

Wijnand VAN TILBURG

[wijnand.vantilburg@essex.ac.uk](mailto:wijnand.vantilburg@essex.ac.uk)

*University of Essex*



## **The unbearable lightness of boredom: A psychological perspective**

Boredom is an unpleasant emotion that correlates with many adverse phenomena (e.g., depression, anxiety, unhealthy eating, lack of self-control, attention failures). Consequently, boredom is typically considered a nuisance. Notwithstanding this negative connotation of boredom, it seems that boredom serves an important self-regulatory function: Boredom affectively signals that an individual's behavior or situation is devoid of purpose and it subsequently motivates attempts at resolving this conflict. Although some responses to this conflict can be undesirable, they nonetheless find their origin in a functional self-regulatory process that expresses itself at the level of complex, symbolic behaviors and attitudes.

Our functional view of boredom was examined across the domains of meaning and ideology (e.g., political orientation, religiosity). Overall, the results indicate that boredom instigates attempts to resolve the perceived lack of purpose at hand by pursuing meaningful alternatives. Importantly, this process can yield both arguably undesirable consequences (e.g., outgroup derogation, political polarization) but also desirable repose (e.g., nostalgic reverie, finding new meaning).