

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STIMULUS-SEEKING  
BEHAVIOR AND LEVELS OF  
MANIFEST ANXIETY

By

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## CHAPTER I

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

#### Review of the Literature

There has been considerable interest in concepts having to do with the extent to which an individual behaves in such a way as to obtain novelty, variability and/or complexity in his perceptual input. The concepts involved include "tendency to obtain new percepts" (McReynolds, 1956), "stimulus-seeking behavior" (Howard, 1961), "sensation-seeking behavior" (Zuckerman, et al., 1964), and "change-seeking behavior" (Garlington and Shimota, 1964). Each differs in some respects from the others but they all imply a motivation to seek some degree of novelty, variability or complexity in perceptual input. The term "seek" used in this context means that in a free choice situation the organism behaves in such a way as to increase its contact with novel, variable or complex stimuli.

McReynolds (1956, 1960) hypothesized that persons have inherent tendencies to seek novel percepts. The term "percepts" was used to refer to data which are being or have been perceived and are still a part of the individual. He also assumed that persons tend to assimilate incoming percepts into their perceptual systems. The concept of assimilation as used by McReynolds refers to the incorporation and integration of incoming percepts into harmonious and concordant relationships with existent perceptual systems. The process of assimilating the continuing input of percepts which one receives in the course of living would be expected to proceed smoothly as long as there were no major

incongruencies between incoming percepts and the schemata according to which they would be assimilated. But in the presence of outstanding incongruencies assimilation would be difficult if not impossible. It is assumed by McReynolds that unassimilated percepts tend to accumulate and that anxiety is a positive function of the quantity of unassimilated perceptual material. He proposed that the tendency to obtain novel percepts, that is, curiosity or exploratory behavior is attenuated as the magnitude of unassimilated percepts becomes greater. In other words, an increase in anxiety would influence an individual to avoid the input of new percepts because they might increase his anxiety still further.

Levitt (1967) and Zuckerman et al. (1964) have postulated that humans require an optimal level of general sensory and emotional stimulation in order to maintain psychological and emotional homeostasis. Like other human attributes, the optimal level of stimulation is most likely to vary among people, depending on a large number of factors. According to Levitt (1967), individuals with a high optimal stimulation level would be interested in seeking activities that are exciting, novel, sensual, strange and unpredictable. Those with a low level of optimal stimulation would tend to seek the moderate, regular, predictable and familiar, using avoidance as a defense. Levitt further hypothesized that the anxious individual may require less stimulation to maintain emotional balance and is perhaps less tolerant of stimulation in general.

In 1961, Howard developed a practical method for quantifying stimulus-seeking behavior. Although there has been an increasing number of experimental efforts concerning stimulus-seeking behavior in humans, his work represents one of the first comprehensive empirical efforts to establish operationally the existence and relevance of such a need. Howard designed three forms (Forms A, B, and C) of a visual paper-pencil maze, each maze having several alternate paths to the goal or goals, all direct paths being equidistant

from a goal, and all paths leading to the goal (Figure 1). Each S receives a maze with instructions to draw a line from the starting point to any goal. The entire procedure is repeated four times, each S traversing a total of five identical mazes. Change-seeking is operationally defined as the total of the four change scores (number of different segments traversed from maze to maze) times the number of mazes on which there is any change. The total score can thus vary from 0.00, indicating that the same path was consistently chosen on all five mazes, to 16.00, indicating that each maze was traversed by a completely different path.

According to Howard (1965), the mazes (Maze Test) constitute a repetitive task that permits the S to structure the ambiguous situation that each maze repetition represents according to his own customary way of seeking interaction with his environment. The S's mode of response is seen to be a function of his current motivational state and set. The availability and arousal of stimulus-seeking behavior depends on the absence of strongly aroused motives. Howard assumed that the low stimulus-seeking individual perceives the test situation as a subjectively threatening and frustrating experience. Anxiety is increased and defenses are mobilized: the person then reacts with his characteristic marked inhibition of motor responses and restriction of input or utilization of novel perceptual information (McReynolds, 1961). This withdrawal from continuous interaction with the environment allows him to maintain his current level of defensive equilibrium and control. Thus, he repeats the same route through the maze, concentrating on his own internal feelings. Howard also assumed that the low maze changer similarly tends to withdraw from any real contact with his everyday environment; he tends to avoid novel stimulation and utilizes his energy to keep the external world constant, predictable and orderly. On the other hand, the high stimulus-seeking individual was assumed by Howard



