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Understanding Relationship Boredom: A Thematic Analysis of Its Dimensions and Links to Sexual Boredom

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ABSTRACT

Boredom is a common experience in long-term relationships, yet research on close relationships has often overlooked this experience and has particularly ignored the way it relates or contributes to sexual boredom. This study aimed to identify and describe dimensions of relationship boredom in individuals in romantic relationships and further understand its link to sexual boredom through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The study included a quantitative survey of 3,089 adults, 401 of whom provided open-ended qualitative responses to answer our research question. Around a quarter of our participants reported that they were experiencing relationship boredom in their current relationship. Thematic analysis of open-ended qualitative responses ($n = 401$) identified four major themes with several sub-themes: 1) protective factors: a) shared experiences, b) emotional connection, and c) independence and autonomy; 2) contributing factors: a) stagnation and monotony, b) sexual health, c) partner and relationship issues, and d) life-stressors; 3) coping strategies: a) effort and responsibility, b) connection and mutuality, and c) novelty and exploration; and 4) consequences: a) negative affect, b) infidelity, and c) relationship end. Overall, participants described relationship boredom as normal and cyclical, and provided intentional ways to manage it, while highlighting some structural barriers to doing this successfully. Findings are discussed using general boredom, self-expansion, and heteronormativity frameworks.

Introduction

Boredom is a common experience in long-term relationships that influences well-being (Aron, Norman, et al., 2000; Tsapelas et al., 2009), and is related to infidelity (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006) and divorce (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995; Gigy & Kelly, 1993). Yet, research on close relationships has often overlooked the experience of boredom within the context of long-term relationships, and the ways relationship boredom and sexual boredom may influence one another remains largely unexplored.

General boredom is commonly understood as a transient psychological state that arises when something requires our attention but is experienced as unstimulating, repetitive, or monotonous (Chaney & Chang, 2005; Fahlman et al., 2013; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Leary et al., 1986; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). It has been associated with both low arousal (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993) and high arousal (Fahlman et al., 2013), manifesting as a mix of lethargy and restlessness, or oscillating arousal (Eastwood et al., 2012). From an evolutionary perspective, boredom may serve as a discomfort mechanism that motivates us to seek mental engagement when cognitive resources are underutilized (Danckert & Eastwood, 2020). As a “push” toward action and engagement, boredom is not inherently bad and can be adaptive (Elpidorou, 2014, 2018).

In the context of close relationships, boredom is often described negatively, with references to an “empty shell marriage”

(Caughlin & Huston, 2006), “relational atrophy” (Kelvin, 1977), or boredom as a “stagnation stage” (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992). Another perspective is that of Gable and Reis (2001, 2003), where they distinguished between aversive (negative) and appetitive (positive) relationship processes as functionally independent. In their model of interpersonal capitalization, Peters et al. (2018) viewed boredom as the absence of positivity, rather than the presence of negativity. The appetitive dimension involves the pursuit of growth, fulfillment, and pleasure in relationships and is typically most salient when people initiate close relationships. However, as partners grow more familiar with one another, the pace of self-expansion slows down, and boredom may emerge when there are limited opportunities for growth and shared experiences (Aron & Aron, 1986, 1997; Aron et al., 1991, 1995). If couples engage in self-expanding activities, inherently exciting and engaging, they can sustain or reignite the excitement associated with earlier stages of the relationship. Research supports this idea, showing that participating in novel activities together contributes to relationship satisfaction and sexual desire (Aron, Norman, et al., 2000; Muise et al., 2019; Reissman et al., 1993). On the other hand, those who experience greater relationship boredom are less likely to engage in enjoyable activities with their partners and report lower daily passion (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2012; Harasymchuk et al., 2022). Furthermore, relationship boredom appears closely intertwined with sexual boredom, infrequent sex, and a lack of sexual desire, which has been characterized as

either defining features or significant contributors to relationship boredom (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010, 2012).

The conceptualization of sexual boredom builds on theories of general boredom, highlighting potential positive outcomes of becoming sexually bored, such as the pursuit of sexual novelty and engaging sexual stimuli. Sexual boredom is the cognitive-emotional process involving wanting but being unable to have pleasurable or meaningful sex – an unmet need – due to a combination of experiencing sex as monotonous and uninteresting and feeling disconnected during sex (de Oliveira, Rahm-Knigge, et al., 2025). In this view, sexual boredom is a perceived negative experience that signals a need or desire for change, potentially prompting the activation of strategies to alleviate its discomfort. Similar to general boredom, it is an uncomfortable state that highlights the need for greater engagement and growth. However, research shows that the more individuals experience sexual boredom, the more they desire to engage in sexual novelty, but the less willing they are to initiate or agree to a partner's bid for sexual novelty (Rosa et al., 2019). Sexual boredom is negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction in women (de Oliveira et al., 2023; de Oliveira, Rahm-Knigge, et al., 2025; Veit et al., 2017) and positively correlated with infidelity (Kwena et al., 2017; Shackelford & Buss, 1997). Similar to relationship boredom, sexual boredom has been hypothesized as a potentially common stage of sexual relationships that may lead to searching for satisfying sex and if that is not achieved, is associated with a decrease in sexual desire (Carvalho et al., 2015; de Oliveira, 2023; de Oliveira et al., 2021, 2022, 2023; de Oliveira, Vallejo-Medina, et al., 2025; Murray & Milhausen, 2012).

Most people experience sexual desire in ebbs and flows throughout long-term relationships (Herbenick et al., 2014; Murray & Milhausen, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2015) and although the decline of sexual desire over the course of long-term relationships is common, it is not an inevitability of long-term relationships (Mark & Lasslo, 2018). The heteronormativity theory of sexual desire (van Anders et al., 2022) critiques how low sexual desire has traditionally been understood, emphasizing that desire is influenced by norms and expectations about gender, sexuality, and relationships. These refer to inequities in the gendered division of labor and caregiving, sexual pleasure, as well as to gender norms surrounding sexual initiation and duty to have sex. Previous qualitative research has identified women's extensive to-do lists as a cause for their low sexual desire (Sims & Meana, 2010), and that feeling obligated to have sex contributed to sexual boredom and, potentially, to waning sexual desire (de Oliveira et al., 2021). Furthermore, research has shown that duty sex detracts from sexual satisfaction; when men and women were asked to double their frequency of intercourse, there was a decrease in sexual interest, perhaps due to a decline in wanting and enjoyment of sex (Loewenstein et al., 2015). Finally, research consistently points to a pleasure gap between men and women, with heterosexual women experiencing considerably less sexual pleasure than men in their relationships (Crutcher, 2012; Laumann et al., 2006; Mahar et al., 2020). Although not directly measured in these studies of the pleasure gap, boredom might be contributing to this.

Current Study

Research on boredom in long-term partnerships is not extensive, particularly in how it relates to sexual boredom. General boredom theory suggests that all forms of boredom share the same mechanisms (Danckert & Eastwood, 2020), yet we are unaware of lay people's views on how different forms of boredom may affect their intimate relationships, how they are developed, and how they are managed. Despite the importance of novelty and self-expansion in the context of relationship boredom and its impact on sexual desire (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010, 2012; Muise et al., 2019), we lack understanding of the potential links between relationship boredom and sexual boredom, and how these might contribute to boredom theory (e.g., Danckert & Eastwood, 2020) and the heteronormativity theory of low sexual desire (van Anders et al., 2022). In view of this, the main purpose of this study was to describe relationship boredom and further understand its link to sexual boredom using frameworks of boredom, self-expansion, and heteronormativity. Specifically, this exploratory study aimed to understand the dimensions of relationship boredom in individuals in romantic relationships and how that intersected with experiences of sexual boredom.

Method

Procedure

Data were collected in April 2011 via an online survey targeting individuals 18+ who were in a relationship at the time of data collection. Participants were recruited through the e-mail list of the website GoodinBed.com, a sex education website for adults looking to broaden their sexual knowledge through empirical information. If they were interested in participating in this 15-minute anonymous online survey, they were consented into the study through a link provided in the e-mail. Participants were informed that they would receive a small incentive – a code for a free e-book of their choice from GoodinBed.com (worth \$5.99 USD).

