Phenomenology of Boredom Coping:
Understanding Students’ Lived Experiences of Coping with Boredom in College

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Boredom

Psychological Perspectives on Boredom

Dissatisfaction with One's Present State
Disengagement from the Environment
Failure to Sustain Attention
Altered Perception of the Passage of Time
Perception of Insufficient Meaning or Sub-optimal Challenge
Arousal (High and Low)
Motor Expression
Neural Correlates
Constraint and Agency
Trait versus State Boredom
Multiple Types of Boredom
Domain Specificity
Summary

Beyond the Psychological Perspective

Sociocultural Perspectives on Boredom

Boredom Regulation and Coping

Emotion Regulation
Emotion Regulation and Boredom
Emotion Regulation and Academic Boredom
Summary
Coping and Academic Boredom
The Boredom Coping Scale
Coping Profiles
Summary .......................................................................................................................... 76
What is Phenomenology? ................................................................................................. 77
Selecting a Phenomenological Approach ....................................................................... 78
Principal Methodological Components.......................................................................... 82
   Lifeworld ...................................................................................................................... 82
   Pre-reflective consciousness ....................................................................................... 83
   Essences ...................................................................................................................... 85
   Addressing presuppositions ....................................................................................... 86
Emotion, Boredom, and Coping: A Personal Perspective ................................................ 89
Purpose and Research Question ...................................................................................... 92
Chapter 2. Methods ......................................................................................................... 95
   Institution and Participant Selection .......................................................................... 95
   Participant Profiles ..................................................................................................... 101
      Zed .......................................................................................................................... 101
      Amethyst ............................................................................................................... 101
      Leslie ...................................................................................................................... 102
      Joe ......................................................................................................................... 102
      Ben ......................................................................................................................... 103
      Steven .................................................................................................................... 103
      Ignacio ................................................................................................................... 104
      Sing ......................................................................................................................... 104
      Ava ......................................................................................................................... 105
      Asia ........................................................................................................................ 106
      Alex ........................................................................................................................ 106
      Sarah ...................................................................................................................... 107
      Kumar .................................................................................................................... 107
      Shubham ............................................................................................................... 108
      Anne ....................................................................................................................... 108
Collecting Lived Experience Descriptions ..................................................................... 109
   Why obtain lived experience descriptions from others? ........................................... 109
   Interview 1. .............................................................................................................. 110
PHENOMENOLOGY OF BOREDOM COPING

Journal entries .................................................................................................................... 115

Interview 2 ......................................................................................................................... 117

Compensation ...................................................................................................................... 119

Chapter 3. Analysis ................................................................................................................. 120

Thematic Analysis ................................................................................................................. 123

Familiarizing Myself with the Data ..................................................................................... 126

Generating Initial Codes ...................................................................................................... 127

Searching for Themes .......................................................................................................... 134

Reviewing and Refining Themes ......................................................................................... 140

Defining and Naming Themes ............................................................................................. 144

Producing the Report ........................................................................................................... 145

Chapter 4. Results ..................................................................................................................... 146

Academic Boredom ............................................................................................................... 146

Theme 1: Boredom meant lack of involvement ................................................................. 146
Theme 2: Boredom meant discomfort and aversion .......................................................... 153
Theme 3: Boredom meant emptiness ................................................................................. 159
  Boredom meant having nothing to do ............................................................................ 170
  Boredom meant feeling tired ......................................................................................... 177
  Boredom meant time slows down .................................................................................. 179
  Boredom meant wasting time ....................................................................................... 181
Theme 4: Boredom meant wanting to escape ..................................................................... 166

Summary ............................................................................................................................ 186

Academic Boredom Coping ................................................................................................. 187

Theme 1: Being respectful ................................................................................................. 187
Theme 2: Turning away from academic boredom ............................................................. 197
Theme 3: Turning toward academic boredom .................................................................. 219
Theme 4: Seeking meaning and purpose ........................................................................... 231

Summary ............................................................................................................................ 240

Chapter 5. Discussion ............................................................................................................... 242

Academic Boredom ............................................................................................................... 244

Academic Boredom Coping ................................................................................................. 253
Rigor and Trustworthiness .......................................................... 264

 Epoché ................................................................................. 265
 Rich experiential materials .................................................. 265
 Sound interpretation ......................................................... 266
 Thick description ............................................................. 267

 Limitations and Future Directions ........................................ 269

 Contributions and Conclusion ........................................... 273

 Appendices .......................................................................... 275

 References ........................................................................... 295
Abstract

Boredom has been identified as one of the most frequently and intensely experienced academic emotions and detrimental to student learning, motivation, self-regulation, and achievement; yet, there has been limited research into how students cope with or regulate their boredom in academic contexts such as the classroom, hallway, or library, and while studying or completing assignments. Consequently, we currently understand very little about the student’s experience of coping with boredom. Using a hermeneutic phenomenological research method, the present study sought to fill this gap in the literature through the thematic analysis of fifteen college students’ lived experience descriptions of academic boredom and coping. Participants completed two one-on-one interviews and three online journal entries across the course of a single semester wherein they provided experiential accounts of boredom and coping in college. Thematic analyses revealed eight boredom themes (lack of engagement, discomfort and aversion, emptiness, a desire to escape, nothing to do, feeling physically tired, time slowing down, and wasting time) and four boredom coping themes (being respectful, turning away from boredom, turning toward boredom, and seeking meaning). These findings make significant contributions toward better understanding of college students’ experience of academic boredom and boredom coping, and may serve to inform professors and college administrators seeking to support students in adaptively coping with their academic boredom.
Résumé

L’ennui a été identifié comme étant l’une des émotions académiques les plus fréquemment et intensément éprouvées, et préjudiciables à l’apprentissage, la motivation, l’autorégulation et la réussite des élèves; et pourtant, peu d’études ont été menées sur la manière dont les étudiants s’adaptent ou régulent leur ennui dans un contexte académique tel que la salle de classe, les couloirs, ou la bibliothèque, et pendant qu’ils étudient ou complètent leurs devoirs. Par conséquent, nous comprenons très peu l’expérience des étudiants en matière d’ennui. A l’aide d’une méthode de recherche phénoménologique herméneutique, la présente étude vise à combler le manque de littérature sur la question par l’analyse thématique de l’expérience vécues par quinze étudiants au collège. Les participants ont complété deux entrevues individuelles et trois entrées dans un journal en ligne, au cours d’un seul semestre, dans lesquelles ils ont décrit leurs expériences de l’ennui et d’adaptation à l’ennui. Les analyses thématiques ont révélé quatre thèmes relatifs à l’ennui (manque d’implication, malaise et aversion, vide, et désir d’évasion) et quatre thèmes relatifs à l’adaptation à l’ennui (être respectueux, se détourner de l’ennui, se tourner vers l’ennui, et rechercher du sens). Ces résultats contribuent de manière significative à une meilleure compréhension de l’expérience des étudiants au collège en matière d’ennui et d’adaptation à l’ennui, et pourraient servir à informer les enseignants et personnels administratifs qui cherchent à aider les étudiants à faire face et s’adapter à leur ennui académique.
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Table

Table 1: Examples of Initial Coding................................................................. 131
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement ................................................................. 275
Appendix B: Recruitment Screening Task ................................................................. 276
Appendix C: Interview 1 Protocol ............................................................................ 279
Appendix D: Script for Establishing Rapport and Obtaining Consent .................... 282
Appendix E: Consent Form ....................................................................................... 283
Appendix F: Interview 2 Protocol ............................................................................ 286
Appendix G: Naïve Descriptions of Boredom and Coping ........................................ 288
Appendix H: Excluded Journals .............................................................................. 292
Chapter 1. Introduction

When discussing the experience of boredom with contemporary students, you are likely to encounter vivid colloquialisms (e.g., “bored to death,” “bored out of my mind,” “bored to tears”) that can reveal much about boredom’s aversive and dissatisfying character in the 21st century. Through educational psychology research, boredom has been identified as one of the most frequently and intensely experienced academic emotions (e.g., Daschmann, Goetz, & Stupnisky, 2011; Larson & Richards, 1991; Nett, Goetz, & Hall, 2011; Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Stupnisky, & Perry, 2010; Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, & Perry, 2002).¹ For most students, boredom is an inevitable part of daily schooling. Even among post-secondary students, who have relative flexibility when choosing their courses and setting their schedules, boredom is often an unavoidable experience (e.g., Mann & Robinson, 2009; Webster & Hadwin, 2015). Yet compared with other academic emotions, such as anxiety (Zeidner, 2007, 2014), boredom remains relatively underexplored (Breidenstein, 2007; Tze, Daniels, & Klassen, 2016; Vogel-Walcutt, Fiorella, Carper, & Schatz, 2012). The limited research that does exist is predominantly quantitative and has focused on defining academic boredom and identifying its antecedents and outcomes. This literature strongly suggests that academic boredom is often detrimental to student learning, motivation, self-regulation, and achievement across educational levels and subject domains (see Tze et al., 2016, for a review).

Given that this burgeoning literature suggests academic boredom is a pervasive, aversive, and debilitating emotion, it is important and prudent to understand how students regulate or cope with boredom in school. Minimal research has been conducted on this topic, and it is

¹ When emotions correspond with learning outcomes and educational experiences, such as lecturing, test-taking, and studying, they have been defined as academic emotions (Goetz & Hall, 2014; Vogel-Walcutt, et al., 2012).
predominantly quantitative (e.g., Daniels, Tze, & Goetz, 2015; Nett, Goetz, & Daniels, 2010). Additionally, the limited research on academic boredom coping has been primarily based upon a single theoretical model (Nett et al., 2010) adapted from the adult stress-coping literature (Holahan, Moos, & Schaefer, 1996). Consequently, as a research community, we currently understand very little about the student’s experience of coping with boredom in academic contexts. Moreover, there have been few attempts to understand how students cope with boredom in school by asking them to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. Providing students the occasion to describe their experiences, verbally or in writing, produces opportunities for exploring and understanding that are not accessible when responses are restricted a priori. In the case of academic boredom coping, qualitative approaches have been undervalued and underutilised.

In addition to a dearth of qualitative inquiry, there are a number of practical reasons for studying how students perceive and respond to boredom in classrooms and lecture theatres, on campus, and through online learning platforms. Understanding how students cope with boredom can be fruitful information for teachers looking to alter their instructional approach or design curriculum to foster a learning environment that enables productive coping. Eliminating boredom for all students at all times is unlikely; however, finding contextualised and creative ways to assist students in adaptively coping with academic boredom is an attainable goal. Another reason for examining boredom is to better teach students to have greater awareness of how they respond to boredom and to embrace coping techniques that allow them to self-regulate their learning, stay engaged, and support their peers in being adaptive copers. Ultimately, these opportunities could contribute to reducing the duration and intensity of students’ boredom.
Few studies have documented students’ lived experiences of boredom coping in educational settings. Specifically, there have been few attempts to understand the meaning that students ascribe to their boredom coping by exploring their perspectives through their own words. Recent calls to pursue qualitative and mixed methods approaches to the topic of boredom coping in school (e.g., Daniels et al., 2015; Eren, 2013) have acknowledged that research questions aligned with qualitative designs will be invaluable in establishing a comprehensive understanding of academic boredom coping (e.g., Breidenstein, 2007; Goetz & Franzel, 2006; Kanevesky & Keighley, 2003; Sharp, Hemmings, Kay, Murphy, & Elliot, 2016).

The introductory chapter of this dissertation will begin with an etymological discussion of boredom followed by descriptions of boredom as a psychophysiological state and a social construction. I will then turn to the emotion regulation and stress coping literatures and examine the extant research on academic boredom coping. Finally, I will discuss phenomenology as a research method that can answer questions about the meaning of boredom coping in educational contexts.

**Boredom**

Boredom is multifarious and ambiguous by definition, and has to date represented a polarizing topic among researchers and intellectuals alike. Many have recognized its elusive and indefinable qualities (e.g., Goodstein, 2005; Musharbash, 2007; Spacks, 1995; Svedsen, 2005), yet as a lived human experience, boredom has been a topic of intense scrutiny for some of the most vaunted writers and thinkers. On the one hand, boredom has been described as “the root of all evil” (Kierkegaard, 1843/1987, p. 285), “the desire for desires” (Tolstoy, 1887/2012, p. 418), and one of two “enemies of human happiness” (Schopenhauer, 1850/2004, p. 97). Erich Fromm (1963/2004) wrote, “I am convinced that boredom is one of the greatest tortures. If I were to
imagine Hell, it would be the place where you were continually bored” (p. 150). For Baudelaire (1857/2014), boredom is the most wicked of monsters:

Amongst the jackals, panthers, bitches,
Apes, scorpions, vultures, serpents,
Yelping, howling, snarling, groveling monsters,
In the squalid menagerie of our vices,
There is one uglier, filthier and most wicked!
Although it manages no grand gestures or screams,
It would gladly make the earth a shambles
And swallow up the world with a yawn.
Boredom!—involuntary tears burden its eye,
As it dreams of gallows and smokes its hookah.
Reader, you know this dainty monster well (pp. 154-155)

In line with these comments, many academics have documented research findings from the past few decades that implicate boredom, and a tendency to be bored (i.e., boredom proneness or trait boredom), with a wide-variety of adverse consequences including drug and alcohol abuse, pathological gambling, juvenile delinquency, risky sexual behaviour, eating disorders, truancy and dropout, anxiety, depression, job dissatisfaction and absenteeism, and unsafe driving (e.g., Bargdill, 2000; Chin, Markey, Bhargava, Kassam, & Loewenstein, 2017; Eastwood, Frischen, Fenske, & Smilek, 2012; Fahlman, Mercer-Lynn, Flora, & Eastwood, 2013; Van tilburg & Igou, 2016b). Consequently, the vast majority have concluded that boredom is problematic.

On the other hand, boredom has been lauded as an impetus for productivity and creativity and for what it can teach individuals about themselves if they allow for its embrace. Bertrand
Russell (1930) extolled boredom as “one of the great motive powers throughout the historical epoch,” (p. 56) while Ralph Linton (1936) declared that the human capacity for being bored “lies at the root of man’s cultural advance” (p. 90). According to Nietzsche (2001/1882), boredom, while unpleasant, has value as a force of productivity: “For thinkers and all sensitive spirits, boredom is that disagreeable ‘windless calm’ of the soul that produces a happy voyage and cheerful winds. They have to bear it and must wait for its effects on them” (p. 57). On the authority of Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky (1995), “boredom speaks the language of time, and it is to teach you the most valuable lesson in your life . . . the lesson of your utter insignificance” (p. 109). Similarly, a minor contingent of academics has been using their research to claim that boredom is beneficial, arguing instead that it is one’s inability or unwillingness to tolerate boredom that allows the experience to become problematic (e.g., Bench & Lench, 2013; Gasper & Middlewood, 2014; Lomas, 2017; Mann & Cadman, 2014; van Tilburg & Igou, 2016b). For example, boredom could inform an individual that their present environment or activity lacks meaning or value and that they should seek out new experiences or set new goals, perhaps leading to creative thinking and self-reflection.

For researchers in the social sciences, the experience of boredom has been defined as an emotion, a mood, an affective state, a condition, a trait, an existential state of being, a conflict, a drive, a feeling, and a force. There have been multiple boredom-related constructs proposed such as situational boredom, existential boredom, trivial boredom, dignified boredom, hyperboredom, normal boredom, pathological boredom, profound boredom, indifferent boredom, and reactant boredom, among others (Fenichel, 1934; Goetz, Frenzel, Hall, Nett, Pekrun, & Lipnevich, 2014; Healy, 1984; Heidegger, 1929; O’Hanlon, 1981; Spacks, 1995; Svendsen, 2005). As a research community we have documented and operationalized work boredom (e.g., Cleary, Sayers,
Lopez, & Hungerford, 2016; Cummings, Gao, & Thornburg, 2016; Game, 2007; Loukidou, Loan-Clarke, & Daniels, 2009; Reijseger et al., 2013; Skowronska, 2012; Whiteoak, 2014), leisure boredom (e.g., Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger 1987, 1990; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001), sexual boredom (e.g., Tunariu & Reavey, 2003; Watt, 2000; Watt & Ewing; 1996) and, of course, academic boredom (e.g., Acee et al., 2010; Goetz & Hall, 2014; Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel, Barchfeld, & Perry, 2011; Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012). In addition to contextual diversity, boredom has been examined in research with people from a wide variety of cultures and regions such as Canada, China, Germany, Scandinavia, South Africa, and Indigenous peoples of Australia and the United States (e.g., Gjesme, 1977; Jervis, Spicer, Manson, & A1 Superpfp Team, 2003; Musharbash, 2007; Ng, Liu, Chen, & Eastwood, 2015; Wegner, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008).

When attempting to understand the present-day meaning of a concept or phenomenon, it can be productive to examine its etymology for hints and clues. Unfortunately, it appears that boredom’s emergence is as ambiguous as its current status. Its exact etymological origin is unknown, but there is some agreement among boredom scholars that the verb to bore and the noun boredom first emerged in the English language during the mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, respectively (Goodstein, 2005; Healy, 1984; Peters, 1975; Spacks, 1995; Svendsen, 2005). While boredom as a popular construct may be relatively young, older concepts, such as acedia (derived from the Greek akēdia meaning “without care”) and ennui (derived from the Latin inodiare meaning “to hold in hatred”), that are sometimes used to connote

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2 According to van Manen (1997), “being attentive to the etymological origins of words may sometimes put us in touch with an original form of life where the terms still had living ties to the lived experiences from which the originally sprang” (p. 59).
3 LaMothe (2007)
4 Healy (1984)
boredom hint at a conceptual history that is much older. Yet these concepts have their own unique etymologies that prevent them from being equated with boredom in its modern form; they are “suggestive rather than declarative of our present day understanding of the term” (Gabriel, 1988, p. 157). As Peters (1975) summarizes in his extensive archaeology of boredom, the terms to bore and boredom were “not early cognate terms for acedia, accidie, sloth, melancholy, or weariness…and [boredom] seems to have shared little of the theological, psychological, and philosophical dimensions of acedia, melancholie, and ennui” (pp. 507-508; see also, Barbalet, 1999; Darden & Marks, 1999; Goodstein, 2005; Spacks, 1995).6

What can be inferred, at least in the English-speaking world, is that the concept of boredom is a relatively recent invention, while “melancholia, sloth, and various forms of weariness appear to have sufficed through the seventeenth century” (Peters, 1975, p. 507). According to Elizabeth Goodstein, boredom “came into being as Enlightenment was giving way to Industrial Revolution . . . not just a response to the modern world but also an historically constituted strategy for coping with its discontents” (p. 3). As Patricia Meyer Spacks (1995) contends in her treatise on the literary history of boredom, “that the word has not always existed, has not even existed for long, suggests not necessarily that the experience is new but at least that the concept has not always be necessary” (p. 25; see also, Peters, 1975). I will return to this point further on in the introduction while examining various sociocultural approaches to boredom.

5 As Peters (1975) attests, “To retain the generic term boredom in studying historical figures and periods is to blur the sometimes fine, sometimes obvious distinctions within societies as well as between historical periods” (p. 510)
6 Goodstein (2005) contends that there was a transnational linguistic convergence in and around the eighteenth century where ennui and langeweile (a German word that translates as “long while”) took on existential and temporal connotations that became more synonymous with boredom’s emergence. These changes reflected experiential transformations as modernization “literally altered the quality of human being in time” (p. 3). Similarly, Svendsen (2005) restricts his analysis of boredom to the “more or less synonymous” concepts of langeweile and kjedsomhet (the Norwegian word for boredom), which emerged in their respective languages at around the same time as boredom in English.
Despite its apparent pervasiveness, boredom remains a messy and complex concept. For those seeking answers to questions about boredom’s structure, meaning, or function, you are unlikely to find consensus within any domain or field of study. Yet, in spite of, or perhaps because of its definitional ambiguity, boredom, in all of its varied forms and degrees, is a fascinating topic of study. In this chapter, I will explore the concept of boredom from a variety of perspectives. As my research is situated in the field of educational psychology, I will frequently incorporate literature that focuses specifically on boredom in academic contexts. However, I will also strive for a wider exposure that includes a sociological perspective on boredom. As such, descriptions of boredom as a psychophysiological state or emotion, a social or cultural construction, and an existential state of being will be assessed.

**Psychological Perspectives on Boredom**

Relative to other fields, such as sociology and philosophy, psychology has produced the largest body of research on boredom that, in recent years, has grown exponentially. As van Tilburg and Igou (2017a) recently highlighted, 1,422 articles on boredom were published in psychology journals between 2010-2015 including 326 articles in 2015 alone (compare that to less than one a year on average between 1926-1980; Smith, 1981). With this growth has come an exciting array of research into the causes, consequences, and correlates of boredom across various contexts. Yet, despite this progress, a fundamental issue continues to plague the field, namely the oft-expressed lack of consensus on how to define or describe this thing called boredom (e.g., Belton & Priyadharshini, 2007; Eastwood et al., 2012; Elpidorou, 2017; Raffaelli, Mills, & Christoff, 2017; van Tilburg & Igou, 2012; Vodanovich, 2003). Specifically, what

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7 According to Turner (2009), “much of the problem is that emotions operate at many different levels of reality—biological and neurological, behavioral, cultural, structural, and situational; and depending upon which aspects of emotions are relevant to a researcher, a somewhat different definition will emerge” (p. 341).
In answering this question, it is worth noting that many psychological descriptions of boredom begin with the assumption that boredom is an emotion. The schools of thought on human emotion situated within the field of psychology are quiet varied (see Gross & Barrett, 2011; Shuman & Scherer, 2014) including basic emotion approaches (e.g., Ekman, 1972; Panksepp, 1998), appraisal approaches (Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 1984), psychological constructionist approaches (Barrett, 2009; Russell, 2003), nonlinear dynamic systems approaches (Camras, 2011; Fogel et al., 1992; Lewis, 2005), and social constructionist approaches (Soloman, 2003; Mesquita, 2010). Yet, despite the divergent assumptions held by these groups, there is some general consensus regarding the characteristics of emotions (Shuman & Scherer, 2014).

First, emotions have situational specificity—that is, they are triggered by real-time, remembered, prospective, or hypothetical situations. Second, emotions are short-term and fleeting phenomena exhibiting temporal variability and constantly changing intensity and focus. Third, emotional episodes have multiple underlying components, including a subjective feeling or affective component, a motivational or action tendency component, an external expressive (i.e., facial, bodily) component, an internal physiological component, and a cognitive component that can include perceptual effects, labelling, and appraisals (whether appraisals are antecedents to emotions or component of emotions is still debated; see Moors, 2009). Fourth, evolutionary and sociocultural forces influence the timing, type, and intensity of peoples’ emotions. These defining features distinguish emotions from other phenomena that fall under the superordinate label of affect, including attitudes, moods, preferences, and affective dispositions (see Scherer, 2005). As such, many psychologists draw the conclusion that boredom is indeed an emotion (i.e.,
transient, event-focused, socioculturally-influenced, and multicomponential; e.g., Damrad-Frye & Laird, 1989; Elpidorou, 2017; van Tilburg and Igou, 2012).

Accepting that emotions consist of multiple constituent components, boredom has often been defined through some combination of affective, cognitive, neurophysiological, expressive, and motivational or volitional characteristics. Such approaches are often rooted in componential models of emotion or affect (e.g., Kleinginna & Kleinginna 1981; Scherer, 1984), such as Scherer’s widely-cited component process model of emotion (Scherer, 1984, 1987, 2009). The model specifies that an emotional episode consists of interdependent, synchronised change in five organismic subsystems “in response to the evaluation of a stimulus, an event, or intraorganismic changes of central importance to the major needs and goals of the organism” (Scherer, 2000, p. 74). The synchronised changes in each subsystem represent the components of an emotion that, when integrated, can lead to overt behaviour and conscious categorization and identification using labels like “anxiety” or “boredom.”

There are also a number of dimensional approaches to classifying emotions (Larsen & Diener, 1992; Russell, 1980; Thayer, 1996; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). The dimensions have been conceptualized and labeled in diverse ways, yet there is support for the notion that all approaches represent the same affective space (see Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1999; Yik, Russell, Feldman Barrett, 1999). The dimensional affective space has been characterized as a circumplex (i.e., emotions are spread around the perimeter of the space) rather than a simple

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8 In a review of theories of emotion, Moors (2009) emphasized that “emotion theorists disagree about the exact number and nature of the components they include in the emotional episode…but also about the component(s) that they include in or identify with the emotion” (p. 627-628). Within the context of academic emotions, leading theories and approaches (e.g., Graesser & D’Mello, 2012; Meyer & Turner, 2006; O’pt Eynde & Turner, 2006; Pekrun, 2006; Schutz et al. 2006), and recent reviews on academic boredom specifically (Goetz & Hall, 2014; Tze et al., 2016), have adopted the view that emotional schema or episodes encompass most or all of the five components.
structure (i.e., clustered along the dimensional axes), and the dominant dimensional models of affect agree on a two-dimensional approach to classifying emotions. These dimensions are labeled valence (i.e., positive–negative, pleasant–unpleasant) and arousal (i.e., activation). Consistent with this approach, valence and arousal are posited to be conscious experiences with underlying physiological correlates (Feldman-Barrett & Russell, 1999; Reisenzein, 1994; Russell, 2003).

Componential and dimensional approaches are also reflected in existing psychometrically-validated self-report measures of boredom (e.g., Fahlman et al., 2013; Hunter, Dyer, Cribbie, & Eastwood, 2016; Todman, 2003; van Tilburg & Igou, 2012; for a review, see Vodanovich & Watt, 2016). Context-specific self-report instruments, such as the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ; Pekrun, Goetz, & Perry, 2005) and the Academic Boredom Scale (ABS; Acee et al., 2010), also assess multiple underlying components and dimensions. For example, the AEQ assesses motivation (e.g., “I think about what else I might be doing rather than sitting in this boring class”), physiology (e.g., “I get so bored I have problems staying alert”), affect (e.g., “I find this class fairly dull”), and cognition (e.g., “Because I get bored my mind begins to wander”). In addition, technological advances in facial coding, body posture tracking, and neuro-physiological measures, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging, skin conductance, cortisol, and heartrate, lend further support to dimensional and componential descriptions of boredom (e.g., Chanel, Rebetez, Betrancourt, & Pun, 2008; Danckert & Merrifield, 2016; D’Mello & Graesser, 2009; Merrifield & Danckert, 2014). Using these methods, researchers have also attempted to differentiate boredom’s psychophysiological signature from qualitatively similar emotions and states such as sadness, frustration, apathy, or depression (e.g., Goldberg, Eastwood, LaGuardia, & Danckert, 2011; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985;
Recently, Elpidorou (2017) provided a comprehensive review of the psychological literature that collated the existing definitions of boredom into nine characteristics belonging to four components: affective, cognitive, volitional, and physiological (for overlapping reviews of the boredom literature see Eastwood et al., 2012; Raffaelli et al., 2017; Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012). Using Elpidorou’s model, selected due to its recency and comprehensiveness, I will discuss each of the nine characteristics and provide illustrative examples from the literature.9

**Dissatisfaction with One’s Present State**

Boredom is the experience of being dissatisfied with the present moment for one reason or another. The dissatisfaction contributes to boredom feeling negative, unpleasant, or aversive (e.g., Eastwood et al., 2012; Fisher, 1993, 1998; Green-Demers, Stewart, & Gushue, 1998; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Ng et al., 2015; Pekrun et al., 2010; Pekrun, Hall, Goetz, & Perry, 2014; Posner et al., 2009; Preckel, Goetz, & Frenzel, 2010; Russell, 1980; Shaw, 1996; Todman, 2003; van Hooff & van Hooft, 2014; Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012; Webster & Hadwin, 2015). This characteristic is captured in Shaw’s (1996) definition of boredom as “a state of under-stimulation, under-arousal, lack of momentum, or a lack of psychological involvement associated with dissatisfaction in the task situation” (p. 275), or Mikulas and Vodanovich’s (1993) definition of boredom as “a state of relatively low arousal and dissatisfaction which is attributed to an inadequately stimulating situation” (p. 3). To further support the claim that boredom is an aversive experience, Elpidorou (2017) pointed to experience-sampling research where other

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9 It is worth noting that Elpidorou (2017) did not attempt to support an existing definition of boredom or create a new one but instead incorporated all of the common characteristics across definitions. In so doing, he acknowledged that some characteristics may be antecedents of boredom according to some definitions and part of boredom itself according to others. He does not attempt to rectify these differences, but, in pointing them out, allows the reader to draw their own conclusions.
negative states, like sadness and worry, have been reported as co-occurring with boredom (e.g., Chin, 2017; Goetz et al., 2014).

**Disengagement from the Environment**

Many psychology researchers consider disengagement to be a central component of the experience of boredom. At work, at home, in school, during free time, bored individuals are typically withdrawn or disengaged from their environment (e.g., Fahlman, Mercer, Gaskovski, Eastwood, & Eastwood, 2009; Fenichel, 1951; Goldberg et al., 2011; Greenson, 1953; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Lewinsky, 1943; Mercer & Eastwood, 2010; Passik et al., 2003). For example, Sundberg, Latkin, Farmer, and Saoud (1991) incorporate disengagement into their definition of boredom as “an internal state ranging from mild to severe unpleasantness, which people describe as a feeling of tedium, meaninglessness, emptiness, wearisomeness, and lack of interest or connection with the current environment” (p. 210). Some theorists and researchers see boredom as a combination of disengagement from and dissatisfaction with the present. Fahlman et al. (2013), for example, define boredom as “the experience of being disengaged from the world and stuck in a seemingly endless and dissatisfying present” (p. 68; see also Eastwood et al., 2012). Elpidorou (2017) further proposed that disengagement was aligned with another common definitional feature of boredom—the desire to be doing something other than what one is currently doing at that moment (e.g., De Chenne, 1988; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2012).

**Failure to Sustain Attention**

A prominent feature of many definitions of boredom is that the individual experiences difficulty paying attention to whatever it is they want to or should be paying attention to such as a lecture, a television show, their partner, or a supervisor (e.g., Damrad-Frye & Laird, 1989;
Evidence for attentional difficulty as a central feature of boredom is covered most extensively by Eastwood and colleagues (2012) who describe boredom as an initial inability to “successfully engage attention with internal (e.g., thoughts or feelings) or external (e.g., environmental stimuli) information required for participating in satisfying activity” (p. 484). Another example that is frequently referenced is Fisher’s (1993) definition of boredom 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. 396). Failure to sustain attention is also aligned with the physiological component of boredom in Pekrun’s (2010, 2014) model of achievement emotions wherein boredom is assumed to be characterized by low levels of arousal and activation.

**Altered Perception of the Passage of Time**

While bored, time may appear to slow down or even stand still. A twenty-minute meeting may feel like it lasts an entire hour, and an hour lecture may feel like a three-hour marathon. This perception is often contrasted with Csikszentmihalyi (1975) conception of flow, a state wherein one loses track of time due to being totally cognitively engaged in an activity. The experience of distorted time has been a central feature of many definitions of boredom (e.g., Acee et al., 2010; Fenichel, 1951; Gabriel, 1998; Greenson, 1953; Hartocollis, 1972; Hunter et al., 2016; Markey, Chin, Vanepps, & Loewenstein, 2014; Martinez-Sierra & Gonzales, 2014; Pekrun et al., 2014; Tze, Klassen, Daniels, Li, & Zhang, 2013b; Wangh, 1975). For Greenson (1953), boredom includes “a distorted sense of time in which time seems to stand still” (p. 7) or a “torturous waiting, and the painful slowness of the passage of time” (1951, p. 346). According to Wangh
(1975), with boredom “our attitude toward time is altered…time seems endless, there is no distinction between past, present, and future. There seems to be only an endless present” (p. 541). Elpidorou (2017) hypothesized that in situations that fail to sustain our attention or engage us, we are likely to focus more attention on the passage of time and, in doing so, the boring meeting or lecture may feel like it lasts much longer than it truly does.

**Perception of Insufficient Meaning or Sub-optimal Challenge**

Another characteristic of boredom identified within the psychological literature is the perception that the current task or situation lacks meaning for the individual or does not present an optimal challenge (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Fahlman et al., 2009; Markey et al., 2014; Moynihan, Igou, & van Tilburg, 2017; van Tilburg & Igou, 2012; van Tilburg, Igou, & Sedikides, 2013). For example, van Tilburg and Igou (2012) conducted four experiments to identify the distinct experiential components of boredom and compare them to other negative affective experiences. Their conclusion was that “boredom makes people feel unchallenged while they think that the situation and their actions are meaningless” (van Tilburg & Igou, 2012, p. 181). Alternatively, some researchers contend that the non-optimal meaning, complexity, or challenge of a specific situation are better understood as causes of boredom rather than experiential characteristics (e.g., Daschmann et al., 2011; de Chenne, 1988; Fiske & Maddi, 1961; Pekrun et al., 2010; Perkins & Hill, 1985). For example, perceiving a task as unchallenging may cause the experience of boredom such that the individual disengages or struggles to pay attention. How to separate the antecedents from the experiential qualities of boredom continues to cause debate among psychologists.
Arousal (High and Low)

Is boredom a state of low arousal, high arousal, or a combination of the two? Qualitative research exists to support both high- and low-arousal definitions (e.g., Goetz & Frenzel, 2006; Harris, 2000; Marsh, 1983; Martin et al., 2006; Pekrun et al., 2010; Vandeweile, 1980). This point is succinctly highlighted in Pekrun et al. (2010) wherein 29 university students were interviewed immediately after class or while studying. All but one student (96.5%) indicated that their boredom was unpleasant. On the other hand, 17.4% of students described their boredom as activating in response to questions about physiological changes and motor responses. The majority of psychologists appear to support the definition of boredom as a state of low arousal (i.e., dysphoric, fatigued, lethargic; e.g., Birdi, Warr, & Oswald; 1995; Martínez-Sierra & Gonzales, 2014; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Perrin-Wallqvist, Archer, & Norlander, 2004; Russell, 1980; Tze et al., 2013b; see Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012, for a review of low-arousal definitions). Those who have claimed that boredom is a state of high arousal (i.e., agitated, irritable, restless; e.g., Bench & Lench, 2013; Berlyne, 1960; Fisher, 1993; Hill & Perkins, 1985) have faced arguments that boredom itself is not activating, but activation accompanying boredom is a result of concurrent or sequential activating emotions or environmental influences; that arousal is ill-defined and potentially multidimensional; and that boredom itself is a multidimensional construct with varying degrees of activation (see Goetz et al., 2014a).

Faced with the mixed findings, several researchers have conceded that high- and low-arousal forms of boredom are not necessarily inconsistent; the level of arousal may change at different stages of the boredom episode and that, in the latter stages, high arousal may signify an attempt to self-stimulate (e.g., Eastwood et al., 2012; Fahlman et al., 2013; Hamilton, 1981; Merrifield & Danckert, 2014; O’Hanlon, 1981; Pattyn, Neyt, Henderickx, & Soetens, 2008;
Smith, 1981). Bernstein (1975), for example, claims that restlessness or apathy can “dominate the picture of one person’s boredom while the other may dominate the next, or their dominance may alternate within one person, but restlessness and apathy are always present together to some degree in boredom” (p. 516). Elpidorou (2017) is among this latter group in firmly rejecting the notion of different types of boredom.

**Motor Expression**

Definitions of boredom that incorporate a motor or expressive (i.e., vocal, bodily, facial) component are relatively limited and supporting research is quite scant. Thus far, the typical characteristics of boredom that have been identified include collapsed or slack body posture; yawning; few bodily movements; leaning one’s head back; an empty gaze; a monotonous, slow rate of articulation; and a lack of an archetypal facial expression (e.g., D’Mello & Graesser, 2009; Eckman, 1984; Johnson & Scherer, 2000; McDaniel et al., 2007; Pekrun et al., 2010; Raccanello & Bianchetti, 2014; Wallbott, 1998). The combination of low movement dynamics and absent facial manifestation has likely fed into the notion that boredom is a relatively inconspicuous or “silent” emotion (see Goetz et al., 2014a; Pekrun et al., 2010). Detecting boredom through facial expressions, via cameras linked with a computer, and body posture, via sensor pads attached to a chair, are two of the primary channels investigated thus far (e.g., D’Mello & Graesser, 2009; D’Mello, Dale, & Graesser, 2012; McDaniels et al., 2007). Importantly, observational channels bypass a major criticism of self-reporting in that individuals may not be able to accurately perceive their own emotions or correctly label them (see Mauss & Robinson, 2009). Researchers are increasingly recognising the weaknesses and imperfections of these technologies and frequently utilize a multimodal approach that includes retrospective affect judgements (e.g., Baker, D’Mello, Rodrigo, & Graesser, 2010; Bosch & D’Mello, 2017;
D’Mello, Craig, & Graesser, 2009; D’Mello, King, Entezari, Chipman, & Graesser, 2008; D’Mello, Taylor, Davidson, & Graesser, 2008; Graesser et al., 2006).

Neural Correlates

While psychologists continue to debate the existence of unique neural signatures for affective states (e.g., Barrett, 2017; Gross & Barrett, 2011), neuroimaging studies are increasingly seeking to define boredom by its neural correlates. Electroencephalography (EEG) research measuring neural oscillations has linked boredom to higher alpha wave activity and lower beta wave activity (e.g., Oswald, 1962; Tabatabaie et al., 2014). As increased alpha activity is typical during mental inactivity, and higher beta activity is correlated with sustained attention (see Raffaelli et al., 2017), an inverse correlation between beta power and boredom would be consistent with definitions of boredom as attentional failure (e.g., Eastwood et al., 2012; Fisher, 1993). Limited MRI and fMRI research has produced mixed results concerning the activation of specific brain regions during boredom such as the hippocampus and anterior insula (e.g., Dal Mas & Wittman, 2017; Mathiak, Klasen, Zvyagintsev, Weber, & Mathiak, 2013; Ulrich, Keller, Hoenig, & Grön, 2014). The most consistent finding pertains to the activation of brain areas associated with the default mode network (DMN) that has been linked to mind-wandering and attentional failure. Danckert and Merrifield (2016) found that participants in an induced boredom condition showed similar patterns of activation in the DMN compared with participants in a resting state and those in a state of sustained attention suggesting that the three states are closely related. Moreover, subtle differences in DMN activation between these three states appear to indicate that boredom is not just a state of disengagement but also one in which we fail in our attempts to become engaged. Future neuroimaging research is needed before including a neural signature as part of the definition of boredom.
When interpreting the results, Raffaelli et al. (2017) cautioned readers to be cognizant of how boredom was being operationalized because inconsistencies across studies could limit substantive conclusions. Ulrich et al. (2014), for example, had participants complete arithmetic problems while undergoing MRI scans, with boredom operationalized as under-stimulation resulting from completing very easy arithmetic problems. Mathiak et al. (2013) had participants play a video game that varied in goal-directed activity and complete a questionnaire that measured their valenced affect (i.e., positive–negative) before and after undergoing an fMRI scan. Mathiak and colleagues claimed to be assessing boredom during the fMRI when the participants recorded a drop in valence (i.e., negative affect) combined with low goal-oriented activity in the video game (i.e., inactivity). Danckert and Merrifield (2016) induced boredom by showing participants an eight-minute video of people hanging clothes while they underwent an fMRI scan (see Merrifield & Danckert, 2014). As these three studies illustrate, researchers’ interpretations of functional neural images can be greatly influenced by their operational definition of boredom.

**Constraint and Agency**

The final characteristic of boredom acknowledged by Elpidorou (2017) is the perception of being constrained in some way and feeling a lack control, agency, or autonomy over a situation. A number of authors define boredom with this experiential component (e.g., Eastwood et al., 2012; Fahlman et al., 2013; Geiwitz, 1966; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Martin et al., 2006; Mercer-Lynn, Bar, & Eastwood, 2014; Pekrun et al., 2010, 2014; Steinberger et al., 2016; Troutwine & O’Neal, 1981), and it is often related to feeling stuck or trapped and frustrated or restless. For example, this component is a central feature of Eastwood et al.’s (2012) widely cited definition of boredom as “the aversive experience of wanting, but being unable, to engage in
satisfying activity” (p. 483). At the same time, Elpidorou clarified that feeling constrained or lacking agency may not be a necessary experiential characteristic of boredom in all contexts (e.g., leisure or free-time boredom). The experience of academic boredom, however, often involves situations where students can feel restricted by curricular, institutional, or teacher demands or by normative constraints related to classroom behaviour (e.g., Larson & Richards, 1991; Pekrun et al., 2010; Shaw, Caldwell, & Kleiber, 1996).

Amalgamating the nine characteristics into their four components, Elpidorou (2017) provided the following succinct description of boredom based on his review of the psychological literature:

In terms of its affective character, boredom is a transitory, aversive state. While bored, one experiences feelings of dissatisfaction with one’s current situation. One feels weary and often even frustrated. In terms of its cognitive character, boredom is characterized by an inability to sustain attention, the perception of a slower passage of time, mental fatigue, and mindwandering. In terms of its volitional character, a desire to do something else is both prominent and strong in boredom. Finally, in terms of its physiological character, boredom is characterized by a decrease in arousal, although an increase may also occur. As a low arousal state, boredom is disengaging, whereas as a high arousal state it prepares our body for action or change. (p. 14)

It is worth noting that the vast majority of definitions discussed thus far typically refer to one variant of boredom—the so-called typical “responsive feeling” (Bernstein, 1975) that occurs with a repetitive task, a dull meeting, or a monotonous lecture. This variant of state boredom has been labeled as situative (Svendsen, 2005), normal (Fenichel, 1951), or simple (Healy, 1984). In contrast, there are descriptions of a second variant of boredom referred to as existential...
(Svendsen, 2005), profound (Heidegger, 1929), or pathological (Fenichel, 1951). This variant has been referred to as a malaise that “corresponds more precisely to the French ennui, a state of soul-defying remedy, an existential perception of life’s futility” (Sparks, 1995, p. 27). The latter variant will be discussed in the Results section as it pertains to the participants’ descriptions of boredom in the present study.

Before moving on, however, a brief note that psychologists who have viewed boredom through a psychodynamic lens have similarly described experiential components that overlap with those discussed above (e.g., Fenichel, 1951; Gabriel, 1988; Greenson, 1953; Lewinsky, 1943; Phillips, 1993; Wangh, 1975). Greenson (1953), for instance, defined boredom as:

A state of dissatisfaction and a disinclination to action; a state of longing and an inability to designate what is longed for; a sense of emptiness; a passive, expectant attitude with the hope that the external world will supply the satisfaction; a distorted sense of time in which time seems to stand still. (p. 7).

Dissatisfaction, a distorted sense of time, and a desire for something else all resonate with Elpidorou’s (2017) encapsulation of the boredom literature, as does Fenichel’s (1951) description of boredom as “the coexistence of a need for activity and activity-inhibition, as well as by stimulus-hunger and dissatisfaction with the available stimuli” (p. 349; cf. Conrad, 1997, p. 468; Sparks, 1995, pp. 4-6).

What distinguishes the psychoanalysts from that of the mainstream is that, in their view, boredom includes not only a desire for something else but also the inability to identify what that desire is. The individual wants something engaging, meaningful, or fulfilling to do but is unable to consciously access what that something should be. Psychoanalysts argue that these desires or
“instinctual aims” are repressed by the Ego because they are in some way threatening. Subsequently, the individual feels an emptiness or deprivation that they will seek to fill by turning to the external world in hopes of a solution. It is what Phillips (1993) describes as “the most absurd and paradoxical wish, the wish for a desire” (p. 68). When the external world fails to fill the emptiness, frustration can manifest. This nuanced description has important implications for coping with boredom that will be addressed below.

**Trait versus State Boredom**

In addition to the experiential components and characteristics, an additional nuance to our understanding of boredom from the psychological perspective concerns the trait–state dichotomy introduced by Spielberger (1966; see also Rosenberg, 1998). *Trait boredom* is a relatively stable predisposition or propensity to experience boredom. Typically, trait boredom is assessed by asking an individual about their beliefs concerning how they have felt or might feel in certain contexts (e.g., King, McInerney, & Watkins, 2012; Nett et al., 2010; Ranellucci, Hall, & Goetz, 2015) or more generally without reference to a specific domain (e.g., Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). This format requires aggregating across experiences and forming a global report. Boredom proneness, for example, is an underlying propensity for boredom represented as a personality construct that remains relatively stable across contexts (e.g., Boredom Proneness Scale; Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). Conversely, *state boredom* is the actual real-time or in situ experience of boredom and must be assessed while engaged in the activity of interest or shortly thereafter (e.g., Bieg, Goetz, & Hubbard, 2013; Goetz, Lüdtke, Nett, Keller, & Lipnevich, 2013a; Larson &

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10 According to some boredom scholars, the psychodynamic or psychoanalytic writers constitute one of four central theoretical approaches to boredom (see Eastwood et al., 2012; Fahlman et al., 2013; Mercer-Lynn, Flora, Fahlman, & Eastwood, 2011).
PHENOMENOLOGY OF BOREDOM COPING

Richards, 1991). With this in mind, it should be noted that the present study utilized students’ retrospective reports by asking them to reflect on a recent academic boredom experience that, in some cases, occurred only seconds prior to the report (for additional discussions on trait versus state boredom, see Elpidorou, 2014, 2017; Fahlman et al., 2013; Vodanovich & Watt, 2016).

Multiple Types of Boredom

As alluded to earlier, the notion of multiple types of boredom has been a recurrent source of theoretical and empirical inquiry in psychology with various researchers having proposed multiple types of state boredom in both academic domains (e.g., Acee et al., 2010) and non-academic contexts (e.g., Greenson, 1953; Neu, 1998; Todman, 2003). A theoretically-based, testable model of multiple state boredom types was proposed by Goetz and Frenzel (2006) following from interviews conducted with Grade 9 students. They examined the characteristics of boredom in educational settings and identified two underlying dimensions (i.e., valence and arousal) that resulted in four boredom types:

(1) Indifferent boredom: slight positive valence, very low arousal (i.e., relaxed, withdrawn, indifferent);

(2) Calibrating boredom: slight negative valence, low arousal but higher than indifferent boredom (i.e., uncertain, receptive to change or distraction);

(3) Searching boredom: slight negative valence, higher arousal than calibrating boredom (i.e., somewhat restless, active pursuit of change or distraction);

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11 Research on academic boredom and other academic emotions has shown a strong tendency towards higher mean-level (i.e., intensity) trait ratings relative to state ratings (e.g., Bieg et al., 2013; Goetz et al., 2013b, 2014b, 2016). This effect has been termed the intensity or impact bias (Buehler & McFarland, 2001; Wilson & Gilbert, 2005). Given that the large majority of academic boredom research has employed trait self-reports, the intensity bias may be obscuring our understanding of how bored students are, thereby generating erroneous practical inferences and implications.
(4) Reactant boredom: highest negative valence, highest level of arousal (i.e., highly restless and motivated to leave the situation for specific alternatives).

Goetz and Frenzel’s (2006) theoretical model was tested by Goetz et al. (2014a) who assessed boredom in achievement and non-achievement contexts using the experience sampling method (ESM) and latent profile analysis. Goetz et al. established internal validity for the model by identifying the four hypothesized boredom types, but also found a fifth class labeled as apathetic boredom, which had a high negative valence and very low arousal similar to learned helplessness or depression. The range in intensity across the boredom types was notably small; thus, arousal and valence were the primary factors differentiating between the five classes. External validity was also obtained by comparing the five classes of boredom on mean levels of well-being, satisfaction, enjoyment, anger, and anxiety, and on their frequencies between achievement contexts (e.g., class, studying, homework) and non-achievement contexts (e.g., sleeping, eating, leisure time). For example, reactant and apathetic boredom were more likely to be reported in achievement settings than non-achievement settings whereas the opposite was true for indifferent boredom.

Despite some limitations (e.g., a small number of external variables were used for establishing qualitative differences; they did not rule out effects of concurrent or sequential emotions; see also, Elpidorou, 2017), Goetz et al. (2014a) established relatively strong validity for a theoretically-based, five-factor conceptual definition of boredom. Specifically, they highlighted substantial “within-boredom-variance” on both the arousal and valence dimensions, thus providing additional empirical evidence against a unidimensional conceptual definition of boredom. For example, there is a lack of consistency in the literature on whether boredom is a low-arousal or high-arousal emotion (e.g., Elpidorou, 2017; Raffaelli et al., 2017). But rather
than argue over if it is one or the other, Goetz et al.’s results suggest that boredom can be both—that is, these authors purport that boredom need not be viewed as a unified construct but instead one that can manifest as qualitatively distinct subtypes. Finally, Goetz et al. speculated on the small but significant degree of between-person variance (24%) regarding the probability of experiencing different boredom types. They interpreted this to mean that some individuals may be more likely to experience certain types of boredom; thus, there may be dispositional or personality factors related to experiencing boredom such as an “indifferent boredom proneness.”

**Domain Specificity**

From the psychological perspective, the final definitional feature to discuss is domain specificity. Within educational settings, students’ emotions, much like other psychosocial constructs (e.g., goals, self-concepts), are organized in domain-specific ways—that is, each domain has unique content, competencies, instruction, and classroom dynamics that could lead students to develop domain-specific experiential boredom (Goetz, Frenzel, Pekrun, & Hall, 2006a; Goetz, Pekrun, Hall, & Haag, 2006b; Goetz, Cronjaeger, Frenzel, Lüdtke, & Hall, 2010a; Goetz, Frenzel, Lüdtke, & Hall, 2010b; Goetz et al., 2007a, 2012, 2013a, 2014b). For example, Goetz et al. (2007a) compared the between-domain relations of five academic emotions among German grade 8 and 11 students in mathematics, German, English, and physics classes. Mean-level descriptive statistics indicated that Grade 8 students experienced greater boredom in German and mathematics classes relative to English and physics, and grade 11 students experienced greater boredom in German and physics classes relative to mathematics and English. Multilevel structural equation modelling revealed that students’ experience of boredom significantly differed across the four domains at both grade levels (i.e., weak between-domain relationships) including the relatively similar domains of mathematics and physics. In terms of
the relative strength of the between-domain relations, boredom was situated in the middle of the pack with enjoyment and anxiety displaying weaker relations. Although the exact moderators of the domain-specific relations (e.g., domain content, teacher characteristics) are just beginning to be examined, existing evidence strongly suggests that boredom, specifically academic boredom, is domain-specific. If or how the experiential components of boredom change from one domain to the next has yet to be examined.

Summary

The psychological literature offers an extensive array of potential characteristics with which to define boredom. After distinguishing state boredom from trait boredom (i.e., the acontextual, stable predisposition or underlying propensity to experience boredom), many psychologists begin with the assumption that boredom is an emotion and from there utilize componential and dimensional models of emotions or affect to identify boredom and differentiate it from qualitatively similar experiences. Thus far, boredom has been defined by some combination of the following: dissatisfaction with one’s present state felt as negative, unpleasant, or aversive; disengagement from one’s environment; difficulty paying attention; the perception that time is passing slowly or not at all; the perception that the current situation lacks meaning or offers suboptimal complexity or challenge; the combination of low movement dynamics and absent facial manifestation; an increase and/or decrease in arousal; the perception of being constrained or lacking agency; and potential activation in the DMN. The existing empirical evidence per component is not always consistent, and debates continue over which components are necessary or sufficient (see Raffaelli et al., 2017). For example, the controversy

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12 A caveat about the between-domain results for academic boredom: Most of the existing research has been conducted with trait assessments of boredom from German middle- and high-school students. Domain specificity among other populations has been largely unexplored.
over whether boredom is a high arousal or low arousal experience continues to polarize boredom researchers (see Elpidorou, 2017).

Perhaps the most successful attempts at consensus have been by those psychologists who have strove for parsimony. Eastwood et al. (2012) are one example, and their definition of boredom as “the aversive state of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity” (p. 483) remains one of the most commonly utilized definitions in the field. A two-dimensional definition of boredom as a negative, deactivating emotion has also seen widespread adoption (Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012). Another potential solution has been to examine the possibility of multiple types of state boredom. A prominent example is Goetz et al.’s (2014) recently validated model that identifies five types of boredom ranging from low arousal, positively-valenced indifferent boredom to high arousal, negatively-valenced reactant boredom. Additional empirical research is likely needed before many psychologists accept that boredom is not a unified construct (e.g., Elpidorou, 2017, 2018). Finally, recent growth in research on domain specificity, especially in educational psychology, highlights the need to acknowledge that the experience of boredom is always situated in a particular context.

**Beyond the Psychological Perspective**

Psychological approaches to theorizing emotions, such as boredom, typically take the stance that emotions are individual, privatized, psychophysiological responses to external stimuli or events. Zembylas (2007) labels this position “emotion as an individual experience” that includes biological essentialist perspectives, such as basic emotion theories (e.g., Ekman, 1992; Izard, 1993), and cognitivist perspectives such as appraisal theories (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Pekrun, 2006) and psychological constructivist theories (e.g., Barrett, 2009; Russell, 2003). When focusing on individual experience, emotions become psychologized, and there is a “presumption
of interiority” (Ahmed, 2004), which is a belief that each individual possesses emotions that then move outwards into the world becoming expressed for others to receive. This “inside-out” approach to emotion generates little concern for how emotions impact others or for the sociocultural contexts wherein the emotions gain meaning (Zembylas, 2007). Consequently, investigations of emotion as individual experience are often decontextualized and reductionist (e.g., cognitive component, feeling component, expressive component), and this is reflected in the variable-centred approach taken by many researchers (see Schutz & Decuir, 2002). From this perspective, the focus tends to be on identifying the structure of emotion as has been exemplified above.

In contrast to the position of emotion as an individual experience, sociological and cultural theorists typically conceive of emotion as a sociocultural experience (e.g., Averill, 1980; Harré, 1986; for reviews, see Lively & Weed, 2016; Turner, 2009). From this perspective, emotions are seen as being constructed by people rather than genetically or biologically determined by nature. Emotions take on meaning from the social and cultural contexts where they are situated at a particular historical moment. In this sense, “emotions are cultural artefacts that convey sociocultural messages . . . not a simple readout of an internal state, but a communicative experience” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 61). As a social construction, the experience, expression, and regulation of emotion is therefore learned. Emotion scripts, rules, and practices are produced and reproduced by social structures and cultures (e.g., schools, universities) and shaped by those in power (e.g., teachers, program chairs, principals; Quinlan, 2016)—that is, emotions are subject to “culturally and historically viable norms defining what should be felt and expressed in various situation” (Lively & Weed, 2016, p. 67). Researchers who examine emotion
from this position often utilize qualitative methodologies, such as observations and interviews, that are sensitive to social, economic, cultural, and political contexts (Zembylas, 2007).

**Sociocultural Perspectives on Boredom**

Though the relative quantity of research into boredom as a sociocultural experience is smaller in comparison to the psychological literature, the former has made contributions that both complement and challenge the latter. First and foremost is the foundational belief that boredom is socially constructed and culturally determined (e.g., Belton & Priyadharshini, 2007; Conrad, 1997; Goodstein, 2005; Peters, 1975; Spacks, 1995). Two notable proponents of this position are Patricia Meyer Spacks (1995) and Elizabeth Goodstein (2005) who have produced two of the most comprehensive studies of boredom to date by detailing the emergence and evolution of boredom in Western culture through an expansive array of literary and sociological texts. Both authors routinely cautioned against universalizing and naturalizing boredom while arguing that attempts to understand and interpret boredom’s dynamic meaning must recognize how boredom is historically and culturally embedded. For example, Spacks contended that “no single definition can encompass the meanings of so culture-bound a term, a word that in less than two and a half centuries has accrued multifarious ideological associations and complicated emotional import” (p. 14). Goodstein added that “while boredom appears to be a private experience of primarily subjective significance, its very pervasiveness marks it as a socially meaningful phenomenon” (p. 12).

