

I decided to study boredom, both chronic and momentary, and its effects on humans. While momentary boredom is generally argued as an emotion that promotes creativity and ingenuity, chronic boredom can be similar to depression, in both its symptoms and its effects. Experiencing both types also involve the risk of turning to reckless behavior, falling prey to addiction, or battling heavy anxiety. Those who are bored often find themselves under-stimulated and frustrated with their lives. While research on boredom is quite new, the emotion is not. Historic works of literature and art illustrate boredom in other times.

Thus, the idea of portraying bored people is not a new theme in art, especially in old paintings. For my artwork, I wanted to pay homage to that, so I built a sculpture depicting a human form experiencing boredom. The sculpture is constructed from a base of two steel rods, with thinner black wire wrapped over and over around the rods. It stands on a wooden base, and is adorned by black ribbon. The combined mediums are intended to induce an image that portrays a figure wasting away due to chronic boredom with the world. A Japanese folding screen stands behind the figure, forcing the human to remain separate from the more inspiring world behind them that others have the ability to experience.

I hope the viewer sees the frustration that can come with boredom. Boredom can be a terrible emotion, despite usually being dismissed as trivial or childish. While this work is an interpretation of my personal ennui, I invite the viewer to ponder and explore their own experience with the emotion, as well as review its place in their life.

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Boredom has existed throughout the entire history of the human race. While the term “boredom” was coined by Charles Dickens in his book *Bleak House* in 1853 (OED), there are many mentions of the same feeling in previous historical works. The old Roman philosopher Seneca (who lived in the early common era) mentions it as a feeling of nausea (McRobbie). Christian tradition had a sin called “acedia,” which was a type of boredom in which people (especially cloistered monks) wandered around without any real interest, yet still had a restlessness that was hard to contain (McRobbie). The Renaissance had *melancholia*, a type of “depression” sourced from excessively studying too much math and science. Boredom is not a new phenomenon, however, only recently has the scientific community begun to focus on its effects on our brains. Some claim that boredom is a good thing, something to stimulate creativity, a cousin of disgust developed to keep ourselves mentally sane. Others claim that it is a danger, too similar to depression. So which is it? How does it affect the individual and society? The fact is, boredom’s positive or negative influence on people is subjective to each personality, but overall is a thoroughly negative thing.

“Simple boredom” encompasses all forms of minor boredom that is situational and quickly passing, for instance, the frustration that happens while one is waiting in line, or when one has nothing to do in the afternoon. It can also come from repetition, or excessive activity (Toohey). When authors or researchers refer to boredom causing creativity, they are generally referring to simple boredom. BBC writer Hannah Richardson presents the idea that boredom is most useful in children, and that it “stimulates the imagination,” due to it prompting them to come up with activities to perform on their own and becoming comfortable with being alone. She cites artist Grayson Perry, who says that, “[boredom is] a creative state,” and then later Dr. Teresa Belton who claims that, “Lack of things to do spurred [my daughter] to talk to people she would not otherwise have engaged with and to try activities she would not, under other circumstances, have experienced, such as talking to elderly neighbours and learning to bake cakes.” Author David Burkus cites university studies of boredom causing creativity in adults, also using his own experience of boring business-meeting presentations inspiring new ideas, claiming that “[l]ate night dinners became the source of the new and exciting.” Both forms of boredom that these authors present are simple boredoms. The idea of simple boredom causing creativity or productivity is an interesting idea, mainly because it seems subjective to every individual person. For example, people experience boredom differently based on their personality. The four subcategories of simple boredom are: indifferent boredom, calibrating boredom, searching boredom, and reactant boredom (Andreassi).

“Indifferent boredom” is a type of pleasant boredom, where the person could feel fatigued and bored, but they don’t mind it and actually find it rather pleasant. “Calibrating boredom” is the type of boredom that promotes good ideas, however, it lacks the motivation to actually follow through on those ideas. “Searching boredom” is like calibrating boredom, only with motivation. Searching boredom causes the person to feel restless, looking for something to do, which, in some cases, could lead to those innovative, creative ideas that authors talk about, however, in other cases, could lead the person to begin drinking or abusing other substances, depending on the person. Lastly, “reactant boredom” is the type of boredom that makes people aggressive and agitated. It occurs when the person is trapped in a boring situation they can’t get out of (Andreassi).

