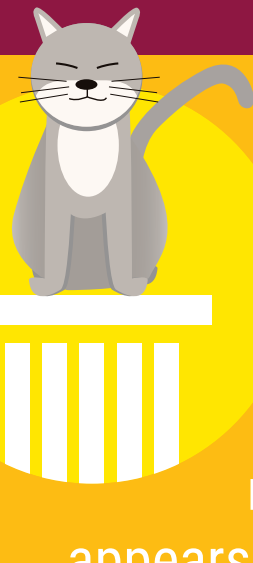


CURIOSITY: A PRIMER

A 2020 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY



Curiosity.

The more we examine curiosity, the more important it appears to be, not only to individuals but to society.

Research¹ consistently shows that curious people have improved:

- Practical life outcomes
- Self-actualization
- Prosocial outcomes

Why?

A key reason may be having an open mindset towards new information, other perspectives, being challenged, and even a comfort level with feeling uncomfortable.



So curiosity deserves a closer examination.

In the 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling, we did just that. Yet there was an issue we immediately had to grapple with: the public (including museum-goers) has a rather different definition of curiosity than scholars.



TO THE PUBLIC, the word "curiosity" often means pursuing existing interests. This is something we like to call the "Star Wars effect." That is, there are a lot of people who have a deep interest in a few specific topics, such as *Star Wars*, but don't necessarily have broader curiosity in other topics.

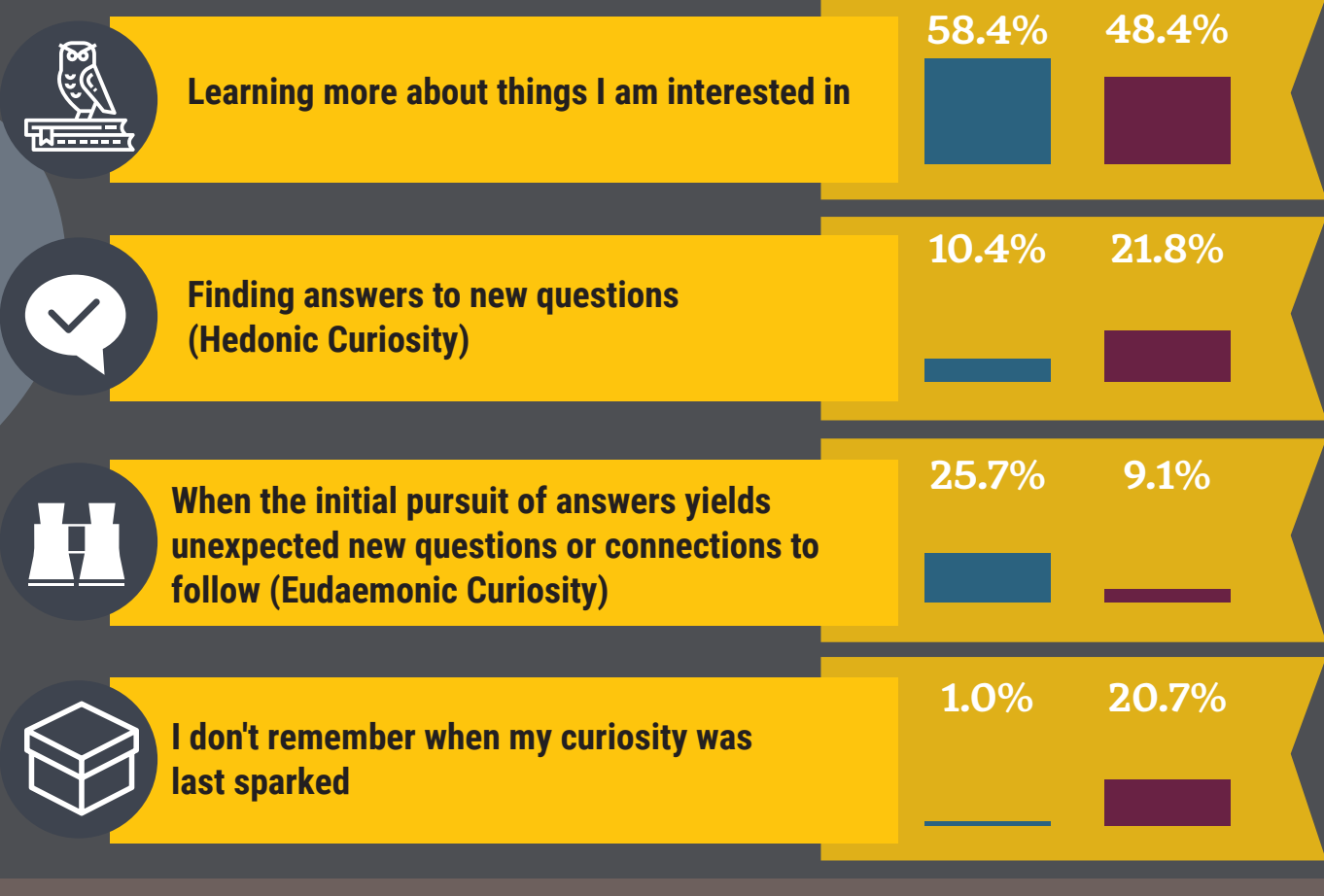


CURIOSITY SCHOLARS have a somewhat different take. While deep interests are great (and we all have them), they don't tend to contribute a lot to those prosocial outcomes that are so crucial. Instead, having a *breadth* of curiosity seems to be what truly matters.

