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Boredom proneness in anger and aggression: effects of impulsiveness and sensation seeking

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Abstract

The present study was a replication and extension of Rupp and Vodanovich's (1997) work on the role of boredom proneness in anger expression and aggression. In addition to replicating their primary analyses, impulsiveness and sensation seeking were included to determine the potential impact of these variables on the relationships between boredom proneness and anger and aggression. Two hundred and twenty-four college student volunteers completed measures of boredom proneness, impulsiveness, sensation seeking, anger expression, and aggression. Findings were consistent with Rupp and Vodanovich (1997) but demonstrated more pervasive effects of external boredom proneness on aggression. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses demonstrated that the relationships between external boredom proneness and trait anger, anger expression/control, and aggression persisted even after accounting for impulsiveness and sensation seeking. Boredom due to a lack of external stimulation predicted one's propensity to experience anger, maladaptive anger expression, aggression, and deficits in anger control.

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1. Introduction

The constructs of boredom and the propensity to experience feelings of boredom have generated an impressive body of research in education, psychology, organizational behavior, accident prevention, and medicine. Throughout these areas, boredom has been associated with many

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negative outcomes, such as procrastination (Ferrari, 2000), job dissatisfaction (Kass, Vodanovich, & Callender, 2001; O'Hanlon, 1981), substance use (Greene, Krcmar, Walters, Rubin, & Hale, 2000; Paulson, Coombs, & Richardson, 1990), eating disorders (Ganley, 1989; Stickney & Miltenberger, 1999), unsafe driving behavior (Arnett, 1990; Furnham & Saipe, 1993; Verwey & Zaidel, 2000), anger and hostility (Boyle, Richards, & Baglioni, 1993; Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997), depression (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986; Giambra & Traynor, 1978), and pathological gambling (Blaszczynski, McConaghy, & Frankova, 1990). Thus, it is clear that individual differences in one's propensity to experience boredom have great relevance.

Farmer and Sundberg (1986) developed the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) in order to measure the general trait of boredom proneness. This 28-item scale, initially thought to be unidimensional, is typically adapted to a 7-point Likert format to increase measurement sensitivity and is now viewed as multidimensional (McLeod & Vodanovich, 1991; Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990). In fact, factor analytic studies have found between two and five factors (Ahmed, 1990; McLeod & Vodanovich, 1991; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990). The first two factors have been replicated across studies and are labeled External Stimulation (BPexts) and Internal Stimulation (BPints). BPexts measures one's need for excitement, challenge, and change in the external environment. Elevated BPexts scores are interpreted as reflecting boredom due to the lack of external stimulation. BPints measures one's ability to generate adequate internal stimulation (i.e., to keep oneself interested or entertained), and high scores are interpreted as boredom due to a lack of internal stimulation. Research has demonstrated that BPexts and BPints have different correlates (e.g., Kass et al., 2001; Rupp & Vodanovich, 1997; Watt & Blanchard, 1994), lending support to the view of boredom proneness as a multidimensional construct.

After noting that psychoanalytic authors have long posited a connection between boredom, anger, and aggression, Rupp and Vodanovich (1997) used the BPS to explore the potential relationship of boredom proneness to anger expression and aggression. After categorizing their sample as high or low in boredom proneness using a median split on the BPS, they performed a series of MANCOVAs controlling for respondent age and gender. Using Spielberger's (1996) State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI), they found that participants with higher total BPS scores reported more anger suppression, outward anger expression, and lower adaptive control of anger. They also found that high BPS participants obtained higher total scores on the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992) and on its Hostility subscale. Secondary analyses in which median splits were computed for the BPexts and BPints subscales showed that high BPexts participants obtained higher total AQ scores, reported more verbal aggression, hostility, and anger on the AQ, and more anger suppression and anger expression on the STAXI than low BPexts participants. In contrast, high BPints respondents differed from low BPints respondents only on anger suppression (higher) and anger control (lower). Regression analyses generally confirmed these findings in that BPexts predicted outward anger expression, anger suppression, and scores on the Anger, Hostility, and Verbal Aggression subscales of the AQ while BPints predicted anger suppression and anger control.

Rupp and Vodanovich's (1997) findings indicate that boredom proneness may be useful in understanding self-reported anger expression and aggression. However, the authors suggested that their findings should be considered as tentative because a number of other constructs may mediate the relationships between boredom proneness and anger expression or aggression (e.g., sensation seeking, depression, impulsiveness, Type A personality traits, etc.). They suggested that

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