

Running head: SOCIAL CURIOSITY

When and How Does Social Curiosity Trait Lead to Interpersonal Citizenship Behaviors?

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**When and How Does Social Curiosity Trait Lead to Interpersonal Citizenship Behaviors?****Abstract**

In this study, we draw upon current knowledge on social curiosity and integrate it with trait activation theory to propose when and how social curiosity trait influences an employee's organizational citizenship behavior directed at individual coworkers (OCBI). Specifically, we suggest that overt social curiosity positively affects an employee's OCBI through heightened employee social acceptance whereas covert social curiosity negatively affects OCBI through reduced employee social acceptance within the workgroup. We further contextualize these effects by focusing on the workgroup and suggesting that group task interdependence moderates the relationship between social curiosity trait and employee social acceptance as well as the indirect effect of social curiosity trait on OCBI. Multi-level analyses of time-lagged multi-source data from 567 employees and 116 supervisors nested in 116 workgroups supported our predictions. Our work increases the understanding of how a social curiosity disposition may ultimately build a sense of community at work.

*Keywords.* Social curiosity, social acceptance, OCBI, task interdependence

Curiosity scholars across disciplines revealed the importance of curiosity in contributing to several individual-level outcomes including job performance, job satisfaction, well-being, and health (cf., Lievens et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2021). A closer look at this literature shows that knowledge gained about why and how different dimensions of curiosity trait – as opposed to a general curiosity disposition – explain job performance outcomes is limited (with a notable exception by Reio & Wiswell, 2000). This is the case of social curiosity, a trait-like construct defined as having an interest in other people’s actions, emotions, and thoughts; it is a general disposition to explore how other people live their lives (Kashdan et al. 2020; Litman & Pezzo, 2007; Renner, 2006). Social curiosity is important to examine not only because curiosity, in general, has a fundamental role in motivation, learning, and well-being (Kashdan et al., 2009) but also because social curiosity is foundational to human relationships (Renner, 2006), which should facilitate the building of social relationships both at work and in our personal lives.

Unfortunately, current personality and organizational research is silent on how social curiosity impacts employees’ sense of community with coworkers, which is core to collective exploration, discovery, and organizational competitive advantage (Lievens et al., 2022). In this study, we examine this need for research considering the workgroup’s social acceptance as perceived by the focal employee and OCBI<sup>1</sup> toward one’s coworkers. We refer to social acceptance as the feeling of value and acceptance by others in the work group (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993) and to OCBI as the employees’ discretionary efforts to aid other individuals in the workplace (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Helping peers with heavy workloads or mentoring new colleagues are examples of OCBI directed at coworkers. As curiosity is important in

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<sup>1</sup> We focused our theorizing on OCBI as opposed to OCBO because there should exist an appropriate match between the referents who have accepted a focal employee in their workgroup and the referents whose treatment is reciprocated by that focal employee.

building psychological resources (Kashdan and Silvia, 2009) and more work is needed in this area (Kashdan & Steger, 2007), our main research question focuses on the function of social curiosity in building psychological resources at work and the contextual factors that can strengthen this relationship. We refer to psychological resources as personal dispositions that help people manage the responses to various events (Taylor et al., 2010). The purpose of our study, thus, is to examine how social curiosity relates to workgroups' social acceptance as perceived by the focal employee, and how social acceptance ultimately relates to OCBI. Further, we study the moderating effect of group task interdependence on the relationship between social curiosity and social acceptance. Group task interdependence refers to the extent to which tasks within a workgroup are interconnected, necessitating coordinated effort and collaboration among group members to achieve shared objectives. In other words, it determines the extent to which the work performed by one individual influences the work outcomes of others within the workgroup (Anand et al., 2018; Wageman & Baker, 1997). Group task interdependence is a situational variable that should moderate the relationship between social curiosity and social acceptance as it activates curiosity trait by facilitating information sharing (Bachrach et al., 2006).

To accomplish this goal, we draw upon current knowledge of social curiosity (Kashdan et al., 2020; Litman & Pezzo, 2007; Renner, 2006) and task interdependence (Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003). We integrate this knowledge with trait activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000), which postulates that a situation allows for the activation of a personality trait. One such situation is groupwork under conditions of varying levels of task interdependence. Drawing from trait activation theory is reasonable given the work conducted by personality scholars. One potential case examined in the trait activation theory literature refers to situational features

affecting the expression of traits both at the task and the social level. In our study, we focus on task interdependence, which focuses on how tasks are implemented at the group level, a level of analysis which is particularly rich for enhancing trait-situation interactions (Tett et al., 2021), activating the salience or potency of trait-relevant cues. We theorize a moderated mediation model and show that overt social curiosity (i.e., overt methods of seeking people-related information such as asking questions; Litman & Pezzo, 2007; Renner, 2006) positively affects an employee OCBI through heightened social acceptance when group task interdependence is high, whereas covert social curiosity (i.e., indirect, secretive, and sneaky ways of getting information about other individuals; Kashdan et al., 2020) negatively affects OCBI through reduced social acceptance within the workgroup under the condition of low group task interdependence. We did not anticipate a direct relationship between social curiosity and OCBI because of the following two reasons. First, traits should be considered as latent potential to think, feel, and behave (Tett et al., 2021). Second, others have long noted the complexity in explaining the relationship between personality and performance pointing to the need to consider attitudinal responses (Tett et al., 2013). Our research model is shown in Figure 1.

