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Perceptions of sexual boredom in a community sample

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the definitions of sexual boredom in a large community sample of Portuguese individuals. A thematic analysis of written responses to the question “What is sexual boredom for you?” was conducted with 653 participants aged 18 to 75 ($M = 33.14$; $SD = 9.01$) of multiple genders, sexual orientations, and relationship types. Three main themes were identified: definitions of sexual boredom, predisposing and maintenance factors of sexual boredom, and managing of sexual boredom. Sexual monotony, sexual desire, and hedonic value stand out as defining features of sexual boredom. Findings suggest the need of a multidimensional measure of sexual boredom.

Introduction

The most cited work addressing sexual boredom corresponds to the validation studies of the *Sexual Boredom Scale* (SBS, Watt & Ewing, 1996), the only existing measure of sexual boredom. The definition of sexual boredom used by these authors was based on two previous definitions of general boredom: a) boredom as “an aversion for repetitive experience of any kind, routine work, or dull and boring people and extreme restlessness under condition when escape from constancy is impossible” (Zuckerman, 1979, p. 3); and b) boredom as a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction individual attributes to an inadequately stimulating environment (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). Anchored on these somewhat conflicting views of boredom, Watt and Ewing (1996) defined sexual boredom as the tendency to experience boredom with the sexual aspects of life, a distinct form of disliked experience, with characteristics unique to itself.

Previous research found boredom proneness to have several dimensions, including low levels of perceived environmental stimulation, or external stimulation, and inability to create interesting activities for oneself, or internal stimulation (e.g. Bruursema et al., 2011; Gana & Akremi, 1998; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990). In the SBS we find the dimensions of sexual monotony (sexual routine and tedium) and sexual stimulation (aspects of sexual excitement and constraint), with a clear focus on monogamy and relationship duration.

Following the creation of SBS (Watt & Ewing, 1996), Tunariu and Reavey (2003, 2007) took the lead on the study of sexual boredom, but with a qualitative emphasis. In their 12 interviews of men’s understanding of sexual boredom in long-term romantic relationships, sexual boredom was seen as boredom with boring sex [dull, routine and over-rehearsed] or, in these authors’ words, the waning of sexual desire (Tunariu & Reavey, 2003). Boring sex was portrayed as something inevitable of long-term sexually exclusive relationships, but potentially managed if couples endorsed sex positive strategies to counter act it. For these men, boring sex could be tolerable if occasional, similarly to boredom state, which occurs momentarily when one’s active attention is

required upon a monotonous task (e.g. Leary et al., 1986; Perkins & Hill, 1985). As for sexual boredom, the persistent emotion characterized by progressive indifference toward a sexual partner, was not tolerable (Tunariu & Reavey, 2003). The same authors, in a later study with mixed methods, requested 66 men and 144 women in long-term relationships to complete the SBS (Watt & Ewing, 1996), and to comment on items, providing more elaborated views on sexual boredom (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007). Participants seemed to identify sexual boredom in their relationships when sex was no longer pleasing, when felt sexual disinterest for their partners, or when began noticing or investing more in other potential sexual partners. Furthermore, they related poor sexual skills, poor communication style, negative views of partner, habituation to partner, low eroticism and romanticism, and taking sex or partner for granted as instances leading to sexual boredom.

More recently, research showed negative relationships between sexual boredom and sexual desire (Carvalho et al., 2014, 2015; Murray et al., 2014), and sexual satisfaction (Pechorro et al., 2015; 2015; Štulhofer et al., 2010). Other studies also indicate sexual boredom may have a negative impact on dyadic adjustment, as was also negatively correlated relationship satisfaction (Veit et al., 2017), and positively correlated with dyadic sexual discord (Watt & Ewing, 1996).

