Predictors of Job Boredom

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PREDICTORS OF JOB BOREDOM

by

MITCHELL EID

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors in the Major Program in Psychology in the College of Psychology and in The Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Summer Term, 2018

Thesis Chair: Dr. Steve Jex
ABSTRACT

Although job boredom is increasingly common in the workplace, little research has examined its’ causes. Reducing job boredom has relevance to companies looking to increase the well-being of their employees in addition to their productivity. This study examined what variables are related to and predict job boredom. The Big Five personality traits and job characteristics as defined by Hackman and Oldham specifically, skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback from the job itself were included. A regression analysis revealed that emotional stability, openness and autonomy were significant predictors of boredom. While those were the only variables predictive of boredom, there were other significant correlations as well. These findings suggest that future research should examine the relationships between the variables in this study and control for factors to further gain insight into possible causes of boredom.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank you to Dr. Steve Jex, your guidance and expertise made this research possible and I appreciate all of your time and effort helping me with this project.

Thank you to Dr. Dana Joseph for serving on my thesis committee and all of the other advice you have given me as I have navigated through the research process.

All the rest of my gratitude to my parents for everything, for your support, for being there, for inspiring my love of learning and the academic process without which I would have never chosen to undertake this project.
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INTRODUCTION

Imagine yourself sitting in a cubicle, staring at a computer screen. You can hear the people around you typing away and talking. You have been staring at the same spreadsheet for over an hour. Then you look at the time, “it’s only two o'clock”, you say to yourself. “Why can’t it be five already?” Many of us have had those days where things are moving slow or we are just not captivated by the necessary tasks we need to perform. Anecdotally, this seems like it is perhaps a common issue but what about for others? Are many other people experiencing boredom at work? Some research suggests that they are and that the problem may be becoming increasingly widespread (Mael & Jex, 2015). A large number of people may be experiencing boredom but is this really a serious issue?

What impact does boredom have on employees? Is it meaningful and does it cause any significant problems? Some researchers have found links between job boredom and various counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) such as theft, sabotage, withdrawal, abuse and production deviance (Bruursema, 2007; Bruursema, Kessler & Spector, 2011). Job boredom has also been found to have negative effects on a person's health and may affect their job attitudes (Harju, Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2014). Specifically, increased stress, turnover intention and intentions to retire early. Others have found those experiencing job boredom to have increased absenteeism and more dissatisfaction with their work (Kass, Vodanovich & Callender, 2001). Research has also found that job boredom can lead to depressive complaints and distress (van Hooff & van Hooff, 2014). With all the possible negative effects, job boredom is something that should be avoided where possible and thoroughly studied. However does boredom get the attention its consequences warrant? Some researchers believe it does not, especially when
compared to other negative affective states (Fisher, 1993; Mael & Jex, 2015). The purpose of my study is to explore what leads to job boredom and more specifically personality factors such as the Big 5 and job characteristics. In the review to follow, I will describe what boredom is, describe the Five Factor model of personality, examine job characteristics that should be related to boredom, and finally I will state my hypotheses.

DEFINING JOB BOREDOM

Before proceeding any further I think it is important to discuss what job boredom is and how it is differentiated from other constructs. Mikulas and Vodanovich (1993) define job boredom as “a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction, which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating situation” (Definition section, para.1). Said otherwise, tasks or situations that trigger boredom are not enjoyable nor do they inspire enthusiasm. Another definition comes from Fisher (1993), who defined it as an “unpleasant, transient affective state in which the individual feels a pervasive lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the current activity” (p. 397). Barbalet (1999), described boredom as a negative emotional response to a lack of meaning.

Barbalet (1999) also contrasted boredom with depression saying that depression is directed inward while boredom is directed outward with depression including a loss of self-esteem while boredom a loss of meaning. Mael and Jex (2015) add that depression leads to a loss of interest in any sort of stimuli or activity while boredom is specific to certain tasks or situations. van Tilburg and Igou (2012) conducted a series of studies to distinguish boredom from a variety of affective states including sadness, anger and frustration finding that what
distinguishes boredom is a feeling of being unchallenged and that their actions are meaningless with regard to their circumstances. They also found boredom to be linked with another construct called boredom proneness which is the degree to which a person is susceptible to boredom. Boredom proneness is a separate construct from job boredom, which is the subject of this paper. Schaufeli and Salanova (2014) discussed the similarities and differences between boredom and burnout with both being a response to the amount of stimulation at work. One is a result of too much stimulation (burnout) while the other too little with both resulting in fatigue as a symptom.