Our study incrementally contributes to personality and individual differences by providing progressive coherence in the form of next steps in the sequence of several past contributions to the curiosity literature (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). Past contributions illuminate the importance of the general domain of trait curiosity to several job attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Harrison & Dossinger, 2017; Harrison et al., 2011). Past contributions also show the relationship between social curiosity and other types of curiosity such as joyous exploration and deprivation sensitivity (cf., Kashdan et al., 2020). Unfortunately, past scholarship remains behind in explaining social curiosity, a specific domain of trait curiosity, that is foundational in explaining

relationships at work and building a sense of community with coworkers (Lievens et al., 2022). In addition, we contribute to the nomological network of social curiosity (cf., Kashdan et al., 2020) by expanding this nomological network to include task interdependence, social acceptance, and organizational citizenship behavior toward individuals.

## **Theory and Hypotheses**

### **Overt Curiosity**

Drawing upon prior work (Renner, 2006; Litman & Pezzo, 2007), Kashdan and colleagues (2020) distinguished overt and covert social curiosity traits. Overt social curiosity trait refers to overt methods of seeking people-related information, such as asking questions (Litman & Pezzo, 2007; Renner, 2006). We posit that overt social curiosity positively relates to social acceptance because social curiosity shapes the psychological resources of individuals (Kashdan et al., 2020; Kashdan & Silvia, 2009). Empirical evidence shows that overt social curiosity positively relates to various psychological resources including intellectual humility, openness to new experiences, and adopting others' views (see Grüning & Lechner, 2022; Kashdan et al., 2020). This bank of resources builds the foundation for other resources (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009) such as social acceptance, or the feeling of value and acceptance by others in workgroup settings (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993). In summary, overt social curiosity contributes to building psychological resources that result in positive perceptions of the standing of the individual in the organization (Kashdan & Steger, 2007).

We also posit that curiosity becomes relevant under conditions of complexity (Kashdan et al., 2013; Kashdan & Steger, 2007). We propose that task interdependence with a workgroup will activate complexity in the work environment and strengthen the positive relationship between overt social curiosity trait and social acceptance. Task interdependence arises from

work inputs – the distribution of resources, information, materials, and skills necessary to complete a task (Wageman & Baker, 1997), and as such, it is important to examine the dynamics of trait activation theory in a workgroup framework as such inputs have the potential to activate the traits of overt and covert social curiosity. Trait activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000) postulates that circumstances determine the activation of a personality trait. It explains that individuals' personality traits are activated through situational circumstances, and they then manifest behaviorally. According to trait activation theory, when individuals with certain personalities find themselves in some environments, they will be more apt to behave in certain ways. A situation is deemed to be relevant to a trait if it presents cues for the expression of that trait-relevant behavior (Tett & Guterman, 2000). Subsequent extensions of the theory incorporated the study of the activation of personality and work attitudes (Tett et al., 2021).

We posit that in contexts of high task interdependence, the employee is more likely to find complexity in the accomplishments of tasks, activating individuals with high overt curiosity and strengthening perceptions of social acceptance. High task interdependence involves a collective task in which the accomplishment of a task depends upon the input of others in the group (Wageman & Baker, 1997). In fact, a high level of task interdependence will require higher degrees of coordination and integration among group members (Baron & Misovich, 1999; Wageman & Baker, 1997). As such, groups with high task interdependence are characterized by high collaboration, cooperation, and information sharing. Under conditions of high task interdependence, the relationship between overt curiosity and social acceptance will strengthen because at the operational task-base and social level, task interdependence functions as a facilitator of information flow enhancing social curiosity, a trait that has the function of

exploring the self and the world around us (Kashdan & Fincham, 2002; Kashdan & Steger, 2007; Tett et al., 2021).

In turn, we argue that perceptions of social acceptance by others in a workgroup setting enhance behaviors that work toward the development of meaningful relationships. One such behavior is organizational citizenship behaviors directed toward individuals in organizational settings (Williams & Anderson, 1991). This relationship is consistent with the idea that with greater social acceptance people will enact socially enriching activities (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009). This argument is also consistent with Korman's (1970) self-consistency theory which proposes that individuals will be motivated to act in a way consistent with their own perceptions, in this case how others in the organization accept this individual. Thus, as a catalyst for individual action or interpersonal interaction in work settings (Lievens et al., 2022), we expect that overt social curiosity will indirectly relate to OCBI via social acceptance. High task interdependence will strengthen this indirect relationship by enhancing opportunities for information sharing.

Alternatively, it could be argued that curiosity is not just an individual-level difference but it can encompass a set of behavioral tendencies or strategies individuals can deploy to achieve specific goals. This is similar to other trait-like domains like dominance and prestige (Cheng et al., 2010), which are also considered as status-seeking strategies. Considering that social acceptance is conceptualized as subjective feelings, it is theoretically possible that when an individual feels accepted, it motivates them to seek out social information overtly.<sup>2</sup> Although this argument is theoretically possible, it is less likely because when someone is socially accepted, it is more likely that this person would enact social enriching activities (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009)

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<sup>2</sup> We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this idea.



such as organizational citizenship behavior rather than seeking out more social information, which is relatively less enriching. Empirical evidence shows that feelings of social worth have an impact on higher performance in teams and facilitate information sharing in teams instead of merely seeking out information (Cunningham, Gino, Cable, & Staats, 2021). Thus, this cooperation should more likely increase organizational citizenship behavior. Furthermore, social approval relates to voluntary help and cooperation within teams (Rand et al., 2009; Grutterink & Meister, 2022).

Empirical evidence suggests that OCBI increases in workgroups with close social relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2018) and shows that positive attitudes enhance the likelihood of enacting discretionary behaviors (Spitzmuller et al., 2008). We note that we focus our theorizing on organizational citizenship behaviors that benefit specific individuals in the organization (i.e., OCBI) as opposed to OCBs that benefit the organization in general (i.e., OCBO), because there should exist an appropriate match between the referents who have accepted a focal employee in their workgroup and the referents whose treatment is reciprocated by that focal employee. Because these referents are individuals who form an employee's social circle (i.e., determine the focal employee's level of being accepted in the workgroup), examining OCBI is appropriate.