While there is vast research dedicated to general boredom (see Smith, 1981; Vodanovich & Watt, 2016), but this knowledge was not fully integrated into the notions of sexual boredom, namely in what concerns cognition and emotion. In addition, we remain not knowing how sexual boredom differs from aspects of sexual function and sexual pleasure, and how relationship and partner factors may contribute to developing sexual boredom. In brief, we are currently unaware of the potential individual and interpersonal mechanisms underpinning sexual boredom, i.e., we are lacking a theory of sexual boredom.

Current study

There is a gap in the study of sexual boredom overall and, specifically, concerning this construct's meaning for different people and discrimination from other constructs. Our study intends to identify characteristics of sexual boredom from the brief written definitions of sexual boredom of a large online sample of Portuguese participants of diverse genders, sexual orientations, and relationship types via thematic analysis. By answering the following research questions - *What is sexual boredom from people's perceptions? What are the dimensions of sexual boredom?* - we hope to reach a definition of sexual boredom which represents more diverse perspectives, highlight possible mechanisms, and assess if a new measure of sexual boredom is needed. We wish to contribute to foster appropriate clinical interventions for sexual boredom, as it seems linked to both sexual response and relationship problems.

Methods

Participants

The sample for this study comprises a total of 653 participants aged 18 to 75 ($M = 33.14$; $SD = 9.01$). Respondents were Portuguese speakers living in Portugal (86.1%), Brazil (5.8%), and other countries (7.8%), of which 90.8% were Portuguese, 7.1% Brazilian, and 2.1% from other countries. A large majority of participants (88.7%) were educated to a university level. Participants self-identified as women (72.1%), men (26.6%), non-binary (0.6%), and other (0.6%). Of the total participants 0.8% self-identified as transgender. The sample consisted of participants who self-identified as heterosexual (78.8%), lesbian (2.6%), gay (4.3), bisexual (10%), pansexual (3.2%), other (0.8%), and 0.2% preferred not to say. Regarding relationship status, 51.2% of the

respondents were married or cohabiting, 24.4% were dating, 22.4% did not have a relationship, 1.2% were in consensual non-monogamies, and 0.2% reported to have occasional sex.

Procedure

Participants were volunteers recruited via email, social media snowballing (Facebook and Instagram) that included promotion by some local influencers, and through the official channels of Porto University. All the advertisements displayed the survey link where a general description of the study was provided, including authorship, affiliations and funding sources, conditions for participating, and the primary author's email contact. Participants were required to agree to terms and conditions and to provide informed consent before answering the questionnaire. Instructions and survey items were written in Portuguese. After completing the study all participants could choose to provide their emails for further contact or write any comment felt necessary. No incentives were provided to participants. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Porto University.

Data was collected between September 2019 and February 2020. Survey protocol included a sociodemographic questionnaire and sexuality related measures, part of a larger study of which the data collected will be published elsewhere. After completing the survey, participants were directed to a non-mandatory, open ended item asking: "What is sexual boredom for you?" The present study refers to the answers given to this item. From the 927 total respondents to the survey, 653 answered to the open-ended item.

Analysis strategy

This study examines data from participants' answers to the open-ended item using thematic analysis and its several stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis was conducted with software NVivo 12 PRO. In an early stage the first author read the total responses to get familiarized with the data. Following this, the first author re-read responses and generated an exhaustive list of possible codes. Subsequently, the first author developed an initial coding scheme with 19 major themes and a total of 93 subthemes, which was reviewed and discussed with the second author. The first author served as coder for all the 653 responses, editing and merging themes throughout the entire coding process. In the final stage, the first and second author reviewed and refined themes until a coherent and representative picture of the data set emerged. The third author reviewed this process. This organic process of discarding and recoding themes led to our final themes of sexual boredom. A minority of fragments (8) were excluded due to irrelevance or inability to code otherwise, i.e. when participants made inappropriate statements or when did not offer any input regarding the definition of sexual boredom (e.g. "My sex life!" or "It can be a lot of day-to-day things").

This analysis applied a data-driven approach as the literature still lacks formal theories of sexual boredom. However, we understand our theme map of sexual boredom represents a co-construction of the views of the participants and the views of the authors, both impinged by science and society's productions of meaning.