To understand boredom as a socially constructed experience with meanings that are fluid and learned, sociocultural researchers have taken a historical perspective that often begins by tracing the etymological origins of the word *boredom*. As discussed earlier, it has been determined that prior to the eighteenth century the word *boredom* did not exist in the English
vocabulary—that is, humans did not demonstrate use of the term *boredom* to identify how they were feeling or what they were experiencing. What Spacks (1995) and Goodstein (2005) have further argued, along with others (e.g., Healy, 1984; Musharbash, 2007; Peters, 1975), is that localized, sociocultural forces converged during modernity that gave rise to a greater need for boredom as a meaningful concept in everyday life. Spacks identified these forces as “the development of leisure as differentiated psychic space; the decline of Christianity; the intensification of concern with individual rights; and the increasing interest in inner experience” (p. 24). In summarizing this position, Anderson (2004) labeled these the material conditions of leisure, secularization, individualism, and bureaucratization (e.g., standardizing how developed, western cultures organize time), respectively. Many of these material effects are assumed to continue to shape boredom’s meaning in post-modern, contemporary life in addition to more recent conditions such as a growing reliance on personalized technology and the constant threat of information overload (e.g., Brissett & Snow, 1993; Calhoun, 2011; Musharbash, 2007; Thiele, 1997; cf. Anderson, 2004).

Recognizing that sociocultural conditions can shape how and why people are bored has permitted some researchers to interpret what it means to experience boredom through a different lens. However, like the psychological approach to examining boredom as an individual experience (e.g., Pekrun et al., 2010), there is little consistency to be found among descriptions of boredom as a sociocultural experience. For example, Brissett and Snow (1993) take a symbolic interactionist approach\(^\text{13}\) wherein they describe boredom as “an experience of the absence of momentum or flow in a person’s life. What is going on, and what the person is doing, seems to have lost impetus and life stands still” (p. 238). Momentum and flow are inherently tied

\(^{13}\) See Bericat (2016), Lively and Weed (2016), and Turner (2009) for reviews of the theories of emotion in sociology.
to the rhythms of life, particularly the social rhythms, and to experience an absence of either implies that the individual is “out of synch with the ongoing rhythms of social life” (Brissett & Snow, p. 239) or “disengaged from the ebb and flow of human interaction” (p. 241). It is proposed that in the absence of social synchronization, whatever we are doing is unlikely to lead to a viable future. Ultimately, if personal experience is understood mainly in relation to social interaction and communication, then “a claim of boredom is an emphatic complaint of being rendered non-social” (Brissett & Snow, p. 241).

Darden and Marks (1999) conducted telephone surveys and unstructured interviews wherein they asked Americans to describe their experiences of boredom. They identified boredom as a fleeting emotional experience having a socially-constructed meaning that is learned from others. Their definition used dramaturgical terms in describing our lives and social interactions as akin to a stage play where people embody roles and utilize scripts and props. For Darden and Marks, boredom is:

The socially disvalued emotion we experience in a setting where the drama fails for some reason; when the only scripts and props available are too well rehearsed and overly familiar; any roles which exist are undesirable and without the possibility of negotiation; there are no others whose roles we can or want to take, and we feel distant from our roles. The situation has no apparent future, in the sense of anticipation, although it may have a temporal dimension, because time seems to stretch endlessly ahead without a foreseeable denouement. Since display of boredom is usually improper or rude, we often deny it while usually leaving the scene, either physically or through fantasy. (pp. 18-19)

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14 In this section I use the term “we” to remain consistent with the language used by the authors I am citing. Based on their research and institution affiliations, I am taking “we” to mean people from primarily developed, Western countries (i.e., North America and Europe).
We experience boredom when there is a lack of drama—that is, when the scripts and props we use in our day-to-day lives are repetitive, the roles we fill are uninteresting and unengaging, and we feel constrained by a lack of options and a seemingly bleak future.

Barbalet (1999) also took a sociological approach to boredom, but in contrast to Brissett and Snow (1993) and Darden and Marks (1999), he defined boredom as the perception of meaninglessness and resulting emotions. Meaning, according to Barbalet, is vital to social processes: “Meaning not only arises in but also directs and defines action. This is to say that meaning both requires and constitutes sociality” (p. 631). The symbolic objects and categories people construct as social beings, such as culture, values, and norms, are imbued with meanings that form our social realities. As we interact with others and the symbolic objects of society, we continually construct and reconstruct meanings. As such, “because particular meanings thus provide context, reference, and purpose to actions, social life – indeed, human life – simply is not possible without the quality of meaningfulness” (Barbalet, 1999, p. 631). To experience boredom is to perceive that our lives, especially our social lives, are meaninglessness which, according to Barbalet, is a restless and irritable feeling akin to anxiety.

A fourth example of a sociological approach comes from Conrad’s (1997) paper on the meaning of “bored” in everyday life. For Conrad, boredom is a term people have learned to employ when situations and interactions do not meet their socially-constructed expectations (versus expectations rooted in human nature; e.g., Fenichel, 1951): We anticipate the possibility of something else yet fail to achieve or grasp it. Conrad used written responses from 35 college students to understand the socially-derived expectations that arose in school and to interpret what it meant for those students to experience boredom. In the end, he determined that boredom had two meanings: under-stimulation and disconnection. To experience being bored meant feeling
like there was nothing to do and feeling disengaged from whatever was going on at the moment. Conrad also mentioned the experience of time passing slowly while bored as a function of how we socially organize time, but he did not pursue the idea in any detail.

I have presented these examples to illustrate how boredom can be described as a sociocultural experience rather than an individual, privatized experience inherent to human nature and physiology. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide an exhaustive review of the sociological, cultural, literary, political, and anthropological approaches to boredom, my goal was to illustrate an awareness and understanding of boredom that stretches beyond psychological perspectives (e.g., Breidenstein, 2007; Calhoun, 2011; Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey, & White, 1988; Klapp, 1986; Larson & Richards, 1991; Shaw et al., 1996). As I will describe below, to take a phenomenological approach to boredom and boredom coping requires identifying one’s preconceived beliefs and biases so that the data can be approached with openness and sensitivity. I believe that this can be accomplished, in part, by challenging myself to think beyond the constraints of my primary discipline of training and research.

In pursuit of this goal, I would also like to recognize some of the criticisms that arise when emotions, like boredom, are qualified principally as sociocultural experiences. As with the approach to emotion as an individual experience, emotion as a sociocultural experience employs its own form of problematic reductionism. Specifically, emotions are reduced to words or concepts, and “the social is equated with the meaningful and the conceptual” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 62). This can be seen as an attempt to cleanse emotions by separating out communication from the components or dimensions of individual experience (e.g., physiological response, motor expression, cognitive processes). Ahmed (2004) refers to these as “outside-in” models where emotions begin outside the subject and then move within so that they may be shared or
experienced. The sociocultural approach privileges the social instead of the individual, but, in so doing, it also reifies the boundary between the individual and social, the inside and outside, or the Self and the Other (Ahmed, 2004). Svendsen (2005), for example, in his philosophical inquiry of boredom, rejects the reductionism that comes with the assumed objectivity of these boundaries: “I do not believe, however, that a clear distinction can be made between psychological and social aspects when dealing with a phenomenon such as boredom, and a reductive sociologism is just as untenable as a psychologism” (p. 12). In addition to the critique of reductionism, psychological and sociocultural approaches have been charged with inadequately recognizing the role of the body in emotional experience. Specifically, there is a failure to recognize that “the ways in which we understand, experience, perform and talk about emotions are highly related to our sense of body” (Zembylas, 2007, p. 64).

The critiques I have just mentioned have tended to be put forward by the poststructuralists who occupy a third perspective on emotion. In striving to overcome the limitations of the psychological and sociological positions, poststructuralists view emotion as embodied, interactional, and performative (e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Boler, 1999; Butler, 1990; Lanas, 2016; Zembylas, 2007). Poststructuralists seek to debunk the connection between emotion and subjectivity by recognizing that the boundaries between the individual and social are much more ambiguous and fuzzy than psychological (inside out) and sociological (outside in) models would have us believe. Accordingly, emotions are not something to be possessed; something that I have or we have. Instead they circulate between people (i.e., bodies) becoming narratives or discourses that define how we live. As such, emotion shape, delineate, or produce the very surfaces and boundaries of objects and bodies. They are discursive practices that are brought into existence by doing them—which is to say, by performing them in the process of negotiating
different realities. Importantly, emotions are mediated by past experiences or histories of contact (i.e., bodily memories) that reflect power relations in society. “Power relations are a part of all discourses about emotions because they determine what can, cannot or must be said. . . . Emotion discourses establish, assert, challenge or reinforce power or status differences” (Lanas, 2016, p. 113). For example, in the school or classroom context, power relations between teachers and students are constantly being negotiated through emotion discourses (e.g., teacher frustration over lack of student engagement versus student frustration over lack of instructional clarity). Emotions can thus be used to discipline and control bodies, and they also can be sites of resistance.

**Summary.** Rather than psychologize boredom as a primarily individual psychophysiological state, sociocultural approaches emphasize how boredom is socially constructed and culturally determined. Boredom’s meaning is localized in culturally-embedded, historical moments and, therefore, dynamic. In support of this claim, critics have proposed that we did not always need the word *boredom* to represent a meaningful human experience despite its near ubiquity in contemporary society. From the sociocultural perspective, boredom’s current meaning appears multifarious. For example, the complaint of boredom can mean feeling out of synch with the rhythms of social life; feeling a lack of drama such that the roles we embody are uninteresting, and the scripts and props of our lives are monotonous and dreary; or feeling that our lives as social beings are meaningless. Yet, from a poststructuralist perspective, sociocultural explanations still fall short—that is, not unlike psychological approaches, they tend to employ a form of reductionism that serves to reify the boundaries between the individual and the social. And while poststructural theories of emotion are becoming more abundant, there are few poststructural investigations of boredom that can add to the current review. Following from the
above review outlining varied conceptualizations of boredom from both psychological and sociocultural perspectives, I will now turn my focus toward a multidisciplinary review of boredom regulation to provide some perspective on research exploring how people respond to or cope with boredom.

**Boredom Regulation and Coping**

“As a matter of fact, all endeavor of every kind takes place in the context of boredom impending or boredom repudiated and can be understood as impelled by the effort to withstand boredom’s threat.” (Spacks, 1995, p. 2)

Boredom has frequently been identified as a negative, unpleasant, or aversive affective experience characterized by the inability to engage in satisfying activities. As many of the descriptions provided thus far suggest, boredom is often an undesirable experience and the threat of boredom is typically daunting. It is not a stretch then to assume that the sufferer of boredom will pursue some form of immediate or eventual escape. But how do people find relief from boredom’s clutches? How do students, faced with yet another dull lecture, regulate their boredom? Do they cope by leaving the lecture hall or daydreaming about the weekend? Do they pull out their phone to peruse Instagram or attempt to reengage with course content by reminding themselves about next week’s midterm? What influences these decisions? Are they consciously made or might they be implicit? Are they motivated by purely hedonic needs or do instrumental goals influence how they cope with “the root of all evil” (Kierkegaard, 1843/1987, p. 285)? The following section will strive to answer these questions through an examination of the emotion regulation and stress coping literatures. However, before narrowing the focus to educational contexts, it is imperative to first clarify what I mean by these terms.
According to current theorizations, the constructs of mood, stress, and emotion represent three distinct yet overlapping phenomena. James Gross, one of the foundational figures in emotion regulation research, posits that the three constructs are subsumed under the umbrella of *affect* that refers to “psychological states that involve valuation, defined as a relatively quick good-for-me/bad-for-me discrimination” (Gross, 2015, p. 2; see also Scherer, 2005). Relative to emotions (see *Psychological Perspectives on Boredom* section above for definition), moods tend to be understood as more defuse and long-lived, generating relatively broad response tendencies (e.g., approach or avoid). Where emotions can be both positively- and negatively-valenced, stress is typically conceptualized as a negative affective experience in response to a situation that has become difficult to manage (Gross). Despite these differences, all three constructs involve affective experiences that people identify as good for them or bad for them and, as such, they routinely seek to influence and change their emotions, moods, and stress responses.

Building on Richard Lazarus’ (1966) foundational text, *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*, research on coping with stress emerged as a systematic field of study in the 1970s with coping defined as “conscious volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances” (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001, p. 89). Similarly, Skinner

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15 Similar to Gross (2015), Koole (2009) utilized the concept of core affect (Russell, 2003), defined as basic states of feeling good or bad, energised or enervated, as a common foundation for mood, stress, and emotion. Originating from core affect, these affective states can be semantically separated, but their substantive overlap often creates ambiguous empirical borders. Regardless, all attempts at regulating stress, mood, or emotion are ultimately targeting core affect.

16 I will not discuss theories of mood and mood regulation (e.g., Larsen, 2000; Thayer, Newman, & McClain, 1994) despite their connection to other affective processes. Unlike emotion regulation and stress coping, mood regulation has not been integrated with research on boredom and is therefore not pertinent to my focus on boredom regulation in academic contexts.
and Wellborn (1994) defined coping as "how people regulate their behavior, emotion, and orientation under conditions of psychological stress" (p. 112). These definitions allude to the initial appraisal of an event as personally meaningful wherein an individual’s goals or aims have been impeded in some way (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Roughly two decades later, the independent field of emotion regulation began to develop and today has become one of the fastest growing subfields of research in psychology (Gross, 2007, 2015; Koole, 2009; Tamir, 2011). Emotion regulation has been defined as “the set of processes whereby people seek to redirect the spontaneous flow of their emotions” (Koole, 2009, p. 6), and as “the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). These definitions imply the pursuit of a goal that requires influencing the trajectory of emotions to be successful.

While the two bodies of research have evolved separately and remain largely disconnected, they share two substantial points of conceptual overlap. First, stress coping and emotion regulation are often subsumed under the broad category of self-regulatory processes (Compas, Jaser, Dunbar, Watson, Bettis, Gruhn, & Williams, 2014; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1997). Self-regulatory processes refer to an assortment of responses “including efforts to initiate, terminate or delay, modify or change the form or content, or modulate the amount or intensity of a thought, emotion, behavior, or physiological reaction, or redirect thought or behavior toward a new target” (Compas et al., 2001). These regulatory processes, whether in relation to stress or a specific emotion, unfold over time and often include controlled, purposeful efforts. Second, while there continues to be debate in both fields over whether regulation can be automatic and involuntary, there has been greater acceptance of implicit processes among emotion regulation researchers (Compas et al., 2014; Gross, 1999; Koole, Webb, & Sheeran, 2015). In both cases,
there is little consensus on the underlying structure of these regulatory processes, and there is a lack of agreement on the types and number of potential strategies that can be employed (Koole, 2009; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003).

At the outset of the coping process, the initial appraisal of an event or situation often triggers acute negative emotions (e.g., distress, anxiety). Thus, attempts at regulating stress responses, which can occur over days or weeks, are often initiated with much shorter duration emotion regulation attempts that can include promoting positive emotions and alleviating negative emotions. As Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) highlight in their review of the coping literature, “often one of the first coping tasks is to down-regulate negative emotions that are stressful in and of themselves and may be interfering with instrumental forms of coping” (p. 747). As the stress response is regulated and reappraised, emotions continue to influence the coping process. Thus, when coping with stress includes regulating emotion (i.e., emotion-focused coping) the two processes intersect and share much in common. Sander Koole, a prominent emotion regulation researcher, agrees with this conceptualization: “In its broadest sense, emotion regulation subsumes the regulation of all states that are emotionally charged, including moods, stress, and positive or negative affect (2009, p. 10). Conversely, coping with stress can include efforts not directed at emotion, and emotion regulation can target emotions that arise in non-stressful situations. In these instance, the two regulatory processes no longer intersect.

I have introduced stress coping and emotion regulation because both constructs and their respective literatures have been utilized in recent research on regulating boredom in academic contexts. I will examine boredom from the perspective of the coping literature later in this section, but first I will review the emotion regulation literature as it has been applied to boredom.
Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation consists of the processes by which people influence if, when, and how they experience emotions, including their intensity, duration, and expression. In a recent meta-analysis of emotion regulation strategies, Webb, Miles, and Sheeran (2012) identified James Gross’ (1998, 2015) process model of emotion regulation as the most widely used framework in the field. The process model is built on a modal model of emotion, which organizes the emotion generative process into a temporal sequence of situation–attention–appraisal–response common to many approaches to conceptualizing emotions. Using the temporal dimension of the modal model, it is possible to identify five distinct points in time when emotions can be regulated. These time points serve to organize emotion regulation processes into five types: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. In the process of regulating an emotion, multiple strategies are often utilized in combination (see Tull & Aldao, 2015, for more on strategy models of emotion regulation).

The first four processes are antecedent-focused meaning they occur prior to the manifestation of the full emotion response. Situation selection includes the actions taken to make it more or less likely that an individual will end up in situation where they expect the emotion to occur. For example, a student may choose to skip a class where they expect to be bored by their teacher’s monotonous lecture style. Situation modification entails efforts to modify the situation once the person is already present in it (e.g., while listening to a lecture in class) with the intention of changing the emotional outcome. For instance, a student may choose to sit next to a friend who they can rely on to keep them focused and engaged when they anticipate being bored. Attentional deployment consists of efforts to direct attention away from or toward features of the
situation with the intention of influencing the emotion. One example may be a student who chooses not to focus on the dull study material but instead daydreams about the upcoming weekend. *Cognitive change* includes efforts to alter how one appraises or interprets a situation “either by changing how one thinks about the situation or about one's capacity to manage the demands it poses” (Gross & Thompson, 2007, p. 20). For instance, a student may appraise practice questions provided by their professor as an opportunity to prepare for an upcoming exam instead of a dreary waste of time that could be better spent at the gym or watching Netflix. Thus far, there has been a great deal more research into attentional deployment and cognitive change strategies as compared to situation selection or modification (Webb et al., 2012).

*Response modulation* is the fifth and final emotion regulation process that stands alone as the only form of response-focused regulation that occurs after an emotion response has occurred. Specifically, response modulation encompasses efforts to directly influence the experience or expression of an emotion after it has already been experienced (i.e., the physiological, behavioural, or experiential components of the emotion). For example, while working on an assignment, a student who feels tired in their boredom may try drinking coffee or going for a walk to reduce their boredom and feel more energized.

Given their distinct locations along the temporal dimension of the modal model, it is expected that each regulation process will have different consequences for the experience of an emotion. Specifically, *when* we intervene in the emotion generative process and *what* resources are needed to intervene at a particular point in time are expected to drive the variability in outcomes (Gross, 2015). Recent meta-analyses on the effectiveness of these strategies across emotions and contexts provide support for this assumption (e.g., Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, Schweizer, 2010; Webb et al., 2012). Aldao et al. examined the relation between acceptance,
avoidance, problem solving, reappraisal, rumination, and suppression as emotion regulation strategies and the psychopathologies of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance-abuse disorders. Across 114 studies (241 comparisons), the authors found small to medium effect sizes for acceptance and reappraisal, medium to large effect sizes for problem solving, avoidance, and suppression, and a large effect size for rumination. Suppression, avoidance, and rumination were positively associated with symptoms of the four psychopathologies (effect sizes \(d\) of 0.72, 0.82, and 1.12, respectively).\(^{17}\) Conversely, the symptoms of the psychopathologies were negatively related to reappraisal, acceptance, and problem solving (effect sizes \(d\) of 0.28, 0.39, 0.65, respectively).

Webb et al.’s (2012) meta-analysis utilized 109 studies (306 comparisons) to compare the effectiveness of attentional deployment, response modulation, and cognitive change processes in relation to physiological, behavioural, and experiential emotion outcomes. Cognitive change had the most profound effect on emotion outcomes with a small-to-medium effect size \((d = 0.36)\). Response modulation had a small effect size \((d = 0.16)\) whereas no effect was found for attentional deployment \((d = 0.00)\).\(^{18}\) The authors also generated a taxonomy of emotion regulation that included various strategies aligned with the three regulation processes. Attentional deployment included four distraction strategies and three concentration strategies. Distraction “redirects attention within a given situation (e.g., from an emotion-eliciting feature of a scene to a neutral feature of a scene) or shifts attention away from the present situation altogether (e.g., thinking about one’s vacation plans while in a depressing meeting)” (Gross,

\(^{17}\) Aldao et al. (2010) used Cohen's (1988) guidelines to interpret. Effect sizes above .40 were considered large, effect sizes around .25 were medium, and those below .10 were small.

\(^{18}\) Webb et al. (2012) used Cohen’s (2002) guidelines to interpret. Effect sizes where \(d = .20\) were considered small, effect sizes where \(d = .50\) were medium, and effect size where \(d = .80\) or above were considered large.
Concentration included strategies that “draw attention to emotional features of a situation” (Gross & Thompson, 2007, p. 13) whether that be the feelings (i.e., the what of emotion), the causes and implications of the feelings (i.e., the why of emotion), or both (Webb et al.). Cognitive change included four strategies of reappraisal that consisted of reappraising the emotional stimulus, reappraising the emotional response, taking a different perspective, or some combination of the three. Finally, response modulation was aligned with four suppression strategies: suppressing how the emotion is expressed, suppressing how the emotion is experienced, suppressing the expression and experience, or suppressing thoughts of the event that caused the emotion.

The results of Webb et al.’s (2012) analysis revealed that distraction was effective for regulating emotions ($d = 0.27$) whereas concentration was not ($d = -0.26$). Attempting to adopt a different perspective was the most effective cognitive change strategy ($d = 0.45$) followed by reappraising the emotion stimulus ($d = 0.36$) and reappraising the emotional response ($d = 0.23$). In terms of suppression, attempting to suppress the expression of emotion was an effective approach to emotion regulation ($d = 0.32$); however, attempting to suppress the experience of emotion was not effective ($d = -0.04$) nor were attempts to suppress thoughts of the emotion-eliciting event ($d = -0.12$). In conjunction with Aldao et al. (2010), these results support the assumption that emotion regulation strategies are differentially effective while also supporting the theorized conceptual distinctions among the strategies. Although boredom was not directly mentioned in either meta-analysis, the results encourage reflection upon how and when different boredom regulation strategies are effective for students situated in various educational settings.

The taxonomy of emotion regulation strategies created by Webb et al. (2012) was constructed on the foundation of Gross’ (1998) process model while simultaneously expanding
his classification system by incorporating lesser-utilized emotion regulation frameworks. One of these integral frameworks came from Koole’s (2009) integrative review of the literature. Koole referred to the “ordering problem” as the current difficulty associated with establishing a comprehensive classification of every emotion regulation strategies by identifying an underlying order. The most rigorous methods for accomplishing this combine top-down (i.e., deductive) and bottom-up (i.e., inductive) approaches where theoretical higher-order categories are first defined (top-down) and then individual strategies are empirically tested (e.g., confirmatory factor analysis, rational sorting) to identify their fit with the higher-order groups (bottom-up). Such an approach has been constructed for stress coping (discussed below; see Skinner et al., 2003) but not yet for emotion regulation.

Koole (2009) identified four influential approaches to solving the ordering problem. The first is to separate emotion regulation strategies into controlled and automatic higher-order categories. There is evidence to support implicit, effortless emotion regulation (e.g., Bargh & Williams, 2007; Mauss, Cook, & Gross, 2007; Hopp, Troy, & Mauss, 2011; Williams, Bargh, Nocera, & Gray, 2009), and, unlike the coping literature, most researchers accept the premise that emotion regulation can be automatic (e.g., Barbalet, 2011; Gyurak, Gross, & Etkin, 2011; Koole & Rothermund, 2011). Such a classification would cut across all identified strategies, yet Koole states that automaticity is heterogeneous with multiple associated concepts that can vary independently such as speed, controllability, and efficiency (see Moors & De Houwer, 2006). However, as I discuss below in relation to the coping literature, higher-order categories should be functionally homogenous—which is to say, all strategies for regulation within a category should have the same function or set of functions. As automaticity is not a functionally homogenous higher-order category, the controlled versus automatic classification is undesirable.
A second approach is to use temporal ordering as a classification system. This is the approach taken by Gross’ (2015) process model of emotion regulation, but Koole (2009) contends that such an approach assumes that the temporal sequence of emotion (i.e., situation–attention–appraisal–response) is fixed rather than variable. If the cycle is fixed, then cognitive appraisals of an emotional situation always precede the emotional response (e.g., physiological, expressive, behavioural), attention to a potential emotion-arousing situation precedes the cognitive appraisals, and so forth. Koole, however, cites evidence that temporal sequencing is variable. For example, emotional behaviour (i.e., the response) may come before cognitive appraisal rather than after (Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, Krauth-Gruber, & Ric, 2005; Neumann, Forster, & Strack, 2003). On these grounds, Koole argues that higher-order categories derived from the temporal sequencing of emotion dynamics are untenable.

A third method for solving the ordering problem is to create higher-order emotion regulation categories based on the emotion-generating system they target. Three such systems include attention, knowledge, and bodily expression of emotion. For example, boredom regulation strategies that target attention could include distracting oneself from a boring lecture by looking at a phone or thinking about something pleasurable like what you will do on an upcoming vacation. Targeting emotional-relevant knowledge could include cognitively reappraising a boring assignment as worthy of your interest and engagement because it will help you prepare for an upcoming exam. Targeting the bodily expression of emotion might include suppressing a yawn to conceal your boredom from the teacher or fidgeting to release pent-up energy when prolonged boredom becomes agitating. Ultimately, Koole (2009) proposed the target approach as the most viable classification system, relative to temporal ordering and the automatic versus controlled dichotomy.
To complement the target approach, Koole (2009) suggested combing it with an approach to classification that organizes strategies into higher-order groups based on the psychological functions they serve. To date, most research on emotion regulation has focused on *how* regulation takes place rather than *why* people regulate (Tamir, Bigman, Rhodes, Salerno, & Schreier, 2014; Tamir & Mauss, 2011), but the function approach seeks to build on the latter body of research by distinguishing three primary functions of emotion regulation: hedonic needs-oriented, goal-oriented, and person-oriented. Ultimately, these three functions can be combined during emotion regulation, although they can be in conflict with one another. Regulating boredom to satisfy hedonic needs might mean taking a break and getting a coffee to increase arousal and positive feelings when studying has become boring (i.e., it feels unpleasant, aversive, or negative). However, emotion regulation does not always function to meet hedonic needs; in many cases, instrumental goals related to a particular context can influence how individuals or groups regulate emotion.\(^{19}\) Regulating boredom to facilitate goal achievement might mean attempting to re-focus during a dull, seemingly pointless lecture by reappraising the importance of paying attention in the moment to be better prepared for the final exam. Finally, regulating boredom for person-oriented functions—that is, to optimize global personality functioning—can mean focusing on long-term well-being. For instance, a student may choose to switch out of a program or major that they judge to be a continual source of boredom and into a new one that engages and interests them. In summary, when attempting to understand emotion regulation

\(^{19}\) One framework that focuses on why people regulate emotions, beyond their basic hedonic need to feel good, is the expectancy–value model of emotion regulation (Tamir, 2011; Tamir et al., 2014). This model takes an instrumental approach by examining why people emote and regulate emotion in light of their instrumental goals. The assumption is that people have expectations about how useful their emotions will be for achieving desired outcomes, and they are motivated to emote and regulate in ways that will optimize how effective they can be in their pursuit of these outcomes. Thus, identifying what people’s instrumental goals are, from one moment to the next, is crucial for understanding the dynamics of their emotion regulation.
inductively, deductively, or through a combination of the two, the most viable and efficacious approach would be to consider the target and function of regulation, which requires considering individual goals and context.

In addition to theoretical models, higher-order classifications, and strategy effectiveness, there are other prominent points of distinctions in the emotion regulation literature that are pertinent to the current study. One such distinction is between intrapersonal and interpersonal regulation. If emotions are theorized as largely internal psychophysiological states, then emotion regulation tends to be viewed as an intrapersonal practice, meaning there is often little concern for how social interactions and environments influence regulatory processes (e.g., Dillon, Deveney, & Pizzagalli, 2011; MacLeod & Bucks, 2011). On the other hand, if emotions are viewed as inherently social or socially constructed, then emotion regulation is typically believed to reside mainly in social interactions and influence, or be influenced by social processes (interpersonal; e.g., Barbalet, 2011; Campos, Walle, Dahl, & Main, 2011; Dixon-Gordon, Bernecker, & Christensen, 2015; Netzer, van Kleef, & Tamir, 2015; Niven, 2017). A related distinction is between intrinsic emotion regulation, which is undertaken with the goal of influencing one’s own emotions, and extrinsic emotion regulation, which is undertaken with the goal of regulating another person’s emotions. We are able to pursue intrinsic and extrinsic regulation goals simultaneously, but the extent to which extrinsic regulation is given consideration will also depend on one’s perspective on emotion (Gross, 2015).

A third point of distinction is determining if emotion regulation strategies are not only internally effective (i.e., they influence emotion as intended) but also externally adaptive. Efforts to define and assess adaptability must take into consideration the context and goals of the regulatory process (Gross, 2015; Tamir, 2011). For example, determining whether it is adaptive
for a bored student sitting in a lecture to use distraction verses suppression versus cognitive reappraisal to regulate their boredom requires a contextualized understanding of that particular student situated within a particular sociocultural context. Moreover, both short-term and long-term outcomes can be considered when evaluating whether a particular strategy is adaptive or maladaptive for the individual. These points of distinction will be discussed below in light of the present findings.

**Emotion Regulation and Boredom**

Having reviewed various models of emotion regulation and some of the key debates and nuances concerning the regulation process, I now narrow the focus of this review toward boredom regulation, especially from the perspective of students in educational contexts. While there has been growth in research into emotion regulation in response to academic tasks and situations (e.g., Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013; Davis & Levine, 2013; Jacobs & Gross, 2014; Schmidt, Tinti, Levine, & Testa, 2010), there has to date been very little empirical research into how students cope with or regulate their boredom in school (e.g., Nett et al., 2011; Sharp et al., 2016; Strain & D’Mello, 2015; Vierhaus, Lohaus, & Wild, 2016). There are also few models that have tailored the emotion regulation process to academic settings including classroom-based learning, studying, homework completion, or test taking. Historically, emotion and emotion regulation have often been excluded from broader frameworks of self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 2004; Winne & Hadwin, 1998; Zimmerman, 2000), which have included metacognitive behaviours, cognition, and motivation (see Ben-Eliyahu & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013).

Despite the limited literature with which to draw upon, researchers are beginning to construct an understanding of how and why people regulate their boredom. In one of the first
studies, Vandewiele (1980) asked 13- to 14-year-old Senegalese students: “Do you try to do something to combat boredom? If so, what do you do?” Students described how they avoided feeling bored across contexts and situations. Their responses included reading, homework, visiting friends, music, debates, shows, sports, walks, and games. Interestingly, 12.2% of the students said they could not resist boredom at all. Soon after, a review article published by Smith (1981) identified physically withdrawing from a situation, daydreaming, motor restlessness, and exploration of one’s environment as common boredom regulation strategies; however, only a handful of studies have since sought people’s open-ended descriptions of boredom regulation.

In an interpretive phenomenological study with ten British participants of various ages and backgrounds, Martin et al. (2006) interviewed people about how they regulate boredom across a variety of contexts (e.g., at work, at home). The most common approach to dealing with boredom was to find something else to do or to engage in diversionary activities. During leisure time (i.e., at home), this included watching television, getting a snack or drink, smoking cigarettes, playing computer games, or being physically active (e.g., taking a walk). At work, these boredom regulation strategies included doodling, playing with a phone, talking with colleagues, looking out the window, emailing, surfing the internet, getting a drink, using the washroom, writing in an agenda, listening to music, taking a break, daydreaming or switching off, thinking about future plans that were enjoyable, or faking an illness in order to leave. Some participants chose to accept the boredom and persist with the task they were doing, while other chose meditation as a way to be more mindful of the here and now, especially when idle. One particularly successful approach to minimizing boredom was to exert control over the situation, for example, by making future plans of which boredom had no part. Engaging in physical activity was also deemed effective because it staved off boredom for longer periods of time.
while providing health benefits, with boredom often returning more quickly following activities like watching television or playing computer games. In the end, the latter types of activities were also deemed to be a waste of time, which further prompted feelings of guilt and frustration. Martin et al. concluded with the following suggestion: “If boredom is, in fact, an inability to attend, effective ways of overcoming the problem might be better directed towards internal mechanisms, such as learning mindfulness meditation” (p. 207).

Harris (2000) produced a mixed methods study of boredom that included written responses to open-ended question about what people do to regulate their boredom. The 170 participants were a mix of undergraduate and graduate students at an American university ranging in age from 19 to 54. Importantly, they were asked to discuss boredom regulation generally and were not restricted to instances of boredom in school. Over 20 regulation strategies were described and the most common were reading, thinking or daydreaming, socializing, watching television, and physical activity. Others included learning or trying something new, focusing on a specific activity, sleeping, refocusing attention, planning or organizing, doing something else, listening to music, studying, eating or drinking, using drugs, and watching people. Participants were also asked to discuss what anticipatory strategies they used to avoid potential boredom. Such strategies are aligned with the processes of situation selection and modification from Gross’ (2015) emotion regulation model. 75% of participants said they did prepare for prospective boredom, and the most common methods were to bring a book with them or bring something to do to fill the time. Others planned for boredom by avoiding the situation altogether, bringing friends or socializing, bringing music, or preparing to use the time for planning, organizing, or thinking. Harris did not comment on participants’ beliefs about the effectiveness of their strategies or how they chose which strategy to employ. Nonetheless, in
conjunction with Martin et al. (2006), there is evidence that people employ a diverse array of tactics to regulate their boredom in everyday situations including making preparations for impending boredom.

The literature on workplace boredom is worth noting here as it can offer insight into boredom regulation in other contexts, such as school, that also feature substantial externally-imposed constraints. The foundational paper by Fisher (1993) identified common responses to boredom at work that were “intended to remediate the unpleasant state” (p. 409). The first was to refocus attention on the task by setting goals, especially ones that were self-generated and could be assessed for progress; eliminating external distractions, especially when working on increasingly complex tasks; and reducing intrusive thoughts from competing concerns by addressing the concerns in some capacity (e.g., responding to an urgent email or writing a reminder). The second approach to regulating boredom was to seek out additional stimulation (see also Game, 2007; Skowronski, 2012) such as initiating subsidiary, non-task-related behaviours (e.g., daydreaming, fidgeting, talking to a co-worker, listening to music) or altering some aspect of the task such as the pace or order of completion. Alternatively, seeking additional stimulation could also mean changing activities entirely if possible. In lieu of empirical evidence, Fisher speculated over how a worker might choose a particular boredom regulation strategy citing the perceived cause of the boredom and feasible options for remediation, how effective previously chosen strategies had been, and how important it was to continue the boring task as potentially critical factors.

More recently, Cleary et al. (2016) summarized the workplace literature by identifying suggestions for regulating boredom and improving engagement at work. First, these authors assert that providing employees a sense of autonomy and control over their work can reduce
boredom, for example, by giving them the opportunity to set their own work schedule. Second, providing breaks from highly stimulating or demanding tasks, or striving for a balance between repetitive, mundane tasks and challenging ones, can also help maintain interest and engagement and minimize boredom. Third, imbuing tasks with purpose and meaning and fostering overall job satisfaction may also encourage engagement and diminish or prevent boredom. For example, using humor can create a work environment that is pleasant and interesting, and integrating collaborative team-based initiatives may add a layer of meaning to the work that might otherwise be absent from solitary projects. Finally, developing effective time-management skills can reduce boredom by limiting the influence of off-task distractions and encouraging employees to be aware of when their ability to attend and focus is most likely to wane. Optimizing daily and weekly schedules to match task demands with attentional resources is thus proposed as a way of limiting disengagement and mind wandering.

**Emotion Regulation and Academic Boredom**

Narrowing the focus to academic boredom, limited empirical evidence suggests that students regulate their boredom in diverse ways and often with the overarching goal to down-regulate or eliminate boredom. In a study with ninth-grade German students, Goetz, Frenzel, and Pekrun (2007c) inquired into regulation strategies that were used in class to deal with boredom. They found that students were most likely to distract themselves from the lesson (86%), accept the boredom (23%), or increase their attention and focus on the teacher or learning content (15%). In addition, 8% of students dealt with their boredom by relaxing, 2% attempted to change the situation somehow, and 1% engaged in behavioural avoidance (e.g., asking to go to the bathroom). These categories were later examined by Nett, Daschmann, Goetz, and Stupnisky (2016) in a study with 437 German grade 9 students. The students were asked whether they
regulated boredom in mathematics class by reactivating attention toward the teacher or activity, influencing the instruction, relaxing, distracting themselves, or accepting the boredom. The strongest agreement was for distracting themselves and relaxing in response to boredom, followed by accepting the boredom, reactivating attention, and influencing the instruction. Additionally, the students reported feeling bored 31% of the time they were in class.

Mann and Robinson (2009) conducted a three-part, mixed-method investigation into British students’ boredom during university lectures. 59% of students found at least half of their lectures boring, and 30% reported that all lectures they attended were boring. The study first included three focus-group sessions meant to identify the strategies students used to combat boredom during lectures, followed by a follow-up questionnaire with over 200 students to assess the frequency with which they used each strategy. The frequency results for strategy were as follows: daydream (75.4%), doodle (66.4%), switch off (61.6%), colour in letters on a handout (59.7%), talk to the person next to them (50.7%), text people on mobile phone (45.5%), write notes to a friend (38%), leave at break time (27.5%), calculate their money situation (23.2%), play games on mobile phone (17.5%), and write a shopping list (16.6%).

Webster and Hadwin (2015) investigated university students’ emotions and emotion regulation strategies while studying. The 111 Canadian students in this project were asked to reflect on their studying during a first-year undergraduate course meant to help them develop self-regulated learning knowledge and skills.\textsuperscript{20} More specifically, in weeks three, six, and nine of the course, students were asked to identify an emotion that was impeding their pursuit of studying-related goals, and then provided an open-ended description of what they did to regulate

\textsuperscript{20} In the self-regulated learning course, “students are taught how to develop accurate and complete task perceptions, set productive goals that are specific and limited to short-term study sessions (e.g., Locke & Latham, 2002), strategically choose and experiment with tactics to achieve those goals, monitor their progress and make adjustments to their studying as necessary” (Webster & Hadwin, 2015, p. 798).
that emotion. Among all emotions reported (e.g., anxiety, hopelessness, shame, anger), boredom was selected most often as the emotion that interfered with goal progress while studying (37-49% of the time over the three time points). The 130 descriptions of boredom regulation provided by students were then coded and categorized according to Gross’ (2015) process model (i.e., situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, response modulation), with this classification system later expanded to include 11 regulation strategies.

The five most frequently employed strategies for regulating boredom while studying were task/goal management (27.7%), task enactment (15.4%), task focus (13.8%), self-consequating thoughts/actions (13.1%), as well as task avoidance (7.7%) and environment management (7.7%). Task or goal management included organizing work, making schedules, taking breaks, or dividing the study task into smaller sections. Task enactment consisted of changing one’s approach to the task in some way such as making cue cards or focusing on the most interesting topics first. Task focus entailed directing attention to the task and away from the boredom, or focusing on getting the task done quicker (e.g., “ignore it,” “put your mind to it”). Using self-consequating thoughts and actions meant reflecting on the consequences of finishing (or not finishing) the task and creating rewards for completing specific tasks. Task avoidance included avoiding specific aspects of the boring task or avoiding the task altogether (e.g., play computer games, study a different topic), and environment management included any attempts at altering the environment to reduce boredom such as listening to music, changing study location, or putting away one’s cell phone to prevent distraction. The other five strategies used to regulate boredom while studying were doing nothing to change the boredom (5.4%), seeking social
support (3.1%), cognitive change (3.1%), response modulation (1.5%), and enhancing competence (1.5%; see Webster & Hadwin, 2015, for further explanation).

Sharp et al. (2016) produced a mixed-method study of academic boredom using British university students who were in the final year of their bachelor’s program in education studies. A sample of 235 students completed a questionnaire that included a question about what they did to regulate boredom, and an additional 10 students were interviewed and asked, “If you find yourself getting bored in a lecture, what do you do?” The results revealed that participants regulated their boredom by daydreaming (45.5%), switching off (44.3%), texting (37.0%), doodling or scribbling over handouts (35.7%), talking to a neighbour (27.2%), and leaving class at the break (5.5%). Other less frequently utilized strategies including taking to Facebook, Twitter, or the Internet, checking email, playing games on mobile phones, falling asleep, making ‘stupid noises’ or comments, and laughing out loud (together these strategies were mentioned by 8.5% of the sample). The authors indicated that they used content analysis to identify categories and themes from the interviews, but these analyses were either not conducted for boredom regulation or not reported.

A few recent studies have begun examining the statistical relationships between academic boredom and various regulation strategies. Building on Gross’ (2015) process model of emotion regulation, Burić, Sorić, and Penezić (2016) identified the need for a psychometrically-verified, self-report scale for assessing students’ emotion regulation in academic contexts. Using samples of Croatian high-school and university students, they designed and tested the Academic Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (AERQ). Based on an initial qualitative study using open-ended questions, the AERQ expanded on Gross’ model to included eight emotion regulation
strategies: avoiding situations, developing competences, redirecting attention, reappraisal, suppression, respiration, venting, and seeking social support. The initial correlational evidence showed that boredom was positively related to redirecting attention, avoiding situations, suppression, reappraisal, and venting, and negatively related to developing competences (no relation with respiration or seeking social support). However, after reviewing the scale items, the only strategy that could be conceptually linked with boredom was redirecting attention (e.g., “I start to think about something more fun when studying becomes boring to me,” “When I get bored by the lesson, I put my mind on something interesting”). Not surprisingly, the correlation between boredom and redirecting attention was by far the strongest. The other regulation scales focused respondents on particular emotions like anger (venting: “When I become very angry in school, I vent my rage on others”) or anxiety (seeking social support: “When I’m nervous about some exam, I talk about it with someone who is close to me”) and thus were not directly related to boredom regulation. Nonetheless, the development of the AERQ is an exciting step forward for the field of emotion regulation in education that, with adjustments accounting for developmental and contextual variability, could help provide new insight into students’ boredom regulation.

Vierhaus et al. (2016) used latent growth models to examine the development of boredom and five coping and regulation strategies in two cohorts of German primary and secondary school students (cohort 1: grades 2-5; cohort 2: grades 4-7). The five strategies for managing boredom were problem solving (e.g., “I take matters into my own hands”), seeking social support (e.g., “I let someone comfort me”), palliative emotion regulation (e.g., “I do something to relax”), anger-related emotion regulation (e.g., “I swear under my breath”), and avoidant coping (e.g., “I try to avoid the matter”). At the end of each school year, the students were asked to rate
their boredom during lessons and respond to vignettes to rate which strategies they used to manage their boredom. They found significant positive relationships in both cohorts between boredom and avoidant coping, and boredom and anger-related emotion regulation, and a positive relationship between boredom and palliative emotion regulation. A negative relationship was found between boredom and problem solving for cohort 2, and no relationship existed between boredom and seeking social support for either cohort. These results do not permit causal explanations, but they do provide evidence concerning developmental changes in boredom and emotion regulation. For instance, as boredom became more intense from grades 2-5 and 4-7, students were also found to increase their use of avoidant coping. Conversely, a positive development of palliative emotion regulation was associated with a decline in boredom. Whereas normative conclusions about which strategies are adaptive or maladaptive, or how they may influence the growth (or decline) in boredom as students progress through school, are not afforded by these analyses, this type of research nonetheless offers an intriguing avenue for future exploration.

Finally, there has been some exploration into why students regulate their boredom and how emotion regulation is shaped by social forces. Moving beyond the individual student and their array of available strategies, research from a sociological perspective has sought to understand the contextualized norms for feeling and expressing emotion, the influence of role identities and expectations, and the social costs and benefits of regulating emotion (see Lively & Weed, 2014, 2016; Stets & Turner, 2014). From this perspective, emotion regulation is typically referred to as emotion management, which builds on the work of sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983), and is “typically performed for the purpose of bringing nonnormative feelings and expressions back in line with culturally agreed-upon emotion norms” (Lively & Weed, 2014, p.
Managing emotions can include changing emotional expression, changing physiology, using different labels to describe the feeling, or reframing what a situation means. According to this perspective, the goal of emotion management is thus to adhere to the norms and expectations of the social roles or identities we fulfill that necessarily change as we move from one context to the next (e.g., student, partner, parent, child, employee).

Being a student is a social role that comes with expectations and norms for feeling and expressing boredom at school and, more specifically, in the presence of teachers and other students. To what end do students manage their boredom when it comes to fulfilling or violating these norms? Farrell et al. (1988) recruited seven American high-school students identified as at-risk of dropping out of school. These students were trained to conduct unstructured interviews about school and social life with other students also enrolled in the dropout prevention program, “regular” high-school students, and friends who had previously dropped out of school. They were also encouraged to conduct interviews with teachers and audio record the classes they found most boring. Through collaborative analysis with the student participants, Farrell identified a conflict between the realities or meaning systems students had constructed and the meaning systems constructed for students by the teachers and administrators. Results showed that students did not find their teachers’ meaning systems to be valid because they, the students, were operating in a less secure world with a wholly different set of pressures. Feeling bored and expressing their boredom, for example, by going to the bathroom for extended breaks, dozing in class, or skipping class entirely, may have been done to reject teachers’ meaning systems that held little value or significance for the students. As Farrell speculates, it was “as though boredom were a way to internally drop out of school” (p. 501). In other words, these particular students were not submitting to the expectations and norms that teachers constructed for the role of
“student.” This explanation goes far beyond simply wanting to down-regulate boredom because it feels unpleasant or to improve engagement with the class content in implicating a more substantial underlying motive to disengage from the context entirely.

As part of a larger ethnographic research project on youth culture in classrooms, Breidenstein (2007) utilized data from classroom observations, interviews, and group discussions to examine the experience of boredom among German grade seven and eight students. His conclusion was that boredom was the experience “that above all makes us, in a fundamental sense, aware of time in its passing (or its stillness)” (p. 104). For the students, regulating boredom was done to kill time and to occupy themselves so as to divert attention away from how slowly the time was passing. Moreover, there appeared to be a tacit agreement between students and teachers to accept a certain amount of boredom as an unavoidable aspect of the classroom context and to cooperatively deal with it. A routine developed wherein the students tactfully did not confront the teacher about their boredom and, in turn, the teachers tolerated many behaviours exhibited by students intended to pass the time that occurred in parallel with the lesson. Boredom became normalized, yet never explicitly addressed, as facilitated by the tacit expectation that if students accepted boredom and managed it by passing the time without interfering in the lesson, teachers would leave them alone.

Summary. Research on academic boredom regulation is in its infancy and has focused mainly on asking students to describe how they regulate boredom to determine which tactics are used most frequently. At this point it is clear that students utilize a wide array of boredom regulation strategies both inside and outside of class when completing academic tasks like studying and homework (Burić et al., 2016; Goetz et al., 2007c; Mann & Robinson, 2009; Nett et al., 2016; Sharp et al., 2016; Vierhaus et al., 2016; Webster & Hadwin, 2015). Educational
psychology research shows the strategies employed, and the frequency with which they are employed, to vary depending on features of the environment including the educational level, task type, and the perceived source of the boredom. Sociological literature into why students regulate their boredom further shows students to often regulate or manage their boredom to kill time in a way that does not interrupt the teacher or violate expected norms for student behaviour (e.g., Breidenstein, 2007; Farrell et al., 1988). However, students have also been observed to regulate their boredom in ways that reject the meaning systems constructed by teachers and administrators and, therefore, deliberately violate the expected norms for behaviour. Thus, if boredom reflects internally dropping out of school, then self-regulation efforts to reduce boredom can similarly be interpreted as efforts to reorient students towards academic persistence. Building on this foundation, additional research is needed to dig deeper into the how and why of academic boredom regulation in a way the respects the multitude of contextual influences.

One final point worth noting before turning to the boredom coping literature is the current ubiquity of smart phones and laptop computers and the ease with which students can access entertainment and distraction. More and more research is emerging showing that the vast majority of students, particularly in developed countries, own or use smart phones, laptops, or tablets, and that these portable devices are routinely used to regulate boredom in school, especially at the post-secondary level (e.g., Emanuel, 2013; Hammer et al., 2010; Panova & Lleras, 2016; Witecki & Nonnecke, 2015). When boredom presents itself during a lecture, in the middle of homework or assignment completion, or while attempting to study, mobile technology offers a quick and relatively effortless form of escape that is routinely used by students. According to Thiele (1997), we are living in an age of postmodernity characterized by the
routinization of novelty and the habitual use of technology. In this contemporary world, “the evasion and suppression of all forms of boredom has become not only customary but institutionalized. A constant supply of novelty is demanded to allow our escape from the looming menace of becoming bored with our thoughts and ourselves” (Thiele, 1997, p. 511). Attempts at documenting boredom regulation in education should embrace this reality and examine how emotion regulation has evolved alongside technological innovation.

**Coping and Academic Boredom**

Prior to the recent foundational papers by Nett et al. (2010, 2011), there had not been a systematic, theoretically-based investigation into how students cope with their academic boredom. Conversely, the literature on coping with stress has had a much richer history (e.g., Holahan et al., 1996; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Understandably, Nett et al. drew heavily on the stress coping literature to develop their theoretical model of academic boredom coping and the associated self-report instrument for operationalizing and testing their model with students. I will evaluate the theoretical origins underpinning Nett et al.’s model, the creation and validation of the Boredom Coping Scale (BCS), and the subsequent empirical research to date.

To begin, a brief overview is required of contemporary theory on coping with stress, which came to fruition during the 1960s and 1970s. The foundational approach of Folkman and Lazarus (1988; see also Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, 1987) is often cited for integrating coping into stress theory (see also Coelho, Hamburg, & Adams, 1974). According to their transactional model of stress and coping, coping is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). *Constantly changing* and *specific* implies that motivation, emotions, thoughts, and actions
associated with coping will change when the source of the stress and resulting appraisals of the situation change; thus, the specific context and what the person actually thinks and does in that context is central (versus what they should, ought, or usually would do).

**Effort** implies that coping requires purposeful behaviours and cognitions rather than automatized reactions. Effort also implies that the act of coping should not be confounded with its outcome. Coping is defined by what the individual does—the efforts they put forth to minimize stress—not by the internal efficacy or effectiveness of their efforts. Consequently, one coping strategy is not better than another, and they argue that the notion of hierarchy should be abandoned. The efficacy of a strategy depends on its effect in a specific situation and its lasting impact on the individual. **Manage** implies that not all sources of stress can be mastered or removed; strategies used to tolerate, minimize, accept, or ignore the source of stress are also relevant forms of coping. According to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) transactional model, there are two main families of coping functions: emotion-focused (“coping that is directed at regulating emotional responses to the problem”) and problem-focused (“coping that is directed at managing or altering the problem causing distress;” p. 150). As discussed below, topological distinction of coping such as these have come under heavy criticism.

Building on the foundation laid by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Holahan et al. (1996) took a social-ecological perspective to develop a resources model of coping (see also Holahan, Moos, & Bonin, 1999; Moos & Holahan, 2003). Similarly, Holahan et al. defined coping as “a stabilizing factor that can help individuals maintain psychosocial adaptation during stressful conditions.”

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21 See Eisenberg, Fabes, and Guthrie (1997) or Skinner (1995) for alternative perspectives wherein coping can consist of both volitional and automatic responses.

22 “The most widely used dimensions of coping are problem- versus emotion-focused coping, primary versus secondary control coping, and engagement (approach) versus disengagement (avoidance) coping. Other dimensions that have been used relatively less often include self-focus and external-focus of coping, cognitive and behavioural coping, and active and passive coping” (Compas et al., 2001, p. 91).
periods; it encompasses cognitive and behavioral efforts to reduce or eliminate stressful conditions and associated emotional distress” (p. 25). They strove for an integrative conceptual framework by drawing on the strengths of both dispositional (stable, person-based) and contextual (transient, situation-based) approaches.

Holahan et al. (1996) conceptualized stress coping along two dichotomous dimensions: cognitive-behavioural and approach-avoidance. The two dimensions were then combined to generate a four-factor model of stress coping. Approach strategies are attempts to resolve the problem either by changing the situation directly (behavioural-approach) or changing one’s perception of the situation (cognitive-approach). Avoidance strategies entail avoiding the problem or situation causing stress by doing something unrelated (behavioural-avoidance) or thinking of something unrelated (cognitive-avoidance). Like Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 1987) they agreed that investing in normative rules about the efficacy of specific coping categories would be an oversimplification. However, they did highlight research from a number of domains wherein approach strategies (e.g., problem solving, information seeking, negotiation) led to lower stress and fewer psychological symptoms compared with avoidance strategies (e.g., denial, withdrawal, escapism, wishful thinking, self-blame). Holahan et al.’s model also acknowledged the importance of personal and social coping resources for strengthening perceived control, accurately assessing a threat, and planning how to cope.

Returning now to coping with academic boredom, Nett et al. (2010, 2011) fashioned their own four-factor model of boredom coping after Holahan et al. (1996) by adopting the cognitive-behavioural and approach-avoidance dimensions. For example, a student who is bored while listening to a lecture on abstract algebra may cope by mentally reminding herself of the attainment value of getting a good grade in algebra (cognitive-approach). She may stop the
teacher and ask how the specific topic is relevant to her current, everyday functioning (behavioural-approach). She may discretely pull out her mobile phone and text a friend (behavioural-avoidance). She might engage in a daydream or think about what she will do on the weekend (cognitive-avoidance). Having established a theory-driven model, Nett et al. sought to design scales for assessing students' boredom coping. Before examining their findings, a closer inspection of the two coping dimensions is warranted precisely because they have formed the foundation for all subsequent boredom coping investigations.

A comprehensive review of the stress coping literature by Skinner et al. (2003) identified over 400 different coping strategies and further proposed three higher-order categories of coping: single functions (e.g., problem-focused and emotion-focused), topological distinctions (e.g., approach–avoidance, cognitive–behavioural), and action types (e.g., support-seeking, opposition). With these approaches in mind, Skinner et al. identified a set of criteria for evaluating higher-order categorization systems. For example, higher-order coping categories should be functionally homogenous and functionally distinct—that is, all strategies for coping within a category have the same function or set of functions. They should also have conceptually clear definitions and be mutually exclusive and generative such that all second-order coping strategies belong to only one higher-order category. Finally, they should be flexible such that they can be applied across contexts.