POSSIBLE PREDICTORS OF JOB BOREDOM

So far we have discussed what boredom is, its impact, its increasingly common occurrence and that it is a construct distinct from many other constructs. In this present study I will explore what contributes to job boredom. The study of job boredom has traditionally looked at what leads to boredom from two perspectives. The traits of the individual, with the most common trait studied being that of boredom proneness and the other perspective looks at the type of job tasks people perform (the situation) (Cummings, Gao & Thornburg, 2016; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014). I will continue viewing the problem through this lens but instead of boredom proneness and specific job tasks, I will examine both the personality characteristics of the Big 5 and job characteristics as defined by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976, 1978) as predictors of boredom because there has not be any research into these factors specifically.

The Five Factor Model (McCrae & John, 1992) has been one of, if not the most widely studied personality theory in recent times. The Big 5 personality traits have been linked with a variety of behaviors including many related to work (Barrick, 2005). Some of these traits have
been found to be significant factors that can be used to predict job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The model has been validated across a variety of instruments and people (McCrae & Costa, 1987) and factor analysis has shown that while other personality traits can have value, these are the five key personality traits to examine (Noller & Comrey, 1987). Boredom proneness is likely a lower level personality trait itself that is subordinate to the Big 5 and this suggests a connection between the Big 5 and boredom that merits studying the connection between the two.

The five factors include openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism or emotional stability. Those high in openness are characterized by having unusual thinking patterns, valuing intellectual matters, having a wider range of interests and being introspective (McCrae & John 1992). Conscientiousness is observed in those who are dependable, ethical, productive and have high ambition. Extraversion is related to talkativeness, assertiveness, gregariousness and being expressive. Agreeableness is characterized by not being critical, sympathy, generosity, compassion and trust. Finally, those low in neuroticism or high in emotional stability would display consistent moods, high self-esteem, ability to take criticism and a lack of excess worry.

In addition to individual differences in personality affecting job boredom, the characteristics of the job itself have a large influence on whether a person will experience boredom. The Job Characteristics Model is one that uses an instrument called the job diagnostic survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). The model has been studied, altered and validated by many researchers (Fried, Y., & Ferris, 1987; Idaszak & Drasgow, 1987). While not quite as widespread as the Big 5 it has been around for quite a few years now and widely been used. Applications
have included job crafting, increasing engagement, job satisfaction and other uses (Harju, Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2016).

![Job Characteristics Model - Hackman & Oldham (Garg & Rastogi, 2006)](image)

In this model, five job characteristics are scrutinized. These are skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. Skill variety is the amount of variation in skills and tools used by a worker when performing tasks of the job (Morgeson, Ga & Campion, 2013). Task identity is the degree to which the worker feels they are responsible for the tasks they are performing. Task significance is how much the job affects others and whether it does so positively or negatively. Autonomy is determined by how much say the worker has in how
he/she can go about completing his/her tasks. Lastly feedback, feedback is whether the worker will know the results or success level of his/her task performance once the task is completed. All of the above factors have been linked to various psychological states and it will be useful to know the relationship they have with boredom as well.

All of the job characteristics described above are positive influences on an employee’s reaction to his/her job (Morgeson, Ga & Campion, 2013). As such I expect higher scores on each characteristic to result in lower scores in job boredom. A job lacking in skill variety would require the worker to use the same small set of skills and tools for every task. Jobs that feature high repetition and monotony have been viewed as likely to cause boredom (Mael & Jex, 2015). A job that lacks task identity would lead to the worker feeling little to no connection to their work, this could lead to a lack of interest and thus boredom. A job with little task significance may also lead to a lack of interest because the worker may question the point of doing such work as it has no benefit to others. A job with low autonomy would consist of following strict procedures for how to complete each task. This would lead to less complex thinking, one simply does as they are told which leads to a lack of stimulation and likely boredom. Finally, a job with no feedback would also have little meaning. If you do not ever know if what you are doing is right or wrong why would you be as invested in the work? This would lead to lower stimulation and again likely boredom. As you can see, job characteristics can greatly affect the level of boredom that employees experience.