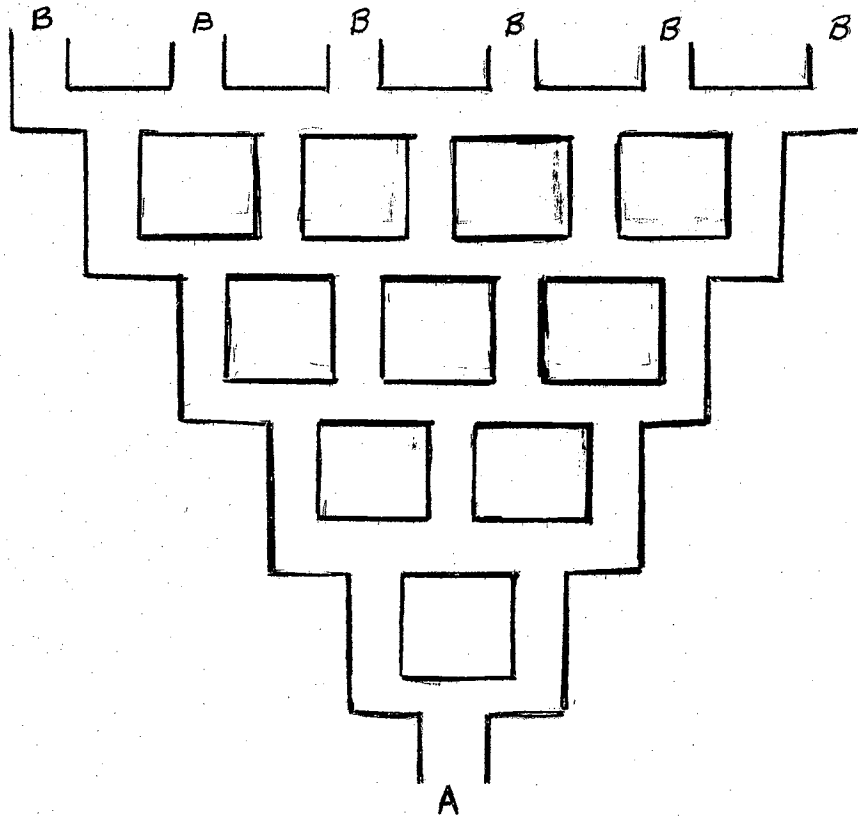


Figure 1. Form A of Howard Maze Test

to seek out and enjoy variability in motor responses and perceptual input. This may be manifested in changing on the mazes. It was also assumed by Howard that the high maze changer similarly tends to seek out real contact with his everyday environment; he tends to approach novel stimulation and applies available energy to increase his information about the external world.

Extending Howard's assumptions beyond the test situation to the actual behavior involving interactions with the everyday environment, Domino (1963) found a positive relation for a college sample between Maze Test performance and a "rough index of actual stimulus-seeking behavior... number of heterogeneous extra-curricular activities attended."

Other findings that fit into the conceptual framework of the Maze Test are the negative relation of stimulus-seeking behavior on the mazes to social withdrawal in psychiatric patients (Sidle, 1963) and the minimal stimulus-seeking in neurotic and psychotic psychiatric patients when compared to medical students, college students, and employment counselors (Howard, 1961; Howard and Diesenhau, 1965; and Sidle, Acker, and McReynolds, 1963). Howard and Diesenhau (1965) used a sample of 30 psychiatric and 30 medical patients and found consistent correlations between maze change and three personality factors on the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 P F) that parallel the theoretical analysis of the Maze Test. The three 16 P F dimensions found to correlate with Maze Forms A and B were: 0, timidity and guilt proneness: Q4, anxious and high undischarged drive energy (both were negatively related to maze change): and Q1, experimenting nature (positively related).

