



## **SEARCHING FOR MEANING: WHY BOREDOM POLARIZES INTERGROUP ATTITUDES, INTENSIFIES POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, AND FOSTERS NOSTALGIA**

Boredom is an unpleasant emotion with many detrimental effects: boredom is associated with aggression, pathological gambling, depression, loneliness, anxiety, hostility, reduced work enjoyment, unhealthy eating, risky driving, and many more (Vodanovich, 2003). Not surprisingly, boredom is typically considered a nuisance. Notwithstanding this negative connotation of boredom, we propose that boredom serves an important self-regulatory function: Boredom affectively signals that an individual's behavior or situation is devoid of purpose and subsequently motivates attempts at resolving this conflict. Albeit some responses to this conflict can be undesirable, they nonetheless originate in an adaptive self-regulation process. This functional view of boredom was examined by testing the impact of experimentally induced boredom on attitudes towards in-groups and out-groups (Van Tilburg & Igou, 2011), political ideology (Van Tilburg & Igou, 2015), and nostalgic reverie (Van Tilburg et al., 2013). Importantly, each of these three potential outcomes of boredom has the potential to offer people a sense of purpose (e.g., Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). The results consistently indicate that boredom instigates attempts to resolve the perceived lack of purpose at hand by pursuing meaningful behavior. Importantly, this process can yield both arguably undesirable consequences (e.g., outgroup derogation and political polarization) but also desirable repose (e.g., nostalgic reverie). The findings portray boredom as an emotion that, notwithstanding its many undesirable correlates, fulfills a psychologically adaptive function.