*Hypothesis 1: The positive relationship between overt social curiosity and social acceptance will be strengthened by group task interdependence.*

*Hypothesis 2: The indirect relationship between overt social curiosity and OCBI via social acceptance will be strengthened by group task interdependence.*

### **Covert Curiosity**

Covert social curiosity involves indirect, secretive, and sneaky ways of getting information about other individuals (Kashdan et al., 2020). Examples include observing

people surreptitiously, eavesdropping, or getting information about a person from friends (Kashdan et al., 2020; Renner, 2006). Kashdan et al. (2020) found negative outcomes associated with covert social curiosity (e.g., tendency to complain and disagree about work issues, snooping, and prying), indicating a reduction in psychological resources. The tendency to complain and disagree about work issues suggests that covert social curiosity involves a low disposition to avoid judgment or criticize other people (Kashdan et al., 2013). This more negative trait should be negatively related to social acceptance. As curiosity involves the need to know about others and the need to control the environment around us (Renner, 2006), when the disposition to complain and disagree increases, so do the negative perceptions of how the self stands as a function of those around us in the form of low social acceptance.

In turn, these seemingly negative perceptions of social acceptance by the workgroup (as perceived by the focal employee) should reduce the likelihood of the focal employee's engagement in OCBI. Specifically, we argue that perceptions of social acceptance by others in a workgroup setting enhance behaviors that work toward the development of meaningful relationships. Citizenship behaviors directed toward individuals (Williams & Anderson, 1991) is one form of such behaviors. This relationship is consistent with the idea that with greater social acceptance people will enact socially enriching activities (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009). However, with lower social acceptance, individuals will be less likely to invest in others (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009). Thus, we expect that covert social curiosity will indirectly relate to OCBI via social acceptance.

However, building on trait activation theory, we propose that high group task interdependence will weaken the negative association between covert curiosity and social acceptance for two reasons. First, when an employee works closely with others in a team to

accomplish tasks, the team exchanges resources in the form of information-sharing, help, communication, and guidance (Wageman & Baker, 1997). This exchange should minimize snooping and spying, as much information about others is facilitated by the interaction. Second, the inflow of resources will buffer the disposition to complain or disagree with group members, who may provide information, tools, and financial resources, or help reduce the task demands placed upon the individual. These exchanges will contribute to lower negative perceptions of social acceptance by the workgroup as perceived by the focal employee.

*Hypothesis 3: The negative relationship between covert social curiosity and social acceptance will be weakened by group task interdependence.*

*Hypothesis 4: The indirect relationship between covert social curiosity and OCBI via social acceptance will be weakened by group task interdependence.*

## **Methods**

### **Sample, Participants, and Procedure**

Data were collected from a large accounting firm located in the Northeastern U.S. A workgroup was defined as all employees working together that report to one supervisor (i.e., senior manager). A total of 137 supervisors and 686 employees embedded in 139 workgroups were invited to fill out paper-pencil surveys written in English. We coded the surveys to match supervisors with their subordinates. We collected data from two sources at three time points: employees (Time 1 and Time 2, a month later) and their corresponding supervisors (Time 3, two months later). We restricted our analyses to workgroups where the response rate was over the 60% cutoff suggested by Timmerman (2005)<sup>3</sup> and removed surveys with missing data. The

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<sup>3</sup> In a multi-study research, Timmerman (2005) examined relationships between team-level variables with various patterns of individual non-response. He found that although team-level relationships were attenuated as individual members were deleted randomly and also were generally reduced as individuals were deleted as a function of their level of participation with the team, the overall amount of variance explained showed a curvilinear effect. More

average response rate for the workgroups in the sample was 82.2%. Five groups were removed from the sample because the within-group response rate was below the 60% cutoff, reducing the number of observations to 567 subordinates (response rate = 82.65%) and their 115 supervisors (response rate = 83.94%) nested within 115 workgroups. The average group size was 4.89 (SD = 0.49). Subordinates were 53.0% male and had an average age of 29.14 (SD = 12.45) years. Their average organizational tenure was 4.51 years (SD = 5.01), and they all had a college education. Leaders were all senior managers. The average leader age was 34.25 (SD = 6.29) years. Leaders were about 58% male (SD = 0.42) and had an average organizational tenure of 6.13 (SD = 2.89) years. We assert that our study was not pre-registered.

### Measures

Participant answers to the survey items were assessed on 7-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. For each measure, we averaged the scores of all included items to create a composite score, such that higher scores indicated higher values for the underlying constructs. Full measures are available in the Appendix.

**Overt social curiosity trait (T1, employee rated).** Employees rated their overt social curiosity trait using a four-item scale published by Kashdan et al. (2020). A sample item was “I ask a lot of questions to figure out what interests other people” ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Covert social curiosity trait (T1, employee rated).** The four-item scale published by Kashdan et al. (2020) was used. A sample item was “When other people are having a conversation, I like to find out what it's about” ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

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specifically, the variance explained in the team outcome peaked when 30-40 % of the low-participation members were deleted. Accordingly, he suggested that in multi-level models, groups with response rates of lower than 60% should be excluded from the analyses. As such, in our case, a high within-group response rate was particularly important because the group task interdependence measure was based on aggregated responses, and aggregation to the group level is meaningful only when a substantial percentage of employees complete surveys (Timmerman, 2005).

**Group task interdependence (T1, aggregated employee rated).** We drew from a six-item scale developed by Pearce and colleagues (1992). An example item was “Performance on this task is dependent on receiving accurate information from others” ( $\alpha = .81$ ). We aggregated the individual responses to calculate group-level task interdependence (Dorfman & Howell, 1988). The values of median  $r_{wg(j)} = .89$ ,  $ICC(1) = .23$ ,  $p = 0.001$ , and  $ICC(2) = .67$  supported aggregating data to the group level (Bliese, 2000).

