals are drawn to novelty and sensation-seeking behaviors, as described by Zuckerman, it is necessary to explore the theories that contextualize the biological, psychological, and social pressures for novelty. Curiosity is a multifaceted concept, even more complex than novelty seeking, driven by different mechanisms that researchers have debated for decades.

At the innate biological level, Drive Reduction Theory claims that curiosity is caused by disturbances or uncertainties introduced by novel stimuli (Silvia, 2012). This disruption then inspires exploration until enough information is gathered to achieve cognitive coherence at an acceptable level (Litman, 2005). This drive theory suggests that humans may initiate the discovery process intrinsically, without any external triggers or disturbances. This is supported by research that believes humans have an optimal level of arousal and that when under-aroused, we feel boredom or apathy and begin searching for new tastes, sights, sounds, and experiences to return us to normalcy. On the other hand, when we experience excessive stimulation, it leads to an anxious or uncertain state, one that requires action and exploration to lower uncertainty and return us to that optimal arousal (Silvia, 2012).

As a result of biological needs for novelty, individuals may have different preferences for the type of sensation-seeking behavior they engage in and fall along a spectrum from low to high seeking and impulsivity (Zuckerman, 1994). Those who score above average in sensation seeking may act recklessly, either choosing behaviors from the disinhibition category or taking activities from other categories to higher extremes. In these cases, they may put their safety and well-being at risk while perceiving the experiences as enjoyable. However, curiosity should be

both reactive and proactive; we can harness our instinctive curiosity to enhance goal setting and personal agency to better understand ourselves and the world around us. When acting upon curiosity or interest individuals usually choose an activity if they appraise the subject of novelty as something manageable or comprehensible (Silvia & Kashdan, 2009). While people are naturally inclined towards things that are familiar and pleasing, they are also drawn to what is new, complex, and uncertain when it is deemed appropriately safe.

Next, examining curiosity through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a more nuanced understanding of curiosity that views it as a conscious choice rather than merely a subconscious reaction to neurological needs. SDT is firmly rooted in the fulfillment of basic psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Curiosity is engaged due to its significant influence on individual growth, optimal functioning and well-being as individuals become more enlightened about the world (González-Cutre et al., 2016). Curiosity and the seeking out of challenges are a default tendency as engaging in challenges is consequential in development across the lifespan. So, curiosity is often driven by a self-determinate need for competence, autonomy and social relatedness. It has also been proposed that experiencing something new to you or that differs from your daily routine may be essential in the development process. Beyond simply reducing uncertainty or arousal, curiosity fosters intrinsic motivation. When aligned with SDT it can help fuel personal development and self-actualization. While people are innately drawn to novel stimuli, they also choose to pursue new experiences, balancing both biological impulses and psychological goals.

The third area that contributes to curiosity is social influence. This area provides top-down pressure, creating the guidelines and scope that individuals are allowed to engage in action, curiosity and exploration. Over the past century, theorists have explored the origins of curiosity, novelty seeking, and sensation seeking, offering varied perspectives on the motives behind these

behaviors and traits. Humans naturally pay close attention to the people and behaviors that occur around us. We are wired to imitate the actions and patterns in the world through cognitive structures such as mirror neurons and facial recognition that can allow us to coordinate effectively with other humans and create cohesive functioning societies. These enable us to perceive others' emotions and actions, thus guiding our responses to be socially appropriate and adaptive. Social norms and the behaviors of those in our environment have always influenced us, and, as highly social beings, fitting into group culture remains a powerful motivator in our decision-making (McDonald & Crandall, 2015).

This social influence is strongly aligned with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, a central theoretical perspective in this paper. Social Learning Theory proposes that much of human behavior occurs due to observing others and internalizing their behaviors (Bandura, 1969). This provides an alternative view of decision making that is not just derived from intrinsic biochemical or psychological factors within us but from the cultural messages we receive from our social surroundings. The processes of observation, retention, reproduction, and motivation inherent in Social Learning Theory allow societal norms and influences to play a significant role in shaping individual behaviors and perspectives.

Traditional research on social influence and sensation-seeking has often focused on the potential dangers associated with these tendencies, such as binge drinking, drug use, and reckless driving. However, today's research increasingly views novelty-seeking with fresh perspectives, highlighting its potential as a catalyst for personal growth and resilience. By understanding how societal influences shape our engagement with novelty, we can begin to view novelty seeking as an intentional choice that, when directed purposefully, has a rewarding impact on our well-being.

