



# New: Understanding Our Need for Novelty and Change

*Winifred Gallagher*

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*Why are we attuned to the latest headline, diet craze, smartphone, fashion statement? Why do we relish a change of scene, eye attractive strangers, develop new interests?*

*How did Homo sapiens survive near-extinction during an environmental crisis 80,000 years ago, while close cousins very like us have died out?*

*Why is your characteristic reaction to novelty and change the key to your whole personality?*

*Why do we enjoy inexpensive pleasures, like fresh flowers or great chocolate, more than costly comforts, like cars or appliances?*

*How can a species genetically geared to engage with novelty cope in a world that increasingly bombards us with it?*

Follow a crawling baby around and you'll see that right from the beginning, nothing excites us more than something new and different. Our unique human brains are biologically primed to engage with and even generate novelty, from our ancestors' first bow and arrow to the latest tablet computer. This "neophilia" has enabled us to thrive in a world of cataclysmic change, but now, we confront an unprecedented deluge of new things, from products to information, which has quadrupled in the past 30 years and shows no sign of slowing. To prevent our great strength from becoming a weakness in today's fast-paced world, we must re-connect with neophilia's grand evolutionary purpose: to help us learn, create, and adapt to new things that have real value and dismiss the rest as distractions.

In *New: Understanding Our Need for Novelty and Change*, Winifred Gallagher, acclaimed behavioral science writer and author of *Rapt*, takes us to the cutting-edge laboratories and ancient archeological sites where scientists explore our special affinity for novelty and change. Although no other species can rival our capacity to explore and experiment with the new, we individuals vary in how we balance the conflicting needs to avoid risk and approach rewards. Most of us are moderate "neophiles," but some 15 per cent of us are die-hard "neophilicists," who have an innate passion for new experiences, and another 15 per cent are cautious "neophobes," who try to steer clear of them—a 1-5-1 ratio that benefits the group's well-being.

Wherever you sit on the continuum, *New* shows you how to use this special human gift to navigate more skillfully through our rapidly changing world by focusing on the new things that really matter.

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