For the personality characteristics, some research has previously been done on some of the traits. For instance, extraversion has been found to relate to higher boredom proneness (Ahmed, 1990). Conscientiousness has also been linked to boredom proneness but with higher
scores being associated with being less prone to boredom (Mkrtchyan, Macbeth, Solovey, Ryan, & Cummings, 2012). Low emotional stability has been linked with various undesirable psychological states including anxiety, depression, anger, embarrassment, worry and insecurity (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Job boredom is also undesirable and as such I would expect those low in emotional stability to experience more boredom than those with higher emotional stability. I expect the results to be consistent with these previous findings. It is unclear at this time what relationship openness and agreeableness will have with job boredom so for now I have no expectations on results relating to those traits.

I believe the connection between personality and boredom is intuitive for some but others may ask why is personality and specifically the Big 5 related to job boredom? As I stated earlier job boredom has been defined as a negative affective state or negative emotional response to a lack of meaning. As Revelle and Scherer (2009) discussed, personality is an individual pattern of emotions, behaviors and thoughts. It is the constant across situations which helps to determine how a person will respond to various stimuli, challenges and problems. As Revelle and Scherer also mention, two particular components of personality (extraversion and neuroticism) have been connected with individual differences in levels of affect. There are many other differences in various individual traits that someone could examine to see how different people vary in their levels of boredom. In the interest of simplicity and practicality however, it makes sense to use a small number of characteristics that relate to many aspects of life and have been shown to be related to a large number of subtraits.

Finally, beyond individual relationships between these variables and job boredom
I am interested to see which will explain more of the variance in job boredom. Will it be personality or job characteristics? Said more broadly, what is a stronger factor the person or the situation? Answering this question has practical value. If personality is more important, then companies will want to focus on selecting employees that fit the job such that they will be less likely to experience job boredom. However, if the job itself is more important, then companies should invest more time crafting jobs that will limit the potential for job boredom.

**THE PRESENT STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to see which is more predictive of job boredom, the Five Factors or the five job characteristics. In addition, the following specific hypotheses have been generated:

Hypothesis 1: There is a negative relationship between skill variety and job boredom.

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative relationship between task identity and job boredom.

Hypothesis 3: There is a negative relationship between task significance and job boredom.

Hypothesis 4: There is a negative relationship between autonomy and job boredom.

Hypothesis 5: There is a negative relationship between feedback and job boredom.

Hypothesis 6: There is a negative relationship between emotional stability and job boredom.

Hypothesis 7: There is a negative relationship between conscientiousness and job boredom.

Hypothesis 8: There is a positive relationship between extraversion and job boredom.
In addition to the above, I will explore whether job boredom is better explained by the Big 5 personality traits or by job characteristics as defined by Hackman and Oldham (1975). Not many studies have examined both individual differences and the characteristics of the work environment as they relate to causing job boredom. By answering this exploratory question I hope to find some insight into how these factors influence the undesirable feeling of boredom on the job. This insight has practical implications for organizations looking to reduce job boredom because they would then know whether they should spend resources on screening candidates likely to become bored versus using those resources to redesign jobs that are likely to lead to boredom.
METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

187 students took part in this study. Participants were students attending the University of Central Florida. The students included both men and women anywhere from 18 to 49 years old. While most of the participants were White/Caucasian (65.8%), Hispanic, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander and other unspecified ethnicities were also represented in this study. Students in this sample worked between 15 and 60 hours per week with an average of 28 hours per week. All participants were over the age of 18 and gave their informed consent. Only students who worked at least part-time (15 hours a week or more) were included. Participants were recruited through the psychology department’s online SONA system (https://ucf.sona-systems.com/). The students received .25 credits for their participation which they can use for course credit.