Ultimately, the study of human motivation toward novelty and curiosity is supported by a wide range of theories. The frameworks discussed, Drive Reduction Theory, Self-Determination

Theory, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory each offer valuable insights into complexity of the origins and influences of curiosity and novelty. Although researchers may continue to differ in their approaches to understanding curiosity, it remains clear that humans are inherently driven to seek new experiences and are influenced by novelty throughout their lives.

### **Part II: Where the Social Push for Novelty is Clear**

This section will discuss how, while every person is primed for novelty and curiosity differently based on individual arousal psychological motivations, social influence plays a powerful role in shaping these behaviors. As stated earlier, Bandura's Social Learning Theory describes how we learn through observing and mirroring the behaviors of others. This raises the question: which areas of society do we mirror, and how do they communicate and promote the need for novelty? This section will begin by investigating a few tenets of American culture, followed by an analysis of media and literature, to understand how each area wields the power to influence individuals to engage with new experiences. Recognizing these influences will be key to understanding the practice of neophilism.

#### **American Culture**

To understand social influence, we must start with American cultural norms. Culture, as mentioned earlier, not only forms the foundations of the other influences, media and literature, to be discussed in this paper, but also constructs the range in which we consider acting upon novelty. When examining social influence all culture but especially, American culture, can be forgotten. It is easy to discount the impact of American culture, either claiming there is not a culture or if so, it is something uncomplicated like just a desire for watching Baseball (MLB) and eating apple pie. However, there are several important tenets to American culture that explain its influence.

The American ideal of freedom and autonomy (self-determination) are rooted in the nation's founding, evident in the constitutional emphasis on personal freedoms and liberties (U.S. Const. Amend 1). Freedom of expression and autonomy is encouraged as politicians and advertising agencies use rhetoric to encourage individuals to protect and use their ability to choose between a vast array of options, styles, colors, flavors, and policies (Markus et al., 2010). In the United States a highly individualist culture manifests in a citizenry that is generally low in uncertainty avoidance and high in the need for uniqueness (Gentina et al., 2014). Because of our belief in freedom, doing "whatever you want" is a culturally positive and tolerated mindset to have. The western understanding of freedom, autonomy and self-expression as necessary areas of development to prove maturity and life well-being, differs from the areas of the world such as in East Asia where family closeness and respect are larger markers of mature individuals (Christopher & Hickenbottom, 2008). In the U.S., ideals of growth and self-actualization can sometimes be prioritized over meeting basic needs or family connection, despite the realistic value of connectedness and networking in professional life. Individualistic societies, in general, encourage risk-taking, especially in business and economic pursuits, promoting personal achievement and competition (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). This individualism and great appreciation for freedom of choice is heralded as distinctly American, putting pressure on individuals to not waste any opportunity that comes to them. Creating a populace with a belief in the core concept of freedom is the first step in culturally communicating that people should be actively doing something at all times.

The second tenet of American culture that often pressures individuals to novelty, is busyness. The American emphasis on busyness can be traced to early Protestant traditions, where work was seen as a divine calling and commandment (Ciulla, 2011). The Protestant work ethic equated constant diligence with a virtuous character and made laziness a moral failing. This

is seen in some translations of the Bible, in the proverb “idle hands are the devil’s workshop” (The Living Bible, 1971) which has now become a popular idiom and social norm pushing productivity. Americans are some of the busiest people globally. Despite the affluence of the nation, rest and relaxation are rare, with days off filled with errands, social outings, or working out (Greenfeld, 2005). Within the nation there is an almost daily marketing of glamorous trips, new tech products, exciting foods, organizations to volunteer with or a multitude of other activities, ingraining the necessity of constant busyness. However, this unending activity can lead to chronic fatigue coupled with an oppressive feeling that stopping would result in a “poverty of deprivation”, where social standing is imperatively at risk (Greenfeld, 2005). Additionally, this constant focus on self-improvement or advancement can negatively manifest as feelings of inadequacy whenever you are not meeting personal expectations of discipline or progress (Shir-Wise, 2019).