In line with the above findings, studies on the relationship between anxiety and object curiosity (McReynolds et al., 1961) or reactive curiosity (Penney, 1965) with school children as Ss have yielded negative correlations.

Levitt (1967, p. 162) has suggested that stimulation-seeking in the adult is to a certain extent analogous to curiosity in the child. "The differences between them are largely a function of the child's more restricted behavioral repertory, general functioning and experience."

#### Purpose of the Study

It was the purpose of this study to determine whether differences in stimulus-seeking behavior were functions of different anxiety levels. The different anxiety levels would be assessed by the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale (MAS) and stimulus-seeking behavior would be measured by Form A of the Howard Maze Test and the Change Seeker Index (CSI).

Also, the degree of relationship between the Maze Test, which assesses stimulus-seeking tendencies at an overt level, and the CSI, which does it on an inventory level, would be investigated. In a previous study, Acker and McReynolds (1967) had found no significant relationship between the two tests.

It was also hypothesized that male and female scores on the MAS and the CSI were significantly different. Taylor (1953) found a higher female mean score than those for males, but the difference between the two means was not statistically significant. A study by Goldstein (1961) showed that male and female Ss demonstrated significantly different patterns of response on the MAS. McCarroll et al. (1967) found significant differences between males and females on the CSI, with males scoring higher than females. Howard and Diesenhaus (1965) had found no difference between male and female scores on the Maze Test. The present study sought to determine whether the above findings of Goldstein, Howard and Diesenhaus, and McCarroll et al. would be reproduced.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD AND PROCEDURE

#### Subjects

The Ss were 243 undergraduate volunteers, 129 women and 114 men, enrolled in introductory psychology classes at Oklahoma State University. From this sample, groups consisting of low, medium, and high anxious Ss were selected on the basis of MAS scores obtained from the bottom, middle, and top 20 per cent in the distribution. Each group consisted of 22 Ss and the total number of groups were 6: 3 male and 3 female groups.

#### Measures

##### Howard Maze Test

Form A of the Maze Test, discussed in detail in the review of literature, was chosen because there has been more research done with it than Forms B or C (Domino, 1965; Diesenhuis and Howard, 1965).

##### Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale

This is perhaps the best known and most widely used measure of anxiety. It consists of 225 items, of which 50 contribute to an "anxiety" score and the remainder are irrelevant buffer items (Taylor, 1953). In the original scale, items were selected from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and were judged by five clinicians for the ability of each of the items to indicate manifest anxiety. In the present study the MAS was given to

Ss under the title of Biographical and Personality Inventory and consisted of 50 MAS items, combined with 38 buffer items drawn from the MMPI L and K scale. The total number of items was 88 (Sjoberg, 1966).

### Change Seeker Index

This 95 item scale was developed by Garlington and Shimota (1964) to measure the need for variation in stimulus input, with an emphasis on stimulus change. The CSI was based on the authors' assumption that:

"... not only do all humans require some stimulus variability, but also that the optimum amount of stimulus variation necessary for effective functioning differs from one person to another. We believe that Change Seeking, the need for variation in one's stimulus input in order to maintain optimal functioning, is a measurable dimension of behavior and one that is reflected in certain personality characteristics" (Garlington and Shimota, 1964, pp. 919-924).

The CSI was chosen in addition to the Maze Test because it seems to sample S's attitude towards or his feelings about participation in various activities while the Maze Test samples S's actual behavior.

### Procedure

All 243 Ss were administered the battery of tests in a group setting. The tests were given in the following order: MAS, the Maze Test, and CSI. Upon S's arrival, he was given a copy of the Biographical and Personality Inventory (disguised title of the MAS) and told that there would be two more "tests", but one was very short. Ss were also told that there were no right or wrong answers on all of the three "tests". The specific instructions for the Maze Test were as follows:

Instructions: On the following pages you will find a series of mazes. On each page your job is simply to draw a line from the "A" to the "B" staying within the boundaries. You may choose any "B" you wish. You may choose any path to a "B" you wish, so long as you start at "A" and stay within the outline. All you are to do is draw a line from "A" to "B".