Skinner et al. (2003) argued that a hierarchical system based on action types adheres to all the above criteria whereas single functions and topological distinctions do not. Compas et al. (2001) also concluded from their review of the literature that single functions and topological

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23 There are parallels here to flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) wherein individuals engage in “microflow activities” (e.g., talking to a friend, biting a pencil) “because while doing it the structure of the activity, however tenuous, provides a respite from worry and boredom and an opportunity to merge action and awareness in a limited stimulus field” (p. 149).
distinctions do not adequately account for the complexity and multidimensional nature of coping. To reiterate, “These widely used dimensions are at best insufficient to capture the diversity and complexity of the ways that children and adolescents cope with stress, and at worst these dimensions can disguise important differences in the nature and function of coping” (Compas et al., p. 120). On the other hand, action types capture the multifunctional, multidimensional nature of coping. Skinner et al. synthesized the existing strategies into a comprehensive list of a dozen action types.24

Rather than employ a hierarchical system based on action types, the BCS utilizes topological distinctions for categorizing boredom coping strategies. This approach does not sufficiently adhere to the criteria for effective higher-order categorization proposed by Skinner et al. (2003). For example, consider the items “I do my homework” and “I copy the homework for my next class,” which are cognitive-avoidance strategies in the BCS. Because the act of doing or copying homework involves both cognitive and behavioural components, they could reasonably be subsumed under either avoidance category. Indeed, according to Nett et al. (2010), behavioral-avoidance strategies are “when students distract themselves from boring situations by doing something else” (p. 628). This issue arises because the topological distinctions are not conceptually clear, mutually exclusive, or functionally distinct. Comparatively, the well-established coping with stress literature has generated numerous structured self-report measures such as the 60-item COPE instrument that includes scales for 15 different action-type stress coping strategies like positive reinterpretation and instrumental social support (Carver, Scheier,

24 Problem-solving, information-seeking, helplessness, escape, support-seeking, self-reliance, social isolation, delegation, accommodation or cognitive restructuring, negotiation, submission, and opposition. Note that these categories are hierarchical in the sense that they are first-order categorical labels that contain second-order categories or strategies. There is no inherent hierarchy based on their efficacy or adaptiveness.
There are also important criticisms that arise from a developmental perspective. Skinner and Zimmer-Gemback (2007) and Compas et al. (2001) emphasized that the adult coping literature (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Holahan et al., 1996) is not developmentally sensitive and cautioned against borrowing from it when studying children and adolescents. The types of strategies used and their prevalence of use will differ based on age. For example, as children grow older they increasingly use more cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and rely less on direct action. In middle and late adolescents (i.e., 14-22 years of age), individuals select coping strategies based on personal values and long-term goals (Skinner et al., 2003; Skinner & Zimmer-Gimbeck, 2009). The mechanisms underlying these developmental shifts in coping may be overlooked or ignored altogether when relying on the existing categorical systems for classifying adult coping. Whether this applies to coping with academic boredom remains to be seen, but it may be beneficial to remember that the BCS was constructed from a conceptual model originally formulated to explain coping with stress in adulthood. Moreover, it was originally validated with students in early and middle adolescence, yet the types of boredom coping strategies available to students likely vary by age because of developmental differences and affordances provided by their current educational level. For instance, high-school and post-secondary students may have a greater array of coping responses at their disposal (e.g., leaving class partway through, using distractors like mobile phones or laptop), and this should be reflected in the research.

25 A review of the developmental literature is beyond the scope of this paper, but it should be noted that Compas et al. (2001) identify four main perspectives on coping within childhood and adolescence, which include Weisz and colleagues (Band & Weisz, 1988; McCarty et al, 1999; Rudolph, Dennig, & Weisz, 1995; Weisz, McCabe, & Dennig, 1994), Skinner (1995), Eisenberg and colleagues (e.g., Eisenberg, Fabes, & Guthrie, 1997), and Compas and colleagues (e.g., Compas, 1998; Compas, Connor, Osowiecki, & Welch, 1997; Compas et al., 1999).
In summary, there are multiple critiques of the recently proposed four-factor model of boredom coping by Nett et al. (2010, 2011) that, not unlike the boredom coping model itself, have their origins in the stress coping literature. Most notably, the Holahan et al. (1996) model makes use of two topological distinctions to classify coping. Although this is a notable improvement over using a single distinction, it is still inferior to a taxonomy grounded in action types as topological distinctions are not conceptually clear, mutually exclusive, or functionally distinct. Consequently, the measurement tool designed by Nett et al. may suffer from the abovementioned conceptual weaknesses inherent to the topological distinctions that are its foundation. Additionally, the Holahan et al. model is based in the adult coping literature yet Nett et al. apply their model and validated their measure with child and adolescent samples. The next sections will provide a closer examination of the design and psychometric validation of the BCS and the subsequent academic boredom coping profiles that have been identified.

**The Boredom Coping Scale**

As the only existing standardized self-report measure for assessing how students cope with academic boredom, the BCS (Nett et al., 2010) deserves to be critically analyzed. Although an earlier scale had been developed to assess general boredom coping (Hamilton, Haier, & Buchsbaum, 1984), it did not measure specific coping strategies and lacked a theoretical basis (Nett et al., 2010; Vodanovich, 2003). In contrast, the BCS consists of four 5-item subscales to measure cognitive-approach, cognitive-avoidance, behavioural-approach, and behavioural-avoidance coping. In accordance with research on the domain-specificity of academic emotions

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26 Hamilton et al. (1984) developed a 10-item boredom coping scale where boredom coping was conceptualized as a trait: “Boredom coping is designed to reflect the disposition to restructure one’s perceptions and participation in potentially boring activities so as to decrease boredom” (p. 183). A sample item from the scale asks: “In school or at my job: (a) I often wish that I was somewhere else or doing something else,” or (b) “It is generally easy to concentrate on what I’m doing.” Answering with choice “b” would indicate a greater disposition toward boredom coping.
(e.g., Goetz et al., 2007a), a domain-specific anchor is provided (i.e., “When I am bored in [DOMAIN] class I . . .”), which can be adapted based on researchers’ preferences. For example, “When I am bored in mathematics class I make myself aware of the importance of the issue,” would assess cognitive-approach coping in math. Each item is ranked on a 5-point Likert scale.

The psychometric properties of the BCS have been tested across a handful of studies (Eren, 2013, 2016; Eren & Coskun, 2015, 2016; Nett et al., 2010, 2011; Tze, Daniels, Klassen, & Johnson, 2013a; Zhou & Kam, 2017). The four subscales continually show satisfactory internal consistency (i.e., $\alpha > .70$), although the cognitive-avoidance subscale has demonstrated borderline reliability in a few studies (e.g., $\alpha = .69$, Nett et al., 2011; $\alpha = .67$, Tze et al., 2013a). The cognitive-approach subscale consistently has the highest mean level across all studies. Nett et al. (2010) conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the factor structure of the BCS. Seven potential models were compared, including one-factor, second-order factor, and four-factor structures. As expected, the four-factor model had the best fit to the data and, therefore, supported their theorized model of boredom coping. The four-factor structure of the BCS has been validated in additional studies with samples from multiple countries and education levels (Eren, 2013; Eren & Coskun, 2015; Nett et al., 2011; Tze et al., 2013a). Gender invariance was also established for the four-factor model (Tze et al., 2013a). Finally, divergent validity was established through low to medium correlations between the four latent coping strategies and eight latent constructs, including interest, effort, and value of achievement.

Despite satisfactory psychometric properties and support for the four-factor structure, there are a number of criticisms of the BCS worth noting. Most importantly, the BCS likely does not capture many of the boredom coping strategies that students use. Within the four coping categories, the BCS assesses a total of six strategies: 1) refocusing attention and 2) reaffirming
the importance of the lesson or class for oneself (cognitive-approach); 3) asking the instructor for a new, more interesting task and 4) attempting to change the topic of a lesson (behavioural-approach); 5) preparing for another class (e.g., doing homework or studying; cognitive-avoidance); and 6) interacting with fellow classmates (behavioural-approach). In the behavioural-avoidance subscale, for example, all five items pertain to talking or interacting with a classmate. Among high-school students, a number of other strategies reasonably subsumed under the umbrella of behavioural-avoidance come to mind, such as asking to visit the bathroom, using a mobile phone or a computer to engage in an unrelated activity, or doodling. Not only are these strategies not assessed, there is also potential for spurious conclusions regarding students who engage in specific actions not identified by the BCS but that would, nonetheless, fall under the one of the four higher-order categories. For instance, researchers can reasonably assume that a college student could consistently rely on their mobile phone to discreetly cope with boredom in class yet minimally interact with their peers for various reasons. With the BCS, this student would be labelled low on behavioural-avoidance coping when in fact the opposite was true.

The limited qualitative research that exists supports the criticism that the BCS likely excludes a number of boredom coping strategies that students use in school settings, particularly in higher education. For example, Mann and Robinson (2009) found that students employed a number of boredom coping strategies during lectures including daydreaming, doodling, colouring letters on a handout, texting a friend, leaving at break time, and playing games on a mobile phone. Sharp et al. (2016) also found that students daydream, “switch off” (i.e., mentally disengage), text, doodle, leave class, use Facebook or Twitter, check emails, play games on their phones, and fall asleep. Webster and Hadwin (2015) found that students cope with boredom by ignoring the boredom, accepting it (i.e., doing nothing), listening to music, playing computer
games, watching TV, taking breaks, drinking coffee or eating food, and taking walks. Through interviews with American high-school students at risk of dropping out, Farrell et al. (1988) similarly found that coping with boredom included going to the bathroom for extended periods, skipping class entirely, or dozing in class. Overall, despite the notable prevalence of these varied behavioural and cognitive responses to boredom in modern educational settings, particularly higher education, none of these strategies are assessed using the existing BCS measure. As quantitative self-report questionnaires are necessarily limited in assessing only a predetermined scope of coping behaviours, additional methods of data collection are needed to further expand our understanding of boredom coping such as observation or interviews to verify, expand upon, and provide context to self-report data. Additional qualitative investigations beyond those conducted with secondary school students are also warranted to identify academic boredom coping strategies specific to post-secondary students, as “measurement needs to be age appropriate and sensitive to both stability and change with development” (Compas, 2009, p. 90). Given that the types of coping strategies available to students are likely to vary by age because of developmental differences and affordances of their current educational level, age differences in boredom coping strategies are to be expected.

Another criticism is that the BCS focuses exclusively on boredom that has already occurred (i.e., reactive coping). Borrowing from the stress coping literature (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997), it is reasonable to assume that students similarly use proactive, preventative, or anticipatory coping strategies to counteract expected boredom before it occurs (e.g., Harris, 2000). Such anticipatory strategies may be especially salient in high-school and post-secondary contexts where leaving class, skipping class, or intentionally bringing distractors (e.g., mobile phone, laptop) to class are feasible boredom-reducing options. It should be noted that Nett et al.
(2011) did attempt an approximation of preventative coping with the BCS by having students answer the state-level boredom coping questions regardless of whether or not they currently were experiencing boredom. Of the four categories, only cognitive-approach was present when boredom was absent leading them to suggest that cognitive-approach strategies may also serve a preventative function. However, given that the measures did not specifically assess the preventative function of this strategy by way of student perceptions (e.g., asking students if they used this strategy in anticipation of boredom) or temporal sequencing (e.g., assessing longitudinal effects of this strategy on subsequent boredom experiences), this hypothesis is in need of further testing.

**Coping Profiles**

Four studies have identified students’ boredom coping profiles through person-centered latent profile analysis (LPA) using data from the BCS (Daniels et al., 2015; Nett et al., 2010, 2011; Tze et al., 2013a). The goal of LPA is to “detect unobserved heterogeneity in a sample in order to reveal homogenous groups of participants that share a similar pattern of responses” (Nett et al., 2010, p. 631). In the initial study by Nett et al. (2010) with German elementary and high-school students, three latent classes or profiles were identified: Reappraisers, Criticizers, and Evaders. Reappraisers preferred cognitive-approach strategies and were below average on all other categories. Criticizers favoured behavioural-approach strategies but were also above average on both avoidance categories. Finally, Evaders utilized both types of avoidance strategies but favoured behavioural-avoidance. In Nett et al. (2011), the LPA revealed a two-class solution that consisted of Reappraisers and Evaders. A third profile was not identified.

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27 Although Tze et al. (2013a) cite the review paper by Skinner et al. (2003) and acknowledge that the BCS dimensions are not mutually exclusive, they provide no additional critiques of topological distinctions. Instead, they proposed that person-centered LPA be used to capture the multidimensionality of boredom coping and identify homogenous groups of copers.
PHENOMENOLOGY OF BOREDOM COPING

among their sample of German high-school students.

Tze et al. (2013a) conducted LPAs separately for Canadian and Chinese undergraduate samples revealing three-class solutions for both groups. Among Canadian students, 85% were labelled as Reappraisers, 13% as Criticizers, and 2% as an “other” group not aligned with the profiles identified by Nett et al. (2010, 2011) that was excluded from subsequent analyses. In the Chinese sample, 68% were labelled as Evaders, 24% as Reformers (i.e., above average for all strategies except behavioural-avoidance), and 7% as Infrequent copers (i.e., below average on all strategies). Generally speaking, the majority of Chinese students adopted avoidance coping whereas Canadian students tended toward cognitive-approach coping. Tze et al. suggested that this difference, along with the emergence of two new profiles among Chinese students, was the result of discrepancies in cultural norms concerning emotion regulation and social harmony underscoring the importance of examining cultural moderators of boredom coping in future research. Finally, in Daniels et al. (2015) a three-class solution was identified with Canadian undergraduates, with these three profiles being consistent with Nett et al. (2010).

Consistent with the stress coping literature (e.g., Aldridge & Roesch, 2008; Skinner et al., 2003; Seiffge-Krenke and Klessinger, 2000; Tolan, Gorman–Smith, Henry, Chung, & Hunt, 2002), these studies reveal that students use multiple methods to cope with boredom. Moreover, the existing research on boredom coping in higher education that has adopted person-centered analytical approaches has provided intriguing preliminary findings. However, as existing results also suggest age-related and cultural inconsistencies in the number, types, and proportionality of profiles identified, it is worth considering that such issues could be due to limitations of the original coping typology. Additionally, as interpreting class-solutions represents an inherently subjective process of determining the best-fitting, most parsimonious model (e.g., despite the
four-class solution fitting the data better, Daniels et al. (2015) opted for the three-class solution due to the fourth class closely resembling an existing class), alternative qualitative investigations in which both the researchers and the respondents perceptions of their coping style are included should be similarly informative.

Two of the main purposes for existing research efforts to identify coping profiles have been to examine their predictive ability and establish external validity concerning psychosocial and academic outcomes; however, there remains a need to identify what situation-specific strategies are effective at reducing boredom in higher education to better assist struggling students. As for findings on the effects of boredom coping profiles, the limited emerging evidence is not consistent. In Nett et al. (2010, 2011), Reappraisers clearly had the most adaptive profile. They had significantly lower trait boredom in both studies, and in the former had the highest achievement, lowest math anxiety and highest math enjoyment, as well as highest levels of effort and interest in math. In contrast, Evaders had the highest boredom levels and were lowest on all other outcomes except anxiety. Interestingly, Criticizers had the highest math self-concept but also the highest math anxiety. In short, students adopting primarily cognitive-approach strategies to cope with boredom also reported the lowest trait boredom and most adaptive emotional, motivational, and achievement profile. Furthermore, the two coping profiles identified in Nett et al. (2011) were compared on the Big Five personality traits, with Evaders reporting more extroversion and less conscientiousness than Reappraisers. These personality traits align well with findings showing Evaders to favour interacting with their classmates and other behavioural-avoidance strategies to cope with boredom.

Among the Canadian students in Tze et al. (2013a), Criticizers had higher intrinsic motivation compared with Reappraisers, but no other differences were found, including for
boredom. By way of explanation, the authors inferred that "high motivation to succeed might propel students to verbalize their feelings and demand changes in learning to meet their needs" (p. 41). Among Chinese students, Evaders had significantly higher boredom relative to Reformers and Infrequent copers, but not lower achievement, suggesting that they could find ways to achieve without coping with boredom. Reformers had higher intrinsic motivation than both groups and higher self-efficacy for self-regulated learning compared to Evaders. As such, these results suggest that the above average levels of coping in three of the four categories reported by Reformers may be due, in part, to higher levels of motivation and self-efficacy to seek out various ways of adaptively coping with boredom experiences.

Finally, in Daniels et al. (2015), differences on precursors to academic boredom were examined among the three coping profiles. They expected that the antecedents identified by the Precursors of Boredom Scale (PBS; Daschmann et al., 2011) would act as situational influences on coping because they reflect situational appraisals of perceived control and value. Reappraisers reported significantly lower levels than Evaders and Criticizers across the various precursors, including over-challenge, lack of meaning, and teacher dislike, suggesting that students may turn to more behavioural-oriented strategies as the number and intensity of precursors increases. However, as this study was cross-sectional in nature, determinations of causality are not possible and require future research to examine potential reciprocal relations between perceived precursors and coping strategy selection.

Given the lack of consistent profiling and findings across emerging research on boredom coping profiles, normative conclusions are not presently warranted. Nevertheless, existing findings tend to suggest that students who rely primarily on avoidance-oriented coping (i.e., Evaders) are likely to also experience higher trait levels of boredom, with students who adopt
more approach-oriented strategies likely faring better. Interestingly, teachers also indicate that they would encourage students to first adopt cognitive-approach strategies (e.g., Reappraisers), with behavioural-approach strategies being less likely to be recommended (Daniels & Tze, 2014). Other researchers have similarly adopted the tentative conclusion that approach-oriented strategies are the most adaptive and the most effective at reducing boredom because they target internal causes (e.g., Eren & Coskun, 2015; Nett et al., 2010, 2011). Nevertheless, keeping in mind inconsistent findings across age groups and cultures concerning boredom coping profiles, it is perhaps more prudent to focus less on generalizability and more on adopting a more situated approach to better identifying the types of strategies used as well as the specific, contextualized factors that mediate and moderate how students cope in a higher education setting.

Thus far, only Nett et al. (2011) have endeavoured to examine real-time boredom coping by examining it at the state (versus trait) level through the use of ESM protocols assessing daily state coping in class over two weeks. They established that cognitive-approach and behavioural-avoidance were used most frequently. Intraclass correlations revealed that the variability in all four categories was largely influenced by the situational context and less so by dispositional factors. Regarding the predictive validity of the trait coping measures, the Reappraiser and Evader trait profiles predicted state coping in line with expectations. For example, a greater probability of being a Reappraiser predicted greater state cognitive-approach and fewer state behavioural-avoidance strategies. State-level cognitive-approach and behavioural-avoidance strategies were successfully predicted by their corresponding trait measures whereas cognitive-avoidance and behavioural-approach were not. The relatively weak relations between trait and state assessments are common but underscore the need to evaluate both in future research.
Summary. In considering the limited research and the critiques I have outlined, there are a number of important reflections and directions for future research on coping with academic boredom. Building on suggestions from the stress coping and achievement emotion literatures, it is imperative to be cognizant of potential age-specific, domain-specific, and context-specific coping strategies and profiles. Broad classifications, such as approach versus avoidance, may help to organize the literature, but may be overly-simplistic and even detrimental when drawing conclusions about student coping. Assessing boredom coping while it is occurring (or as close-in-time as possible) via state-level assessment also holds considerable promise, allowing researchers to simultaneously examine both within- and between-person variability in coping. As researchers, we cannot ignore that there are dispositional and situational influences on when and how students choose to cope with boredom. Moreover, we should remain vigilant against drawing intraindividual conclusions from interindividual data, with in-depth longitudinal observation or qualitative interview protocols being potentially informative in this regard.

It is also important to re-examine the conceptual foundation of existing boredom coping measures, namely the BCS and its four subscales. Extant research to date has relied solely on this measure, and if future research is to do the same, greater scrutiny is needed. An important first step could be to perform a developmentally-sensitive, qualitative inquiry that favours students’ phenomenological perspectives on their boredom coping, with a specific focus on underexplored higher education settings. It is anticipated that this approach might reveal common coping strategies not tapped by the BCS and also suggest a different approach to categorizing higher-order coping actions. A phenomenological investigation of college students’ lived experiences coping with boredom could thus shed much-needed light on the nature, intensity, and scope of boredom coping at the post-secondary level.
What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology began as a branch of philosophy in the early 20th century. The overarching goal was to describe phenomena “in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer” (Moran, 2002, p. 4). Phenomenology later evolved into a diverse array of research approaches or methodologies that corresponded with one or more phenomenological philosophies. According to Finlay (2013), there is widespread agreement that the central concern of phenomenological research is “to return to embodied, experiential meanings of the world directly experienced . . . [to] strive for fresh, complex, rich description of phenomena as concretely lived” (p. 173).

Hence, the goal of phenomenology is description, not causal explanation, prediction, or generalization. Any phenomenological inquiry seeks to understand and describe a phenomenon; to capture individuals’ lived experiences. Despite a unifying interest in uncovering and describing the meaning of human experiences, there is great diversity in the interpretations and applications of phenomenological philosophy that is reflected in the language and methodologies of contemporary phenomenological research (Finlay, 2009; Gill, 2014; Moran, 2000).

Arriving at a specific frame of phenomenological inquiry requires an understanding of the ways in which phenomenological approaches differ. According to Lather (2006), it is important to recognize the tensions, aporias, or points of contention that characterize the discipline following from the contrasting philosophical reflections of central figures in phenomenology including Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Some examples of these aporias include: the role of interpretation in phenomenological description, how the researcher’s presuppositions and pre-understandings of a phenomenon are treated, and how a researcher
interprets and exercises the phenomenological attitude (Finlay, 2009). Choosing a methodology requires a willingness to critically reflect on one’s own ontological and epistemological assumptions and a commitment to locate oneself within these tensions. Thus, in selecting a phenomenological methodology to utilize in one’s own research, it is imperative to establish a thorough understanding of its philosophical origins (e.g., Koch, 1996).

**Selecting a Phenomenological Approach**

For the current study, I will employ the hermeneutical phenomenological human science approach of Max van Manen (1997). My goals for this section of the paper are to concisely summarize his approach, identify the philosophical underpinnings, and highlight specific suggestions that directly pertain to key elements of the research process (e.g., sampling, interviewing and investigating experience, reflecting on essential themes).

At the outset of *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen (1997) suggested that his text be interpreted as a coherent set of methodological suggestions for approaching human science research. But what is human science? van Manen noted that the term *human science* (German translation: *Geisteswissenschaften*) comes from the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1989) who differentiated between human and natural phenomena. Human phenomena (e.g., love, language, music, religion) are best addressed with description and interpretation. Natural phenomena (e.g., particles, light, weather, energy) are amendable to observation, probabilistic and causal explanation, and prediction as aligned with positivistic rationality and the scientific method. Conversely, human science research attempts to understand and explicate the meaning of human phenomena.

Max van Manen’s particular methodology for conducting human science research is referred to as *hermeneutic phenomenology*. Hermeneutics, derived from the Greek verb
hermeneuin ("to interpret"), is the art or the theory and practice of interpretation. Hermeneutics, as a discipline, was initially tasked with interpreting ancient texts, such as the Bible, but has since expanded to include verbal and non-verbal communication including painting, sculpture, music, and dance. Building on the efforts of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) to substantiate hermeneutics as a method for questioning and understanding in the human sciences, Heidegger (1962) is credited with combining hermeneutics with Husserl’s phenomenology to produce the discipline of hermeneutic phenomenology (Moran, 2000). Philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) and Paul Ricoeur (1976) are also often acknowledged for their efforts to develop the notions of interpretation, understanding, and textuality within the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition. As such, their philosophies are evident in van Manen’s discussion of his own method.

What does it mean for phenomenology to be hermeneutic or interpretive? How does this differ from the purely descriptive phenomenology? To what lengths can I go in interpreting the lived experiences of the people who lend their descriptions to my research? First, take into consideration how van Manen (1997) describes his method:

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. (p. 180)

With all phenomenology, the researcher or philosopher strives to be descriptive (versus explanatory) by explicating the meaning or essence of a phenomenon as it is lived. For example,

my goal in the present study is to describe what it is like for college students to cope with academic boredom. But any description, whether in thoughts, words, sounds, or images, can only be expressed through some form of symbolism such as language. As such, any attempt at producing a phenomenological description is inescapably mediated by some form of symbolic expression that necessitates interpretation. This may seem like a trivial point but it is at the heart of a deep methodological divide within the discipline. By acknowledging that interpretation is an integral feature of his phenomenological method, van Manen embraced Heidegger’s ontological approach to phenomenology and accepted that “the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 37). Interpretation is not an additional procedure to be carried out after description.

In attempting to understand and describe human phenomena, language is typically the symbolic form through which we interpret: “Lived experience is soaked through with language. We are able to recall and reflect on experience thanks to language. Human experience is only possible because we have language” (van Manen, 1997, p. 38). Consequently, because of the ubiquity of language in human existence, van Manen supports Heidegger’s philosophy and argues that there cannot be interpretation-free description no matter what form that description takes (cf. Giorgi, 1985, 2006). In this sense, Finlay (2009) is correct to say that “we experience a thing as something that has already been interpreted” (p. 11), as is Gadamer (1986) when he said “when we interpret the meaning of something we actually interpret an interpretation” (p. 68). I will adopt van Manen’s hermeneutic phenomenological method because I believe it is imperative to acknowledge the fundamental role of language and interpretation in phenomenological description.
Additionally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the extent to which my existence, and the existence of those who have lent their lived experiences to my research, is historically embedded in a particular sociocultural context. I acknowledge that the language I use to form descriptions is influenced by my living in a particular sociocultural context that is historically-situated and therefore dynamic. As such, hermeneutic phenomenologists, such as Heidegger, Gadamer, and van Manen, argue for research perspectives that acknowledge our “embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the inescapable historicity of all understanding” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). Our reality—our way of being in the world—is culturally- and historically-situated, and our linguistic interpretations of that reality, what we might count as knowledge, are likewise situated. To conduct hermeneutic phenomenological research is to embrace these ontological and epistemological premises from the outset.

According to van Manen (1997, 2014), language can be used to explicate phenomenological meanings. Language is integral to his methodology because hermeneutic phenomenology is first and foremost a textual or reflective writing activity. According to this perspective, language (via phenomenological text) succeeds when it is able to make meaning recognizable to the reader and bring the reader in closer contact with the phenomena of everyday living. Hermeneutic phenomenologists demonstrate a great deal of confidence in the power of language to capture the meaning of lived experiences; yet, “experience is always more immediate, more enigmatic, more complex, more ambiguous than any description can do justice to” (van Manen, 1997, p. xvii). It is important then to acknowledge this limitation: what

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29 To adeptly illustrate this point, van Manen (1997) uses the phenomenon of womanhood: “For example, to understand what it means to be a woman in our present age is also to understand the pressures of the meaning structures that have come to restrict, widen, or question the nature and ground of womanhood. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is a search for the fullness of living, for the ways a woman possibly can experience the world as a woman, for what it is to be a woman” (p. 12).
language describes, no matter how reflective or insightful, will forever fall short of raw reality and pre-reflective experience. In embracing phenomenology and striving to produce a phenomenological text on academic boredom coping, I acknowledge that the end product will ultimately be incomplete.

Finally, while adhering to the philosophical traditions of hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen also identifies his human science approach as a *phenomenology of practice*. To pursue a phenomenology of practice means to strive for phenomenological research and writing that serves one’s professional practice, such as education, psychiatry, or nursing, rather than concerning oneself with the technical or theoretical issues of philosophical phenomenology. As such, a phenomenology of practice enhances understanding for the immediate experiences and phenomena of everyday life (e.g., boredom, playing, studying, teaching), and strives “to foster and strengthen an embodied ontology, epistemology, and axiology of thoughtful and tactful action” (van Manen, 2014, p. 15). This branch of phenomenology has its origins in the Dutch or Utrecht School of phenomenology that arose in the 1950s and including academics such as Martinus Langeveld (1905-1989) and Frederik Buytendijk (1887-1974). Suggestions for a rich phenomenology of practice are explicated below.

**Principal Methodological Components**

**Lifeworld**. Building on the previous section, it is imperative to elaborate on some of the central philosophical ideas of hermeneutical phenomenological (at a conceptual level) as they apply to van Manen’s human science approach. Perhaps most importantly, phenomenological research begins in the *lifeworld* or *Lebenswelt*, a term popularized by Husserl (1936/1954), which is the world of everyday lived experiences (e.g., having a conversation, riding the bus, watching a movie). In summarizing the works of original thinkers such as Dilthey (1989),
Gadamer (1975), and Merleau-Ponty (1962), van Manen (2014) succinctly defines lived experience as “experience that we live through before we take a reflective view of it” (p. 42). According to Moran (2000), lived experience is “experience before it has been formulated in judgements and expressed in outward linguistic form, before it becomes packaged for explicit consciousness” (p. 12). Lived experience is thus pre-reflective and precedes objectification, idealization, classification, categories, taxonomies, or abstractions that arise through thought and language. The lifeworld, in this pre-given and pre-theoretical sense, consists of our everyday direct and immediate experiences that happen in “the now.”

**Pre-reflective consciousness.** A second feature of phenomenological research is that it attempts to describe lived experiences as they present themselves to consciousness. Our access to the lifeworld—to any phenomenon or lived experience, to anything and everything we can know (real or imagined)—is through our consciousness. However, according to phenomenological perspectives, to describe a phenomenon as it is experienced in the now, in immediate, pre-reflective consciousness, is inherently problematic because we are unable to reflect on an experience while living through it. The now is always initially unreflective: “When we turn toward the experience attentively and grasp it, it takes in a new mode of being: it becomes ‘differentiated,’ ‘singled out’” (Husserl, 1917/1991, p. 132). To understand this issue, consider the example of feeling anger. When a person is angry, their anger will likely dominate their consciousness and influence decision making and judgement, but as soon as they reflect on their anger (*Why am I angry? Do I want to feel angry?*) the emotion should dissipate or change in

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30 “The now is the moment of existence that we experience at present . . . the living present that is somehow the primordial reality or raw existence that we live from moment to moment” (van Manen, 2014, p. 56)

31 For the sake of clarity, I define reflection in this dissertation as consciously directing one’s cognition toward a previous experience.
some way (e.g., become more focused on specific assumed causes). Being angry and reflecting on anger in an attempt to describe it are therefore not the same. The phenomenological approach asserts that by labeling an experience using language (e.g., “I am bored”) we have “lifted it up” from our pre-reflective consciousness (van Manen, 2014) thus allowing us to reflect on it retrospectively, with such reflecting being qualitative different from true introspection due to the experience having occurred in the past (van Manen, 1997).

The belief that we cannot reflect on experience while living through it calls to mind the accessibility model of emotional self-report (Robinson & Clore, 2002), which presents a contrary epistemological stance. Coming from cognitive psychology, Robinson and Clore argued that people utilize different types of information or knowledge about their emotions depending on when they are asked to describe them (i.e., temporal distance from the target event or context; trait versus state emotions). They believed that although we cannot store an original emotional experience, retrieve it from memory, or re-experience it after it has happened, emotions are open to true introspection when they are being experienced (despite their short duration). Consequently, they contend that “real-time” or “in-the-moment” self-reporting (e.g., the experience sampling method; see Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2007), typically through psychometrically-grounded scale-based surveys, is the most ecologically-valid method for understanding how people experience emotions.

While I see the merits of investigating emotions in situ, in the current study I will take the epistemological stance of the phenomenologists and focus my efforts on utilizing qualitative, retrospective reports of academic boredom and boredom coping. This requires accepting that even the best experiential descriptions will not succeed in capturing pre-reflective experience in
its full form. Nonetheless, constructing evocative descriptions is about striving to bring the reader as close as possible to the original lived experience.

**Essences.** A third feature of phenomenological research is the search for “essences.” The essence of a lived experience is the “aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. 107). According to phenomenologists, the essence of a phenomenon is a universal, but to uncover or grasp the essence the researcher must study particular instances or manifestations of the phenomenon (e.g., participant descriptions collected in one-on-one interviews). As these instances will be bound by the sociocultural context, language, and historicity, so too will the researcher’s description of the essence of that phenomenon (see Wertz, 2010). Thus, in the phenomenological research tradition, a researcher’s description represents just one possible interpretation of the experience with the researcher’s goal not being to solve a phenomenological question but rather to better understand the lived meanings that fuel his or her inquiry.

Phenomenology systematically thus strives to make explicit (via text) the lived meanings of our human experiences, but it is not systematic in the sense that it can be reduced to a fixed set of steps or a methodological sequence for elucidating essences (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenological research is nonetheless methodical to the extent that it entails uniquely practiced modes of thoughtful questioning and reflecting (cf. Giorgi, 2006). In the search for lived meanings, phenomenology distinguishes itself from human science approaches that attempt to predict, explain, control, or replicate some aspect of the world. Unlike many empirical analytic

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32 Importantly, van Manen (1997) points out that *essence* from a phenomenological perspective is not the same as essence according to categorical essentialists who have come under heavy criticism from poststructuralists and other anti-essentialists/foundationalists. Categorical essentialism involves defining social groups and phenomenon in absolute terms, as things with immutable properties from which moral convictions can be drawn. This provides fuel for oppression or unjust treatment of one group by another.
PHENOMENOLOGY OF BOREDOM COPING

sciences, phenomenology seeks to avoid reductionist models and theories that simplify and fragment human experience for the sake of obtaining statistical relationships among variables or frequencies of behaviours and characteristics (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology does not strive for data about how often something happens or how one thing is causally related to another. As van Manen (1997) states, “phenomenology does not allow for empirical generalizations, the production of law-like statements, or the establishment of functional relationships. The only generalization allowed by phenomenology is this: Never generalize!” (p. 22).

Addressing presuppositions. A primary concern among phenomenologists is how to address one’s existing beliefs and presuppositions as a researcher or scholar concerning the lived experience that is to become the focus of inquiry. Through my previous research and writing about academic boredom and boredom coping, I have been exposed to numerous theories, frameworks, models, and knowledge claims about the nature of boredom, how boredom arises in the classroom, and how students behave and think in response to boredom. Consequently, I have been predisposed to interpret boredom and boredom coping in ways that may facilitate or interfere with my ability to remain attentive to my data and the lived experiences I seek to describe. So, before beginning the process of data collection and analysis, I was required to decide if and how these presuppositions should influence my phenomenological reflection (Finlay, 2008; Gearing, 2004; LeVasseur, 2003). Should I ignore the potential influences of my presuppositions and beliefs? Do I attempt to set them aside or bracket them so that they cannot influence my phenomenological descriptions and understanding? Or do I continually reflect on them and critically evaluate how they are influencing my phenomenological inquiry?

When engaging in phenomenological reflection, the existing literature suggests that we should strive to adopt the phenomenological attitude that involves going “beyond the natural
attitude of taken-for-granted understanding” and “engaging a certain sense of wonder and openness to the world while, at the same time, reflexively restraining pre-understandings” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). By adopting the phenomenological attitude, scholars have suggested that we as researchers should aim to be free of our personal theories, presuppositions, and beliefs about lived experience. This requires that we first awaken and confront our assumptions about the nature and meaning of the phenomenon (Moran, 2002). Furthermore, throughout the entire research process we must strive to let the lived experience speak for itself and not impose categorical abstractions, models, or positivistic schemata (van Manen, 1997).

The phenomenological attitude was first espoused by Husserl (1913/1982, 1936/1954) as a radical approach to philosophical reflection on the lifeworld. Husserl believed that a phenomenological attitude could be achieved through a multilayered process called the phenomenological reduction. A key component of the reduction is the epoché, which means suspension or abstention. To get at the meaning structures and essence of a phenomenon requires that we suspend, bracket (derived from mathematics), or hold in abeyance our personal past experiences with the phenomenon and all epistemological and ontological assumptions that we have derived. This process is embodied in Husserl’s (1913/1982) pronouncement that “we must go back to the 'things themselves'” (p. 252). But how can we completely suspend or bracket all of our presuppositions and ensure they do not seep back into our musings and descriptions?

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33 van Manen (2014) elaborates: “One needs to be aware of one’s own constant inclination to be led by preunderstandings, frameworks, and theories regarding the (psychological, political, and ideological) motivation and the nature of the question. The hermeneutic reduction consists of a search for genuine openness in one’s conversational relation with the phenomenon. In the reduction one needs to overcome one’s subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through” (p. 224).
Hermeneutic phenomenologists are skeptical of the efficacy of bracketing and contend that it cannot be achieved in its totality as Husserl intended. This skepticism originated with Heidegger’s aforementioned philosophy that we cannot escape or bracket our historicity and situatedness in sociocultural contexts; we are “always already in an environing world” (Heidegger, 1988, p. 164), and, therefore, “interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something to us” (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 191-192). Thus, Heidegger suggested that our experiences and interpretations are always contextualized and cannot be fully transcended for the sake of phenomenological reflection; we cannot fully suspend our own interpretations of a phenomenon when attempting to understand the experiences of others and the meaning they assign to it. Thus, to subscribe to hermeneutic phenomenology is to accept that bracketing is not possible, and a different approach to addressing our presuppositions is required.

Accordingly, the phenomenological attitude in hermeneutic phenomenological research is one of openness and sensitivity (Finlay, 2008). According to van Manen (2014), in the hermeneutic epoché-reduction:

One needs to practice a critical self-awareness with respect to the assumptions that prevent one from being as open as possible to the sense and significance of the phenomenon. We need to forget as it were our vested interests and preunderstandings, and practice a radical openness to the phenomenon. On the other hand, it means that one needs to realize that forgetting one’s preunderstandings is not really possible, and therefore these various assumptions and interests may need to be explicated so as to exorcize them in an attempt to let speak that which wishes to speak. (p. 224)

In line with the philosophies of Heidegger (1962), Gadamer (1975), and Merleau-Ponty (1962), van Manen acknowledged that bracketing to forget or suspend presuppositions is not a realistic
goal. Instead, he suggested that we should strive for openness and “exorcise” our assumptions and beliefs by making them explicit and by coming to terms with how they might influence our descriptions and interpretations throughout the research process. With regard to the practical and instrumental concerns of the researcher, maintaining a hermeneutic phenomenological attitude is thus proposed as an iterative and dialectical process of reflexivity (Finlay, 2008). Given my present aim of utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology to study boredom coping in students (so as to incorporate the critical goals of reflexivity, openness, and sensitivity), I will now outline my personal beliefs and presuppositions about the topics discussed thus far.

**Emotion, Boredom, and Coping: A Personal Perspective**

I am currently situated in a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm or worldview (i.e., relativism)—which is to say, I believe there are multiple subjective realities that are dynamic, fluid, socially constructed through interacting with the world, and can be apprehended. With that said, I acknowledge that my exposure to emotion theory has been primarily in the field of psychology, and I have been greatly influenced by approaches that psychologize emotions (e.g., appraisal theories) such that emotions are conceptualized primarily as individual psychophysiological experiences. However, my personal theory of emotion is rooted somewhere between a psychological constructionist approach and a social constructionist approach as aligned with Russell (2003) and Barrett (2006). I believe that our initial bodily state or feeling (e.g., core affect; basic states of feeling good or bad, energized or enervated) is the first ingredient in emotion formation and that people utilize learned sociocultural knowledge about emotions to label their core affect and construct the boundaries of emotions. From my perspective, to label a feeling as *boredom* or *anxiety* or *shame* is to rely on socially-constructed knowledge that will vary across groups and situations. I do not conceptualize emotions as given
by nature (i.e., natural kinds), but rather constructed by people through shared, culturally-
determined knowledge.

My belief is that boredom is an emotion constructed by people; that boredom is *learned* via local sociocultural meanings. As a construct, I further assume that boredom does not have a fixed meaning and that at any given point in time its meaning is tied to its utility or functional significance (i.e., what purpose it serves). Accordingly, I believe boredom’s utility or functional significance is influenced by one’s conceptual knowledge (scripts, expectations, constraints, norms) as learned in a local social context. It is my belief that how people think, behave, plan, express, and feel when bored are determined by the learned local meanings that they have been repeatedly exposed to. I would additionally espouse that although these aspects can be perceived as individual, internal, psychological experiences (e.g., “I’m bored,” “I feel bored,” “I’m going to leave because this is so boring”), this seemingly individual cognitive process is nonetheless constructed by sociocultural scripts and practices.

At this moment, the definition of boredom that resonates most with me is “the aversive state of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity” (Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 483). In my opinion, this definition is sufficiently descriptive while remaining broad enough to be applicable across a variety of contexts. I further assert that when boredom corresponds with formal educational experiences, such as being in class, test-taking, or studying, it is best classified as an *academic emotion* for the purpose of specifying the context. I further believe that academic boredom is one of the most pervasive academic emotions and that boredom often has a debilitating effect on learning.

I use the terms *coping* and *regulating* synonymously to refer to the processes through which people “influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they
experience these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). In line with my beliefs about emotions, I view coping or regulation processes as highly contextualized and situated, with these processes influenced by normative regulations of an educational institution and the corresponding expectations and roles as taught to students. In my opinion, it is, therefore, difficult to generalize across contexts, schools, or even classes within a school with respect to normative conclusions about which coping strategies are most adaptive or most efficacious for students. I further believe that boredom, as an emotion, is amendable to control or regulation and that people manage their boredom through both conscious and unconscious or implicit means. My belief is that we have the ability to influence our own boredom and the boredom of others as well as anticipate boredom and manage it before it is experienced.

Based on my adopted definitions of boredom (i.e., “a state of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity;” Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 483) and emotion coping/regulation (i.e., “the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience these emotions;” Gross, 1998, p. 275), I believe the function of boredom is to alert us to an unsatisfying situation or state of being and “move us out of the unsatisfactory situation that is the cause of its existence” (Elpidorou, 2017, p. 17). In other words, I believe boredom to reflect a feeling that we are stuck and need to become unstuck and that the function of boredom coping is to escape boredom by finding “a situation that is interesting, exciting, fulfilling, or meaningful” (Elpidorou, p. 17). This interpretation is purposefully broad such that the nature of the task or situation that feels unsatisfying, and specific reasons for why we need to escape it, are intentionally not specified to allow for flexibility when examining a specific instance of boredom.
Purpose and Research Question

There are primarily three approaches that have to date been adopted in existing research investigating academic emotions: 1) investigating variables (i.e., defining and quantifying constructs; examining relations among variables); 2) investigating process and meaning (i.e., understanding the meanings that people attach to their experiences and the processes involved with those experiences); and 3) investigating social-historical contexts (i.e., illuminating the social, cultural, and historical influences on human experiences; Schutz & Decuir, 2002; Schutz, Hong, Cross, & Osbon, 2006). Phenomenological investigations into emotion fit within the second group as their goal is to understand and describe the processes involved with experiencing and managing emotion and the meanings that people attach to those experiences.

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe students’ experiences of coping with or regulating boredom within higher education settings (e.g., in class, at the library, in the hallway) and while participating in academic tasks (e.g., attempting to listen to a lecture, completing an assignment, studying for a test). The goal is to utilize the hermeneutic phenomenological method to produce a fresh, complex, and rich description of academic boredom coping from the student’s perspective.

Quantitative inquiries into academic emotions typically begin with specific hypotheses and research questions meant to identify a priori relations among variables. Within a phenomenological framework, a priori specification of this nature would necessarily compromise an open, sensitive, and reflexive approach to the phenomenon (Finlay, 2008). As such, phenomenological research questions are instead formulated to ask: “What is the structure of this particular experience? What is it like to be or experience a particular situation?” (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 348). In line with the purpose of my phenomenological investigation, the question that guides my research is: What is it like for a student to cope with academic boredom?
When I say I am attempting to understand what it is like for a student to cope with boredom, I am striving to describe the essential qualities that comprise boredom coping (i.e., its essence). I am therefore striving to obtain evocative descriptions that bring the reader as close as possible to the original lived experience of coping with boredom in higher education settings.

With this goal in mind, I chose an interview- and journal-based approach to data gathering to offer students multiple opportunities to provide detailed, first-person accounts of what it is like for them to cope with boredom. This approach enabled me a level of access to their lived experiences that I could not have obtained through other methods. For example, as previously noted, a comprehensive self-report scale that can adequately capture the scope of behaviours reasonably assumed to represent boredom coping in post-secondary students does not presently exist (cf. Nett et al., 2011). Although I had also considered observing students in the classroom, or while engaged in academic tasks like studying, academic boredom is commonly understood as reflecting a relatively inconspicuous or “silent” emotion (see Goetz et al., 2014a; Pekrun et al., 2010). Thus, without the assistance of expensive technologies to identify emotions (e.g., facial recognition software, sensor pads to detect body posture, galvanic skin response equipment; D’Mello & Graesser, 2009; D’Mello, Dale, & Graesser, 2012) boredom is more difficult to recognize than other more overt emotional experiences (e.g., enjoyment, anger).

Moreover, because of practical reasons such as access, time, and cost, I would have necessarily been required to limit visual observations to certain contexts (e.g., classroom observation) thereby excluding other academic settings (e.g., studying at home, in-between classes in the hallway). Whereas an experimental approach could also have been adopted in which student boredom was induced in a laboratory setting (e.g., watch a dull video, complete a monotonous task), the experimental control gained would come at the cost of ecological validity.
and authenticity—the primary foci of the present research. Finally, although biophysiological methods would provide external data on the experiential qualities of boredom and coping, they would not inform the present research focus on students' perceptions as to the subjective nature of boredom coping experiences. The same argument could be made for not using ESM to examine boredom as it would limit the opportunities for students to provide contextualized, first-person descriptions of boredom and coping. In conclusion, given my present research goal of understanding and describing what it is like for students to cope with boredom, I have chosen to ask them directly by giving them a platform to provide rich, detailed, first-person accounts by way of interview and diary methods (cf. Mann & Robinson, 2009; Sharp et al., 2016; Webster & Hadwin, 2015).
Chapter 2. Methods

Institution and Participant Selection

As explicated in the introduction, I sought a sample of post-secondary students given the relative paucity of research on boredom coping that has relied on the lived experience descriptions of students at this educational level. I selected a public college located in the largest city in Ontario, Canada because I am employed as a part-time instructor in the School of Arts and Science. Given my knowledge of the institution and its students, and my existing connections with the faculty and administration, I anticipated expedient access to the student population. Additionally, my choice of this college over other post-secondary institutions was driven by concerns about positionality as they related to interviewer-interviewee dynamics. As a professor, I believe I benefitted from insider positionality—that is, “the aspects of an insider researcher’s self or identity which is aligned or shared with participants” (Chavez, 2008, p. 475). Due to this shared institutional affiliation, I believe I represented a partial insider who shared “a single identity (or a few identities) with a degree of distance or detachment from the community” (Chavez, 2008, p. 475), with this status affording several advantages that could be leveraged throughout data collection.

Greene (2014) summarized three methodological advantages of insider research: knowledge, interaction, and access (see also Chavez, 2008). Insider researchers are privileged to nuanced knowledge of the context (e.g., historical and practical) and participants (e.g., cognitive, linguistic, emotional) that precedes their entry into the field. Based on their pre-existing

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34 At the time of data collection, I was teaching two sections of an introductory psychology course. At the beginning of the course, I discussed the study with my students and explained that they were ineligible to participate due to a potential conflict of interest resulting from teacher-student power dynamics (i.e., it would have been uncomfortable and potentially prejudicial to ask a student to openly talk about their experiences of boredom in the classroom with the teacher of that class). Students who respond to the recruiting advertisement despite the in-class discussion were not considered for participation in the study.
knowledge and shared identity or identities with the participants, insider researchers can more easily approach participants, gain legitimacy, and establish rapport that produces authentic interactions. Insider researchers may also be granted expediency of access (i.e., entry into the field, acceptance) given their existing connections with the research setting and shared identity or identities with the participants. The advantages of an insider position were much coveted as I anticipated that successful data collection would be highly dependent on my ability to develop a strong rapport with my participants and gain their trust (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The institution from which the participants were drawn is a large, multicultural, public college with approximately 22,000 full-time students across multiple campuses in Ontario. It offers baccalaureate-, diploma-, certificate-, and post-graduate-levels programs for full- and part-time students. Many students, especially those who did not meet the necessary pre-requisites for a typical four-year bachelor program, select two- and three-year university transfer programs. With a focus on core literacies (e.g., problem-solving, critical thinking, writing) and relatively small class sizes, these pathway programs provide students an opportunity to hone their academic abilities, improve their grades, and obtain credits that can be used towards obtaining a bachelor’s degree upon transferring to local universities. It also offers high-quality vocational degrees in fields such as aviation, computer systems technology, electronics engineering, and hospitality. These programs are built on industry partnerships that enable experiential learning opportunities (e.g., co-ops, work terms, internships) intended to set students up for employment immediately upon graduating. This particular campus includes programs in graphic design, liberal arts, computer programming, broadcasting, and social services, among others.

Recruiting began at the end of January 2017 through multiple channels: departmental and faculty listserv emails and online message boards, in-class announcements, and flyers posted on
campus message boards with the support of the Student Federation. Across all available platforms, a short recruitment message was relayed with information about the general purpose of the study: to understand and describe the student’s experience of boredom coping (see Appendix A). If interested, students were provided a web link to SurveyMonkey® that directed students to a five- to ten-minute screening task to assess their eligibility. Specifically, all interested students were asked to write a one- to two-paragraph description, or record a two- to three-minute video, of themselves discussing a recent experience with boredom coping in college.35 Specific instructions to elicit phenomenological descriptions were provided (see Appendix B). In addition, the potential participants were asked to provide basic demographic information (e.g., age, gender, year of study).

Upon completing the candidacy questionnaire or video upload, students were thanked and told that they would be contacted soon if selected to participate. Students who attempted the recruitment procedure were entered into a one-time, random prize draw for a $50 Amazon gift card to compensate them for their time. When the recruitment phase was closed, one student was randomly selected, contacted by email, and provided a gift card in person.

The initial recruitment phase lasted from January 17-February 13, 2017 and attracted 38 potential participants who completed a lived experience description and provided demographic information. Two successive forms of purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Payls, 2008) were employed within this initial group of 38 respondents to determine the final sample of students who would participate in the interviews and journal writing. In the first step, criterion sampling was used to identify students who had reported first-hand experiences

35 The two options were provided to enhance accessibility such that interested students could choose the method of communication they were most comfortable with or that they felt would most effectively convey their experience. However, in the end, all students chose to write about their boredom coping; thus, only the written responses will subsequently be discussed.
with boredom and boredom coping, and who were also able to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of their experience. In phenomenological inquiry, it is essential that participants offer meaningful descriptions that will deepen the researcher’s understanding (Englander, 2012; van Manen, 1997, 2014).

More specifically, meaningful participant descriptions were defined in the present study as those that focused on concrete experiential details rather than their interpretations of the experience that instead reflected the person’s beliefs, opinions, or views about what happened and why. For example, the following lived experience description was ranked as one of the best because of its vivid, direct experiential details:

*On an average day I travel anything from 1:30 to 2 hours (I guess depends in a ton of factors, which I resume as luck). Anyway, on Wednesday I have my class starting at 1:30 but I arrived early to finish homework, look for a job on the internet, and take a look at what the class will be about, arrived at 10:30, usually as I’m arriving I got excited about been back at school, a feeling that I will be able to finish all the things that I have in mind, and luckily will find a job. However as soon as I log into the computer and start with the homework I start deviating, trying to get into multitask mode, but after my first hour I start to get hungry, sure thing to grab a snack and get back but it’s in that moment when I’m having a snack that some overwhelming feeling starts to appear, I am at the cafeteria and even there's people around me I can see myself as if I'm in a bubble, where my feeling starts to get the best of me and soon enough I'm not listening, I hear noises but still feel myself out of my body, completely inactive, with out energy to do anything more, Don't want to go back to finish whatever I*
have to, don't feel the need or the interest, just feel like I wanna hear the noise, the noise feels like a feedback on a speaker . . . Damn, how much time I spent doing nothing but hearing empty noises? 20 minutes have gone by and I realize that I had finished my snack, must have to get back on track, must keep myself straight and go finish my tasks for the day . . . Get up! I shout to myself, but I feel so heavy that I can barely walk into the computer commons . . . I am looking at the screen and realize that the clock is ticking and I’m just switching between tabs . . . I get up and try to find something, someone that catches my attention and usually I succeed, I get to see something or someone that make my mind spin back into a better dream, like start dreaming awake, trying to get my mind into a more positive thinking, about what I can or could do, helping myself out of the darkness that steals your time and energy into the abyss of boredom . . . Finally I can retake control of my feeling and get back to work on whatever I left, but time is a bitch that has taken his share and I only have 20 minutes left to be at class.

This student (Kumar) went on to be selected for the study and agreed to participate. In contrast, the following description was ranked as one of the least descriptive in nature:

I was in class this morning 8 am in my English class. We were learning about citation and quoting but I found it boring because I am not really interested in English. I just sat in class and did my work but I really wanted to listen to my music but I didn’t.

After utilizing criterion sampling to rank the lived experience descriptions, maximum variation sampling was used to finalize the list of candidates. In striving for maximum variation
with a small sample (i.e., less than 30 participants), there is potential for documenting two equally valuable types of findings: (1) idiosyncratic experiences that arise out of detailed, rich descriptions of individual participants and (2) common patterns or shared aspects of the phenomenon that emerge from heterogeneity (Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 2005). As the combination of these perspectives can produce a more complete description of the phenomenon, I strove for variation in (1) year of study, (2) program of study, (3) gender, and (4) ethnicity among the students who provided the most direct, concrete experiential descriptions of boredom.

With the list of candidates finalized, the first 15 students were contacted via email. In phenomenological inquiry, a relatively small sample of between 5-25 participants is recommended (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 2005) and there is no prescribed formula for determining an exact number. I anticipated that the intermediate number of 15 participants would yield enough experiential accounts to enable rigorous, rich phenomenological analysis without overwhelming me with data that could prompt shallow reflection. In the introductory email, the potential participants were provided more information about the purpose of the study and informed that participation would entail (1) two 30-60 minute, in-person interviews with the researcher on campus and (2) three, brief written or video journal entries to be completed online at their prerogative in the three weeks following the first interview. Candidates were asked to indicate if they were interested and available to participate over the coming months. If they agreed, a follow-up email was sent to secure a date and time for Interview 1. Whenever a student did not respond or declined participation, the next student on the list was contacted until 15 students had agreed to an interview time and date with official written consent forthcoming.
Participant Profiles

In the early portion of Interview 1 (see below), participants were asked a series of questions about their background, educational history, and current experiences as college students (e.g., tell me a bit about yourself, describe your experiences as a student before you came to college, what do you plan to do after graduating; see Appendix C for the full Interview 1 protocol). Using this information, a profile was compiled for each student in the section below with all participants having selected a first-name pseudonym to help protect their identity.

Zed. Zed was 19 years old, born in the United States but moved to Canada when she was five, and self-described her ethnicity as Pakistani. She was in her fourth semester of the eight-semester Honours Bachelor of Technology – Software Development program. Toward the end of the program she expected to participate in two paid co-op work terms that would hopefully lead to a good job in software development after graduating so she could support her parents financially. Zed was the eldest of four siblings and described herself as compassionate, introverted, shy, and a very quiet personality. As a student, she struggled with procrastination, poor study habits, mathematics, and science, but enjoyed reading, writing, and learning computer languages. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to go on her phone and check out Instagram, Facebook, or YouTube videos, especially Conan O’Brian and Jimmy Kimmel.

Amethyst. Amethyst was 22 years old and in the fourth and final semester of the Arts and Science University Transfer program. She completed a year of university in civil engineering in her native Bulgaria (self-describing her ethnicity as Eastern European) but found it did not challenge her as she hoped it would. She moved to Canada in 2015 and enrolled in the Liberal Arts program at the college for one semester before transferring into the Arts and Science
program. Amethyst described herself as complex, ambiverted (i.e., can be both introverted and extroverted), intelligent, and caring. At the time of the study, Amethyst had applied to transfer to a local university to complete her Bachelor of Science with the eventual goal of pursuing a master’s degree and becoming an environmental biologist. As a student, her biggest struggle was time management, but she excelled at comprehending the curriculum and using her regular attendance in class as her main method of studying. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to take on another task that felt productive and engaging.