The survey included questions on demographic background, sexual behaviors, relationship dynamics, and several measures of relationship boredom detailed below, including open-ended questions about participants' experience of boredom in their relationship. Participants were presented with the opportunity to fill in an open-ended response option at the end of the survey asking "Do you have anything else you'd like to add with regard to relationship boredom?" and the answers to this question were subject to thematic analysis and consist of the primary source of data for this paper. Data were collected using the survey monkey platform and participants' e-mail addresses for the e-book code were entered in a separate survey to ensure full anonymity of the data collected. As noted above, when potential participants clicked on the link provided in the recruitment e-mail, they completed screener questions to ensure they were 18+ and currently in a romantic relationship, followed by an informed consent page, where upon completion they entered the survey. The institutional review board of University of Kentucky and University of Minnesota provided ethical approval.

Measures

Relationship and Sexual Quality Characteristics

There were several single item quantitative questions that were asked of participants to provide context to their experiences of sexual and relationship boredom. These included: relationship happiness ranging from 1 (*extremely unhappy*) to 8 (*extremely happy*), excitement with relationship ranging from 1 (*very untrue*) to 7 (*very true*), engaging in outside interests with a partner ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 6 (*all of the time*), laughing together with a partner ranging from 1 (*very untrue*) to 7 (*very true*), sexual happiness ranging from 1 (*extremely unhappy*) to 8 (*extremely happy*), excitement with sexual life ranging from 1 (*very untrue*) to 7 (*very true*), and tired of having sex with their partner in the same old ways ranging from 1 (*all of the time*) to 6 (*none of the time*). Higher scores on all items indicated higher quality.

Level of Boredom

Level of boredom was measured with two items. The first, “How do you feel about the state of your current relationship?” used a scale ranging from 1 (*extremely bored*) to 5 (*extremely excited*) to measure the degree of boredom. The second, “How often do you feel boredom in your relationship?” used a scale from 1 (*every day*) to 7 (*not bored*) to measure the frequency of boredom experienced in the relationship.

Dimensions of Relationship Affected by Boredom

Dimensions of the relationship affected by boredom were measured with a multi-answer multiple choice question asking “If boredom impacts your relationship, please indicate which areas of your relationship are impacted (select all that apply).” Participants could choose as many that applied from: 1) *sexual desire for your partner*; 2) *frequency of sex with partner*; 3) *satisfaction with sex with your partner*; 4) *communication with partner*; 5) *relationship happiness*; 6) *vulnerability to infidelity*; 7) *vulnerability to breakup/divorce*; 8) *attraction to your partner*; 9) *I am not bored*; 10) *other, please specify* with the option to enter text into an open text box.

Milestones for Boredom Onset

Milestones for the onset of boredom were measured with two multi-answer multiple choice items. One of the items asked: “Please indicate the point(s) in your relationship that you became bored (select all that apply),” with the following answer options: 1) within the first year; 2) between year 1 and year 3; 3) between year 3 and 5; 4) between year 5 and 7; 5) after 7 years; 6) when we got pets; 7) when we had kids; 8) when our financial situation changed; 9) I am not bored; and 10) other (please specify). The second item inquired “Which milestones do you believe are most likely to lead to relationship boredom (select all that apply)?” To answer this item, participants could choose from: 1) moving in together; 2) marrying; 3) getting pregnant; 4) having kids; 5) getting older; and 6) other (please specify).

Beliefs About Boredom

Beliefs about boredom were measured with the item “It is ‘only normal’ to get bored in a long-term relationship” on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*).

Strategies

Strategies were measured with a multi-answer multiple choice item asking “Would you consider taking any of the following steps to decrease boredom in your relationship (choose all that apply)?” Answer options were: 1) going on dates more frequently; 2) incorporate lubricating aids into sex; 3) spending more time together; 4) spending less time together; 5) incorporating arousal/creams into sex; 6) incorporating sex toys into sex, and 7) other (please specify).

Desire for Change

Desire for change was assessed with two items. One item used multiple choice (*yes; no; I never thought about it*) to answer “Do you want to decrease boredom in your relationship?” The second item focused on partners, inquiring “If your partners suggested something new in the bedroom, how interested would you be?” Answers to this item were provided on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all interested*) to 5 (*entirely interested*).

Participants

A total of 3,089 participants (1775 women (57.5%) and 1314 men (42.5%) who were in a relationship, and over 18, completed more than two thirds of the survey. All participants indicated that they were over the age of 18 to access the survey, but we did not collect any additional information about age from the participants. Of the total participants, 90.7% were heterosexual and more than half were married or cohabiting (62.7%). The majority were in relationships of three years or more (64.9%) and 58.5% had children. See Table 1 for additional demographics by gender. There were 536 participants who answered the open-ended question: “Do you have anything else you’d like to add with regard to relationship boredom?” Of these, 124 reported “not applicable” or similar and were therefore excluded. An additional 16 responses were excluded as they were providing feedback about the study or other comments unrelated to the scope of this analysis, resulting in a final qualitative analytic sample of 401 participants. Of these, 217 (54.1%) identified as women and 184 (45.9%) identified as men. The vast majority (91.8%) identified as heterosexual; 67.6% were married or cohabiting with their partners, and 69.5% were in relationships for over 3 years. In this subsample, only 36.2% did not have any children.

Data Analysis

Participants’ demographic characteristics and sexual and relationship characteristics were analyzed using SPSS version 30.0. Qualitative data on relationship boredom were analyzed using thematic analysis and conducted with NVivo 14. The analysis

Table 1. Participant demographics.

	Men <i>N</i> (%)	Women <i>N</i> (%)	Total Sample <i>N</i> (%)
	1314 (42.5)	1775 (57.5)	3089 (100)
Sexual Orientation			
Heterosexual	1237 (94.1)	1564 (88.1)	2801 (90.7)
Gay or lesbian	14 (1.1)	24 (1.4)	38 (1.2)
Bisexual	38 (2.9)	112 (6.3)	150 (4.9)
Queer	0 (0.0)	14 (0.8)	14 (0.5)
Uncertain/Questioning	16 (1.2)	31 (1.7)	47 (1.5)
Other	9 (0.7)	30 (1.7)	39 (1.3)
Relationship Status			
Dating more than one person	30 (2.3)	63 (3.5)	93 (3.0)
Dating 1 person	188 (14.3)	635 (35.8)	823 (26.6)
Engaged	58 (4.4)	130 (7.3)	188 (6.1)
Married	973 (74.0)	684 (38.5)	1657 (53.6)
Common-law/cohabiting	52 (4.0)	228 (12.8)	280 (9.1)
Widowed	3 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	4 (0.1)
Other	8 (0.6)	25 (1.4)	33 (1.1)
I choose not to answer	2 (0.2)	9 (0.5)	11 (0.4)
Relationship length			
< 6 months	63 (4.8)	137 (7.7)	200 (6.5)
6 months to < 1 year	61 (4.8)	137 (7.7)	221 (7.2)
1 to < 3 years	159 (12.1)	160 (9.0)	663 (21.5)
3 years to < 7 years	199 (12.1)	504 (28.4)	634 (20.5)
7 years to < 15 years	320 (15.1)	435 (24.5)	631 (20.4)
15 or more years	512 (39.0)	311 (17.5)	740 (24.0)
Employment			
Work full-time	1076 (81.9)	948 (53.4)	2024 (65.5)
Work part-time	62 (4.7)	260 (14.6)	322 (10.4)
Unemployed	52 (4.0)	144 (8.1)	196 (6.3)
Children full-time	9 (0.7)	184 (10.4)	193 (6.3)
Children part-time	2 (0.2)	10 (0.6)	12 (0.4)
Other	94 (7.2)	185 (10.4)	279 (9.0)
I choose not to answer	18 (1.4)	44 (2.5)	62 (2.0)
Children			
No children	319 (24.3)	928 (52.3)	1247 (40.4)
1 child	164 (12.5)	217 (12.2)	381 (12.3)
2 children	400 (30.4)	296 (16.7)	696 (22.5)
3 children	219 (16.7)	166 (9.4)	385 (12.5)
4 children	113 (8.6)	84 (4.7)	197 (6.4)
5+ children	86 (6.5)	61 (3.4)	147 (4.8)
I choose not to answer	13 (1.0)	23 (1.3)	36 (1.2)

was done using reflexive thematic analysis from a contextualist/critical realist epistemological perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). To ensure trustworthiness of the analysis, we prioritized credibility between transcripts and our interpretation of the data, dependability through documentation, confirmability through reflexive openness, and transferability by providing detailed descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Consistent with our analytic approach, the analytic process involved ongoing reflection on how the researchers' professional background and assumptions about relationship dynamics might influence coding and interpretation. Two of the three authors (first and senior) contributed to the analysis of the data. The first author is a white Portuguese bisexual cisgender woman and a clinical psychologist, sex therapist, and researcher specializing in human sexuality and intimate relationships. The senior author is a white Canadian bisexual cisgender woman and a behavioral health scientist, researcher, educator, and sex therapist, specializing in sexual wellbeing across the lifespan. The authors' clinical and research work with individuals and couples informed their interest in relationship boredom and shaped the interpretive lens brought to the analysis.

