

Sexuality and Boredom

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Citation: Stang P, Weiss M, Jainta S, Krauss S (2025) Sexuality and Boredom. American J Sci Edu Re: AJSER-241.

Received Date: 25 March, 2025; **Accepted Date:** 31 March, 2025; **Published Date:** 07 April, 2025

Abstract

The present study examines the relationship between sexual boredom and sexual satisfaction. Sexual boredom, defined as lower arousal and dissatisfaction in sexual situations, correlates negatively with partnered sexual desire and sexual satisfaction. Emancipation and modern relationship structures are seen as factors that contribute to the trivialization of sexuality and thus inhibit eroticism and passion. The quantitative cross-sectional study uses the “Sexual Boredom Scale (SBS)” to measure sexual boredom and the “Questionnaire on Life Satisfaction (Fragebogen zur Lebenszufriedenheit, FLZ)” to assess sexual life satisfaction. The sample consisted of a total of 225 people (n = 150 persons (67 %) were female, n = 69 (31 %) were male, n = 6 persons (3 %) were of diverse gender). Results show that men have higher scores for sexual boredom than women and that 24% of participants report low sexual life satisfaction. Women have a higher level of sexual life satisfaction than men. A significant negative correlation between sexual boredom and life satisfaction ($r = -0.38$) was found. The study highlights that singles experience more sexual boredom than people in relationships and emphasizes the need to adapt sexological interventions to individual needs and gender differences.

Keywords: Sexuality, boredom, sexual life satisfaction, gender, relationship status.

Introduction

Opinions about gender are partly guided by stereotypes (Elsen, 2023; Hannover & Wolter, 2017). Gender research therefore also aims to examine the extent to which the experiences and behavior of people of different genders deviate from or correspond to clichéd or stereotypical ideas. Gender stereotypes have a certain temporal stability (Schaufler, 2002; Stocker, 2005; Wetterer, 2008). Women in western european cultures are often associated with the domestic and family sphere and with aspects such as dependence, devotion, love, emotionality, sex object and passivity (Bildén & Dausien, 2006; Elsen, 2023). Complementary to this, men are associated with the area of employment and aspects such as independence, activity, sexually aggressive, assertiveness and rationality (Elsen, 2023; Lautenschläger, 2022). Current research in the context of sexuality and gender addresses sexuality in complex and varied ways, e.g. sexual desire, desire for orgasmic experience, decrease in sexual satisfaction in oncology patients, impact of non-specific interventions on sexual life satisfaction, hormonal contraceptives and sexuality, power of the relationship partner and relationship satisfaction, trauma severity and sexual satisfaction, sexual pleasure and sex therapy (Botzet et al., 2021; Büsing et al., 2001; Haase et al., 2009; Kamrava et al., 2021; Körner & Schütz, 2024; Leuteritz et al., 2022; Stang & Rico-Dresel, 2023; Stokes et al., 2020; Werner et al., 2023). Sexual boredom points out that the individual experiences low arousal and dissatisfaction in a specific situation in contrast to sexual satisfaction (Byers et al., 1998; Lawrance & Byers, 1995; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). In addition to Zuckerman (2014) and Eastwood et al. (2012) boredom as an aversive state often

occurs in monotonous and repetitive situations. There is a link between sexual boredom and lower partner-related sexual desire and with lower sexual satisfaction (Oliveira et al., 2023). Emancipation is seen as a factor that has created space for the acceptance of apathy, which was previously somatized as sexual disorders (Schmidt, 1996). In addition, modern relationship structures and widespread sexualization are seen as causes of the trivialization and rationalization of sexuality, which stifles eroticism and passion (Schmidt, 1996). An empirical study has shown that sexual dissatisfaction is often accompanied by health problems and interpersonal problems (Schmidt, 1996). It is emphasized that sexual activity has a significant influence on sexual satisfaction and that psychosocial factors play a significant role in the decline in sexual activity and satisfaction in old age (Beutel et al., 2002). Connections can also be found between sexuality and health, quality of life and life satisfaction or body satisfaction (Job et al., 2024; Oliveira et al., 2021; Schneider et al., 2018). There is also a connection between sexual desire problems and lower sexual and relationship satisfaction (Oliveira et al., 2023). Sexual problems can be caused by biological, psychological and social/partnership factors, e.g. pharmacological treatment of affective disorders (Ebert, 2021; Hartmann, 2018). They can be treated through various interventions, such as sex therapy or counseling and sexual education. Classical sex therapy has evolved towards a diversification of concepts (Hartmann, 2018; Stang, 2024; Stang & Wüchner-Fuchs, 2024). This also shows the great importance of sexuality for health psychology.