**Leslie.** Leslie was 20 years old, born and raised in Canada but from an Afghan background, and in her fourth semester of the Liberal Arts University Transfer program. Prior to enrolling in her current program, Leslie had completed one year in the Child and Youth Worker program at another college but decided it was not the right fit for her. She described herself as nerdy, very friendly, and awkward. Leslie was working part-time in retail in addition to her full-time student responsibilities. For Leslie, the key to success in college was to maintain a positive attitude, stay organized, and find role models who she could identify with and who could support her growth. After graduating, Leslie planned on transferring to the Human Resources and Management program at a local university. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to self-reflect on why she was bored and then exert energy to reorient herself and stay engaged in the present by making it meaningful and interesting.

**Joe.** Joe was 19 years old, of Eastern European ethnicity, and in the first semester of the Graphic Design program. After completing high school in Russia, Joe moved to Canada to study computer science at a local university at the insistence of his parents. While he enjoyed the university lifestyle and the people he met, he found he wasn’t interested in what he was learning and struggled to stay engaged through lecture-based courses. By switching to graphic design, this
allowed him to pursue his creative passion for experimenting with graphic art forms. Moreover, the courses were primarily focused on hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, which suited Joe perfectly, and, consequently, he was thriving academically. Joe described himself as motivated, hard-working, and really chill. His most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to keep his hands occupied by doodling

**Ben.** Ben was 23 years old and described his ethnicity as Chinese-Canadian. He was in his second semester in the Arts and Science University Transfer program. Ben had previously completed two years in the Biochemistry program at a nearby university but had to withdraw so that he could move to China to be with family. Upon returning to Canada, roughly two years later, he tried to reapply to Western but the program was full. Unwilling to sacrifice his goal of completing a bachelor’s degree, but not wanting to let another year idle by, Ben enrolled in his current program to take advantage of their university transfer pathway. He intended to enroll at a local university after completing the necessary two-year program. At the time of the study, Ben was working a part-time job as an online tutor focusing primarily on international students who were struggling with English. He described himself as very motivated, noncompetitive, and laid back, and although he was maintaining a 4.0 GPA, he saw room for improvement. His most effective method for coping with boredom in school was going on his phone to read books, the news, and his favourite websites.

**Steven.** Steven was 27 years old, of Southeast Asian ethnicity, and in his fourth semester of the Social Service Worker program, which includes 600 hours of field placement. Prior to enrolling in his current program, Steven had completed a nine-month culinary program at another college and went on to work in the industry for three and a half years. Finding it too physically demanding, Steven quit his job and enrolled at a local university to study psychology.
After a year, he learned about the Social Service Worker program at his current college and believed it would offer a better fit for him given he could develop practical skills and put his life experience to use to help others. He had maintained a 4.0 GPA since entering the program but stated that he would like to improve his presentation skills, time management, and organization. He described himself as insightful, mentally strong, kind, generous, and compassionate. He planned on travelling to Costa Rica and Asia after graduating and before securing long-term employment. His most effective method for coping with boredom in school was doodling in relation to the current topic, such as drawing keywords being used by the professor, so that he could stay in the moment and work on re-engaging with the class.

Ignacio. Ignacio was 20 years old and in his second semester in the Chemical Engineering Technology program. He was an international student from El Salvador and described his ethnicity as Latino. Ignacio’s biggest challenge in college had been accepting that he was not academically competitive enough to apply for a summer co-op position. He stressed that the keys to overcoming this setback and achieving success were maintaining a growth mindset, surrounding himself with supportive relationships, and effectively managing his time. Ignacio described himself as very passionate, determined, independent, empathetic, and mature. He planned on transferring to a local university after college to complete his bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering. Ignacio’s long-term goal was to complete a Masters of Business Administration and then return to El Salvador to contribute to the development and growth of his home country. His most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to find excitement and enjoyment in the small things.

Sing. Sing was 19 years old, in his first semester in the Arts and Science University Transfer program, and described his ethnicity as Filipino. After his mother had married a
Canadian, Sing moved from the Philippines to Canada roughly six months prior to his first semester in college. At the time of the move, Sing was a second-year undergraduate working toward a Bachelor of Science and Mathematics. However, he did not meet the academic admission’s criteria for enrolling in a Canadian university, and, more importantly, he felt it would be beneficial to revisit certain courses and improve his confidence. Prior to starting at college, Sing worked at an amusement park to be able to send money to his family in the Philippines. He described himself as shy and introverted. He preferred to listen attentively in class so that he could understand the material then rather than having to study it later. Sing planned on going to a local university to study mathematics after graduating from college but was unsure whether he would have to return to the Philippines to work full-time. His most effective method for coping with boredom in school was surfing the web and checking his Facebook and emails.

**Ava.** Ava was 24 years old and in the second semester of the Social Service Worker – Immigrants and Refugees program, which requires co-op placements in three out of four semesters. She described herself as a Canadian of Filipino descent, bubbly, honest, caring, and understanding. Ava had previously completed the two-year Police Foundations program at her current college institution, but, for various reasons, had decided that a career in law enforcement was not in her best interest. She was motivated to pursue social service work after witnessing the struggles and setbacks her father had faced for over 20 years while trying to gain his Canadian citizenship. Her dream was to become a Canadian Border Service Officer to help immigrants and refugees overcome the barriers her father had encountered. Ava described herself as a hard-working, focused student who tends to procrastinate until the last minute. Her goal was to graduate with a 4.0 GPA while maintaining a part-time position as a store manager at a women’s
fashion store. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to use her phone to search Facebook.

Asia. Asia was 18 years old, Caucasian, and in the first semester of the Liberal Arts University Transfer program. She described herself as extremely outgoing, talkative, focused, and book smart. After graduating from high school, Asia spent a year working three different jobs in retail and customer service. The college’s university transfer pathway appealed to her because she wasn’t sure what she wanted to pursue and didn’t want to invest time and money jumping into a bachelor’s degree. She hoped the Liberal Arts program would help her determine which field of study would interest her long term. As a student, she could comprehend most of the curriculum on her first exposure to it, and she would get angry with herself if she did not achieve at least 90% in a course. At the time of the study, Asia was planning on transferring to a local university to study philosophy or history, and, upon completing her degree, she intended to pursue law school in England. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was watching Netflix.

Alex. Alex was a 19-year-old international student from Lebanon. She was in her fourth semester in the Liberal Arts University Transfer program. Alex came to Canada half-way through grade 11 and finished high-school in Ontario. She was accepted to a local university but did not want to attend until she had Canadian citizenship, which would drastically decrease the cost of tuition. Instead, she enrolled in the two-year Liberal Arts program the current college and hoped to work full-time after graduating to secure citizenship. Alex described herself as quiet, independent, open to new experiences, and always looking forward to learning something new. Alex enjoyed literature and writing and preferred to learn by working in groups that divided up tasks based on each student’s strengths. She struggled with leaving assignments until the last
minute and doing in-class presentations, but she was working on maintaining a GPA of 3.5 or higher. Alex hoped to eventually study social sciences or broadcasting and communication at university and pursue a job focused on bridging ethnic and religious divides in the Middle East. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was meeting up with friends or talking to them on the phone.

**Sarah.** Sarah was 24 years old, Caucasian, and in her fourth semester in the Liberal Arts University Transfer program. Previously, Sarah had begun studying business at another college but decided she wasn’t interested in the subject matter and so moved onto study general arts and science at a separate college. Upon completing the one-year certificate, Sarah worked as a server for four years before deciding to come back to school. Since returning, Sarah had found the motivation to succeed, a passion for learning, and self-confidence in her abilities that had previously not existed. At the time of the study, she was maintaining a 3.8 GPA and mentoring new international students. She had also been accepted into the a local university with a bursary that she explained as due to her being one of the most promising new students. Sarah described herself as honest, friendly, emotional, and quiet. Her goal was to obtain good grades while studying law and criminology at a local university and then apply to law school. Her most effective methods for coping with boredom in school were doodling and having awareness of her boredom so she could diagnosis its cause and address it.

**Kumar.** Kumar was a 33-year-old international student from Mexico of Hispanic ethnicity. He was in the first semester of the Project Management program and a volunteer with the Student Federation. Kumar had moved to Canada with his wife and two young children found his job unfulfilling and too stressful. Moving to Canada offered an opportunity for a fresh start and a new experience he could share with his family. Roughly nine years prior, Kumar had
completed a bachelor’s degree in Mexico and graduated with honours. He described himself as introverted, adaptable, and easy going. His most effective methods for coping with boredom in school were to keep busy and to search for meaning and higher purpose in life.

**Shubham.** Shubham was 20 years old and in his sixth semester of the Computer Programming diploma program. Shubham was an international student from Punjab, India who had moved to Canada to further his education after high school. With no contacts in the area and having never travelled or lived outside India, the transition to college had been challenging but rewarding. Shubham had undergone extensive personal growth since arriving in Canada, and described himself as more mature, independent, and hard-working than he was in India. In addition to his studies, Shubham was working part-time at a restaurant as an assistant to the manager. Upon graduating, he planned to visit home for a few months and then return to Canada for work experience in computer programming and to pursue an advanced diploma. His most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to interact with friends.

**Anne.** Anne was a 27-year-old Filipino Canadian in the fourth semester of the Social Service Worker – Immigrants and Refugees program. After finishing high school, Anne enrolled in the Paralegal Studies program at another College, and upon graduating worked in a pet store as she was unable to find a job in the field. She continued working at the pet store for approximately two years at which time she learned of the Immigrants and Refugees program. Anne had a strong desire to help immigrants and refugees new to Canada and to give back to her community, especially since both of her parents were first-generation immigrants from the Philippines. Anne described herself as loud and always smiling and laughing. In addition to continuing part-time work at the pet store, she was fulfilling her co-op requirement at a centre that supported immigrants with developmental disabilities. Anne preferred experiential, hands-on
learning opportunities, and she was working hard to improve her public speaking. Her most effective method for coping with boredom in school was to focus on completing school work.

**Collecting Lived Experience Descriptions**

**Why obtain lived experience descriptions from others?** The point of obtaining other peoples’ descriptions of a phenomenon is not to learn about their subjective beliefs, perspectives, views, opinions, or perceptions per se. The primary goal is to get at the experienced phenomenon that lies behind the idiosyncratic beliefs and opinions about what that experience might represent. In accordance with the phenomenological attitude, the reason I gathered lived experience descriptions through interviews and journals was to understand the nature or meaning of boredom coping as an essential human experience (van Manen, 1997; for examples pertaining to boredom see Bargdill, 2000; Baumann, 2013; Lomas, 2017; Martin et al., 2006; Steinberger, Moeller, & Schroeter, 2016). While reading through participants’ experiential accounts, I always returned to my phenomenological question and asked: How is this boredom coping or is this what boredom coping is like? What does it mean to cope with boredom for this student? As van Manen states: “The point of phenomenological research is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience . . . ” (p. 62).

A cautionary note about lived experience descriptions: they can never be identical to the lived experiences themselves. As noted earlier, any reflection or recollection on a lived experience, even one that has occurred only moments before, will be retrospective. According to van Manen (1997), the experience as it presents itself to pre-reflective consciousness is never the same as our description of that experience, no matter how rich or thoughtful the description may
be. This is what van Manen means when he states that, “we need to find access to life’s living dimensions while realizing that the meanings we bring to the surface from the depths of life’s oceans have already lost the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence” (p. 54).

**Interview 1.** One-on-one, in-depth interviewing was the primary method for obtaining concrete experiential descriptions of boredom coping in college. Although in-depth interviewing is typically used when studying a person’s lived experience of a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), a common issue raised by phenomenologists (e.g., Bevan, 2014; Dinkins, 2005; Englander, 2012) is that popular qualitative interviewing protocols tend to adopt a generalist approach (e.g., Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) that does not provide practical advice aligned with the assumptions and purpose of phenomenology. While some human science approaches, such as narrative inquiry or ethnography, may strive for sociopsychological opinions, cultural perspectives, or idiosyncratic interpretations of phenomena, phenomenology strives for lived experience descriptions and pre-reflective experiential accounts (Dinkins, 2005; Sorrell & Redmond, 1995; van Manen, 2014).

Consequently, I sought out suggestions for designing and conducting interviews that were tailored to this purpose.

van Manen (1997, 2014) specifies two types of interviews that can be used in service of phenomenology: the phenomenological (or conversational) interview and the hermeneutic interview (cf., Dinkins, 2005; Geanellos, 1999). The phenomenological interview “serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, stories, or anecdotes that may serve as a resource for phenomenological reflection and thus develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (van Manen, 2014, p. 314). In the present study, Interview 1 was designed as a phenomenological interview and Interview 2 as a
phenomenological interview. Below I describe how I designed and conducted the phenomenological interview to obtain concrete experiential descriptions of boredom coping.

In Interview 1, I approached each interaction with my participants as a conversation rather than an interview. The rationale is that a conversation occurs in an atmosphere of closeness, friendliness, trust, and openness where each person feels comfortable and willing to share (van Manen, 1997, 2014). To facilitate such an environment, I took time to establish rapport with each participant at the outset of the interview, prior to audio recording, by describing myself, my background, my research (see Appendix D oral script). To this end, I additionally asked participants general questions about their program, how their semester was proceeding, upcoming assignments or exams, etc. Once the audio recording commenced, I also began with general questions to get to know my participants (e.g., *First off, tell me a bit about yourself*), their educational background (e.g., *Describe your experiences as a student before you came to college*), how they came to be at college (e.g., *Tell me about your decision to come to college?*), their current experiences as a student (e.g., *Describe what it’s like to be a student at college. Talk about anything that comes to mind. The friends, other students, professors, classes, programs, atmosphere, environment*), and their future educational plans (e.g., *What about after you graduate from college? What comes next?*). These questions were intended to give me a contextualized understanding of my participants and their educational environment while also establishing a comfortable and open atmosphere prior to embarking on the phenomenological questions.

Every question posed to participants was written in such a way that it would be accessible to the participants, but if initial responses or descriptions were short or accompanied by extended periods of silence, I embraced these silences with patience. I also prepared multiple prompts that
I would vocalize should a participant struggle to interpret or answer a question. For example, for the initial question, *Tell me a bit about yourself,* potential prompts included: *What do you like to do in your free time? What are three words that best describe you? What do consider to be important parts of your identity?*

After establishing rapport through the aforementioned introductory questions, participants were asked to describe what boredom meant to them. In addition, participants were asked to describe what they would consider to be the opposite of boredom. There was a threefold purpose to asking these questions (see, also, Dinkins, 2005). First, like the preceding interview questions, these questions were intended to elicit more information about the sociocultural context that gave meaning to the experience of boredom coping at college. A context-bound, localized description or definition of boredom was expected to be a useful starting point for exploring each student’s lived experience of coping with boredom. Second, the questions were meant to prime students’ thinking on the phenomenon of boredom prior to producing lived experience descriptions of boredom coping, which were to be the focal point of the study. Third, given my extensive exposure to the boredom literature, I had encountered many definitions and nuanced analyses of boredom. By asking each participant to define what boredom meant to them, it acted as a check on my own presuppositions—as part of the ongoing epoché—and further enabled me to be more receptive to pre-reflective experience during the interviews. As I explain in the Analysis section below, the responses to these two questions were examined via a preliminary thematic analysis, but they were not directly used in the main analysis on boredom coping.

The next phase of Interview 1 consisted of guiding participants in providing concrete experiential accounts of boredom coping in college. To facilitate this process, I wrote down two
reminders recommended by van Manen (2014) that I placed on table in front of me: (1) “Keep the phenomenological intent of the interview clearly in mind”; and (2) “Try to obtain concrete stories of particular situations or events” (pp. 316-317). I then proceeded with the following instructions:

Next, I want you to think about a specific time you felt bored in school that really stands out in your mind. Describe what happened, how you felt, what you thought, what you did. You should try to describe the experience as you lived through it. What I mean by this is try to avoid providing explanations for what you did or said or felt—I’m looking for you to tell me what happened rather than why it happened this way or that way.

Depending on how each student responded, prompts were used to elicit new details or bolster descriptions (van Manen, 2014). Some examples included: When exactly did this happen? Describe the environment, the objects, the people. What were you doing? What did it feel like? What happened next? What else do you remember about the event?

Through these instructions and prompts my aim was to prevent students, as much as possible, from forming explanations, generalizations, or interpretations of their lived experiences. When the participants did start to engage in explanation, generalization, or interpretation, I would steer the conversation back to descriptions of concrete experience (e.g.,
What was it like? Can you provide an example? Can you remember a particular instance?).

The participants were encouraged to provide as much detail as possible and to take their time in doing so. Notes were taken throughout that included my reflections on the participants, their comments, and the utility of the interview protocol itself. Ultimately, it was anticipated that the more concrete the participants’ descriptions were, the less tempted I would be to engage in speculation, over-interpretation, and conjecture when analysing the interview transcripts (van Manen, 1997).

Having exhausted the participants’ experiential descriptions of boredom coping, I ended the interview with several direct questions related to boredom and boredom coping in school (e.g., What are the most effective ways for coping with boredom? Of all the ways you could manage your boredom in school, how do you choose which approach to use at any given time?). To be clear, the responses to these questions were not used in the thematic analysis of boredom coping; only the concrete lived experience description of boredom coping were incorporated into the phenomenological analysis. These questions arose out of aporias I had identified within the academic boredom and boredom coping literatures and were intended for use in future research. Responses to these questions also provided rich contextual insight within which I could situate participants’ boredom coping descriptions.

36 To clarify the difference between explanation and description, consider the following examples. A description of boredom coping might sound like this: “I was feeling tired and finding it hard to concentrate. The professor was going on and on about the same topic and it felt very draining and a bit frustrating. I pulled out my phone and started texting my friend to make plans for after class. After that I felt a bit more relaxed.” Compare that example with one that includes explanations and interpretations: “I feel like I’m always bored in English class because the professor’s voice is so monotone. I don’t have the same problem with other professors. Given how bored I was feeling, I decided to take out my phone and start playing a game because it always helps me escape. I usually go on my phone because it’s easy to hide, and I know the professor can’t see me.” As such, description of an experience is focused on providing details about what happened whereas explanation additionally attempts to account for why it did.
Interview 1 was conducted between February 16 and 24, 2017 in a small conference room on campus. Interviews ranged from 39 to 59 minutes in duration. Prior to enacting the Interview 1 protocol described above, the purpose of the study was explained, and participants had the opportunity to ask questions before reading and signing the consent form (see Appendix E). After each interview, participants were compensated (see Compensation section below), informed about the second phase of the study, and encouraged to ask questions.

**Journal entries.** The second phase of the study entailed three written or video journal entries wherein participants described a recent experience with boredom coping in school. The entries were completed and uploaded online through SurveyMonkey®. The objective was to complete one entry per week for the first three weeks of March. Participants received an email reminder that included a web link to the SurveyMonkey® website at the start of each week. If participants had not completed their entry by Thursday of each week, a second email reminder was sent. Although the majority of participants completed the entries as scheduled, a few participants with extenuating personal circumstances were allowed to submit their final entries during the last week of March and first week of April.

Similar to Interview 1, the purpose of the journals was to encourage participants to provide concrete experiential accounts of boredom coping. Participants were asked to complete their entries in class or as soon after class as possible so that the experience remained vivid. Having completed a written description (in the recruitment phase) and participated in Interview 1, participants already had experience with producing experiential descriptions that avoided explanations, interpretations, or generalizations of experience. The length of the journal entries was left to the participants’ discretion.
Upon arriving at the SurveyMonkey® website, participants encountered the following instructions:

*Take a moment to think about a recent time when you felt bored in school.*

*Where were you? What was happening? How did you feel? What did you do? I would like you to describe this experience in your own words. You have the option of typing your description or recording a video of yourself talking about the experience. The journal entry should take 10-20 minutes to complete depending on how much you have to say. Please answer the following 3 questions and then select the option you are most comfortable with by clicking one of the buttons below.*

1. *Where were you in school when your felt bored? (e.g., in class, at the library, studying)*

2. *What was the date? (e.g., March 5th)*

3. *Approximately what time was it? (e.g., 2:30)*

After completing the three questions and selecting their preferred option, participants were asked to provide their lived experience description. All participants chose the writing option for every journal, and the instructions were as follows:

*Think about a recent time you felt bored in school that really stands out in your mind. Remember, the more recent the experience the better! Please write a description of where you were in school when you felt bored, what was happening, how you felt, what you thought, and what you did. The more details the better! There is no need to use fancy words or phrases, just tell it like you*
would to a friend or family member. When you are finished, click the SUBMIT button below.

After submitting their entry, participants were thanked for their time and instructed to close their web browser. After participants submitted their third journal entry they were contacted by email to set up a brief meeting on campus to receive their compensation (see Compensation section below). At that time, participants were also reminded that they had consented to participate in a second interview and would be contacted by email in early April to set a time and date.

**Interview 2.** The final phase of the study consisted of one-on-one, audio-recorded, hermeneutic interviews to facilitate data-interpretation (van Manen, 2014). The goal of the hermeneutic interview was to dialogue with each participant on what was said during the phenomenological interview (Interview 1; see Appendix F for Interview 2 protocol). In this second interview, I collaborated with each participant to explore phenomenological descriptions and potential themes that arose out of the first interview. To do so, I created initial codes from the data in Interview 1 and used these to create naïve descriptions of boredom and boredom coping (see Generating Initial Codes section below for further explanation). I began Interview 2 by reading these boredom and boredom coping descriptions to the participant and asking for feedback to understanding if my initial descriptions resonated with them: Was I accurately interpreting their experiences? Was I capturing what it meant for them to be bored and to cope with boredom? At this point in the second interview, participants had the opportunity to clarify or add to their earlier descriptions and the interview did not proceed until participants reported feeling satisfied that I had adequately understood their experiences.
Following our discussion of the naïve descriptions, I posed questions to each participant for clarification or elaboration. These questions were derived from Interview 1 and the journals, and, when needed, I repeated their words back to them verbatim to elicit a clear reminder of what they had said. Thus, the hermeneutic interview enabled me to clarify any ambiguous statements and verify if my interpretations of the lived experience descriptions were consistent with the original meanings conveyed by the participant. This dialectical interaction was intended as a form of “member checking” to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the final results (see Rigor and Trustworthiness section below). However, as van Manen cautions against assuming that interviewees possess expertise to interpret their lived experience descriptions, the responsibility for deciding how to guide the interview and what interpretive insights to embrace ultimately resided with the interviewer.

Interview 2 was conducted between April 10-20, 2017 in the same room as Interview 1. Interviews ranged from 15 to 46 minutes in duration. Notes were taken throughout the interviews that included my reflections on the participants, their comments, and the interview protocols. At the end of the interview, participants were compensated, given the opportunity to ask any lingering questions, and thanked for their time and commitment to the study. They were also told that a final version of the study (i.e., a dissertation manuscript) would be sent to them when completed and to contact me at any time in the future regarding their participation in the study.

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38 Examples of clarification questions: Can you talk a bit more about what fidgeting for you entails, like what’s happening? (Sarah Interview 2/Line 170); You mentioned boredom as feeling like you’re all alone. Can you elaborate a bit more on that? (Alex I2/60); Another thing you mentioned is, “Coping is a temporary escape,” and you said, “While that other thing gains its meaning,” Can you talk more about that? (Amethyst I2/141); Okay, you mentioned you sometimes use your imagination when a professor is boring, when they’re talking, as a way to help you stay engaged. Can you elaborate a bit more on what you meant? (Leslie I2/104).
Compensation

Participants were compensation for Interview 1 with a $25 gift card of their choice for either Amazon, Cineplex Movies, or Starbucks. For completing and submitting the online journal entries, participants received a second $25 gift card of their choice for Amazon, Cineplex Movies, or Starbucks (they did not need to choose the same gift card as Interview 1). Finally, compensation for participating in Interview 2 was also a $25 gift card of their choice for Amazon, Cineplex Movies, or Starbucks. All participants partook in both interviews, in their entirety, and submitted three journal entries except for Leslie who completed one journal. Each participant received a total of $75 in gift cards as compensation.
Chapter 3. Analysis

According to van Manen (1997), there exists a critical difference between how we understand a phenomenon pre-reflectively, as a lived experience, and how we can come to reflectively understand the structure of that phenomenon. Consider van Manen’s example of the experience of time:

What could be more easily grasped than time? We regulate our lives by time. We carry the time around on our wrists. We divide the day into morning, afternoon, evening, and night time. And we reflect on past time and anticipate the time to come. We even talk about the time going by, sometimes fast, and at other times more slowly. And yet when someone asks us “what is time anyway?” we are quickly at our wit’s end to describe it.

What is it that goes by fast or slowly when we say that the time is elapsing? (p. 77)

The phenomenological philosopher and the phenomenological researcher alike are thus motivated to understand or effect a more direct contact with the meaning of the experience as lived. In this section of the paper, I provide a detailed explanation of how I conducted the data analysis using reflective human science methods. Specifically, I will describe how I integrated the philosophical methods of the *epoché* and *reduction proper* with the reflective methods of thematic analysis to grasp the meaning of boredom and boredom coping for my participants.

Importantly, thematic analysis (i.e., transcribing data, identifying initial codes, collating codes into themes, etc.) is not bound to a given theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and thus can be flexibly utilized as part of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach by way of specific *epoché* and the *reduction proper* methods (van Manen, 2014).

In our day-to-day existence, we typically take for granted the meanings of our experiences because these meanings are already felt “through our bodies, language, habits,
things, social interactions, and physical environments” (van Manen, 2014, p. 215). This taken-for-grantedness is the natural attitude of everyday life; “From the natural attitude, we see everything at face value: there is simply this cat, this tree, this house, simply accepted in their facticity as self-evidently present; we do not inquire further into our perceptions, our intuitions” (Applebaum, 2012). In this sense, the natural attitude represents a fundamental naïveté or uncritical dogma that the phenomenologists must recognize and overcome to get at the meaning structures of pre-reflective experience. The method for accomplishing this feat is called the phenomenological reduction, which consists of the “mutually required and mutually conditioned” (Fink, 1995, p. 41) moments of the epoché and the reduction proper that Husserl strove to explicate and refine throughout his lifetime (1913/1982, 1936/1954). They are termed “moments” and not “steps” because they recursively condition one another and occur hand-in-hand rather than as a strict linear progression. As such, the phenomenological reduction does not prescribe a set of rules or steps for returning to experience as lived; each phenomenon must be approached in its own unique way (van Manen, 2014).

The epoché prepares the researcher to be open to receiving the phenomenon and to be free of all obstructions (i.e., presuppositions, taken-for-granted attitudes, interpretations, theories, conventional techniques) that may prevent the researcher from approaching the phenomenon as it experienced in the lifeworld (van Manen, 2014). In the Principal Methodological Components section, I first discuss Husserl’s version of the epoché as a reflective process of suspending, bracketing, or holding in abeyance our personal past experiences with the phenomenon and all epistemological and ontological assumptions that we have derived from the natural attitude, from

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39 To avoid confusion, the terms “reduction proper” and “phenomenological reduction” are used to differentiate between the moment of reduction proper, which complements the epoché, and the entire operation of the phenomenological reduction, which encompasses the reduction proper and epoché (Cogan, 2016).
science, etc. However, as van Manen (1997) does not believe this is fully possible from a theoretical or practical perspective, he instead proposes that we continually explicate our presuppositions—making them known to ourselves (and those who read our research)—rather than attempting to forget or suspend. In consideration of this critique, I sought to exercise the époché well before conducting interviews, reading transcripts, or searching for initial codes in the data.

Accordingly, I began writing down my own assumptions, beliefs, preunderstandings, suppositions, and theories about reality, knowledge, emotion, boredom, and boredom coping. I kept a separate document to record my own presuppositions by writing out answers to such questions as: What is an emotion? What is boredom? Is boredom an emotion? What can boredom do for students? Is there a difference between emotion generation and emotion regulation? In forcing myself to explicitly answer these questions, I was made aware of more assumptions that I held, which in turn gave rise to new questions: Are there multiple types or levels of boredom? Is it possible to concurrently experience multiple emotions or affective states? Is acceptance a coping strategy? I have frequently returned to this document throughout all phases of the dissertation to continually explicate my assumptions and come to terms with how they may influence my analyses or “impinge upon the reflective gaze” (van Manen, 2014, p. 224). Additionally, I have discussed my assumptions in the above section entitled Emotion, Boredom, and Coping: A Personal Perspective.

The interpretive activity following the initial époché is known as the reduction proper or the intuition of essences. Having confronted one’s own biases and assumptions through the époché, the reduction proper is then a reflective process of understanding what is unique about a phenomenon as a pre-reflective experience (van Manen, 2014). With the reduction proper, the
researcher seeks to reflectively grasp the singularity, essence, or essential structures of meaning “that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. 107). In the current study, the reduction proper was emphasized in the third and fourth phases of the thematic analysis with respect to searching for and refining themes.

**Thematic Analysis**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is an independent qualitative method “for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). There currently exists a plethora of prescriptive texts that seek to explain thematic analysis and guide researchers in its execution (e.g., Attride-Sterling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, for the present study I adopted recommendations by Braun and Clarke that provide not only considerable depth, clarity, and an explicit focus on research in psychology but also emphasize making assumptions explicit in advance of analysis and engaging in ongoing reflexive dialogue to (re)evaluate rigor. Regarding the explicit acknowledgement of personal assumptions, Braun and Clarke entreat researchers to consider five questions:

1. What counts as a theme?
2. Inductive or theoretical thematic analysis?
3. A rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect?
4. Semantic or latent themes?
5. Epistemology: essentialist/realist or constructionist thematic analysis?

Answering these questions will elucidate the researcher’s assumptions and define what thematic analysis will mean within the boundaries of a given study. Such transparency is also anticipated to enhance an audience’s ability to effectively evaluate the research and compare it with similar
investigations. Importantly, engaging in this exercise is another example of how the epoché was practiced in the current study.

To clearly and concisely answer the first question, I prefer the definition from Lindseth and Norberg (2004): “A theme is a thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few. It is seen as conveying an essential meaning of lived experience” (p. 149). The meaning of any phenomenon is ultimately complex and multi-dimensional, and themes can provide a degree of structure and control over the messiness. Whereas themes arise out of our need to understand some phenomenon, they are necessarily also a reduction or simplification of the phenomenon. Although a theme can never do justice to the deeper meaning and mystery of pre-reflective experience, it can nevertheless allude to some aspect of a phenomenon and bring you closer to answering your research question (van Manen, 1997).

In reflecting on a lived experience, it is important to recognize that not all themes that are uncovered are necessarily essential to the phenomenon. *Incidental themes* point to some meaning that is associated with a phenomenon but is not unique to the phenomenon. For example, a college student’s experiences of coping with stress, coping with anxiety, and coping with boredom are likely to share some incidental themes, but each experience has an essential structure that is unique. On the other hand, *essential themes* identify those “aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is” (van Manen, 1997, p. 107). An integral component of phenomenological analysis is to differentiate between incidental and essential themes using *free imaginative variation* as discussed in detail below.

I have pursued an inductive analysis such that a pre-existing theoretical framework has not been applied to the data, and I have continually worked at critical self-awareness or
reflexivity to understand my own presuppositions and biases (Question #2). Thematic analysis isn’t bound to a theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allows it to be flexibly utilized within hermeneutic phenomenological research that is focused instead on letting experience speak for itself. Thematic analysis in phenomenological research must not be confused with similarly named methodologies in other human science approaches such as grounded theory, ethnography, or content analysis. In these approaches various “codifications, conceptual abstractions, or empirical generalizations” are employed in service of thematic analysis (van Manen, 2014, p. 319); as lived experiences are assumed to be pre-reflective in nature, they can thus also be assumed to precede any concepts, categories, or schemata that might be imposed upon it.

I have pursued a thematic analysis that provides a rich description of the entire data set (Question #3). The essential themes reflect the experiences of all participants across both interviews and all completed journal entries as opposed to a focusing on a single theme or moment within boredom and boredom coping. I have also pursued a semantic approach to analysis wherein I have described and interpreted the semantic content or surface meanings of the data as opposed to theorizing the latent structures that shape the semantic content (Question #4). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a semantic approach requires “a progression from description, where the data have simply been organized to show patterns in semantic content, and summarized, to interpretation, where there is an attempt to theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications” (p. 84).

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In grounded theory, thematic analysis is seen as an effort to codify and develop theory; ethnographic thematic analysis aims at discovering the categories that identify and describe cultural groups and practices. In contrast, content analysis actually preselects the themes that it is looking for in empirical data. Content analysis may examine transcripts for the occurrence of certain thematic terms that would show, for example, the existence of gender bias in texts” (van Manen, 2014, p. 319).
Finally, I have placed myself within a “contextualist” paradigm, which falls between realism and constructionism (Question #5). As a contextualist, I hope to identify how students make meaning of their boredom and boredom coping while also acknowledging how the sociocultural context influences their meaning making. From the position of emotion research, my approach aligns with a psychological constructionist perspective (see Gross & Barrett, 2011; Shuman & Scherer, 2014). With these five critical questions explicitly addressed, I describe below how I conducted my thematic analysis using the six-phase framework outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006). Where relevant, I further discuss how hermeneutical phenomenology guided the analysis.

**Familiarizing Myself with the Data**

The first phase of thematic analysis consisted of transcribing the data, initial readings of the data, and recording initial impressions and considerations. Audio recordings for Interviews 1 and 2 were securely sent to a transcription service to be transcribed verbatim (Transcript Heroes; http://transcriptheroes.ca). The use of a transcription service was essential so that the transcripts from Interview 1 could be analyzed for initial codes in time for Interview 2. Once received, the transcripts were compared line-by-line with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. In the event of inconsistencies, the transcripts were corrected to reflect the audio recordings verbatim. This process served as the first readings of the interview data.

Online journal entries did not need to be transcribed as all participants opted instead for the written submission format. The journals were preserved in their original form—that is, I did not edit for grammar, punctuation, etc., so that the participants’ expressions of their lived experience would remain authentic. As the journal entries were received through SurveyMonkey®, I read through each submission to ensure that participants were understanding
the instructions and providing lived experience descriptions. This process served as an initial reading of the journal data.

All interview transcripts and journal entries were imported into MAXQDA (Version 12; 2016), and a second reading of the data was performed. At this time, the goal was to familiarize myself with the data and ensure no errors had occurred during the importing process. Notes or “memos” were recorded within the MAXQDA software throughout the second reading to document initial impressions and identify ideas for potential codes. The same process was repeated for the Interview 2 transcripts once they were received.

**Generating Initial Codes**

Having familiarized myself with the data, the next step was to systematically identify meaningful segments of text (i.e., the initial codes). I began this process with the data from Interview 1 (i.e., the phenomenological interview). I completed the initial coding of all Interview 1 transcripts prior to Interview 2 to ensure the fidelity of the follow-up or hermeneutical interview protocols. This process entailed thoughtful reflection on what each datum segment revealed about boredom and boredom coping. Initial codes were segments of meaningful text that represented potential patterns or themes that varied in length from three- or four-word phrases to entire sentences or paragraphs.

According to van Manen’s methodology, researchers can isolate codes or potential thematic statements by taking one of three approaches to treating texts as sources of meaning: (1) the wholistic or sententious approach; (2) the selective or highlighting approach; and (3) the detailed or line-by-line approach:
1) “In the wholistic reading approach we attend to the text as a whole and ask, ‘How can the eidetic, originary, or phenomenological meaning or main significance of the text as a whole be captured?’ We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.

2) In the selective reading approach we listen to or read a text several times and ask, ‘What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?’ These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight. Next we try to capture these phenomenological meanings in thematic expressions or through longer reflective descriptive-interpretive paragraphs.

3) In the detailed reading approach we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, ‘What may this sentence or sentence cluster be seen to reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?’ Again we try to identify and capture thematic expressions, phrases, or narrative paragraphs that increasingly let the phenomenological meaning of the experience show or give itself to the text” (van Manen, 2014, p. 320).

I chose to use the detailed reading approach and read line by line, fragment by fragment, and asked: How does this segment speak to boredom or boredom coping? What does this segment of text reveal about the student’s lived experience of boredom or boredom coping?

At this point, I would like to highlight that one of my first analytical decisions was to create a different set of initial codes for parent groups of boredom versus boredom coping as I intended to conduct two separate thematic analyses: one for the experience of boredom and one for the experience of coping with boredom. In producing a phenomenology of boredom coping, I thought it integral to conduct a preliminary analysis to understand what boredom meant to my participants before conducting the main thematic analysis on boredom coping. The pre-emptive separation of initial codes was meant to facilitate this process in the next stage of analysis. The
underlying assumption I made was that the experience of boredom would be qualitatively different from the experience of coping with boredom for these students. If I was unsure of whether an initial code pertained to boredom or boredom coping, I created a memo attached to the code so that I could directly ask for clarification in Interview 2. Here is an example clarification question posed to Joe during Interview 2:

Kyle: Okay. So, is – I guess the kind of key distinction I’m looking for is, and it can be both, but the shaking, the fidgeting is that what boredom – is that part of boredom or is that more of how you cope with boredom?

Joe: I think it’s more of coping, it’s more like a release of my energy. Because if I’m concentrating on something I can just sit and just like do it, but if I’m not fully, fully into it or – like even – like it’s not even on purpose, like sometimes if I’m not like – if I’m not fully focused I can like fidget and things like that.

These memos were revisited throughout the thematic analyses.

Building toward an inductive analysis of semantic themes, the initial codes were formatted as concise, meaningful descriptions that reflected students’ experiences. At this point in the analysis, the goal was to let the students’ experiences speak for themselves by organizing the text so that patterns in the semantic content could emerge. The initial codes were intended to work primarily at the descriptive level (Braun & Clark, 2006), whereas identifying themes from the initial codes would operate on a more interpretive level later in the analysis. Heeding the advice of Braun and Clarke, I gave full and equal attention to each data item, strove to generate as many initial codes as possible, maintained context by including surrounding data with each

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41 Here is an example memo created while generating initial codes from Interview 1: “Fidgeting: it seems like fidgeting (or shaking) is more a coping strategy . . . but hard to determine- consider the idea of emotion generation vs. regulation and if I have forced a reification on the participants, or if a separation into two (assumed) real categories is beneficial.”
code when relevant, and allowed the data to be incorporated into multiple initial codes if needed. Importantly, generating initial codes was an iterative, provisional process of reading, reflecting, rereading, assigning a meaningful description, reflecting and rereading, adjusting the description, and so on. Initial coding was like “decorating a room; you try it, step back, move a few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on” (Abbott, 2004, p. 101). The codes were revisited several times with the expectation that I would not get them “right” the first, second, or even third time through. Moreover, I would revisit these codes multiple times in the next phases of analysis with the expectation that they would continue to evolve with further reading and reflection. Examples from this stage of the analysis are provided in Table 1 to clarify my process of initial coding.

Using the detailed, line-by-line approach, I systematically identified initial codes throughout the entirety of a participants’ Interview 1 text before moving onto the next participant. I performed the initial coding in chronological order based on when the interviews were conducted. I kept notes or memos to organize my reflections and identify areas to be clarified in Interview 2. The memos could be attached to particular codes or segments of data for organized retrieval at a later date. I did not code the text that preceded the phenomenological descriptions wherein participants responded to questions about their background, educational journey, and current experiences as a college student (that preliminary information was used to compile the participant profiles provided above). I also did not code responses to the direct questions that followed participants’ concrete experiential accounts of boredom coping because these questions were not intended to elicit pre-reflective descriptions (e.g., What are the most effective ways for coping with boredom; see Follow-up Questions section of Appendix C). In the
event that these questions did elicit experiential narratives of boredom coping, initial codes were
assigned to these data but marked to indicate that they arose in the latter part of the interview.

Table 1

Examples of Initial Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Extracts</th>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Parent Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It's when time does not pass by and you have absolutely nothing to do and you're all alone, there is nothing that you can think of that could make time pass by or any of that. (Alex Interview 1/Line 116)</td>
<td>• Time does not pass by&lt;br&gt;• Alone / lonely&lt;br&gt;• Doing nothing or nothing to do&lt;br&gt;• Time does not pass by + Doing nothing or nothing to do</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it's a combination of, like, you don't care about this and you want something else to do, or you could do something else instead of doing this that you're not really interested in... It's like being uninterested and, like, you could've done something else in this time that would have been more appealing to you. (Sing I1/195-197)</td>
<td>• Not interested / don't care / not important&lt;br&gt;• Want something else or want to be somewhere else</td>
<td>Boredom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I kept going, and I kept trying to fight it. I did other stuff. I doodled a bit, I read a bit. But when I was reading and doodling, I kind of was subconscious, because I didn't want to offend my prof. So I would gaze up every now and then, just to show her that I'm listening, but doing other stuff. (Steven I1/251)</td>
<td>• Fight the boredom&lt;br&gt;• Doodle&lt;br&gt;• Read&lt;br&gt;• Don't want to offend prof&lt;br&gt;• Make eye contact with prof</td>
<td>Boredom coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I just was scrolling through my phone, looking at Facebook, looking at the news headlines, what's trending. I was on Instagram looking what's trending on there, then I even checked my email a couple of times even though I knew I got nothing new. (Zed I1/130)</td>
<td>• Using your phone or computer&lt;br&gt;• Checking Facebook&lt;br&gt;• Reading the news&lt;br&gt;• Checking Instagram&lt;br&gt;• Checking email</td>
<td>Boredom coping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step was to produce naïve descriptions of boredom and boredom coping, the
impetus for which came from the hermeneutical phenomenological method advocated by
Lindseth and Norberg (2004). After initial naïve readings of the data, the researcher compiles a
description of the phenomenon of interest as a first conjecture. The naïve descriptions are
typically a few sentences to a paragraph in length and are meant to be supported or refuted in
light of the ensuing thematic analysis. In the present study, a naïve description for boredom and a
naïve description for boredom coping were produced for each participant based on the initial
codes developed from their Interview 1 text. The initial codes were recursively examined against the naïve description of each participant to determine if the initial codes validated the description. If these initial codes were not validated, the naïve description was adjusted
accordingly until validation was achieved. As mentioned above, the naïve descriptions were read to each participant at the beginning of Interview 2 to determine if the participant’s experiences were being described and interpreted accurately (see section entitled Rigor and Trustworthiness below for further explanation). Importantly, all naïve descriptions for boredom and boredom coping I generated were approved by participants with some minor elaborations or clarifications. Examples of the naïve descriptions for boredom and boredom coping are displayed below (the remainder can be found in Appendix G):

• Boredom in school means feeling disconnected from the world and the people around you. Boredom means that life has lost meaning or purpose. You feel stuck, static, incomplete, unable to move, and unable to do anything. Boredom feels like emptiness, loneliness, an unfulfilled desire for something more. (Kumar)

• Boredom in school means having nothing to do that is engaging, interesting, or important. Boredom means not being able to pay attention, focus, or participate. Boredom feels like a waste of time, you feel lost, and time goes by very slowly. Boredom means wanting something else to do that will engage or interest you. (Anna)

• Boredom in school means you’re stuck in a routine that lacks importance and enjoyment. You feel as if you’re on autopilot- disconnected, uninterested, and unexcited. Boredom feels tiring, lazy, and depressing. You aren’t able to focus on the task at hand, you don’t enjoy it, and you feel the need to do something else. (Ignacio)

• Coping with boredom in school means continually reminding yourself that your attitude or mentality towards education/the class/the topic is how you can overcome boredom. Coping means exerting energy to reorient yourself and stay engaged in the present by making it meaningful and relevant; by sticking with it even though it pains
you to do so. Coping with boredom means being self-disciplined such that your thoughts never strays too far from the here and now. (Leslie)

• Coping with boredom in school means seeking an escape- anything to fill in the emptiness that boredom has created. To cope with boredom is to waste time attempting to seek temporary comfort and enjoyment in thoughts and behaviours that provide a break/distraction from the drudgeries of boredom. To cope with boredom is to hope to control the emotion so that one may re-engage with the learning process. (Sing)

• Coping with boredom in school means clearing your mind of the boredom, removing yourself from the present, and blocking out everyone. Coping means finding a temporary escape or distraction from the boredom, something interesting or exciting. Coping also means overcoming the feeling of laziness when something important arises. (Ava)

The process of generating initial codes was replicated for the journal entries and Interview 2 texts using the detailed reading approach. Specifically, the initial codes derived from Interview 1 were first displayed side by side with the journals entries in MAXQDA. Each text fragment—be it a phrase, a few sentences, or multiple paragraphs—from each journal entry deemed to reveal something meaningful about boredom or boredom coping was compared with the existing codes to see if it could be integrated. If it could not be integrated, an initial code was modified or a new code was created. For example, following Interview 1, a number of participants had described coping with boredom as “zoning out” or “tuning out,” which became the initial code Tune or Zone Out. Following journal entry and Interview 2 coding, the initial code was modified to Tune, Zone, or Space Out / Slip or Drift Away. This modification was made to be more inclusive of the diverse vocabulary students were using, but also because it was
determined that these labels represented the same qualitative experience (e.g., through direct clarification questions posed in Interview 2). Another example was the addition of a new code, following journal entry coding, labeled as *An Itch You Can’t Scratch*. This description was used by participants in Interview 2 to depict feeling bored, but it had not surfaced in Interview 1. Rather than integrate this description into *Frustrated / Irritated / Annoyed*, for example, it was deemed important to create a new code to preserve an independent meaning.

At this point, I would like to highlight that 6 out of 43 journals were excluded from the initial coding phase. The purpose of the journals was to obtain descriptions of academic boredom and boredom coping in contexts affiliated with college. The journals were therefore intended to assess boredom experienced on campus (e.g., in class, at the library, during a break between class) or off-campus when participants' boredom was experienced in relation to an academic task associated with college (e.g., doing an assignment, studying, fulfilling co-op or field placement requirements). Four of the six excluded journals pertained to feeling bored while waiting for the bus or riding on the bus. The fifth excluded journal detailed a boredom coping experience while attending an evening religious class that was not affiliated with the college in any capacity. The sixth excluded journal was about coping with boredom when unable to fall asleep at home. All six journals are included in Appendix H should they be of interest.

**Searching for Themes**

Having gone through several iterations of the detailed, line-by-line reading to identify and refine the initial codes, the next step was to organize the codes into potential themes. As mentioned in the previous section, the initial codes were organized independently for the parent groups of boredom and boredom coping. At this point, a third parent group labelled “Other” was also created for initial codes that were not intended for thematic analysis but nonetheless helped
organize the data set in beneficial ways. For example, under “Other,” an initial code called “Location” was created. Any time a participant mentioned where they were when they experienced boredom (e.g., in English class, at the library, studying at home), the text was given the Location code that could be easily called up in MAXQDA. Responses to the follow-up questions that came after the experiential narratives on boredom coping were also grouped under the Other parent group as they were not intended for the thematic analyses on boredom or boredom coping—that is, responses to these questions did not yield phenomenological descriptions or did not confirm prior phenomenological descriptions. Findings from the Other parent group will be discussed below under Supplemental Data.

With the initial codes separated into these three groups, I then focused more specifically on differentiating the codes within the boredom parent group with the goal of determining how the boredom-specific codes could be combined into themes. Using the MAXQDA software, I sorted the boredom-specific codes into potential themes and subthemes and collated all codes relevant to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, one of the first candidate themes to emerge in this phase of analysis was titled “Boredom Means Wanting to Escape.” This theme arose after collating the following initial codes based upon their shared meaning:

- Stuck or trapped (40)
- Want to do something else (72)
- Want to leave or avoid (31)
- Feeling impatient (7)
- Sighing (2)
- It needs to end (1)
- Feeling of urgency (1)
• Looking like I don’t want to be there (1)

The numbers in the brackets show how many individual segments of text (i.e., a few words, a sentence, a paragraph) were assigned to each initial code. Collation was conducted by reading and rereading the segments of text assigned to each code to determine how well they fit within the emerging theme. Codes that were plausibly related based on underlying patterns of meaning were grouped together to determine if one code seemed particularly essential to the concept of boredom. If a code was deemed critical, I further examined whether other codes could be considered subthemes or potential incidental themes. If a code was not deemed critical, I further considered if it represented a separate theme, if it needed to be combined with other codes, or if it pertained more to coping rather than boredom (or vice versa). Such considerations were recursively revisited in light of the evolving themes. The evolving themes were also compared against the naïve descriptions for boredom to examine overlap and identify descriptions that were not being captured by the themes (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

I adhered to three main practical criteria (Braun & Clarke, 2006) throughout this stage that were intended to enhance the rigor of the final results. First, I habitually created memos that were attached to codes, potential themes, or data segments to record my insights and questions. These memos were continually referenced throughout the search for themes.42 Second, I did not

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42 For example, a code indicating that boredom felt like a waste of time had the following note attached:

“Pointless / Trivial / Useless / Meaningless- these descriptions of boredom are thematic of its function- it indicates that the student may not be doing/pursuing what is right for them- function is to prompt reflection on meaning, purpose, and direction (“am I in the right place”; “I don’t want to be doing this”)- am I wasting time with something I don’t truly want or value? Indicates they are unsatisfied (in the moment or in life more generally). See notes on Svendsen (2005) for concise descriptions of meaningless and loss of meaning.”

This note was to record a divergent interpretation that I wanted to return to while collating codes and searching for themes.
abandon any initial codes; discarding codes would occur in the next stage once all extracts pertaining to a code had been evaluated in detail. Finally, interview questions were not used as themes. For example, I avoided taking a question like, *do you think boredom could be helpful, beneficial, or a positive thing to experience,* and then creating a theme like *Boredom is Beneficial.* As Braun and Clark highlight, such an approach requires no analytical work and may inadvertently impose the researcher’s own biases onto the data to the extent that they were present in the creation of interview questions.43

The provisional search for themes ended when all initial codes had been examined in relation to one another and potential themes had been generated. As a reminder, at this stage all initial codes were preserved and codes that did not fit within the evolving themes grouped under a code labeled *Miscellaneous* (Braun & Clark, 2006). The miscellaneous codes were re-evaluated after all initial codes pertaining to boredom had been assigned to a provisional theme.

A second independent search for themes was then executed using the initial codes pertaining to coping with boredom. At this stage, the reduction proper was conducted with the goal of uncovering the essential structures of meaning (i.e., themes) for academic boredom coping. Among the various forms of the reduction proper, the *eidetic reduction* has been proposed as central to phenomenological analysis (van Manen, 2014). The goal of the eidetic reduction is to uncover the *eidos* or essence of a phenomenon by examining particular manifestations of that phenomenon that arise as lived experiences (e.g., in written descriptions and interviews). Put simply, the eidetic reduction “seeks to describe what shows itself in

43 This pitfall is less of a concern where I have posed questions intended to elicit phenomenological descriptions from the participants (e.g., *Think about a specific time you felt bored in school that really stands out in your mind. Describe what happened, how you felt, what you thought, what you did.*). However, given that I did ask questions at the end of the Interview 1 that could be made into themes, I isolated the responses to these questions prior to searching for themes (i.e., by allocating to the “Other” parent group).
experience or consciousness and how something shows itself. The eidetic reduction focuses on what is distinct or unique in a phenomenon” (van Manen, 2014, p. 229). Of course, the unique features of boredom coping that began to take shape in this stage of eidetic analysis did not simply emerge on their own.

I read through the initial codes organized under the boredom coping parent group several times, and then began sorting them into potential themes and subthemes by collating all codes that were relevant to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entailed reviewing all of the instances (i.e., text segments ranging from a few words to a few paragraphs in length) that had been assigned to a code and reflecting on what these instances might reveal about boredom coping. All text segments assigned to a code were compared and contrasted to see if there was a consistent pattern or theme. This involved comparing the coded text between participants and within each participant at different points in the interviews or journals. If a coherent, consistent, and conceptually clear theme was not emerging, then the text was reviewed to identify the inconsistencies. In some cases, this meant recoding sections of text—that is, adding segments of text to different, existing codes; creating new codes to embody the text; or dividing up a code into subcodes to better capture a complex, layered meaning. Once it was determined that the code fit coherently and consistently into a theme (new or existing), I moved on to the next code. As a few themes began to emerge, each subsequent code was examined against the existing themes to identify similarities and patterns. For each code, I determined if it fit within an existing theme or if a new theme was needed to accommodate a new meaning. Intrinsic to this process was an ongoing deliberation on the relationships among codes and themes and reflection on potential incidental versus essential themes. The evolving themes were also compared against the
naïve descriptions for boredom coping to examine overlap and identify descriptions that weren’t being captured by the themes (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

To illustrate the process of searching for boredom coping themes using the initial codes, consider the candidate theme of “Escaping.” This theme arose after collating the following initial codes based upon their shared meaning:

- Not listening or paying attention (17)
- Drift off or drift away (7)
- Leave class (11)
- Think about something unrelated to the course (2)
- Take a walk (8)
- Realizing you’re bored (8)
- Zone out (11)
- Use phone or computer (8)
- Draw or doodle (7)
- Think about something interesting or rigorous (1)
- Play games (3)
- Block the professor/students out (2)

As stated above, the numbers in the brackets show how many individual segments of text were assigned to each initial code. Collating involved reading and rereading the segments of text assigned to a code and reflecting on how well they fit within the pattern of meaning that was shaping the emerging theme. This iterative process of comparing and collating codes in search of essential themes was my initial attempt at initiating the eidetic reduction.
Reviewing and Refining Themes

After assigning all initial codes to a theme and, thus, producing a set of candidate themes, each theme was then reviewed and refined. As with the previous step, I first completed this process with the boredom themes before moving onto the boredom coping themes. The reviewing and refining process involved comparing all initial codes within a theme and deliberating on whether or not they formed a coherent and clear pattern. To confidently make this judgement, I continually asked myself some of the questions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) including: What does this theme mean? What are the assumptions underpinning it? What are the implications of this theme? What conditions are likely to have given rise to it? Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)?

If I struggled to answer one or more of these questions, I sought to identify the source of the problem while keeping in mind Braun and Clarke’s (2006) stipulation that “data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes” (p. 91). Themes that lacked consistency and clarity were then adjusted by re-assigning initial codes to other themes, creating new themes that could better accommodate the initial codes, or discarding codes or entire themes that no longer had a place in the evolving narrative. However, acknowledging the iterative nature of this process, I typically opted to hold onto codes by placing them in the Miscellaneous theme in the event that they may be of use in a future iteration.

Once satisfied that a theme was conceptually clear and internally consistent based on the assigned initial codes, I wrote an initial description of the theme that was recorded as a memo in MAXQDA. For example, one theme for boredom coping was labeled “Being Productive” and had the following description: To cope with boredom means to engage one’s self in thoughts or
activities that are perceived as personally beneficial or constructive in relation to school, work, or life more generally. It means making good use of the time where “good” refers to productive or constructive. Codes within this theme included booking appointments, searching for jobs online, and doing work for another class. This entire process was then repeated for the next theme until all themes were complete.

To illustrate my development of conceptually clear, internally consistent, and coherent themes as part of a transparent reviewing and refining process, I now provide an example from the boredom coping data. As I became more familiar with the data and more adept at identifying patterns, I began to see a two-level structure emerge. On one level, participants discussed coping responses or coping instances where they elaborated on something they did—some sort of specific, direct response to the boredom. Some examples included doodling, leaving class, getting a snack, making plans for the weekend, thinking about upcoming due dates in other classes, watching Netflix, and sitting up straight and looking at the professor. On another level, participants’ descriptions of these coping instances revealed overarching strategies or action types that illuminated the function or purpose of their coping. Some examples included escaping, seeking social support, killing time, being productive, finding distraction, and reengaging with the original task.

