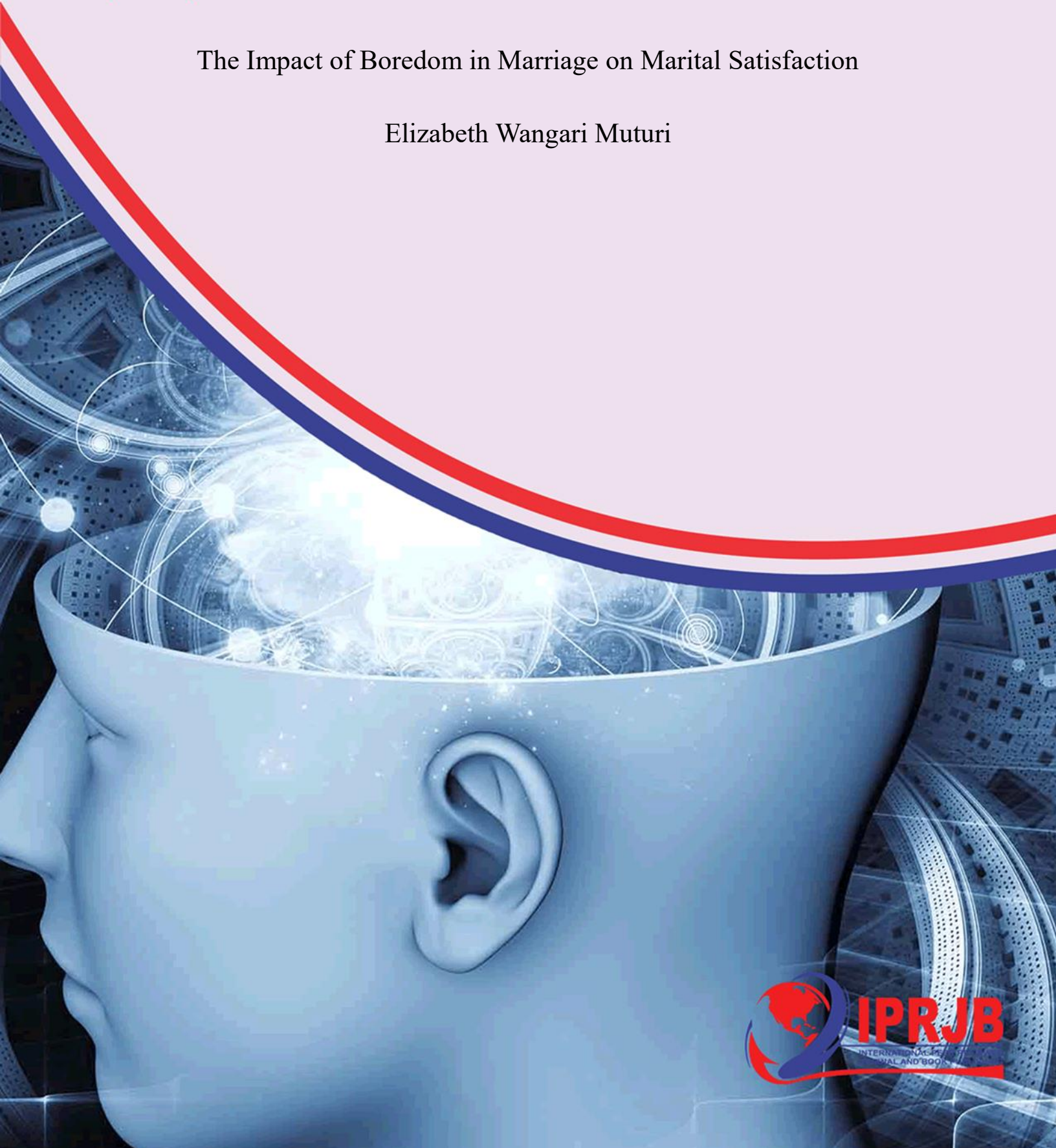


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The Impact of Boredom in Marriage on Marital Satisfaction

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## The Impact of Boredom in Marriage on Marital Satisfaction