MATERIALS

IPIP-FFM. A measure of the Big 5 containing 50 items (Goldberg, 1999). Cronbach’s alpha (reliability) is estimated to be .87 for extraversion, .82 for agreeableness, .79 for conscientiousness, .86 for emotional stability and .84 for intellect/imagination. The items are rated on a five point Likert scale: (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree). This inventory is included in Appendix A. Examples of items on this measure include:

Am the life of the party. (Extraversion)

Sympathize with others’ feelings. (Agreeableness)

Get chores done right away. (Conscientiousness)
Have frequent mood swings (Neuroticism)

Have a vivid imagination (Intellect/Imagination)

**Job Diagnostic Survey.** The shortened version of this survey includes 21 items (Hackman & Oldham, 1974). Some of the items were slightly modified so that all items would be measured on the same Likert scale. Cronbach’s alpha (reliability) is estimated to be .71 for skill variety, .59 for task identity, .66 for task significance, .66 for autonomy, .71 for feedback from the job. The items are measured on a seven point Likert scale: (1 - very inaccurate 2 - mostly inaccurate 3 - slightly inaccurate 4 - uncertain 5 - slightly accurate 6 - mostly accurate 7 - very accurate) This scale is provided in Appendix D. Examples of items on this measure include:

- The job requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills. (Skill variety)
- The job provides me the chance to completely finish the pieces of work I begin. (Task identity)
- The job is arranged so that I do not have the chance to do an entire piece of work from beginning to end. (Task significance)
- The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work. (Autonomy)
- Just doing the work required by the job provides many chances for me to figure out how well I am doing. (Feedback from the job itself)
- Supervisors often let me know how well they think I am performing the job. (Feedback from agents)
- The job requires a lot of cooperative work with other people. (Dealing with others)
**Job Boredom Scale.** A thirteen item inventory which measures the extent an individual is experiencing job boredom (Lee, 1986). Items will be measured on a seven point Likert scale: (1 - Never, 2 - Very Rarely, 3 - Sometimes, 4 - Often, 5 - Very Often, 6 - Almost always, 7 - Always). The Cronbach’s alpha (reliability) of this scale is .95 (Kass et al, 2001). This scale is provided in Appendix C. An example of an item on this scale is, “Do you find the job dull?”

**Demographic Questionnaire.** This questionnaire was given to collect general data on each participant. This general information included questions asking for the person’s age, race, year in school, major and job title. Two job related questions were also be included which asked the participant to list how many hours a week they work on average as well as their job title. This questionnaire is included in Appendix D.

**PROCEDURE**

This study was be completed online. Participants used a computer with internet access to take part in the study. When the participants accessed the online study link they were first told the general purpose of the study and the general procedures for completing the study after which they were asked to provide their informed consent by clicking “agree”. Before completing any additional requirements the participants were screened to make sure they were working at least part-time (15 or more hours a week), any participants who indicated they did not meet this requirement were not be allowed to continue. From this point on the participants were asked to complete a series of inventories. First they completed the IPIP-FFM to measure personality on five dimensions. After this they completed questions measuring the characteristics of their job using the Job Diagnostic Survey and their level of job boredom using the Job Boredom Scale.
Finally, they were asked some demographic questions. When they finished all questions they were thanked for their time and granted credit.
RESULTS

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Observed Range</th>
<th>Possible Range</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Boredom</td>
<td>47.11</td>
<td>14.09</td>
<td>13-85</td>
<td>13-91</td>
<td>.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Five</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>31.94</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>12-50</td>
<td>5-50</td>
<td>.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>39.64</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>18-50</td>
<td>5-50</td>
<td>.887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>35.76</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>18-50</td>
<td>5-50</td>
<td>.875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>32.10</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>12-49</td>
<td>5-50</td>
<td>.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>37.33</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>11-50</td>
<td>5-50</td>
<td>.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill Variety</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Identity</td>
<td>14.04</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>4-21</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>14.49</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>4-21</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Significance</td>
<td>14.17</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>13.88</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.604</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( N = 187 \)