Results

Responses enabled the identification of three main themes: *definitions of sexual boredom*, *predisposing and maintenance factors of sexual boredom*, and *managing sexual boredom*. In addition, some participants (17) answered by stating *I don't know/I have never experienced* [sexual boredom]. These were 8 women, 7 men, and 2 other, 14 were heterosexuals, 8 were either married or

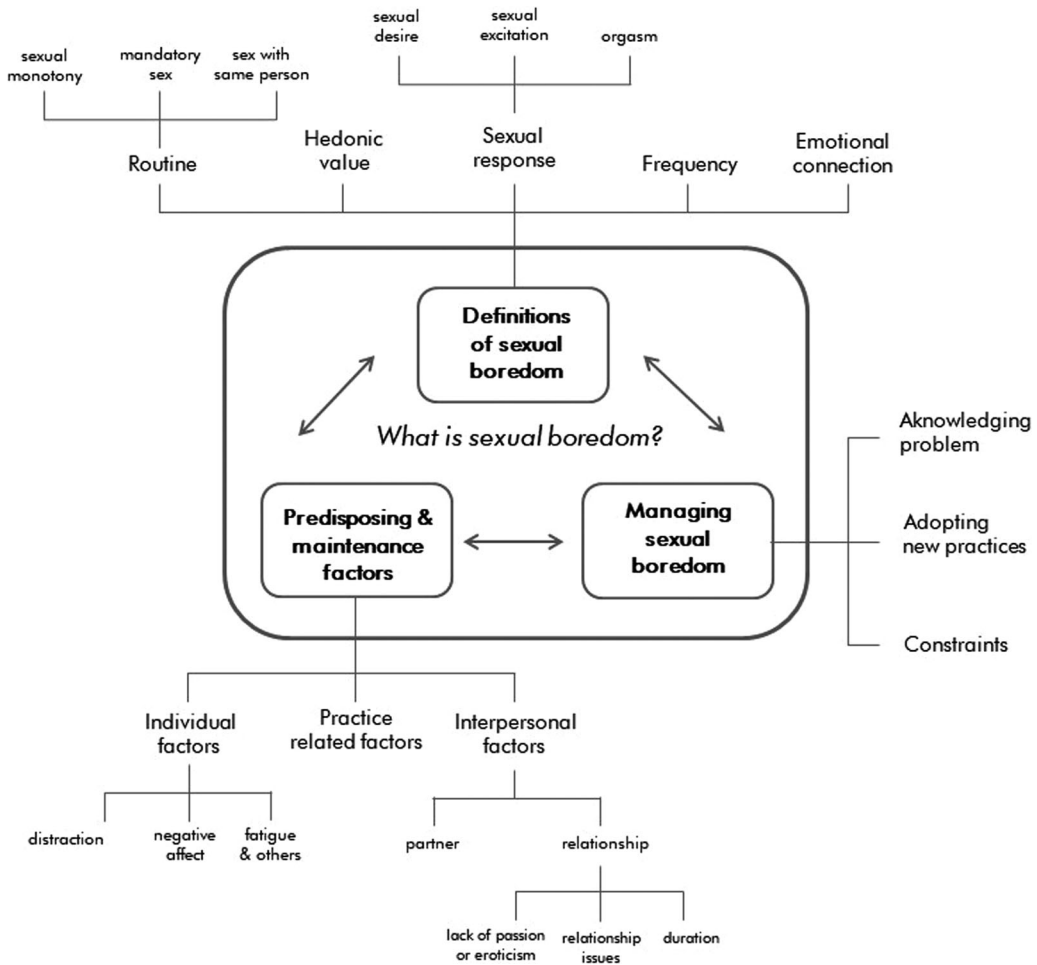


Figure 1. Thematic map of the participants' perceptions of sexual boredom.

cohabiting, 5 were not in relationship, 3 were dating, and 1 was a polyamorous dating ($M = 38.35$, $range = 20-75$).