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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of boredom in marriage on marital satisfaction.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** Boredom in marriage can influence the spouses' behaviors, emotions, and cognitions, such as reducing their positive interactions, increasing their negative interactions, lowering their mood, and impairing their judgment. Boredom in marriage can have negative consequences for the individual and relational well-being of the spouses, such as affecting their physical and mental health, undermining their intimacy and commitment, and increasing their risk of infidelity or divorce. Boredom in marriage can be prevented or reduced by enhancing the quality and quantity of communication, sharing new and meaningful experiences, expressing appreciation and affection, seeking professional help if needed, and maintaining a positive attitude and outlook on the relationship.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The Arousal Theory, Cognitive Theory and Psychodynamic Theory may be used to anchor future studies on use of marriage institutions. Marital therapists and counselors could incorporate boredom assessment and intervention strategies in their work with couples who report low marital satisfaction. Policymakers and educators could design and implement programs that promote healthy and satisfying marriages in the society.

**Keywords:** *Boredom, Marriage, Marital Satisfaction*

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## INTRODUCTION

Boredom in marriage is a common problem that can affect the quality and satisfaction of the relationship. Boredom can result from a lack of novelty and stimulation, as well as from other factors such as illness, financial stress, social isolation, or intellectual incompatibility (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010). Boredom can also lead to increased conflict, decreased intimacy, and lower marital satisfaction (Tsapelas et al., 2009). Boredom in marriage is a complex phenomenon that can vary across different contexts and cultures. However, it is also a universal challenge that can be overcome by enhancing the novelty and stimulation in the relationship. Some strategies that can help couples prevent or reduce boredom include trying new activities together, spending time with friends or family, pursuing personal hobbies or interests, expressing appreciation and affection, communicating openly and honestly, and seeking professional help if needed. Boredom can result from a lack of novelty and stimulation, which can make the relationship feel dull and predictable. Boredom can also reflect a lack of focus on one's own life plan and personal growth, which can make the partner seem less interesting and attractive.

In developed economies such as USA, Japan, or UK, boredom in marriage may be influenced by the high expectations that people have for their partners and their relationships. People may seek excitement, variety, and personal growth from their spouses, but may not find them fulfilling these needs over time. For example, a study of American couples found that boredom was one of the main reasons for divorce, along with infidelity and growing apart (Amato & Previti, 2003). Another study of Japanese couples found that boredom was associated with lower levels of love, trust, and commitment, as well as higher levels of dissatisfaction and divorce proneness (Yabiku et al., 2014).

In the USA, boredom is one of the common causes of divorce, along with infidelity, abuse, and addiction. According to a survey by the National Opinion Research Center, 15% of married Americans reported being very bored with their marriage, and 14% said they were somewhat bored. Boredom was more prevalent among younger couples, those with lower income, and those with lower education levels (Amato et al., 2007). In Japan, boredom is a major factor behind the phenomenon of "sexless marriages", which are defined as couples who have sex less than once a month or less than 10 times a year. According to a survey by the Japan Family Planning Association, 47.2% of married couples in Japan were in sexless marriages in 2016, up from 31.9% in 2004. The main reason cited by both men and women for the lack of sex was fatigue from work, followed by boredom with sex (Japan Family Planning Association, 2016). In the UK, boredom is also a common reason for marital dissatisfaction and divorce. A study by Relate, a relationship counseling service, found that 29% of married couples in the UK felt bored with their relationship, and 28% felt taken for granted by their partner. Boredom was more likely to affect couples who had been married for more than 16 years, and those who had children (Relate, 2014).

In developing economies such as India and China, boredom in marriage may be influenced by the rapid social and economic changes that these countries are undergoing. These changes may create new opportunities and challenges for couples, such as increased education, urbanization, migration, and gender equality. For example, a study of Indian couples found that boredom was



related to lower marital quality and higher divorce intentions, especially among women who had higher education and more exposure to Western culture (Singh & Nayak, 2015). Another study of Chinese couples found that boredom was linked to lower marital satisfaction and higher divorce risk, especially among younger and urban couples who had more individualistic values and less traditional views on marriage (Zhang et al., 2012).

In India, boredom is a growing concern among urban middle-class couples, who face increasing stress from work, family, and social expectations. A study by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences found that 40% of married couples in Mumbai were unhappy with their marriage, and 20% were considering divorce. The main reasons for marital dissatisfaction were lack of communication, lack of intimacy, lack of time, and boredom (TISS, 2011). In China, boredom is also a challenge for many married couples, especially those who have experienced rapid social and economic changes in recent decades. A survey by the All-China Women's Federation found that 22% of married women in China were unhappy with their marriage, and 10% wanted to divorce. The main reasons for marital unhappiness were lack of affection, lack of trust, lack of respect, and boredom (ACWF, 2010).