In Table 1 above, descriptive statistics are displayed. These include means, standard deviations, ranges (possible and observed), and reliability as measured by Cronbach’s Alpha. As can be seen, observed ranges were relatively close to the possible ranges so there does not appear to be a problem with range restriction. Reliabilities were all over .80 for the big five variables and job boredom but was considerably lower for the measures of job characteristics. This may have been due to the small number of items in each of these measures (\( n = 3 \)).
Table 2. Intercorrelations among Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Job Boredom</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Extraversion</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.093</td>
<td>.208**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.103</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.300**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emotional Stability</td>
<td>-.159*</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.193**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Openness</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.166*</td>
<td>.506**</td>
<td>.238**</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Skill Variety</td>
<td>-.314**</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>-.083</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Task Identity</td>
<td>-.112</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.225**</td>
<td>.204**</td>
<td>.174**</td>
<td>.176**</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Feedback</td>
<td>-.180**</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.260**</td>
<td>.308**</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.309**</td>
<td>.162*</td>
<td>.395**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Task Significance</td>
<td>-.316**</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.178**</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.183**</td>
<td>.561**</td>
<td>.221**</td>
<td>.320**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Autonomy</td>
<td>-.351**</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.154*</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.137*</td>
<td>.371**</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>.331**</td>
<td>.376**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 187, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01

Table 2 shows the correlations for all variables measured. As shown in Table 2, hypotheses 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are supported since skill variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback and emotional stability were all significantly and negatively correlated with job boredom. Hypotheses 2, 7 are not supported since task identity and conscientiousness are not significantly related to job boredom. In addition, hypothesis 8 is not supported since extraversion is not significantly related to job boredom.
A regression analysis was performed with job boredom regressed on both the Big 5 personality traits and job characteristics and the results for the overall model are displayed in Table 3. As can be seen, the overall model which includes all variables is significant and explains 19.5% of the variance in job boredom. Table 3 also shows that three significant predictors of job boredom are emotional stability, openness and job autonomy. Interestingly, when the big five and job characteristics were analyzed in separate regression analyses, the big five model was not statistically significant ($p > .05$) while the job characteristics model was ($p < .01$). In the job characteristics only model, autonomy was the only significant predictor ($p < .01$) as was the case in the overall model. This can be seen in tables 4 and 5.
Table 4. Summary of Regression Results - Big 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Big Five</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.320</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>-.268</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.204</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 187$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 5. Summary of Regression Results - Job Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill Variety</td>
<td>-.459</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Identity</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.292</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>-.177</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Significance</td>
<td>-.464</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>-.832**</td>
<td>.274</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>0.155**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 187$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to look into possible causes and explanations for why job boredom occurs. As stated earlier, job boredom is a growing problem in the workplace and organizations as well as employees should try to reduce this unpleasant state where possible. The first step to do that is to know what variables are most related to and predictive of job boredom.

Most of the hypotheses made were supported. Based on the zero-order correlations it was found that skill variety, task significance, autonomy, feedback and emotional stability were all significantly and negatively correlated with job boredom. Conversely, task identity, extraversion and conscientiousness are not significantly related to job boredom. It may be the case that these relationships exist but are not strong enough for the sample size gathered. The correlations for these hypotheses were in the expected direction but did not meet the threshold for significance. It may also have been that interactions between personality and job characteristics were obscuring their relationships to job boredom.

The main research question of this study was left open ended. Specifically, I wanted to see whether job boredom is better explained by the Big 5 personality traits or the job characteristics described by Hackman and Oldham (1975). The results were unclear as to whether workplace boredom is best explained by personality traits or job characteristics. For example, the results revealed that the regression model containing only job characteristics was significant while the model only containing the Big 5 was not. On the other hand, when the regression analysis included all variables, both emotional stability and openness were significant predictors from the Big 5 while autonomy was the only job characteristic that predicted workplace boredom. As stated earlier, these conflicting results may be explained by the different
variables interacting with each other; that is, personality traits may partially explain why people end up in jobs with certain characteristics. Interestingly, when looking at the correlations in Table 2, four out of five of the job characteristics showed significant relationships with job boredom while only emotional stability from the Big 5 did.