With the emergence of a two-level structure, it became apparent that I could organize the data into clear, internally consistent, and coherent themes based on the higher-level strategies or action types. Each theme would identify a specific function or purpose that was served by the lower-level boredom coping responses (see the Results section below for further elaboration). After establishing a clear written description of the theme, I reviewed every code and all associated text segments to ensure they were aligned with the thematic function or purpose. For
instance, doodling was frequently mentioned as a coping response to boredom when professors were lecturing. However, in some cases doodling was done for the purpose of escaping boredom and disconnecting from the situation, whereas in other cases it was done to reengage with the present moment and reorient towards the professor’s lecture. The simple act of doodling in response to boredom could, therefore, be carried out with very different functions in mind. The first instance would be assigned to the *Escaping* theme while the second instance would be assigned to the *Reengaging/Reorienting* theme. As such, the themes could be distinctive yet internally consistent when aligned with specific coping functions. When the function or purpose of a specific coping response was not explicitly clear, I would attempt to gain insight and a clearer understanding of the context through a detailed reading of the text surrounding the specific code, by referring to the naïve descriptions from Interview 1, and by considering similar instances mentioned by the participant at other points in the interviews or journals. If it remained difficult to determine the appropriate theme, the coded segment would be grouped under the *Miscellaneous* theme to be evaluated again at a later point in time.

Having reviewed each candidate theme first for boredom and then for boredom coping, the second step in the reviewing and refining process entailed considering how valid each theme was in relation to the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This required rereading the entire data set while considering the themes and checking the themes against one another to determine how effectively they fit the dataset when considered in its entirety. This process also enabled for coding any additional data that had been previously overlooked. The refining process ended when the continuous fine-tuning and re-coding was no longer contributing to my understanding of the phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
During this phase of coding are some common pitfalls, the first being the temptation to take an anecdotal approach where one or two instances are reified into a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These instances may reveal something of interest about the phenomenon but should not be misrepresented as thematic. This was important to keep in mind given how easy it was to become attached to a candidate theme, especially in the early phases of analysis. Another potential pitfall is to only select themes that are 100% complete and contradiction-free as it is rare for such a pattern to emerge across all participants (Braun & Clarke). Throughout multiple interviews and journals, participants’ lived experience descriptions of boredom and boredom coping sometimes diverged with seemingly little overlap or continuation. Striving for a comprehensive analysis meant using these contradictions to challenge the evolving narrative and identify potential weaknesses in my interpretation. On a related note, a third possible pitfall is failing to allow the data to remain open to alternative readings, rival explanations, and divergent interpretations (Whitehead, 2004). In an eidetic analysis, such as the one conducted on the boredom coping data, every theme or “eidetic claim is subject to deception, modification, revision, and even denial – in short, continual criticism” (Husserl, 1911/1965, p. 216). One valuable technique to accomplish this goal is free imaginative variation.

The process of free imaginative variation derives from the eidetic reduction based in Husserl’s methodology of phenomenological reflection. After reviewing and refining the themes, free imaginative variation involves imaginatively altering or removing each theme from the description of the phenomenon and determining if the phenomenon loses its fundamental meaning (van Manen, 1997, 2014). Free imaginative variation enables the researcher to

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44 The distinction between incidental and essential themes is perhaps one of the most controversial and difficult aspects of phenomenological research, and the eidetic reduction is not a universally accepted component of phenomenological reflection (van Manen, 1997).
distinguish essential themes from incidental or accidental themes (Wertz, 2005, 2010). For instance, van Manen (2014) described using free imaginative variation to distinguish between lying and keeping a secret based on the theme of deception. Despite potential overlapping or incidental themes, the theme of deception is only essential for the experience of lying. In the present study, each theme was subjected to free imaginative variation to determine if it was essential to the lived experience of coping with academic boredom.

**Defining and Naming Themes**

This stage of the analysis consisted of writing a clear, detailed description for each theme. The descriptions were to be concise accounts of the scope and content of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, here is the description for the boredom coping theme “Seeking Meaning and Purpose:”

*To cope with boredom means to seek meaning or purpose in one’s life. Oftentimes, the search for personal meaning or purpose is a response to boredom that manifests as a feeling of emptiness, meaningfulness, or wasted time. To confront this feeling, to cope, is to ask why the present moment feels so devoid of significance. Attempts to resist the emptiness and meaningfulness are often accompanied by feelings are frustration, anger, and anxiety.*

Keeping with the previous stages, this process was first executed for the boredom themes and then for the boredom coping themes. Memos written in previous coding stages were an important tool for compiling the description of each theme. Once written, the descriptions were compared against one another to identify areas of overlap. In the event of too much overlap between two themes, I reflected on whether one theme may represent a smaller subtheme of the other. This entailed re-reading the coded extracts where necessary. Finally, each theme was assigned a concise, trenchant name building off of the working titles employed.
Producing the Report

The final step in thematic analysis is to propose an answer to your research question(s) by telling the story of your data through a written report (see the Results and Discussion sections below). As phenomenology is fundamentally a textual activity, phenomenological research cannot be separated from the activity of writing—that is, writing is not to be regarded as a supplemental activity, but the very object of phenomenological research. In van Manen’s (1997) words, “responsive-reflective writing is the very activity of doing phenomenology” (p. 132). In phenomenological research, the written report culminates in a final phenomenological description that weaves together the essential themes to illuminate the meaning of the lived experience under investigation (van Manen, 2014). To reach the final phenomenological description of boredom coping in the present study, a vivid description of each essential theme is first provided along with a discussion of its nuances. To convince the reader of the rigor and trustworthiness of my analysis, it is imperative to select vivid, compelling extracts from the interviews and journals to provide sufficient evidence of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a reminder, I conducted an initial, separate thematic analysis on participants’ descriptions of boredom to help contextualize their subsequent boredom coping narratives. This thematic analysis is presented first in the written report prior to a discussion of boredom coping. Following from the final phenomenological description of academic boredom coping, I relate my findings back to the literature discussed in the introduction. Presented below are my findings in response to the question: What is it like for a student to cope with academic boredom?
Chapter 4. Results

**Academic Boredom**

Throughout the interviews and journals, eight underlying themes about academic boredom were identified. As a reminder, I am defining a theme as “a thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few. It is seen as conveying an essential meaning of lived experience” (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 149). Each theme is discussed in detail below and accompanied by supporting descriptions from the participants. The themes are presented in random order; therefore, they are not prioritized in order of strength, frequency, or any other criterion.

**Theme 1: Boredom as lack of engagement.** The students frequently described their academic boredom as a lack of psychological engagement in the present moment—the here and now—whether that was sitting in class, working on an assignment at home or the library, studying for a test, or being on campus during a break between classes. These experiences were further described as a state of feeling uninterested, unstimulated, or unmotivated. Lack of engagement also meant struggling to appreciate the experience in the moment—a lack of connection—which the students variously described as a difficulty focusing, listening, or paying attention.

Students frequently discussed feeling *unengaged* when bored such that they were not captivated with, absorbed in, or engrossed by the educational content in front of them. Subsequently, the students struggled to remain invested in the learning process as they grappled with their boredom and tried to maintain prior connections or attachments to the activity or content in question. To describe their lack of engagement when bored, student used phrases like “you are just gone” (Shubham I1/102), “everyone’s just in their own world” (Ava I1/187), “you
start backing off from the situation” (Alex I2/117), “you don’t really internalize it, it’s like you’re there but you’re not there” (Amethyst, I2/134), and “it's like you're not even engaging in anything, you’re just there” (Sing I1/211). Anne described feeling engaged in class as the antithesis to boredom:

Usually when I'm - when I'm engaged in the class, I kind of just don't feel the boredom at all. So, it's like I'm willing to participate, I'm willing to, you know, answer questions that the professor throws out at everyone. Because just like I'm - I'm in class focussed.

(I1/338)

The lack of engagement that often characterized academic boredom also tended to manifest as a lack of focus or difficulty paying attention and listening. For example, students talked about how they would stare blankly or how their eyes would wander from the “intended” point of focus when bored: “You’re not looking where you’re supposed to be, you’re looking somewhere else, somewhere else, wherever it may be but not just there . . . like it could be a window outside or it could be just the table. It's actually pretty funny where you find the table more interesting then listening to the topic” (Sing I1/340). Consequently, students often expressed how they struggled to understand the professor or the content when bored because they could not maintain focus. A few additional examples illustrate the lack of concentration that typically accompanied boredom:

- “And I was just sitting there trying to listen to this guy but I just couldn’t . . . I just couldn’t focus on anything . . . and I couldn’t pay attention 'cause he was repeating stuff he talked about before.” (Zed I1 130-142)

- “Sort of like nothing to sort of – for your brain to focus on I guess or using, you know, just using your mind I guess, having it like focus on something, it’s maybe – yeah, not
tuned into anything…I’m sort of half focused, so I’m not – so my mind isn’t going to be focused on other things I want to think of or do, so yeah, there’s kind of like that – there’s that imbalance, like half of me is listening, the other half is like not interested so I – that’s when I feel bored.” (Leslie I1 120-122)

- “I’m not concentrated, you know, like in engaging activity, or something that I’m liking.” (Ignacio I1 624)
- “Even though he explicitly declared that his lecture was important because it would be on the exam and there would be no lab or exercise to practice the concepts, I just could not bear to pay any attention whatsoever.” (Zed J3)
- “I'm the type of person that does try to listen to the class but if the topics covered fails to grab my attention and is not interesting to me, then there is a good chance I'll get bored.” (“Sing J3)
- “We had class presentations and that’s when I felt bored. The topic was on HIV/Aids and I was interested but I couldn't listen…The presenters were very monotone and making me loose focus and they were not prepared to present to engage the class with activities.” (Ava J2)
- “It was such a simple assignment yet it took multiple hours because I just couldn't stay focused. . . . I felt stupid honestly, I couldn't get my mind straight to describe such an easy thing about my thoughts on something!” (Asia J1)
- “I became easily distracted after a break was not given and found it harder to focus on the subject matter. I was aware that I was feeling bored.” (Sarah J1)

It is important to keep in mind that academic boredom was described as having difficulty focusing, paying attention, or listening whereas coping with boredom, as discussed below, was
described as an active decision to deliberately disengage and cease concentrating on the perceived source of the boredom (e.g., a peer’s presentation, studying for a biology exam).

Within the educational psychology literature, the related construct of interest has been defined as “the psychological state of engaging or the predisposition to reengage with particular classes of objects, events, or ideas over time” (Hidi & Renninger, 2006, p. 112) and as “the feeling of being engaged, caught-up, fascinated, curious . . . a feeling of wanting to investigate, become involved” (Izard, 1977, p. 216). Similarly, the construct of “passion” has been recently proposed to reflect “a strong liking for an activity, object, or concept” (Vallerand, 2010). Within the present study, both Sarah and Steven referenced interest with respect to “passion,” with Sarah stating, “I feel like boredom is not a stimulating experience and that boredom is the opposite of passion” (J1) and Steven providing the following description of an interesting class:

There's an interest, there's a level of passion. The course, like the one that I wrote the exam for, I never found that class boring at all. There was always something. There was always something new to learn, and I just found it interesting to learn about yoga and art therapy and all the other holistic forms. (I2/27)

However, one of the most salient, more specific descriptors of academic boredom as lack of engagement was a lack of interest:

- “The professor was teaching us about series and summation but it was going really slow and I had also studied those some time ago, so I found it not challenging enough and lost interest. I wanted to do something else, more interesting and more engaging.” (Amethyst J1)
“You don’t know what you’re doing, like you have no – not goal, but . . . let me see, no interest or – yeah, no interest in what you’re doing . . . not tuned into anything or you’re not interested.” (Leslie I1/118-122)

“When I'm bored during class I feel disengaged, uninterested, dull and like I have become stagnant . . . disinterested in the subject, unmotivated to do the work. For example, I had a paper that was due yesterday, and I didn’t even finish it on time just because I was so uninterested and not motivated to do it.” (Sarah J1 & I2/11)

“It was during class. and this boredom is rooted to the most common cause I face, and it was due to complete disinterest in the topic the class is covering. . . . I'm the type of person that does try to listen to the class, but if the topics covered fails to grab my attention and is not interesting to me, then there is a good chance I'll get bored.” (Sing J3)

“Boredom is something that when you're not interested, so to speak, in what's going on around you, or for example you're more interested in, like that wall then whatever is going on in front you like my teacher talking. Like I could be counting the tiles if I wasn't interested, and I was that uninterested and bored I would be doing something like that. So, I'd say boredom is like being uninterested and not, like you don't care much about, like, anything and you, you lost interest. That's the only word, interest.” (Asia I1/174)

Asia’s comment highlighted a connection between academic boredom as a lack of interest and as a lack of caring about the topic, course, or instructor:

“So, it has to do with your – with umm . . . your interests. Like I’m in class, I can be learning about DNA, but because I don’t care, I will watch videos, or listen to music.” (Ignacio I1/348)
“Like I feel like if I’m sitting here, and I’m, you know, I don’t care what the prof is saying, and I’m not interested in the topic, I just want to leave and do something that’s more interesting.” (Steven I1/188)

“It's a combination of, like, you don't care about this and you want something else to do, or you could do something else instead of doing this that you’re not really interested in... It's like being uninterested and, like, you could've done something else in this time that would have been more appealing to you.” (Sing I1/197)

This distinction between maintaining interest in a specific task while acknowledging the lower overall value of the task (e.g., lack of caring), relative to more meaningful tasks, was also noted by Ben who provided a unique elaboration related to stimulation. He experienced academic boredom when he wasn’t feeling stimulated or motivated by something “whether it's the goal or the process or the enjoyment, pleasure or necessity, whatever it is” (I1/105). Ben believed he could be engaged in a task, in the sense that he was focused and getting it done, but could still feel bored because the task wasn’t stimulating such that it lacked value or did not fulfill a larger purpose. For Ben, feeling engaged was not as important as feeling stimulated by a purpose and finding it meaningful—that is, it was more important for the task to have instrumental value beyond its immediate function. The connection between boredom and meaninglessness or purposelessness will be discussed in more detail below.

Finally, Ignacio expanded upon other students’ descriptions of being stuck or trapped and discussed boredom as an experience of feeling entrenched in a routine and disconnected from the world, like he “was on autopilot” (I1/415):

“I remember myself just going to class, you know, like falling into a routine. And that’s the problem. You fall – if you fall into a routine, and that’s the worst. Because if you fall
into a routine, you stop enjoying the things that you’re doing…So, you’re in a routine. So, you don’t enjoy, you just going autopilot. So, I remember being on autopilot, and, you know – have the same food, going to the same spot, listen to the same music. . . . So, you’re doing the same thing over and over, but you don’t realise.” (I1/391-393)

- “You’re not like injecting nothing new into your life, so you’re into routine…People don’t know that they’re bored…so they are only on autopilot, and they haven’t realised. So, they bored, but they don’t realise, so they’re like normal. And people don’t realize their whole life . . . when you stay in your comfort zone, when you don’t go out of your comfort zone, that’s boring. . . . That’s the problem. If you don’t look for new sensation, new emotions, new, yeah, experiences. I don’t know, that’s boredom, and you need to realise.” (I1/409-413)

- “For me, when you come into school, to college, it should be a sense of, ‘oh, I want to go with’, you know like? ‘I want to see these people, I want to see my teachers, I want to.’ But I find myself like walking in the hallways, you know, like after class, and people are so bored in that routine and they don’t want to open up. That’s the problem.” (I1/435-443)

As his descriptions show, boredom could be especially problematic because students, including himself, didn’t even realize they were stuck in a routine. They remained indifferent in their boredom and continued to exist on autopilot, unable to engage with the world in ways that were personally meaningful. Through our discussions, this realization led him to classify boredom as a villain: “I think boredom is like a villain that takes out like the, like the vision what you need to do. If you’re bored, you won’t do what you’re supposed to do” (I1/516). In Interview 2 he elaborated:
But if you don’t realize it, if you don’t do something about it, if you don’t change your mindset, it's the worst villain. . . . It's the worst villain because it puts you in a routine and you die, it's sad. And it’s a reality, this is real life, this is not a movie. So, if you don’t do something about it, no, oh no. (I2/96-98)

**Theme 2: Boredom as discomfort and aversion.** In their descriptions, students talked about academic boredom as having an aversive quality that was tightly connected to the experience of mental and physical discomfort. The students expressed a strong feeling of opposition or antipathy towards their boredom because it felt uncomfortable and unpleasant. In short, their boredom did not feel good, and they expressed it as a disliking for or dissatisfaction with the experience. This condition of academic boredom was exemplified through a vivid array of expressions including “I want to jump out of my skin” (Sarah I1/128), “like an itch inside your skull that you just can’t scratch” (Sing J3), “your mind feels like it’s about to explode” (Alex I2/1170), “bored outta my mind” (Asia J3), and “[it] just feels like you’re dying” (Shubham I1/173). To the students, academic boredom meant feeling tense, overwhelmed, irritated, agitated, restless, and frustrated. These expressions captured a troubling, disquieting quality to academic boredom as experienced both inside and outside the classroom.

In capturing the feeling of discomfort or unease that characterized the aversion to academic boredom, the students repeatedly reported feelings of frustration, anxiety, irritation, and annoyance:

- “There have been times when I've gotten so tired or so annoyed and bored and all that that I actually want to cry.” (Asia I1/224)
- “I felt slightly anxious when I was bored because learning is important to me, and I feel I should be engaged lectures and tutorials.” (Sarah J1)
“It was an irritating kind of boredom where all you want to do is leave and move on with your life because you genuinely don't have any need to listen to the conversation.” (Asia J2)

“The feeling was unpleasant, like an itch inside your skull that you just can't scratch. It’s just reaaaally unpleasant? Sad? Dull? Empty? A mix of these 4 words, and from those mix of words you develop an itch to get rid of it, and it’s sometimes frustrating even.” (Sing J3)

“I guess I felt kind of anxious as I am a VERY impatient person, I like to fidget alot especially when I get bored.” (Joe J1)

“I thought the world was going to end! That's a tad dramatic but it was a really annoying feeling.” (Asia J3)

Interviewer: “You mentioned this kind of tension, you feel this tension in your body and in your mind when you’re bored, can you say more about that, like what it’s like or what is it, what’s happening?” Amethyst: “Yes. Okay, let’s say you’re supposed to act but you’re not able to and there’s this – like you get irritated. It’s not nice, it’s just kind of negative.” (I2/71-74)

As the comments above attest, students often used words like “frustrated,” “anxious,” “irritated,” and “annoyed” to allude to boredom’s distressing, uneasy, or uncomfortable qualities. However, it can be argued that affective states such as anxiety, irritation, frustration, and annoyance are qualitatively different from boredom and thus may be contiguously or concurrently experienced with boredom yet represent distinct constructs. The nature of the research questions and corresponding data in the present study does not permit an in-depth examination of these states (e.g., temporal change over time to ascertain causality) in a way that
would satisfactorily resolve this debate. However, what the students’ descriptions did exemplify was how interdependent these feelings can be within an educational setting as illustrated in these examples:

- “I felt frustrated when I was bored in this class. I felt like as I became more bored, I also became more frustrated. . . . When I was bored I felt anxiety, frustration and angst. I felt more negative feelings when bored because I feel like boredom is the opposite of passion.” (Sarah J1)

- “I feel like frustration can branch itself into boredom so it’s not like there’s boredom and then there’s frustration. Like they can be combined. . . . So, it’s like I feel like you could put boredom in with any emotion. It’s just how like you are feeling in that time.” (Asia I2/93-95)

- “If you're really bored you get frustrated. It's like an itch. You want to get out and do something else, that's like the bottom. . . . Yeah that's the very worst.” (Sing I2/96-98)

- *Interviewer:* “Just to clarify, the experience of boredom, is it the same as frustration or are boredom and frustration different things? But they're linked? Or how would you . . .”

  *Anne:* “I would say that they're linked to each other. . . . Yeah, they're different but they're linked in a way.” (I2/107-112)

Additional interrelated affective states that are mentioned within the context of boredom will be considered as they pertain to the other themes discussed below.

Returning to the theme of discomfort and aversion, students also described physical sensations of feeling restless, jittery, and agitated when bored. Although their boredom was sometimes described as a tension in the body or mind that was difficult to further articulate, students also acknowledged specific behaviours as fidgety, anxious movements like shaking their
feet or playing with their hands (e.g., “I get very jittery. I’m like yeah very jittery and like I’ll fidget a lot, and it’s usually like my legs or something or I’ll just play around with my hands more”- Leslie I2/87). Amethyst, for example, had the following description:

I kind of get that like feeling of tension in my body and kind of like in – I don’t know how to say, but like in my mind. I have this tension and it’s bugging me. . . . And it stays there no matter what I do, I’m like I know I have to get through it but it’s so boring! I don’t like it. (I1/257-261)

A few students mentioned that the restless, jittery feeling would gradually build over time and gain in intensity:

- “There are different, definitely different intensities and I guess that’s when I feel more frustrated and, you know, certain feelings start to arise, like I get more anxious and more fidgety, I guess, if I’m more bored, let’s say, or the longer I have to sit through it kind of thing.” (Sarah I2/169)
- “I feel like it’s like gradual, like it kind of builds over time. Like if you don’t have a way to – if you don’t have a way to shift your attention to be more engaged or interested, then it definitely like builds that restlessness or that impatience or frustration.” (Leslie I2/101)
- “I think the more you think about it, the worse it becomes because you just keep on – I guess it builds up and you know you keep on checking your time and you keep on checking your watch and you just get – you keep getting more and more impatient.” (Joe I2/42)

45 Fidgeting is one physical manifestation or expression of academic boredom as a restless, agitated feeling; however, fidgeting, in its many forms, also appears to be a way to cope with boredom. It can function as a release of energy or as a signal to others that the situation is unsatisfactory. I will discuss fidgeting as a coping response in the next section (Academic Boredom Coping).
For Leslie, the feeling was described as becoming so unbearable that she would start gritting her teeth: “Sometimes if it’s really boring and I have nothing to distract myself with, like my brain is just like – yeah, I’m not coming up with anything, I’m very bored then yeah I will grit my teeth” (I2/14). Students’ descriptions of restlessness also often overlapped with a desire to escape the situation and do something else (e.g., “I was itching to take a break and walk outside or something”- Sing J2; “I wanna, you know, not sit there anymore, just do something”- Sarah I1/128) or a wish for time to speed up (e.g., “I feel personally like restlessness is like you’re not patient, like you just want time to like speed up”- Leslie I2/83).

Students also expressed the discomfort of academic boredom as an overwhelming, heavy feeling related to the concept of darkness. Kumar, for example, described his experience of boredom as “a really dark place” (I1/83) and an “overwhelming feeling on your chest like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders” (I2/136). Ava, Shubham, and Steven further reported that it felt like dying while bored, hence the common adage “being bored to death.” Asia uniquely illustrated this characteristic in Interview 1 by assigning boredom a colour: “Darkness, like it would be dark, it would be a burgundy” (I1/180). In Interview 2, she went on to elaborate:

When you think of happiness you think of like the – well, I do – I think of like the beach and like brightness and like things I want to be doing. So, I always think of like yellow and blue. And, I don’t know, maybe I only think, I really think, sort of think like colours because I’m an art kid but kind of stupid but I see it still. So, when you think of something that’s annoying you or irritating you, you think of like deeper colours but not black cause black reminds me of like scary. So, it’s not really just black but like
burgundy’s a good colour because it’s sort of red like angry but like dark like annoyed and like you don’t want to be there. (I2/23)

Many students also noted how academic boredom could become so overwhelming that it felt unbearable. This sentiment was captured in expressions such as “when I’m bored, I just cannot handle any more of it” (Amethyst I1/267), “I just couldn’t deal with it” (Sarah I2/169), “after a while I couldn't bare the boredom anymore” (Alex J2), “it’s like I can't tolerate the boredom anymore” (Steven I2/44), and, “you really can’t take it anymore” (Asia I2/51). For Alex, the culmination of a two-and-a-half-hour class filled with overwhelming, unbearable boredom could have only one outcome:

At the end where you just cannot, literally cannot stand the professor, cannot stand what other people are participating in cause like it’s just uninteresting so you just cannot stand anyone in that room, so you just pick up your stuff and leave. That’s like where your mind feels like it’s about to explode. (I2/117)

Finally, the students discussed the aversive quality of academic boredom using a diverse array of negative, unpleasant descriptors. Whether struggling to complete an uninspiring coding assignment (Joe), attempting to participate in a class discussion on field placement experiences (Ava), or sitting through a repetitive lecture in a Women in Canada course (Leslie), boredom meant not enjoying what you’re doing. Ignacio went as far as saying “it’s almost being depressed, because, yeah, it’s —boredom is like you’re not enjoying it” (I1/384). For Sing, academic boredom “kind of sucks because it's not exciting, it’s like the opposite of exciting. It's the exact opposite of exciting” (I1/213). For Kumar, “having that boredom feeling is not an easy thing” (I1/134), and for Amethyst, boredom is “not nice, it’s just kind of negative . . . obviously you don’t like it. You don’t feel like this is good for you” (I2/74 & 116). Sarah discussed how
feeling bored “upset her” because she was passionate and ready to learn but wasn’t being stimulated. For Sing, boredom was “unpleasant” and for Asia and Ignacio it was “horrible,” with Shubham repeatedly discussing how boredom “doesn’t feel good.” In summary, the students were unanimous in their perception of academic boredom as an adverse experience whenever and wherever it arose.

**Theme 3: Boredom as emptiness.** Across the interviews and journals, the students described their experience of academic boredom as a state of emptiness: an experience defined by its lack of meaning, significance, or purpose. Academic boredom was the recognition that, at that precise moment in time, their lived experience was hollow and contained nothing of value. More than just a lack of interest or stimulation, the quality of emptiness entailed the unsettling realization that their actions were devoid of meaningful purpose.

Of the study participants, Kumar appeared to feel this emptiness most strongly. For him, feeling the emptiness of boredom meant acknowledging that life was meaningless and hollow. Confronting this reality was often frightening and paralyzing for Kumar who used vivid analogies to elucidate what the emptiness felt like for him. He began by describing boredom as being in a dark room where he felt lonely and disconnected from people around him:

> You find yourself, like you are in a dark room where there’s no light, but you can still – you can still see the walls, you can still see yourself, your hands. If you look at your shoes, you will be seeing that you are wearing shoes. But you are still in a dark room. And you start seeing persons coming by, a lot of them. They don’t touch you, but they are shadow, they are all black. They are just walking around you, they are coming and going

46 In his second journal, Kumar asked, “What if boredom is like an anti-feeling?” This self-questioning of boredom as the opposite of feeling aligns well with his and other students’ descriptions of boredom as emptiness and nothingness.
and you can see that they are doing something, but you don’t understand what they are doing . . . Like if you were static and you’re seeing everyone, but you cannot move because you cannot do anything. You don’t have the will. The will is gone. (I1/64-70)

When experiencing boredom, and feeling stuck in that dark room disconnected from those around him, he said “I'm feeling like I’m drowning in that emptiness” (I1/78). Soon after, Kumar elaborated on this feeling with the analogy of being at the top of a mountain, looking down into a bottomless pit:

I'm not sure if you have ever climbed a big mountain where you are looking at the bottom of it and you see all – how deep is it and how bad it will be and how fucked up you will be if you end there, you know, at the bottom of that mountain? You’re seeing it – well, I’m not sure if you can see it, but if you have been in that dark room where you are seeing the things that you are feeling, like in a sink hole, you don’t see – I don't know how to describe it. You don’t see the – it’s like a bottomless pit. . . . Yeah, it’s a bottomless pit. And you know that at the end of that it’s your end. Your end. It’s up to you if you want to keep looking at it, because if you keep looking, you will want to jump. And if you jump you’re gone. You’re gone. You’re past this life . . . it will get you in a point of no return because it will stay with you the rest of the days, the rest of the week, the rest of the year, and you will not – I'm unsure if you will – I think that you will need professional help . . . for getting back into normal life because otherwise you are going to be pretty much fucked up because you are going to be just a soulless person. You will have lost everything. Everything will not be worth it for you because you already seen what is down there. (I1/85-93)
Later, in his third journal, he wrote about how reflecting on boredom transported him again to this feeling of emptiness. He described this experience as a scary but familiar feeling of looking into the abyss and being taunted by it:

I was sitting on the cafeteria, eating a Boston cream when I was starting to have this thought about boredom, it was about this experiences that I have been writing, they had made me think more and more about it, and thinking in them in that moment transport me into that darkness again, it's like if I was dreaming awake, the place is scary, familiar but still scary since I can see the abyss, it's like the feeling is taunting me, why I feel this sadness/emptiness? (J3)

Through additional elaboration in Interview 2, it became clear that Kumar’s experience of boredom as being atop a mountain looking into the abyss meant contemplating its emptiness and confronting the insignificance of his own life. As Kumar said, “boredom in school will be the catalyst for you taking a look into that [abyss], and then doing the jump” (I1/93). To jump into the bottomless pit, “the abyss of doing nothing,” meant giving in to boredom and accepting that your life was meaningless or insignificant. But he warned of the dire consequences of jumping, of becoming soulless and losing everything: “Your soul will be stopped there or it will be so negative like in that place. It will, it will suck your soul and you will be like an empty creature and not more human being” (I2/139). The alternative, which will be covered in more detail below (see Coping with Academic Boredom), was peering into the abyss but remaining on the mountain—that is, fighting the state of emptiness, fighting the boredom, by searching for meaning and purpose.

Kumar also mentioned that emptiness of boredom left him feeling incomplete. He mentioned that it was a feeling he had consistently throughout his life in different contexts (that
he referred to as “cycles”). At the time of our interviews, he labeled the feeling as “boredom” when experienced in an academic context:

I feel in this cycle that I'm living, I feel incomplete. And that’s what will get the best of me. Like that feeling of not – not feeling complete in my personal life, with school, and with all the external factors that are in play. . . . I guess that in every cycle that I’ve been unhappy or that I have been having this feeling or of not being complete, I have had that kind of feeling and now, for example, at this point, it’s the school. It’s called for me, “boredom.” (I1/95-98)

Kumar later clarified that “in every single cycle there is boredom, the presence of boredom. It’s even if you’re in school, even if you’re at work, even, wherever you are . . . these feelings start coming back to me. Like what’s my real purpose?” (I2/42). That final question — what’s my real purpose — acknowledged his struggle with finding meaning when plagued with boredom.

Without an answer, he felt the emptiness weighing heavily on him — feeling heavy as iron (J1) — a feeling he recognized from previous negative life experiences: “While you are having a lot of negative things happening in your life with no one to care for you, no meaning in your life, no significant meaning, you will just be there, stay there, live there” (I2/151).

While Kumar provided the most detailed and nuanced account of boredom as a state of emptiness, he was not alone in this experience. Other students like Ben, Amethyst, Sing, and Steven discussed feeling empty and struggling to find meaning. Ben initially discussed how he struggled to describe emptiness:

There really isn’t any emotions that come with it. I mean if you think about this, when are you not thinking about stuff? Can you think of a time when your mind is just completely
blank? You're always thinking about stuff, exactly. So, to say describe emptiness is in itself a problem. . . . That's close, as close as I could get. (I1/127-129)

After requesting additional elaboration in Interview 2 as to what boredom as emptiness felt like, Ben continued to struggle: “Yeah, it is something that you kind of can’t put it into one word, maybe a whole essay to describe it. So, I think that’s about as close as it’s going to get” (I2/193). Nonetheless, he did provide insight into his empty feeling within the context of striving for success, achieving goals, and being ambitious. He wanted to be actively engaged in these pursuits, and when he wasn’t he felt the boredom arise as a feeling of emptiness such that he was not meaningfully pursuing success:

I’m also a very, you know, ambitious person. Like I want to, you know, achieve great things in life or you know have success throughout my life. So, in that sense maybe that’s why I feel like that, because if you know you’re bored and you’re not actively engaged in trying to make your – you know, developing your success, right? Then that kind of – maybe that’s why I feel kind of empty or lack meaning in that sense. (I2/9)

Being bored for Ben meant being not only feeling unstimulated by a task but that it did not fulfill a goal or purpose and therefore lacked meaning, adding that it “becomes an especially pronounced feeling when the semester is getting more and more busy and there just seems to be a lack of time to complete anything” (I2). However, Ben also noted an important caveat:

Well when we talk about meaning or purpose right, or stimulation, right, what does that mean? Does that fit into the long-term goals in life, right? But at the same time there are many things in our lives that doesn’t pertain to the long-term goals. We can’t always be working towards you know getting, developing meaning or purpose, the purpose in our lives, right? . . . I guess one thing we could talk about is there are a lot of – there are a lot
of tasks that we do, right, simply for pleasure, right, and we don’t feel – when we do
those tasks we don’t feel bored about it, right? But those tasks doesn’t necessarily give us
more meaning and it doesn’t achieve a higher purpose in our lives. (I2/80-88)
Ultimately, we can’t always be striving for meaning and purpose, and we can instead do things
for pleasure that don’t bore us. Whether we will feel bored or not thus depends on the situation
and our goals within that context.

Amethyst was in the library studying for a biology exam and feeling overwhelmed and
frustrated by the amount of material she had to cover. She discussed how this prompted
existential questions about the meaning of studying and life more generally. These existential
reflections culminated in a feeling of emptiness, an experience where she “doesn’t feel
anything,” that was akin to boredom:

This weird feeling was there and then after a bit I felt empty - had no thoughts or
anything, just needed to reset and try to focus on my studies again. As I have shared,
boredom comes to me when I am not doing something that is beneficial for someone (not
just me actually) or when I don't feel myself deeply involved with it - so it happened at
that moment. (J3)
Her boredom was determined to exemplify emptiness in that she was unable to identify the
meaning or purpose of her actions. Similar sentiments were echoed by other participants. For
example, Sarah said, “If I’m bored and not doing anything, [I] just feel like I’m not really
benefiting myself and not being productive” (I1/198). Although descriptions such as these did
not contain direct references to emptiness, they nevertheless connoted an experience devoid of
meaning or significance.
Sing also confirmed that his experience of academic boredom felt like emptiness. In Interview 1 I asked him, “What does it feel like to be bored?” He responded by saying:

I think it's more close to sadness . . . Because it's definitely not - it's not - it's definitely not happy, it's not - you're not really angry about it, it's more feeling - it's more of a feeling of being empty. Empty I guess. Empty. Sad and empty but there's not really despair or anything, like - but it's more of a not feeling. Yeah, it's empty. That's how I can describe it. (I1/230-236)

The emptiness he felt was closer to sadness than anger or despair; a sentiment that Kumar also expressed by the phrase “a not feeling.” This description aligned with emptiness as a state of containing nothing, an experience devoid of significance, and an absence of meaning. In Interview 2, Sing continued to elaborate on his description of boredom as emptiness, this time highlighting a contiguous feeling of frustration:

You might be just a bit frustrated because you want to get out of that feeling of emptiness. It's like feeling of, you know, those old-time torture devices where you get buried alive and like how bad it is because you're so enclosed and you're in complete darkness and you can't move, like you're probably going to die going mad actually and stuff. It's like you're mad 'cause you want to move and stuff. And I think it's the same for boredom, you want to do something and you might get frustrated because you can't 'cause if it's something you need to do, like studying I guess. You get frustrated 'cause you want to do something else but you can't 'cause you have to study and stuff. (I2/137-144)

Sing had compared the frustration he felt trying to escape from boredom’s emptiness to the frustration of being enclosed in an “old-time torture device” without the possibility of escape.
Such vivid imagery captured the crushing psychological weight of emptiness and the struggle to escape it.

**Theme 4: Boredom as wanting to escape.** Across the students’ descriptions, a desire to escape was found to be a condition of the experience of academic boredom. As Theme 2 and Theme 3 have illustrated, academic boredom meant feeling uneasy or uncomfortable, it meant feeling emptiness, and it meant aversion. These interrelated themes described boredom’s unpleasant qualities and suggested an experience that constrained or confined students. Thus, to desire escape meant expressing a need to break away from or get free of boredom due to it restricting students’ ability to feel connected to something meaningful or significant. Part of academic boredom was to wish for the experience to end as quickly as possible, which is to say, boredom included a desire to escape from itself. In the words of Andreas Elpidorou, “boredom is both a call to ‘stop’ doing what we are doing and a ‘push’ to do something else” (2017, p. 15). Sarah echoed this sentiment in her first journal: “I think that boredom is our mind signalling to us that something isn't working for us” (J1).

The need to escape was most often expressed by the students as a desire to be doing something else or something other than what they were currently doing. As I will discuss below, whereas the experience of *coping with boredom* meant actually attempting some form of mental or physical escape, the experience of boredom itself was operationalized as consisting only of the reported desire for something else. Frequently, students described what they would rather be doing while bored in class, on a break, or while studying including going to sleep, reading, partying, taking a break, going home, working out, and actually being able to listen to and be engaged by a lecture or presentation:
“When you're participating in any activity and you just want to be somewhere else, you just want to go to sleep. You don’t want to be there. You're not absorbing anything, it's not - you feel like it has no positive effect on your life and there is so many things that you would rather be doing at that moment.” (Zed I1/121)

“What am I doing here? Like time is of the essence and I want to go home and read more and everything.” (Leslie I1/146)

“It kind of makes you feel like you need to do something, so you’re constantly thinking about, oh, you know, like . . . I’m bored like from Monday to Friday, because I have classes, I have gaps. So, on Friday, I’m like, no, I need to do something. I want to party, I want to go downtown, you know? So, it makes you – boredom makes you . . . yeah . . . makes you, like, you know, want to do something else.” (Ignacio I1/362-364)

“I’m just sitting there praying that just – I would close my eyes and I will just be in my next class so I can go home. . . . I just want to go home.” (Alex I1/118)

“I felt really bored but there was still another 20 minutes before my bus came. I had nothing to do and I really wanted to go home and sleep.” (Ben J3)

“I was thinking of just wanting to go home and sleep and whether I wanted to go to the gym.” (Ava J1)

“I wanted a physical break from sitting, and a mental break from taking in lots of information in a short span of time (especially since I have another class right after).” (Sarah J1)

“It was really boring ‘cause, you know, when it comes to presentations you're supposed to bring everyone upbeat and so interested but that week when they presented I was just like, no. . . . So, I was not engaged and then I just felt bored. I was really interested about
hearing the topic 'cause you don’t really talk about it too much, right? It happens but you don’t really know. I didn’t know too much about where it came from or how it happens, how colonialism took part within the HIV. . . . I really wanted to listen and engage within that conversation but how he presented, no.” (Ava I2/164-165)

It should be noted that the stated desire for something else did not always include a clear reference to something specific they would rather be doing or somewhere else they would rather be and was often quite vague and open-ended:

- “When I’m bored, I just cannot handle any more of it so I have to get away as fast as I can.” (Amethyst I1/267)
- “You just want to do anything else.” (Zed I1/125)
- “Yeah, it’s like I’m having a conversation with myself in my own head, I’m really bored. I don’t want people to notice that I’m really bored, I want to get something done.” (Alex I1/126)
- “Doing other things, wanting, thinking about other things. . . . I wanna, you know, not sit there anymore, just do something.” (Sarah I1/124-128)
- “It’s like I’m bored, maybe I should do something else.” (Amethyst I2/148)
- “You want to do something but you don't know what. . . . Boredom is just like, I just want to get up out of my seat and leave and go and do something.” (Anne I1/226 & 263)
- “Like when I'm bored in these classes I literally say to myself ‘what am I doing here? I should be doing something else with my life.’ So, that's always a constant kind of like remark I like when I'm bored.” (Steven I2/32)
- “Anything at all actually. Yeah, I think it is filling it in because I would prefer doing something else when I'm bored, like to do anything at all, even receive news of
something not very good, not very good news. . . . Anything that would click my mind, my brain to something 'cause it's dead right now, something that would spark it.” (Sing I2/132-134)

- “You always think like, what do you want to do? . . . So I still am like in the computer programming course, which I would think I want to do, right? I should do that thing, right? Attending the lectures, right? But I am getting bored in the lectures.” (Shubham I2/205-207)

- “You just want it to all finish, just wrap it up. It doesn’t have to go on for how many hours. You don’t have to take us until the full class. There's other classes that are short, simple and sweet.” (Ava I2/68)

However, when prompted to elaborate, it became clear that something else—other than being bored—meant doing something more interesting, enjoyable, or meaningful, which provided a direct link to the previously discussed themes:

- “I really want to just walk out of the lecture and do something more productive or more interesting.” (Leslie I1/132)

- “I just want to leave and do something that’s more interesting.” (Steven I1/188)

- “I wanted to do something else, more interesting and more engaging.” (Amethyst J1)

- “I was irritated since there were more important things to be discussed other than new material.” (Alex J1)

Fueling their desire to escape was a feeling of being stuck or trapped when bored in school. According to the *Google Dictionary*, to be *stuck* means to “remain in a static condition” or to “remain in a specified place or situation, typically one perceived as tedious or unpleasant.” This feeling of being static was described by the students as an undesirable inability to move or
progress past some form of obstruction. Amethyst, for example, recognized the need to push through her boredom and continue studying, but she felt obstructed: “I’m like I have to go through it but I can’t, I’m kind of stuck” (I1/249). In Interview 2 she elaborated: “You know you have to act if you want to feel better, I don’t know, but you can’t really, something’s stopping you” (I2/74). Sarah felt trapped by her boredom and, like Amethyst, she also recognized the need to liberate herself from confinement. When bored in class, she said she felt “like I have become stagnant. . . . I feel like boredom was a cage. I feel trapped when I am bored and I try to motivate myself to get out of boredom” (J1). She reiterated this point in Interview 2 when discussing the feeling of wanting to jump out of her skin: “You can’t sit still, almost like you’re trapped kind of. There’s like this physical entity to it almost” (I2/69).

Others, like Kumar and Sing, mentioned the sensation of being stuck while bored through more indirect descriptions. In his analogy of boredom as a dark room, Kumar portrayed boredom as “one of those dreams where you cannot move at all . . . like if you were static and you’re seeing everyone, but you cannot move because you cannot do anything” (I1/66-68). In his analogy of boredom as a medieval torture device, Sing discussed feeling enclosed and unable to move as a negative experience because he wanted so badly to do something else; he felt trapped within his boredom and was compelled to remain invested in studying despite it being mundane and irrelevant.

**Theme 5: Boredom as having nothing to do.** When prompted to describe what academic boredom meant to them, many participants first responded by saying it was the experience of doing nothing or having nothing to do. But what did it mean when Joe, for example, said “boredom I would say it’s when you either don’t do anything or have nothing to do” (I1/95)? What about their boredom could be expressed as “not doing anything” (Ava) or
having “absolutely nothing to do” (Alex)? Surely there was something that they could be doing? Yet, in that moment, there was nothing that felt worthy of their efforts. Indeed, within their educational context, where much of what a student does or “should be doing” is directed by others, feeling like there was nothing to do typically meant not being able to engage, participate, or find interest in what was happening at that moment. It meant feeling like there was nothing to do that was personally meaningful and was often synonymous with the experience of “just sitting there.” Having nothing to do meant finding oneself in a state of emptiness where no meaning could be found. It meant an encounter with nothingness such that one’s current undertaking lacked significance, whether it be completing a task at field placement (Ava), studying at home (Amethyst), finding something to do on a break between classes (Ben, Joe, Asia), or sitting through a passive lecture (Shubham, Alex).

The following excerpts from the interviews and journals highlight the condition of having nothing to do as part of the experience of academic boredom. Ben discussed feeling bored during a three-hour break between classes:

I don’t like being, not doing anything. So, I want to do something. But because I'm stuck here for a three hour break I can't really go home 'cause it's an hour bus trip, that just doesn’t make sense so I'm kind of stuck at school and I don’t have anything to do.

(I1/134)

His description of struggling with having nothing stimulating to do illustrated the overlap with boredom’s aversive quality. Other comments also referenced boredom’s emptiness quality with respect to having nothing to do, such as Ava feeling like she was “slowly dying” while having to wait for a boring class to end (I2/64) and the following statement by Shubham:
When I don’t have like anything to do. . . . It’s not good. It feels like – just feel like you’re dying or something or nothing to do or something like that. . . . Like dying, you have nothing to do. You are just sitting like this or [thinking] what’s happening in the world. You are thinking like, “I have nothing to do.” So, it’s almost like that – equal that in death. (I1/167-175)

Leslie described boredom as the experience where “you have nothing to do or you tell yourself you have nothing to do” (I1/118). When pressed to elaborate on what it meant to having nothing to do she said:

Sort of like nothing to sort of – for your brain to focus on I guess or using, you know, just using your mind I guess, having it like focus on something, it’s maybe – yeah, not tuned into anything or you’re not interested . . . with nothing to do more in the sense of my brain’s just wandering, like my mind is wandering, like I’m not – because I tell myself, my attitude is like “oh, there’s nothing to do because they’re not like discussing things that are of importance.” (I1/120-122)

Asia and Alex highlighted feeling immobilized or incapacitated by not having anything to do while bored:

- “When you’re bored like there’s, you’re literally out of thoughts on how to like amuse yourself in a way. So, you’re just sitting there, it’s like you’re sitting between like four walls, you can’t do anything. So, your mind is sort of blocked, there’s either, you just sit there and accept it or you just leave.” (Alex I2/23)

- “I have a pretty large break between two of my classes and usually I hang out with my friends. But unfortunately, everyone decided to not come to school, and I mean EVERYONE, so I had less than 0 idea on what to do to entertain myself the whole time.
So, I literally just walked around the school, doing nothing, bored outta my mind lol. And just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, I DIDNT BRING MY HEADPHONES. So, what was I supposed to do after that? It was an overall horrible experience.” (Asia J3)

Like Asia, Joe discussed the condition of having nothing to do while on a break between classes: “I always have a 1 hour break between classes on Fridays. Though it’s not the worst scheduling, but I can get pretty bored during those breaks because I usually have nothing to do but wait and kill time” (J2). According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, to wait means “to remain temporarily neglected or unrealized” or “to remain stationary in readiness or expectation.” Indeed, the students’ experience of waiting while bored included descriptions of remaining inactive while anticipating something else more engaging like going home, seeing a friend or partner, or attending the next class. Ignacio vividly captured this sentiment when he characterized the waiting as *dead time*:

Time between two things can be like a dead time . . . and I think when I told like the indifference, most people are in that time, it's like a dead time. Gap. It’s like that time between two things that you need to do but you can't leave. It's just such college thing, this is perfect for this, it's dead time because you can't go home. An example: I need to go to the shuttle bus that goes to the other campus so I can’t leave. I can't go like around the corner and just to my home and sleep. It's like a dead time. So, that time is when I feel like, you know, bored, and I think that most students are in that time, so just like walking around. (I2/43-44)

Ignacio and Ben provided the following elaborations on the experience of waiting while bored:
“I guess it fits in very well with the idea of waiting. You’re waiting for something to happen . . . you’re waiting for the next thing to happen but you just – you don’t know – I mean you don’t have anything to do at that moment.” (Ben I2/57-62)

“So, an example like three hours between classes, that a lot, that's a long time. So, when you know that you will wait to go to class for three hours, it's like, you know, the feeling when you go like oh, it’s like you need to wait. It’s a waste [of] time. . . . You need to wait. So, that puts you like in a mindset to just be like bored because okay, I need to wait so what am going to do?” (Ignacio, I2/41-43)

Drawing again from Kumar’s nuanced perspective on boredom as an overwhelming feeling of emptiness, one salient connection he identified concerned having nothing to do as a condition of academic boredom or what he called “the abyss of doing nothing” (J1):

(Building on his early description of boredom as being in a dark room) “You don’t get to do whatever they are doing. You are just standing there. You are there with nothing to do. Why are these people doing something that you cannot do? Why are you doing nothing? And that fact of not doing something, that – in a room, just standing there, I will say that will be the best description I can do or give about boredom.” (I1/64)

“Part of me feel[s] bored in school when I'm not doing anything or even when I'm doing something that it's not of my complete interest. This time it happened when I was trying to get to do my homework at library, I was just looking at the monitor of my computer, something is not fine . . .” (J2)

“That feeling is what I describe as boredom because I was not doing anything. It was just like, I was killing time there.” (I2/44)
Later in Interview 2 he confirmed boredom was the experience of doing nothing, that it contained an aspect of loneliness, and that it was separate from the experience of depression:

And forget about depression, that point of doing nothing that, for me that’s not depression, that for me would be boredom, like staying there. Depression will feel like, feel sad and all that kind of feelings . . . it’s like when you are there alone doing nothing it will, your brain will go and you will go with the boredom. . . . I don’t see depression as something that will open a door and you will be there all depressed or something, no. I think depression as whatever else, some feeling, some normal feeling. On the other side, I see boredom as like this portal, like boredom, not doing anything with yourself or that period of time will get you into there . . . no meaning in your life, no significant meaning, you will just be there, stay there, live there. (I2/147-151)

As referred to earlier, the portal or door he mentioned at the end of the comment referred to the point at which his boredom prompts him to reflect on the meaning of his life. This will be discussed in more detail below in reference to coping with boredom.

In addition to Kumar’s statements suggesting overlaps between having nothing to do and emptiness, Alex’s recognition that having nothing to do felt awkward suggested an additional overlap with the boredom quality of aversiveness. When bored in between classes, Alex became acutely aware of how her boredom was being experienced in the presence of other students. For example, she said, “you’re sitting there for so long doing nothing, like if I was sitting there doing my essay I would feel like so much better, it’s like I’m doing something useful” (I1/124), and “nothing to do is exactly like I don’t have, there’s no assignments for me to do, there is nothing for me to read so like there’s literally nothing I can do that can make me relate to the school at
that point” (I2/69). In an academic context, these activities also felt useless and her awkwardness intensified:

Let’s say I’m sitting like this, there’s an empty chair in front of me and one person would come and then they would leave and then another person will come and I’m just sitting there doing nothing on my laptop and people are leaving and coming, leaving and coming. So, it’s just awkward that you’re just sitting there and you feel like everyone is watching you, and no one’s watching you, because you feel like you’re the centre of attention, even though you’re not. Probably no-one noticed you sitting there, but the fact that you’re sitting there for so long doing nothing, like if I was sitting there doing my essay I would feel like so much better, it’s like I’m doing something useful, but just sitting there doing some like online shopping or whatever, sort of feels awkward…I’m having a conversation with myself in my own head, I’m really bored. I don’t want people to notice that I’m really bored, I want to get something done but then I can’t because there is nothing to do. (I1/121-126)

Later in Interview 2 she elaborated on the awkward feeling:

So, you just sit down and just stay bored until like there’s this time where you go back to class or whatever you have next to do. You just sit there like stay doing that one thing even though you feel like awkward or lonely or whatever you’re feeling you just stay and put, like you don’t do anything else. (I2/25)

She even mentioned anticipating the awkwardness that would accompany her boredom (i.e., having nothing to do) and made preparations to be comfortable and combat the feeling:

When I know that I’m going to be bored, I sort of come to school prepared for it, like wear my sweatpants, have on something that’s very comfortable so I know like, I’m
going to be sitting down doing nothing, might as well be comfortable doing nothing.

(II/116)

**Theme 6: Boredom as feeling physically tired.** Feeling physically tired as a condition of the experience of academic boredom was expressed by many students; a powerful weariness or lethargy had enveloped them in the initial stages of their boredom and drained them of any capacity for connecting with the present moment. When discussing fatigue due to boredom, students described wanting to sleep, shut down, or disconnect, particularly when asked to express how academic boredom felt within their bodies. Ignacio depicted feeling “lazy,” Ava described feeling “very sloppy,” and Zed and Shubham’s boredom took on a “sleepy” quality. Asia’s vivid description perhaps best summarized the students’ bodily sentiment of torpor:

> When I'm bored I feel sluggish and, like, exhausted; like if I'm bored of say my sociology teacher, the first thing I want to do is sleep because my brain is just not in it. It's like shutting down, it's like nap time, you've got to go. I feel like if I could describe it, it would be exhaustion and it would be, like, no motivation, it's just not alert and awake and ready to see what's going on, it's more the complete opposite. (II/180)

There was also a connection between the lethargy of boredom and the experience of doing nothing that seemed to drain students of their motivation to participate in academic tasks:

- “When you’re sitting doing nothing, I get tired. I don’t know how that sounds but you’re just sitting there doing nothing, your eyes get tired. I just want to go home. I lose all of the motivation that I had walking in in the morning.” (Alex II/118)

- *Interviewer:* “Okay, you mentioned the idea of feeling lazy when you're bored, can you talk about this being lazy?” *Ignacio:* “Not doing things makes you lazy. . . . People think that “oh, I'm so tired, I'm so lazy because I've done so [many] things.” No. If you're
sitting down just - it's like your mindset, it’s, like switches and your whole body doesn’t want to do things because you're not active.” (I2/47-50)

- Interviewer: “What does it mean to be bored?” Ava: “Feeling lazy.” Interviewer:
  “Feeling lazy, okay.” Ava: “Not doing anything. . . . Honestly doing nothing all day, even if there's priorities to do I just ignore them.” Interviewer: “How does it kind of feel within you, or what does it look like when you’re bored?” Ava: “Very sloppy. . . . Just more tired to be honest with you. Not motivated to do anything at all.” (I1/147-160)

As a feeling of sluggish exhaustion, or the “complete opposite” of feeling awake and alert, academic boredom appeared to often physically overwhelm the students regardless of how rested they were or how much they attempted to stimulate themselves. For example, when bored and sitting in an Information and Communications Technology Lab before class, Zed said:

I feel sleepy (even though I got 8 hours of sleep last night), and even though there's a bunch of movies or shows or funny videos I could be watching for entertainment, I don't feel like it. I've yawned at least 4 times while writing this. (J2)

Ava highlighted that she “drank coffee to stay awake and feel energized but that did not happen. I felt more tired and bored” (J1). On another occasion in a community practice class with a monotone professor she said, “I felt so tired at the end of class and just wanted to go back to sleep and not go to my next class” (J3). Anne echoed this sentiment when she mentioned feeling as if she “couldn't sit down without falling asleep” when bored by her repetitive seminar professor (J2). Ignacio was also feeling the draining effects of boredom while in a typically enjoyable biology lab:

I was in the Biology Lab it was very early in the morning and with the stress that I had because of the multiple tests coming up I just felt exhausted. Normally lab is fun,
however, this time I was bored, therefore I kept getting behind on the on-point work rhythm that you need to have. I am tired and lazy. I can say that being bored affected my performance on this lab. (J2)

Consistent with feelings of fatigue and weariness, boredom was also described by students as being physically manifested in yawning, slouching, and drowsy eyes:

- Interviewer: “If someone was to be watching you when you’re bored, what would they see?” Zed: “They’d probably see me with my eyes kind of like all drowsy and mostly directed towards like my phone or my laptop.” (I2/104-105)
- “I sit on [my] desk, and my hand on my chin, and like, you can like see on my face like I am like, I am being lazy and bored. . . . It seems like on my face, like sleepy and like I am passing out and everything.” (Shubham I2/145-148)
- “Even my posture will change, like I’ll be slouched over and like I’ll just like look at my feet.” (Leslie I2/91)

Embodied as a lethargic, sluggish weariness, academic boredom was repeatedly described by students as draining their physical energy and suppressing their ambitions. As outlined in the following theme, while in this state of torpor, many students also reported that their perception of time became altered (i.e., slowed down).