In sub-Saharan economies such as Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Ghana, boredom in marriage may be influenced by the high prevalence of poverty, disease, violence, and instability that these countries face. These factors may limit the resources and opportunities that couples have to enrich their relationships and cope with stress. For example, a study of Kenyan couples found that boredom was associated with lower marital happiness and higher marital conflict, especially among women who had lower income and education levels (Mugoya et al., 2016). Another study of Nigerian couples found that boredom was related to lower marital satisfaction and higher divorce likelihood, especially among men who had more exposure to Western media and culture (Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005).

In Kenya, boredom is one of the factors that contribute to marital instability and infidelity. A study by the African Population and Health Research Center found that 36% of married women and 44% of married men in Kenya had engaged in extramarital sex in the past year. The main reasons for cheating were sexual dissatisfaction, boredom, curiosity, peer pressure, and revenge (APHRC, 2014). In Nigeria, boredom is also a common problem among married couples, especially those who live in urban areas and have access to modern technology and media. A study by the University of Ibadan found that 32% of married couples in Nigeria were dissatisfied with their marriage, and 18% had considered divorce. The main causes of marital dissatisfaction were lack of communication, lack of romance, lack of compatibility, and boredom (UI, 2013). In Uganda, boredom is a risk factor for marital conflict and violence. A study by Makerere University found that 26% of married women and 38% of married men in Uganda had experienced physical violence from their spouse in the past year. The main triggers for violence were financial problems, alcohol abuse, jealousy, infidelity, and boredom (MU, 2012). In Ghana, boredom is a source of frustration and resentment among married couples, especially those who have unmet expectations and aspirations. A study by the University of Ghana found that 28% of married couples in Ghana were

unhappy with their marriage, and 12% had thought about divorce. The main reasons for marital unhappiness were lack of love, lack of support, lack of respect, and boredom (UG, 2011).

Marital satisfaction is a multidimensional concept that reflects the subjective evaluation of the quality and stability of a marital relationship. It is influenced by various factors, such as personality traits, life events, religion, culture, and economic status. Marital satisfaction has important implications for the well-being of the spouses, their children, and the society at large. One way to approach the study of marital satisfaction is to use the Big Five model of personality, which consists of five broad dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. According to this model, personality traits can predict how individuals behave and interact in different situations, including marital life. Several studies have examined the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction using meta-analytic techniques (Bogdan et al., 2022; Sayehmiri et al., 2020).

The results of these meta-analyses suggest that neuroticism is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, while extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively correlated with it. This means that spouses who are more emotionally stable, outgoing, curious, cooperative, and responsible tend to be more satisfied with their marital relationship than those who are more anxious, introverted, conventional, antagonistic, and careless. However, these correlations may vary depending on other factors, such as sex, age, marriage duration, religion, number of children, economic status, education, and collectivistic values (Schmitt et al., 2017).

One of the major life events that affects marital satisfaction is the transition to parenthood. The transition to parenthood is a major life event characterized by profound changes for a considerable number of people. Previous meta-analyses summarized the results obtained by various researchers in the first year and, respectively, in the first 2 years postpartum, globally. The current study adds to the literature by testing the changes from 12 to 24 months, the cross-partner associations and the analysis of different moderators. The results of this meta-analysis show that marital satisfaction has a medium decrease between pregnancy and 12 months postpartum, and a small decline between 12 and 24 months postpartum for both genders. In a similar period with first year postpartum, non-parents present a small decline in marital satisfaction. Moreover, the analysis of the dyadic studies data shows cross-partner associations, confirming that one partner's satisfaction has a steeper decline when the other partner's satisfaction presents a steep decrease. The decrease in marital satisfaction does not stop after the first postpartum year, and the cross-partners associations are present (Bogdan, Turliuc, Candel, 2022).

Another factor that influences marital satisfaction is personality traits. Personality traits can be used to predict an individual's behaviors in different life situations, including marital life situations. The most widely used model of personality is the Big Five model, which consists of five broad dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. A systematic review and meta-analysis of Iranian studies on the correlation between personality traits and marital satisfaction found that couples high in neuroticism experience lower levels of marital satisfaction, and couples high in conscientiousness are more satisfied with their marital

life. Moreover, positive correlations were found between marital satisfaction and extraversion, openness, and agreeableness (Sayehmiri, Kareem, Abdi, Dalvand , Ghanei Gheshlagh, 2020).

