

- 00:17 This is Annie Grace and you're listening to This Naked Mind Podcast where without judgement, pain or rules we explore the role of alcohol in our lives and culture.
- 00:31 Hi friends! It's Annie Grace. I am coming to you from a road trip with my family so apologies for the background noise, but I wanted to answer this question from Sara and this is an interesting one for me because I experienced this myself. And so I did a lot of research to kind of get to the bottom of this one because I didn't have a good answer. So Sara asks...she said, "I've become very aware that boredom is a trigger for me. It generally shows up whilst I'm at home on the weekends when we have nothing planned and I have time just to be with myself, my thoughts, my feelings, etc. Home drinking actually rather than social drinking is my weakness and boredom, it sounds like such an easy thing to overcome, but in reality it's so frustrating and difficult. Do you have any recommendations?"
- 01:13 And I have a lot of notes on this one so I'm going to be referring to my notes, but I think in general how I like to approach things is you know rather than just giving you my recommendations for overcoming my own boredom, which is definitely a struggle for me, it's more about okay let's actually look at what boredom is and what it does and what the source is and then enable ourselves to come up with kind of our own treatment for ourselves with more knowledge. So I always think that knowledge is a really good way to tackle some of these big issues. So I went deep into this one and I found some really interesting stuff. And you know we've been bored as... humans have been bored forever. So the first evidence of boredom is back as early as like early Pompei.
- 01:59 So it's not sort of a new thing but it's a really uncomfortable feeling and it comes from you know it gets so uncomfortable for us that we seek to change our state of mind often by doing stuff that's actually quite destructive for us. So for example if you have been drinking and you know drinking just ends up with a hangover the next day in misery and bad decisions you still might drink to relieve boredom, despite knowing that. There was a study done and it's really interesting. They put people in a room for 15 minutes with an electric shocker and they showed them... they had them touch the electric shocker and it hurt and they said okay, this is an electric shocker. And then they put them in the room and they left them alone with just their thoughts for 15 minutes. And it was like 80 percent of the people left in the room would rather shock themselves and cause themselves pain than just sit there in the room for 15 minutes and be bored.
- 02:49 So boredom is a really uncomfortable emotion and it's interesting because it's almost an emotion we feel guilty about. You know we feel bad about being bored because if you compare it to other uncomfortable emotions, let's say pain or nausea or disgust, you know if you're in pain you wanting to change your state is a good thing and you want to take your hand off the flame, if you will, not to get burned or you want to relieve the physical pain. You know nausea, it's something that's perpetuating something good. So the decision to change it is a

good thing whereas boredom, we almost feel embarrassed that we're bored as if it's something we shouldn't be feeling which is really, really interesting. And um, but more and more people are saying like no boredom is not trivial at all.

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In fact there's a huge amount of research that's currently been going on about boredom that I had no idea about. There are some great articles in the Scientific American and just a bunch of people saying okay, what is this emotion? Because it is real and it is definitely you know makes us uncomfortable and it's something that is so uniquely human. So what is it and what does it mean. And they even have a way to test yourself for how bored you are, your propensity to be bored. So you can google it. It's called the BPS, The Boredom Proneness Scale and the average boredom number is 81 to 117 and you won't be surprised Sara, or anyone listening, to know that people who are prone to addiction are more easily bored. So we're often trying to get ourselves out of a state of boredom. In fact a 2003 survey of teenagers showed that those who said they were easily bored, 50 percent more likely to try drinking, illegal drugs or smoking than those who said they weren't easily bored. And physiologically there's also a connection between boredom. And kind of what's going on in your brain so people with fewer dopamine receptors. And what that means is it takes more dopamine to trigger the dopamine related emotions that you would be having are more prone to boredom and also studies have shown people with fewer dopamine receptors are also often more prone to pleasure seeking and with that comes addiction. So there's this whole thing wrapped around the feelings of boredom and being addicted, which I found really really interesting.

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So along with excess spending money and stress, boredom was the third leading cause of teenagers trying and getting addicted to drugs, smoking or alcohol. So all of that is kind of background but let's take it deeper and say okay, well what exactly is boredom? So boredom is defined as being disinterested in the outside world and in the world of your thoughts. So when you're just alone with yourself. So it's almost as if with boredom we're saying that life itself, just being, isn't enough. That we need something more. And that's like a really depressing thought but that is in essence what boredom is defined as. And so Arthur Schopenhauer said "If life possessed in itself had a positive value of real content, then there would be no such thing as boredom. Mere existence would fully satisfy us."

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So what he's saying is that life, just existing, isn't positive by itself because if it were boredom wouldn't exist. Now of course that's not the final word on that because we can't, we can't believe that that's true, but boredom does exist still what does that mean? Does that mean that there's something wrong with the very essence of being? That being, just existing, is not enough with our own selves and our own minds? And I mean I can't, I can't say that I want to take that answer. It's obviously very depressing but then there is something else. It's like maybe, maybe it's not that just being is not enough. Maybe it's that we, the human spirit, the human mind, the human capacity to create and do and change the world is incredibly awesome. Maybe there's just something incredible about human beings.