**Theme 7: Boredom as time slowing down.** Students’ academic boredom was also found to be characterized by an inimical temporal quality; a feeling of time slowing down. “It’s slow, and it’s not moving almost” declared Steven (I1/218). “It just feels like it's going on and on and on and on” echoed Joe (I1/119). Relatedly, time was also reported to *drag on*, with Google Dictionary defining *drag* as to “pull (someone or something) along forcefully, roughly, or with difficulty;” to “go somewhere wearily, reluctantly, or with difficulty;” or to “continue at tedious
and unnecessary length.” Indeed, reports of discomforting tedium reported by students were consistently accompanied by those of an earnest desire for finality: “You just want time to like speed up” (Leslie I2/83); “It just needs to end” (Anne I2/64). Some students also reported becoming upset by the slowing of time, such as Joe, who stated: “I guess I felt anxious for the time to run out, time just seems so much slower when you’re thinking about it passing” (J2).

The following examples from the interviews and journals evocatively revealed academic boredom’s temporal character:

- “If you’re sitting there and you’re listening to someone talk about something that you should care about but you don’t because you know it, it’s so, it drags on and it – three hours feels like seven. . . . It becomes so much more than what it really is, so when you're on something else or you’re preoccupied with anything the time goes by faster. It's even, like, with work, if I don’t think about what time I'm off, time flies by, but if I'm thinking 'oh my god I have 11 and a half minutes' or, 'oh my god seven minutes', constantly doing that kills you and it's so much worse. But it's like, anything to get rid of looking at the time and seeing things drag on helps. So, they should just tape the clocks around, let's just have no clocks then we'd probably do so much better. . . . Especially looking at the seconds, it's like, oh my gosh, seconds slow down in that class . . . it's so bad.” (Asia I1/248-254)

- “It’s when time does not pass by and you have absolutely nothing to do and you’re all alone, there is nothing that you can think of that could make time pass by or any of that. . . . You literally look at the clock, say it’s 2:17 it would feel like 10 minutes passed and then it’s only like 2:19.” (Alex I1/116-118)
“It feels like time is going by slow when you're bored and you don't have anything to do. . . . You're just sitting there and then you look at your time and you're just like ‘why is time going by so slow?’ Like I, like your mind thinks that it's already like been half an hour or an hour but it's actually only been 10 minutes. So, you're just like ‘oh, man,’ you're just like “I have to sit in this class for like another like two hours or an hour.” So, it's kind of just like I need something to make time go by faster.” (Anne I1/271-279)

Interviewer: “Can you say anything more to describe what it feels like when time goes by slowly? As a part of boredom?” Anne: “It just feels like you're just getting nowhere. You're just like, just sitting there. You feel like time's stopped, basically. But then you realize that maybe it's just your mind playing tricks on you, kind of thing. Saying that you should be, you should try focusing on doing something, so that way when you look up you'll realize that the time's like, past, past by and you don't even know it cause you're so focused on something.” (Anne I2/96-97)

As these descriptions illustrate, the experience of time painfully dragging on overlaps with the previously discussed themes including having nothing to do, feeling discomfort and aversion, and a lack of engagement in the present moment. These qualities were also connected with the final theme identified: academic boredom as wasted time.

**Theme 8: Boredom as wasting time.** Within the academic context, the experience of boredom also consistently involved feeling like time was being wasted. It was the perception or acknowledgement that “this” is useless—this lecture, this assignment, this test preparation, this professor, or this break between classes when you can’t go home. It was the recognition that time wasted was time consumed without adequate return. As a condition of academic boredom, wasting time meant students’ resources were not being properly utilized, that something
irreplaceable was being lost, and that this loss could be quantified by the clock on the wall or on the screen of a smart phone. Academic boredom appeared to necessitate a direct appreciation of the passage of time in a way that forced students to confront the temporal consequences of their current actions. Students often described the experience of something important was being squandered, such as Steven who said, “I feel like when I’m bored, I, I’m wasting my life, because time is valuable, and I’m sitting there, I’m bored, and like the seconds are ticking, the minutes are going to waste” (I1/210). Sing highlighted that boredom “disconnects you from everything and it's like . . . it’s like you’re wasting your time . . . it's like you’re wasting your time living” (I1/326). Amethyst echoed their sentiments: “It makes me feel like I'm losing time and I know that time is perceived as pretty finite” (J2).

In some descriptions, students were very forthcoming about the perception of boredom as a waste of time. For example:

- “If you’re not doing anything and you’re wasting time, then that’s boredom, you feel like you’re wasting time . . . for example, that calculus class, we weren’t doing anything basically because he was going over the same thing, over and over and over again. So, I got bored and I’m like this is a waste of time.” (Amethyst I1/214-218)
- “That is one thing I would classify boredom as in some situations, a waste of time . . . I’d feel like I’d want to be somewhere else and I’d feel like it’d be a waste of time if I come to a lecture and the teacher’s teaching something I’m already really good at. Then I’d feel like it’s a waste of time, and I’d be bored.” (Zed I2/9 & 80)
- “I feel like I am wasting time and money when I am bored at school. I also feel like I am wasting the professor's time if I am bored. . . . I feel like I am wasting time and money if I am bored and not engaged with the subject matter.” (Sarah J2)
“That's if you are like, just feeling bored, that's pointless, right? A waste of time.”

(Shubham I2/229)

Related descriptions also referred to academic boredom as wasted time due to not doing anything beneficial, worthwhile, or useful; descriptions pertaining to the aforementioned theme of lack of value or emptiness. However, the explanations for why boredom felt wasteful varied depending on what they valued about their education or what they expected from attending college. In direct response to the question of how she would describe or define boredom, Alex said: “It’s like when I’m doing something that’s so useless. . . . It’s when time does not pass by and you have absolutely nothing to do and you’re all alone, there is nothing that you can think of that could make time pass by” (I1/116). While feeling bored attempting to study plant biology at home for an upcoming exam, Amethyst said: “I didn’t feel like this is something that I’m ever going to apply . . . I’m not really going to do anything with plants, I don’t care, I’m not going to apply it anywhere” (I1/249 & I2/65). Joe discussed his boredom in English class by noting the following:

I would say it’s more like most of the stuff she talks about is just – it has no connection with the class. Like literally if – like I would say I would go maybe for the handouts and for like five, 10 minutes where like she’s explaining what to do, and then honestly like out of a two-hour class I would say maybe like 10, 15 minutes are actually useful. And then I guess the rest of the time that I don’t find useful, I’m more bored. . . . I haven’t learned a single thing in English, not a single thing. (I2/68-72)

Students also noted a relation between academic boredom as wasted time and experiences that seemed pointless or unproductive such that they did not connect to their learning goals in that academic context. Steven mentioned having to take some alone time before suffering through a boring group project meeting that entailed “a lot of pointless bickering about what we
should and shouldn't do” (J2). Asia recalled struggling through 40 minutes of boredom before leaving an irrelevant critical thinking class because “the teacher was rambling on about a certain point she was trying to prove which had zero relevance to the class” (J2). Alex lamented a similar experience in French class saying, “I couldn't bare the boredom anymore so I just decided to leave the class, and it felt pointless” (J2). Likewise, art class lecture’s routinely produced boredom experienced as wasted time and irrelevancy:

This happens typically every Friday. The prof started off the class talking about photography, a topic we've been going over for four weeks by now. So, the subject is becoming extremely irrelevant and boring. As soon as she started talking about the subject, I rolled my eyes knowing that this is going to be a waste to time. It had no relevance to the upcoming assignments. (J3)

Anne mentioned a similar boredom experience that concerned the professor in her mental health class:

He tends to talk about his personal experiences as opposed to focusing more on like, the course. . . . So it's kind of just like, that's like, the point where I just start to just zone out, because it has nothing to do with the course and it's just about his personal life. . . . So I tend to just, like, not listen to what he says most the time, cause it relates to his personal life. (I2/193-197)

For Steven, boredom represented wasted time due to having to repeat academic tasks he believed he had already mastered:

I guess boredom would be like maybe repetition or like improving a skill that I've already maxed out. So, if I already mastered the skill and for me to do it again and again kind of leaves me bored 'cause I know I'm not progressing anymore and I've already met the - I've
already mastered that in my own mind. So, if I'm doing it again I'm just like “oh, I'm wasting my time and like I've already done this countless times and I've mastered it so why do it again?" So, I procrastinate and I avoid it and I guess especially boredom with it 'cause it's not challenging me, it's not progressing, I'm not progressing I'm just doing it to occupy my time or 'cause I need to. (I2/84-85)

Finally, descriptions of academic boredom as wasting time because of being in an unproductive or useless situation were often accompanied by descriptions of other feelings such as guilt, anxiety, and frustration. Sarah provided an excellent example of these dynamics when describing feelings of boredom due to not feeling productive:

I also feel a personal and external pressure to achieve high grades and do well in school, therefore I associate being bored with being non-productive. I feel like it's easy to associate boredom with negativity especially being in a pressured environment such as school or work. I felt that being bored was holding me back from being productive. (J1)

She expressed expectations about being interested and engaged in class, and about learning and benefiting herself, while also feeling pressure to succeed academically. She then reported becoming frustrated when feeling unproductive because those expectations were not being met:

I want to learn and, you know, benefit myself and move forward and feel like I’m gaining something, not just like I’m just trying to get the credit kind of thing. . . . Like I enjoy more so actually learning and being engaged and passionate about the subject than just earning the credit. And maybe that’s ‘cause I took like five years off school maybe that’s why I get so frustrated when I’m bored because I feel like I should be working towards something now that I am. But when I feel like I’m not it kind of frustrates me. (I2/155-157)
Interestingly, Sarah also associated feeling guilty with academic boredom: “I associated my boredom with guilt and experienced guilt when I was bored” (J1). Likewise, Asia, Sing, Amethyst, Alex, and Anne all mentioned feelings of annoyance, irritation, and frustration that accompanied their academic boredom when they also felt they were wasting time on something useless and not benefiting in some way.

**Summary.** As narrated by college students across multiple disciplines, the experience of academic boredom consisted of the following eight themes: lack of engagement, discomfort and aversion, emptiness, a desire to escape, nothing to do, feeling physically tired, time slowing down, and wasting time. As a lack of engagement, academic boredom meant feeling uninterested, unstimulated, unmotivated, and uninvolved. The students struggled to pay attention in the moment, which included difficulty focusing, listening, or participating in class activities. As discomfort and aversion, academic boredom felt uncomfortable or unpleasant combined with a disliking for or dissatisfaction with the experience. Their antipathy towards academic boredom meant accompanying feelings of tension, agitation, and restlessness. As a state of emptiness, academic boredom was an experience defined by a lack of meaning, significance, or purpose. Academic boredom was the recognition that students’ lived experiences at that moment were hollow or devoid of meaningful purpose. As a desire to escape, academic boredom meant feeling a need to break away from or get free of academic situations that made them feel trapped or restricted by an inability to feel connected to something meaningful. Academic boredom was also often described as a lack of activity, having nothing to do or wasting time, and was consistently reflected in oppressive sensations of tiredness as well as the sensation of time slowing down. Having established an understanding of what academic boredom meant to the
students, I will now depict their experience of coping with academic boredom using the
descriptions obtained from the interviews and journals.

**Academic Boredom Coping**

Throughout the interviews and journals, students talked and wrote about academic
boredom coping according to four underlying themes. As a reminder, I am defining a theme as “a
thread of meaning that penetrates text parts, either all or just a few. It is seen as conveying an
essential meaning of lived experience” (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 149). Each theme will be
discussed in detail and accompanied by supporting descriptions from the participants. The
themes are presented in random order; therefore, they are not prioritized in order of strength,
frequency, or any other criterion.

**Theme 1: Being respectful.** The four essential themes of academic boredom coping are
ultimately interrelated and mutually reinforcing; yet, I begin with the theme of being respectful
because I believe it lays the foundation for understanding the students’ narratives in the themes
that follow. The reason for this is that coping with academic boredom, from the students’
perspective, implied relationality, or what van Manen has called the *lived other*. Lived other (i.e.,
communality) refers to the interpersonal spaces in our lifeworld where we form and sustain
relations with others. Our lived human relations are the connections and communications we
share with others because we exist in a world where we are conscious of the presence of other
people and things. In an academic context, students described an acute awareness of how others,
primarily their professors, were experienced when coping with boredom in interpersonal spaces
such as the classroom, library, and hallway.

To cope with academic boredom meant striving to be respectful. More specifically, it
meant that students had awareness of how they were being perceived by the professor and they
strove to be respectful with how their boredom was expressed and managed in their professors’ eyes. They acknowledged a desire to avoid being rude or causing offense with their coping. The following examples illustrated some of the ways they deemed coping to be respectful or disrespectful. Leslie, for instance, illuminated the difference between leaving in the middle of class and not coming back versus getting up, going for a walk or a short break, and then returning to the classroom:

That’s why like I think it’s also okay to like sort of get up and go for a walk. Like I used to think it was kind of rude too, but like if you have to do it, go for a walk, right? I’ve seen students do that. But I mean just getting up and leaving is kind of like harsh, I feel like I can’t do it. But yeah, it’s like if it gets pretty bad I do stand up and like go take a walk or something . . . I mean it’s crazy when they do get up and leave, but it’s kind of like, fine, like you did what you had to do. I personally can’t do that because it’s still rude, it’s kind of like it shows you don’t care right, and I don’t want to have that attitude. But when you like get up to take a walk, like that’s I feel like totally normal. Like that’s a great way to like you know – you just need a break, like that’s totally human, right, so – and the profs get that, people get that. (I2/159-166)

Her description demonstrated how getting up and leaving could be perceived by the professor as harsh or rude, which did not apply to taking a walk and returning to class. The latter form of coping was “totally normal” and “the profs get that, people get that.” Alex recounted an example where she did get up in the middle of class without any intention of coming back which was not an enjoyable experience:

I sort of did the walk of shame, my head was towards the floor, didn’t want to look at my professor. I opened the door slowly so I wouldn’t disturb anyone. Sort of took all of my
stuff and then once I got out of class, I sorted my things in my bag and like not going to make a scene if you leaving class. (I1/137-138)

Given how unpleasant it felt to cope with her boredom in a disrespectful manner, she typically opted for a different approach where she would not have to deal with the professor’s unpleasant scrutiny: “Once the professor gives those 10 minute breaks, you know like she’s not going to be in the class. So, you can pack up your stuff and leave and no one will ever know you left” (Alex I2/51).

Asia endorsed a similar conception of respectful coping. In addition to avoiding getting up and leaving class to cope with her boredom, she would intentionally look up from her computer every so often to show the professor respect and indicate she was paying attention even if she actually was not:

Because it’s still, it’s like the whole respect thing, like I don’t want to get up and make it seem as boring as it really is and sort of send that message like “I don’t want to be here so I’m just going to get going, you keep doing your thing.” I’d rather be able to look at my computer and still periodically look up and be like “yeah I’m paying attention” and you’re really not. But you’re still paying as much respect as you possibly can, still being a little bit disrespectful but like you’re still in his presence or her presence and you’re still sort of paying attention. (I2/109)

In addition to periodically looking up at her professors in class, Asia attempted to be respectful in her coping by only using one headphone instead of two. She would cope by watching Netflix in class, which the professor couldn’t see, but she was careful to only use one headphone at a time to convince her professors that she was listening to them. In this way, she could be respectful while escaping boredom:
Everyone's on their laptop or on their phone, like sitting like this. Headphones are always in, and not just one [headphone], you know like the sort of “I’m listening but I'm not.” Both, like “I’m not listening,” that kind of thing. And I don't, because then I just feel rude so I just only have one in. (I1/205)

Zed also supported this approach in class by “occasionally looking up if the professor is speaking so that I don’t seem like that disrespectful” (I2/105). Steven too used eye contact with professors to show respect when attempting to cope with boredom in class:

So, around 1:30 she walks in, and that’s when I try to calm myself down, so I can give her the respect that she deserves. And so, I sat there, and I listened to her a bit, and I kept drifting in and out of just – and then boredom set in, and I wanted to, I don’t know, respect her, so I tried to – I made eye contact with her, and I tried to look like I was interested. (I1/235)

Relatedly, Zed abided by a self-imposed rule that forbid her from watching videos on her phone in class as a way to cope with boredom:

I would not watch like videos in class. I only do it outside of class. . . . I do something else. I download, scroll through and look at memes or whatever. I wouldn’t do something that’s like completely obvious that like I’m watching a video or – I’m just staring down at my phone, not looking up at all. (I2/21-25)

Adhering to these self-imposed rules was particularly important in the classroom as she did not have the same reservation about watching videos while coping with boredom in the hallway between classes. In these instances, there was no one she might disrespect with this coping behaviour.
In some cases, students described how they would empathize with the professor and acknowledged feeling bad when they coped in ways that were not socially appropriate. Ultimately, they did not want to be disruptive or upset the professor; thus, their coping was very much affected by their potential influence on their professors’ emotions. This aspect of coping was illustrated in the following examples:

- “You just want to like do something about it but then certain things might stop you. Like, for example, like I really want to just walk out of the lecture and do something more productive or more interesting, but I’m like I can’t, like I’ll be the only one – that’s just – I’ve seen it happen before and it’s so rude and so like, so rude! You know, I feel so bad because the lecture – like they will – the lecturer will notice and like I feel bad for that.” (Leslie I1/132)
- “But when I was reading and doodling, I kind of was subconscious, because I didn’t want to offend my prof. So, I would gaze up every now and then, just to show her that I’m listening, but doing other stuff. . . . It’s because I respect the prof, and I know they go through many lectures, and stuff. So, it’s almost like I empathize with the prof…Leaving, and coming back a bunch of times. . . . I find that really ineffective, because the prof would get upset, and, and it’s just really disruptive. So, I don’t really use that anymore.” (Steven I1/251-282)
- “I don’t want the teacher to be thinking that they’re so terrible at their job that they have students dozing off in front of them, putting their head down or anything like that. And it distracts the teacher too if they see a student with their head down. It’d be better if I just leave the room and put my head down somewhere else where a teacher can’t see me.” (Zed I2/72)
In part, the students’ decision-making process concerning how they would cope with boredom was influenced by how they thought they would be seen by their professors. If a possible coping response might upset a professor, they tended to search for a more respectful alternative.

Respectfully coping with academic boredom entailed acknowledging social norms for how to “appropriately” or “acceptably” cope in the college context, and the potential consequences of breaking those norms (i.e., acting in ways the students believed would be perceived as disrespectful or rude). Students discussed having learned these normative constraints on their coping in the past (e.g., high school, previous semesters) and how it felt upsetting to intentionally violate them. Sometimes professors set specific norms for their class by explicitly forbidding certain forms of coping. For example, professors would forbid students from using their phones in class, which, as discussed below in Theme 2, was an important coping mechanism for many students. Sing, Sarah, and Steven provided three examples of this:

- “He scolded some students that do that and like really bad like, “hey keep your phone,”—sharp words—“get your phone away!” or something like that. Yo, scary stuff. I didn’t do it; it was more than enough to deter me to.” (Sing I2/170)

- “I went on my phone. I felt guilty at one point because my professor complained that I was on my phone and told me it was offensive, so I refrained from going on my phone after that.” (Sarah J2)

- “And then, I would look around class, and I would see people on their phone, and so I try not to do that. Like I try to do other stuff, like reading and writing. Because profs have an issue with phones. And they always mention that so I didn’t really want to do that.” (Steven I1/251)
Other times, students recognized that certain approaches to coping with academic boredom had tacit acceptance from their professor in that there were no reprimands or acknowledgements of the behaviour by the professor. If students did not feel the behaviour was disrespectful or rude, then they deemed their coping to be acceptable. Whether it was taking a nap in class, leaving part way through, openly using their phone, or doodling, when “you do this thing one time, you realize that it’s fine, no one gave you attention for it so you feel more comfortable doing it again” (Alex I2/141). When students became comfortable with certain forms of coping because they no longer had to worry about feeling disrespectful or rude, these particular coping mechanisms became their go-to response. Alex discussed this experience in relation to taking a nap in class:

You take a nap. You’re like okay I’m just going to leave him talk for a while, I’m just going to fall asleep, and I’m going to wake up. I’m going to do the 2% discussion assignment, and I’m going to leave. So, it’s like a win-win situation. . . . I don’t know if you’ve ever napped like in class but it’s one of the best naps that you can ever have. You just like pass out, right. And like it’s different then when you’re on your laptop and you can know like the, you see the teacher’s disappointment, but when you’re sleeping you don’t see anyone, you’re just sleeping. So, you just wake up, you’re like okay I’m going to do this and I’m just going to leave. So, everything goes by smoothly, like all of those like emotions that you experience when you’re alone, you don’t experience it ‘cause you’re knocked out. (Alex I2/153-155)

Contextually, Steven helped illustrate the normative constraints on coping in the classroom by comparing it to coping with boredom in a cooperative education setting (i.e., co-op; practical work experience gained outside of the classroom to fulfill a degree requirement):
Because for a co-op I can't just up and leave so I have to tolerate it. . . . I guess in a classroom setting you can't interact with the students 'cause the prof if talking and if you talk over the prof it's going to be an issue. But in placement, I'm free to interact with whoever I want to a certain extent. So, I'll seek social interactions that stimulate me, try something different with a client. I'll just do something 'cause I know that I can't do nothing 'cause I'm being watched by my supervisor or I can't leave. (I2/86-90)

Zed added to this narrative through her earlier comments about watching videos and dozing in class as opposed to engaging in these behaviours in the hallway or library between classes. The professor’s presence clearly exerted an impact on how students chose to cope with boredom in the classroom.

Students’ descriptions revealed that an important part of selecting how to cope entailed reflecting on the consequences of being disrespectful toward their professors. They recognized that they were constantly being observed and judged by their professors, particularly in the classroom, and that their actions had costs that could impact their academic success. Disrespectful boredom coping could leave a bad impression and negatively affect their relationship with a professor, their grades, or their chances of getting a reference letter. Thus, the risks associated with offending a professor were high, and students appeared to want to avoid these risks, even when a professor was deemed to be the cause of their boredom. The following examples illustrate how students considered the consequences of their coping choices:

- “I understand the consequences of leaving class. . . . Having the teacher view me as a student that doesn’t care, missing information that I eventually, that can potentially be on an exam or just for information. Even if I'm not interested, it's still important, maybe not to me but to the grand scheme of things and to the course and my success in the course. . .
. I guess ultimately my actions and my behaviour will affect how they view me and that might affect my grade and my reference and all that stuff. So, I'm mindful of how I'm in class.” (Steven I2/38-67)

- “I feel like really bored. You know? Like, uninteresting topic, I don't want to hear, like. I am totally bored. I just want to leave but I can't leave. . . . Because you have to be here, right . . . In class, right? Otherwise, you know, sometimes like, when you leave, like professors think like, you know? It leaves bad impression on professor.” (Shubham I2/111-116)

- “I texted a lot more in that class and then I realise, like I feel bad about it after. Like I realize I’m just sitting in class to text which isn’t great, not really benefiting anybody, kind of looks bad. . . . And also because they know you’re texting, they can see you’re texting…It affects your relationship with them too.” (Sarah I1/188-192)

With these consequences in mind, many students discussed concealing their boredom from professors to maintain respectful interactions. Deliberately displaying or vocalizing boredom was deemed to be “rude,” “unprofessional,” and “inappropriate” in the college classroom. Yet, the students discussed feeling conflicted in these moments because they wanted to escape from boredom’s unpleasant clutches. For example, four students provided the following descriptions:

- “For example, that calculus class, we weren’t doing anything basically because he was going over the same thing, over and over and over again. So, I got bored and I’m like this is a waste of time. So, I sit down, and I just get angry, but I’m not saying anything. I can’t really say anything.” (Amethyst I1/218)
“This is one of my favourite teachers, so I don’t want to show her that it’s not interesting, but I also don’t want to sit through something where I can’t relate to or does not really benefit me.” (Alex I1/140)

“I wanna, you know, not sit there anymore, just do something, just like make it aware that I’m bored, but not do that because it’s inappropriate.” (Sarah I1/128)

“I think also with boredom, with like using the profs, like not wanting to show them you’re bored, it’s also with like professional – you’re trying to be professional. So that’s why – that’s part of the attitude of not being bored. So, you don’t want to show them, you know, that you are bored, right?” (Leslie, I2/158)

Expanding on her earlier comment, Alex highlighted how giving in to the desire to communicate her boredom to the professor left her feeling stupid. In this example, she openly displayed and coped with her boredom by braiding her friend’s hair in class, and, when the professor saw this, the look Alex received made her feel really dumb:

It’s when you feel stupid it’s like that feeling that your professor gives you. It’s like “what are you doing in my class?”, like you know what I mean? It’s like you’re sitting there, you’re not pretending to do something on your laptop, you’re not pretending to write down while you’re actually drawing things. It’s like something that everyone can see. It’s like you’re trying to show the person that you’re bored but you don’t mean to show it. That’s like when you feel stupid. . . . But like the professor as they’re going like HAM into the subject then you’re just sitting there braiding someone’s hair, they look at you like “really?”, like “between all things like at least pretend to show interest.” That’s when you feel like really dumb for doing that. (I2/131-137)
Ultimately, the students understood that it could be academically valuable if they concealed their boredom from the professors and coped with boredom instead in ways that were tacitly accepted by their professors. Academic boredom coping, therefore, entailed a constant awareness of the lived other (i.e., the professors), and, given the potential consequences of impaired student–teacher relationships, this awareness motivated students to be respectful of their professors when attempting to combat their boredom.

**Theme 2: Turning away from academic boredom.** Across their descriptions, students talked about coping as the experience of turning away from academic boredom. To turn away meant to repel or avert academic boredom by moving in a new direction and not allowing their boredom to increase. Specifically, when students turned away from academic boredom it meant they were striving to reduce or remove their boredom without the intent to reengage with the original task, be it completing an assignment, studying for an exam, or listening to a professor’s lecture. Whatever the perceived source of their academic boredom, students coped by removing themselves from it and turning towards something more enjoyable, interesting, or stimulating. Turning away from academic boredom was an attempt to experience something different by no longer engaging the perceived source of their boredom. Simply put, the students no longer wanted to feel bored, and turning away meant avoiding confrontation with boredom as a way of overcoming it. This was accomplished by escaping boredom, distracting themselves, self-improvement, physical actions, killing time, striving to feel good, seeking social support, and being productive.

Turning away meant coping with academic boredom by *escape* it; to seek relief from boredom’s unpleasant qualities by leaving the perceived cause of their boredom behind. Not surprisingly, coping by escaping boredom took many forms. For example, students, like
Shubham, Alex, and Asia, escaped boredom by physically removing themselves from the classroom. As Asia put it, “by removing myself from the whole situation I was free of the whole sense of boredom” (J2). For Alex, the choice came down to two options: “You’re either like sitting down and doing the same thing that’s keeping you bored or just giving up and leaving” (I2/41). Leaving and not returning was how she coped when her boredom became unbearable and her presence in class felt like a waste of time. As she explained, “I would say like there’s sometimes you can’t like deal with it so you sort of like have to run away from it in a way” (I2/97). Particularly, the choice to leave came at “that moment when you realize like whether you’re here or not, it wouldn’t make a difference so, might as well just leave” (I2/97). In one extreme case, Asia’s boredom became so unbearable that she chose to drop her sociology class completely: “I hated that class so much after that I dropped out of it. I couldn’t do it anymore. I switched teachers to take it in the summer. . . . I’m not putting up with it anymore” (I2/61-65). In addition to leaving a boring classroom, students also sought an escape from boredom while studying or working on assignments. While studying for a biology test, Amethyst could not bear to experience more boredom and chose to escape by moving on from that particular topic to a different one even though this meant being less prepared for the test:

I pushed through it for maybe half an hour, really fast, as much as I can and then I left it. I didn’t finish the presentation and then opened the next presentation. I kind of relied on my attendance in the lectures, so I’m like I think I remember the major things about this stuff. So, yeah, like when I’m bored, I just cannot handle any more of it so I have to get away as fast as I can. (I1/167)

Coping by escaping from academic boredom could also have meant physically remaining in a boring situation but *mentally* breaking away or disconnecting in an intentional or agentic
manner. Students typically labelled this form of coping as zoning out, drifting off, or drifting away. Sarah described it as “taking yourself out of the moment” (I1/126) while Anne said, “I'll just, kind of just turn off, like, my brain at that moment and just go, like, start to slowly start to daydream, kind of thing. So, like, I'm here but I'm not actually there” (I2/55). While zoning out, their thoughts would often drift to something more enjoyable or interesting. Zed, for example, described her version of zoning out as “daydreaming that I’m in a different place or, I don’t know, thinking about if I was a movie character or something like that” (I1/50). But in some cases, students claimed that their mind would go blank as a response to academic boredom. As Amethyst described it, she would go blank and “not think of anything and time just passes and I can’t even feel it” (I1/271). In these instances, the students had no intention of reengaging with the task-at-hand, which is to say, they were turning away from boredom without physically escaping. The following descriptions further illustrated this form of coping:

- “Sometimes you just need a break and going blank is a way out of it, that gives you time. . . . You’re there, you see what’s happening but you don’t really internalize it, it’s like you’re there but you’re not there.” (Amethyst I2/96 & 133-134)
- “My brain’s just wandering, like my mind is wandering. . . . My attitude is like ‘oh, there’s nothing to do because they’re not like discussing things that are of importance.’ So, yeah, that’s like my – I just sort of like drift off.” (Leslie I1/122)
- “I'm sitting there and I'm bored and like many people you instantly kind of try to avoid that, avoid the feeling of being bored. You can do that by whether, just start, you could sit there and start thinking about stuff.” (Ben I1/123)
- “My thoughts, like, will fly off, like to somewhere else or it's not where it’s supposed to be. Yeah, it's somewhere else.” (Sing I1/211)
• “I'm just staring into space thinking of other things that are really not related to class.” (Ava I1/206)

• “It usually starts when I arrive in class and he pulls - he pulls down the PowerPoint and starts talking and then I would say about maybe mid-way through the slides, I'd kind of just start to just like zone out. . . . I felt like I wasn't learning anything in that class so I just tend to zone out and shut down my brain.” (Anne I1/247 & J3)

In many instances, students acknowledged a deliberate decision to stop listening to their professors or peers as a prelude to zoning out. Bored by repetitive lectures, irrelevant topics that lacked importance, or underwhelming presentations styles, students refrained from paying attention or decided to block everyone out as a way to escape their boredom. For example:

• “So, my mental health class basically every, every week he would just read from the PowerPoints and it was kind of just not registering to me so I would just not - I would just zone out completely and just not even paying attention.” (Anne I1/230)

• “If the teacher has talked about it before, if it's something I might have learned a little bit before then I'm not going to gain anything new from listening to this guy. So, I'm just not going to pay attention.” (Zed I1/144)

• “I don't want to do anything, especially talking about my experience that happened two days before for placement. I just block everyone out.” (Ava I1/226)

Students also commented on how many of their bored peers appeared to escape by not paying attention:

• “Very few people were actually paying attention, most of them were just looking at a screen in front of them.” (Zed I1/131)
“Everyone's on their laptop or on their phone, like sitting like this. Headphones are always in, and not just one, you know like the sort of ‘I’m listening but I'm not.’ Both, like “I’m not listening,” that kind of thing. And I don't, because then I just feel rude. So, I just only have one in, but even the people beside me, like even the ones I don't know aren't paying attention.” (Asia I1/205)

“So, some of what these guys do, professor who’s teaching, so they start gaming on the laptop. I know they are not like attending the lecture and just showing the professor we are in class.” (Shubham I1/197)

As the previous comments alluded to, another common method for escaping and turning away from boredom was **personalized technology** by way of a mobile phone or computer. Especially in class, students discussed playing games, watching Netflix or YouTube, and checking emails to “relieve my boredom” (Sarah J1) or “get out of boredom” (Sing I1/301).

Finding herself losing interest in an unchallenging calculus class, Amethyst wrote, “At first I was going to fall asleep but then I downloaded a game from the app store about atoms and played it for the rest of the class” (J1). Asia pointed out that she struggled to leave class when bored, but her laptop was her way of “getting up and leaving” without having to actually remove herself; it was her way to mentally transport to a less boring reality:

When you’re in class, for example, or you’re watching YouTube—I’ll use YouTube and Netflix sort of like the same thing—but, when you’re on that you know that it’s not real but you sort of want to be there. So, if I’m watching Civil War on Netflix, like I used to religiously watch that during my sociology class, I’d feel like I was in it. And I’d want to be paying attention and I’d want to be a part of what’s going on in the movie more so than what’s actually going on in reality sitting in a classroom being bored out of your
mind. So, it’s sort of like transferring, I mean, transporting yourself somewhere else but you’re still there. It’s just like more psychological that you’re just not really there but there. (I2/99-101)

For many students, personalized technology offered an escape from boredom and a portal into a more engaging and enjoyable reality. As I discussed above in Theme 1, one of the primary advantages of personal computers and phones was that students could “silently” escape. Relative to the scrutiny students would have to endure if they physically left class (or never attended), personal technological devices offered a path of least resistance for mentally turning away from boredom without disrespecting their professors. There also appeared to be tacit acceptance from many professors that such behaviour was acceptable.

Turning away from boredom by escaping also meant approximating sleep by putting your head down and closing your eyes or imagining going to sleep. Like zoning out or drifting away, this form of escape did not entail leaving class but rather mentally disconnecting from its source. Ava, for example, said, “Normally what I do instead of sleep is just put my head down on the desk and then just stay quiet. If I close my eyes then I close my eyes” (I2/88). Zed performed a similar form of escape: “Sometimes I'll put my head down and close my eyes and just imagine that I'm going to sleep even though that never happens” (I1/166). Although she acknowledged falling asleep in class was not an option for her, other students had no problem taking a nap to escape their boredom. Alex provided the clearest description of what this experience entailed:

Taking a nap, once you do it once it becomes like your escape to everything. Like, so you do it, you do this thing one time, you realize that it’s fine, no one gave you attention for it so you feel more comfortable doing it again. And then once you’re sitting in a class and like you get distracted even for one minute you’re like okay, it’s okay I can take a nap
now. . . . You’re so used to like feeling the boredom that you just give up. So, you’re like okay I felt for one second this boredom, I’m just going to give up on the class, I’ll take a nap. (I2/141-145)

In line with Theme 1, taking a nap felt comfortable when it was not reprimanded by the professor. As for Alex it was not acknowledged at all, she subsequently felt comfortable napping as her go-to means of escaping boredom.

Other means for escaping boredom included additional activities such as doodling and keeping busy. Among the students who would draw or doodle in class as a way to escape boredom, it was Joe who provided the most insightful descriptions about what it did for him, especially in his dreaded English class. In Interview 1 he showed me a notebook for a subject where he wasn’t typically bored. It contained notes he’d taken while listening to the professor and virtually no doodles at all. Then he showed me his notebook for English and almost every page contained his abstract drawings. As he explained, “this is every English class. Every class like I always like do something abstract like doodle . . . I just draw. I don’t think, I just draw what comes in my head” (I1/134 & 141). Later in Interview 1, I asked him to describe what the doodling did for him:

I’d say ’cause I’m doing something with my hands, my hands are pretty fidgety. And it just helps me, I guess it kind of focuses me. It just helps me escape. It helps me - I focus more on the drawing then on the experience of boredom. (I1/145)

As it turned out, his escape from boredom through doodling meant overcoming the restless tension that made him fidget. Kumar also mentioned volunteering with the student federation as an additional activity that reduced boredom: “I mean that’s the reason why I try to volunteer, try to do as much stuff as I am able to keep away from that, because I know how it is to be there”
Ultimately, however, efforts to escape boredom through additional activities appeared to be a temporary solution. According to Kumar, keeping busy needed to be done daily to be effective: “Keeping yourself busy day to day, it will definitely will reduce your time of thinking because you will be more exhausted about doing all that kind of stuff” (I2/105). Although he discussed additional work or family contact as other means for escaping the emptiness, those too seemed insufficient in the long run: “If I have family and beloved ones. It will not matter. It will be not enough. I will still be jumping into that abyss” (I2/114).

Students often discussed turned away from their academic boredom by distracting themselves. To distract meant to divert attention away from boredom and toward something pleasant—something that was amusing or entertaining. There was a wide variety of distractions that students pursued when bored, from Facebook to braiding a friend’s hair. One approach was to simply look out the window or around the room for anything that might distract the students from their boredom. Ava described this experience during her field placement class where the professor asked students to recount the events of the previous week:

Normally when I'm bored I just sit, try to stay awake. He likes to put us in a group circle. [I] try to separate from him because he likes to pick on people, but normally when people are talking I just have a nice view of the window and start yawning. (I1/198)

She also noticed many of the other students doing the same:

Everyone is just not paying attention. The professor's just talking, he's just asking general questions. No one's listening, they're just there, sitting there. They're either on their phones, staring out the window, just trying to avoid talking. (I2/57-58)

Looking around in search of distraction was also related to the experience of zoning out to turn away from boredom. Alex provided a revealing description of what that process was like for her:
Alex: I have a lot of interest in art, but like when I’m sitting in class and I feel like I’m learning about how a camera was made, that’s like irrelevant, like I want to learn about the pictures taken. So, you just sit there and you’re like zoning out about like – so you sit down and you’re like not focused at all and you feel like you’ve looked at everything, you’ve looked at the person’s shoes that are sitting next to you, the girl’s eyebrows in front of you, like whatever is out there. And the teacher’s still going on for an hour and a half about how to make a camera. So, you feel like you’ve zoned out for the longest time and she’s still like, you’re still in the same situation, you’re still bored, she’s still going on about the same thing.

Interviewer: Okay. And so, to actually zone out is just to find anything else to look at?

Alex: To distract you.

Among the many uses that students had for their computers and phones while bored at school, finding a simple distraction seemed to be the most prevalent. Joe, for example, believed that seeking relief from boredom via mobile phones was inevitable: “I mean everyone has like phones and they’re always going to find a way to distract themselves from boredom” (12/92). Through their phones and laptops students utilized Facebook, Instagram, Netflix, YouTube, email, news articles, memes, games, and shopping for distraction from boredom. In these instances, students were turning away from their boredom without any intention of reengaging in their initial task. For example, Zed expressed her desperation for a distraction while bored in class:

You just want to do anything else, like most of us it's just go on your phone or your laptop, you'll do anything, you'll look at anything, even like if you don’t like reading the news even the news seems like a good option to you at that moment. . . . I just was
scrolling through my phone looking at Facebook, looking at the news headlines, what's trending, I was on Instagram looking what's trending on there, then I even checked my email a couple of times even though I knew I got nothing new. (I1/125-130)

Any distraction would seemingly suffice, even those that weren’t particularly appealing or productive. Later, in one of her journals, Zed also mentioned being in a computer programming class and thinking about studying or doing assignments for other courses. Ultimately, she disregarded these options in favour of less involved distractions:

I chose to do neither, and instead spent my time on Facebook, scrolling down my news feed to see if there were any new food videos I hadn't watched at least thrice before, or what the latest trending news stories were, or a bunch of articles on how well Logan did in the box office. (J1)

Even while bored studying at home, Zed found her phone to be an essential tool for distraction:

I don’t think I’ve ever actually properly like studied like normal people, like I’ll be like – I’ll leave it – I’ll start studying and then for like five hours I’ll be watching Conan O’Brien videos or something like that. I’ll just be scrolling through Facebook over and over again. (I2/90-93)

Ben mentioned that “humor is an excellent boredom reliever,” and so he often “ended up on YouTube watching videos of Stephen Colbert” (J3). Ava described focusing on school work for other classes as distraction when she wasn’t able to be interacting with friends:

While I was bored, I did look around the classroom but focused on my school work to not be bored. I did not have battery on my phone to have conversations with my friends or just to see the gossip on Facebook; yesterday I used my laptop but to focus on school work to distract my boredom. (J3)
Sarah also sought out distraction on her phone, but, in line with Theme 1, she felt guilty about coping with boredom in this way. She did her best to minimize this approach because she recognized it wasn’t helping her reengage and focus on her learning:

I went on my phone. I felt guilty at one point because my professor complained that I was on my phone and told me it was offensive, so I refrained from going on my phone after that. I also felt guilty because I wanted to learn something from the lecture (and not look for ways to distract myself). (J2)

Like Sarah, other students recognized that their chosen distractions often felt mindless and wasteful; thus, distraction-seeking was often nothing more than an unsatisfactory and temporary solution. Zed vividly illustrated this challenge in her third journal:

I tried scrolling through Facebook, looking for some interesting news (that controversial Pepsi ad was most of it), or some funny memes, but to no avail. I closed Facebook, scrolled through my java assignment again, opened up my email, closed my email, opened Facebook again, closed it again, and the cycle went on and on. (J3)

Compared to seeking distraction, turning away from academic boredom through alternative learning or reflection consisted of arousing interest or enthusiasm for something that felt purposeful, meaningful, or beneficial; tasks that contributed to personal goals. In these cases, students not only stimulated but attempted to improve themselves as a way to overcome boredom in a situation they wanted to disconnect from, as opposed to reengaging with the perceived source of their boredom. For Ben, coping is not only “about whether or not I can find something to do to stimulate me” (I1/139), but also about educating himself as illustrated in this example of being bored on a break between classes:
I go onto the computer and I'm reading CNN or whatever and I read an article and I say this is a good article so I become stimulated though the article 'cause I want to learn something or read that article, then I stop being bored. (I1/139)

Another approach he took to cope with boredom was reflection; to simply sit, close his eyes, and think about things. This reflection was a way to engage and stimulate his mind and, in so doing, no longer feel restricted by boredom: “closing your eyes and thinking to yourself is actually a way to get back the control in your life and not be bored” (Ben I1/192). Steven also sought out ways to alternatively educate himself and turn away from his boredom. The following instance occurred while attempting to study using his phone at the library:

I got bored of the site I was on, so decided to look for something in my environment to do. I decided to take an "old school" approach to reading and using the library. I went over to the library book shelves and randomly picked a few books that interested me. The subjects ranged from chemistry, public speaking, creative journaling, eating disorders, and art therapy. I read a few pages of each book and read more of the ones that seemed interesting. Acquiring new information something I do to help with boredom. I feel the dopamine rush when I read something interesting. (J2)

The instances of coping through learning typically occurred while on a break between classes rather than in class. In these moments, students who described boredom as a lack of stimulation, such as Ben and Steven, sought out ways to simulate themselves and reduce boredom through learning or reflection until they could move onto a more meaningful endeavor.

In a similar vein, students described turning away from their boredom through productivity. To cope with academic boredom in this way meant to engage themselves in activities that were perceived as useful or practical, academically or otherwise (e.g., Alex
completed her third journal while bored in class: “Right now since I’m sitting through this boring class, I decided to make use of it and do this survey.”). It meant making good use of the time, with “good” meaning productive, especially when boredom meant feeling unproductive or like one was wasting time. For example, many students described coping as working on tasks for other classes or other commitments that they valued. These instances occurred primarily while students were in class or at field placement (i.e., weekly work assignments outside the classroom to gain practical experience in their field of study):

- “I was in class and the boredom strikes when the professor chose to talk about irrelevant material rather than going over the midterm so as students we would be prepared. If the prof chose a different path I would not have felt overwhelmed and decided to begin doing other assignments rather paying attention to what’s going on in class. I was irritated since there were more important things to be discussed other than new material, therefore, I decided to do some assignments and then took a nap in class, until it was time to go home.” (Alex J1)
- “I’m like I can do something else, meanwhile, maybe I can talk to my colleagues or check on my protégées because I’m a mentor or email something to someone because I have to do it anyway. I kind of get with my other tasks.” (Amethyst I1/290)
- “I would say that if I have an activity to be doing at that time more, not like that, just an activity to where I can feel useful and helpful, I will think that I will not have time to be there. It’s about the time. It’s not about the actions that you perform. For me, it’s more about like getting the time to do something.” (Kumar I1/112)
- “I was sitting in mental health class, and the professor was talking about suicide and stigma. My thoughts were focusing on other classes and assignments and wanting to
improve my GPA so that I can graduate with honours. I took out my laptop and started working on other class assignments. After working on other class assignments, I felt relieved and less stressed because I had accomplished something and did not waste time.” (Anne J3)

- “But for that few hours I had nothing to do and felt bored I started searching for jobs that were sent by emails here at placement, on the Ontario Public Service Careers and on the [college name] website. There were postings that I did like but after searching for an hour I started looking at places where I can get my gun license.” (Ava J1)

- “I was in my YKC class and the teacher was rambling on about a certain point she was trying to prove which had zero relevance to the class considering it was an opinion on Donald Trump. She was sitting there discussing it with another student for nearly 40 minutes before I decided to leave and go to the library to see if I could actually get some work done.” (Asia J2)

- “I thought about what I could be doing to be productive because I felt that I wasn't being productive in that moment. I daydreamed a little, drew in my notebook, and took some last-minute notes on a reading for my environmental studies class (I had a paper due Tuesday).” (Sarah J3)

As these examples illustrate, coping by being productive not only allowed students to turn away from their boredom, it also provided relief from contiguous affective states such as irritation and stress.

Coping with academic boredom by turning away also meant engaging in physical behaviours in order to reduce thoughts about boredom or reduce unpleasant feelings that manifested as boredom (i.e., agitation, discontent, discomfort). Fidgeting—tapping fingers and
feet, rocking knees back and forth, clicking pens, playing with bracelets and coffee cups, whole-body shaking—enabled a release of pent up energy and tension, and also allowed the students to overcome their feeling of uneasiness due to boredom. Anne, Joe, Sarah, and Sing elaborated on how they would fidget as part of their efforts to turn away from unpleasant boredom—that experience of wanting to jump out of your skin or that itch inside your skull that you just can’t scratch. For example, Joe stated:

It’s more like a release of my energy. Because if I’m concentrating on something I can just sit and just like do it, but if I’m not fully, fully into it or – like even – like it’s not even on purpose, like sometimes if I’m not like – if I’m not fully focused I can like fidget and things like that. (I2/57)

Sing echoed his sentiment when asked to describe his own fidgeting: “I don’t know what it does but I find myself doing it…It’s kind of automatic but I can’t - but I prefer doing it, if I don’t do it I feel a bit uneasy (I1/263-265). In Interview 2 he elaborated:

Yeah it's definitely uneasy if you don’t do it. Like if someone tells you to stop - if I was fidgeting or something, anything like that, if someone tells you to stop, I probably will, but it's uneasy, you want to do it more discreetly this time. (I2/226)

Both students also recognized that in engaging classes, like graphic design for Joe or critical thinking for Sing, they did not feel the need to fidget and could easily sit still and connect with the professor and curriculum. Finally, more intensive examples of attempting to escape boredom through physical activity were also provided by Kumar who described sports or exercise activities as physically exhausting him and, consequently, preventing him thinking about boredom:
If you go into activities, physical activities like going to the gym, football or whatever you want, it will obviously will bring a benefit to you but it will be just like not enough personal or spiritual way of helping way but more in a physical way that you will be exhausted and you will not have time to think about that. (I2/106)

Other approaches to turning away from boredom involved striving for positive affect—that is, striving to feel good by fulfilling the hedonic need (i.e., a pleasure response) to feel happy, excited, or relaxed. These activities included taking a walk, eating, listening to music, watching videos, and talking with friends and family. Students described feeling good while doing these things, with this pleasant affect counteracting their boredom. As Ignacio explained, “It’s about finding happiness, finding excitement in the little things” (Ignacio I1/553). The following descriptions supported this stance:

- “I’ll call my friends if they are free. We can like meet at the coffee. If they are not free then like I do like go myself to coffee, watch people. Then that feels good.” (Shubham I1/221)
- “If I’m bored and I just want to, you know, like enjoy myself, I would seek for things that makes me happy, like maybe food, maybe watch videos, read a book, talk to my mom. Developing my like plans, business things that I want to do.” (Ignacio I1/550)
- “I was doing an online homework in my computer for my math class. I was somehow having a bit of trouble answering them. I felt bored. I was taking too much time on question and find myself staring at it. It wasn’t a good feeling. But I’ve experienced this before and sometimes a little music in the background helps . . . it was eerily quiet and there was nothing but the click-clacking of my keyboard. . . . I then turned on the music . . .
. . . sat back and relaxed a bit . . . I relief. Like I was tired even though I wasn't. Or that I was sad and was happy again.” (Sing J2)

In addition to escaping, finding distraction, self-improvement, being productive, physical actions, and striving to feel good, students attempted to turn away from boredom by *killing time*, which meant pursuing a thought or activity that would make time go by faster or at least make them unaware of how slowly time passed while bored. For example, Asia described being willing to do anything to avoid the feeling of time dragging on when feeling trapped in a boring three-hour class:

It's a three-hour class and 40 minutes in and you're counting down the minutes, like I'll do the math I'll be, like okay well that's two and a half episodes of the 100 I could go watch before this is over, so it kills time. . . . Anything else, other than listening. . . . Anything to get rid of looking at the time and seeing things drag on helps. So, they should just tape the clocks around, let's just have no clocks then we'd probably do so much better. (I1/246-250)

Alex admitted that coping by wasting time often meant making decisions that would affect her negatively; yet, even self-destructive behaviours were an improvement over feeling bored:

When I have nothing to do, I will probably pass by Tim’s like five times in a couple of hours. It’s like instead of getting everything at once, I would start making choices that would sort of affect me negatively, in that case like spending money on useless stuff, just anything to get me to do something to pass time. (I1/151)

Joe would wander the campus with friends in search of anything that might help him kill time:
I can get pretty bored during those breaks because I usually have nothing to do but wait and kill time. Me and my friend were walking around campus just looking for something to do, we walked and talked until we found a place to sit. (Joe J2)

Similar to seeking out distractions, what students did to kill time often felt wasteful and not an improvement over boredom, but rather an equally meaningless alternative. In Interview 2, Sing provided clarification on this point:

The ways I cope with boredom is definitely a waste of time because I should be doing like - in class of course listening to lectures isn’t a waste of time but that's how I feel when I'm bored. So, in turn to cope with it I do something that I know is a waste of, another waste of time no matter what angle you look at it. Listening to class in my view is a waste of time because I'm getting bored but in different angles it's not, you have to do it and it can be important. But like to cope with it it's funny 'cause yeah both are a waste of time. (Sing I2/35-36)

Ignacio echoed this point when describing being bored at college as just waiting to leave. He mentioned watching videos and listening to music as ways to cope, but lamented that “you do things just to kill time instead of actually enjoying that time” (I2/43). Alex also provided support for this idea when discussing how she was bored on breaks between class and would watch Netflix in an attempt to cope:

And you’re just sitting there and everyone knows you’re watching Netflix and you feel like it’s worthless like it’s a waste of time so you feel like you’re all alone. Because you look around there’s no one else doing the same like thing that you’re doing. So, you feel like you’re weirded out, like everyone’s focused on this important thing and you’re focused on Netflix. (I2/63)
Although wasting time in a different way in order to escape the feeling of wasting time may seem paradoxical, Kumar explained that anything would be better than feeling academic boredom, no matter how meaningless the activity may be:

I think that if the school had more things to do, like for example a room where they had movies or videogames I will be happily to go and do something, even if I'm not convinced, since I know that killing time like that will be better than letting the boredom get the best of me. (Kumar J3)

Finally, turning away from academic boredom could mean seeking social support or comfort by interacting with other people, primarily friends. Recognizing that many of their peers were also bored, student would initiate a kind of collective coping wherein they could share resources to overcome boredom, especially while in class. Anne, for example, would look at her friends in class and roll her eyes or display her “you want to shoot yourself because your bored” (I1/257) face as a way to commiserate and facilitate leaving class: “I just look at my friends, I'd just be like rolling my eyes and I'm like ‘really guys, like can we just go and do something’ kind of thing” (I1/257-259). Zed would talk to the student beside her “just to see if we can have a conversation more interesting than the lecture that's going on. Anything that will get my mind off of this ‘I wish I was in my bed’ type of mood” (I1/172-174). Similarly, in her migration and trauma class, Ava would seek out social support for dealing with her boredom by texting friends sitting next to her: “My phone kept going off from the conversations I had with my friends even though we were right beside each other” (J2). The purpose was to utilize collective coping to triumph over boredom:

The majority of us are all on our phones, because we’re divided off into sections of, depending where our placement is. We would be messaging each other. We would be
Alex described how she felt comfortable leaving class to escape her boredom when she could rely on a friend to let her know what she missed: “And also depends if there’s like someone in the class that you know that you know you can just message and be like ‘Hey, like just let me know what I missed.’ If that person is not there then there’s no way I’m leaving” (I2/57-59). This form of social support enabled her to overcome boredom without having to worry that she may jeopardize her academic success. Sarah would similarly use her friends to cope with boredom in class by acknowledging that “some of them don’t always pay attention so it’s easier to, you know, turn to them and be like ‘oh I’m bored’ because they all respond and take me out of that and help me with that” (I1/170). She mentioned that this way of coping could be easier than trying to fight through the boredom and stay engaged in class (see Theme 3- Turning Toward Academic Boredom), however she also expressed worry over fully disengaging from the lecture by focusing on her friend:

My friend was watching Sponge Bob or something the other day and like I just started watching because she was watching it. And I wanted, you know, I wasn’t really interested in what was going on so I just kept like looking over. And then she sort of handed me my headphone, like ‘do you want to listen to?’ And I was like well yeah. So, then I like watched for a few minutes and then I went on the walk because I didn’t want to distract her either because I know like me also listening in on Sponge Bob or watching it, you know, kind of, you know, encouraging her to not pay attention as well as myself. (I1/158-163)
Other students, like Shubham, would call or text friends to see if they were coming to class to avoid facing a boring lecture alone: “Sometimes you can say like, let's suppose like, I am in the class, right, alone, right? And like, nobody's there and topic is like not very interesting, so I call my friends- “where are you?” (I2/167). If no one was coming to join him, he would sometimes leave and go to the library to take a nap. In addition, Steven, Alex, and Anne all discussed turning away from boredom by leaving class to meet up with friends on campus. Alex provided the following description:

   It’s like you wait for like an excuse, so like sometimes I would get a message from my friends and it’d be like “Hey, do you want to meet up?” and then that would be my get-away, you know, like I would have a reason to leave. Unless like I don’t have like a straight reason in front of me to leave I feel like I’m trapped in the class. (I2/49)

Ignacio discussed his boredom as being stuck in routine or on autopilot, and, for him, turning away from academic boredom meant social engagement and connection with others. Forming connections and community with other students enabled him to create a new reality at college and escape from routine and indifference. Even though it could be challenging and intimidating, connection meant starting conversations with other students: “Oh, I’ve seen you. You’re in my program. How was the bio test?” (Ignacio I1/463). Connecting with other students enabled him to find relief from boredom that would have persisted had he remained isolated:

   So, if you're alone of course you're going to be on your thoughts, you know, by yourself, you’re going to be – because you don’t have to engage with person, like you don’t talk with them, you're constantly on the same feeling. So, people can get you out of that feeling of being bored. So, if you're engaging, talking because usually you talk about what you want to talk about, what you like. So, like this friend I talk with her about
music, I talk about her, to her, about, like I don’t know, like drama in our friendships, you
know? So, it's the things we enjoy and want to talk about. So, if you're constantly
releasing all your emotions, like feelings, you're good like because you're entertained.
(Ignacio I2/23-24)

Importantly, these conversations sparked empathy and support as he could commiserate with
other students over shared struggles with labs, tests, or the program itself. For example:

You’re sitting down, you’re bored, and there’s like a girl like beside you, and she can be
in your same lab, instead of like just like doing this [plays with phone], you can be like
‘oh, what’s up’, you know, like talk. It’s like it’s about communication. It’s about human
relationship. If you have that, then the boring – the boredom will like . . . disappear,
because like you always have something to do, you know, like enjoy yourself. Like if
you’re enjoying yourself, you’re not bored. (Ignacio II/465)

In these social interactions, he described the importance of being open-minded, genuine, and
sincere to better form connections, share experiences, and increase his resilience against
academic boredom (i.e., being stuck in a routine; on autopilot). He expressed this sentiment in an
example of striking up a conversation with a girl in class:

I saw her through all my course, through all my semester, and I didn’t, we didn’t—we
just like smile, you know, like whatever. But I didn’t engage to her. And I was like “oh,
that was horrible.” And she was like “oh yes, in this part?” And I was like “yeah in that
part” and we started a conversation and now we're friends, you know? So, being genuine
with your feelings and just be like open-minded and free will and to say something, that's
a catalyst because that lowers the activation energy to start a conversation and to engage
in. (Ignacio I2/87)
Without engaging with others and finding social connections, Ignacio claimed he would never have appreciated that many students also felt bored at school and were looking for relief. He came to realize that “you're like a fish between fishes but you don’t know they are fishes,” (I1/445) meaning although other students felt the same as him, he would not have known it unless he had engaged, interacted, and communicated with other students. Accordingly, Ignacio suggested that sharing experiences of boredom with other students represented a powerful coping mechanism in helping to escape academic boredom by feeling more fulfilled and less stuck in a routine.