Lastly, Americans can combine their belief in freedom and autonomy with busyness culture to center themselves on a core focus of vitality and mobility. Vitality, meaning a freshness in life, especially in mind and body, and mobility, upward attainment, are strongly defended by the language of the American Dream. The American Dream contains a persuasive message: that with enough effort, anyone can achieve a higher social status or success (Bellezza et al., 2017). The ideals of vitality and mobility validate an ethic of busyness, consumption and exploration. Creating your own destiny is just within your grasp with enough forward momentum. This focus on aggressive progress is shown as resulting in economic success and personal satisfaction without any negative consequences, directly impacting participating in seeking and impulsive behavior. The American Dream puts pressure to always be looking for opportunities to stay fresh, be innovative, and active, and avoiding negative American traits such as laziness or stagnation. In the wealthy nations of the United States even the less financially

privileged may have these beliefs of attainable success, with always reaching for what is new as the potential key. In this way, the intersecting ideals of freedom, busyness, vitality, and mobility within American culture create an environment where novelty-seeking behaviors serve the goal of creating purpose, progress, and personal identity.

### **Media**

There is a seemingly endless number of popular media that show how and why we are guided toward novelty and sensation-seeking. Popular media, including television programs, movies, and news sources, provide much of the information people consume and play an increasingly central role in transmitting cultural norms and values. In the 21st century, various forms of media can now be found digitally on social media platforms, stretching across news apps, music streaming services, and video-sharing apps. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2024, 83% of U.S. adults use YouTube, 68% use Facebook, and among adults aged 18-29, 78% use Instagram (Gottfried, 2024). Other popular media sites currently used by at least 22% of U.S. adults include Reddit, X (formerly Twitter), and Pinterest.

Media fosters a drive for novelty as it raises uncertainty in users, introducing them to an overwhelming amount of new people, culture, places, and activities. This constant exposure aligns with Drive Reduction Theory, which suggests that the novelty portrayed by media consumption motivates people to act, engaging in media even more deeply to reduce uncertainty and return to optimal arousal (Silvia, 2012).

The themes in TV, news and entertainment are typically relatable to our realities. Entertainment and plotted narratives rely on audiences having a level of understanding and identification with the main protagonists. This connection allows individuals to create a parasocial relationship or engage socially and cognitively, opening themselves up for persuasion and influence (Green et al., 2002, p172). Influencers and content creators model behaviors and

choices, aiming to set trends, encourage viewers to emulate their actions, closely linking social media use to the effects of Social Learning Theory. By learning and mimicking those behaviors, through trial-and-error users can be seen as popular through behavior reinforcers (Bandura, 2001) such as likes, comments and shares (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Oftentimes, media persuasion is intentionally kept in the subtext and underlying messaging because too obvious messaging is often off-putting. Media consumers tend to find it intrusive when a message is overly explicit (Green et al., 2002).

The “reality” aspect of media today is particularly persuasive, as individuals tend to trust the lived experiences of others, which are judged more on scenario relevance than substance or validity. Shows like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* or various TLC network reality shows present real lives, albeit often with scripting tailored to specific messaging. This assumed validity of others’ experiences encourages viewers to absorb messages uncritically, which can lead to the adoption and spread of inaccurate beliefs and information. Youth especially seem driven to extensive social media use by a strong desire for new information (Roberts & David, 2020). Social media, sensationalist magazines, and news outlets frequently promote constant comparisons, often encouraging negative or even hateful content that people consume endlessly as they scroll. Social media platforms allow family members, influencers, and occasional experts to share articles, information, opinions, and reviews on current events, regardless of accuracy, thus impacting personal development significantly (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). It’s easy to get lost in rabbit holes filled with negative opinions, where people engage in “doom scrolling” at the cost of productivity.

The presence of endlessly evolving fashion trends encourages rapid consumerism but also potentially damaging body image messaging. Additionally, the parasocial relationships between content creators and users can introduce people to a plethora of new activities and

behaviors, some of which, like smoking, vaping or poor dieting, can lead to negative health ramifications (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Behaviors such as gambling, substance abuse, risky driving, frivolous spending, unsafe sex, and escapism are other examples of sensation-seeking promoted through the media through extravagant clips posted by influencers. Those individuals and demographics that are already prone to sensation seeking can use social media as a medium for finding new ways to engage in thrill seeking behaviors.

Social media as a whole spurs individuals to make life changes, some of them even drastic, in order to stay relevant, on trend and feel secure in their identities. This is especially true for adolescents who are spending more time online and using that space to not only bond with peers but explore their identities and compare themselves with others. Envy and narcissism can be drivers as well, when individuals put a concerted effort into curating a specific image often with conspicuous consumerism and persuasive placing and association with brands (Taylor & Strutton, 2016).

