

Bored? This is anything but tedious

May 25 2011

Boredom: Children are quick to distastefully proclaim it and adults are quick to deny it. But University of Calgary Greek and Roman Studies professor Peter Toohey says there is nothing wrong with boredom after all. In fact, he credits the unappreciated emotion for inspiring some of the most important ideas and creative works in history.

If you've ever felt fed up and bored and have done something about it, Toohey, also the author of *Boredom: A Lively History*, says you've experienced one of boredom's benefits. "Boredom is hard wired into us. Like other emotions, it is adaptive. It exists to assist human beings to flourish," says Toohey. "Just as an emotion like disgust can protect you from eating toxic food, so can boredom protect you from toxic social circumstances. It can force you to act in a self-beneficial way."

But that's not all. Toohey maintains that boredom intensifies our self-perception by causing us to step back and to look within ourselves. It encourages contemplation, daydreaming and innovation. Andy Warhol famously claimed to he liked to be bored. It may have helped him generate new ideas.

But there is a downside.

"If unrelieved, boredom is a dangerous emotion. It can intensify and spill over into a manic angry reaction and from there into unrelieved depression. You can witness this with incarcerated animals and humans," says Toohey.

“Boredom is like an early warning system. If you’re feeling bored you shouldn’t think it’s crazy or silly. It’s a proper reaction to circumstances that can be harmful and you need to remedy them.”

Toohy examines neurological and psychological theories of boredom. He studies boredom as a stimulus for art and literature, looks at boredom in cultures as diverse as the Australian Aboriginals and the ancient Romans, and discusses the role of [boredom](#) in literature and art as different as that of Jeffrey Archer, Albert Camus, the early Christians, as well as Albrecht Dürer and Edgar Degas.

Provided by University of Calgary

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