Within each of the main themes we classified several subthemes. In *definitions of sexual boredom*, we found *routine*, *sexual response*, *hedonic value*, *frequency*, and *emotional connection*. In *predisposing and maintenance factors of sexual boredom*, we identified: *individual factors*, *interpersonal factors*, and *practice-related factors*. Lastly, in *managing sexual boredom* we recognized the following: *acknowledging problem*, *adopting new practices*, and *constraints*. See Figure 1 for a graphic representation of these themes and subthemes.

In our coding process two subthemes were largely cited by our participants: *sexual monotony*, with 280 coded segments, and *sexual desire*, with 270 coded segments. These are followed by *hedonic value* (76 segments) that was also frequently referred to as a feature of sexual boredom. Several responses combined these and other themes of sexual boredom, whilst some provided unidimensional views of sexual boredom, i.e. concerned solely with one theme. Below we present description and examples of each theme. These examples are translated extracts of our participants written answers in Portuguese, where translation was performed by the first author. Table 1 shows our coding matrix and description of themes and subthemes, number of coded segments under each theme and subthemes, and examples for all subthemes.

Table 1. Matrix of themes and subthemes of sexual boredom.

Themes*	2 nd order subthemes*	3 rd order subthemes*	4 th order subthemes*	Description	Examples
Definitions of SB (783)	<i>Routine</i> (332)			Statement outlining sexual boredom's meaning	
				Repeated sexual activities or sexual actions regularly performed	
		<i>Sexual monotony</i> (280)		Tedious or repetitive sexual stimuli/practices, dull or predictable sexual activity, and exhaustion of sexual repertoire	"Monotony" or "always remaining in the same sexual positions"
		<i>Mandatory sex</i> (28)		Sexual activities felt as a duty or obligation	"When sex is an obligation, there is no desire to do it, and it is done only to satisfy the partner"
	<i>Sexual response</i> (331)	<i>Sex with the same partner</i> (24)		Situations where having sex with the same person becomes boring or unappealing	"Being tired or bored of having sex with the same person" or "the loss of excitability towards a single partner"
				Sexual difficulties concerning sexual function	
		<i>Sexual desire</i> (270)		Losses or decreases in sexual interest, and lack of will or enthusiasm for sex	"Lack of libido" or "not having the same will to have sex"
		<i>Sexual excitation</i> (48)		Difficulty or inability in becoming sexually aroused	"Lack of excitement" or "when I lose my erection"
		<i>Orgasm</i> (13)		Difficulty or inability to reach orgasm	"Having a hard time reaching orgasm"
	<i>Hedonic value</i> (76)			Instances where sex is not pleasurable or satisfying	"When sex is not good" or "being dissatisfied"
		<i>Frequency</i> (23)		Contexts where sexual activity does not take place with the desired frequency	"Not having sex" or "not having sex frequently"
	<i>Emotional connection</i> (21)			Sexual instances where there is lack of affection or intellectual connection toward the sexual partner	"Uninteresting person. That I don't feel anything for them" or "when there is a lack of