In the initial phase of the analysis, the first author familiarized themselves with the data by reading all responses. Subsequently, all responses were re-read and a comprehensive

list of potential codes was compiled. Based on this, an initial coding framework was developed, initially encompassing 11 major themes, which was reviewed and refined in collaboration with the senior author, who had also familiarized herself with the data. The first author systematically coded all 401 responses, continually revising and merging themes throughout the process. Both authors worked together to review and refine the themes iteratively, ensuring they captured a coherent and accurate representation of the dataset. Given the broad exploratory nature of the research question, coding was conducted across the entire dataset rather than being restricted to specific responses. This reflexive and iterative process of refinement led to the identification of the final four themes and several sub-themes. The thematic framework was understood as a co-construction, shaped by the perspectives of participants as well as the authors, influenced by scientific knowledge and societal narratives about the topic.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Results in this section refer to the larger quantitative sample of 3089 participants. Overall, 27.2% of the participants indicated

they were fairly to extremely bored in their current relationship. Fewer (17.4%) perceived that their partners were fairly to extremely bored. When asked about the frequency of their boredom, 18.1% reported they were bored every day or almost every day. More than half of participants (64.6%) reported being happy to extremely happy in their relationships, with 39.7% reporting experiencing mostly excitement in the relationship. A smaller proportion of participants indicated that they were happy with the sexual facets of their relationships (49.8%) and feeling excited with their sexual life most or all the time (35.1%). See Table 2 for additional sexual and relationship characteristics by gender.

Table 2. Relationship and sexual variables by gender.

	Men M (SD) n = 1314	Women M (SD) n = 1775	Total M (SD) N = 3089
Relationship happiness	4.16 (1.60)	4.13 (1.57)	4.15 (1.58)
Excitement with relationship	3.87 (1.53)	3.81 (1.56)	3.83 (1.55)
Engage in outside interests with partner	3.16 (.97)	3.12 (1.04)	3.13 (1.01)
Laugh together with partner*	4.88 (1.23)	5.06 (1.22)	4.99 (1.23)
Sexual happiness*	3.40 (1.69)	3.76 (1.70)	3.61 (1.70)
Excitement with sexual life*	2.96 (1.10)	3.13 (1.09)	3.06 (1.10)
Tired of having sex with partner*	3.25 (1.18)	3.39 (1.18)	3.33 (1.18)

*significant gender differences, $p < .001$.

Note: relationship happiness and sexual happiness are on an 8-point scale; excitement with relationship and laugh together with partner are on a 7-point scale; and outside interests, excitement with sexual life, and tired of having sex with partner are on a 6-point scale.

Regarding the dimensions of the relationship affected by boredom, participants reported that boredom impacted sexual desire for their partner (28.7%), frequency of sex with partner (47.3%), sexual satisfaction with partner (32.2%), attraction to partner (17.8%), as well as the susceptibility to infidelity (19.7%), and susceptibility to breakup (17.4%). In addition, 19.4% reported they could envision themselves cheating on their partner due to boredom, and 24.2% reported they had engaged in infidelity as a result of being bored. Only 5.9% reported that they were very likely to leave their partners for a chance at a more exciting relationship, with 11.5% stating they were somewhat likely to do this. See Table 3 for additional details on the experience of boredom by gender.

When asked about milestones leading to relationship boredom, 31.8% identified moving in together or marrying, and 34.8% identified having children as an important milestone for boredom onset. Around 14.9% of participants identified other milestones for boredom, including infertility, illness, menopause, empty nest, retirement, as well as living with family. Infidelity, relationship conflict, and issues with in-laws or former spouse were also named. Some participants mentioned that change in work demands (e.g., schedule, stress, or deployment) and financial problems were also possible milestones for boredom.

In this sample, there was relative balance between those who believed boredom was “only normal” (35.8%) and those who believed it to be a threat to their relationship (36.8%). However, the vast majority wanted boredom to change, with

Table 3. Boredom variables by gender.

	Men N (%)	Women N (%)	Total Sample N (%)
Point where boredom occurred	1314 (42.5)	1775 (57.5)	3089 (100)
Within the first year	71 (5.4)	210 (11.8)	281 (9.1)
Between year 1 and before year 3	152 (11.6)	419 (23.6)	571 (18.5)
Between year 3 and before year 5	159 (12.1)	263 (14.8)	422 (13.7)
Between year 5 and before year 7	160 (12.2)	160 (9.0)	320 (10.4)
Year 7 and beyond	239 (18.2)	171 (9.6)	410 (13.3)
Other	50 (3.8)	100 (5.6)	150 (4.9)
I choose not to answer	56 (4.3)	65 (3.7)	121 (3.9)
Areas impacted by boredom			
Sexual desire for partner	310 (23.6)	576 (32.5)	886 (28.7)
Frequency of sex with partner	667 (50.8)	793 (44.7)	1460 (47.3)
Satisfaction of sex with partner	437 (33.3)	559 (31.5)	996 (32.2)
Communication with partner	468 (35.6)	840 (47.3)	1308 (42.3)
Relationship happiness	398 (30.3)	758 (42.7)	1156 (37.4)
Vulnerability to infidelity	200 (15.2)	408 (23.0)	608 (19.7)
Vulnerability to breakup/divorce	161 (12.3)	377 (21.2)	538 (17.4)
Attraction to partner	191 (14.5)	360 (20.3)	551 (17.8)
Other	15 (1.1)	38 (2.1)	53 (1.7)
I choose not to answer	31 (2.4)	23 (1.3)	54 (1.7)
Milestones leading to boredom			
Moving in together	105 (8.0)	418 (23.5)	523 (16.9)
Marriage	170 (12.9)	289 (16.3)	459 (14.9)
Getting pregnant	103 (7.8)	162 (9.1)	265 (8.6)
Having children	525 (40.0)	549 (30.9)	1074 (34.8)
Getting older	567 (43.2)	718 (40.5)	1285 (41.6)
Other	160 (12.2)	299 (16.8)	459 (14.9)
I choose not to answer	172 (13.1)	188 (10.6)	360 (11.7)
Desire to decrease boredom			
Yes	872 (70.1)	1182 (71.3)	2054 (70.8)
No	39 (3.1)	69 (4.2)	108 (3.7)
I've never thought about it	303 (24.4)	365 (22.0)	668 (23.0)
I choose not to answer	30 (2.4)	41 (2.5)	71 (2.4)

70.8% indicating a desire to reduce boredom in their relationship. To cope with boredom, 65.2% reported they would spend more time with their partner, and 76.7% said they would go on dates more frequently. However, financial constraints were noted as a significant barrier, with 43.5% of participants reporting that finances limited their ability to go on dates, 58.2% saying it affected their ability to take vacations, and 13.2% noting it restricted their ability to hire a babysitter. Additionally, 69.3% reported that financial stress alone diminished their excitement in their relationship. In contrast to these strategies, 19.2% of participants believed that spending less time with their partner could help alleviate their boredom.