**Social acceptance (T2, employee rated).** We used the three-item scale developed by Ibarra and Andrews (1993) to assess employees’ perceptions of social acceptance in the workgroup. Whenever necessary, we changed the referent in the items to make them applicable to our research setting (i.e., we substituted ‘company’ with ‘workgroup’). A sample item was “I feel accepted in this workgroup” ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**OCBI (T3, supervisor rated).** We used Williams and Anderson’s (1991) seven-item measure of OCBI for supervisors to rate their subordinates’ OCBI. An example item was “This employee helps others who have heavy workloads” ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Control Variables.** Meta-analytic findings suggest that employee age, sex, education, and tenure matter to their performance (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2008; Pulakos & Wexley, 1983). Hence, we controlled for them. Because workgroups varied in size, we controlled for group size as well. Moreover, to conduct a rigorous test for the moderating effects of the workgroup attribute of task interdependence, we controlled for subordinates’ individual ratings of their task interdependence. We also controlled for openness to experience because theory and empirical evidence show that it relates to both overt and covert curiosity (Kashdan et al., 2020). We measured openness to experience with a four-item scale from the Mini-IPIP6 (Sibley et al., 2011) ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Finally, we controlled for extraversion given its theoretical relation with curiosity (Renner, 2006). We

measured extraversion with a four-item scale from the Mini- IPIP6. We note that all analyses were carried out with and without controls to see if there were any significant differences arising from the inclusion of control variables. Finding no such differences between the two sets of results, we report results from analyses with controls below.

### **Analyses**

Because employees were nested in workgroups and supervisors rated OCBI of individual members, we used multilevel path analysis with the maximum likelihood estimator with robust standard errors in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to test our main and moderation effects. Random-effects models were used in all analyses as well as group mean-centering the variables of interest. We used the Mplus TWOLEVEL RANDOM command. Group size and group task interdependence were group level variables and thus were modeled at between-level while all other variables were modeled at within-level as they were individual-level variables. To obtain accurate tests of indirect effects in multilevel analyses, we tested conditional indirect effects using the Monte Carlo resampling method (Bauer et al., 2006). Monte Carlo has demonstrated superior accuracy over the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) that computes confidence intervals based only on the single sample of data (Preacher & Selig, 2012). The Monte Carlo resampling method repeatedly simulates indirect effects to obtain a distribution of the indirect effect using the information from the asymptotic covariance matrix of estimated model coefficients. To test the moderated mediation hypothesis, we ran a model in two sets of analyses with the moderator centered at plus one standard deviation (high levels of the moderator) and minus one standard deviation (low levels of the moderator) from its mean. The resulting coefficients, their respective variances, and covariances were then transferred to an R-web utility developed by Selig and Preacher (2008) to calculate 95% confidence intervals (CIs) for indirect

effects. We utilized 20,000 resampling for each confidence interval. To estimate model goodness of fit, we computed the pseudo  $R^2$  statistic following Snijders and Bosker's (1999) formula along with AIC (the Akaike information criterion).

### Results

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities, and correlations for all measures. Prior to hypotheses testing, we conducted a set of single-level confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess the psychometric properties of subordinate-rated measures: overt social curiosity, covert social curiosity, social acceptance, and task interdependence. We constrained each item to fall under a single factor, and the factors were allowed to correlate. The hypothesized four-factor model indicated a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2(113) = 331.51$ , RMSEA = .06, CFI = .94, and proved a superior fit over all alternate models. Furthermore, because we had a group-level moderator in our model (i.e., group task interdependence), we also conducted a multilevel CFA. The multilevel CFA results indicated suitable fit statistics ( $\chi^2(170) = 469.23$ , RMSEA = .05, CFI = .95), and proved superior fit over all alternate models.

To assess the incremental variance explained by the study variables beyond that by control variables, we created a preliminary model consisting of employee age, sex, tenure, openness to experience, extraversion, group size, and individually rated task interdependence scores as a base model to be compared with our hypothesized models. To test Hypothesis 1, a test of moderation showed that after controlling for subordinate-rated task interdependence and other controls, workgroup task interdependence moderated the relationship between overt social curiosity and social acceptance ( $\gamma = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ,  $\Delta\text{pseudo } R^2 = 0.06$ ,  $\Delta\text{AIC} = 25.60$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1 (Model 6-Table 2). Analyses of simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that the interaction effect aligned with our predictions (see Figure 2). When group task

interdependence was high, overt social curiosity was positively associated with social acceptance ( $\gamma = 0.24, p = .007$ ), whereas when group task interdependence was low, overt social curiosity was not significantly associated with social acceptance ( $\gamma = 0.06, p = .590$ ).

In testing Hypothesis 2, the Monte Carlo resampling showed that the indirect overt social curiosity-OCBI link via social acceptance was positive when group task interdependence was high (.05, bias-corrected 95% CI [.02, .08]), and non-significant (.01, bias-corrected 95% CI [-.01, .03]) otherwise, supporting Hypothesis 2 (see Table 3).

To test Hypothesis 3, moderation analyses show that group task interdependence weakened the association between covert social curiosity and social acceptance ( $\gamma = 0.21, p = 0.030$ ,  $\Delta\text{pseudo } R^2 = 0.10, \Delta\text{AIC} = 27.80$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3 (Model 8-Table 2). Simple slopes analyses showed that when group task interdependence was high, covert social curiosity was negatively associated with social acceptance ( $\gamma = -0.31, p = .001$ ), whereas when group task interdependence was low, covert social curiosity was not significantly associated with social acceptance ( $\gamma = -0.05, p = .619$ ) (see Figure 3).