Theoretical and empirical foundations

In the current state of research, studies can be found in the context of sexuality, sexual satisfaction and sexual boredom. The focus is on scientific findings and empirical studies that

shed light on various dimensions and factors that influence these aspects. Oliveira et al. (2021) present a systematic review of sexual boredom and its effects on sexual behavior and satisfaction. They note that sexual boredom includes both individual and partnership and societal aspects and call for further research to develop models and theories on this phenomenon. Oliveira et al. (2022) conduct a cluster analysis to identify profiles of sexually bored people. Their study shows that sexual boredom is often associated with low sexual desire and satisfaction and is particularly prevalent in long-term relationships. Women who experience sexual boredom show low sexual desire for their partner. However, they experience a high sexual desire for attractive other people. They discuss the implications for sex therapy and emphasize the importance of individual and partnership dynamics. Marriage and couples counseling usually have a positive effect on couples who initially had serious sexual problems and achieve an improvement in overall sexual satisfaction (Kröger et al., 2007).

Beutel et al. (2002) examine sexual activity and satisfaction in older men. Their results show that sexual activity is an important determinant of sexual satisfaction and that psychosocial factors such as health and partnership problems influence sexual activity and satisfaction. Mernone et al. (2019) found that age and postmenopausal status were negatively associated with general sexual function, arousal and lubrication. Using regression analyses, relationship satisfaction, emotional support, self-esteem, optimism and life satisfaction were each able to significantly predict general sexual function, such as arousal, satisfaction, orgasm and pain (all $p < 0.029$). A study by Moynihan et al. (2021) examined the relationship between boredom and sexual sensation seeking. The results showed that boredom is associated with an increased need for sensational and unattached sexual experiences. Men who experienced high levels of boredom tended to use sexual activities as a coping mechanism for negative emotional states, which ultimately led to increased sexual sensation seeking and promiscuous attitudes.

Lack of sexual interest and desire is common among women (Bell et al., 2022). Low satisfaction with appearance and low satisfaction with relationships appear to be key predictors of lack of sexual interest and desire. Watt and Ewing (1996) report more sexual boredom in younger people than in older people. Gender differences with higher sexual boredom in males were found in one of two studies by Watt and Ewing (1996). Moreover, they report an interaction between age and gender, indicating highest sexual boredom in young men, followed by older men, older women and younger women. Sexual relationship status did not correlate significantly with sexual boredom. Watt and Ewing (1996) report a negative correlation between sexual boredom and general life satisfaction.

Tunariu and Reavey (2007) assessed sexual boredom in a mixed methods approach in $n = 210$ (144 women, 66 men) persons. Consistent with the findings by Watt and Ewing (1996), they found higher sexual boredom in men. Relationship duration in those people reporting to be in a stable partnership did not predict sexual boredom. The qualitative data achieved by the analysis of the open-ended data showed consistent responses across women and men's appraisal of sexual boredom. Moreover, the qualitative data underlined the necessity to interpret sexual boredom as relational aspect instead of an individual trait.

The examination of sexuality and boredom is of great psychological importance for health. Boredom can be a predictor of sexual risk behavior, hypersexuality and promiscuous attitudes, especially in men (Oliveira et al., 2021). Sexual concerns and the quality of the bond as well as considering the partner's needs and one's own needs within a partnership play a central role in sexual satisfaction (Impett et al., 2019). The systematic literature search via the specialist databases pubpsych and psycinfo could not identify any study that reports the direct connection between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction. Therefore, a desideratum for this connection was assumed. The aim of the study is to determine the relationship between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction. An attempt will be made to create typologies based on socio-demographic data. Based on this, it is possible to derive specific needs and intervention offers. The study was preregistered with "as predicted" (www.aspredicted.org, 180900). The following hypotheses are being investigated:

H1: There is a significant negative connection between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction.

H2: There is a connection between sociodemographic data and sexual boredom:

H2a: Younger subjects experience more sexual boredom than older subjects.

H2b: Male subjects experience more sexual boredom than female subjects.

H2c: There is an age by gender interaction in sexual boredom.

H2d: There is no significant correlation between sexual boredom and relationship status.

A research question is accordingly derived as follows: When assessing the interaction between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction in an explorative way, how large is the proportion of persons with high boredom whose sexual life satisfaction is high nevertheless?

Methods

The study was designed as an online survey in June to August 2024. The survey was based on the survey software Unipark (www.unipark.com). The survey link was distributed by university distribution channels, social media and SurveyCircle. The data collection was completely anonymous. Inclusion criteria were being of legal age and sufficient knowledge of German to answer the questionnaire. The study is a quantitative single-sample study with a cross-sectional design. Subsamples are then generated according to sociodemographic data: e.g. male versus female subjects, students versus non-students. In addition, the data sets are divided into four groups: high sexual boredom versus low sexual boredom and high sexual satisfaction versus low sexual satisfaction.