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Themes*	2 nd order subthemes*	3 rd order subthemes*	4 th order subthemes*	Description	Examples
Predisposing and maintenance factors of SB (229)	<i>Individual factors</i> (52)	<i>Distraction</i> (9)		Different elements that affect sexual boredom	emotional surrender”,
				Cognitive, emotional, and physical factors affecting sexual boredom	
				Allusions regarding inability to concentrate or being present during sexual acts	“Thinking about the shopping list” or “at times during sexual activity when you are not entirely «present»”
		<i>Negative affect</i> (33)		Mentions to an emotion in relation with sexual boredom. Includes but is not limited to tedium, indifference, sadness, and anxiety	“When to have sex or not is indifferent” or “it’s a tension/ discomfort that makes us lose desire”
				Tiredness or any other physical or biological factors affecting sexual boredom, often combined with aspects of other themes	“Can arise as tiredness from day to day” or “it could be the loss of excitement during or even before the beginning of sexual activities due to (...) moment of the ovulatory cycle”
		<i>Fatigue and others</i> (10)			
	<i>Interpersonal factors</i> (136)	<i>Partner</i> (55)		Dyadic aspects affecting sexual boredom.	
				Perceptions of partner’s sexual behaviors or attitudes	“Partner selfishness”, “a partner’s lack of empathy” or “It is the other person not enjoying the sexual act as much as I do”
		<i>Relationship</i> (81)		Sexual and non-sexual aspects of relationships	
			<i>Lack of passion or eroticism</i> (41)	Refers to instances where sexual play is deficient or lost its intensity	“Lack of attraction and lust” or “lack of spark”
			<i>Relationship issues</i> (29)	Relationship problems,	“It is when both participants are (continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Themes*	2 nd order subthemes*	3 rd order subthemes*	4 th order subthemes*	Description	Examples
Managing SB (71)	<i>Practice-related factors</i> (41)		<i>Duration</i> (11)	including communication problems	not in tune" or "it is monotony in and out of bed"
				Allusions to long-term commitments affecting sexual boredom	"I get bored in longer relationships, even when there is affection and sex is good" or "losing interest in sex in a long-term relationship"
				Disappointment specific to certain sexual practices or to a general sense of frustration stemming from sexual activity	"There is much more to sex than penetration", "do it alone only" or "frustrated expectations"
				Stages of development and management of sexual boredom	
				One's acknowledgement or onset of altered or shifting sex patterns	"Not having the same desire to have sex as before this boredom" or "losing intensity"
	<i>Adopting new practices</i> (12)			Solutions to manage sexual boredom	"Try new positions every now and then", "there is BDSM for some reason", "my current way of fighting sexual boredom is through free relationships of no sexual exclusivity"
				Circumstances hindering or blocking overcoming sexual boredom.	"Moral limits" or "lack of time"

Numbers inside (*) correspond to the total of segments coded under each theme SB = Sexual boredom

Definitions of sexual boredom

Several participants combined aspects of *sexual monotony* and lack of *sexual desire*, as 19-year-old heterosexual women put it, sexual boredom is "the loss of desire/disinterest in having sex, often due to some monotony". Others linked *sexual desire* and *hedonic value*, like a 65-year-old married heterosexual man who wrote, "not feeling the need and not having pleasure in the relationship". The following segment, from a married heterosexual woman aged 36, combines *sexual monotony*,

hedonic value, and *mandatory sex*: “to experience repetitive sexual relationships and without creativity, without experiencing new things or varying. Not feeling enough pleasure to enjoy the moment and just «fulfill the obligation».”

For other participants, sexual boredom was a result of being with the same partner, as mentioned by a 29-year old heterosexual men dating who described “it’s being bored of the person you’re having sex with”. In the same line, a 32-year-old heterosexual married man explains sexual boredom as a human inner conflict related with monogamy:

The lack of sexual tension. Which comes from a conflict between desire for safety and desire for adventure/risk. But above all, it is a consequence of a struggle against our natural instincts, our biology... I deeply believe that the human being is not a monogamous being in essence. We get sexually bored by looking for something in our partners that they are unable to offer.

Emotional connection (or lack thereof) was also mentioned by some participants. A 26-year-old bisexual women not in a relationship shared “I have a hard time keeping this part exciting for both myself and the partner if the emotional part is at fault, there need be no loving involvement, but maintaining good trust and friendship is definitely important”, describing aspects of *sexual excitation* and *emotional connection*.

Matters of *frequency* were also mentioned by our participants. A self-identified non-binary polynosexual aged 29 described “When the person I am in a relationship with loses part of the sexual interest in me, decreasing the frequency with which we have sex”. Here were also mentioned aspects of *sexual desire*, albeit these are partner related.