- 06:52 Giacomo Leopardi said "Boredom is the most sublime of all human emotions because it expresses the fact that the human spirit in a certain sense is greater than the entire universe. Boredom is an expression of profound despair at not finding anything that can satisfy our soul's boundless needs." And so actually in a way boredom forces us to create. And you know he goes on to say, and a lot of people agree with this, that without this sense of boredom we wouldn't have these incredible cities, we wouldn't have these advances in sort of some of the areas we have, we wouldn't have literature, we wouldn't have music, we wouldn't do these things to relieve our boredom. And these beautiful life affirming very human things wouldn't exist if we didn't get bored. And so when you're bored and you go into an MRI machine there's a 5 percent drop in brain activity, but there's a huge increase in certain parts of the brain.
- 07:48 So the parts of the brain that recall autobiographical facts, the parts of the brain that get into self knowledge increase. The parts of the brain responsible for creating things, so hypothetical situations, the what ifs, the inventions, those parts start firing at a much higher rate. So boredom actually is a very important source of creativity and well being. It says you know also in the brain the parts that encourage us to do more, to create, to learn, the parts that encourage us to remember, the parts that are more intuitive and in tune with the thoughts and feelings of others, all of those increase in a bored brain. So the feeling of boredom, all of those things are actually happening, which is really interesting.
- 08:35 So again, perhaps we wouldn't have everything that we have and all these incredible things if we weren't bored. And in fact, I've read something that says Einstein was an incredibly bored person. And you know because of that he went so deep into challenging and finding out about the universe and think of that, I mean obviously things we know now because of Einstein which is really interesting. So David Foster Wallace he says "Boredom isn't just good for your brain, it's good for your soul. Bliss—a-second-by-second joy and gratitude at the gift of being alive, conscious—lies on the other side of crushing, crushing boredom." So all of this knowledge about boredom, what I take away from it is if you are bored, I think you are one of the people who needs more, to do more, to create more.
- 09:29 And boredom just like anything else, there's lots of studies to show that if the brain is left completely bored or if someone is totally isolated, people can actually go crazy. It's not a healthy emotion beyond a point. So you need to do stuff to relieve your boredom and stimulate your brain and really positive stuff. So this had me reflecting on the first year that I went alcohol free and I started to think about all of the different sorts of things that I used to do and oh my gosh I made myself a list before I quit drinking I made myself a list of everything I was looking forward to because I had been told by other people that when you quit drinking you open up a ton of time. There's so much time that you just spent in this kind of half state of consciousness so you weren't really thinking and you didn't even have the capacity to be bored because you were drunk.

10:14 So I said okay, I'm going to make myself a list of everything I kind of want to try. You know and I did all sorts of crazy stuff that first year. I mean I ordered a huge box from eBay of 10,000 Lego bricks and challenged... I had kids, the kids couldn't touch these Legos, these are my Legos... like I challenged myself to make a plane and a ship and it was really nuts and then I went and I took a painting and I was painting for a while and that was pretty fun. And then I started baking cakes. I remember baking this one cake for my son's birthday, it was a volcano and it actually had a Hot Wheels race track running through the middle of the volcano where cars could actually race.

10:45 I mean pretty compulsive stuff. And then I started writing my journals into a book and the rest is history. I've been pretty busy writing the book and getting it out there since that, but I think that we really do need stimulation. Boredom is your brain saying you need stimulation, you just need to find healthy stimulation. So I would recommend writing that list. And where I ended up finding the most relief from boredom is in activities that have sustained growth. So activities where you can challenge yourself to reach a goal. So my husband and I we actually joined a Taekwondo gym and we're like on the second belt now. But it's been almost a year and it's hard work but there's always something new to go for. You know the next thing you can learn...I broke a board the other day which was like, I mean talk about a rush. Like, how powerful did I feel? I broke a board with my foot? Like I felt really really cool. And so these things of doing something where you can achieve something new and sustained growth, I think that is one of the most engaging things because in our mind we always want goals, we want something to achieve and so happiness is really often found in an area of growth. And I guess just remember that boredom is not a bad thing. It feels uncomfortable, but it's a truly amazing thing. It is one of the reasons why we have and do and create everything we have. It is definitely one of the main reasons my book got written and wasn't just a series of journals that you know I had freed myself from alcohol, but then I wanted to kind of share it with the world. I mean that, that desire to go and do something and get myself out of this state of just sitting around I think is really beautiful.

12:22 So Sara, I would say that you as a bored person have something amazing inside yourself to create and share with the world and just do some soul searching which is great because when you're bored your self awareness goes up. So you'll have plenty of time to do some soul searching to find out what exactly that is and what you can bring. And so anyway it was such a good question. I really enjoyed answering it. Again this is Annie Grace, author of *This Naked Mind* and have a wonderful day.

12:54 This has been Annie Grace with *This Naked Mind* Podcast. Thank you so much for listening. You can learn more at ThisNakedMind.com. And please remember to rate, review, and subscribe as it really helps us spread the word.