The instructions for the MAS and CSI were given as:

The statements in this booklet represent experiences, ways of doing things, or beliefs or preferences that are true of some people but are not true of others. Read each statement and decide whether or not it is true with respect to yourself. If it is true or mostly true, blacken the answer space in column T on the answer sheet in the row numbered the same as the statement you are answering. If the statement is not usually true or is not true at all, blacken the space in column F in the numbered row. Answer the statements as carefully and honestly as you can. There are no correct or wrong answers. We are interested in the way you work and in the things you believe. Sometimes it may be difficult to make a decision, but please answer every item either true or false without skipping any.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

It was hypothesized that differences in stimulus-seeking test scores are functions of different anxiety levels. The high level of anxiety was comprised of Ss with scores of 25 and above for the males, and 28 and above for the females; the medium level of Ss with scores between 16 and 19 for males, and 20 to 22 for females; and the low level of Ss with a score of 10 or lower for males, and 13 or lower for females. In order to determine if performance differences on the stimulus-seeking tests (CSI and the Maze) could be attributed to anxiety levels or sex of Ss, an analysis of variance was performed (Tables I and II). F tests performed on these data failed to show significant relationships at the .05 level between stimulus-seeking test scores and anxiety levels, or between stimulus-seeking test scores and sex of Ss. The hypothesis was not supported by the above findings.

The mean difference between female and male populations on the MAS was found to be significant beyond the 0.001 level by means of the t-test. The hypothesis that there are significant differences between the male and female Ss was supported. However, the mean differences between the male and female Ss on the Maze Test and the CSI were not significant and the result of McCarroll et al. (1967) were not reproduced (Table III).

Also, no relationship was found between the Maze Test and CSI (Table IV), which supported Acker and McReynolds (1967) who found a Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation of .05 between the two tests.

TABLE I  
SUMMARY OF AOV FOR MAZE TEST PERFORMANCE AS  
A FUNCTION OF ANXIETY LEVELS AND SEX

Source	df	MS	F
Anxiety Levels	2	31.1552	.4145
Sex	1	39.5304	.5271
Anxiety Levels x Sex	2	1.9643	.0262
Error	126	75.0000	
Total	132		

TABLE II  
SUMMARY OF AOV FOR CSI PERFORMANCE AS A  
FUNCTION OF ANXIETY LEVELS AND SEX

Source	df	MS	F
Anxiety Levels	2	71.7834	.1108
Sex	1	221.5269	.3417
Anxiety Levels x Sex	2	10.6650	.0164
Error	126	647.8616	
Total	132		



TABLE III  
 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON MAS,  
 MAZE TEST AND CSI

		Male	Female	t	Both
MAS	Mean	17.83	21.10	3.59***	19.62
	S.D.	7.38	7.23		7.47
	n	114.00	129.00		243.00
Maze	Mean	9.07	11.28	.04	10.21
	S.D.	2.89	4.05		3.32
	n	114.00	129.00		243.00
CSI	Mean	55.08	53.13	1.31	54.05
	S.D.	11.16	11.97		11.62
	n	114.00	129.00		243.00

\*\*\*p < .001

TABLE IV  
 INTERCORRELATIONS AMONG MAS, MAZE TEST AND CSI  
 FOR 243 MALE AND FEMALE Ss

	Maze Test	CSI
MAS	.01	.04
Maze		-.01

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The results of this study do not support the hypothesis that stimulus-seeking behavior is negatively related to anxiety. Any attempt to explain these results is speculative and subject to further testing.

One possible explanation lies in the difference in population sampled between this study and others. Many of the studies had hospitalized psychiatric patients as Ss while the present study used college students. It is generally assumed that college students are at a lower anxiety level than psychiatric patients. Several investigators have found no differences among groups differing in scores on anxiety scales when tested under neutral and apparently non-threatening conditions (Sarason, 1956, 1957 a and b; Silverman and Blintz, 1956). Sarason, in a series of three experiments (1956, 1957 a and b) involving the effects of anxiety and experimental stress on verbal learning, failed to find under pre-experimental neutral conditions significant differences in performance between groups which differed in anxiety, although varying performance was obtained under later conditions of personal threat. The task instructions and the tasks themselves employed in this study may not be stressful enough to differentiate the high anxious Ss from the low anxious Ss.