Sample: The sample consisted of a total of 225 people. An a-priori power analysis yielded the following result: With an effect size of $\eta^2 = 0.04$ (corresponds to an F of about .204) and a power of .8, 96 subjects per group (192 in total) would be needed to obtain a significant result with a one-way ANOVA ($\alpha = .05$). It was therefore assumed that the sample size was sufficiently large.

Of the overall sample, $n = 150$ persons (67 %) were female, $n = 69$ (31 %) were male and $n = 6$ persons (3 %) were of diverse gender. Considering participant age, 11 % were 18-20 years old, 66 % between 21 and 29 years, 12 % between 40 and 49 years, and 6 % were 50 or older. 15 participants (7 %) had lower or middle education degrees, $n = 84$ persons (37 %) had higher education degrees, and $n = 125$ persons (56 %) had started or

finished university. Most participants (n = 220) reported a monogamous lifestyle. Concerning relationship status, n = 147 participants (65 %) were currently in a relationship, whereas n = 78 (35 %) were single.

Survey instruments: The sample completed questions on demographic data (e.g., age, gender, level of education). Sexual Boredom was measured using the established "Sexual Boredom Scale (SBS)" by Watt and Ewing (1996). It conceptualizes the tendency to experience boredom in sexual activities in one's life (item examples: "Sex frequently becomes an unexciting and predictable routine", "I would not stay in a relationship that was sexually dull."). The questionnaire contains 18 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher experienced sexual boredom. The questionnaire gives a total score and two subscales (sexual monotony, sexual stimulation). In this study, we report only the total score (Cronbachs Alpha = .80). Sexual life satisfaction was measured by the "Questionnaire on life satisfaction" (Fragebogen zur Lebenszufriedenheit, FLZ) by Fahrenberg et al. (2000). The FLZ assesses life satisfaction by 49 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very dissatisfied to 7 = very satisfied). For this study, we only used the subscale "Satisfaction with sex" (Cronbachs Alpha = .75). The scale contains 7 items (item examples: „With my physical attractiveness I am ...", "When I think about the extent to which my partner and I harmonize in terms of sexuality, I am ..."). The FLZ is a reliable and valid instrument that is used widely in German speaking countries. For clinical interpretation, Stanine norm values are available.

Data protection and ethics: Participation was voluntary and respondents actively agreed to participate. The data was collected anonymously. Participants were informed in detail about the project (e.g., who is conducting the survey, purpose of the survey, type of data collected, legal basis for data processing, data protection officer). Respondents were able to discontinue their participation at any time without detrimental consequences

and could also request that their data be deleted retrospectively. The stress caused by completing the questionnaire did not exceed everyday stress. According to the self-assessment of the Joint Ethics Committee of Bavarian Universities (Gemeinsame Ethikkommission der Hochschulen Bayerns [GEHBa], 2022), no risks or harm were to be expected for the participants because of taking part in the survey. In addition, the basic ethical principles of the professional psychological associations DGPs and BDP were adhered to in the research project. The authors report there are also no competing interests to declare. The study was preregistered with "as predicted" (www.aspredicted.org, 180900). Potentially personally identifying information presented in this article that relates directly or indirectly to an individual, or individuals, has been changed to disguise and safeguard the confidentiality, privacy and data protection rights of those concerned, in accordance with the journal's anonymization policy.

Results

Descriptives: The mean value of sexual boredom was 3.00 (SD = 2.89), with higher values in men than in women (Table 1). The female SBS mean value was significantly higher than the one reported by Tunariu and Reavey (2007), which was 2.78 (SD = 0.85; $t(149) = 2.95, p = .004$), whereas the male SBS mean value was significantly lower than the one reported by Tunariu and Reavey (2007) which was 3.40 (SD = 1.11; $t(68) = -3.26, p = .002$). Persons of diverse gender reported the highest SBS mean values (Table 1); however, we did not find any reference value for the gender diverse subsample in previous publications. The mean value for sexual life satisfaction was significantly higher for women than for men ($t(220) = 2.387, p = .018$, Table 1). Concerning the clinical interpretation (Stanine values compared to the FLZ norm sample), 24 % reported low sexual life satisfaction (Stanine values 1-3), 64 % reported average life satisfaction (Stanine values 4-6), and 12 % reported high sexual life satisfaction (Stanine values 7-9, Table 1).