For the Annual Survey of Museum Goers, we wanted to assess if there was a connection between breadth of curiosity and prosocial outcomes.

So we asked respondents to share what their favorite outcome was when their curiosity was sparked:

MUSEUM-GOERS BROADER POPULATION



For both museum-goers and the broader population, learning more about pre-existing interests was the most popular response.

But we were most interested in the responses that represent two key types of curiosity:

- ? - - ? - **HEDONIC CURIOSITY**
the opening and closing of information gaps
- ? **EUDAEMONIC CURIOSITY**
the sustained pursuit of new questions

Hedonic curiosity happens to us *all the time*.

- Information gaps occur constantly: Loud noises. Elections.
- Trivial questions. A question arises and we feel compelled to answer it.

In museum settings, the opening and closing of information gaps typically makes us feel good! That's because we release dopamine when we have "a-ha" moments, making curiosity good for our bodies, brains, and emotions—thus creating a positive feedback loop.



WE WANT people to get "hooked" on opening and closing information gaps. The more they enjoy that process, the more likely they will find the curiosity journey itself exciting. That is, they will become eudaemonically curious.

Think of Eudaemonic curiosity as the classic "rabbit hole."

It's when an information gap opens and closes, but in the process new information gaps open up, and your curiosity journey takes you to unexpected new places and insights ... it never really ends.



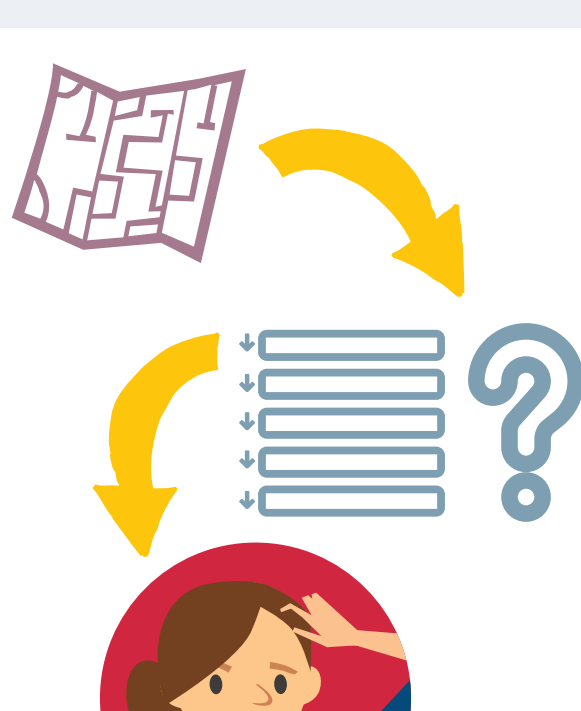
When we asked museum-goers and the broader population about curiosity, we were most interested in that eudaemonic response. Our hypothesis was that those individuals would have more prosocial attitudes. And we were right!



The eudaemonically curious were significantly more likely to want museums to:

- Present multiple perspectives
- Challenge them
- Be more inclusive
- Cultivate empathy and understanding

Because it feels so good to close information gaps, hedonic curiosity can be a powerful tool to encourage broader information-seeking habits that will, ideally, become eudaemonic in time. In that way, we not only pique interests, but we can also work more deliberately to expand worldviews by opening new information gaps that encourage visitors to consider different perspectives and experiences.



And that is social impact that deeply matters.

"At the least I want museums to introduce me to different cultures and perspectives. What is the point of a place of learning if it's not helping us expand our worldview?"

"Exposure to different customs and perspectives broadens our world and introduces us to the lives of others, which can increase our empathy. Challenging our beliefs and views can introduce us to different perspectives and shed light on how our own experiences shape our beliefs. This can create a connection to people with different beliefs and bridge the divide we're seeing."

*Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
• 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
• 2020 Broader Population Sampling
• 2020 Online Pandemic Panel of Museum-Goers (ongoing)
• 2017 - 2019 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

*Data Stories share research about both museum-goers (who visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).
†Please see Wilkening Consulting's Data Story "Curiosity, Empathy, and Social Justice" at [wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories](http://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories).

You can also find a list of other curiosity resources at <http://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/curiosity-resources.html>.



American Alliance of Museums