The current study added some knowledge about how personality and job characteristics affect people experiencing job boredom. In addition to boredom proneness, we now can see that personality and job characteristics interact and combine to have a significant effect on whether a person will experience job boredom. These factors are also individually related to job boredom as we saw in the correlation table. Before this study, little research had been done to find out what leads someone to be bored with the exception of boredom proneness which has seen a few studies examine it’s impact (Ahmed, 1990; Kass, Vodanovich & Callender, 2001; Bruursema, 2007). With this study and future research into this issue, more insight will be gained into just what causes people to get bored with their jobs.

The current results also show possible implications for companies looking to reduce job boredom. These results suggest that organizations should focus on designing jobs high in job autonomy where possible. Trust your employee to be able to make decisions about how to accomplish the tasks you assign, give them the tools they need and review progress as necessary. This could be good news for many companies in that if there were specific personality traits that are independently problematic, there is much less that can be done to address the problem. Generally, jobs can be redesigned more easily than new quality employees can be found.

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**
There were clearly some limitations with this study. All measures used were self-report and therefore the results may have been different if more objective methods had been used. In addition, the sample consisted of students from the University of Central Florida exclusively. While all were only asked to participate if they worked at least 15 hours it is possible that the results would not generalize to non-student workers. It is also possible that working with students who are generally in their late teens and early twenties, restricted the type of jobs that we could survey. People out of school, that are older, may have different job experiences that could lead to a lack of generalizability for this sample. Another limitation is the cross-sectional design of the study. We are not able to establish that the variables studied actually caused job boredom because other factors could be involved. For example, it could be that employees who are bored view their jobs differently than employees who are highly engaged in their work. Finally, we did not include boredom proneness in the study. This was because much of the previous boredom research has examined boredom proneness, so it was felt that examining the Big 5 would represent an extension of the literature. Even so, not including boredom proneness takes away the ability to see how it may interact and affect the variables we did include.

Further study into what influences job boredom is necessary. In the future it would be useful to look for interactions between the variables used in this study. As mentioned earlier it is possible that boredom is caused by interactions between personality traits and job characteristics. After knowing the nature of these interactions it would also be useful to moderate or mediate certain variables and see how others affect job boredom. This could further provide insight into just what leads to job boredom and how someone’s personality interfaces with different job characteristics. People with certain personality traits may be selecting certain types of jobs that
typically have a specific set of job characteristics. The intertwined nature of these variables needs to be unwound to know just how impactful each variable is and in what way.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite evidence showing that workplace boredom is on the rise and that it is related to organizationally relevant variables, very little empirical research has examined its causes. The present study sought to address this knowledge gap. In this study a sample of students that worked at least part-time was collected and established inventories were used to assess their personality, level of current job boredom and the characteristics of their job. The data was analyzed using regression to see what factors were significant in predicting job boredom. What was found was that while multiple personality traits and job characteristics are related, it depends. Personality and job characteristics are highly interactive. The type of job someone picks will depend on their personality. All of these factors combine to significantly influence job boredom together. Emotional stability, openness and autonomy were significant predictors but more study is needed. In the future we can further research these interactions to gain more insight into how and why personality and the job itself influence job boredom.
APPENDIX A: 50-ITEM IPIP-FFM
Factor I (Extraversion) - 10-item scale (Alpha = .87)

Am the life of the party.
Feel comfortable around people.
Start conversations.
Talk to a lot of different people at parties.
Don't mind being the center of attention.
– keyed
Don't talk a lot.
Keep in the background.
Have little to say.
Don't like to draw attention to myself.
Am quiet around strangers.

Factor II (Agreeableness) - 10-item scale (Alpha = .82)

+ keyed
Am interested in people.
Sympathize with others' feelings.
Have a soft heart.
Take time out for others.
Feel others' emotions.
Make people feel at ease.
– keyed
Am not really interested in others.

Insult people.

Am not interested in other people's problems.

Feel little concern for others.

Factor III (Conscientiousness) - 10-item scale (Alpha = .79)

+ keyed

Am always prepared.

Pay attention to details.