To attract followers or maintain trendy content, users invest in new skills, such as editing or cosmetics, engage in materialistic consumption, and explore content creators' work to keep their own feeds fresh and appealing. This curated self-presentation often omits life's negative sides (Perez-Torres, 2024).

Social media encourages novelty seeking for the sake of personal validation. Social media encourages users to stay informed and closely follow issues while interacting with people of various races, ethnicities, environments and religions (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014). It constantly introduces users to new possibilities like travel destinations or local events (Perez-Torres, 2024), prompting users to feel inspired to share their new adventures, jobs, hobbies or health goals to boost self-esteem or even gain a larger following and branding opportunities. Individuals may even decide to live-stream risky, disinhibited behavior or participate in trending

challenges in order to get that attention. However, this level of engagement with social media can put users at risk of developing FoMO or the “fear or missing out” as this fear encourages users to feel the need to constantly stay in touch with their peers which can increase anxiety (Roberts & David, 2020). Ironically, while social media often promises stimulation, it can lead to increased boredom as users fall into smartphone or screen addiction, and binge-watching, searching for more engaging content.

### **Literature**

Story worlds are not just a source of entertainment but also catalysts for personal transformation, guiding readers to question, imagine, and discover more about themselves and the world. Story telling has long been a method of cultural transmission and a primary resource for communicating social information and values (Imada & Yussen, 2012). Literature allows us to experience new perspectives through imagination and active participation in stories. Books, like the popular media sources discussed before, provide information to people, making them partially responsible for transmitting cultural norms and values.

Although reading for pleasure and overall literacy rates have declined over the past few decades (Schaeffer, 2021), books are still examined for those in education, whether than be pre-k to college. Reading is critical for younger audiences especially as they are expanding their language comprehension and more elastic in their perspectives (Slavin et al., 2009). Because of this, educational institutions consistently prioritize reading instruction and actively teach students how to interpret and engage with the content and texts they read. Reading is a particularly immersive experience, where readers actively bring stories to life and react to content as if it were a real social encounter. Many readers feel drawn to identify with key characters, learning about diverse experiences and sometimes facing moral dilemmas that shape their beliefs or self-efficacy (Green et al., 2002). Engaging with characters from varied backgrounds or experiencing

moral quandaries through reading can alter readers' understanding of cultural norms and views on topics such as sexual behavior.

In some cases, fictional storylines can create a subjective reality that feels more immediate than historical events; for example, those born in the late 1990s or early 2000s might feel more connected to the world of Harry Potter than to the Great Depression (Green et al., 2002). Additionally, fiction can be persuasive, as readers may make information from books feel generalizable to their own lives, especially if it aligns with their beliefs or passes a baseline of skepticism. This generalization from fiction can reinforce biases, lead to misinformation, or create misunderstandings that influence real-life actions without fact-checking. "In fictional worlds, authors decide who to characterize as virtuous or vicious and which perspectives they want us to adopt or reject. Fiction invites readers to adopt perspectives and commitments they would not entertain in their actual worlds" (Strange et al., 2002). While the extent to which these story-world experiences shape real-world actions varies by individual, readers are often inclined to accept even marked "fiction" as truth if the content appears reasonable.

When exploring novelty influences our lives, literature emerges as a powerful and expansive force. We engage with literature from early childhood and continue to do so throughout our lives, from children's literature to non-fiction biographies, historical/political works, dystopian critiques, and fantasy narratives. Literature's persuasiveness is clear in its encouragement for individuals to explore, imagine, and deepen their understanding of the world around them.

Within the many ways that reading persuades, it often encourages the pursuit of novelty. Even in early childhood books like Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*, we see encouragement to take chances. One line from the book captures this well: "You do not like them. So you say. Try them! Try them! And you may, I say." This is a book commonly read by parents to elementary-

aged children, often as part of efforts to convince their kids to try new foods or experiences. The fact that so many children in the United States grow up hearing this story demonstrates that the social push for novelty begins early.

As children grow older, their reading choices may expand, but public and private education systems remain one of the biggest influences on adolescent reading. Young adults are commonly introduced to nonfiction biographies, such as Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, historical literature like the essays of transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, and critical dystopian stories like Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451", before they graduate high school.