To finish, we include an excerpt of the response of 25-year-old heterosexual men describing how sexual boredom could affect people in relationships as well as single people:

It depends on the point of view: if we look at sexual boredom in the context of a relationship, I would say that sexual boredom could be synonymous with 1) little perceived satisfaction in performing the sexual act with the partner, 2) little practice of the sexual act, 3) lack of stimulation (visual, emotional, psychological), or a mixture of the three; if we put the thing in the context of a single person, I would say that sexual boredom could be synonymous with 1) little practice of the sexual act, 2) frequent but “hollow/superficial” practice of the sexual act (e.g. I only feel physical attraction for the person, but I don’t feel more than that), or 3) unavailability or inexistence of a person who fills us sexually.

Predisposing and maintenance factors of sexual boredom

As in other themes, some participants provided unidimensional depictions of sexual boredom, and others reflected multidimensional views of sexual boredom. In this section we present responses which may combine *predisposing and maintenance factors of sexual boredom* with other aspects of the major theme of *definitions of sexual boredom*. A 25-year-old gay man explained sexual boredom as “losing interest in sex in a long-term relationship”, focusing on aspects of relationship *duration* and *sexual desire*. The following extract contains elements of both *individual* and *interpersonal factors* (*fatigue and others* and *partner factors*, respectively), elements of *routine* (*sexual monotony*), and elements of *sexual response* (*sexual desire* and *sexual excitation*): “It is when, due to external factors, due to stress, tiredness or lack of interest in the partner (or from the partner), sex becomes monotonous, repetitive or almost non-existent due to lack of excitement or interest to start it” (from 33-year-old heterosexual men, dating). Other responses offered insight on sexual boredom in the context of both short-term and long-term sexual relationships. A heterosexual woman aged 35 who was not currently in a relationship wrote the below segment, reflecting elements of *sexual monotony*, *partner factors*, *duration* (*relationship factor*), and *emotional connection*:

When short-term sexual relations are monotonous, when there is not much creativity and passion in the act of having sex, when it is always the same, or when the partner is retrograde and does not like to innovate. In the long run, it happens to me, even though it was one of the best and most passionate sexual

relationships I have had, it ends up boring me, but maybe it has to do with the emotional/loving part be fading.

Managing sexual boredom

This section introduces data concerning subthemes coded under *managing sexual boredom* (*acknowledging problem*, *constraints*, and *adopting new practices*), as well data concerning the major themes addressed previously.

Acknowledging problem took many forms in our participants' responses. The following passage from a 31-year-old heterosexual women cohabiting with a partner for over a year privileged *distraction* and *negative affect (individual factors)*, a sense of frustration stemming from sexual activity we coded under *practice related factors*, lack of *sexual desire*, and indicts *acknowledging problem*:

For me, sexual boredom refers to moments during sexual activity when you are not entirely "present", moments when you are distracted and bored. It is not common, but sometimes it happens to me at some point to wander during sex and, when I realize it, think that it is sad that this is happening. In my fantasy, sex is a super exciting and interesting thing to the point of not leaving even 1% of the brain available for any thought. (...) Despite having interpreted it more like this, I imagine that sexual boredom can also refer to the lack of interest in sexual activities accompanied by a notion that this should not be so.

A married heterosexual men participant aged 36 described sexual boredom as the "Reduced desire for the partner motivated by the routine/inability to innovate in the expression of sexuality for two" mixing low *sexual desire* with *sexual monotony*, and with general *constraints*.

To finish, we cite a participant which while acknowledging lowering *sexual desire* also reflects *adopting new practices* to manage sexual boredom, a "feeling associated with stagnation of desire and activity (individual/couple), usually transient, as it gives rise to new experiences or development of existing sexual activity" (from 35-year-old heterosexual women, cohabiting for more than one year).

Discussion

This thematic analysis identified diverse definitions of sexual boredom, as well as individual, interpersonal, and practice-related factors involved, and, finally, management paths.