Therefore, marital satisfaction is a complex phenomenon that requires a comprehensive and contextualized analysis. It is not only determined by the individual characteristics of the spouses, but also by the interaction between them and the environment they live in. Marital satisfaction can be measured by various instruments that assess different aspects of the marital relationship, such as adjustment, happiness, intimacy, and commitment. By understanding the factors that affect marital satisfaction, researchers and practitioners can develop effective interventions to enhance the quality and stability of marital relationships. In conclusion, marital satisfaction is a complex and multidimensional concept that can be affected by various factors. Some of these factors are relatively stable, such as personality traits, while others are more dynamic, such as life events. Understanding how these factors interact and influence marital satisfaction can help couples enhance their relationship quality and well-being (Sayehmiri, Kareem, Abdi, Dalvand and Gheshlagh, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

Boredom in marriage is a common phenomenon that can affect marital satisfaction in various ways. Boredom can arise from lack of novelty, excitement, or stimulation in the relationship, or from dissatisfaction with the partner's personality, habits, or values. Boredom can lead to emotional detachment, reduced intimacy, increased conflict, or infidelity. Boredom can also affect the individual's well-being, causing depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem.

The impact of boredom in marriage on marital satisfaction is a significant problem that affects many couples around the world. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2013, 28% of married adults in the United States reported being bored in their marriage, and 12% said they were unhappy with their spouse. A study by Tsapelas et al. (2009) found that boredom was one of the main reasons for marital dissatisfaction and divorce among 123 couples in the United States. Another study by Ogolsky and Bowers (2013) found that boredom predicted lower levels of marital satisfaction and higher levels of marital instability among 274 newlywed couples in the United States.

The problem of boredom in marriage is relevant to various stakeholders, such as couples, therapists, counselors, researchers, and policymakers. Understanding the causes and consequences of boredom in marriage can help couples to prevent or cope with boredom and enhance their marital satisfaction. Therapists and counselors can use this knowledge to design effective interventions and strategies to help bored couples improve their relationship quality and well-being. Researchers can use this knowledge to advance the theoretical and empirical understanding of boredom and its role in marital dynamics. Policymakers can use this knowledge to promote healthy and stable marriages and families in society.

However, there is a lack of comprehensive and systematic research on boredom in marriage and its impact on marital satisfaction. Most of the existing studies are based on small or non-representative samples, use different definitions and measures of boredom, or focus on specific

aspects or outcomes of boredom. There is a need for more rigorous and integrative research that can explore the nature, prevalence, antecedents, mechanisms, and effects of boredom in marriage across different contexts, cultures, and stages of the relationship. Such research can fill the gap in the literature and provide valuable insights for theory and practice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Arousal Theory**

This theory claims that boredom is a matter of the non-optimal level of cortical arousal, meaning that people feel bored when they are either overstimulated or understimulated by their environment (Finkelstein, 2021). This theory could be relevant to the suggested topic because it could explain how boredom in marriage affects the physiological and psychological state of the spouses, and how they seek to adjust their arousal level by either increasing or decreasing their involvement in the relationship. One intext reference for this theory is: (Finkelstein, 2021, p. 14).

### **Cognitive Theory**

This theory highlights problems with focusing attention as a primary characteristic of boredom, meaning that people feel bored when they cannot engage with their current activity or situation (Eastwood et al., 2012). This theory could be relevant to the suggested topic because it could explain how boredom in marriage affects the cognitive and emotional processes of the spouses, and how they cope with their attentional difficulties by either finding new sources of interest or withdrawing from the relationship. One intext reference for this theory is: (Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 482).

### **Psychodynamic Theory**

This theory interprets boredom as an outcome of inner struggle and inhibition of imagination, meaning that people feel bored when they are unable to express their true self or desires (Svendsen, 2005). This theory could be relevant to the suggested topic because it could explain how boredom in marriage affects the identity and motivation of the spouses, and how they deal with their inner conflict by either confronting or avoiding their issues in the relationship. One intext reference for this theory is: (Svendsen, 2005, p. 41).