**Theme 3: Turning toward academic boredom.** Students also regularly described coping as the experience of turning toward academic boredom, meaning to confront boredom head on with the intention of returning to or reengaging with the perceived source of their boredom. Whereas turning away and turning toward boredom both functioned to reduce or eliminate academic boredom, turning toward boredom meant fighting the boredom directly by staying engaged in class or while completing academic work. It meant rejecting the pull of more enjoyable, meaningful, interesting, or stimulating pursuits and recognizing the value of investing resources in reconnecting with the initial educational task. Rather than escape, students would turn toward boredom and grapple with it in an attempt to conquer the emotion. Common expressions students used to describe how they would turn toward boredom included pushing through it, fighting it, sticking with it, enduring it, powering through it, and forcing themselves to continue. Turning toward academic boredom was about persisting even though it was difficult.

Students often discussed reorienting toward or reengaging with the original task to re-establish the connection that was disrupted by feelings of boredom. Whatever the approach taken (e.g., changing locations, doodling, Facebook), the intention was to *eventually* reorient to the
original task. Kumar, Sarah, and Ignacio claimed that an important initial step toward reengaging with a task or situation was to first realize that you are bored. Without having the awareness and ability to label your experience as boredom, there was no way to effectively cope with it. As Kumar explained, “understanding it or creating that awareness it’s where I think even the importance of the whole thing starts” (12/97). Ignacio echoed this sentiment: “If you don’t realize it, if you don’t do something about it, if you don’t change your mindset, it's the worst villain” (12/96). Sarah similarly reported that “when I’m bored I try and realize I’m bored and make myself pay attention, just because I know it’ll benefit me later” (11/132). She said that she would think about “why I’m bored and why I’m losing focus and sort of focusing on that and figuring out why that is and sort of working with that so I can become more engaged. And if that means, you know, taking a break for a few minutes and walking down the hall so I can get myself back into the moment then I can do that” (12/62). When the objective was to reengage with a boring task, being able to accurately identify their experience as boredom appeared to be a prerequisite for successful coping.

One of the most discussed coping strategies with the explicit goal of reducing boredom by reorienting oneself to the task at hand was to take a break: “There are times where I’ll leave class, and walk around, then come back to class” (Steven 11/214). In these instances, the students intended to return to class, studying, or an assignment and reengage with the content. Steven, for example, recognized a need to move his body and find temporary relief when bored in class:

It's like I can't tolerate the boredom anymore, that I have to do something with my body or I have to like just take myself out of that boredom and then maybe just walk the hallways. And when I walk the hallways. . . . Maybe I go out to see if I can see a friend or
if I can just like get my mind off things and think about something that's interesting or something that's not related to the course that's more rigorous. (I2/44)

Sarah chose a similar coping response to “get myself back into the moment” when her boredom became suffocating:

The other day I did have the experience where I just couldn’t deal with it and that’s when I just left the class for a minute and just went on a walk just cause’ I knew like I couldn’t sit through it anymore I just needed to get out. (I2/169)

As mentioned in Theme 1, Leslie was concerned about how she would be perceived by the professor if she left class midway through and didn’t return; yet, leaving class for a short break and returning was deemed acceptable:

Sometimes, like something else I don’t do often, but if I know I read like the text very well, like in depth and I know like I’m bored only because – inattentive because maybe I didn’t get sleep or something and like I might take a walk or just like go and grab a drink and that usually helps. (I1/164)

Leslie also noted that taking a break and going for a walk was more effective for reengaging with a boring class as compared to talking with other students or distracting herself. The latter options made it much harder to retain focus, and this was something she prided herself on avoiding:

I definitely prefer that than to talking to people or like distracting myself because also once you do that it’s very hard to – like when you engage with other people, it’s hard to focus whereas it’s like when you’re walking you can even think about the lecture or something, let it settle in, take a break and then come back. (I2/167)

Amethyst would turn toward boredom in a similar way when attempting to study at home: “I go downstairs, I take a walk or I start stuffing my mouth with food of any kind. Then I go back. I
went back, I tried – I forced myself. I had to” (Amethyst I1/249). In these situation, when students’ capacity to cope with boredom appeared to be on the verge of being overwhelmed, taking a break and temporarily removing themselves from the situation was effective in helping them persevere and return to the original task (e.g., “If it gets pretty bad I do stand up and like go take a walk or something”- Leslie I2/159).

In addition to taking a break, students relied on alternate interim activities, such as doodling, texting, checking Facebook, or changing locations, to help them fight boredom and return to their original task. Steven employed a number of these tactics to overcome the boredom he felt while getting through a lengthy assignment:

After class I headed straight to library learning lab to work on my self-reflection assignment due the next day. My goal was to complete this assignment before I left school, even if it meant staying until the school closed. Boredom set in at about an hour into my work, I took a 10 min break and watched some sports highlights. . . . I went back to the lab to finish my assignment. I would spend the next 4 hours there working. I took about three 15 minutes breaks in-between to help alleviate boredom and eye/back strain. I did things like walking around the school (all three floors), reading online articles for fun, researching unrelated things online, messaging friends on Facebook. (J3)

Sing described his boredom in class as a feeling of emptiness, and he would “try to fill it in with something else to do” such as checking his phone and re-reading old messages. After a time, the boredom would lessen enough for him to reengage with the class and reorient back to the lesson, or “go back to the real world:”

After doing that I feel, like a bit less bored then I can pay attention a bit more. It actually, like, lessens the boredom then I can listen again. Because when I'm bored I can't listen
and understand the lesson so I do that, then it actually helps. Even though if you think
about it, it shouldn't; like checking your phone during lessons that shouldn’t help you but
actually it kind of does because you check it, but not too long, you check it and, like,
‘okay that's funny. Okay I can - let's go back to the real world’ and . . . yeah it gets you
back. (I1/240-242)

Sarah would often doodle or take hand-written notes to keep herself present when bored in class:

I try to motivate myself to get out of boredom. I think boredom can occur more or less
frequently and I can better control it depending on whether I respond proactively or re-
actively to the situation. I tried to stay proactive when experiencing boredom during this
class so I could try to eliminate boredom as much as possible from my classroom
experience. I tried to do this by drawing in my notebook and taking hand written
notes. (J1)

Unlike texting or reading material for other classes, doodling and writing notes by hand
prevented Sarah from completely disengaging from the lecture due to boredom. It was a
technique she had been taught by one of her psychology professors:

I have this psychology class, and my professor said, ‘If you’re bored don’t text or do
something else, just doodle,’ and you’re still engaged with what’s going on, but it’s less
of a distraction. So, I try and take that to heart and do that and actually utilize that.
(I1/132)

Steven would also rely on doodling to stay engaged, and he acknowledged that it was a useful
coping mechanism for succeeding in courses where boredom would arise:

I think when I doodle, especially if it’s related to the topic – so if I, if I want to do well in
the class, I’ll doodle, but in relation to the topic. So, when I’m doodling, it doesn’t take
away from my hearing. Like I can hear everything, and so I’ll doodle keywords. . . . I’ll even doodle like a sentence that my prof would say, that resonates with me, and that helps a lot. It’s like building a mind map almost. And so I’ll do that. And I think, looking back, the classes that I’ve done that with, I’ve gotten really good marks, just based on that. (11/264-268)

Similarly, Leslie said, “I’ll play with my pens when I’m bored, so something small to focus on while the other part of me is still trying to tune into the lecture” (11/130). While studying and working on assignments, students would turn toward boredom and reorient to a task by changing locations. Anne left her room at home and went to the library in search of a quieter work space: “I thought about what to do and I decided to go to the library where it was quiet and I was able to focus and start making notes for my mid-term” (J1). Asia moved from her bedroom to the dining room to reduce her boredom:

I just kept music playing in the background and ended up moving locations from my room to the dining room because it was brighter and more spacious . . . plus I felt that my mom could keep my focused with her constant complaints and threats about me being on the dining room table just before dinner. (Asia J1)

Finally, Joe discussed his reliance on music to help him complete boring assignments:

If I find an assignment boring or something, usually I just power through it. I listen to this really ambient-type music. Each album is like 40 minutes long and it literally like if I'm doing something and the music is playing, I just zone out and just do it and I don’t think about boredom or anything. (11/171)

Turning toward academic boredom also meant reaffirming the importance or value of the original task that gave rise to boredom such as listening to a professor’s lecture or completing an
assignment. To reaffirm was to acknowledge that engagement with the task could be personally beneficial and that fully disengaging from the task or situation could have negative consequences. When coping with a boring task by reengaging, students acknowledged it could benefit their grades, their comprehension and mastery of the content, and their future academic prospects (e.g., university acceptance). Feeling bored when attempting to study, Amethyst would remind herself about the academic importance (e.g., “I need a high GPA if I want to get into U of T”- I2/69) and personal significance (“I got back to my studies and told myself that I need to do this for my own growth and that is what makes it matter”- J3) of coping by reorienting to the task. She provided two additional explanations:

- “Yeah, it’s more like you take your time to remind yourself why you’re doing this as with the thing with the GPA. So why am I doing this? Well I’m doing this because there’s something bigger that I want to do so I have to go past this like moment and I just have to do it.” (I2/141-146)
- “And then I would feel bored with the book which had interested me so much just moments ago. But I know that it was important for me to read it since it was of my benefit to acquire the personal skills described in it, so each time this happened I forced myself to continue reading and after about 2-3 pages of reading I would restore my interest and focus.” (J2)

Leslie echoed this sentiment a number of times throughout her interviews. Despite temptations to leave class, zone out, or engage with friends, she would turn toward boredom by continually asserting the importance of personal mastery:

- “I can’t zone out because what if she like just says something that you might miss. Like that for me is huge. I can’t zone out because I’m like what if they say something really
small, certain things, small things, will like really open my eyes. I’m like ‘oh wow, I never saw it that way.’ So, I’m always like dammit, you can’t zone out or fantasize . . . because what if she says something?” (I1/142)

- “I stuck through it. I had to, I’ve never left due to boredom, I’ve never left. . . . You know how important it is to stick through it, like you can’t, even though it pains you not to leave.” (I1/148-150)

- “If it’s another prof and I recognize their style of teaching and like I know that they say certain things that – even if it’s like a joke, something small like a joke, like I don’t want to miss that because it makes class more enjoyable. Or they’ll say something really small that just puts everything – like it just clicks, makes everything like click or whatever, or they tie things together and I find that really important. Like that’s what class is there for, so I’m scared of missing that, yeah.” (I2/56)

- “One of my friends, oh man, every lecture, every single lecture, she’ll always like turn to me and talk and I hate that, like I hate it so much. Like this one – and that kind of helped me like be more engaged, funnily enough, like she was like – she leaned her notebook over and she’s like ‘hey, tic-tac-toe’ and I’m like ‘what? No! Like we’re here – like no!’ And she was like flabbergasted, like ‘why not? You look bored.’ I’m like, ‘no!’ But yeah, that kind of like helps me be like okay, you don’t – kind of like reason with myself, do you want to play tic-tac, I’m like okay, you’re not bored you must – I don’t know, I’ll trick myself that way. Or like I’ll be like she’s bored and she wants to like sort of doze off and play like little games and doodle, but I can’t do that so it helps when I see other people around me are bored, to be honest. . . . It’s like okay, smarten up, you know what I mean? You’re going to fall behind.” (I1/163)
As described above, Sarah described a boring class in which she was drawn to a television show her friend was watching on her laptop. Although she initially started watching the show, she eventually took a walk to reset herself and return to class. She recognized that disengaging from the lecture to watch television would not benefit her academically:

My friend was watching Sponge Bob or something the other day and like I just started watching because she was watching it. And I wanted, you know, I wasn’t really interested in what was going on so I just kept like looking over. And then she sort of handed me my headphone like “do you want to listen to?” And I was like “well yeah.” So, then I like watched for a few minutes and then I went on the walk. . . . I could totally watch Sponge Bob and get lost for the rest of the class but do I really want to do that? And do I want to do that to her? So, I kind of like just try and pay attention. (I2/163-165)

Considering upcoming due dates enabled Asia to turn toward boredom: “The only thing that really kept me focused was remembering that I had no other choice but to finish this considering it was due the next day” (J1). Similarly, reminding herself of the prospect of failing a midterm exam motivated Anne to reflect on how to cope with boredom directly: “I thought that if I don't study, I am going to fail my mid-term. So, I thought about what to do” (J1). Asia also decided it was better to address boredom head on after a professor mentioned something pertinent to an upcoming assessment that reoriented her to the lecture:

I pay attention to what’s being told is important cause I’m more afraid of the consequence of not listening to this because if it is important and it is on an exam I’m screwing myself over. So, I don’t want the whole consequences of not paying attention to something they’re literally telling us pay attention to. It’s different when they’re literally just going on about something that you sort of you get. But when they say “Okay, pay attention, this
is important,” you better pay attention or else you’re just screwing yourself over. (I2/127-128)

In summary, although a boring lecture or study topic could prompt students to disengage and seek more enjoyable alternatives (i.e., turn away), students also reported turning toward boredom by confirming the importance of remaining engaged. Students did this by considering the future consequences of disengaging or reminding themselves about their academic and career goals.

Students also described turning toward boredom through *stimulation seeking*, which consisted of seeking out stimuli, academic or otherwise, that aroused interest in or enthusiasm for an otherwise boring academic task so as to enable them to return to or persist through the task. In this respect, students reported both making themselves more interested in the lecture content or seeking out stimulating environmental stimuli to help them fight through their boredom and remain engaged. Steven gave the following example from a co-op placement, which was part of his Social Service Worker program. He described returning from a lunch break and searching for features of his environment to stimulate himself in order to persist through boring tasks:

After exploring uncharted territory, I came back and was ready to resume work. I regained some of the motivation and energy that I initially had, but that did not last long as boredom was still present. I think I subconsciously seek out primitive stimulus such as food, some sort of physical exercise and attractive women to increase my dopamine level when I am stuck in a boring situation. For example, I was keenly aware that I was constantly staring one of the female admin staff there. . . . In retrospect, in all of the classes that I had experienced some level of boredom in, I had subconsciously used a similar "most attractive woman" technique to preoccupy my five senses with. (Steven J1)
In a related example, Leslie described how she had learned to use her imagination during class and while reading to imbue a boring lecture or book with a new perspective that she found engaging. She gave the following examples from reading her history textbook and listening to lectures on the cold war, western civilization, and women in Canada where she addressed her boredom directly by making the content interesting:

- “We just had a lecture on the cold war and I was really engaged, like – well the prof was really awesome too with the lecture. I was already interested. But when it got to like the dryer facts, I was definitely like starting to picture it like what would have happened or what it would have looked like back then in the cold war? And that really helps, you know when you try to like visualize. . . . Or even like – I guess it’s kind of bad, but like even like pretending – like imagining – I mean my attention does kind of drift but not for long, just enough so I stay engaged, and I’m still focused. But it’s like even imagining trying to put it into perspective. So, if they’re like, ‘Oh yeah everyone was tense,’ I’ll kind of like imagine everyone in the room being tense like, ‘Oh like imagine we were – this was the cold war right now, like how would things’ – that definitely helps me put things in perspective and like keeps me engaged.” (I2/110-112)

- “If a prof is talking about something and it’s pretty boring, I’ll be like oh, this person – for example, I had one of my western civilization courses and it was pretty boring so I’m like this person is a survivor and they’re telling us, like I should listen and like – it’s a once in a lifetime chance to listen to this person talk. So, that actually helps a lot with me. So, or like, again, the Women in Canada’s course, like my prof was pretty boring, she’s very dry but yeah, I’ll just be like oh, she’s like a member of this sort of society like so
cool. Like let’s write down what she has to say. Like you’ll never get this opportunity again.” (I1/182)

- “Just use my imagination and sort of – like I remember with history, I actually used to hate it a lot but somebody was like just read it like your textbook – not really history. I didn’t hate history, but reading the textbook, the certain textbook and I’m like okay, just read it like a story and that – like I like to read things in that sort of different style. So, it helped me and I sort of related it to my interest, you know, like you actively play out whatever you read in your mind, kind of like a movie or something. So, that helped me. That got me to be interested and I wasn’t bored anymore.” (I1/134)

Using her imagination to fight through a boring lecture or reading and make it interesting was part of the overarching attitude she took toward boredom in college. She placed considerable emphasis on having the right attitude to effectively cope with boredom that, for her, largely meant turning toward the boredom and finding something to be interested in (e.g., “It’s also about like self-discipline and your attitude, the mentality of like how you’re approaching whatever it is you’re bored with”- I2/15). She provided the following elaborations:

- “That’s usually my main motto, to like just take a second and sometimes I just need to like, you know, just tune everything out and you know, think for myself. Like I’ll look down and just like take a minute to recap and tell myself like no, it’s your attitude, like – when I say your attitude it’s like you could always make yourself interested, like look at it in a different light.” (I1/170)

- “So, when I see others being bored I don’t want to be like in their shoes, I’d rather – it kind of helps me shape my own attitude. Like you don’t want to be in that situation because you know that it’s not – kind of like, I don’t know, just recognizing – like I
recognize my own behaviour in other students and then that kind of makes me more aware, I’m like, ‘No this is interesting, like come on,’ right.” (I2/163)

Leslie’s focus on her attitude was akin to what other students, such as Sarah and Ignacio, described as the need to first specifically acknowledge that one is experiencing boredom in order to effectively cope with it. With awareness and the right attitude, students were able to turn toward their boredom and successfully reduce it.

**Theme 4: Seeking meaning and purpose.** To cope with academic boredom meant to seek meaning or purpose in one’s academic experience, often observed in response to boredom that manifested as a feeling of emptiness, meaninglessness, or wasted time. To cope with this feeling was to ask why the present academic task or situation felt lacking in significance. Attempts to resist such feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness due to boredom were often accompanied by feelings of frustration, anger, and anxiety.

Students described coping with academic boredom as a process of engaging in self-questioning about their academic choices (e.g., Why am I taking this course? Why am I in this program?) and future life directions (e.g., What am I doing with my life? Where am I going?). Despite differing terminology (e.g., meaning, purpose, fulfillment, direction), students consistently described seeking answers to profound questions of whether they were living meaningful lives and on a path to achieve something greater to combat feelings of boredom. Anne, for example, described being bored in class and attempting to cope by reflecting on her past, her current predicament, and her desire for direction:

If you're bored, you kind of just, you get frustrated with yourself because you feel like you're not doing anything like, proactive. And you're just sitting there. You're just, like, a clueless person, you're just like okay, like -- then you start to think about, like, what
you're doing with your life, and like, just reminisce about the past, basically. And then just, it gets frustrating because you start to get angry with yourself. You're like, “what am I doing? Like, why is this happening,” kind of thing? (I2/100)

For Anne, frustration quickly supplanted boredom when the answers she sought were not forthcoming. When asked to elaborate on these comments she said:

Well, it's like, I would say like, I'm considering my future and like, where am I going to go from here? Kind of, it just frustrates me cause it's just like, you kind of see like your classmates or your friends, like, they already have jobs set up. But then when it comes to you, you're just like, you don't have a job lined up. Like, you have interviews. It's kind of like a jealous thing. But then you get frustrated as well. (I2/102)

Her attempts to cope with her boredom by seeking direction and purpose were thus complicated by jealousy resulting from social comparisons with seemingly more successful friends—those who had found purpose and were succeeding in it.

Leslie discussed how she was frequently bored in her very dry and repetitive Women in Canada class (e.g., “It was very, very dry the class, and we discussed the exact same things we did from the previous class. So yeah, it got very boring”- I1/142). Moreover, she said that in “the Women in Canada’s course, like my prof was pretty boring. She’s very dry” (I1/182). In Interview 1, she recounted an experience of boredom two weeks prior where her professor’s uninspiring answer to a question she posed aggravated her and served to distance her from the class:

I remember too in that class, the Women in Canada’s class two weeks ago, like I asked a question and she was just like, what did I ask on? I’m not sure specifically what the question was, but anyway, she like answered very vaguely and it was so dry so I’m like
“okay, thanks.” Like very like, okay, very basic answers and everything. So yeah, I was a little disappointed. At that point I’m like – I got kind of aggravated. You’re kind of like “what am I doing here?” Like time is of the essence, and I want to go home and read more and everything. (I1/146)

In attempting to cope with her boredom and subsequent frustration, Leslie engaged in self-questioning as an attempt to make sense of the situation. Clearly, she saw more meaning in going home and studying rather than wasting time with a professor who could not provide what she sought. Ultimately, her attempt to cope with the boredom by seeking meaning did not result in her leaving class as it might have for other students: “I stuck through it. I had to, I’ve never left due to boredom. I’ve never left” (I1/148). Ava similarly discussed feeling bored and frustrated with her professor in her field placement class who would ask her to summarize her experiences in placement and fixate on the negative aspects. She said, “I don’t like to deal with the negatives. Yes, it's a stepping stone to making it a positive thing but picking at it all the time kind of puts you in a down mood” (I1/179). Ava subsequently reported feeling bored due to having lost interest and becoming disengaged, which further prompted her to reflect on her current direction and the significance of being in a placement-based program:

And trying to hear it every week, "oh you’re doing this wrong, this is how the approach should be," I don’t want to participate. It just sets my mood. Then, afterwards, it's just like, “do I really want to be at placement? Do I really want to be in that environment where it's just, like, okay you're doing nothing, you're getting bad feedback from your professor?” So, I just normally try to stay quiet. (I1/181)
As with Leslie, Ava’s strategy for coping with boredom consisted of seeking meaning from her current academic experience. However, this strategy seemed to further distance her from the class and her professor, as exemplified by her choice to remain quiet and not contribute.

In her interviews and journals, Zed provided three descriptions that captured the search for meaning as an important strategy for coping with boredom. In Journal 1, she wrote about an experience in her Programming in Java class where she was bored by a lecture taught by a professor she otherwise truly enjoyed. After contemplating working on her lab assignment, studying, or preparing for a group meeting, Zed attempted to escape from her boredom by perusing Facebook. This appeared to provide temporary relief, however, she then said:

Most of all, I spent that time thinking about how lazy I was and how much better I would feel if I had gotten at least 7+ hours of sleep the previous night (even though a lot of sleep probably wouldn't have made much of a difference). I also contemplated what else I could have done with my life (if I wasn't in my current program). (J1)

Almost one month later, in the same programming class, Zed provided a strikingly similar description of a boredom coping experience:

Of course, I blamed my lack of attention to the lecture taking place and my overall sense of boredom on my lack of sleep, but I'm thinking sleep really isn't the main reason I felt bored. Maybe I'm just thinking if I'm in the right program, or if I really want to do Java programming in my future? (J3)

In both journal entries, she initially blamed her boredom on sleep deprivation, but eventually admitted that feelings of meaninglessness in those programming classes may have prompted her laziness. To cope with her boredom, she contemplated if computer programming was the right program for her, if she wanted to do programming in the future, and if she could be doing
something different with her life at that moment. All of these reflections indicate a search for meaning and purpose as way of coping with boredom. Zed further elaborated in Interview 2:

I think ever since first semester or maybe second semester I felt like, “do I really want to wake up every morning for the rest of my life and go do some programming stuff?” I’m just questioning like how good of a programmer will I be? So, while part of me thinks that I’m bored mostly because I just want to be in bed sleeping, there’s also a part of me that’s always – like in a difficult lecture or something I don’t understand – I’ll be like, “am I in the right place? Is that why I’m feeling bored because I feel like I don’t want to be doing this or learning this for the rest of my life?” (I2/37-38)

As evidenced by this quote, Zed was engaging in a search for meaning to overcome the boredom she experienced in class that had manifested as a feeling of emptiness. After confronting the possibility that she was not satisfied with her current position and future trajectory she sought to cope with her dissatisfaction (that she described as boredom) by seeking purpose in life.

For Amethyst, coping with boredom by seeking meaning and purpose involved what she referred to as **acute consciousness** (a term she admitted borrowing from Dostoevsky):

I get that feeling of very acute consciousness. . . . I feel a lot. . . . It’s kind of like you fall into this over-thinking or philosophical state and you kind of think and think and think but you’re not really [acting]. So that tension is still there, but you’re kind of thinking a lot [about] what you should do or what you’re doing right now, kinda. But you don’t really act out your thoughts, I’d say. . . . A lot of reflecting. (I1/273-277)

Similar to Anne, Leslie, Ava, and Zed, Amethyst’s acute consciousness included reflecting on what she was doing at the moment or what she could be doing instead of sitting in a boring class or studying for an exam when the topic was meaningless to her. However, for Amethyst this
search for meaning also included over-thinking without acting that generated a feeling of tension. In Interview 2, she later elaborated on her acute consciousness:

I think it’s like a thread of thoughts that just . . . It just keeps on like, it just keeps on running, running, and running and you get more and more ideas, and sometimes it gets deeper, sometimes it shifts and it changes. I think I told you about that weird situation when you’re studying biology and all of a sudden you’re just like okay you get bored, obviously you don’t like it. You don’t feel like this is good for you, and then I just started thinking of all kinds of like weird stuff, like, “Why am I doing this, like what’s the point of this? I’m going to be dead in a couple of years, nobody’s like going to remember me most likely so. And I’m just like a tiny little particle in the universe so what’s the point?”

(I2/114-116)

Amethyst’s existential reflections thus embodied a desire to make sense of her choices and find the significance in studying biology, even when biology bored her and might not be important to her in the future. She captured the acute consciousness again in Journal 3:

What is the point of it? It is not like I matter more than anybody else, so what is the point of doing all that to fit into a society that was designed for somebody else to get the most of? Wouldn't it be easier to just be a crazy person and live in your own made up reality? Why should I study to get a respectful job that can feed my kids who are going to die someday anyway because the sun won't last forever? (I do not need hospitalization, I promise lol). (J3)

Amethyst further commented that coping with boredom through acute consciousness could be also produce positive results:
Maybe when you’re bored and you have that time to reflect, yeah, as I said, you might actually think of something that is kind of new and – not exactly new, maybe it was there, maybe you didn’t notice it, but maybe something else that’s beneficial. . . . Maybe new ways to think about different stuff. So, I’m kind of just, it’s kind of like self-improvement. (I1/351-355)

Similar to his descriptions of boredom as emptiness, Kumar provided some of the most vivid and nuanced accounts of coping with boredom through a search for meaning and purpose. For him, coping with boredom meant making sense of daily life and finding purpose in it. He was often overcome with emptiness (i.e., boredom) and sought to fill it by using the experience to gain greater awareness of who he was: “To develop myself in the long term, like you’re looking for that, that meaning, that whole meaning of my existence” (I2/26). For Kumar, this process also included addressing larger questions concerning the meaning of life. Recall that Kumar’s analogy for boredom was standing on the top of a mountain and looking over the edge into the abyss of emptiness, contemplating whether to jump—to give into boredom—and accept an empty life devoid of meaning. Therefore, for Kumar, coping with boredom meant resisting the urge to jump and, instead, searching for meaning in his life. It was clear throughout our discussions that he very much wished to cope with his boredom and feel fulfilled rather than give into it. He described this experience as walking a thin line:

That little line that hold you is that greater feeling about something else. . . . It’s that I think of a greater thing, greater good, something else. . . . Just knowing that I want to get to that future is that little, that little, little, little thin line that holds me from not jumping to the abyss. (I1/114-117)
In coping with boredom, the thin line was his hope that in the future his life would feel more meaningful and the emptiness (i.e., boredom) would be filled. However, on his worst days, the abyss seemed to pull him closer, and it took everything he had to resist and keep coping:

There is just this thin, thin line – thin, thin, thin line that you hold onto with all your strength. And you know that the moment it breaks, if you are not complete or if you are not in your best day, hell, I don't know what’s going to happen. (I1/95)

As part of this coping process of trying to understand the larger impact of his life and actions, Kumar acknowledged the importance of avoiding complacency and going through the daily motions. As he commented, stopping the cycle of doing things just for the sake of doing them “will get you to some of the more joyful feelings. Like you can feel that you are fulfilling your life as soon as you realize that” (I1/74-76). For Kumar, coping represented a process of active, daily reflection:

That’s my solution for dealing with it, just try to make sense of daily life. . . . Every action that I have in my daily life I like to see it, then like they have some powerful meaning, some truth beyond our knowledge, our reach, that will help us or that will get us somewhere. (I1/112-114)

That “somewhere” he spoke of was far away from boredom and associated negative feelings, with successful boredom coping expected to reveal a path to a meaningful, fulfilled life:

Boredom is something negative but I know that there is something bigger, you know, there’s something more there. Like I need to overcome boredom to get to that whatever is behind that. . . . So, whatever that bigger goal is, you need to overcome those feelings, then you could probably be right. (I2/36-38)
Kumar further described the reflection that was needed to cope with boredom as an experience of walking through a door: “It would be like a door. Like a portal that when you are actually feeling that boredom it will take you to all of that, other possibilities, all that universe that is there” (I2/51-53). The act of walking through the door was synonymous with boredom coping; it prompted him to first feel the boredom (i.e., emptiness) and then attempt to regulate it by seeking meaning and purpose. Each time he walked through the door and attempted to cope with boredom, he could take a different path, a different line of thinking. And each time, he could emerge with more understanding or awareness of his own existence:

For me, this is boredom: just crossing this door with all the feelings that I have in my day-to-day life and making it into the other door with more awareness of what I am, where I belong, with my place, with all the consequences that I have. All those consequences, all those things are here, they live in that thing called boredom. . . . It will be like in that moment you are crossing the door and all those things are happening to your head. All those feelings, all that meaning to your life. I think that this space it’s where I think of it. And the outcome is my awareness of what I am. But that’s how I see boredom . . . every single path, everything that you think about will make you more aware of where you at the end. And if it seems so dark, so negative there, the outcome of you being aware it’s what, it’s pretty amazing for me. (I2/124-128)

Like Amethyst, Kumar saw the value of coping with his boredom and searching for meaning. Crossing through the door and experiencing the boredom was an unpleasant experience, but emerging with greater self-awareness was worth it:

I guess that I have realized that you can have a good outcome. And if you can control it probably you will start knowing or – well, no, you can start realizing that there is
something greater out there. . . . A part of me felt like well it doesn’t have to be something bad. I mean, it could be something good because you are still thinking about greater things, a greater existence, a greater meaning. And it’s not necessarily a bad thing to start thinking about that. If you feel emptiness well probably it is what it is; emptiness is always there where we [are] as a human race. I’m pretty sure that everyone will feel emptiness at some point of their life. And the way that you realize that or the way that you visualize that emptiness through boredom could be a good outcome, you know what I mean? (I2/53-55)

As mentioned in the thematic analysis on boredom, Kumar’s vivid descriptions initially stood out because they went above and beyond the everyday, seemingly mundane academic boredom to a more pervasive experience that impacted his views on life. Yet, despite his unique imagery, his descriptions and conclusions shared much in common with the other students.

**Summary.** As narrated by college students across multiple disciplines, the experience of coping with academic boredom consisted of the following four themes: being respectful, turning away from academic boredom, turning toward academic boredom, and seeking meaning and purpose. For the students, coping with academic boredom meant having awareness of how they were perceived by their professors and striving to be respectful with how they expressed and managed their boredom, especially in the classroom. In recognizing the relationality of their coping experiences, students expressed a willingness to empathize with their professors. In doing so, coping became a carefully managed act in reducing or removing boredom without being disruptive or offending their professors. Oftentimes, coping meant concealing boredom from the professor because simply expressing boredom, whether in their facial expressions and behaviour or through perceptible disengagement, could be disrespectful. As the act of turning away from
academic boredom, coping meant repelling or averting academic boredom by changing one’s focus so as to prevent boredom from increasing. It meant no longer facing the perceived source of their boredom and, instead, turning toward something enjoyable or an unrelated learning activity. Students were able to turn away by escaping boredom, distracting or mentally stimulating themselves, killing time, physical activity, striving to feel good, seeking social support, and being productive. As the act of turning toward academic boredom, coping meant confronting boredom head on with the intention of reengaging with the perceived source of their boredom. Rather than attempt to escape or avoid it, turning toward boredom meant dealing with it directly by re-engaging with the original task, be it listening to a lecture or studying for an exam, through taking breaks, doodling, enjoyable interim activities, seeking cognitive stimulation, and finding aspects of value in boring academic activities. Finally, coping with academic boredom meant seeking purpose in life by asking why the present academic task or situation felt devoid of significance and attempting to more clearly define their larger priorities and goals to imbue the boring experience more personal meaning.
Chapter 5. Discussion

Among primary, secondary, and post-secondary students, boredom is one of the most frequently and intensely experienced academic emotions and is often detrimental to student learning, motivation, self-regulation, and achievement (Tze et al., 2016). Despite its pervasive, aversive, and debilitating nature, we lack research providing a comprehensive understanding of students’ experiences of managing boredom while participating (or avoiding participating) in academic activities. Existing research efforts to expand our understanding have underutilized qualitative approaches to understand the meaning that students ascribe to their boredom coping by exploring their perspectives through their own words. In the present study, I attempted to address this shortcoming by asking 15 college students to speak and write about their experiences with regulating academic boredom over the course of a semester.

Phenomenological investigations into emotion strive to understand and describe the processes involved with experiencing and managing emotion and the meanings that people attach to those experiences. The present study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological method (van Manen, 1997) to address the following question: What is it like for a student to cope with academic boredom? Guided by this question, I strove to produce evocative descriptions of academic boredom and boredom coping from the college student’s perspective. The evocative descriptions I strove for were meant to bring the reader as close as possible to the original lived experience of coping with boredom in higher education settings (e.g., in class, at the library, in the hallway) and while participating in academic tasks (e.g., attempting to listen to a lecture, completing an assignment, studying for a test).

The 15 students who shared their lived experiences with me represented a diverse array of backgrounds, interests, and aspirations. All participants were enrolled full-time and ranged in
age from 19 to 33 years old. Their interests were represented in a diverse array of program affiliations including software development, liberal arts, graphic design, social service work, and chemical engineering technology. Five participants were international students studying in Canada from India, Mexico, Lebanon, El Salvador, and the Philippines. The students’ self-described ethnicities included Eastern European, Pakistani, Chinese Canadian, Hispanic, Caucasian, Southeast Asian, Filipino, and Punjabi. The students expressed an assorted collection of aspirations that they hoped to pursue upon graduating including transferring to bachelor’s programs at university, striving for employment in software development or the Canadian Border Services, travelling to Costa Rica and Asia, and working toward master’s degrees in business administration or environmental biology.

Beginning in mid-February, I met with each student for a one-on-one interview to obtain concrete experiential descriptions of boredom coping in college. In March, each student was tasked with completing three online journal entries (roughly one per week) to describe a recent experience with boredom coping. Upon review of the rich interview and journal data acquired, I prepared my own interpretations of each student’s experience of academic boredom and boredom coping. In mid-April, I met with each student again to share these interpretations, seek their feedback, and ask them to clarify or elaborate where necessary. In this final section of the dissertation, I will review my findings for academic boredom and boredom coping, connect these results to the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, and discuss their implications. Following this, I will underline the ways in which this study is rigorous, trustworthy, and valid, as well as highlight its limitations. I will end with a discussion of future directions for research into academic boredom and boredom coping.
Qualifying the Experience of Academic Boredom

Through my analysis of the students’ interviews and journal entries, eight themes emerged that embodied what it meant to experience academic boredom: lack of engagement, discomfort and aversion, emptiness, a desire to escape, nothing to do, feeling physically tired, time slowing down, and wasting time. The first theme spoke to academic boredom as an experience that lacked psychological or social involvement. Feeling unengaged was described as a state or condition of feeling uninterested, uninvolved, unstimulated, and unmotivated in the present moment, whether that was sitting in class, working on an assignment at home or the library, studying for a test, or being on campus during a break between classes. Lack of engagement also meant struggling to participate in the moment—a lack of connection—which the students variously described as a difficulty focusing, listening, or paying attention (e.g., “When I'm bored during class I feel disengaged, uninterested, dull and like I have become stagnant . . . disinterested in the subject, unmotivated to do the work”- Sarah J1)

As an experience of being unengaged and unable to participate, the academic boredom described by students in the current study has connections to the literature discussed in Chapter 1. In relation to the nine characteristics outlined in Elpidorou (2017), disengagement from the environment and failure to sustain attention intersect most closely with this theme. Concerning the former, the students routinely discussed their lack of engagement as a feeling of disconnection or detachment from the present moment, which many psychologists have previously identified as a key component of boredom (e.g., Fahlman et al., 2009; Fenichel, 1951; Jarvis & Seifert, 2002; Shaw, 1996; Sundberg et al., 1991). Initial results from functional magnetic resonance imagining (fMRI) research on the default mode network (DMN) also suggest that boredom is a state of disengagement, one where we continually fail in our attempts
to become engaged by something (Danckert & Merrifield, 2016). Additionally, boredom appeared to be antithetic to interest—that “feeling of being engaged, caught-up, fascinated, curious . . . of wanting to investigate, become involved”—such that wherever boredom reared its head, students expressed a lack of interest that contributed to their disengagement (Izard, 1977, p. 216). In his philosophy of boredom, Svendsen (2005) provided the following commentary on the intricacies of interest and boredom:

We cannot adopt a stance towards something without there being an underlying interest, for interest provides the direction. But, as Heidegger emphasised, today’s interest is only directed towards the interesting, and the interesting is what only a moment later one finds indifferent or boring. The word ‘boring’ is bound up with the word ‘interesting;’ the words become widespread at roughly the same time and they increase in frequency at roughly the same rate…The ‘interesting’ always has a brief shelf-life, and really no other function than to be consumed, in order that boredom can be kept at arm’s length. (p. 28)

In empirical research, too, a relationship between academic boredom and interest, or a lack thereof, has been documented. Research from Pekrun and colleagues (2010, 2014) has demonstrated that interest can have a negative effect on boredom, suggesting that “interest can protect against feeling bored, and that lack of interest can contribute to the arousal of boredom” (2010, p. 705). In congruence with previous evidence, the present findings support a conceptualization of boredom as disengagement from the environment, particularly during school-related activities.

The results of the present study also contribute to our understanding of boredom as an inability to sustain attention. Students discussed how, when bored, they felt detached from their surroundings and unable to participate, which they described as a difficulty concentrating,
listening, or paying attention often to the professor or reading material. This failure to “successfully engage attention with internal (e.g., thoughts or feelings) or external (e.g., environmental stimuli) information required for participating in satisfying activity” (Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 484) has previously been documented by numerous studies across multiple domains including school, work, and leisure time (e.g., Calhoun, 2011; Damrad-Frye & Laird, 1989; Fisher, 1993; Game, 2007; Harris, 2000; Hunter et al., 2016; Leary et al., 1986; Martin et al., 2006; Skowronski, 2012; van Tilburg & Igou 2017a). Recent electroencephalographic (EEG) research examining neural oscillations (i.e., alpha and beta wave activity) in different parts of the brain has also identified links between a state of boredom and attentional failure (Tabatabaie et al., 2014).

Concerning the second theme, students’ descriptions revealed academic boredom to be an experience marked by discomfort and aversion. The students expressed a strong feeling of opposition or antipathy towards their boredom because it felt uncomfortable and unpleasant. In line with two-dimensional models of emotion (e.g., Larsen & Diener, 1992; Russell, 1980; Thayer, 1996; Watson & Tellegen, 1985), Theme 2 highlighted that academic boredom was very much a negatively-valenced experience (Eastwood et al., 2012; Fisher, 1993, 1998; Green-Demers et al., 1998; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Ng et al., 2015; Pekrun et al., 2010, 2014; Posner et al., 2009; Preckel et al., 2010; Shaw, 1996; Todman, 2003; van Hooff & van Hooft 2014; Webster & Hadwin, 2015; see Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012, for a review of unpleasant definitions). This was exemplified through expressions including “I want to jump out of my skin” (Sarah), “like an itch inside your skull that you just can’t scratch” (Sing), and “your mind feels like it’s about to explode” (Alex). The discomfort, aversion, and negative-valence captured by this theme are aligned with the characteristic of dissatisfaction described in Elpidorou’s
(2017) review. Moreover, through the combination of Theme 1 and Theme 2, the results of the present study contribute to our understanding of boredom as “the experience of being disengaged from the world and stuck in a seemingly endless and dissatisfying present” (Fahlman et al., 2013, p. 68).

In addition to being dissatisfied with one’s present state, the findings from Theme 2 add to the research literature by documenting how boredom can be a high-arousal experience (e.g., Bench & Lench, 2013; Berlyne, 1960; Fisher, 1993; Hill & Perkins, 1985). In some instances, but not all, the students described feeling restless, jittery, and agitated and often used words like “frustrated,” “anxious,” “irritated,” and “annoyed” to describe their boredom. In combination with the low-arousal dynamics, which presented themselves as part of Theme 3 (see below), the present findings would suggest that high- and low-arousal forms of boredom are not necessarily inconsistent; said differently, “restlessness and apathy are always present together to some degree in boredom” (Bernstein, 1975, p. 516). As suggested by previous research (e.g., Eastwood et al., 2012; Fahlman et al., 2013; Hamilton, 1981; Merrifield & Danckert, 2014; O’Hanlon, 1981; Pattyn et al., 2008; Smith, 1981), the level of arousal may change at different stages of the boredom episode and high arousal may signify an attempt to self-stimulate. Kenny’s (2009) description captures this possibility:

Sometimes there is movement that reflects our inner restlessness: we might tap our fingers, bounce our knee or fidget with something small at hand. It is as though our frustration is expressed in these small but insistent gestures. Sometimes we might even sigh loudly, as though signaling to our own selves that we are nearing, or have reached, an unacceptable level of boredom. (p. 220).
Moreover, the results from Theme 2 lend support to Goetz et al.’s (2014a) model of boredom as a multidimensional construct. In particular, the dissatisfied restlessness captured in the students’ descriptions aligns with the searching and reactant types of boredom first suggested in Goetz and Frenzel’s (2006) theoretical model. Future research is needed to verify if boredom is a multidimensional construct or whether it can manifest in the presence of contiguous or concurrent emotions (e.g., irritation, frustration, annoyance), but the current results would suggest that boredom has varying degrees of activation.

In regard to Theme 3, the students in the present study described their experience of boredom as emptiness, which is to say, an experience defined by its lack of meaning or significance. Their lived experience of boredom was hollow and contained nothing of purpose (e.g., “It's more of a feeling of being empty. Empty I guess. Empty. Sad and empty but there's not really despair or anything, but it's more of a not feeling”- Sing I/230-236). As “the maw of the meaningless” (Spacks, 1995, p. 56), their boredom felt devoid of significance. The emptiness and lack of meaning students spoke of aligns with previous psychological research (Fahlman et al., 2009; Markey et al., 2014; Greenson, 1953; Moynihan et al., 2017; van Tilburg & Igou, 2012; van Tilburg et al., 2013) and with sociological conceptualizations of boredom (e.g., Barbalet, 1999; Darden & Marks, 1999). This experiential quality is succinctly captured by Michael Raposa in his book *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (1999):

> Boredom itself represents the death of meaning, of interest. It is an experience (however dimly understood as such) of the emptiness that lurks at the heart of human existence, an emptiness into which each moment fades, into which all finite things pass away. (p. 60)

According to Barbalet (1999), boredom is the emotional perception of meaninglessness in a world where meaning provides the context, reference, and purpose to all of our actions. Human
life is not possible without the quality of meaninglessness and when we experience boredom we are brought into direct contact with that absence. In building on the work of Heidegger (1949), Thiele (1997) commented that boredom can “confront us with the abyss of Being as nothingness” and “bring us face to face with the threatening insignificance of the finite self” (p. 502). Frankl (1962) used the metaphor of the existential vacuum to describe boredom. He believed that finding meaning in life was integral to avoiding suffering and feeling fulfilled; however, “if meaning is what we desire, then meaninglessness is a hole, an emptiness, in our lives” (Boeree, 2006). Meaninglessness thus creates a vacuum in our lives that we wish to fill so that we may find meaning. Boredom is the manifestation of this existential vacuum; it is one of the most conspicuous signs that our lives lack meaning in some way. As Svendsen (2005) explains, “boredom has to do with finitude and nothingness. It is a death within life, a non-life. In the in-humanity of boredom we gain a perspective on our own humanity” (p. 40-41). It is not surprising then, that Shubham commented how boredom “feels like you’re dying” (11/173). The emptiness that pervades boredom—that existential vacuum of meaninglessness—could feel like a death within life for students who believed they were wasting time on meaningless lectures, assignments, programs, or career goals.

For the fourth theme, boredom meant wanting to escape. To desire escape meant expressing a need to break away from boredom’s clutches because boredom restricted students’ ability to feel connected to something meaningful within school or, more broadly, their program. Boredom was often expressed by the students as a desire to be doing something else or something other than what they were currently doing (e.g., “When I’m bored, I just cannot handle any more of it so I have to get away as fast as I can”- Amethyst 11/267). Although the “something else” was not always specified by the students, when it was elucidated, it was clear it
meant something more interesting, enjoyable, or meaningful. The desire to be doing something else is consistent with past conceptualizations of boredom (e.g., De Chenne, 1988; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2012). Additionally, the desire for escape aligns with Elpidorou’s (2017) conceptualization of boredom as self-regulatory emotion whose function is twofold: “first, it informs us of the presence of non-interesting situations; second, it promotes escape from such situations. In other words, boredom’s function is to get us unstuck when we find ourselves stuck” (p. 469). Spacks (1989) argued for a similar interpretation of boredom’s utility:

For most people, boredom's utility as a state of mind resides not in its function as a means to serenity or creativity but in the signal it offers of disharmony between self and environment—a signal which, unfortunately, it also makes it difficult to respond to. (p. 599)

In conjunction with the experiential qualities of discomfort and aversion, lack of engagement, and emptiness, the theme of desiring escape describes an emotion whose function is “self-effacing” (Elpidorou, 2017)—which is to say, we feel bored so that we may break free of the conditions that caused boredom in the first place.

Academic boredom constrained the students in the present study and made them feel trapped or restricted in an unsatisfying present. They mentioned feeling static which they described as being unable to move or progress past some form of unpleasant obstruction, be it a tedious lecture, meaningless assignment, or uninteresting topic of study. This quality was captured by Elpidorou’s (2017) ninth and final characteristic of boredom labeled Constraint and Agency. The present results contribute to our understanding of boredom as a lack of control, agency, or autonomy over a constraining situation, and are congruent with previous research that
has also demonstrated this experiential quality (e.g., Conrad, 1997; Eastwood et al., 2012; Fahlman et al., 2013; Geiwitz, 1966; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Martin et al., 2006; Mercer-Lynn et al., 2014; Pekrun et al., 2010, 2014; Steinberger et al., 2016; Troutwine & O’Neal, 1981). In an academic context, it was apparent that the students in the current study routinely felt constrained by curricular, institutional, or professors’ demands. Such normative educational constraints have been demonstrated in previous research (e.g., Larson & Richards, 1991; Pekrun et al., 2010; Shaw et al., 1996) and align with the present results wherein boredom was described as being entrenched in a confining routine that prompted escape.

Concerning Themes 5 and 8, contact with boredom was described by students in the present study as having nothing to do or wasting time. Specifically, it meant feeling like there was nothing to do that was personally meaningful, and what they were attempting to engage with felt wasteful. “Doing nothing,” as Brissett and Snow (1993) explained, “is roundly considered a waste of time and, by implication, a waste of a person’s potential, skills, and attributes” (p. 247). The encounter with meaninglessness was likened by Kumar to the experience of standing at the top of a mountain and looking down into a bottomless pit or abyss. A similar metaphor has been used by existential theorists in their descriptions of boredom. Kierkegaard (1843/1987), for example, said that, “boredom depends on the nothingness which pervades reality; it causes a dizziness like that produced by looking down into a yawning chasm, and this dizziness is infinite. . . . For in nothingness not even an echo can be produced” (p. 287). Kenny (2009) summarized her position on boredom as a “philosophical response to the existential problem of the great abyss of meaning” (p. 92).

The experience of boredom was also embodied as an oppressive tiredness; as a powerful lethargy, torpor, or weariness (Theme 6). For the students, their sluggish exhaustion manifested
as a combination of low physical movement and absent facial expression. This is congruous with previous evidence showing that boredom can be expressed through collapsed or slack body posture, yawning, few bodily movements, an empty gaze, and a lack of an archetypal facial expression (e.g., D’Mello & Graesser, 2009; Eckman, 1984; Johnson & Scherer, 2000; McDaniel et al., 2007; Pekrun et al., 2010; Raccanello & Bianchetti, 2014; Wallbott, 1998). In conjunction with these expressive components, the students’ descriptions of boredom add to the research literature by documenting how boredom can be a state of low arousal like the indifferent, calibrating, and apathetic types identified by Goetz et al. (2014a; see also, Birdi et al., 1995; Martínez-Sierra & Gonzales, 2014; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Perrin-Wallqvist et al., 2004; Russell, 1980; Tze et al., 2013b; see Vogel-Walcutt et al., 2012, for a review of low-arousal definitions). However, it is important to keep in mind that, like previous qualitative research on academic boredom (e.g., Goetz & Frenzel, 2006; Harris, 2000; Marsh, 1983; Martin et al., 2006; Pekrun et al., 2010; Vandeweile, 1980), the present results support both high- and low-arousal conceptualizations. When boredom was experienced as state of low arousal, students reported feelings of nothingness that indicated to them that their present situation, or life more generally, was devoid of meaning.

Finally, while bored, the very passage of time began to slow down and drag on for the students in the present study (Theme 7). Their descriptions were in line with Darden and Marks (1991) who identified moments of boredom to be when “the situation has no apparent future, in the sense of anticipation, although it may have a temporal dimension, because time seems to stretch endlessly ahead without a foreseeable denouement” (pp. 18-19). This temporal quality of boredom was described by the students as inimical, tortuous, and painful, and, as such, is congruous with previous research (e.g., Acee et al., 2010; Breidenstein, 2007; Fenichel, 1951;
Philipson, 1998; Greenson, 1953; Hartocollis, 1972; Hunter et al., 2016; Markey et al., 2014; Martínez-Sierra & Gonzales, 2014; Pekrun et al., 2014; Tze et al., 2013b; Wangh, 1975). Their descriptions were, therefore, in line with Eastwood et al. (2012) who suggested that “when individuals are unable to occupy themselves with meaningful activity, having endlessly dragging time on their hands becomes the unsatisfying focus of their awareness” (p. 489). Taken together, Themes 5-8 align with a number of the characteristics identified by Elpidorou (2017) including perception of insufficient meaning, low arousal, altered perception of the passage of time, and limited motor expression.

**Identifying Themes of Academic Boredom Coping**

Through my analysis of the students’ interviews and journal entries, four essential themes emerged that embodied what it meant to cope with academic boredom: being respectful, turning away from academic boredom, turning toward academic boredom, and seeking meaning and purpose. Theme 1 spoke to the awareness students possessed concerning how they were being perceived by others, primarily their professors, when coping with boredom. “Boredom within the classroom situation is very much social (i.e., a shared and communicated phenomenon),” and so were the acts of coping that the students described (Breidenstein, 2007, p. 98). As boredom coping occurred in interpersonal spaces, such as the classroom, students attempted to be respectful with how they expressed and managed their boredom (e.g., “But when I was reading and doodling, I kind of was subconscious, because I didn’t want to offend my prof. So, I would gaze up every now and then, just to show her that I’m listening, but doing other stuff” - Steven I1/251). Being respectful meant that they acknowledged social norms for how to “appropriately” cope with academic boredom and the potential consequences of ignoring those normative constraints (e.g., coping as “self-consequating thoughts and actions”; Webster & Hadwin, 2015).
In some cases, being respectful meant managing their boredom by concealing it, which is aligned with previously examined response modulation strategies in the process model of emotion regulation (e.g., suppressing how the emotion is expressed; see Webb et al., 2012). The students in the present study thus recognized the relationality of their coping experiences by expressing empathy for their professors and striving to reduce or remove their boredom without being disruptive or disrespectful. For example, while bored, they mentioned periodically looking up to make eye contact with a professor to create the impression that they were engaged. They discussed avoiding “obvious” forms of distraction, like watching videos, that a professor would easily identify. They mentioned not using both headphones if watching videos or listening to music in class, and they highlighted the merits of taking a break and going for a walk compared to getting up and leaving class for good. Each student had their own opinion on what constituted socially appropriate boredom coping in school, and seemed motivated to adhere to these norms out of respect for their professors. If they violated these norms in some way, for example, by packing up their bag and leaving halfway through class, they reported feeling guilty and rude.

In regard to the existing literature, this coping theme is primarily aligned with sociological accounts of academic boredom management. Going beyond the individual, this perspective seeks to understand the contextualized norms for displaying emotion, the influence of role identities and expectations, and the social costs and benefits of regulating emotion (Lively & Weed, 2014, 2016; Stets & Turner, 2014). As such, questions about why students regulate emotion often supersede questions about how they do it, the opposite of which is true in the psychological literature (Tamir et al., 2014; Tamir & Mauss, 2011). Farrell et al. (1998) spoke of
realities or meaning systems constructed for students by their teachers and administrators that often have very little in common with those constructed by students:

They presume enough overlap in cultural perspectives for common values and understandings between the students and themselves. These meaning systems, however, have very little relationship to the meaning systems constructed by the students who have to function in their daily lives within a larger and, compared with the teachers, less secure world context. (p. 500)

Due in part to this lack of overlay, Breidenstein (2007) reached the following conclusion:

Overall, boredom appears to be a necessary and unavoidable component of school. One simply gets used to the idea . . . of often having to deal with boring topics and boring teachers. A certain sense of fate is associated with it, for example, the allocation of teachers to the classes which cannot be influenced by the students. There also does not seem to be much point in trying to rebel against boredom; in principle neither teacher nor topic can do anything about the fact that they are boring. (p. 103)

The lack of shared meaning systems between college students and professors can thus create conditions where academic boredom is necessary and unavoidable for the students. However, in the present study there was little evidence to suggest that students used boredom coping strategies as form of resistance against these meaning systems. Instead, the students described acting in ways that did not violate classroom norms to remain respectful of their professors and minimize being disruptive or rude. This conclusion is in line with Farrell et al. who also found little evidence that boredom coping behaviours, like sleeping in class, were intended as forms of resistance against externally imposed normative constraints.
In contrast, professors were reported as tolerating boredom coping behaviours that were less disruptive in nature. Perhaps because the professors themselves accepted boredom as a necessary and unavoidable component of school, they appeared to tacitly accept many of the coping behaviours the students demonstrated. In the present study, the results showed that the professors’ implicit permission to engage in certain boredom coping behaviours encouraged the students to engage in and repeat acts like napping, watching videos, or taking a walk during an unscheduled break. While Calhoun (2011) has argued that “rebellion against boredom might naturally find its outlet in normative delinquencies that violate the specific normative constraints engendering boredom” (p. 272), these forms of boredom coping did not appear to be delinquencies at all. Instead, “a tacit agreement is formed amongst the participants that a certain amount of boredom is to be accepted during the school lessons,” and “together the teachers and students adjust themselves toward a certain amount of boredom, and cooperatively go about dealing with it” (Breidenstein, 2007, p. 105). A routine developed wherein the students tactfully did not confront the professor about their boredom and the professor, in turn, tolerated various behaviours in which students engaged to pass the time. In the absence of reprimands or other overt expressions of disapproval from their professors, the students felt that they were actually managing their boredom while remaining respectful interactions, which was their intent.