Krakauer's portrayal of Chris McCandless in *Into the Wild* highlights the man's reckless abandonment of safety in search of adventure. McCandless embarks on a journey to Alaska, hitchhiking without the proper gear. His radical lifestyle change is motivated by a desire to live passionately, escape the monotony of security, and find meaning by embracing the uncertainty of each day (Krakauer, 2015). Ultimately, McCandless's search for meaning leads to his death in the wilderness, alone. Nevertheless, his story captivates students year after year, inspiring thoughts of travel, reckless adventure, and the desire to leave behind the routines of daily life for something thrilling and unknown. This inspiration has led to numerous others following in his footsteps, actually travelling out to the Alaskan wilderness. Unfortunately, several of these hopefully adventurers have died in the process, leading authorities to remove the famous bus from the region and placed it in a museum to dissuade people from making the dangerous journey (Ornelas, 2022).

Transcendentalist literature, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, advocates for the belief in human potential and the importance of living authentically, rather than adhering to societal conventions. Emerson encourages extreme individualism, warning against imitating others or being constrained by their ideologies, as this limits one's potential. He contrasts two

individuals: one, a university graduate at the top of his class, who is unable to find a fulfilling career, and another, a person who has explored many professions and embraced new challenges. The latter, Emerson argues, is ultimately the more valuable person, having given themselves countless opportunities to succeed in diverse ways (Emerson, 1841).

Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" speaks to the importance of challenging societal standards and re-evaluating the world around us. The novel promotes the necessity of knowledge and information to ensure that our actions are not merely conformist or a result of societal oppression. It encourages readers to resist the status quo, engage more actively with the world, and grow in resilience to bring about change (Al-Rubaye, 2024). The book also critiques the power of books to influence society, suggesting that history is often written by the victors, and that literature can be a tool for both propaganda and progress.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins embarks on an adventure that requires him to take immense risks, sacrificing his financial, physical, and mental security to join Thorin Oakenshield and his company on a journey across Middle earth (Tolkien, 1937). This is a prime example of sensation-seeking behavior. Despite narrowly escaping perilous situations, Bilbo's adventure ends with him victorious—not only gaining wealth and treasures, but also valuable friendships and stories.

Literature, in all its forms, serves as a compelling medium that subtly encourages individuals to explore new ideas, step into the unknown, and adopt diverse perspectives. Through stories of adventure, rebellion, and self-discovery, reading inspires a desire for novelty and growth, prompting readers to take chances in both their imagination and their lives.

### **Part III: Engaging in Neophilism & Improving Well-being**

After reading about the prevalence and potential consequences of social influence from American culture, media, and literature, an initial reaction may be to grab your passport, delete

all smartphone apps, and return library books to the nearest drop box. However, it is important to note that being prone to sensation seeking does not mean automatic engagement with novel situations dangerously or recklessly. As Martin Zuckerman found, sensation seeking decisions are often made with consideration and basic precautions (Zuckerman, 1994). For example, you may be tempted to speed like a NASCAR driver down an empty highway, but you are still likely to make sure you are wearing a seatbelt. Staying interested and engaged by what is new around us has always been important for humans.

Humans have always needed to stay aware of what is new around them for their survival adaptation (Silvia, 2006). Even in the 21st Century, despite the pressures we face, it is still possible to remain engaged with society and even seek novelty in ways that benefit rather than harm us. One approach to this would be adopting neophilism. Neophilism should be seen as a committed way of living, a life philosophy that values and actively pursues new experiences. This life strategy allows interests to be pursued in an intentional and conscientious manner, one that allows for advantageous decision making in the world for the betterment of our psychological and eudaimonic well-being. The better and smarter our decisions are when we engage with the world, the better at problem solving we can become.

A study observing adolescent decision-making described multiple foundations of decision making, expressing how developing good decision making is a protective factor, increasing well-being and self-realization (Páez-Gallego et al., 2020). This included utilizing research from Irving Janis and Leon Mann, who have studied optimal decision making in highly emotional or high-stakes situations. This decision making can be interpreted to mean avoiding complacency (going along with others), decision avoidance (ignoring present issues or any decision making), or hypervigilance (rapid impulsive decision making resulting in panic or anxiety) (Páez-Gallego et al., 2020). Instead, safer decisions take into account the fact that many

times our desires can lead us to find satisfaction through stimuli that are not healthy or safe. We must balance our biological “wants” with the conscious control we have to choose activities and results that align with our priorities. Neophilism offers a way for both low and high sensation seekers to benefit from novelty, as it can encourage the more impulsive to explore with mindfulness but also motivate those who are less exploratory to regularly step out of their comfort zone.