While two of four of these types of boredom could promote positive results, the other two are negative, with indifferent boredom producing lazy or immobile behavior, and reactant boredom producing hostile or pent up anger. With the other two types, calibrating and searching,

the person has the possibility to produce creative ideas or ingenuity. This possibility makes calibrating boredom *seem* good, however there are plausible negative drawbacks as well. The calibrating type may produce interesting ideas, however, with this boredom, the person doesn't have any motivation or desire to record or follow through on the ideas, thus making this positivity or usefulness void. With the searching type, there still is the possibility of turning to harmful or risky behavior, especially in adolescents figuring out their identities, who lack the ability to figure out what activities entertain them (Gosline). Many people who don't have the skills to cure their boredom conventionally end up developing addictions, to drugs, alcohol, or even smart phones and video games (Robson), which is counter-productive due to creating a dependency on self-damaging activities. In the end, while simple boredom can act as a motivator to people of selective personalities, its main effects are thoroughly negative.

While simple boredom has the some positive effects, "chronic boredom" is nearly entirely negative. There are a few key differences between chronic and simple boredom. While simple boredom is situational and temporary, chronic boredom lasts an extended, indefinite period of time. Chronic boredom is similar to depression, however, the two are separate things. Like depression, the exact cause of chronic boredom is generally unknown, however it is attributed usually to recurring under-stimulation, or the brain's inability to produce the neurotransmitters in the right balances (Weir) (Sinicki). To figure out how easily prone to boredom people are, a professor and his student at the University of Oregon composed a system/survey called "The Boredom Proneness Scale." The scale is composed of twenty-eight statements, such as, "Having to look at someone's home movies or travel slides bores me tremendously," and, "I am seldom excited about my work." When taking the survey, the participant rates the statements from 1-7. The sum of these numbers are then compared to other participants' results in order to figure out how easily bored the person is. The average scale is 81-117, with 117-196 being the most easily bored people, and 0-81 being the most easily excitable people (Toohey). Those who are above the average are those are most likely to experience chronic boredom, a problem due to the results that follow. Like searching boredom, chronic boredom is known to lead to substance abuse, risky behavior, and anger. If left untreated or not looked after, chronic boredom can be a serious detriment to the person's health. One of the worse factors of chronic boredom is that it can become a cycle; to the people who experience it, even the activities that used to break up the monotony grow old after awhile. For example, those who are fond of breaking rules find eventually that even breaking the rules becomes predictable and boring (Toohey), adding to the monotony of every day life. Those who do not find pleasure in breaking rules or giving in to addiction end up finding themselves sitting idle most of the day, with little enthusiasm in any activities. Chronic boredom leads to an unsatisfying life in which the sufferer is trapped by his/her own repetition.

It is this trait of easily bored people that creates a link between chronic boredom and depressive patients. Some wonder if those who are chronically bored are also depressed, or if their boredom stems from depression. Other scientists say that they are related and are mutual causations of the other at the same time (McRobbie). Selective papers/research say that the main difference between boredom and depression comes from the type of emotion they are. Gustave Flaubert writes in his novel, *Madame Bovary*, a perfect description of the link between chronic boredom and depression. His main character, Emma Bovary, suffers endless boredom from her miserable life, and Flaubert claims that, "She wanted to die, but she also wanted to live in Paris," a sentence that perfectly describes the melancholy that can stem from chronic boredom, while also capturing the essence of wanting something more. While boredom is a minor emotion,

depression is an all-consuming type feeling (Goldberg). It tends to be that the two go hand in hand, and that those who are more prone to feeling bored experience depression at some point in their lives as well. The following table explains the main differences between the feelings of depression and boredom:

Boredom	Depression
• Blames others or things	• Blames self
• Empty feeling	• Heavy feeling, hopelessness
• Lack of interest	• Sadness, sense of personal loss
• Limited attention	• Intense feelings
• Contributing events are static	• Contributing events are ongoing
• Rate of incidence higher in males	• Rate of incidence higher in females
• Seeks stimulation	• Avoids stimulation