Regarding mitigating boredom with sex specifically, 50.6% reported they would incorporate arousal creams/gels into sex, and 59.3% stated they would incorporate sex toys into sex to decrease boredom. Other strategies were shared by 8.5% of participants, including adding variety (e.g., sexual acts, positions, or places), non-monogamy (e.g., open relationship, swinging, cuckholding), kink (e.g., BDSM, role-play, cross-dressing), using erotica and sensual clothing, flirting, or going to sex shops. Some referred to the usefulness of sex guides and sex therapy. The large majority (96.4%) stated they would be interested in trying something new in the bedroom if this was suggested by their partners.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative responses of 401 participants who expanded on the survey questions regarding relationship boredom. Thematic analysis resulted in the identification of four themes regarding relationship boredom: protective factors, contributing factors, coping strategies, and consequences. Themes and subthemes are

graphically represented in [Figure 1](#) and themes and subthemes with additional examples of each are provided in [Table 4](#).

Protective Factors

Many participants described conditions that could protect against relationship boredom, including subthemes of *shared experiences*, *emotional connection*, and *independence and autonomy*. Under *shared experiences*, several codes emerged such as shared views of *growth and future*, aspects of *novelty and adventure*, and spending *quality time* together. As one participant described, relationship boredom might be prevented by enjoyable new activities that are intentional and require effort, which might be facilitated by aspects of *emotional connection*, another subtheme under *protective factors*, and worsened by *complacency*, a code under the subtheme of *relationship issues* in *contributing factors* that will be described further:

We have been married for more than 35 years, we love to love each other and are always looking for new ways to have fun together ... there is NO boredom in our home ... but we also WORK HARD to spend time loving each other ... like anything that is worthwhile ... it takes effort ... when something is taken for granted than you can be sure bad things will result ... just a matter of time. (heterosexual man in relationship of 15+ years)

Some participants talked specifically about how *good or frequent sex*, under the shared experiences subtheme, could protect or reduce relationship boredom. Put simply by one participant: “New styles of sex and more regularly.” Others focused on aspects such as *loving, liking, and caring* for their partners, and *openness and communication*, reflecting the subtheme of *emotional connection*, as described by this participant:

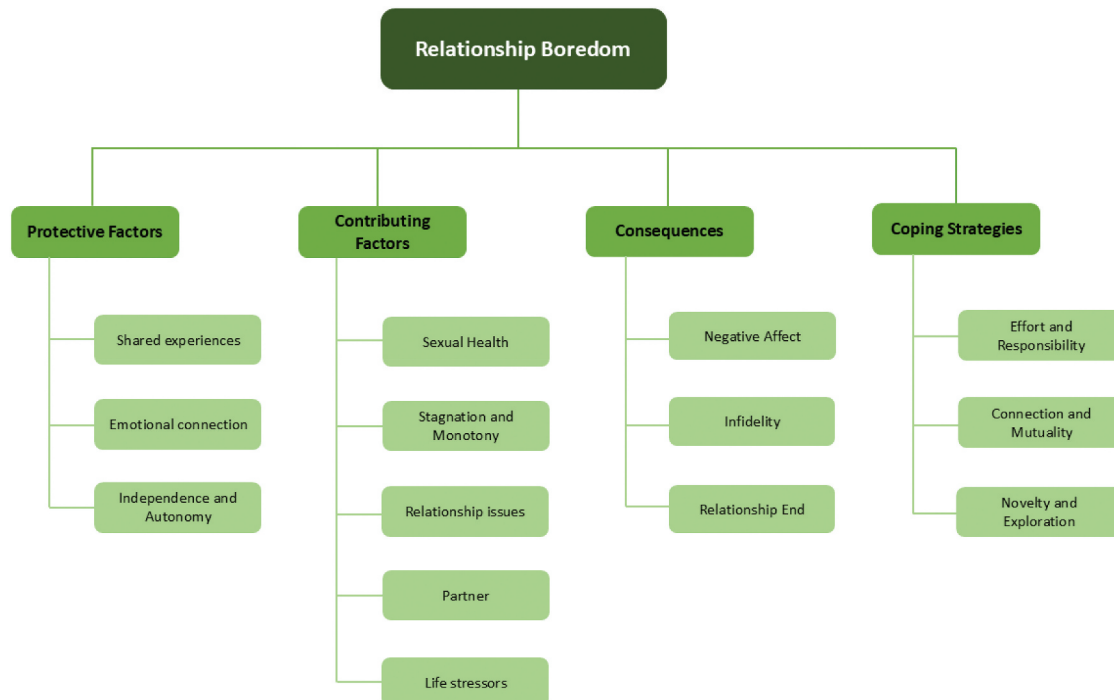


Figure 1. Thematic tree of relationship boredom.

Table 4. Matrix of themes and subthemes of relationship boredom.

Themes*	Sub-Themes*	Specific Codes*	Description	Examples
Protective factors	<i>Shared experiences</i>		Characteristics or circumstances that can reduce or prevent RB.	
		Quality time	Activities and experiences that strengthen the bond between partners. Spending time together in ways that feel engaging.	"Laugh! You have to laugh at each other or you will def be bored!" "I'm 65 and passionately in love with a 55-year old woman. We dance 10–15 hours a week and it is like hours of foreplay. So, guess what? There is no boredom in our love life. And, it is hard for me to imagine there ever will be. LOL"
		Novelty and Adventure	Engaging in new or exploratory activities.	"Try everything, if you don't like it don't do it again, however if your partner enjoyed it sacrifice a little and make it a special treat. Sometimes you have to give a little to get a lot!" "My Wife and I have never been bored in our relationship since the day we met. We are both very ADHD and never run out of things to do. We are both sexually adventurous and that adventuresomeness has only increased over the years."
		Good or Frequent sex	Having sex that is satisfying or with the desired frequency.	"New styles of sex and more regularly"; "Just have lots of sex" "When we're having sex, my whole body is wracked with extreme pleasure and she looks like a goddess. I love her intensely and I can't imagine ever cheating on her. From these three points, I conclude that I have no "relationship boredom."
		Growth and future	Shared views regarding expansion and the future.	"Not everybody in a relationship is bored. We share a similar vision for our future, similar goals, similar interests and appetites. I see boredom as unimaginable. There's a lot of good that comes from being with a deeply compatible partner."
<i>Emotional connection</i>			Feelings and attitudes that maintain a sense of connection. Positive and mutual feelings for the other.	"My wife and I grow together in most aspects of our life. We each accomplish things on our own, and I still find my wife a fascinating person to talk to. We talk about things we have in common and the things that we do that are different. We are each other's best friend."
		Loving, liking, and caring		"Boredom is a relative term ... sometimes it can be problematic, but mostly not. It's normal and it passes. It comes and it goes. No need to get too concerned about it if your relationship is good, and you genuinely care about each other's happiness in the relationship."
				"When the other person makes me feel loved, sexy, exciting, etc. then I find the relationship more fulfilling. When the other person says things that go against the aforementioned qualities I feel initially hurt and then later just bored."
		Openness and Communication	Willingness to communicate openly and vulnerably.	"With modern ideas and the ability to discuss anything there should be no boredom in the bed room"
				"We've found that consistent and good communication is a good "vaccine" against boredom creeping into the relationship. Boredom may be present in our individual lives, but we try to keep our relationship growing and fresh by learning more about each other's feelings. It seems that the more we know about each other the more "new things" we can try with each other (...). This isn't restricted to the bedroom."
<i>Independence and Autonomy</i>			Personal space and individual or social activities that contribute to a healthy balance in the relationship. Plans or activities not involving partner.	"Laugh, take time for each other, take time for yourself, absence does make the heart grow fonder" "If one imagines what it's like without their significant other, it makes them appreciate them more. it's all about being a team, and to love like and looove each other"
		Spending time apart		"My woman and I are not bored in our relationship and it has been 18 months strong living apart and VERY HAPPY that way."
		Long-distance relationships	Circumstances that dictate that the couple does not cohabit.	"My partner and I are currently in a long-distance relationship – which staves off boredom significantly because it's such a treat whenever we get to spend time together."
		Being social	Plans or activities with personal network (whether or not with the partner)	"... when he does have breaks, like Christmas or Spring Break, we do go out with our friends. Since I graduated, I still spend time, like a night a week or so, with my friends whenever I can, with or without him."
			Aspects that can promote or lead to RB.	"Always looking for interesting things to do which might include others."
Contributing factors	<i>Stagnation and Monotony</i>		Routine in long-term relationships.	"We live in a very boring town. There's only so much we can do."
				"I think any relationship can get a bit boring after a while – especially once you settle into a routine of work, school, go home, make dinner, go to bed."