It is also possible that individuals have learned to resort to different defenses against anxiety. Instead of withdrawal from interacting with the external environment as hypothesized, some anxious individuals may seek out various activities and be more assertive. Levitt (1967) has postulated that individuals

whose primary defense mechanism is repression may become withdrawn and inhibited, whereas others whose major mechanism is regression are likely to make more demand on others for support and satisfaction of needs, and thereby engage in more interaction with the environment. The behavioral effect of these two defenses is exactly opposite. With Ss employing opposite defenses in this study, it is likely that the results were confounded.

The highly significant differences obtained between male and female scores on the MAS may be attributed to cultural factors -- males being less ready to admit to experiencing anxiety in certain situations.

Intercorrelations were found among inventories purported to measure "originality", "change-seeking", "change", and "sensation-seeking" (Acker and McReynolds, 1967; McCarroll et al., 1967), but no correlation was found for the Maze test and these inventories (Acker and McReynolds, 1967). One may tentatively hypothesize from this that there are at least two independent dimensions of stimulus-seeking, the motoric and the conceptual.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that stimulus-seeking behavior is negatively related to levels of anxiety as measured by the MAS. Stimulus-seeking behavior was assessed by means of the Maze Test and the CSI. Differences in performances between males and females on the three tests were also investigated.

Two hundred and forty three introductory psychology students, 114 males and 129 females participated in the study. They were administered the MAS, the Maze Test, and the CSI in groups. The male Ss were classified into three groups representing different levels of anxiety. The same procedure was done for the females, but with different scores for the three levels of anxiety.

The hypothesis was not supported by the results. It was shown that the relationships between the three levels of manifest anxiety and the change-seeking tests did not reach significance for either the male or female groups. However, the mean difference between male and female Ss on the MAS was highly significant. The predicted difference between the males and females on the Maze Test and the CSI was not realized. No relationship was found between the two measures of stimulus-seeking behavior either. Possible explanations for these results were discussed.

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## APPENDIX A

### THE CHANGE SEEKER INDEX

- \* 1. I think a strong will power is a more valuable gift than a well-informed imagination.
2. I like to read newspaper accounts of murders and other forms of violence.
- \* 3. I like to conform to custom and to avoid doing things that people I respect might consider unconventional.
4. I would like to see a bullfight in Spain.
- \* 5. I would prefer to spend vacations in this country, where you know you can get a good holiday than in foreign lands that are colorful and "different".
6. I often take pleasure in certain non-conforming attitudes and behaviors.
- \* 7. In general, I would prefer a job with a modest salary, but guaranteed security rather than one with large, but uncertain earnings.
8. I like to feel free to do what I want to do.
- \* 9. I like to follow instructions and to do what is expected of me.
10. Because I become bored easily, I need plenty of excitement, stimulation, and fun.
- \*11. I like to complete a single job or task at a time before taking on others.
12. I like to be independent of others in deciding what I want to do.
13. I am well described as a meditative person, given to finding my own solutions instead of acting on conventional rules.
- \*14. I much prefer symmetry to asymmetry.

---

\*Items starred are scored for high Change Seeking if answered false.

15. I often do whatever makes me feel cheerful here and now, even at the cost of some distant goal.
16. I can be friendly with people who do things which I consider wrong.
17. I tend to act impulsively.
- \*18. I like to do routine work using a good piece of machinery or apparatus.
19. People view me as a quite unpredictable person.
20. I think society should be quicker to adopt new customs and throw aside old habits and mere traditions.
- \*21. I prefer to spend most of my leisure hours with my family.
- \*22. In traveling abroad I would rather go on an organized tour than plan for myself the places I will visit.
23. I like to have lots of lively people around me.
24. I like to move about the country and to live in different places.
- \*25. I feel that what this world needs is more steady and "solid" citizens than "idealists" with plans for a better world.
26. I like to dabble in a number of different hobbies and interests.
27. I like to avoid situations where I am expected to do things in a conventional way.
- \*28. I like to have my life arranged so that it runs smoothly and without much change in my plans.
- \*29. I like to continue doing the same old things rather than to try new and different things.
30. I would like to hunt lions in Africa.
31. I find myself bored by most tasks after a short time.
- \*32. I believe that it is not a good idea to think too much.
- \*33. I always follow the rule; business before pleasure.
34. I enjoy gambling for small stakes.