In testing Hypothesis 4, a Monte Carlo resampling demonstrated that after accounting for control variables, the indirect relationship between covert social curiosity and OCBI via social acceptance was negative when group task interdependence was low (-.04, 95% CI [-.07, -.01]), and non-significant (-.01, 95% CI [-.04, .01]) otherwise, supporting Hypothesis 4 (see Table 3).

To further test the robustness of our analyses, we incorporated models where both types of social curiosity (i.e., overt and covert) were included in the analyses simultaneously (see Model 4 and Model 9, Table 2). The results showed that when both types of social curiosity were included in the model (Model 4-Table 2), overt curiosity was positively, and covert curiosity was negatively related to social acceptance. Further, the results of moderation analyses showed that



group task interdependence moderated the effect of both overt and covert curiosity on social acceptance when both were included in the model simultaneously (Model 9-Table 2). These findings suggest the robustness of our analyses and results.

## **Discussion**

### **Theoretical Implications**

Results inform personality and individual difference researchers in several ways. First, results supported our mediated-moderation model, according to which covert and overt social curiosity traits relate to OCBI mediated by perceptions of social acceptance. We showed that overt social curiosity positively affects an employee's OCBI through heightened social acceptance whereas covert social curiosity negatively affects OCBI through reduced social acceptance within the workgroup. Furthermore, we found support for our contention that group task interdependence moderates these mediated relationships. As such, we uncovered a mechanism and a condition under which the social curiosity trait influences a sense of community in the form of OCBI.

Second, results provide support for trait activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000), and suggest that group task interdependence is a situational constraint activating social curiosity, and ultimately, increasing the likelihood of OCBI. Thus, group task interdependence in interaction with the social curiosity trait influences communal working environments. Third, our work provides theoretical implications for the curiosity literature. Although self-expansion and building psychological resources emerge from curiosity (Kashdan et al., 2012), overt and covert social curiosity traits had striking differences. Overt social curiosity seems to increase self-expansion by generating positive perceptions regarding how others think about the self; it also indirectly enhances OCBI. Instead, covert social curiosity acts in the opposite

manner, reducing perceptions of social acceptance, and consequently OCBI. However, group task interdependence not only affects social acceptance under conditions of high social overt curiosity but also under conditions of covert social curiosity. Theoretically, this finding means that group task interdependence acts as leverage to facilitate social relationships at work.

Finally, our work suggests that social curiosity can generate both functional and dysfunctional outcomes (Lievens et al., 2022). Overt social curiosity impacts functional outcomes by increasing OCBI, thus contributing to a sense of community in work settings. However, covert social curiosity propels dysfunctional outcomes, diminishing the capacity to build psychological resources and therefore reducing OCBI.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although we developed theory-driven hypotheses and applied a time-lag, we did not utilize an experimental design to establish causality. Experimental manipulations with random assignment can help rule out reverse causality and other confounds that bring causality into question (Bullock et al., 2010; Giner-Sorolla, 2016; Rohrer et al., 2022). We, nevertheless, explored the possibility of an alternative causal sequence of social curiosity trait leading to OCBI that in turn affects employee social acceptance in the workgroup. However, as expected, the results did not support such a causal sequence. We urge personality and individual difference scholars to devise experimental or longitudinal study designs to establish causality on curiosity research.

Another limitation was that social acceptance was measured from the point of view of the focal employee and not by the workgroup. Yet, another limitation of our study was the lack of variation in job type and culture in our sample. The present sample came from one industry (accounting) and culture (e.g., individualistic). The following questions arise: is group task

interdependence a function of the context? If yes, what are the dynamics in other industries? Future research can test the generalizability of the present findings using different samples (e.g., manufacturing facilities) and country contexts (e.g., a collectivistic culture). This is even more salient with regards to moderation and moderated mediation effects. We thus encourage future studies to replicate our moderation and moderated mediation models. We further urge personality and individual difference scholars to explore social curiosity trait dynamics at the group level. For example, the effects of the extent and variation of group social curiosity on both team potency and performance need examination. Our theory and measurement focused on social curiosity as a trait not as a state. Accordingly, we proposed that social curiosity led to social acceptance, not the other way around. Nonetheless, we urge future research to examine social curiosity as a state and how it relates to social acceptance and OCBI theorizing the causal order.

We also encourage further research on the mechanisms and behaviors that may intervene between the trait by context interaction and employee performance. Tett and Burnett's (2003) original model describes a path 7 whereby social cues and traits jointly influence evaluation processes which affect job performance. They state that "performance ratings may be influenced as well by perceived fit with organizational values, policies, structure, and so forth" (p. 504). In our case, it is curiosity trait  $\times$  group task interdependence that leads to social acceptance (a form of fit) and then OCBI. Future research may test other mediating mechanisms (and specifically behaviors) other than the mechanism examined in the present study.

Finally, the findings of this study relate to work context and work-related behaviors (i.e., OCBI). Future research may focus on generalizing the model to include how overt and covert

curiosity may explain social acceptance and increases in citizenship behaviors in various community contexts such as neighborhood associations, churches, and social clubs.

### **Practical Implications**

In today's organizations, citizenship behaviors could be as instrumental as employee job performance. Because job descriptions are incomplete, the ability to be flexible and assist others helps organizations function. Therefore, it is essential for managers to understand and foster the conditions that stimulate employees to enact citizenship behaviors as opposed to only focusing on their task performance. Managers must note that the trait of social curiosity is not always desirable; instead, it depends on whether it is overt or covert. Although overt social curiosity trait can increase the employees' potential to engage in citizenship behaviors, covert social curiosity trait proves the opposite effect. At the organizational level, managers and human resources professionals who oversee structural design should consider the effect of group task interdependence so employee social curiosity trait can facilitate organizational citizenship behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

Extending the social curiosity literature, we proposed and showed that social curiosity trait affects employee social acceptance in the workgroup, which in turn influences employee engagement in OCBI. However, this effect was contingent upon the workgroup attribute of task interdependence, as suggested by trait activation theory. This study presents evidence of how social curiosity trait may ultimately build a sense of community in the workplace and sheds light on the importance of accounting for the influence of group context when theorizing about the effects of trait social curiosity on work outcomes.