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued).

Themes*	Sub-Themes*	Specific Codes*	Description	Examples
<i>Sexual health</i>	<i>Sexual dissatisfaction</i>	<i>Traditional sexual views</i>	Aspects of sexual health affecting RB. Unhappiness with the sexual relationship due to sexual problems, infrequent sex or discrepant sexual desire. Conservative sexual beliefs.	"We use toys, lube, creams etc. He doesn't last long so that's mainly why I get bored" "My wife's sex drive is non-existent. I feel like she has sex out of duty not out of interest." "My relationship is boring due to the lack of intimacy, which is largely the result of my wife's rigid, conservative view of sexuality / intimacy – this view is the result of her religious beliefs (...)" "My partner was married at 19 the first time, and I think he may not think anything "wild" is "okay"
			Partner's attitudes or characteristics contributing to RB. Partner does not want to try new things or change behaviors.	"My 'relationship boredom' revolves almost entirely around her lack of imagination and unwillingness to explore different things sexually. I'm not bored with her; I'm just bored with the physical part." "As a wife, I am always willing to step outside of my comfort zone and do things for my husband. But I don't feel like he's willing to do those things for me. As time goes on, and the passion fades, I know we need to do things to get that passion back, but he seems unwilling. Men don't respond well when they're asked to change, but then as the woman I feel constantly left wanting something more, and knowing that I cannot ever have it."
	<i>Partner</i>	<i>Is uncaring</i>	Partner behaves in insensitive or unkind manner.	"On the occasions that I have experienced 'relationship boredom,' it has been due in large part to me not feeling wanted, or cared about. Sometimes I feel as if I don't matter to my fiancée at all, and those are the only times I, very briefly, contemplate anything else." "I wish technology didn't rule his life and mine. I try not to be online as much or watch TV as much, but my partner cannot live without either. he is constantly glued to his laptop or watching television. he hardly pays attention to me and therefore get bored."
			Partner is different or has changed characteristics with time.	"Sometimes when two people have literally nothing in common ... it creates a learning environment. But sometimes ... it makes it justboring!" "I've been with my boyfriend for over 8 years. When I met him his was outgoing and laid back, but throughout the years he's gotten too laid back. I'm not a person who easily gets bored (...). and it's heartbreaking to know I can't take anymore."
<i>Relationship issues</i>	<i>Relationship difficulties</i>	<i>Relationship difficulties</i>	Relationship difficulties influencing RB.	"My partner doesn't really believe in 'dating' one another within the context of our relationship. He thinks it's contrived. We go out but it doesn't really ever feel like 'a date' if we did, I think that would make a big difference for me."
			De-erotized or de-romanticized relationship.	"Our issues are twofold: our baby sleeps in our bed and can't be left in it alone, and my husband has admitted not feeling attracted to me sexually after I had the baby. working on both issues now ..."
			Downsides of cohabitation.	"Moving in together can take away the allure and mystery of one another. Too much time together can be as bad as too little time. Me and my partner are more like family now, not lovers."
			Taking a partner for granted.	"I married my best friend. We are more like roommates than lovers. After 11 years, we are boring roommates." "Unfortunately, most people assume that relationship boredom is inevitable. I strongly disagree. If people become bored in a relationship it is because they have become complacent and unwilling to try new things."
<i>Life stressors</i>	<i>Life stressors</i>	<i>Life stressors</i>	Problems communicating clearly or authentically, or underlying disputes or disagreements.	"Boredom comes from making your partner wallpaper and not appreciating what they do for you. Sometimes you need to step back and remember the big picture, and remember them as human beings (not just 'the husband') – sometimes, if I see someone being flirtatious with him, I remember that he is a man, not just the guy that does the dishes at home."
			Problems communicating clearly or authentically, or underlying disputes or disagreements.	"I think that relationship boredom largely relates to a lack of communication between partners. I think if someone feels bored, it's because they feel like they are lacking something. They need to know themselves well enough to know what it is they feel they are lacking and be able to communicate that to their partner so that their needs can be met."
			Circumstances that dictate that the couple does not cohabit.	"How your partner treats you (especially during an argument) can mislead you into boredom"
			Areas of stress impacting RB.	"Long distance relationships make boredom more of an issue." "Having a long-distance relationship creates a lot of boredom because it's not always easy to see the other person and therefore is hard to constantly keep things creative and exciting."

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued).

Themes*	Sub-Themes*	Specific Codes*	Description	Examples
Coping strategies		<i>Time constraints</i>	Lack of time spent with partner due to hectic or busy life.	"TIME is a huge factor. Our life with kids is so chaotic, and we rarely have time – real time – to be alone together, or to do anything together."
		<i>Health concerns</i>	Health problems of self or partner.	"Since we are both full-time students finishing our degrees this term, it is often hard to find the time to go on dates and go out to more parties. During summers (and I'm sure now that we're done graduating) we have almost never experienced any type of boredom. Sometimes there are situations you just have to stick out! :)" "When you have one person who would like sex and the other who doesn't due to health/obesity and other emotional reasons, it makes it difficult to keep from being bored."
		<i>Childrearing</i>	Caring for children.	"We are bored due to many complications in life, especially the fact that I am ill and always in pain. He feels terrible and doesn't want to hurt me. We've gone through so much, that we haven't had sex for over a year – now I think we have forgotten how to be intimate comfortably. It is confusing for two very open-minded sex addicts' (almost)"
		<i>Financial worries</i>	Fears regarding money or scarcity.	"Our boredom has nothing to do with sex. We have great sex. Just can't go out on dates because of the kids." "I think a lot of the relationship boredom is due to the stresses of life such as jobs, injuries as we age, and lack of privacy due to adult children staying at home longer."
		<i>Stress</i>	Overall stress.	"Our boredom is more of finding things to do (that don't cost a lot of money) and not the same old things. Not that we are bored with each other" "My husband is away for four months on business and I'm living in an unfamiliar town with hardly any extra money or a job or children to fill my time. Boredom just kind of comes with the territory right now."
				"We are on the brink of being engaged and that is adding to the stress. He feels pressure and it is impacting all aspects of our relationship."
				"The stressors of life have the most impact on our relationship. We are still each other's best friend but we let life get in the way of our intimacy."
	<i>Effort and Responsibility</i>		Ways or tools to manage RB.	
			Active engagement required to overcome RB.	
		<i>Accountability</i>	Personal accountability and initiative in navigating RB.	"Routine contributes to relationship boredom. If one partner doesn't recognize it, then how can it be changed? Only the partner who recognizes the need to change can do it, albeit alone."
Connection and Mutuality				"Boredom is an attitude, not a state of being. You control your attitudes. If you are bored, change your attitude."
		<i>"It takes two"</i>	Shared equal responsibilities	"Like a garden, it takes a great deal of care on the part of both people to keep things in full bloom." "It takes two to each give 100% to a relationship for it to continuously work out. Each partner listens to the other and is able to give and receive suggestions to make things better all the time. Play and laughter make it better all the time."
		<i>Hard work</i>	Continuous effort, dedication, and perseverance.	"Sliding into a companionate relationship, while it can be satisfying, still needs to include repeated validation of the commitment. A more platonic way of relating created through the "business of family" certainly contributes to relationship boredom by decreasing the importance of affection and frequency of sex. To keep the relationship interesting takes continual work or attention, especially through the midlife or transitional times of life and family."
			Strategies that foster closeness and reciprocity to address RB.	"My husband had an affair late last year and while we're trying to work things out, it has made us both work harder at making our marriage stronger and less boring."

(Continued)

Table 4. (Continued).