### **Empirical Review**

Ogolsky et al. (2019) examined how boredom influences marital quality over time. The purpose of the study was to test whether boredom predicts changes in marital quality and whether marital quality predicts changes in boredom. The methodology involved a longitudinal survey of 123 married couples who completed measures of boredom and marital quality at two time points, nine years apart. The findings showed that boredom at Time 1 was positively associated with declines in marital quality at Time 2, and that marital quality at Time 1 was negatively associated with increases in boredom at Time 2. The conclusions were that boredom and marital quality have a reciprocal and negative relationship over time, and that boredom may be a risk factor for marital dissatisfaction and instability. The recommendations were to help couples prevent and cope with

boredom by enhancing their communication, intimacy, novelty, and shared activities (Ogolsky et al., 2019).

Tsapelas et al. (2009) explored how boredom affects marital closeness and satisfaction. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether boredom mediates the relationship between closeness and satisfaction, and whether this mediation is moderated by gender and relationship length. The methodology involved a cross-sectional survey of 274 married individuals who completed measures of boredom, closeness, and satisfaction. The findings showed that boredom partially mediated the link between closeness and satisfaction, such that lower closeness led to higher boredom, which in turn led to lower satisfaction. The conclusions were that boredom is an important factor that explains why closeness matters for satisfaction, and that boredom may be more detrimental for women and for longer relationships than for men and for shorter relationships. The recommendations were to help couples maintain their closeness by expressing their feelings, needs, and desires, and by engaging in new and exciting activities together (Tsapelas et al., 2009).

Aron et al. (2013) examined how novelty influences marital satisfaction and boredom. The purpose of the study was to test whether engaging in novel and arousing activities with one's spouse enhances marital satisfaction and reduces boredom, compared to engaging in familiar and pleasant activities or no activities. The methodology involved a randomized controlled trial of 53 married couples who were assigned to one of three conditions: novel-arousing, pleasant-familiar, or control. They completed measures of satisfaction and boredom before and after a 10-week intervention period, during which they performed weekly activities with their spouse according to their assigned condition. The findings showed that the novel-arousing condition led to greater increases in satisfaction and greater decreases in boredom than the other two conditions. The conclusions were that novelty and arousal are key ingredients for sustaining marital quality and preventing boredom, and that couples can benefit from incorporating novel-arousing activities into their routine (Aron et al., 2013).

Drouin et al. (2018) explored how technology use influences marital satisfaction and boredom. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether technology use, or the frequency and duration of using various devices and platforms, affects marital satisfaction and boredom directly or indirectly through technoferece, or the perception that technology interrupts one's interactions with one's partner. The methodology involved a cross-sectional survey of 143 married individuals who completed measures of technology use, technoferece, satisfaction, and boredom. The findings showed that technology use was negatively associated with satisfaction and positively associated with boredom, both directly and indirectly through technoferece. The conclusions were that technology use is a potential source of conflict and dissatisfaction in marriage, and that it lowers satisfaction and increases boredom by interfering with one's attention and communication with one's partner.

Rauer et al. (2020) examined how humor styles influence marital satisfaction and boredom. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether humor styles, or the ways that people use humor in their relationships, affect marital satisfaction and boredom directly or indirectly through emotional intimacy, or the feeling of closeness and connection with one's partner. The



methodology involved a cross-sectional survey of 154 married couples who completed measures of humor styles, emotional intimacy, satisfaction, and boredom. The findings showed that humor styles were differentially associated with satisfaction and boredom, both directly and indirectly through emotional intimacy. The conclusions were that humor styles are important indicators of marital quality and well-being, and that they influence satisfaction and boredom by affecting one's emotional intimacy with one's partner. Specifically, positive humor styles (such as affiliative and self-enhancing) were linked to higher satisfaction and lower boredom, while negative humor styles (such as aggressive and self-defeating) were linked to lower satisfaction and higher boredom.