Engaging with novelty through neophilism is not only valuable for making life more exciting, but it also contributes to increasing well-being. Two commonly studied concepts of well-being, psychological and eudaimonic, are closely intertwined. Psychological well-being focuses on feelings of competence, purpose, and the ability to meet demands within one's social environment while maintaining autonomy (Ryff, 1989). Eudaimonic well-being extends this by emphasizing self-realization and the pursuit of a life that prioritizes taking on challenges for the purpose of growth and better alignment with personal values, rather than simply pleasure (Ryff, 1989; Schwartz et al., 2013). The foundational researcher Carol Ryff operationalized various elements of well-being, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery (an element that demonstrates signs of maturity and offers positive life span outcomes), purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). All of these concepts overlap with the goals outlined by Self-Determination Theory.

Setting self-induced goals has been found to increase self-expressed feelings of well-being, more so than drifting aimlessly searching for broad meaning (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). These goals may vary for each individual but might include areas like career development, relationships, spirituality, education, physical fitness, nutrition, or inspiring others (Strout & Howard, 2012). Flourishing, achieving a strong sense of well-being, has been linked to providing numerous protective factors for youth by having positive correlations with low levels of

misconduct, like missing school or engaging in underage substance use, and providing several key high level protective factors such as strong relationships with older role models, self-determination and self-esteem (Keyes et al., 2012). Overall, we can see positive outcomes in physical, social, psychological, and cognitive health when we use novelty to strive for psychological and eudaimonic well-being.

### **Physical Health**

Poor diet and low levels of physical activity amount to significant costs for the American public as they age (Sylvester et al., 2017). Most people would agree that maintaining mobility and strength could increase their enjoyment of life as they age and their ability to stay engaged with friends and family members. A study by Benjamin Sylvester et al. (2017) discussed how using novelty could be applied to physical activity and improved consistency. They proposed that by incrementally increasing the novelty of tasks and exercises, individuals can build confidence and competence. Once a task becomes routine, it can be replaced with a more challenging one, minimizing the risk of injury and burnout. This gradual approach allows for the adoption of more complex movements and new activities, such as a more advanced CrossFit program or 10k run. Introducing new fitness programs or styles of training can keep exercise fresh and engaging, while keeping the process safe. Novelty in this area has been generally related to greater life positivity, increasing enjoyment, helping with motivation, and ultimately improving the consistency of your physical activity and nutrition consciousness.

### **Social Health**

Social health and social advantage are areas that can be improved by incorporating novelty. Researchers have repeatedly linked openness and novelty as something relating to health socialization. As Kashdan et al. (2012) suggest, people who remain curious across the lifespan are viewed differently by themselves, friends and family in positive ways. Curiosity can

signal openness to new friendships or relationships. People who were curious were seen as less anxious and defensive, able to handle multiple perspectives and avoiding closed mindedness or dogmatism, often initiate humor and express appreciation for beauty and abstract thinking (Kashdan et al., 2012). Curious people are regarded in a positive light as long as they are careful to avoid being overbearing, over-enthusiastic and or exhibiting poor listening skills.

Another example of this fits well with American cultural influence. We can use the strategy of individual choice in relationships by intentionally seeking to accept social support and be open to interacting with individuals of various groups, to offset some of the damages of endless competition that can face people in individualistic societies (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014).

Leaning into social media novelty can be useful when allowing social media figures to teach and share their lived experiences. This is a benefit in society and individually as it can address oppression, reduce stigma for individuals struggling with different mental or physical issues, and inform on health information, and cause feelings of inclusion and connection (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Even just posting on social media apps such as Facebook, have been found to decrease feelings of loneliness. As we engage in novelty we can see real benefits for our emotional intelligence, cultural awareness and social connectedness.

### **Psychological Health**

A study on risk-taking behavior found that sensation seeking behaviors increased both well-being and depressive symptoms. People who were more open to new experiences experienced positive and negative occurrences more deeply, suggesting that the intensity of sensation seeking experiences can influence depression. The best practice to mitigate these consequences would be to be cautious in the extreme or intense nature of activities and favor more neutral or moderate ones (Ravert et al., 2013). In this way, the present pressures for novelty and neophilistic commitment to novelty can be turned into interest-enhancing strategies that keep

us engaged with the world in meaningful, rather than harmful ways. The pursuit of novelty can help individuals attain their goals of relatedness, as described by Self-Determination Theory, by introducing them to new activities that put them in close proximity to other people. Meeting this psychological need can, in turn, enhance self-motivation and mental health (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Carol Ryff's model of well-being, rooted in positive psychology, connects openness to new experiences and lifelong engagement with novelty to self-realization and healthy personal growth (Ryff, 1989). A lack of opportunities for future growth, leaving us in a fixed state of passivity, can be detrimental to mental health, making continued exploration important.

