

## Rethinking Boredom

I was recently catching up with a friend I hadn't seen in a while. He seemed bothered by something and when I asked about it, he confessed that he was feeling...bored. Bored with work and his social life, to the point where he felt he needed make a big change to get himself out of his rut. Most of us have felt this way at some point in our lives, and we know how uncomfortable and agitating feelings of boredom can be. But is that such a bad thing? On the one hand, we've all heard the derisive adage "only boring people get bored." But on the other, boredom can motivate us to make changes in our lives, and that's not such a bad thing.

Turns out, scientists have been researching the nature of boredom for years, and their findings support the idea that being bored isn't actually all that bad. One such scientist is Dr. Sandi Mann of the University of Lancashire in the UK. She and her team [published a study](#) in 2014 that looked at how a bored mind responds to creative stimulus. She took two participant groups and had one carry out the exceedingly boring task of writing out a list of phone numbers by hand. She then had both groups complete a creative task: to come up with as many creative uses for two polystyrene cups as they could. Her team found that the group that started the exercise with a boring activity came up with significantly more novel uses for the cups than their counterparts.

"Once you start daydreaming and allow your mind to wander, you start thinking beyond the conscious and into the subconscious" said Dr. Mann during [an interview](#) for Nautilus, a science magazine. That's because when we let ourselves daydream—a common occurrence when we feel bored—we tap into our own cognitive system and begin processing our own internal thoughts, regardless of their relevance to what is happening outside of our heads. While most forms of cognition are responses to external stimulus, boredom-induced daydreaming is the mind working on itself. It helps us think creatively and develop insight into who we are, because what our minds wander to signals our internal mental state.

Boredom can also act as a motivator, as it did for my friend. Andreas Elpidorou, an assistant professor in philosophy at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, has [written extensively](#) about the good side of boredom. [He argues](#) that boredom encourages one to pursue new goals because it signals that a current goal is no longer attractive or meaningful. In other words, boredom tells us what we don't want to do so we can move onto something else.

If boredom makes us more creative and can inspire positive changes in our lives, perhaps it is good for us. And if that's the case, maybe we don't need to feel so bad about feeling bored from time to time. Rather than something to be avoided, boredom can be embraced as a mental tool for problem solving, or a strategy for boosting our creativity. If we can do that, we might find we're not so bored after all.