Get chores done right away.

Like order.

Follow a schedule.

Am exacting in my work.

– keyed

Leave my belongings around.

Make a mess of things.

Often forget to put things back in their proper place.

Shirk my duties.

Factor IV (Emotional Stability) - 10-item scale (Alpha = .86)

+ keyed

Am relaxed most of the time.

Seldom feel blue.

– keyed
Get stressed out easily.
Worry about things.
Am easily disturbed.
Get upset easily.
Change my mood a lot.
Have frequent mood swings.
Get irritated easily.
Often feel blue.

Factor V (Intellect or Imagination) - 10-item scale (Alpha = .84)

+ keyed
Have a rich vocabulary.
Have a vivid imagination.
Have excellent ideas.
Am quick to understand things.
Use difficult words.
Spend time reflecting on things.
Am full of ideas.

– keyed
Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.
Am not interested in abstract ideas.
Do not have a good imagination.
APPENDIX B: JOB DIAGNOSTIC SURVEY
How accurate is the statement in describing your job?

1 = very inaccurate  2 = mostly inaccurate  3 = slightly inaccurate  4 = uncertain  5 = slightly accurate  6 = mostly accurate  7 = very accurate

1. The job requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills.
2. The job requires a lot of cooperative work with other people.
3. The job is arranged so that I do not have the chance to do an entire piece of work from beginning to end.
4. Just doing the work required by the job provides many chances for me to figure out how well I am doing.
5. The job is quite simple and repetitive.
6. The job can be done adequately by a person working alone; without talking or checking with other people.
7. The supervisors and co-workers on this job almost never give me any "feedback" about how well I am doing in my work.
8. This job is one where a lot of other people can be affected by how well the work gets done.
9. The job denies me any chance to use my personal initiative or judgment in carrying out the work.
10. Supervisors often let me know how well they think I am performing the job.
11. The job provides me the chance to completely finish the pieces of work I begin.
12. The job itself provides very few clues about whether or not I am performing well.
13. The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work.

14. The job itself is not very significant or important in the broader scheme of things.

15. The job requires me to work closely with other people (either clients, or people in related jobs in your own organization)

16. The job allows significant autonomy, permitting me to decide on my own how to go about doing the work.

17. The job involves doing a "whole" and identifiable piece of work allowing me to complete tasks that have an obvious beginning and end as opposed to tasks that involve a small part of the overall piece of work, which is finished by other people or by automatic machines.

18. The job contains a significant amount of variety, requiring me to do many different things, using a variety of talents.

19. The job is significant or important; the results of the work are likely to significantly affect the lives or well-being of other people.

20. The managers or co-workers on this job let me know how well I am doing by providing frequent feedback on my performance.

21. The job itself provides me with information about my work performance which includes clues about how well I am doing separate from any feedback given by co-workers or supervisors.
APPENDIX C: JOB BOREDOM SCALE
The questions that follow all deal with your experience of your job as dull or exciting. Please answer the questions with respect to your own reactions to your present job.

*Instructions.* Please use the scale that follows to answer the questions.

1 = Never 5 = Very Often
2 = Very rarely 6 = Almost always
3 = Sometimes 7 = Always
4 = Often

1. Do you get bored with your work?
2. Is your work tedious?
3. If the pay were the same, would you like to change from one type of work to another from time to time?
4. Do you like the work you do?
5. Do you get tired on the job?
6. Do you find the job dull?
7. Does the job go by too slowly?
8. Do you become irritable on the job?
9. Do you get apathetic on the job?
10. Do you get mentally sluggish during the day?
11. Do you get drowsy on the job?
12. Does the time seem to go by slowly?
13. Are there long periods of boredom on the job?
How old are you?

What year are you in school?
Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Graduate Student

What is your major?

Are you of hispanic or latino origin?
Yes
No

Which race do you most closely identify with?
White
Black or African American
Asian or Pacific Islander
Native American or Alaska Native
Other
How many hours do you work in a typical week?

What is your current job title?


Bruursema, K. (2007). *How individual values and trait boredom interface with job characteristics and job boredom in their effects on counterproductive work behavior* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida).


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