



Dimensionality of interpersonal curiosity

Jordan A. Litman ^{a,*}, Mark V. Pezzo ^b

^a *Center for Research in Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology, Department of Psychology,
University of South Florida, Tampa, United States*

^b *Department of Psychology, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, United States*

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Abstract

Interpersonal curiosity (IPC) is the desire for new information about people. Fifty-one IPC items were administered to 321 participants (248 women, 73 men), along with other measures of curiosity and personality. Three factors were identified from which five-item subscales were developed that had good internal consistency: *Curiosity about Emotions*, *Spying and Prying*, and *Snooping*. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated the three-factor model had acceptable fit. The IPC scales correlated positively with other curiosity measures and interest in gossip, providing evidence of convergent validity. Divergent validity was demonstrated in finding the other curiosity scales correlated more highly with each other than with IPC; parallel results were found for the gossip measures.

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1. Introduction

Curiosity is the intrinsic desire for new information that will stimulate interest or relieve uncertainty (Litman, 2005). Historically, researchers have investigated curiosity for three types of information: intellectual knowledge (Berlyne, 1954; Litman & Spielberger, 2003), sensory stimulation

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: jlitman@shell.cas.usf.edu (J.A. Litman).

(Berlyne, 1957, 1958; Collins, Litman, & Spielberger, 2004), and experiences characterized as adventurous or thrilling (Litman, Collins, & Spielberger, 2005; Zuckerman, 1994). However, there is another kind of information that has received considerably less attention by curiosity researchers – information about *people*.

People-information differs from other kinds of knowledge in several ways: First, people-information is extraordinarily complex (Fiske, 1995), and includes knowledge about individuals' experiences, their public and private behaviors, and also their thoughts and feelings. Second, people-information often has special value in the social world; obtaining it is important for social comparison (Festinger, 1954; Snyder & Ickes, 1985), while its transmission (i.e., gossiping) plays a role in forming friendships (Rosnow, 2001) and attacking adversaries (Galen & Underwood, 1997). Additionally, because people-information often involves private matters that cannot be easily confirmed, individuals differ in their willingness to share it (Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1994), as well as their attitudes about its reliability as a source of information (Litman & Pezzo, 2005).

The intrinsic motive to seek people-information is referred to as *interpersonal curiosity* (IPC), for which the signature measure is the interpersonal curiosity scale (IPCS; Singer & Antrobus, 1963). The IPCS is a 12-item instrument that assesses differential tendencies to wonder about people's public and private lives. In past research, the IPCS has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.80$), and evidenced construct validity on the basis of positive correlations with gossip tendencies and negative correlations with social approval needs (Litman & Pezzo, 2005).

While the IPCS appears to be a reliable and valid measure of individual differences in IPC, we note two important limitations of this instrument: First, the IPCS items inquire almost exclusively about interest in people's *external* life-experiences (e.g., what they do for a living); there are no items that assess curiosity about *internal* life-experiences such as thoughts or feelings, which are significant sources of people-information (Fiske, 1995); being motivated to seek information about people's internal experiences may play an important role in the development of abilities such as empathy (Håkansson & Montgomery, 2003) and emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1990). Second, the IPCS items all refer to passively wondering about other people, but do not address active information-seeking behaviors such as asking questions or spying,¹ which may be influenced by social approval constraints or experiences of anxiety (Trudewind, 2000).

Given that the IPCS does not assess differential interests in learning about internal life-experiences or engaging in active information-seeking, these two important aspects of IPC remain unmeasured. Thus, the goal of the present study was to develop a new instrument for assessing individual differences in facets of IPC not previously taken into account. Moreover, given that the structure of curiosity instruments reflects both the type of information sought as well as the methods employed in seeking it (e.g., Litman & Spielberger, 2003), the dimensionality of IPC was also examined, with the expectation that emergent factors would correspond to different kinds of people-information (i.e., internal vs. external experience) and different methods of attaining it (i.e., overt vs. covert), from which subscales could be constructed. The internal consistency of the

¹ Renner (2006) recently developed a similar scale that differentiates between covert and overt social exploration, which was not available for the present study.

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