

# Is Boredom Driving Our Culture of Lunacy?

"Somebody's boring me," poet Dylan Thomas once commented. "I think it's me," he added.

Were you to become a fly on the wall, or in this age of electronic wonders, a tiny drone, you might observe my daily life and decide that I'm the most boring human on planet earth. I follow the same daily routine for the most part, even down to playing solitaire while eating yogurt for breakfast so as to avoid taking vitamins on an empty stomach. I write, read, write some more, fuss with the yard, take a nap (or two), wash the dishes, and occasionally deep-clean a part of the house. When I get a little stir-crazy, I drive to town, where I visit a coffee shop, shop at the grocery store, and drop in at the library a couple of times a week.

Like many people, however, the interior self is another matter altogether. I'm always searching for writing topics, and I entertain pleasant thoughts about my children, grandchildren, and friends, and not-so-pleasant thoughts about the state of our country. I won't say I'm a bonfire of ideas, but there's always a fire in the hearth.

In other words, Madame Ennui and I are at best passing acquaintances.

Until one day last week. And at the beach of all places.

It was the final day of my stay at the coast. For different reasons, the last of my kids and grandkids had departed for their homes ahead of schedule that Friday morning, but my room reservation ran until Saturday, so my friend John and I stayed one more day. The two-bedroom suite was spacious and accommodating, but after a day of hard, steady rain had confined us to these quarters, I was ... bored.

Television wasn't an option. Even if I was a viewer of the tube, I doubt whether I could have figured out how to operate that electronic cyclops in the den. So, I wrote, read a bit, and took a nap—I've read that dogs, unlike humans, take naps when bored, and decided to follow suit—but it was a long, dreary confinement. By bedtime, I'd cleaned out my backpack and carefully packed for the trip home, but those welcome diversions took less than 45 minutes.

At one point, I even looked up several online articles about boredom. One of these included a [test](#) determining whether one is suffering from transient or chronic boredom. I glanced at a few of the questions, but found myself too disinterested to answer more than the first three.

As I considered my inert self, a thought occurred: Is our culture so bored that we seek out new and exciting entertainments—girls becoming boys, men having babies, racism around every corner, Democrats in Congress spending hundreds of billions of dollars?

Are the members of Antifa fervent and educated ideologues, or are they burning cars, looting stores, and beating people in the street in order to escape another humdrum evening of playing Grand Theft Auto V? Did Attorney General Merrick Garland order the raid on Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago home to thwart his reelection hopes or did he just wake one morning bored out of his skull, wanting to whip up some excitement? Is Joe Biden cloistered from public view these days because of his dementia or because he's just fed up with the whole presidential thing?

Long ago, before it was lumped into that catch-all sin of sloth, acedia was the eighth cardinal sin, dwelling alongside lust, avarice, and pride. Kelsey Kennedy provides an excellent [sketch](#) of this sin of spiritual apathy and its history in *Atlas Obscura*, writing that acedia, especially among monks, "made it difficult to be spiritual." According to Kennedy, one

monk fought acedia by “tying ropes to the ceiling of his cell, putting his arms through, and singing the psalms.” That sounds silly but effective, and left me wondering whether that same spiritual exercise might cure today’s immature radicals or those teenagers who, dripping with exhaustion from a day of video games, declare themselves bored. “Down to the basement and the ropes with you,” their mother might command, “and sing the National Anthem while hanging from the ceiling.”

Claiming to be bored as an adult should be embarrassing—even my brief stint with apathy recounted above is shameful. We live in a world of providential natural wonders and a manmade carnival of electronic amusements. Listless apathy, other than for a prisoner in solitary confinement, is unbecoming, and the fault, as Dylan Thomas noted, lies not in others, but in ourselves.

“All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone,” wrote French philosopher Blaise Pascal. After my long day of being confined to quarters, I think the old guy was onto something.

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