

THE IMPACT OF FEELING BORED¹

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Abstract: *The scientific interest for boredom has increased lately due to its impact upon everyday life. The present study investigates the relationship between boredom proneness and impulsivity upon alcohol consumption. A total number of 180 students responded to 3 questionnaires measuring proneness for boredom, impulsivity and alcohol consumption. Results showed that subjects that feel bored easily are prone to alcohol consumption as well as those who are impulsive. The interaction between these two features upon alcohol consumption could not be proven.*

Key words: *boredom, impulsivity, alcohol consumption, maladaptive behaviour.*

1. Introduction

1.1. A history of boredom

The concept of boredom has been a point of interest for philosophers even since ancient times. Christians considered that boredom is a sin, being called dryness of the soul, complete paralyzing of will, inexplicable grief, laziness (Kuhn, 1976 cit. in Martin, 2006). Starting with the XVIIth century, it began to be used by French writers, Voltaire himself declared in 1764 that "boredom is the worst of all conditions" (Kuhn, 1976 cit. in Martin, 2006). Among the authors that wrote about this subject we recall Baudelaire, Byron, Durkheim, Kierkegaard, Dostoievsky, Tolstoi, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Ibsen, Flaubert, Verlaine. In the XIXth century the general opinion upon boredom can be synthesized by Kierkegaard words: "almost half of the world's sins are made by fear of boredom" (Kuhn, 1976 cit. in Martin, 2006).

Moving forward towards time, in the XXth century, nothing changes regarding how this affective state is seen. Nowadays, it is considered that boredom is a consequence of overstimulation and not of monotony as it has been thought until now. According to Klapp (1986, cit in Martin, 2006) feeling bored appears in highly developed societies. Although, nowadays people have access to many more interesting and entertaining activities, the discomfort caused by boredom is visible.

¹ Paper presented at the International Conference "Psychology, Education and Human Development", Braşov, 23-25 May 2019

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1.2 . Theories of boredom

Despite the growing body of research regarding the phenomena of boredom, a clear definition could not be stated. Several theories have been developed as follows:

The psychodynamic theory –from this perspective boredom is seen as a condition represented by the wish to do something without knowing what exactly because of a repressed impulse that usually has an aggressive or libidinal origin (Fenichel, 1951). Despite the fact that the instinctive content is latent, the affective load which results after this repression is felt at a conscious level in an unpleasant way, dissatisfaction associated with boredom (Wangh, 1979, cit in Mercer, 2008)

The attentional theory – boredom is explained using cognitive processes, therefore the inability of a person to focus his/her attention, generates a state of boredom (Fischer, 1993; Leary et al., 1986; Hamilton, 1981 cit in Mercer, 2008)

Theory of physiological arousal – this model is based on the assumption that people try to reach an optimal level of arousal, but when the environment cannot maintain this level boredom appears; boredom is defined as “a negative affective state that implies an inadequate stimulation form the environment “ (De Chenne, 1988 cit. in Mercer, 2008, p.73)

The existential theory - emphasizes the importance of knowing the meaning in life; according to Frankl (1959, cit. in Mercer, 2008) looking for a meaning is the essence of human motivation but sometimes society can burden this process leaving the person with a sensation of emptiness, that his life is meaningless; Frankl considers that “this inside void matches with a state of boredom” (p. 129)

1.3 . Boredom and its correlation with impulsivity and alcohol consumption

Boredom has an important role in substance abuse and alcohol consumption. People often declare that they started to drink alcohol or they tried for the first time drugs because they were bored. They also find an excuse in being bored to maintain their vices. The fear that life without alcohol or drugs can become boring again can make them continue with an addiction. The monotony of life, the fact that someone does the same things all over again or the idea that he has to respect rules all the time can make him at some point to desire for something more challenging. For this reason, some people find a solution for this problem in consuming large amounts of alcohol. It begins as something fun and ends with the impossibility to resist.

One motivation for alcohol consumption is sensation seeking, which has been demonstrated to correlate with boredom (Gordon, Caltabino, 1996 cit. in Boden, 2009) and impulsivity (Watt, Vodanovich, 1992 cit. in Boden, 2009).

2. Objectives

The present study investigates the influence that boredom proneness and impulsivity have upon alcohol consumption. The variables of the current study are displayed below.