(Source: Deal)

Note that women are more prone to feeling depressed, whereas men are more prone to boredom. In fact, the trend of men being more prone to boredom provides the question of if men need more lively activities than women to keep them interested in life. The answer most likely lies in the brain. In the brain, the chemical dopamine is a neurotransmitter largely responsible for the “reward” section of the brain (Toohey). It lives on the left side of the brain, and while women use both sides of their brains, men tend to lean more to the left side. Men also have a higher need for hormones that are associated with pleasure and reward (Sinicki), providing the idea that maybe it is men who have a high amount of these chemicals, or whose brain is more reliant on them, who are prone to being bored. Obviously it is not only men who get chronically bored; there are certainly women who find themselves quite prone to tedium and frustration, so we can estimate that the reason this is so is due to the level of dopamine in the brain. As dopamine controls time orientation as well as reward systems, it makes sense that those who find themselves unable to be stimulated have a low level of dopamine in their body. And having a low level of dopamine doesn’t necessarily have to come from genetics. It could be that the environment of those chronically bored affects the level of dopamine in the brain, thus meaning that, “[e]nvironment, not just genes, can cause boredom” (Toohey).

Like depression, there are certain groups of people who are more prone to suffering from boredom proneness, or chronic boredom. Much like with depression, teenagers are one of these major groups. With adolescence comes new freedom, but often, teenagers find themselves lacking an idea of what to do to fill that freedom. While teens know they no longer want to engage in their previous childhood activities, they do not yet have the abilities to perform adult ones. Nowadays, to extinguish their boredom, teenagers will often turn to screens and modern electronics, which is a problem, as electronics, nowadays, elevate the threshold for stimulation needed to keep someone entertained (Pickhardt). For those who continue to use modern electronics and screens as an “opt-out” of sorts, it could aggravate their ability to self-stimulate, thus causing the threshold for boredom to elevate. And it is not just teenagers who continue to use electronics to cure their restlessness. Adults do it too, thus raising questions for what our society might look like should we continue to use electronics as a way to “self-medicate.”

So how does one fight boredom? Well, it begins with deciding if the boredom is controlled by environmental (or situational) effects or by genetics. If it is environmental, then one of the best ways to cure it is to travel and try new things. As aforementioned, boredom often

comes from repetition (thus, why a synonym for it is “tedium”) and the newness of the traveling allows for a break in the monotony from one’s every day life and location. Experiencing new things and traveling also allows one to learn new things by choice. Another option is staying active, as exercise releases endorphins in the brain (Lloyd). Trying aerobics, working on strength exercises, or merely running on the treadmill are all ways to give your brain a rush of endorphins. Another option is to study the world around you, or do an activity that distracts you. While losing yourself with a substance or addictive pastime is a bad idea, controlled oblivion or retreat can be helpful for curing apathy. And, if worse comes to worse and none of these activities offer relief, one should follow the directions that the emotion advises (Toohey). Sometimes, if one is really lucky, new project ideas or interesting self-reflections come out of boredom. However, if none of these solutions relieve discomfort, it could be best to see a doctor. A psychiatrist could help to determine if one’s chronic boredom and/or proneness to it correspond to the amount of dopamine in one’s brain. From there, the doctor could determine if therapy or medication (such as anti-depressants) would benefit the patient, and how severe the issue might be. Some people might need a combination of these factors in order to ease boredom.

Overall, the restlessness and tedium that come with boredom can be a serious problem, and with the intensity they can provide, we should take the emotion more seriously. When bored, ignoring the feeling until it goes away is an ineffective method, as is turning to harmful substances. Instead, the best method is to partake in an activity that eases dissatisfaction, or recognizing the boredom for what it is. By recognizing boredom, one can prevent binge-eating, technology obsession, or substance abuse before it happens. It is best to pay attention to children, especially adolescents and teach them ways of handling their restlessness before they reach adulthood, or fall prey to addiction. The best way to solve any problems associated with boredom is merely to be aware of it, in order to combat its negative effects.

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