Table 1: Means and standard deviations

Scale	Male (n = 69)		Female (n = 150)		Diverse (n = 6)		Total (n = 225)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Sexual Boredom	3.10	0.76	2.93	0.64	3.35	0.92	3.00	0.69
Sexual life satisfaction	4.81	1.06	5.11	0.84	4.48	0.69	5.00	0.92
Sexual life satisfaction norm sample								
Stanine values 1-3	24 (35 %)		26 (17 %)		4 (66 %)		54 (24 %)	
Stanine values 4-6	35 (51 %)		108 (72 %)		2 (33 %)		145 (64 %)	
Stanine values 7-9	10 (15 %)		16 (11 %)		0 (0 %)		26 (12 %)	

Hypotheses testing and explorative analyses: Sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction were significantly intercorrelated ($r = -.38, p < .001$). There was no significant difference in the correlation between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction of females ($r = -.39, p < .001$) and males ($r = -.34, p = .004$; $z = -0.342, p = .366$). Only a small group of persons (n = 6) reported high sexual life satisfaction (Stanine values 7-9) despite high (= above median) sexual boredom, and only n = 12 persons reported low sexual life satisfaction despite low (= below median) sexual boredom. Of the persons with average sexual life satisfaction (Stanine value 4-6, n = 143), 70 % reported low sexual boredom, whereas 61 % reported high sexual boredom. Concerning the relation between sexual boredom and sociodemographic variables, we found significant differences between males and females ($F(1, 215) = 5.08, p = .025$; descriptive values see table 1), but no significant age effect

(aged under 30 vs. 30 years and older; $F(1, 215) = 0.06, p = .806$) and no significant interaction between age and gender ($F(1, 215) = 2.50, p = .115$). We could not include the diverse gender sample (n = 6) in this analysis due to insufficient sample size. Concerning relationship status, singles reported significantly higher sexual boredom (M = 3.14, SD = 0.72) than persons who were in a relationship (M = 2.92, SD = 0.66; $t(226) = -2.25, p = .025$).

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to shed light on the link between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction. The hypothesis H1 could be confirmed: Sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction were significantly negatively intercorrelated on a moderate level without a difference between men and women.

But a medium correlation meant that there are also people with high levels of boredom who are nevertheless satisfied (and vice versa). These results follow Eastwood's definition that boredom is an unpleasant feeling (Eastwood et al., 2012) and people who feel unpleasant don't feel well to a maximum at all. But the data shows that there are also people with high levels of boredom who are nevertheless satisfied (and vice versa). Tunariu and Reavey (2007) call this the 'paradox of change and after 'stability' individuals need stability and trust to experience true intimacy and at the same time long for autonomy and variation in their sexual experiences. This indicates that the relationships of the measured variables are complex and that the personal characteristics of the individuals and the current relationship as well as the living environment of the individuals play a role. Our study showed that sexual boredom is not per se associated with sexual dissatisfaction, which can also be seen in the context of low sexual desire and low sexual satisfaction. According to the definition by Lawrance and Byers (1995) and Byers et al. (1998), sexual satisfaction is defined as an affective reaction resulting from the subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions of one's own sexual relationship. Under this circumstance it makes sense that marriage and couple counselling usually have a positive effect on couples who report to have serious sexual problems (Kröger et al., 2007). Professional counselling may help to more clearly identify the factors influencing the variables under investigation in each couple. It was found that, according to literature, men experience more sexual boredom than women (Watt & Ewing, 1996). Compared to the Tunariu and Reavey (2007) sample, the discrepancy between men and women was even higher in this data set (men mean 3.10, SD 0.76; women mean 2.93, SD 0.64). Only 12% had a high stanine value, i.e. satisfaction in our sample was slightly lower than in the FLZ standard sample (Fahrenberg et al., 2000). If the findings of the present study are compared with the FLZ standard sample, it is evident that men were more often dissatisfied than women (35% vs. 17%). In contrast to this finding, the literature states that satisfaction with sexuality is higher among men and people in relationships (Fahrenberg et al., 2000). Connections with marriage and partnership, one's own person and health are reported (Fahrenberg et al., 2000). It can be assumed that people who are more satisfied with their sexuality experience themselves as more physically attractive and are also more satisfied with their sexual performance, their sexual contacts and reactions (Fahrenberg et al., 2000). Following on from this, Fahrenberg et al. (2000) point out that these people are also able to talk more openly about sexuality and have more sexual harmony with their partner. Regarding our hypotheses summarized in H2 the results are somewhat mixed: The hypothesis H2a must be discarded, because the present data showed no significant age effect at all. It could be that the results change if the value for the division into "old" and "young" is shifted. For example, the German Center on Aging collects data with a cut-off at the age of 40 (instead of aged under 30 vs. 30 years and older). Especially when it comes to satisfaction or parts of satisfaction (sexual satisfaction), variables such as physiological impairment could influence the results. Further, in the present sample, people with diverse genders showed values of highest sexual boredom. Unfortunately, the count in this subsample was very low. Nevertheless, men and women differed significantly in sexual boredom scores and hypothesis H2b can therefore be regarded as confirmed. In addition, H2c must be falsified because – in contrast to the findings by Watt and Ewing (1996) – the present data showed no interaction between age and gender. Since the present sexual boredom scores did not distinguish between trait

