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How Do People Cope with Boredom? Insights from Daily Boredom Experiences During the COVID-19 Lockdown

Understanding the nature and causes of boredom has increasingly received attention among scholars. However, the current literature on boredom coping is limited. There is a need to understand the process of how people select a specific type of boredom coping strategy in the moments when they feel bored, and whether this is influenced by the intensity and type of boredom they are experiencing, the type of activity they are engaged in, and if individuals are more likely to favor certain types of coping strategies over others across different boredom situations. To answer these questions, a 7-day daily diary study was conducted with 289 adults from the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in 2020. The pandemic offered a unique opportunity to explore daily boredom experiences and coping, as boredom levels and frequency increased during this period. It also presented unique challenges as people now had to cope with boredom in a way that complied with the stay-at-home orders and social distancing protocols. Participants were asked to respond to three open-ended questions each day: to describe a time when they felt bored, why they felt this way, and what they did to stop feeling bored. Preliminary content analysis revealed that participants were often bored because they had nothing to do and were unclear as to how to spend their time. They used a variety of methods to cope with boredom such as engaging in a different activity, resting, or cleaning and sanitizing their house. Some even reported participating in more engaging activities, reflecting the positive impact that boredom has the potential to create by motivating people to seek more meaningful and stimulating activities. Further in-depth analysis of this data aims to identify whether the types of boredom coping strategies that these participants implemented (i.e., cognitive-approach, cognitive-avoidance, behavioral-approach, behavioral-avoidance, based on Nett et al., 2011 classification of boredom coping) differed by activity type (work, leisure,

maintenance), boredom intensity, and individual dispositions. Knowing this can help us understand how to promote healthy and effective boredom coping. This study adds to the currently limited literature on boredom coping by highlighting how different contextual and individual factors influence the process of regulating momentary boredom experiences.