Participants frequently defined sexual boredom with aspects of sexual monotony, lack of sexual desire and lack of hedonic value. Monotony is a core feature of general boredom (Fenichel, 1951; Geiwitz, 1966; Perkins & Hill, 1985; Zuckerman, 1979) and research verified that monotonous stimuli led to decreases in judged hedonic value (Berlyne, 1970). Sexual monotony is central to the definition of sexual boredom (Watt & Ewing, 1996), which was negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction and sexual desire (Carvalho et al., 2014; Štulhofer et al., 2010).

Some participants described sexual boredom as feeling obligated to engage in undesired sexual acts. We are unaware of similar findings in previous research. In the context of general boredom, research concluded that boredom is a function of the level of effort required to attend to stimuli that are not intrinsically captivating (Leary et al., 1986; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). Being bored with an obligation in a more mundane situation may not cause much distress, however this might not be the case for mandatory sex.

In addition, participants identified sexual boredom could be a result of having sex with the same partner. These findings may be partially explained by the sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) that postulates sexual boredom in males restores mating behavior in the presence of novel females (see Dewsbury, 1981). According to this view, desire for sexual variety is not observed in women (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt et al., 2001), but our study suggests sexual boredom linked to having sex with the same partner is too found in women. Possibly, some

people, independently of gender, may have a non-monogamous orientation, which may be in the genesis of their sexual boredom.

Our findings suggest sex frequency may also play a role in one's assessment of sexual boredom. Although no previous research addressed sexual boredom and sex frequency, some studies reported sex frequency predicts sexual satisfaction in couples (e.g. Frederick et al., 2017; McNulty et al., 2016; Schoenfeld et al., 2017). Further research is needed to determine if low sex frequency can trigger or result in sexual boredom.

Finally, our research implies having low or no emotional connection with a sexual partner may contribute to sexual boredom for some. There are no previous studies addressing this link, although emotional connection to a sexual partner was found as an important component of sexuality in long-term couples (Lemieux et al., 2004), friends with benefits (Lehmiller et al., 2011), and individuals reporting having "great sex" (Kleinplatz & Ménard, 2007).

Our findings highlight potential cognitive, emotional, and physical mechanisms of sexual boredom, namely distraction, negative affect, and fatigue – all of which were previously related with boredom proneness (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Malkovsky et al., 2012; Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014), or with decreases in sexual desire (Maserejian et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2014). However, there is no research on individual factors of sexual boredom we are aware of. This study indicates that similarly to general boredom, sexual boredom may have relationships with attentional processes, affect, and physical well-being. More importantly, it suggests sexual boredom is linked to personal distress, emphasizing the need of further examining this construct as a sexual problem with impact on sexual relationships.

In addition, our participants linked partner and relationship factors to sexual boredom. Although we did not find research concerning partner factors in sexual boredom, some studies indicate partners' poor sexual skills impacted negatively sexual desire in women (Basson, 2001; Brotto et al., 2011; Gehring, 2003), whilst partner responsiveness was positively associated with sexual satisfaction in women and men (Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2019). Within relationship factors, were identified themes of lack of passion or eroticism, relationship issues, and duration of relationship - which were previously related with decreases in sexual desire (Klusmann, 2002; Murray et al., 2014; Murray & Milhausen, 2012; Sims & Meana, 2010). Only the studies of Tunariu and Reavey (2003, 2007) explored relational aspects of sexual boredom, suggesting poor sexual communication and relationship length could lead to sexual boredom.

Engaging in solitary practices and lack of sexual stimulation during partnered activity were two reasons our participants related to sexual boredom. We know masturbation was related with boredom (Gana et al., 2001), and sexual boredom (Carvalho et al., 2015), but there seem to be no studies regarding partnered sexual practices and sexual boredom. Moreover, several participants reflected on a general sense of frustration stemming from sexual disappointment, as when sex does not meet expectation. This could be in part related to the over-emphasis placed on sexual variety and novelty (Tunariu & Reavey, 2007), which sets unrealistic expectations, and consequently leads to frustration (Metz & McCarthy, 2011).