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**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and reliabilities of study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	29.14	12.45											
2. Sex	0.47	0.50	-.03										
3. Education	2.73	1.03	.27**	-.01									
4. Tenure	4.51	5.01	.32**	.04	.09*								
5. Openness to experience	3.61	0.90	.02	-.23**	.15**	-.01	(.81)						
6. Extraversion	4.01	1.27	.08	-.16**	.15**	.09*	.18**	(.79)					
7. Overt social curiosity	3.21	0.89	-.03	-.01	.03	.07	.22**	.15**	(.88)				
8. Covert social curiosity	2.93	0.82	-.11**	.05	-.11**	-.10*	.02	-.09*	.12**	(.80)			
9. Task interdependence	2.51	0.68	-.01	.11**	-.01	-.07	.01	-.09*	-.06	.01	(.81)		
10. Social acceptance	3.41	0.92	.18**	-.04	.10*	.11**	.07	.27**	.17**	-.18**	-.05	(.79)	
11. OCBI	3.88	0.84	.12**	.01	.07	.09*	.01	.12**	.08	-.22**	-.04	.26**	(.90)
Group level variables													
1. Group size	4.89	0.49											
2. Group task interdependence	2.51	0.43	-.01										

**Notes:**  $n = 567$  individuals in 116 groups; Cronbach alpha reliability is shown along the diagonal. Tenure and age are measured in years. Sex is coded as 0 = female and 1 = male. Education is coded 1 = undergraduate student, 2 = bachelor's degree, 3 = graduate student, 4 = master's degree, 5 = doctoral degree.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . (two-tailed tests).

**Table 2.** Multilevel modeling results

Variables	Social acceptance								
	Model 1 estimates	Model 2 estimates	Model 3 estimates	Model 4 estimates	Model 5 estimates	Model 6 estimates (H1)	Model 7 estimates	Model 8 estimates (H3)	Model 9 estimates
Intercept, $\gamma_{00}$	0.01(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	-0.01(0.04)	-0.01(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	-0.01(0.04)	-0.01(0.04)	0.01(0.04)
Control variables									
Age, $\gamma_{10}$	0.13**(0.04)	0.12**(0.04)	0.12**(0.04)	0.12**(0.04)	0.12**(0.04)	0.12**(0.04)	0.12**(0.04)	0.13**(0.04)	0.13**(0.04)
Sex, $\gamma_{20}$	0.01(0.09)	-0.01(0.09)	0.02(0.09)	-0.01(0.09)	-0.01(0.09)	-0.01(0.09)	0.03(0.09)	0.01(0.09)	-0.01(0.09)
Education, $\gamma_{30}$	0.02(0.04)	0.02(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	0.02(0.04)	0.02(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	0.01(0.04)	-0.01(0.04)
Tenure, $\gamma_{40}$	0.05(0.03)	0.05(0.03)	0.04(0.03)	0.04(0.03)	0.05(0.03)	0.06*(0.03)	0.04(0.03)	0.04(0.03)	0.03(0.04)
Openness to experience, $\gamma_{50}$	0.02(0.05)	-0.02(0.05)	0.03(0.05)	-0.01(0.05)	-0.02(0.05)	-0.02(0.05)	0.03(0.05)	0.03(0.05)	-0.01(0.05)
Extraversion, $\gamma_{60}$	0.25**(0.09)	0.27**(0.08)	0.24**(0.08)	0.25**(0.07)	0.27**(0.08)	0.26**(0.07)	0.24**(0.08)	0.24**(0.08)	0.23**(0.04)
TI, $\gamma_{70}$					0.01(0.06)	0.01(0.06)	-0.02(0.06)	-0.01(0.06)	0.01(0.05)
Group size, $\gamma_{01}$	-0.03(0.09)	-0.03(0.09)	-0.03(0.09)	-0.03(0.09)	-0.03(0.09)	-0.05(0.08)	-0.03(0.09)	-0.05(0.08)	-0.04(0.08)
OSC, $\gamma_{80}$		0.13**(0.04)		0.15**(0.04)	0.13**(0.04)	0.13**(0.04)			0.15**(0.04)
CSC, $\gamma_{90}$			-0.15**(0.04)	-0.16**(0.04)			-0.15**(0.04)	-0.13**(0.04)	-0.15**(0.04)
GTI, $\gamma_{02}$					-0.04(0.12)	-0.03(0.12)	-0.04(0.12)	-0.05(0.12)	-0.05(0.12)
OSC $\times$ GTI, $\gamma_{82}$						0.21*(0.10)			0.15+(0.08)
CSC $\times$ GTI, $\gamma_{92}$								0.21*(0.10)	0.18*(0.09)
AIC	1575.34	1559.57	1564.74	1540.32	1566.38	1540.78	1571.07	1543.27	1514.06
$\Delta$ AIC						25.60		27.80	
pseudo $R^2$	0.09	0.17	0.12	0.20	0.17	0.23	0.12	0.22	0.25
$\Delta$ pseudo $R^2$						0.06		0.10	