Themes*	Sub-Themes*	Specific Codes*	Description	Examples
Novelty and Exploration	<i>Openness and Communication</i>			"I don't think relationships necessarily have to turn to boredom after a long period of time together. I feel if people had better communication, then there would be less boredom in marriage. For some reason people tend to have a hard time expressing their desires and asking for what they need. If they did, I think there would be less boredom in their relationship. It's like you don't want to 'rock the boat' so you just remain content with what you have. I feel like if you have allowed yourself to get bored in your relationship it is time to speak up!" "I have in the past [experienced boredom], but do not now. The issue was resolved when my husband became more communicative about our sexual needs and desires – something that happened after our child left home for college and we were able to focus once more on our relationship. I credit my husband with opening up this conversation, one that was very difficult at first for us both. I have since spent some time reading about long-term relationships and sexuality and would particularly recommend the work of Esther Perel, David Schnarch, Michael Bader, and Bernie Zilbergeld (particularly his book, <i>BETTER THAN EVER</i>)."
		<i>Spending time together</i>		"I think our boredom could improve if we shared a hobby together, something we could go out and enjoy together rather than cruise a mall or go eat something." "Find things in common again, start something new to do together"
	<i>Trying something new</i>		Tools to manage RB.	"We are in a big rut but I don't think it's going to end us. We just need new ideas on how to get out of it. And a fresh approach might rejuvenate us to try harder."
			Experimenting new activities together.	"Don't let the empty nest syndrome get to you. Start training new things in the bedroom (Not Porno either). Rediscover one another's bodies all over again. Fall in love all over again. Reenact how you met for the first time."
Consequences	<i>Consensual non-monogamy</i>		Engaging in forms of CNM, including swinging or poly relationships.	"Our relationship and whether or not we're bored has changed a lot since we allowed ourselves the chance to be sexually active with other people. It makes our sex lives together more exciting"
			Seeking books or other informational resources.	"I am in multiple casual relationships in order to fight boredom. I have experienced boredom in marriage and other serious, long-term relationships before, which is what/why my personal life has evolved into what it has."
	<i>Seeking Information</i>			"My wife and I currently do not live together, due to my job. We see each other as often as financially possible, and it is great. We often talk about preventing boredom and read your books together during video chats."
				"It's an educational issue, actually. I think if someone has a College education and the other has no education, hardly things work out. It's an educational issue too."
Negative affect	<i>Infidelity</i>		The costs or outcomes of RB.	"It sucks. And, with only so many hours in the day, there is very little free time to reallocate to each other."
			Negative emotions and feelings.	"It is really frustrating and it makes you wonder if the relationship is even worth the trouble!"
			Extradysadic liaisons.	"When one is not interested in sex or intimacy or even talking about it, the other has NO choice, but to accept it. I can see why men cheat ..."
				"I am a 40-year-old woman that loves sex. He chooses to ignore my needs than address them. I hate to cheat, but feel I need to in order to keep my sanity."
Relationship end				"Complaining about boredom is a threat. For example, last year she was 'bored' and nagged about getting married and felt threatened by other women. Eventually, I met someone who was hot but was also complementary toward me and not 'bored.' I e-flirted with this girl briefly out of anger at my partners 'boredom.' We since worked things out, I wasn't bored but someone bored with me, was hurtful, and I took that hurt out in an immature and reckless manner."
			Separation or termination.	"I believe that boredom is the number one killer in a relationship." "I sometimes equate the boredom factor with the 'comfortableness' of being in a long term committed relationship. I find extreme excitement in the getting to know someone phase, and when things become routine, the excitement is gone. It takes two people to keep the excitement alive, or in my mind inevitably one person will either stray or leave the relationship."

Note: RB = relationship boredom.

My partner and I have a very happy relationship for 6 years now, occasionally boredom does creep in but it never lasts long because we both love and listen to each other and when one of us is bored we can mention it to the other without it seeming threatening and we are able to then act on that and work on whatever is bothering us. (bisexual woman in relationship of 3–7 years)

In contrast with the previous subthemes about connection and sharing, we also identified the subtheme of *independence and autonomy* that could include both *spending time apart* and *being social* with or without their partners, reflected by one participant account here:

We believe that the key to a fun relationship is to keep YOURSELF interesting, that means, get alone-time so you can work out, get into your hobbies, and have some friends of your own, not just “couple” friends ... That way you have a more interesting “self” with more to add to the relationship! Maintaining a balance between “I” and “we” is the healthiest way to keep a relationship exciting! (heterosexual woman in relationship of 3–7 years)

Lastly, participants reflected on how *long-distance relationships* could prevent or significantly reduce relationship boredom through fostering high-quality interactions, contributing to the *independence and autonomy* subtheme, as expressed here “a long-distance relationship (...) staves off boredom significantly because it’s such a treat whenever we get to spend time together.”

Contributing Factors

Participants provided several *contributing factors* to relationship boredom, and these were coded into five subthemes of *sexual health*, *stagnation and monotony*, *relationship issues*, *partner factors*, and *life stressors*. *Stagnation and monotony*—particularly routine in long-term relationships—was frequently mentioned. One participant described it as follows:

I sometimes equate the boredom factor with the “comfortableness” of being in a long term committed relationship. I find extreme excitement in the getting to know someone phase, and when things become routine, the excitement is gone. It takes two people to keep the excitement alive, or in my mind inevitably one person will either stray or leave the relationship. (heterosexual woman in relationship of 1–3 years)

The subtheme of *relationship issues* contributing to relationship boredom included participants referring to a *lack of passion or attraction* (e.g. “My partner doesn’t really believe in ‘dating’ one another”) and *complacency* (e.g., taking one’s partner for granted), as illustrated in the following response:

Boredom comes from making your partner wallpaper and not appreciating what they do for you. Sometimes you need to step back and remember the big picture, and remember them as human beings (not just “the husband”) – sometimes, if I see someone being flirtatious with him, I remember that he is a man, not just the guy that does the dishes at home. (heterosexual woman in relationship of 3–7 years)

Other *relationship issues* referred to by participants such as difficulties in communicating clearly or authentically, as well as unresolved disputes or disagreements, aspects coded under *communication difficulties* were significant contributors to relationship boredom. The following excerpt is an illustration of this and how a lack of access to a partner’s inner world or vulnerable side can lead to stagnation:

I feel I am emotionally bored. My partner is reserved about his emotions and expects me to do all of the work in discovering his emotions. I am physically and mentally satisfied with the relationship; however, I need to know how he feels. I feel like we’ve reached a plateau in our relationship and that this will not progress further until he is more forthcoming with his emotions. We have dated for almost two years and he still can’t tell me how he feels about me. This is why I am bored. I don’t want this to be it; I want our relationship to evolve and reach its full potential. The process of falling in love and discovering things together as a couple is what is exciting to me. I feel like he is not allowing this to happen. If it doesn’t eventually happen, I will become too bored to continue any further with the relationship. (heterosexual woman in relationship of 1–3 years)

Moreover, some participants noted that cohabitation or the *domestication* of relationships contributed to relationship boredom (e.g., “Too much time together can be as bad as too little time”), while others highlighted boredom challenges in the context of *long-distance relationships* (e.g., “Having a long-distance relationship creates a lot of boredom”).

Under the subtheme of *sexual health*, many focused specifically on aspects of their sexual lives affecting relationship boredom, including traditional sexual views hampering sexual relationships, and sexual dissatisfaction with sexual problems, infrequent sex, or discrepant sexual desire, as mentioned by one participant: “He doesn’t last long so that’s mainly why I get bored.”

Some participants also focused explicitly on how the attitudes or characteristics of one’s partner conduced to relationship boredom (*partner* subtheme). Some mentioned their partner was *unwilling to change* (e.g., “lack of imagination and unwillingness to explore different things sexually”), others that their partner is uncaring and behaved in an insensible or unkind manner toward them (e.g., “not feeling wanted, or cared about”). Additionally, some participants expressed that their partner was different from them or had changed significantly over time, as described by one participant “Sometimes when two people have literally nothing in common (...) it makes it just ...boring!”