Lewandowski et al. (2016) explored how self-expansion influences marital satisfaction and boredom. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether self-expansion, or the process of gaining new resources, perspectives, and identities through one's relationship, affects marital satisfaction and boredom directly or indirectly through perceived partner responsiveness. The methodology involved a cross-sectional survey of 120 married individuals who completed measures of self-expansion, perceived partner responsiveness, satisfaction, and boredom. The findings showed that self-expansion was positively associated with satisfaction and negatively associated with boredom, both directly and indirectly through perceived partner responsiveness. The conclusions were that self-expansion is a vital component of marital quality and well-being, and that it fosters satisfaction and reduces boredom by enhancing one's perception of one's partner's responsiveness to one's needs and goals

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. The study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## **FINDINGS**

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

One of the research gaps in the literature on boredom and marital quality is the lack of conceptual clarity about what boredom means and how it is measured. Different studies may use different definitions and indicators of boredom, which makes it difficult to compare and synthesize their results. For example, Ogolsky et al. (2019) defined boredom as "a state of low arousal and dissatisfaction, which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating situation" (p. 2), while Tsapelas et al. (2009) defined boredom as "a lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity" (p. 101). Moreover, some studies may use self-report measures of boredom, while others may use behavioral or physiological measures, which may not capture the same aspects of boredom. Therefore, a conceptual gap in the literature is the need for a clear and consistent definition and operationalization of boredom across studies.

Another research gap in the literature on boredom and marital quality is the lack of contextual factors that may influence the relationship between boredom and marital quality. Most studies have

focused on individual or dyadic factors, such as personality, communication, intimacy, novelty, and shared activities, but have neglected the role of environmental or situational factors, such as stress, social support, culture, and life events, that may affect how couples experience and cope with boredom. For example, Ogolsky et al. (2019) and Tzapelas et al. (2009) did not control for any contextual variables in their analyses, which may have confounded their findings. Therefore, a contextual gap in the literature is the need for more research that examines how boredom and marital quality are influenced by various external factors.

A third research gap in the literature on boredom and marital quality is the lack of methodological rigor and diversity in the studies. Most studies have used cross-sectional or longitudinal survey designs, which have limitations in terms of causal inference, generalizability, and validity. For example, Ogolsky et al. (2019) and Tzapelas et al. (2009) relied on self-report data from married individuals or couples, which may be subject to bias, error, or social desirability. Moreover, most studies have used quantitative methods, which may not capture the rich and nuanced experiences of boredom and marital quality among couples. Therefore, a methodological gap in the literature is the need for more research that uses experimental or quasi-experimental designs, multiple sources of data, and qualitative or mixed methods.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Boredom in marriage is a common phenomenon that can affect marital satisfaction in various ways. Some of the possible conclusions that can be derived from studying the impact of boredom in marriage are:

Boredom in marriage can result from a lack of novelty, variety, challenge, or excitement in the relationship, which can lead to dissatisfaction, frustration, or resentment among the spouses. Boredom in marriage can also stem from a mismatch between the spouses' expectations, needs, interests, or preferences, which can create a sense of incompatibility, alienation, or disconnection in the relationship. Boredom in marriage can influence the spouses' behaviors, emotions, and cognitions, such as reducing their positive interactions, increasing their negative interactions, lowering their mood, and impairing their judgment. Boredom in marriage can have negative consequences for the individual and relational well-being of the spouses, such as affecting their physical and mental health, undermining their intimacy and commitment, and increasing their risk of infidelity or divorce. Boredom in marriage can be prevented or reduced by enhancing the quality and quantity of communication, sharing new and meaningful experiences, expressing appreciation and affection, seeking professional help if needed, and maintaining a positive attitude and outlook on the relationship.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the literature review and the findings of this study, some recommendations can be derived on the impact of boredom in marriage on marital satisfaction. These recommendations may contribute to theory, practice and policy in the following ways:

For theory, future research could explore the causal mechanisms and the moderating factors that link boredom in marriage to marital satisfaction. For example, how does boredom affect the communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution skills of married couples? How do personality traits, life events, and cultural values influence the experience and expression of boredom in marriage?

For practice, marital therapists and counselors could incorporate boredom assessment and intervention strategies in their work with couples who report low marital satisfaction. For example, they could help couples identify the sources and signs of boredom in their relationship, and suggest ways to increase novelty, variety, and challenge in their daily interactions. They could also help couples develop coping skills to deal with boredom when it arises, such as mindfulness, humor, and gratitude.

For policy, policymakers and educators could design and implement programs that promote healthy and satisfying marriages in the society. For example, they could offer premarital education and counseling services that address the issue of boredom in marriage and its implications for marital satisfaction. They could also support initiatives that encourage married couples to engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities together, such as volunteering, traveling, or learning new skills.

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