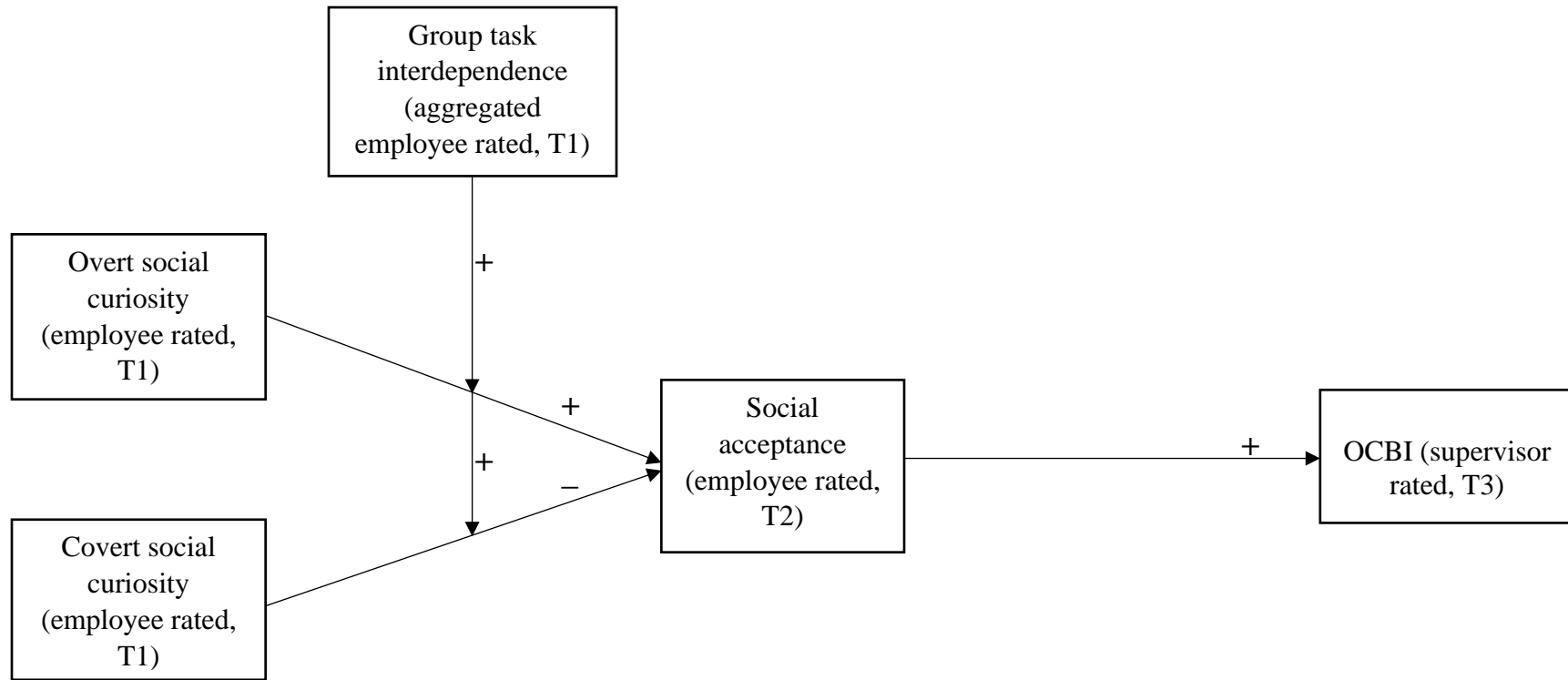
**Notes:**  $n = 567$  individuals in 116 groups; Standard errors are shown in parentheses; TI = task interdependence; OSC = overt social curiosity trait; CSC = covert social curiosity trait; GTI = group task interdependence.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . (two-tailed tests).

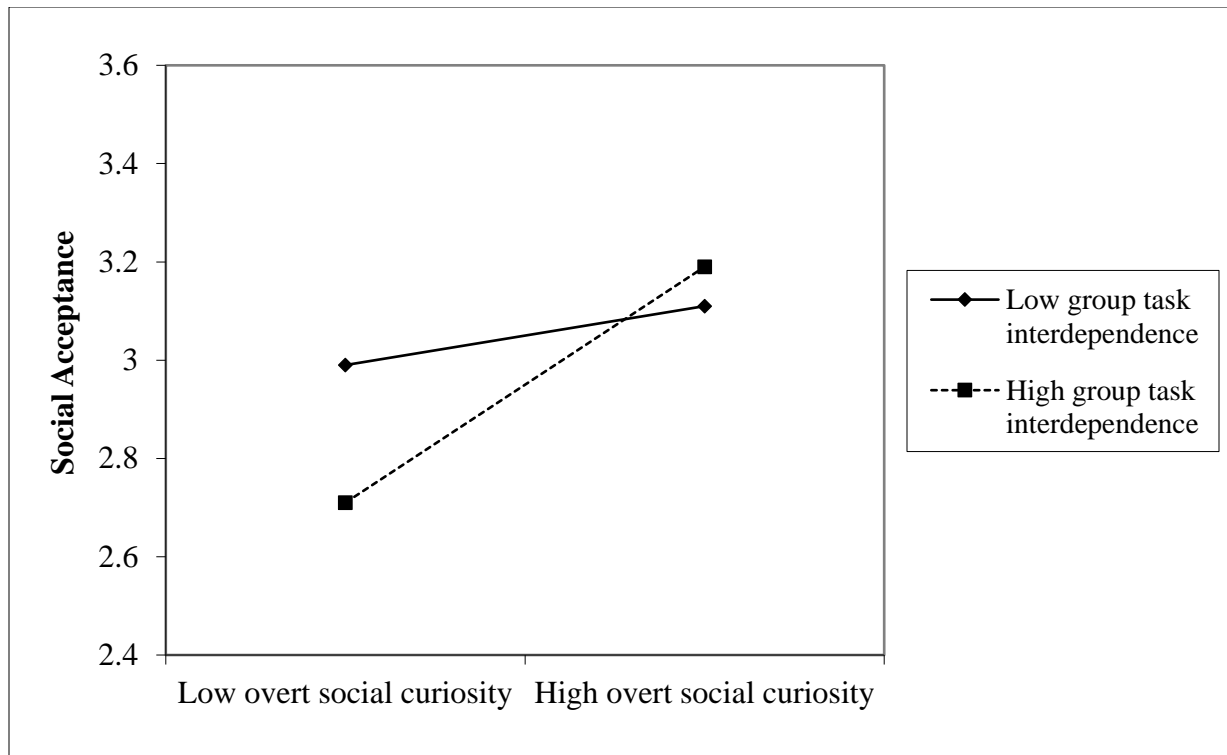
**Table 3.** Moderated mediation results across levels of group task interdependence