Additionally, studies on sensation seeking show an association with resilience, indicating that sensation seeking is not a negative component of life but rather one that aids in coping with anxiety, building psychological resilience, and managing stress (McKay et al., 2018). Taking small risks can increase confidence and encourage a perspective frames negative outcomes as less damaging. Even those who experience trauma from poor experiences generally have higher associated feelings of eudaimonic well-being than those who avoided novelty. Increasing eudaimonic well-being and positive emotions, experiencing life as more positive than negative, has the potential to increase your life span by as much as thirteen years (Diehl et al, 2020).

### **Cognitive Health**

As we age, we increase our risk for cognitive decline, especially in areas such as mental processing, intuition, language processing and memory (Strout & Howard, 2012). Novelty itself can be linked to decreasing risk of memory or language loss. Continued learning, whether through formal education or by adopting new skills, like learning a new instrument, can not only make us feel in more control of our lives but also potentially reduce adverse cognitive health conditions such as dementia. This can help keep individuals independent longer regardless of the level of psychological health they started at (Hammond, 2004). This focus on lifelong learning is

supported well by Cognitive Reserve Theory (CRT). CRT supports the importance of continually engaging with intellectually stimulating activities to avoid major cognitive issues in the future. By participating in those activities, it builds brain resiliency and a reserve that can compensate for and utilize alternative undamaged neuropathways to meet demands as we age (Stern, 2002). This can lead to better cognitive health and protections against age related decline, especially in individuals over the age of eighty (Stern, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

As we conclude, it is clear that neophilism offers incredible opportunities for personal growth when approached thoughtfully. There are still areas that, if explored, could provide deeper insights into how novelty affects individuals across cultures and throughout the lifespan. Additionally, there are numerous practical steps for incorporating neophilism into daily life in small, safe, and meaningful ways.

### **Areas for Future Research**

Future research on these topics should explore how sensation seeking and novelty seeking traits can promote positive outcomes across diverse populations, including immigrant, ethnic minority, and lower income groups. Studies should address issues of privilege and oppression to ensure that these benefits of novelty seeking are accessible to more than just middle- or upper-class Americans. Exploring well-being and novelty from perspectives outside the Western or European American lens is important as people in collectivistic societies experience emotions and community relationships differently. These individuals have a unique understanding of personal fulfillment and meaning making (Christopher & Hickenbottom, 2008).

Secondly, increased investigation into sensation seeking behaviors throughout the lifespan framed by Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development may be useful. Discovering how novelty is advantageous during middle adulthood and old age, particularly in

relation to Erikson's stage of ego integrity vs. despair (Malone et al., 2016), may provide insights on the impact of age on decision-making. Exploring how old age reflection and middle adulthood midlife crisis affect novelty interaction could be a compelling new direction for future research. Currently, most research on sensation-seeking focuses on studying binge drinking, smoking or cigarette usage and is often limited to younger age demographics such as adolescents (10-19) or young adults (20-30), when sensation seeking tendencies are higher (Evans-Polce et al., 2018). As technology, culture and literature continue to evolve it is important to understand how aging influences novelty and well-being. With life expectancy increasing (Diehl et al., 2020), research extending into this lengthened lifespan is growing in importance.

### **Practical Action Steps**

How can we stay engaged with culture, media, and literature in ways that actually reward us? These areas are not inherently bad; with mindful, critical, prioritized, and educated interaction, engagement can be fun and inspiring. Media and literature are powerful tools for neophilism because they act as vessels carrying novel opportunities and are capable of informing individuals of what is available to them.

To begin, it is important to be aware of the subconscious messaging embedded in these areas.

Once recognized, take time to decide why you are choosing to engage further. For example, media can be a tool when it is used to help you identify gaps in your knowledge, create consistent learning, and motivate exploration by revealing new areas for curiosity (Kind & Evans, 2015). When reading a fiction book, there is little risk in enjoying a fun story, but if it sparks interest in a historical time, or a unique setting, use that curiosity to propel you to learn more. Participating in a book club could add further benefits, offering opportunities to hear new perspectives and enjoy new genres.