Finally, the subtheme of *life stressors* included codes of *time constraints* stemming from busy or hectic lives (e.g. “time is a huge factor”), *health concerns* affecting themselves or their partners (e.g., “We are bored due to many complications in life, especially the fact that I am ill and always in pain”), *child-rearing* responsibilities (e.g., “Just can’t go out on dates because of the kids”), *financial worries* (“Our boredom is more of finding things to do that don’t cost a lot of money”), and overall *stress* (e.g., “The stressors of life have the most impact on our relationship”), all leading to relationship boredom. See Table 4 for additional examples for codes under the subthemes of contributing factors.

Consequences of Boredom

Participants clearly articulated that there are *consequences* of boredom and these were classified into three subthemes: *negative affect*, *infidelity*, and *relationship end*. Participants often reported experiencing heterogeneous negative emotions such as frustration, resentment, and apathy, experiences that were coded under the subtheme of *negative affect* and are exemplified by the following quote: “It is really frustrating and it makes

you wonder if the relationship is even worth the trouble!" Many also expressed concerns that boredom could lead to *infidelity*. An example of this was: "I am a 40-year-old woman that loves sex. He chooses to ignore my needs than address them. I hate to cheat, but feel I need to in order to keep my sanity." Others mentioned the potential for boredom to lead to termination, particularly if left unaddressed, as expressed in the excerpts coded under the subtheme *relationship end*, such as "It takes two people to keep the excitement alive, or in my mind inevitably one person will either stray or leave the relationship." In contrast with some participants whose views expressed some accountability or shared responsibility in managing boredom, others portrayed relationship boredom as a justifiable reason for engaging in extradyadic liaisons or ending the partnership altogether. The following participant expressed some of this, externalizing relationship boredom and taking little or no responsibility for the problem:

Having sex with the same person over 1000 times has its ebbs and flows. I think one of the big problems is that as we approach our 50's he lacks stamina and can only fuck for 30 min or so max and I want to go for hours. So, I became frustrated and had to seek supplemental sex. I know we will be exclusive again but I figure if no one knows then why not get what I need elsewhere rather than be frustrated and then too old to do anything about it. (heterosexual woman in relationship of 15+ years)

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies to manage relationship boredom included three subthemes of *effort and responsibility*, *connection and mutuality*, and *novelty and exploration*. One's personal *accountability* in navigating relationship boredom, a code of subtheme *effort and responsibility*, was clearly stated by participants who said things like "you choose to be bored," or "relationships only get boring if you let it." Under this subtheme, many also underscored the importance of sharing responsibilities, to cope with relationship boredom, the code of (*it takes two*) and that it involves continuous effort and perseverance, coded under *hard work*; as one participant put it, "My husband had an affair late last year and while we're trying to work things out, it has made us both work harder at making our marriage stronger and less boring." In the excerpt below, this participant notes several aspects of *effort and responsibility* being described:

I also feel that some people need to look within themselves and think about what it is they are really bored with. When I ask myself that question, I find it can go either way; I am sometimes really bored with myself and my usual routine, not him, I just don't always know how to make changes by myself. This is where an objective third party comes in handy; I have a life coach I meet with occasionally. I think that others can benefit from seeing a positive psychologist and actively involve their partner in addressing the sources of boredom in both their lives. (bisexual woman in relationship of 7–15 years)

Within the subtheme of *connection and mutuality*, participants reflected on the need for *spending time together*, exemplified by "find things in common again, start something new to do together," as well as of *openness and communication*. The last point was very clearly expressed by a participant who stated:

I don't think relationships necessarily have to turn to boredom after a long period of time together. I feel if people had better communication, then there would be less boredom in marriage. For some reason people tend to have a hard time expressing their desires and asking for what they need. If they did, I think there would be less boredom in their relationship. It's like you don't want to "rock the boat" so you just remain content with what you have. I feel like if you have allowed yourself to get bored in your relationship it is time to speak up! (heterosexual woman in relationship of 7–15 years)

Novelty and exploration subtheme included several tools to manage relationship boredom, namely *trying something new*, as in new activities or methods, or by changing perspective and rediscovering each other again. Examples of this code included using or buying sexual aids, as in "I think I need to make a trip to Goodvibes," or specific suggestions or role-plays, such as "Re-enact how you met for the first time." Some participants reflected on the importance of *information seeking* in books and other resources. As one participant suggested, "I have since spent some time reading about long-term relationships and sexuality and would particularly recommend the work Esther Perel, David Schnarch, Michael Bader, and Bernie Zilbergeld." Others mentioned different forms of *consensual non-monogamy* as specific means to handle relationship boredom, as exemplified by the following "We are open, have visited swingers' clubs and invited others for threesomes."

When discussing *coping strategies*, many participants emphasized the natural ebbs and flows of relationships, describing them as "ups and downs," "peaks and valleys," "comes and goes," and "boredom in, boredom out." These reflections highlighted the normalcy and cyclical nature of sexual boredom, suggesting that it was not only expected and non-alarming but can also foster growth and contribute to more dynamic, ever-evolving relationships.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify and describe dimensions of relationship boredom, including sexual boredom, for individuals in romantic relationships. Data indicated that over a fourth of participants experienced relationship boredom and it affected multiple dimensions of their relationship. Participants identified clear milestones for boredom onset, and their beliefs, strategies, and desire for change. Additionally, using thematic analysis, we identified four themes in the data: protective factors (3 subthemes: shared experiences, emotional connection, and independence and autonomy), contributing factors (4 subthemes: stagnation and monotony, sexual health, partner and relationship issues, and life stressors), coping strategies (3 subthemes: effort and responsibility, connection and mutuality, and novelty and exploration), and consequences (3 subthemes: negative affect, infidelity, and relationship dissolution). These findings indicated that boredom was experienced as normal and cyclical but was not without distress. Participants discussed intentional healthy and unhealthy ways they managed it and the overlap between relationship boredom and sexual boredom in intimate relationships was extensive.

Relationship boredom was not universal; around a third of our participants reported experiencing relationship boredom

in their current relationship, while another third stated that they were not bored in their romantic relationships. Participants expressed frequently that boredom was a normal experience in long-term romantic relationships, stressing that relationship boredom ebbs and flows, and that remaining bored in a relationship was a choice. This is consistent with the theory of general boredom that describes boredom as an adaptive mechanism toward action and engagement (Danckert et al., 2018; Elpidorou, 2014, 2018), and several of our participants discussed how their relationship boredom was an impetus for change.

Many participants focused on describing relationship boredom specifically, as was asked in the survey question “Do you have anything else you’d like to add with regard to relationship boredom?” However, perhaps surprisingly, many participants did not make a distinction between relationship boredom and sexual boredom, highlighting the intertwined nature of the two, not dissimilar to how intertwined sexual and relationship satisfaction can feel (e.g., Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Quinn-Nilas, 2020; Vowels & Mark, 2020). Perhaps this is because relationship boredom in intimate relationships is often caused by monotony or routine, similar to the main causes of sexual boredom (de Oliveira et al., 2021; de Oliveira, Rahm-Knigge, et al., 2025).

Developing Relationship Boredom

Stagnation and monotony in long-term relationships were identified as the overarching themes of relationship boredom, in line with previous research linking relationship boredom with less enjoyable partnered activities and lower daily passion (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2012; Harasymchuk et al., 2022). The domestication of the relationship was recognized as an important factor leading to relationship boredom. In this regard, participants identified key milestones associated with increased relationship boredom, including cohabitation, having children, and further stages of the life cycle. More than a third of women reported that their boredom developed between years 1 and 3 of the relationship, whereas men’s boredom tended to develop later, beyond year 5. These findings prompt reflection on how gender socialization, the shaping inequities intensified by cohabitation and childrearing in heterosexual relationships (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Robertson et al., 2019; Sayer, 2005), affects women’s relationship quality (Coltrane, 2000) and potentially contributes to relationship boredom during the early stages of cohabitation pointing to a potential extension of the heteronormativity theory of low sexual desire in women (van Anders et al., 2022).