35. Nearly always I have a craving for more excitement.
36. I enjoy doing "daring", foolhardy things "just for fun".
- \*37. I see myself as an efficient, businesslike person.
38. I like to wear clothing that will attract attention.
39. I cannot keep my mind on one thing for any length of time.
40. I enjoy arguing even if the issue isn't very important.
- \*41. It bothers me if people think I am being too unconventional or odd.
- \*42. I see myself as a practical person.
- \*43. I never take medicine on my own, without a doctor's ordering it.
44. From time to time I like to get completely away from work and anything that remind me of it.
45. At times I have been very anxious to get away from my family.
46. My parents have often disapproved of my friends.
47. There are several areas in which I am prone to doing things quite unexpectedly.
- \*48. I would prefer to be a steady and dependable worker than a brilliant but unstable one.
- \*49. In going places, eating, working, etc., I seem to go in a very deliberate, methodical fashion rather than rush from one thing to another.
50. It annoys me to have to wait for someone.
51. I get mad easily and then get over it soon.
52. I find it hard to keep my mind on a task or job unless it is terribly interesting.
53. For me planning one's activities well in advance is very likely to take most of the fun out of life.
54. I like to go to parties and other affairs where there is lots of loud fun.
55. I enjoy lots of social activity.

56. I enjoy thinking up unusual or different ideas to explain everyday events.
57. I seek out fun and enjoyment.
58. I like to experience novelty and change in my daily routine.
59. I like a job that offers change, variety, and travel, even if it involves some danger.
60. In my job I appreciate constant change in the type of work to be done.
61. I have the wanderlust and am never happy unless I am roaming or traveling about.
62. I have periods of such great restlessness that I cannot sit long in a chair.
63. I like to travel and see the country.
- \*64. I like to plan out my activities in advance, and then follow the plan.
65. I like to be the center of attention in a group.
66. When I get bored I like to stir up some excitement.
67. I experience periods of boredom with respect to my job.
- \*68. I admire a person who has a strong sense of duty to the things he believes in more than a person who is brilliantly intelligent and creative.
- \*69. I like a job that is steady enough for me to become expert at it rather than one that constantly challenges me.
- \*70. I like to finish any job or task that I begin.
- \*71. I don't like things to be uncertain and unpredictable.
- \*72. I feel better when I give in and avoid a fight, than I would if I tried to have my own way.
- \*73. I am known as a hard and steady worker.
74. I would like the job of a foreign correspondent for a newspaper.
75. I used to feel sometimes that I would like to leave home.
76. I find my interests change quite rapidly.

77. I am continually seeking new ideas and experiences.
78. I like continually changing activities.
79. I get a lot of bright ideas about all sorts of things -- too many to put into practice.
80. I like being amidst a great deal of excitement and bustle.
81. I feel a person just can't be too careful.
82. I try to avoid any work which involves patient persistence.
83. Quite often I get "all steamed up" about a project, but then lose interest in it.
84. I would rather drive five miles under the speed limit than five miles over it.
85. Most people bore me.
86. I like to find myself in new situations where I can explore all the possibilities.
87. I much prefer familiar people and places.
88. When things get boring, I like to find some new and unfamiliar experience.
89. If I don't like something, I let people know about it.
90. I prefer a routine way of life to an unpredictable one full of change.
91. I feel that people should avoid behavior or situations that will call undue attention to themselves.
92. I am quite content with my life as I am now living it.
93. I would like to be absent from work (school) more often than I actually am.
94. Sometimes I wanted to leave home, just to explore the world.
95. My life is full of change because I make it so.

VITA

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Master of Science

Thesis: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STIMULUS-SEEKING BEHAVIOR  
AND LEVELS OF MANIFEST ANXIETY

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