Step one in the process of practical neophilism involves taking small, safe steps toward new things. Small, safe steps are gradual, manageable changes that allow for building skills and confidence over time. Examples of this include trying a new food, redecorating your home, or starting a simple daily habit. Unsafe decisions, on the other hand, lack preparation and informed decision-making. Acting impulsively or without considering cultural sensitivity, relationship dynamics, or safety can lead to poor outcomes (Hammon et al., 2006). Safe decisions involve weighing the costs and benefits thoughtfully. Larger, yet still safe steps may include switching careers after careful planning or travelling to a new country with a guide, or well-organized itinerary.

The second step towards neophilism is learning new skills. Branching out into areas that interest you or deepen your understanding of current interests may be a good place to start. For example, if you enjoy cooking or a particular restaurant, try out a new dish. If music is interesting, you can explore a new genre or learn an instrument. Both branching out and investigating current interest more deeply to see its complexities can be a great way to stay engaged with novelty.

The third step towards neophilism is to substitute impulsive or extreme behavior for safer, more mindful decisions. Returning to Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scales, we can explore ways to substitute healthier forms of exploration for some of the higher-risk activities that are often advertised to us. Mindfulness and careful decision-making are particularly necessary for individuals drawn toward disinhibition, as this trait often manifests in unconventional, potentially illegal, or high-risk behaviors (Zuckerman, 1994). These behaviors can include taking recreational (e.g., alcohol, marijuana) or synthetic drugs (e.g., LSD, MDMA, cocaine), vandalism or, modern day activities such as live-streaming illicit behavior like street racing. If substance use remains a desire, consulting medical professionals may be best to prevent misuse. Alternatively, highly sensational activities that include risk-reducing structure,

such as attending substance free music festivals or visiting a rage-room might offer similar levels of excitement without compromising safety.

For individuals with higher thrill and adventure-seeking tendencies, sporty or physical activities may be more attractive (Zuckerman, 1994). Choosing activities such as indoor climbing, virtual reality extreme sports, or professional organized events such as Spartan Races or skydiving can provide thrilling excitement while ensuring proper training and equipment are in place.

Experience seekers, who are drawn to novel sensations, can fulfill this desire through activities like exploring new foods, music, art, or travel (Zuckerman, 1994). With proper planning and financial forethought, even extreme life changes like long term travel, adopting the van life lifestyle or even starting a business can be manageable novelty seeking. Smaller, more regular behaviors like trying to cook or sample new foods each week, checking out new movies, visiting a new museum, or taking a class can be safe modes for discovery and stimulation.

Individuals prone to boredom, those routine or repetition averse (Zuckerman, 1994), could benefit from incorporating consistent variation into their routines, such as volunteering once a month, but choosing to help at a different organization each time. Daily activities, like taking walks, can also be made more interesting by finding new routes or parks in your area. For those you find themselves scrolling endlessly through social media or swiping through multiple dating apps, switching them for educational or interest-based apps might be just as intriguing. Other ways to combine motivation and novelty could be engaging in challenges that build on past achievements, explore creative hobbies, or discovering new genres of books can provide new stimulation without relying on digital media and instant gratification.

Neophilism, as a lifestyle strategy, suggests that we can gain immense personal rewards when novelty seeking is pursued in a manner that is informed, intentional, and safe. While each

individual person falls somewhere along the spectrum of sensation seeking, from low to high, our natural biological tendencies do not have to dictate our choices. Instead, we can harness a neophilistic mindset to maximize the rewards of exploration when the right opportunities arise.

Staying intentional about sources of information and considering counter arguments can help us avoid biases and stereotypes (Fransen et al., 2015). Understanding common persuasive techniques in advertising, for example, can make us more discerning and help us avoid superficial or manipulative influences.

To prevent not being overwhelmed by endless choice or falling into decision-making guided only by social pressure, setting clear goals and priorities is important. Even utilizing tools like AI assistants can help manage and organize all the options presented by society, while making sure they meet your goals. Finally, remember that embracing a neophilistic outlook means more than simply trying new things, it also involves keeping a positive mindset that views challenges and setbacks as valuable learning opportunities. Do not be afraid to embrace a little more unknown each day, remembering that that push for novelty in American culture, media, literature can be positive. When we thoughtfully and intentionally engage in novelty we can augment our well-being and gain the benefits of a life enriched by curiosity.

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