Several participants referred potential stages involved in managing sexual boredom. Some mentioned acknowledging changing sex patterns allowed them identifying sexual boredom, while others reflected on solutions to overcoming this, or identified potential constraints doing so.

Participants in this study named engaging in novel sexual behaviors (e.g. try new positions, using sex toys, practicing BDSM, etc.) as potential solutions for overcoming sexual boredom. Previous research suggested introducing sexual novelty to combat negative consequences of sexual boredom could be helpful for couples in long-term monogamous relationships (Matthews et al., 2018).

From the participants' answers we also extracted some potential constraints, which may possibly interfere with adopting new practices to fight sexual boredom, namely sexual beliefs and ignorance of sexuality or one's body. Research shows dysfunctional sexual beliefs play a role in

sexual dysfunction (Nobre & Pinto-Gouveia, 2006), and specifically in sexual desire in men and women (Carvalho & Nobre, 2010, 2011). As well, poor sexual skills, such as unwillingness to integrate the sexual skills necessary to uphold exciting sex, was postulated by Tunariu and Reavey (2007) as a factor leading to the onset of sexual boredom. Our study adds evidence for the importance of sexual education in managing sexual problems, an area of clinical intervention with people with sexual difficulties for some time (Annon, 1976).

Limitations

This study aimed to explore definitions and dimensions of sexual boredom in a heterogeneous sample of the community. Like many studies of sexuality, participants volunteering to take part in the investigation may not resemble the general population in several aspects, especially in what concerns openness to discuss sex related matters. Although our findings are not meant for generalization, it is possible that they more closely reflect women's sexual boredom, as they made up most of our sample. In addition, the investigators responsible for the analysis were both women psychologists, which may have also influenced the process. Another drawback of this study relates to the potential influence of survey content on our participants' answers to the open-ended item. We are mindful that the participants' attitudes and responses may have been primed having answered questionnaires on some aspects of human sexuality before providing their definitions of sexual boredom. This study did not assess intercoder reliability as, similarly to Braun and Clarke (2019), we believe this would bear a positivist assumption there is a reality in the data that can be accurately captured through coding. Our final coding matrix is purposely a simplification of a complex construct and a product of these authors' choices. While acknowledging this we also stress the importance of rendering dimensions of sexual boredom intelligible, as most of the individual and interpersonal aspects of sexual boredom were not yet known.

Conclusions and implications

Sexual monotony, decreased sexual desire, and low hedonic value are important features of sexual boredom for these participants. Other aspects, such low sex frequency or lack of emotional connection to a sexual partner in short-term and/or long-term relationships may also play a role in some experiences of sexual boredom.

In this thematic analysis, sexual boredom presented multi-dimensional and comprised individual (cognitive, emotional, and physical factors), interpersonal (partner and relationship factors), and practice-related facets. Findings also suggested different paths in and out of sexual boredom when an individual acknowledges sexual boredom. These could be, on one hand, adopting new practices or, on the other hand, finding constraints and, consequently, experience sexual monotony and sexual disinterest. Further immediate research on sexual boredom should focus on clarifying the relationship with sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, and sexual pleasure in different demographic groups, as well as determine the level of distress and impact on individuals and couples.

We conclude the current conceptualization of sexual boredom is insufficient and does not capture this multifaceted construct that should be granted a comprehensive theory. Based on our participants contributions we suggest sexual boredom may be defined as the individual's perception of monotonous or unpleasurable sexual activity or of lack of sexual interest, related to individual, relationship or practice aspects of sexual relationships, and which may lead to exploring sexual novelty or to the progressive waning of sexual desire. Furthermore, the current measure of sexual boredom may not allow a complex assessment of the construct, as is utterly focused on monogamy and relationship duration. A new self-report measure of sexual boredom that captures its multidimensional nature may be needed at this time.

Declaration of interest statement

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

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