4. Results

To test the first two hypothesis, we used t test for independent samples and to check the interaction effect of the two independent variables upon the dependent one we used Anova Univariate. In addition, we studied the correlation between proneness to boredom and alcohol consumption as well as impulsivity and alcohol consumption.

The first hypothesis confirms, meaning that there are significant differences between participants that are prone to boredom and those who are less prone regarding alcohol consumption. Therefore, people that are prone to boredom report consuming a larger quantity of alcohol comparing to those who are not ($t(171) = 3.19, p = 0.002$).

Using Pearson correlation method, we analysed the relation between proneness to boredom and alcohol consumption. The correlation is positive, significant and of low level ($r = 0.237, p = 0.002$). To refine the results, we analysed the relationship between proneness to boredom and gender. The results sustain that there is no significant difference between the two variables ($p = 0.915$).

The second hypothesis confirms as well, therefore impulsive people report consuming more alcohol. There are significant differences between subjects with a high level of impulsivity and those with a low level regarding alcohol consumption ($t(157) = 3.34, p = 0.01$).

The correlation between impulsivity and alcohol consumption is positive, significant and of low level ($r = 0.258, p = 0.001$).

The third hypothesis does not confirm. There is a main effect of proneness to boredom as well as impulsivity upon alcohol consumption but there is no interaction effect of the two independent variables upon the dependent one. The differences are insignificant between subjects that are prone to boredom and with a high level of impulsivity and those who score low on impulsivity and proneness to boredom regarding alcohol consumption (Table 1).

Statistical parameters of the interaction effect

Table 1

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	4.139 ^a	3	1.380	6.006	.001
Intercept	327.670	1	327.670	1.426E3	.000
bismedddd	1.559	1	1.559	6.784	.010
BPSmed	1.372	1	1.372	5.973	.016
bismedddd * BPSmed	.134	1	.134	.582	.447
Error	35.609	155	.230		
Total	399.000	159			
Corrected Total	39.748	158			
a. R Squared = .104 (Adjusted R Squared = .087)					

5. Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between proneness to boredom, impulsivity and alcohol consumption. The results conclude that people that are easily bored will consume more alcohol, and those who are impulsive as well. The behaviour of consuming alcohol by prone to boredom individuals was explained by the fact that they try to replace a negative affective state with a positive one. Boredom has been described as having a negative valence, the individual being compelled to repeat a weak stimulated activity. Alcohol consumption is in this way a coping method. Regarding the fact that most of the time alcohol allow people to feel good, to get rid of tension and inhibitions, it is easy to understand why the environment becomes stimulating thus the individual changes his negative affective state into a positive one. Displaying maladaptive behaviours like alcohol abuse by prone to boredom individuals was explained by the reduced capacity to take into consideration possible alternatives.

In what matters the relationship between impulsivity and alcohol consumption, this main effect was explained using three dimensions: lack of perseverance, lack of premeditation and sensation seeking. The most powerful predictor of alcohol consumption is sensation seeking. Impulsive persons often try to engage in risky or provocative activities, that can stimulate them, and alcohol can facilitate the identification of such activities.

The fact that it could not be demonstrated that impulsive and prone to boredom individuals consume more alcohol is explained through the theoretical framework or the paradigm you take into consideration. If in the case of impulsivity there is a general opinion concerning this phenomenon, in the case of boredom there is still a need for extensive research.

6. Limits of the research

The current study has two major limits. First of all, we should take into consideration the possibility that the subjects did not answer honestly to the questions, thus intervening the social desirability phenomena. Regarding the fact that the investigated subject has a negative overtone, the risk to appear social desirability is higher. This effect it is possible to have appeared when measuring the variable alcohol consumption, due to the fact that the formulated items request saying about a behaviour that is often devalued.

Second, the instrument measuring alcohol consumption was built after a study made in United States of America, therefore future research should try to validate the scale on a Romanian population, thus taking into consideration cultural differences.

7. Directions for future research

This study offers a perspective upon boredom and its relation to other traits and behaviours. Although there have been made remarkable progression in this area of research, there are still questions to answer. Therefore, an important issue would be the

perception that people have upon boredom, which are the most effective or more used methods for coping with boredom or what other affective states are associated with boredom. In addition, research can also focus on the structure of boredom or for identifying the moments in time in the appearance of boredom.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully thank to Professor Onici Octavian from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iasi for the advice in conducting this study and to all the members of the TEMES group (group of research in social psychology).

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