and state aspects, some people might have been more inclined to feel generalized boredom than others. Such a trait aspect of boredom plays a major role in basic boredom research (Donati et al., 2022) and the used questionnaire did not account for this distinction. Hypothesis H2d assumed that there is no significant correlation between sexual boredom and relationship status: Oliveira et al. (2022) showed that sexual boredom is often associated with low sexual desire and low sexual satisfaction and is particularly common in long-term relationships. But in the present data set singles reported significantly higher sexual boredom than persons who were in a relationship, so that hypothesis H2d is not valid either. In Eastwood et al. (2012), boredom is the unpleasant feeling of wanting to do something satisfying but not being able to do so. In the case of sexual boredom, singles probably cannot access this desired satisfying activity in the same way that couples can. Consequently, part of the boredom here can be seen in the lack of actual activity. Sexual boredom takes place when the environment is perceived as unstimulating, repetitive, or monotonous (Oliveira et al., 2022). The most boring sexual environment is probably the one in which there is no currently available partner. Of course, and in all considerations, the moderating effects of personal characteristics should not be forgotten (e.g. Bauer et al., 2006).

Implications for practice and research: Oliveira et al. (2021) pointed out that sexual boredom includes individual, partnership and societal aspects and in line with this argument the results show that the relationship between sexual boredom and sexual satisfaction appears to be very complex. In most cases, when research results are contradictory, it can be assumed that there are other influencing variables, such as moderators or mediators (Döring, 2023). More research is needed to identify these variables. For example, it is possible that the separation between state and trait boredom, which was not accounted for in this study, affects all results. Future studies should make a distinction here. The results of our study offer the opportunity to optimize sexual science concepts and interventions. The focus of sexual science and therapy as well as systemic interventions should, for example, be on individual needs and gender differences and not guided per se by opinions about gender stereotypes (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Verhaltenstherapie, 1977; Elsen, 2023; Hannover & Wolter, 2017; Hartmann, 2018).

Limitations: The present study is a cross-sectional study that does not allow any conclusions to be drawn about causality. It is conceivable that sexual boredom could increase pre-existing sexual dissatisfaction. The self-reporting of the data also represents a limitation of validity in general. The survey variables were methodically collected in the same way and could therefore lead to an artificial increase in the linear correlations between the variables due to a common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, the small sample size of non-binary people can be seen as a limitation.

Future Directions: The data were only collected at one measurement time point; to minimize possible consistency effects, future studies should work with several measurement time points (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, future research should not collect age as continuous rather than categorized data to enable more accurate analyses. Gender should also have more than two categories in future studies thus accounting for diversity. Different sexual orientations and relationship types should receive more attention in research protocols. Future research should further examine the individual experiences and

behavior of different genders to enable a comparison of stereotypical and clichéd associations within a real-life context. Future research should investigate further possibilities of both specific and non-specific interventions to increase sexual satisfaction and possibly sexual self-confidence and reduce sexual boredom (Fahrenberg et al., 2000; Stang, 2024; Stang & Rico-Dresel, 2023).

Conclusion

Overall, our results demonstrate that male subjects had higher sexual boredom scores than women. The level of sexual boredom in women was significantly higher than the findings reported in current research (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007), while that of men was lower. 24% of participants reported low sexual life satisfaction, 64% average and 12% high. Women in our study have a higher level of sexual life satisfaction than men. There was a significant negative correlation between sexual boredom and sexual life satisfaction ($r = -0.38$). Only a few people reported high satisfaction despite a high value in boredom. Men and women showed significant differences in sexual boredom, but no significant age effect. Contrary to previous findings, our study shows that singles experience more sexual boredom than people in a relationship.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our assistants for their support in literature research, data collection and data processing.

Description of each author's role

The first author and the last author did the literature review, conducted the data collection and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors two and three conducted the data analysis and participated in writing the Method and Results chapters. The first and last authors focused on writing the Introduction and Discussion chapters. All authors contributed to the article and agreed with its final version.

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