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## BOREDOM IS NOT BORING

*Maik Bieleke, Wanja Wolff, and Corinna S. Martarelli*

Experience shows that escape from boredom is one of the really powerful desires of almost all human beings.

—*Bertrand Russell (1950) in his Nobel Lecture*

Almost everyone is bored sometimes. But despite the fact that boredom is a frequent experience in everyday life, people tend to treat boredom as a more or less aversive nuisance that does not warrant further interest or consideration. However, more and more research suggests that boredom matters more than it tends to get credit for and that it has powerful effects on human behavior. But how?

Boredom is understood to signal the need to change something about one's current situation by interrupting the focus of attention and spurring people to "do something else". If this call to action remains unanswered, boredom is experienced as an aversive state that people try to avoid and escape. This makes boredom an immensely powerful motivator of human behavior, eloquently emphasized in the introductory quote by philosopher and Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell. While great minds such as Bertrand Russell, Seneca, or Leo Tolstoy understood and expressed the importance of boredom for human behavior, behavioral science research has only recently started to focus on boredom as worthwhile research topic. This rise in boredom research has led to an accumulation of insights into the prevalence of boredom and its key role for human behavior.

This booming interest in boredom is reflected in an ever-growing number of articles and special issues devoted to the theoretical underpinnings and phenomenology of boredom, its position in nomological networks of established constructs, and the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of boredom in applied contexts. While boredom research had already been on the rise before the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to better understand boredom, and the consequences of being bored, became even more evident during this time. To illustrate this boom, an analysis of PubMed—one of the most important databases for life sciences and biomedical research—conducted by the magazine *Discover* showed that boredom research had increased by about 30% in 2020 compared to 2019, making it the third fastest-growing topic during this time. Highlighting the public interest in boredom throughout the pandemic, numerous newspapers and podcasts around the world published dedicated content on boredom. While

the public interest in boredom waned and waxed with COVID-19 restrictions, the interest of researchers turned out be much more than a fleeting trend. For instance, the attention to boredom has been consolidated by the foundation of the International Society of Boredom Studies (ISBS; [www.boredomsociety.com](http://www.boredomsociety.com)), which brings boredom researchers across various disciplines in exchange and has recently started to publish the *Journal of Boredom Studies* (JBS).

Today, we know increasingly more about boredom—and fortunately, our knowledge about boredom is not restricted to one specialty domain (e.g., boredom in the work context or the neuronal basis of boredom). Across various domains, researchers have started to shed light on what boredom is and why it matters. While this diversity in boredom research is a testament to its general relevance, it also proves challenging to keep track of boredom research as a whole and to synthesize commonalities across domains. *The International Handbook of Boredom* is a first attempt to bring together these strands of research by inviting leading boredom experts to present their research and their perspectives on boredom. They will navigate you through those questions that have formed the field in the past and the questions that shape it today, as well as explore new cutting-edge perspectives for future research. Despite an extensive body of work and longstanding traditions across different fields, numerous questions about boredom remain unanswered. These questions relate to basic properties of boredom such as the intensity, dynamics, and duration of its experience; the ways in which boredom might evolve and change across developmental stages; the underlying neurological mechanisms that lead to and accompany the experience of boredom; its role in orchestrating decisions to explore versus exploit one's environment; effective strategies of dealing with boredom and capitalizing on the information it conveys about the value of an activity; and many more.

We have structured the book in three parts. Part I focuses on conceptual approaches to boredom, addressing fundamental questions about its definition, explanation, and measurement. Part II covers research on boredom that identifies its experiential properties, accompanying processes, and associated concepts. Part III presents research that investigates the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of boredom in applied contexts. The final chapter of the book provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary summary of these contributions that has been jointly written by the editors and all authors. This makes *The International Handbook of Boredom* a unique knowledge hub that hopefully appeals to researchers from diverse disciplines and serves as a source of inspiration and encouragement for future research on boredom.

We wish you an exciting journey through the landscape of boredom research!

The editors of *The International Handbook of Boredom*  
Maik Bieleke, Wanja Wolff, and Corinna S. Martarelli

## Reference

Russell, B. (1950). What desires are politically important? [Nobel lecture]. *NobelPrize.org*. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1950/russell/lecture/>