Some participants in the current study linked relationship boredom with sexual dissatisfaction, due to desire discrepancies or sexual dysfunction, consistent with prior research examining sexual boredom (de Oliveira et al., 2021). Others reflected on traditional sexual views, which were previously related to sexual difficulties (Moura et al., 2023), and fit in the heteronormative model of desire (van Anders et al., 2021). Plausibly, the heteronormative structures and beliefs about gender/sex and sexuality could potentially be linked to stagnation and monotony and dampening one’s ability to cope with sexual difficulties of boredom and desire.

Many facets of the relationship or partner also arose as contributors to boredom in this context, including no longer feeling attracted to one’s partner, taking them for granted, or partners behaving in an uncaring manner. Both relationship conflict and lack of vulnerability being expressed from their partner were noted as important factors in communication difficulties that impacted relationship boredom. This points to the importance of resolving conflict, enhancing trust, and promoting vulnerability in relationships where uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure are expressed (Brown, 2015) for growth, pleasure, engagement, and self-expansion in sexual and romantic relationships (Angel, 2022; Aron & Aron, 1986; Gable & Reis, 2001; Kleinplatz & Ménard, 2020). Our findings indicate that perhaps vulnerability in relationships may have the potential to mitigate negative consequences of relationship and/or sexual boredom; this may be an important future area of research or clinical treatment path.

Participants also named diverse and specific life stressors contributing to their relationship boredom in health, change, crisis, family and work stress, and financial problems, bringing attention to the complex interplay of biopsychosocial factors dampening relationship-well-being. These findings are consistent with the importance of taking a biopsychosociocultural approach to sexual and relationship issues in research and clinical care (Brotto et al., 2016; Carvalho & Nobre, 2010, 2011; Connor et al., 2025).

Preventing and Coping with Boredom

Many participants reflected on experiences that prevented developing relationship boredom, stressing the importance of shared views of growth and future, novelty and adventure, and spending quality time together (shared experiences), even in long-distance relationships. When boredom occurred, the majority reported wanting to reduce boredom in their relationship, and many shared their tools to accomplish this, underscoring the importance of personal and shared ownership for their boredom and its intentional management. Research on self-expansion supports these findings, showing that participating in new and stimulating activities together enhanced relationship quality and rekindles passion and excitement (Aron, Norman, et al., 2000; Harasymchuk et al., 2022; Muise et al., 2019; Reissman et al., 1993). Aspects of emotional connection, communication, and vulnerability were highlighted as protective factors against relationship boredom, often contrasted with the value placed on independent and autonomous socialization. The coping strategies presented by participants were in many ways similar to the protective factors mentioned, emphasizing facets of connection, mutuality, and open communication.

As stagnation and monotony were considered main features of relationship boredom for the participants in this study, it is not surprising that the antidote presented by participants related to novelty and exploration of information, activities, and relationships outside of the norm. Despite recognizing this, many participants revealed that experiencing financial constraints or stress were significant barriers to overcoming relationship boredom. Moreover, some particularly bored individuals might not be willing to engage in novel

activities, even if they desire novelty, as identified in research pertaining to sexual boredom (Rosa et al., 2019). In contrast, aligned with the findings of Harasymchuk and Fehr (2010, 2012), participants reported that satisfying or frequent sex served as a buffer against relationship boredom. To counteract sexual boredom, almost all participants (96.4%) were open to sexual novelty if suggested by their partners, with many willing to try sexual aids (lubricants/gels, sex toys, erotica), and some interested in non-monogamy and kink, aligned with previous research highlighting sexual boredom as an opportunity for change and for pursuing sexual novelty (de Oliveira, 2023; de Oliveira et al., 2021). This high endorsement of willingness to explore sexual novelty is hopeful for people who feel at a loss for how to mitigate sexual boredom when it arises. These data help support therapists, counselors, educators, and the public with suggestions that have an emphasis on flexibility and deconstructing gendered sexual beliefs.

Consequences of Relationship Boredom

Although a neutral to positive depiction of relationship boredom was common, many participants stated that relationship boredom threatened their relationships, similar to previous qualitative findings, where sexual boredom too, was seen as a threat in long-term relationships (Tunariu & Reavey, 2003). Furthermore, some participants voiced experiencing negative emotions and feelings, like frustration and apathy, due to relationship boredom, as observed in previous research on negative affect and relationship boredom (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2012), sexual boredom (de Oliveira et al., 2021), and boredom proneness (see Vodanovich & Watt, 2016).

Participants often saw relationship boredom as a potential trigger for infidelity or relationship breakdown. Whilst these could be seen as coping strategies, they were coded in the current paper as consequences due to their frequent negative outcomes. In addition, contrary to coping and protective factors, consequences mirror an overall lack of self-awareness and accountability. Specifically, some participants viewed sexual boredom as a valid reason to pursue non-consensual extra-dyadic relationships or end the partnership. In these participants' voices we witness a lack of complex attribution to the phenomenon of boredom in relationships, observed in research with boredom prone individuals, who tended to use fewer complex descriptions for behavior (Fletcher et al., 1986), or used avoidance strategies when making external attributions to their boredom (Xie et al., 2021).

Limitations and Strengths

These findings should be interpreted in the context of the strengths and limitations of the data. Findings presented here were interpreted using theoretical frameworks of general boredom (Danckert et al., 2018; Elpidorou, 2014, 2018), the self-expansion model of close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1986; Gable & Reis, 2001), and the heteronormativity theory of women's low sexual desire (van Anders et al., 2022). This integrative approach provides the opportunity to address a gap in understanding relationship and sexual boredom. The study contributes to the refinement of theoretical models

of relationship boredom while advancing broader theories of boredom, sexual boredom, and sexual desire.

Several limitations should be noted, including the lack of information on participants' age, the timing of data collection in 2011, and the reliance on responses to an open-ended survey question for thematic analysis. Data used in this study were collected from individuals who were actively interested in improving sexual health (people who subscribed to receive information from goodinbed.com). This can be interpreted both as a limitation due to the skewed nature of participants dedicated to improving their sexual lives, but also as a strength because these individuals might have been particularly motivated to provide rich and informative response to open-ended prompts. Notably, findings are not exhaustive, as participants were not explicitly asked about antecedents, consequences, or protective factors. These themes emerged organically and thus reflect participants' spontaneous reflections rather than a comprehensive exploration of each domain that an interview would potentially allow. Furthermore, the survey items were developed for the purposes of this study and were primarily intended to provide descriptive context for the qualitative analysis; as such, some relational domains potentially affected by boredom were not assessed. In addition, response options for some items, including strategies to address boredom, were limited and may not have captured the full range of participants' experiences, hence the relevance of the analysis of the open-ended questions.

Finally, although data were collected over a decade ago, we would not anticipate that the experience of the construct of boredom would have changed drastically over time, especially since 2011 was still in the post-internet era. One benefit of collecting data in 2011 is that AI had not yet been introduced, preventing today's growing issues with internet bots or false respondents in online internet data collection. This provides us with a higher level of confidence in the validity of the data we collected.

Implications and Future Directions

Our findings highlight a considerable overlap between experiences of relationship boredom, sexual boredom, and general boredom, suggesting the existence of one type of boredom and that context-specific forms share the same mechanisms with general boredom, as proposed by Danckert and Eastwood (2020). Further, our findings underscore that the experiences of relationship boredom are heterogeneous, and often lived as normal and cyclical, indicating that relationship boredom can be expected and potentially foster growth and contribute to more dynamic, ever-evolving relationships. There are, however, structural barriers to the pursuit of novelty and self-expansion, which could contribute to pervasive boredom and constitute an obstacle to maintaining lasting love, as hypothesized by Aron and Aron (1986). These barriers include financial uncertainty, as well as power imbalances within relationships that may restrict individuals from expressing needs or exploring new experiences, and heteronormative assumptions about discouraging novelty or unconventional relational structures and practices. On a positive note, connection and mutuality emerged as important ingredients for

positive, boredom-free relationships, and can be sustained by authentic and vulnerable communication, not requiring costly aids or leisure. Clinicians may emphasize to their clients that although boredom can be a common experience in long-term relationships, affecting both relational and sexual dynamics, it can be addressed through shared and equitable efforts. In contrast, difficulty or reluctance to pursue change may contribute to the persistence of boredom and potentially erode relationship quality.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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