Variable	level	conditional indirect effect	<i>lower 2.5%</i>	<i>upper 2.5%</i>
Overt social curiosity → social acceptance → OCBI	low GTI	0.01	-0.01	0.03
	high GTI	0.05	0.02	0.08
Covert social curiosity → social acceptance → OCBI	low GTI	-0.04	-0.07	-0.01
	high GTI	-0.01	-0.04	0.01

**Notes:**  $n = 567$  individuals in 116 groups; GTI = group task interdependence.

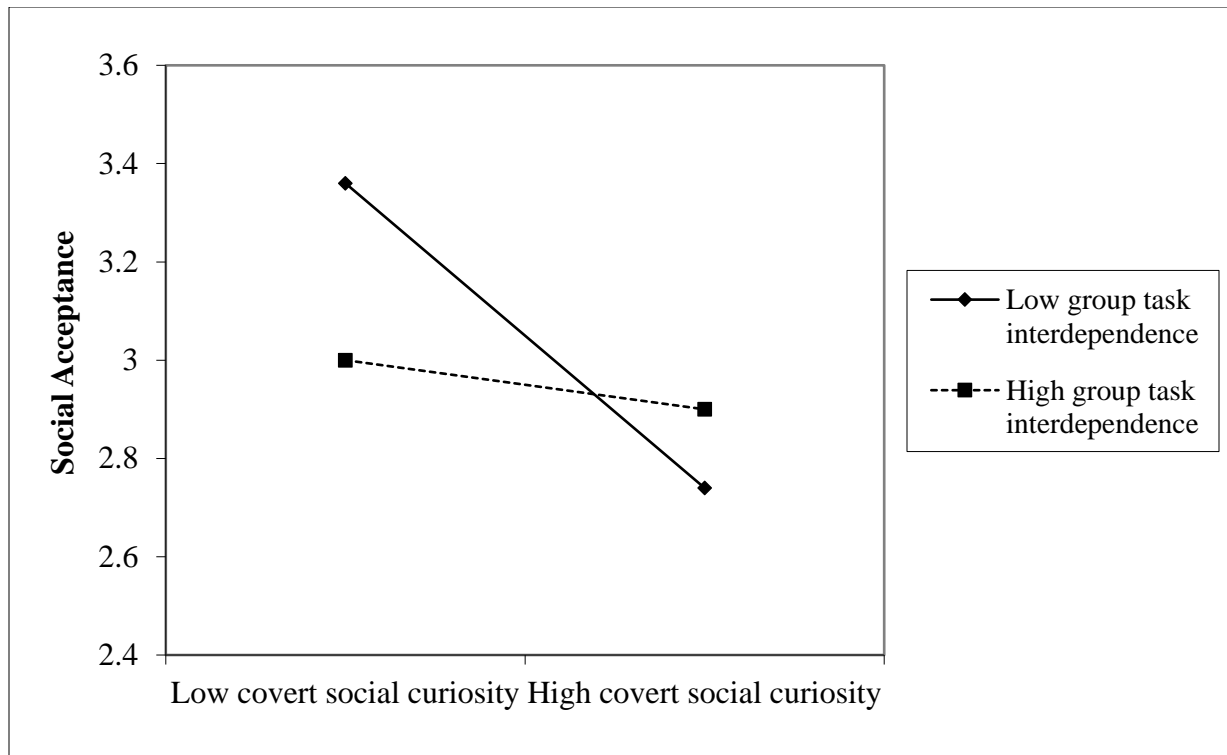


**Figure 1.** Research model.



**Figure 2.** Group task interdependence as the moderator of the relationship between overt social curiosity trait and social acceptance.





**Figure 3.** Group task interdependence as the moderator of the relationship between covert social curiosity trait and social acceptance.

### **Appendix: Study Measures**

#### **Overt social curiosity (Kashdan et al., 2020)**

1. I ask a lot of questions to figure out what interests other people.
2. When talking to someone who is excited, I am curious to find out why.
3. When talking to someone, I try to discover interesting details about them.
4. I like finding out why people behave the way they do.

#### **Covert social curiosity (Kashdan et al., 2020)**

1. When other people are having a conversation, I like to find out what it's about.
2. When around other people, I like listening to their conversations.
3. When people quarrel, I like to know what's going on.
4. I seek out information about the private lives of people in my life.

#### **Social acceptance (Ibarra & Andrews, 1991)**

1. I feel accepted here.
2. I often feel like an outsider in this company.
3. I feel valued by the company.

#### **Task interdependence (Pearce et al., 1992)**

1. I work closely with others in doing my work.
2. I often must coordinate my efforts with others.
3. My performance is dependent on receiving correct information from others.

#### **OCBI (Williams & Anderson, 1991)**

1. Helps others who have been absent.
2. Helps others who have heavy workloads.
3. Assists supervisor with his/her work "when not asked".
4. Takes time to listen to coworkers' problems and worries.
5. Goes out of way to help new employees.
6. Takes a personal interest in other employees.
7. Passes along information to coworkers.