For Theme 2, coping meant turning away from academic boredom. In turning away the students discussed avoiding and escaping boredom by turning toward something else they deemed interesting, enjoyable, or stimulating (e.g., “If I’m watching Civil War on Netflix, like I used to religiously watch that during my sociology class, I’d feel like I was in it. And I’d want to be paying attention and I’d want to be a part of what’s going on in the movie more so than what’s actually going on in reality sitting in a classroom being bored out of your mind”- Asia
In turning away from the perceived source of their boredom, such as a tedious assignment or lecture, there was no intent to reengage with it. Students were able to turn away from boredom by escaping it, distracting themselves, self-improvement, killing time, physical actions, striving to feel good, seeking social support, and being productive. In practice, this consisted of physically leaving, mentally zoning out or drifting off and no longer paying attention, using their phone or computer, doodling, fidgeting, exercise, attempting to nap, talking with friends, and completing work for other classes.

Similar to research on workplace boredom and leisure boredom (Fisher, 1993; Game, 2007; Harris, 2000; Martin et al., 2006; Skowronski, 2012), the present findings for turning away from boredom are congruent with similar coping processes previously documented in the educational psychology literature including task-avoidant activities (Webster & Hadwin, 2015), avoidant coping (Vierhaus et al., 2016), behavioural and cognitive avoidance (Nett et al., 2010, 2011), and avoidant coping profiles (i.e., Evaders; Daniels et al., 2015; Tze et al., 2013a). These results also add to the research literature by documenting the diverse array of coping strategies students use to turn away from boredom at the college level. Diversionary or task-irrelevant activities have been well-documented in the emotion regulation literature in non-academic contexts (e.g., Gross, 2015; Webb et al., 2012), with this study expanding our understanding of the types of distractions students utilize to manage their academic boredom, especially their reliance on personalized technology (laptops, mobile phones). The students routinely described the many distractions their mobile devices afforded them, including Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Netflix, email, texting, and general Internet browsing, so that they could rapidly and effectively turn away from boredom. As Thiele (1997) explained, “the evasion and suppression of all forms of boredom has become not only customary but institutionalized” (p. 511), and
although there were a few mentions of professors who prohibited personal technology during lectures, the students’ descriptions suggested that phones and laptops have become institutionalized coping tools. They frequently discussed the advantages of having these devices in class and during breaks between class which is consistent with recent usages statistics among post-secondary populations (e.g., 91% of students who own laptops use them during class for activities not related to the class, Hammer et al. (2010); see also, Emanuel, 2013; Panova & Lleras, 2016; Witecki & Nonnecke, 2015).

In addition to supporting earlier research documenting the students’ heavy reliance on utilizing distractions to cope with boredom (e.g., Burić et al., 2016; Goetz et al., 2007b; Nett et al., 2016), the present findings also contribute to our understanding of how students turn away from boredom by physically leaving, mentally escaping, or by killing time. To escape their boredom, the students described leaving class, and in one case dropping a course, when boredom threatened to overwhelm them. When this was deemed too drastic or unfeasible, students reported switching off, zoning out, or daydreaming (i.e., mind wandering; Critcher & Gilovich, 2010; Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Smallwood & Schooler, 2006; Smallwood, O’Connor, Sudbery, & Obonsawin, 2007), which is consistent with previous research on post-secondary students (e.g., Mann & Robinson, 2009; Sharp et al., 2016). Darden and Marks (1999) provided this explanation for why people escape boredom by leaving the situation: “Since display of boredom is usually improper or rude, we often deny it while usually leaving the scene, either physically or through fantasy” (pp. 18-19). Their rationale succinctly connects Themes 1 and 2 in the present study such that students may have chosen to escape rather than attempt to remain physically or mentally present and risk disrespecting their professors. In addition, students in the present study turned away from boredom by killing time, which meant pursuing a thought or
activity that would make time go by faster or at least make them unaware of how slowly time passed (see also Breidenstein, 2007). As May (1953) explained, individuals need to “desensitize” themselves to the acute awareness of time dragging on in order to cope with increasingly painful boredom:

Boredom is the occupational disease of being human. If a man’s awareness of the passage of time tells him only the day comes and goes and winter follows autumn and that nothing is happening in his life except hour succeeding hour, he must desensitize himself or else suffers painful boredom and emptiness. (p. 197)

In the college context, students’ awareness of the passage of time meant that nothing meaningful was happening concerning their educational interests or goals, and many sought to desensitize themselves from this temporal awareness to escape further unpleasantness.

In Theme 3, students discussed coping with their boredom by turning toward it rather than turning away. To turn toward meant to confront boredom head on in order to reengage with the original task be it listening to a lecture, completing an assignment, or studying for a test. It meant re-establishing a connection and persisting or enduring, rather than moving in a new direction so as to escape the boredom (e.g., “I can become more engaged and if that means, you know, taking a break for a few minutes and walking down the hall so I can get myself back into the moment then I can do that”- Sarah I2/62). Turning toward boredom—often expressed as fighting it, forcing yourself to continue, sticking with it, or pushing through it—was done when students recognized the value of investing resources in reconnecting with the initial educational task. Whatever the approach taken, the intention was to eventually reorient to the original task. In practice, turning toward boredom included temporary change-of-pace activities (e.g., doodling, texting, checking Facebook, moving locations, taking a break), avoiding distractions (e.g., not
talking with another student), reaffirming the importance of the boring task, and seeking mental stimulation to enhance engagement with the boring task (e.g., using imagination to make a lecture more interesting).

The instances in the present study that were described as turning toward boredom are aligned with a number of theorized strategies and empirical findings discussed in Chapter 1. At the outset of their coping response, students discussed the importance of having awareness of their boredom and reflecting on the causes and consequences of being bored. These initial assessments are aligned with the concentration strategies utilized as attentional deployment in the process model of emotion regulation (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Webb et al., 2012). For instance, students in the present study reflected on how boredom could impact their grades, their comprehension and mastery of the content, and their future academic prospects (e.g., university acceptance). Webster and Hadwin (2015) labeled these instances “self-consequating thoughts and action” and found them to be the fourth-most utilized boredom coping strategy among university students. Moving beyond hedonic needs-oriented regulation, these instances represented turning toward boredom in service of instrumental goals that could be disrupted by boredom (see Koole, 2009; Tamir, 2011; Tamir et al., 2014).

Turning toward boredom is also aligned with cognitive change and response modulation boredom regulation (Gross & Thompson, 2007; Webb et al., 2012) and approach-based boredom coping (Nett et al., 2010, 2011). Cognitive change or cognitive-approach strategies work to change one’s perception or interpretation of a boring situation. In the present study, students discussed their attempts to arouse interest in or enthusiasm for a lecture or reading by using their imagination or reaffirming the importance of focusing on the professor or completing the reading. There is limited existing research that has documented these strategies for turning
toward boredom (e.g., Goetz et al., 2007b; Webster & Hadwin, 2015), therefore, the present results are a valuable contribution to our understanding of how college students utilize cognitive change regulation and cognitive-approach coping strategies.

Additionally, the students discussed a number of strategies for turning toward boredom that could be consider response modulation or behavioural-approach coping. Efforts to directly influence the situation to reduce boredom included temporary change-of-pace activities, like going for a walk, doodling, or changing location, and efforts to avoid additional distractions like not looking at one’s phone or eschewing friends who were trying to start a conversation. Thus, in support of few existing studies that have documented these processes at the post-secondary level (e.g., Webster & Hadwin, 2015), the present findings confirm these strategies to be an integral part of students’ coping repertoire and deserving of further investigation. Finally, existing research has labelled students who favour turning toward boredom as “Reappraisers” as they prefer cognitive-approach strategies to cope with boredom (Daniels et al., 2015; Nett et al., 2010, 2011; Tze et al., 2013a). Reappraisers have been shown to have lower levels of boredom and higher levels of both interest and achievement relative to other coping profiles (e.g., Evaders). However, as the present study did not address rates of boredom or achievement outcomes, future research is warranted to explore the short- and long-term effects of specific coping responses.

Lastly, Theme 4 described academic boredom coping as a process of seeking meaning and purpose in life; a response to boredom when it manifested as a feeling of emptiness and wasted time. To confront this feeling was to ask why the present moment was bereft of significance (e.g., “I blamed my lack of attention to the lecture taking place and my overall sense of boredom on my lack of sleep, but I'm thinking sleep really isn't the main reason I felt bored - maybe I'm just thinking if I'm in the right program, or if I really want to do Java programming in
my future”- Zed J3). The students’ descriptions were in line with van Tilburg and Igou (2017b) who said, “boredom serves as an affective cue that a specific activity or situation lacks meaning, and this affective spark facilitates the pursuit of meaningful engagement” (p. 3). The students sought to fill the emptiness by defining their own meaning in life, which often was accompanied by feelings of frustration, anger, and anxiety due to uncomfortable realizations of what this inferred meaning meant for their educational trajectory and life plans.

Unlike the previous three themes, there are few unique connections to be made between coping with boredom by seeking meaning and existing literature on academic boredom coping and regulation. In his philosophy of boredom, Svendsen (2005) made the following comment:

Meaninglessness is boring. And boredom can be described metaphorically as a meaning withdrawal. Boredom can be understood as a discomfort which communicates that the need for meaning is not being satisfied. In order to remove this discomfort, we attack the symptoms rather than the disease itself, and search for all sorts of meaning-surrogates. (p. 30)

His claim was than rather than cope with boredom (i.e., meaninglessness) head on by searching for personal meaning, we are often satisfied to accept meaning-surrogates in its place. Similarly, Thiele (1997) commented that boredom confronts us with nothingness and the mystery of our own insignificance; yet, “in boredom, the mystery is avoided by a listless or frenzied turning away” (p. 502). While it is true that many times students chose to cope with boredom by turning away, there was evidence in the present study that, contrary to Svendsen and Thiele, coping meant self-questioning and seeking self-awareness. Thus, Elpidorou’s (2017) perspective on the function of boredom is more closely aligned with the present findings:
Boredom informs one of the presence of an unsatisfactory situation and, at the same time, it motivates one to pursue a new goal when the current goal ceases to be satisfactory, attractive or meaningful. Boredom ultimately promotes both movement and the restoration of the perception that one's activities are meaningful and congruent with one's overall projects. (p. 1)

As such, the present findings add to the research literature by documenting college students’ search for personal meaning and purpose as an important component of their academic boredom coping. Given that few empirical studies on student boredom to date have acknowledged this process, additional research to further explicate the nature and prevalence of this strategy type is needed.

Finally, it is worth mentioning how some students commented on the positive outcomes that could arise from experiencing academic boredom and effectively coping with it, such as self-improvement (Amethyst) and self-awareness (Kumar). Although boredom was uniformly described as unpleasant, with coping typically serving to remove or reduce it, boredom could offer unexpected rewards for those willing to grapple with it:

If, however, one has the patience, the sort of patience specific to legitimate boredom, then one experiences a kind of bliss that is almost unearthly. A landscape appears in which colorful peacocks strut about, and images of people suffused with soul come into view. And look – your own soul is likewise swelling, and in ecstasy you name what you have always lacked: the great passion. (Kracauer, 1963/1995, p. 334)

Indeed, many of the students in the present study may have agreed with Spacks (1989) who said, “although empty time holds terrors for everyone, it contains the potential for discovery” (p. 9), and O’Doherty (1967) who wrote, “far from having no content, boredom is a state of potential
richness” (p. 237). Research is consistently emerging in which the benefits of boredom are highlighted (e.g., Bench & Lench, 2013; Gasper & Middlewood, 2014; Lomas, 2017; Mann & Cadman, 2014; van Tilburg & Igou, 2017b) with popular media also increasingly promoting the adaptive aspects of boredom with articles entitled Could You Benefit from Boredom (Shroeder, 2017), The Surprising Benefits of Boredom (Burton, 2014), and The Joy of Boredom (Johnson, 2008). In relation to Theme 4, boredom could thus serve an adaptive function as a “self-regulatory cue that breeds commitment to meaningful action, hence fulfilling an important existential function” (van Tilburg & Igou, 2017b, p. 3).

**Rigor and Trustworthiness**

Prescriptive texts on validating qualitative research consistently state that quantitative and qualitative approaches have different assumptions, goals, and methodologies, and thus require different strategies for establishing credibility. However, there exists considerable disagreement among researchers as to the appropriate nomenclature, quality, and quantity of strategies that should be employed to ascertain credibility. Creswell (2013), for example, identified approaches that strive for qualitative equivalents to quantitative notions of validity and reliability (e.g., LaCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), postmodern and interpretive approaches that reject positivist terminology and standards (e.g., Lather, 1993; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008), and approaches that claim concern with validation distracts the researcher from uncovering a deeper understanding of their topic (e.g., Wolcott, 1990). With this diversity of validity assessments in mind, I have opted to follow evaluative criteria that are tailored to hermeneutic phenomenology and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; van Manen, 2014).

In this section I will describe the measures taken to ensure that the present study was both rigorous and trustworthy. In doing so, I hope to reaffirm the quality of the lived experience
descriptions obtained, demonstrate the originality of my insights, and convince the reader of the soundness of my interpretive process. These measures included the epoché, obtaining rich experiential materials, conducting sound interpretation, and producing thick description.

**Epoché.** In the *Principal Methodological Components* and *Analysis* sections above, I discussed the method of the epoché as an integral feature of phenomenological research. To summarize, when attempting to understand the meaning of a phenomenon, like boredom coping, the researcher must constantly be aware of their own biases and assumptions about the phenomenon and how they might influence all stages of the study (Finlay, 2008; Moran, 2002; van Manen, 1997, 2014). The first step is to awaken these biases and assumptions and then make them explicit for oneself and for those who will read the research. We cannot forget or suspend these assumptions, but we can be on guard for how they might influence participant selection, interviewing, transcript reading, data coding, thematic description, and so forth. While planning the present study, I began the epoché by posing questions to myself to uncover my assumptions about emotion, boredom, coping, and regulation. I reread this document throughout all stages of the study as a check on my biases, and I have summarized my key assumptions for the reader in the section entitled *Emotion, Boredom, and Coping: A Personal Perspective*. The reader should have a clear understanding of my position so that they may judge how it has impacted the inquiry.

**Rich experiential materials.** Phenomenological inquiry requires rich and concrete experiential material upon which an analysis can be based (van Manen, 2014). In the present study, I strove to obtain rich experiential descriptions of boredom coping from the participants. Such descriptions were based in experiential details rather than interpretations of the experience that reflected students’ beliefs, opinions, or views about what happened and why. In striving for
these descriptions, I provided clear and concise instructions to the participants in Interview 1 and at the outset of each journal entry to elicit experiential accounts of academic boredom coping (see Appendices B and C). I also utilized multiple data sources (i.e., two interviews and three journal entries) to increase the opportunity for students to describe their experiences. Moreover, these varied sources provided students the opportunity to communicate their experiential descriptions in verbal, written, and video-based formats. The benefit of providing varied potential response formats was that students who were initially uncomfortable in a one-on-one interview could follow up with written journals completed at home or in the library where they potentially felt more relaxed (and vice versa for students who preferred the interview format).

**Sound interpretation.** In the Analysis section of the paper, I endeavoured to provide a transparent and comprehensive description of my analytic procedure so that the reader may evaluate the credibility of my work. Beginning with the explicit acknowledgment of my personal assumptions about thematic analysis, I provided a structured discussion of all six phases of analysis as described in Braun and Clarke (2006). Throughout the Analysis section, I positioned myself as active in the analytical process and strove to document each decision for the reader so as to avoid the common pitfall of themes seemingly “emerging” on their own. To further judge the rigor and trustworthiness of my interpretations, Braun and Clarke provided the following criteria for good thematic analysis:

- The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
- There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis. (p. 96)

I strove to meet each of these criteria throughout the analysis, and to substantiate that claim I have provided unambiguous, exhaustive descriptions of the decision-making processes that led to the final results. Additionally, I was explicit about how I incorporated elements of phenomenology (e.g., free imaginative variation) into the thematic analysis to further strengthen the rigor of my interpretations. I also built in “member checks” (Creswell, 2013) that allowed me to solicit the participants’ judgement on whether my interpretations of their lived experience were accurate and credible. This was accomplished in Interview 2 where I provided participants with my naïve readings of boredom and boredom coping in school so that they could provide feedback or make suggestions. The student participants were unanimous in their support of my interpretations, and through follow-up questions and clarifications consented that I was accurately representing their lived experiences.

**Thick description.** The goal of phenomenological research is to produce “fresh, complex, rich description of phenomena as concretely lived” (Finlay, 2009, p. 173) that “offer us the possibility of deeper and original insight” (van Manen, 2014, p. 356). Thick description was used to describe the participants’ lived experiences of academic boredom and boredom coping. My thematic descriptions were intended to illuminate for the reader the aspects or qualities that make boredom coping what it is and without which boredom coping could not be what it is (van Manen, 1997). In support of this goal, I strove to meet the criteria set by Braun and Clarke (2006) for achieving credible and rigorous analytical descriptions:

- Data have been analysed—interpreted, made sense of—rather than just paraphrased or described.
• Analysis and data match each other; the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.

• Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.

• A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided. (p. 96)

Thick description also included a detailed biographical narrative for each participant and for their academic setting. By situating my sample, I strove to provide a framework for the experiential materials so that the reader could better understand the contextual nuances embedded within the data.

In addition to the criteria above, the reader may judge the rigor and trustworthiness of the present study by reflecting on the following evaluative questions proposed by Creswell (2013):

1. Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology?

2. Does the author have a clear ‘phenomenon’ to study that is articulated in a concise way?

3. Does the author use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology, such as procedures by Moustakas and van Manen?

4. Does the author convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants? Does this essence include a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred?

5. Is the author reflexive throughout the study? (p. 260)

I have endeavoured to effectively address all questions throughout the study to validate the rigour and trustworthiness of my findings. I took time in the Introduction to convey my understanding of phenomenology, situate myself within the different phenomenological perspectives, and concisely articulate the phenomenon of boredom coping by reviewing the
existing literature. I described and followed an established procedure for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; van Manen, 1997) and strove to convey the overall essence of academic boredom coping through my thematic analysis and accompanying summary in the Discussion section. Finally, I remained reflexive throughout the study by maintaining awareness of my own biases and assumptions.

Limitations and Future Directions

There were a few limitations in the present study that should be addressed before discussing future research. First, although I did follow up with participants in Interview 2 to share my naïve descriptions and seek support for my interpretations, I was not able to present them with the final results of my analysis. This would have been beneficial as it would have further validated my findings and added to the trustworthiness of my final interpretations. Unfortunately, many of the students in the study graduated and left the college before the final results were compiled. Second, the raw interview and journal data were not analysed by a second researcher due to timing constraints and lack of availability. Collaborative thematic analysis should serve to strengthen the rigor of the final results through discussion and debate on the best or clearest interpretation of the data at each stage of analysis (e.g., Rich, Graham, Taket, & Shelley, 2013; Thomé, Esbensen, Dykes, & Hallberg, 2004; see Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2014). However, given the depth and breadth of the dissertation process, having another researcher (apart from my supervisor) involved was not feasible.

Third, the input from all participants was not equal and some participants tended to dominate certain themes. This was due to some participants being more expressive or detailed in their descriptions and that not all participants’ journals could be used because they discussed boredom coping in non-academic contexts. Participant selection was based solely on a one-
paragraph lived experience description, and while I strove to select participants who could speak eloquently about their boredom and coping, ultimately there was some variability in how adept they were at providing phenomenological descriptions (i.e., describing their experiences versus hypothesizing about what happened or why it happened). I tried to correct for this whenever possible through my instructions and attempts to reorient them back to experiential descriptions and away from interpretations of those experiences. Finally, the aforementioned limits of language when attempting phenomenological descriptions are worth restating. Any description of a phenomenon is always an interpretation that inevitably falls short of the experience as originally lived (i.e., pre-reflective experience). As van Manen (1997) states, “experience is always more immediate, more enigmatic, more complex, more ambiguous than any description can do justice to” (p. xvii). I accordingly experienced the limitations of my own linguistic capacity when attempting to describe boredom coping in such a way that the reader could recognize the lived pre-reflective experience in themselves (van Manen, 1997). This is something I will strive to improve upon in future studies by expanding the boundaries of my linguistic abilities as I continue to gain experience as a phenomenologist.

Based on the contribution of the present study to the existing literature, I would like to propose some suggestions for emotion researchers interested in furthering our understanding of boredom regulation and coping in academic contexts. First, it would be beneficial to employ qualitative methods that can speak to academic boredom coping from the professor’s perspective. Across all participants and themes, there was mention of how boredom was experienced and coped with while in the presence of professors. The students made many assumptions about how their actions and expressions were being viewed by the professors (e.g., Theme 1: Being respectful) and their experience of boredom coping was heavily influenced by
the conclusions they drew. Consequently, it would be interesting to hear from professors, perhaps via interviews or journals, to understand their thoughts on student boredom and how it is managed. What constraints do they, the professors, set on coping and why? Do they truly feel disrespected by certain instances of boredom expression or coping? Do they believe boredom is inevitable and accept certain coping strategies as exhibited by students? Answers to these questions would enrich our understanding of boredom coping in the college context.

Second, collective coping, anticipatory coping, and acceptance of boredom were three incidental themes that surfaced in the present study but did not generate enough data to warrant consideration as essential themes (see Boredom Regulation and Coping section above). There is limited research documenting the use of social support (e.g., Mann & Robinson, 2009; Sharp et al., 2016) and anticipatory coping (e.g., Harris, 2000) in the academic boredom literature, yet the present study would suggest that they are fruitful topics for future research. Much of the psychological literature is focused on a single individual’s coping experience as it occurs after boredom has manifested. However, it would be beneficial to learn from the sociological literature (e.g., Lively & Weed, 2014) so that we may better understand boredom coping as a collective experience that occurs in interpersonal spaces like the classroom, hallway, or library. Moreover, in line with Gross’ (1998) process model of emotion regulation, we may benefit from expanding our investigations of boredom coping to incorporate so-called anticipatory coping that can occur minutes, hours, or days before academic boredom has manifested (e.g., situation selection and modification). Additionally, although boredom was uniformly described as an unpleasant and aversive experience in the present study, there was some mention of accepting boredom and sitting with it, so to speak, rather than reducing or removing it. Whereas there is some precedent for acknowledging acceptance of boredom in the existing literature (e.g., Goetz
et al., 2007b; Nett et al., 2016), the nature of acceptance is not well understood. For example, it is possible that acceptance of boredom may simply signify a delay in the coping response, perhaps due to lethargy or weariness, or instead represent something more significant about students’ relation to boredom and how it is managed.

Third, I believe we as a research community would be better equipped to understand the nuances of how and why students manage their boredom if the boredom regulation literature (e.g., Webster & Hadwin, 2015) and boredom coping literature (e.g., Nett et al., 2010, 2011) were merged rather than continuing to proceed down parallel, fragmented tracks. The two literatures have different theoretical underpinnings, yet in practice seek to understand and explain the same human experience (i.e., jingle-jangle fallacies; see Marsh, 1994). The lack of a common vocabulary from which we can base our research unfortunately limits our ability to successfully communicate with each other and advance our shared interests. Although such an undertaking was beyond the scope of the present study, I have, where possible, attempted to discuss my results so as to highlight connections between the two literatures.

Fourth, although the present study was limited in what it could reveal about the adaptiveness of different coping strategies (i.e., which strategies effectively reduced boredom without harming academic success), future research should continue to examine how best to support post-secondary students so that they can cope with boredom in ways that benefit them academically. To do so, researchers should continue to examine contextualized nuances (e.g., domain specificity, developmental differences) and strive to understand how they shape the lived experiences of students in specific sociocultural environments. For example, coping with boredom by getting up and leaving class (or even dropping a class altogether) may in fact be the most academically adaptive strategy for a specific student depending on specific other variables
(e.g., their relationship with the professor, how much sleep they got the previous night, whether or not they have an upcoming test in another class, if they have a friend in class who can take notes for them, etc.). Conversely, being more sensitive to context should not mean we eschew adjacent fields of research such as boredom coping in the workplace. I believe there is much we can learn from these fields that can have applications within schools, colleges, and universities. Cleary et al. (2016), for example, provided a number of practical suggestions for regulating boredom and improving engagement in the workplace that may be applicable to post-secondary students such as providing greater autonomy over assigned tasks, providing more breaks from demanding tasks, and imbuing tasks with clearer purpose and meaning.

**Contributions and Conclusion**

The current study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research method to analyze and describe the lived experience of coping with academic boredom for a group of 15 college students. Through repeated one-on-one interviews and online journal entries across a single semester, the students shared their experiential accounts of boredom and coping. While it is important to keep in mind that the transferability of the present findings to other college students and settings depends on the degree of contextual similarity, the thematic analyses herein offer an important and unique empirical contribution to existing literature on college student boredom and boredom coping or regulation. Little empirical research to date has attempted to understand how college students cope with boredom by asking them to elaborate on their experiences in their own words, with qualitative approaches being underutilized in existing boredom research. Accordingly, the present study represents an important advancement in our understanding of the meaning that students ascribe to their experiences of boredom and coping with boredom. Moreover, until now, the literatures on academic boredom coping and academic boredom
regulation have proceeded largely independent of one another despite their shared interest. Through the comprehensive review in Chapter 1, the present study adds value by finding common ground between these literatures and identifying how they can reinforce each other with the goal of advancing current knowledge and developing educational practices that support students, as well as professors and college administrators. Perhaps most importantly, the present study illuminates the complexity of boredom in how it is both experienced and managed by students and, in so doing, substantially addresses a current deficiency in our understanding of college student boredom and reiterates the need for further investigation.
Appendix A  
Recruitment Advertisement

DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH BOREDOM?

ARE YOU ALWAYS BORED?!  

My name is Kyle Hubbard. I’m a PhD student, a McGill University researcher, and a part-time teacher at [college name] in the School of Arts and Science. I’m looking for [college name] students who want to share their experiences of being bored in college.

If you’re interested, please follow the link below to complete a brief 5-10 minute survey. By participating you will be entered into a prize draw for a $50 Amazon gift card. Based on the survey responses, a group of students will be chosen to be interviewed about their personal experiences. Students who are selected will be compensated for their time with additional gift cards to the movies, Starbucks, and Amazon.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at kyle.hubbard@xcollege.ca or by phone at (514) 826-5904. You can also contact my supervisor, Nathan Hall, at nathan.c.hall@mcgill.ca or (514) 398-5904.

THANK YOU!

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/[college name]-boredom-survey
Appendix B
Recruitment Screening Task

DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH BOREDOM?

ARE YOU ALWAYS BORED?!

McGill REB File #: 288-1116 / [college name] REB File #: 16-34

Researcher: Kyle Hubbard (Ph.D. student), McGill University, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. Email: kyle.hubbard@xcollege.ca. Phone: (514) 826-5904

Supervisor: Nathan Hall, Ph.D., McGill University, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. Email: nathan.c.hall@mcgill.ca. Phone: (514) 398-3452

My name is Kyle; I’m a PhD student, a McGill University researcher, and a part-time teacher at [college name] in the School of Arts and Science. I’m looking for [college name] students who want to share their experiences of being bored in college.

Please take 5 to 10 minutes to check out the survey. By participating you will be entered into a prize draw for a $50 Amazon gift card. Anticipated odds of winning are 1 in 50.

Based on your survey responses, you may be contacted next week to be interviewed about your personal boredom experiences. Students who are selected will be compensated for their time with additional gift cards for Amazon, Cineplex, and Starbucks.

Please note that your participation is voluntary, you don’t have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can quit at any time simply by closing your web browser. All information you provide in this survey, including your personal information, written responses, and videos are solely for my research and will not be disseminated in public or shared with anyone else at any point in time (including other students, teachers, the [college name] College administration, etc.). All responses and personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and secure. Only my supervisor (Nathan Hall) and I (Kyle Hubbard) will have access to your information. The information you provide in the survey will only be used in the final study report if you are selected to participate in the interviews. If you are not selected for the interviews, your information will be removed from our records.

The on-line survey results are accessible to the researchers using a password but the raw data is stored on a server housed in the United States. All responses to the survey will be stored and accessed in the USA. The survey company is subject to U.S. laws, in particular, to the U.S. Patriot Act that allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers. If you choose to participate in the survey you understand that your responses to the questions will be stored and accessed in the USA.

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.
If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca, or the [college name] College Ethics Review Board at REB@xcollege.ca

Please take a moment to print or save this screen if you would like a copy for your own reference.

If you agree with these terms, please click the NEXT button below to proceed.

**Take a moment to think about a recent time when you felt bored in school.** Where were you? What was happening? How did you feel? I would like you to describe this experience in your own words. You have the option of typing your description (1-2 paragraphs) or recording a brief video (2-3 minutes) of yourself talking about the experience. Please select the option you are most comfortable with by clicking one of the buttons below.

Pick One:

- Written Description *(direct to page 3)*
- Video Description *(direct to page 4)*

Think about a recent time you felt bored in school that really stands out in your mind. Please write one or two paragraphs to describe:

- Where you were in school when you felt bored
- What was happening
- How you felt
- What you thought
- What you did

The more details the better! There is no need to use fancy words or phrases, just describe it as you would to a friend or family member. When you are finished, click the NEXT button below.

*Type description directly into SurveyMonkey*

Think about a recent time you felt bored in school that really stands out in your mind. Please record a video of yourself talking about this experience. Take a few minutes to talk about:

- Where you were in school when you felt bored
- What was happening
- How you felt
• What you thought
• What you did

The more details the better! There is no need to use fancy words or phrases, just describe it as you would to a friend or family member.

Please record your video on a phone, computer, or tablet and send the video file to my email: kyle.hubbard@xcollege.ca. I recommend using WeTransfer to send the file. It is free to use, you do not need to register an account, and you can send videos up to 2 GB. Simply attach the video, enter in my email address and your email address, and then hit transfer. I will email you back to confirm that the video was received.

Go to WeTransfer

When you have sent the video, please click the NEXT button below to move onto the final section.

Thank you for taking the time to describe your experience!
To complete the survey, please provide answers to the following final questions.

• First and Last Name:
• Email:
• [college name] Student ID:
• Age:
  • What is your gender?
    o Female
    o Male
    o Non-binary/gender queer
    o Prefer not to say
    o Prefer to self-describe:
• In your own words, how would you describe your race or ethnicity?
• What program are you enrolled in at [college name]? (e.g., Liberal Arts University Transfer, Graphic Design, Journalism, etc.):
• What semester of your program are you currently in? (e.g., first, second, third, etc.)
• Provide any other information about yourself that you wish to share (optional):

Thank you for completing my boredom survey—I hope it wasn’t too boring!
Your time and effort are greatly appreciated. You will be contacted next week if you are selected to participate in the study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to email me, Kyle Hubbard, at kyle.hubbard@xcollege.ca. THANK YOU!
Appendix C
Interview 1 Protocol

Rapport Building //
I want to start by asking you some general questions about yourself and your identity as a student. Take as long as you need before responding to a question. And don’t worry about having to stop and take time to think about your answer. There is no rush.

Educational Journey and Background //
- First off, tell me a bit about yourself. Who is ____________?
  - Prompt: What do you like to do in your free time? What are three words that best describe you? What do consider to be important parts of your identity?
- Describe your experiences as a student before you came to [college name].
  - Prompt: What was school like for you before [college name]?
- Tell me about your decision to come to [college name]?
- What inspired you to choose your current program?

Current Experience as a Student //
- Describe what it’s like to be a student at [college name]. Talk about anything that comes to mind. The friends, other students, teachers, classes, programs, atmosphere, environment.
- How would you describe yourself as a student now?
  - Prompt: What do you feel good about?
  - Prompt: What concerns or worries you?
  - Prompt: Describe your own learning process? Describe how you best learn?
  - Prompt: How do you take what you learn in class and transform it into personal, lasting knowledge- that you can hold onto long-term?
- At the start of each week, what do you look forward to at [college name]? What are you excited about?
  - What do you not look forward to or wish you could avoid?
- What academic goals have you set for yourself?
- What about after you graduate from [college name]? What comes next?

**PAUSE: I appreciate your thoughtful reflections- How are you feeling? Break? Anything you want to go back to?**

Descriptions of Boredom and Boredom Coping //
- Before you tell me about specific events or experiences, first, please describe boredom?
  - Prompt: What does boredom mean to you?
- What is the opposite of boredom?
- Next, I want you to think about a specific time you felt bored in school that really stands out in your mind. Describe what happened, how you felt, what you thought, what you did. You should try to describe the experience as you lived through it. What I mean by this is try to avoid providing explanations for what you did or said or felt—I’m looking for you to tell me
what happened rather than why it happened this way or that way. *TAKE A SECOND, CLOSE YOUR EYES IF IT HELPS*

- **Questions to Facilitate Description**
  - What was happening when your boredom started?
  - Describe the environment, the objects, the people.
  - How did you feel when you were bored? What does it feel like in your body?
  - What did you do when you felt bored? (or What do you feel like when you're bored?)

- **Possible Prompts**
  - When exactly did this happen?
  - What were you doing?
  - Who said what?
  - And what did you say then?
  - What happened next?
  - How did you feel?
  - What else do you remember about the event?

**Follow-up Questions //**

- In addition to what you described earlier (*reiterate an example*), what else do you do when you're bored in school?
- What are the most effective ways for coping with boredom?
- When you're bored and need to focus, what things (if any) do you do/use to help you engaging in the learning tasks at hand?
- Of all the ways you could managing your boredom in school, how do you choose which approach to use at any given time? What things do you consider when making you choice?
  - Potential follow-up: For example, you said you have done __________ and __________ in the past, so how do you chose one over the other?
- Do you believe you can control your boredom in school?
  - Potential follow-up: Can you influence how bored you are, when you get bored, or can you make yourself more or less bored?
- If you think you’re going to be bored in school, do you make plans or preparations for managing the boredom?
  - If so, what do you do?
  - If not, how come?
- What factors (situations/environments/characteristics) makes you bored (e.g., length of lecture, day of week, class size, prof, friends, etc.)?
  - Potential follow-up: Follow-up: How often do you get bored in school?
- As a student, do you think boredom could be helpful, beneficial, or a positive thing to experience?
  - Potential follow-up: Are there any times, places, etc., you feel "bored" but where feeling "bored" is productive, or where boredom is helpful, beneficial, a good thing?
  - Potential follow-up: What could boredom have to offer that might be of value?
• Potential follow-up: Is boredom ever important for learning? (If so, describe, when, where, why)
• As a student, what are some of the rules for feeling and expressing boredom in school?
  o Potential follow-up: Where and who do these rules come from?
  o Potential follow-up: Considering the teacher or others at all?
  o Potential follow-up: How do you know when other students are bored?
  o Potential follow-up: Do you usually obey or resist them? Describe what you do
    ▪ What are the consequences for not following the rules?

Wrap-Up //
Alright, it’s officially the end of the interview. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I truly appreciate your honesty and openness. At this point, I want to give you an opportunity to ask any questions or vocalize any concerns you are having. Was there anything related to boredom that we did not get to discuss that you want to mention or think is important?
First off, thank you for meeting with me today. I’ll begin by telling you a bit about myself and my research. I grew up in Newmarket and went on to do a bachelor’s degree in psychology at McGill University in Montreal. I’m currently a PhD student at McGill University where I study educational psychology. I’m also a part-time teacher in psychology here at [college name] College.

In my PhD program, my goal has been to understand student’s motivation and emotions in school, like their anxiety, enjoyment, boredom, and pride. Specifically, I’m fascinated by the experience of boredom, and I want to learn more about what students do and feel and think when they get bored in school. I think the best way to learn about students’ experiences is to meet with them and give them a chance to talk about what school is like for them.

The research study that I’m asking you to participate in has three parts. Part 1 is a one-on-one interview with me that we will do today and which will last approximately 1 hour. In the interview I’m going to ask you to tell me a bit about yourself, your experiences as a student, and your experiences with boredom. In total, I’ll be interviewing 10-15 other students. I’ll then take time to think about what each student has said to me and look for similarities and differences across the interviews, kind of like patterns or themes. Part 2 will take place in March. You will be given another opportunity to talk about a recent time you felt bored in school. You can choose to write about your experiences or record a video of yourself talking about your experiences. Finally, Part 3 will be a follow-up interview with me in April. In this interview we’ll go over the experiences you discussed in Part 2, and I’ll be asking for your feedback on my ideas. Any questions so far?

So, for each part of the study it’s important to note that your participation is voluntary, meaning you can refuse to participate in any part of the study, you don’t have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you are free to leave at any time and there won’t be any punishment or repercussions. Also, everything you say and all of your personal information will be kept strictly confidential and secure. Your identity will only be known to me and my supervisor, Nathan Hall, at McGill, and it will never be shared with anyone else, including other students, teachers, or [college name] College administration.

I would like to record our discussion so I have a record of what we talked about, and afterwards I will create a written copy of our conversation. But it’s important for you to know that what you say will never be linked with your personal identity. Do you understand everything I have said so far? Do you have any questions?

Finally, I have no expectations about how this will go or what you should say. My hope is that, over the next hour, you’ll feel comfortable to talk openly about your experiences and your perspective on student life. I truly want to understand what it’s like for you to be a student at [college name] college, especially as it relates to your experience with boredom. So feel free to stop at any time and ask questions.

If everything sounds alright so far, then I would ask you to read and sign the consent form, which states that you understand all parts of the study and that you agree to participate. It also ensures that you agree to having our conversation audio-recorded.
Appendix E
Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

**Researcher:** Kyle Hubbard (Ph.D. student), McGill University, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. Email: kyle.hubbard@xcollege.ca. Phone: (514) 826-5904

**Supervisor:** Nathan Hall, Ph.D., McGill University, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology. Email: nathan.c.hall@mcgill.ca. Phone: (514) 398-3452

**Title of Project:** Phenomenology of Boredom Regulation: Understanding Students’ Lived Experiences of Regulating Boredom in College

**Sponsors:** Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

**Purpose of the Study:** This is an invitation to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand and describe student’s experiences of regulating boredom in college.

**Study Procedures:** The research study has three parts, all of which will take place in the Winter 2017 semester. Part 1 is a one-on-one, in-person interview with the researcher that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will take place in an available classroom at the [college name] campus in February. In the interview you will be asked to talk about your educational background, your current experiences as a student, and your experiences with boredom specifically.

Part 2 will take place in March, and you will be asked to complete three online journal entries, which can be completed on any device, in any location, as long as there is an Internet connection. In the journal entries you will be asked to talk about a recent time you felt bored in school. Each entry should take you 10-20 minutes. You can choose to write about your experiences or record a video of yourself talking about your experiences. The option to record a video is provided for participants who express themselves best when talking rather than writing. The video recordings will be used by the researcher to identify common themes across all participants’ experiences. Participants will receive two email and two mobile phone (text) messages each week during the month of March to remind them to complete the journal entries.

Part 3 will be a follow-up interview with the researcher held in April. In this interview you will be asked to discuss your journal entries from Part 2 and provide feedback to the researcher on his interpretations of your experiences from Part 1 and 2. This interview will also be conducted in-person in an available classroom at the [college name] campus and will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews in Part 1 and 3 will be audio-recorded so that the researcher can have a record of the discussion, which will later be transcribed and then reviewed. The analysis will consist of reading the interview transcripts and identifying common themes.
across all participants’ experiences. Without the audio-recordings, rigorous, high-quality analyses would not be possible.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this research study is voluntary. This means you may refuse to participate in parts of the study, you may decline to answer any question, and you may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. If you withdraw from the study, all information you have provided up until that point will be destroyed unless you provide permission otherwise. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study before beginning or any time during the study.

**Potential Risks:** There are risks involved in all research studies. This study is anticipated to include only minimal risk. A possible risk of participation in this study is mild anxiety that may be associated with participating in one-on-one interviews.

**Potential Benefits:** Possible benefits you may experience from study participation include an opportunity to reflect on your boredom as a student and your strategies for managing boredom in school. The possible benefits of this study to others involve advancing the field of emotions in education by filling current gaps in the research literature. This study may also benefit college teachers and students by expanding their understanding of the experience of boredom and how to manage it to improve learning, motivation, and achievement in college.

**Compensation:** The research study consists of three parts, and you will be provided compensation for participating in each part. Compensation for participating in the first interview will be your choice of a $25 gift card for Amazon, Cineplex Movies, or Starbucks. Compensation for participating in the three journal entries will be your choice of a $15 gift card for Amazon, Cineplex Movies, or Starbucks. Compensation for participating in the third interview will be your choice of a $25 gift card for Amazon, Cineplex Movies, or Starbucks. Thus, if you participate in all three parts of the study, you will obtain $65 worth of gift cards.

**Confidentiality:** All information gathered in this study, including audiotapes, videotapes, and written materials, will be kept completely confidential. All recordings and information gathered in this study will only be accessible to the researcher and his supervisor who are identified at the top of this consent form. All recordings and information gathered are solely for the use of the researcher and will not be disseminated in public. All hardcopy records will be stored in a locked facility at McGill for 7 years after completion of the study. All electronic records (e.g., videotapes, online journal entries) will be stored on the researcher’s password protected computer until the study is completed. When the study is completed, all electronic records will be transferred to a password protected computer kept in a locked facility at McGill University for 7 years. After the storage time all information gathered will be destroyed. The results of the research will be disseminated via the researcher’s doctoral thesis to satisfy the requirements of McGill’s Ph.D. program in Educational Psychology. The researcher also plans to present the results at an international conference and to publish the results in an academic journal. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study.

The on-line journal entries (Part 2) are accessible to the researchers using a password but the raw data is stored on a server housed in the United States. All responses to the journal entries will be
stored and accessed in the USA. The survey company is subject to U.S. laws, in particular, to the
U.S. Patriot Act that allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers. If you
choose to participate in the journal entries you understand that your responses to the questions
will be stored and accessed in the USA.

You consent to receiving two email and two mobile phone (text) messages each week
during the month of March 2017 as reminders to complete the journal entries: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Questions: If you have any questions or concerns before consenting to participate or at any time
during the research study, you can contact the researcher, Kyle Hubbard, by email at
kyle.hubbard@xcollege.ca or by phone at (514) 826-5904. You can also contact his supervisor,
Nathan Hall, by email at nathan.c.hall@mcgill.ca or by phone at (514) 398-3452. If you have any
ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with
someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at (514) 398-6831
or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca. You can also contact the [college name] College Ethics Review
Board at REB@xcollege.ca

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study.
Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers
from their responsibilities. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher
will keep a copy.

Participant’s Name (please print):
_____________________________________________________

Participant’s Signature: _____________________ _____________________

Date: _____/_________/_________ Day/Month/Year
Appendix F
Interview 2 Protocol

Introduction //
Thank you for participating in the third and final phase of this research study. In February we met to discuss your educational background, your understanding of boredom, and your experiences with boredom regulation in school. In March you completed _____ journal entries where you talked about a recent experience with boredom at [college name]. Today, I’d like to better understand some of the things you talked about in Part 1 and Part 2. I’d also like to share my ideas and thoughts with you and have you provide some feedback: Do they make sense to you? Do they sound familiar? Do they fit with your experiences?

As with the first interview, it is important that I audio-record our discussion so I have a record of what we discussed, which I can return to in the future. If it’s alright with you, then I would like to start the audio recording now. I also want to remind you that your participation is voluntary, meaning you don’t have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable and you are free to leave at any time and there won’t be any punishment or repercussions. Everything you say and all of your personal information will be kept strictly confidential and secure. Your identity will only be known to me and my supervisor at McGill, and it will never be shared with anyone else, including other students, teachers, or [college name] College administration.

Presenting the Naïve Readings //
Based on what we discussed in Interview 1 and what you wrote in the journals, I put together a brief description of what I think boredom means to you as a student. It my interpretation of what boredom is like for you, how you experience it as a [college name] student. I’ve also created a description of how you cope with boredom as a student.

First, I’m going to read to you my interpretation of boredom as you experience it. Please listen carefully and reflect. I am happy to read it a second time if you would like. I want you to think about if what I’m saying makes sense to you. Do my words capture or describe your experience? Do they sound familiar to you? Or would you disagree or say “No Kyle, that doesn’t make sense to me.” This is a good thing! There is no right or wrong here. It’s important for me to know if I’m on the right track, and if I’ve got it wrong, I want you to help me understand why and how I can improve it. Does that seem okay with you?

*Present naïve reading of boredom

Tell me anything that came to mind while I was reading. Anything at all. Anything you liked, didn’t like, thought made sense or didn’t make sense. Anything you would want to change. Is there anything else you want to add? Any descriptions or ideas I might have missed?

Now, I’m going to read to you my interpretation of coping with boredom as you experience it. Again, please carefully reflect and provide feedback.

*Present naïve reading of boredom coping

Obtaining Clarifications //
Now I’m going to ask you some specific questions to help clarify what was said in Interview 1 and the journals. I’m also going to ask you to elaborate on certain phrases or descriptions that you provided.

*Specific questions will be contingent upon what the participants described in Parts 1 and 2. Some examples of questions might be:

**Examples:**
- In the first interview you mentioned ________________________. Can you elaborate on that point a bit more/can you tell me more about that/can you tell me what you meant?
- In your journal entry from March _____, you talked about __________________________. What did you mean by that?
- When you said __________________________ in your second journal entry, did you mean that ___________________________?
- I don’t fully understand what you meant by ______________________________. Were you saying that __________________________. Can you talk more about this?

**Wrap-up**

Alright, it’s officially the end of the interview. I will stop audio-recording now. Thank you so much for giving me your time today, and for helping me better understand your experiences as a student. This also marks the end of your participation in the study. At this point, I want to give you an opportunity to ask any last questions or vocalize any concerns you are having. If not, you have my email and phone number, so feel free to message me any time if anything comes up. Also, I want to ask if you would like to receive a final version of the research study when it is complete?
Appendix G
Naïve Descriptions of Boredom and Coping

Boredom

For Zed: Boredom in school means wanting to be somewhere else doing anything else, especially being in bed sleeping. Boredom means being uninterested while being unable to focus, listen or absorb anything. Boredom is feeling that paying attention to the teacher or the content would be a waste of time, as though nothing can be gained or learned from it.

For Amethyst: Boredom in school means wasting time, you are uninteresting in what is happening and do not perceive any benefit to what you are doing. Boredom is an aversive state that can feel empty, hollow and vacant, but can also feel like acute consciousness where you are filled with thoughts but cannot act and there is an overwhelming tension in your body and mind from which you must escape.

For Leslie: Boredom in school means being uninterested in what you’re doing and unable to fully focus on or engage with the task at hand. Boredom means you are of two minds, wanting to focus and be present while simultaneously feeling yourself zone out and surrender to the thoughts that want to wander and drift away. Boredom feels restless and fidgety.

For Joe: Boredom in school means you are uninterested in what is happening at the moment and you do not think it holds any personal importance. Boredom is a feeling of dislike for the present moment because it holds no enjoyment and it feels as if time has slowed down, such that the present moment drags on and on.

For Ben: Boredom in school means you are not stimulated or motivated and what you’re doing at that moment lacks meaning. Boredom feels like emptiness, like you have nothing to do and you’re just killing time. Boredom is a feeling to avoid or resist because it feels like you lack control over your life in that moment.

For Steven: Boredom in school means being uninterested and unstimulated by what is happening at that moment, time slows down, feels like it's almost unmoving and there's the desire to escape, to find something more interesting and exciting. To be bored is to feel like you're wasting valuable time.

For Ignacio: Boredom in school means you're stuck in routine that lacks importance and enjoyment. You feel as if you're on autopilot, disconnected, uninterested and unexcited. Boredom feels tiring, lazy and depressing. You aren’t able to focus on the task at hand, you don’t enjoy it and you feel the need to do something else.

For Sing: Boredom in school means being uninterested and unengaged with what is happening in class, you have trouble listening and understanding and your thoughts fly off to somewhere else, anywhere else that is unrelated to the class. Boredom feels sad, empty, unexciting, and uncomfortable, like an itch inside your skull that you can't scratch. When bored you feel you're wasting time and you want something else to do.
**For Ava:** Boredom in school means feeling uninterested, unmotivated and unexcited; boredom means repetition. You can't focus and you do not want to participate or listen. You don’t want to do anything at all. Boredom feels lazy, tired, restless; it feels like dying.

**For Asia:** Boredom in school means you are uninterested in what is going on in front of you, what you should be interested in. That’s what, you had that in quotations. What is going on feels unimportant and it feels like you are wasting time. Boredom feels like darkness, exhausting, sluggish, and sad. Time feels like it has slowed down and is dragging on. You want the moment to be over, you want to sleep, you want to escape. Boredom is often associated with feeling angry and frustrated.

**For Alex:** Boredom in school means you have nothing to do that is important, useful or interesting. Boredom feels tiring, draining, lonely and awkward or uncomfortable. Time appears to slow down and drag on. Boredom also feels like you’re wasting time and there’s a desire to seek out something more meaningful.

**For Sarah:** Boredom in school means being uninterested and unengaged in the present moment. Boredom feels unproductive and upsetting, as if you want to jump out of your own skin. You fidget, drift off, and are drawn to more stimulating alternatives.

**For Kumar:** Boredom means feeling disconnected from the world and the people around you. Boredom means that life has lost meaning or purpose. You feel stuck, static, incomplete, unable to move, and unable to do anything. Boredom feels like emptiness, loneliness, and unfulfilled desire for something more.

**For Shubham:** Boredom in school means you have nothing interesting or important to do. You're unable to focus, participate, or enjoy the present task. Boredom feels sleepy, tired and negative, and unenjoyable. It feels like you are dying. Boredom makes you want to fall asleep.

**For Anne:** Boredom in school means having nothing to do that is engaging, interesting, or important. Boredom means not being able to pay attention, focus, or participate. Boredom feels like a waste of time, you feel lost, and time goes by very slowly. Boredom means wanting something else to do that will engage or interest you.

### Coping

**For Zed:** Coping with boredom in school means staying in class but combating the feeling of wanting to be anywhere else by seeking a distraction, something more interesting or entertaining to give one’s attention to. To cope also means to strive for a distraction that would not be disrespectful to the teacher—that is, something accessible and quiet that would not distract others, primarily going on one’s phone or laptop.

**For Amethyst:** Coping with boredom in school means temporarily escaping the tension felt in your body and mind, and the accompanying anxiety that comes from feeling that you are wasting
Coping means doing another task or activity that is more productive or fulfilling either to pass the time or repair your focus.

For Leslie: Coping with boredom in school means continually reminding yourself that your attitude or mentality towards education or the class or the topic is how you can overcome the boredom, so your mentality, your attitude. Coping means exerting energy to reorient yourself and stay engaged in the present by making it meaningful and relevant, by sticking with it even though it pains you to do so. Coping with boredom means being self-disciplined, such that your thoughts never stray too far from the here and now.

For Joe: Coping with boredom in school means attempting to feel the boredom less intensely, or temporarily escaping it, by focussing on something more enjoyable and interesting. Coping also means doing something typically with your hands, to kill the time and avoid thinking about feeling bored.

For Ben: Coping with boredom in school means finding something to do or think to avoid feeling bored. Coping means taking back control of your life by finding something meaningful and stimulating rather than just killing time.

For Steven: Coping with boredom in school means curbing or killing boredom by feeling stimulated or productive and overcoming the feeling that you are wasting time. Coping means fighting boredom without disrespecting the professor or adversely affecting your grades.

For Ignacio: Coping with boredom in school means realizing you're bored and finding ways to control your boredom or get out of your routine. Coping means striving to feel connected, passionate and excited by engaging in activities you enjoy and interacting with others.

For Sing: Coping with boredom in school means seeking an escape, anything to fill in the emptiness or to scratch the itch that boredom has created. To cope with boredom in school is to waste time attempting to seek temporary comfort and enjoyment in thoughts and behaviours that provide a distraction from the drudgeries of boredom.

For Ava: Coping with boredom in school means clearing your mind of the boredom, removing yourself from the present and blocking out everyone. Coping means finding a temporary escape or distraction from the boredom, something interesting or exciting. Coping also means overcoming the feeling of laziness when something important arises.

For Asia: Coping with boredom in school means anything other than having to feeling bored and think about feeling bored. Coping means searching for a distraction or an escape, something to transport you to a better reality where your boredom is no longer the focus of consciousness. Coping also means anything that can kill time and make time go by faster. For Alex: Coping with boredom in school means, first and foremost, that you do something, anything to pass or kill the time and make it go by faster. Coping means avoiding or escaping boredom because doing nothing of importance or interest can be unbearable.
For Sarah: Coping with boredom in school means being aware you are bored, recognizing how it is affecting your focus or attention, and actively resisting the desire to fully disengage from the present task. Coping means attempting to control boredom such that it does not adversely affect your learning or performance.

For Kumar: Coping with boredom means stopping the cycle of doing things just for doing them—that is, trying to understand the larger impact of our lives and our actions and doing things to feel fulfilled, to feel joy and happiness. Coping means having awareness of your boredom and what it signifies and trying to overcome it. In the short term this can mean keeping busy through activities but in the long term it is, mean seeking connection, meaning, and the greater purpose of your life.

For Shubham: Coping with boredom or dealing with boredom in school means you look for something interesting or enjoyable to do. Coping means finding a distraction that feels good, such that it can help you escape the feeling of boredom or take a break from boredom so you can come back refreshed and prepared to focus.

For Anne: Coping with boredom in school means doing something or focusing on something to escape the feeling of being bored. Coping means finding something to do so that you do not focus on the time or to make the time go by faster. Make sense?
Appendix H
Excluded Journals

Leslie- Journal 2
I take religious classes with my siblings at a family friends house, but haven't been attending regularly for a while since the school assignments have been piling up. A class was arranged for one of my siblings, and myself (but the other two weaseled their way out of it), and it was after I had a long shift at work. Let me just say, that the second I stepped in that classroom I could feel the tension in the air, because my tutor was cross that I haven't been attending the classes regularly, and didn't call her. the way I see it, I'm just prioritizing and getting my stuff together-religious classes drain me, and I need my senses to put that essay together. Anyway, the last class I attended was about 4 months ago (^_^;), and I haven't reviewed the material before arriving to class. My sister and I were sitting there for about fifteen minutes (only hour and 15 minutes to go from this point), and I could feel my mind straying from the text, and my imagination was soaring because the environment was fascinating enough for my attention to stray and focus on my surroundings. There were plenty of weird posters, cool vases, interesting furniture, distracting noises like the faint sound of a radio, cars driving by, interesting wallpaper, and all sorts of fun things that made one thought lead to another. The way the class works is there is a small group of people sitting in a circle on a cushion on the floor with a new chapter from our religious book, the quran, sitting in front of us on a folding book stand, and each student recites a verse from this chapter. So its not that the content of the lesson is uninteresting, but, well, i don't understand the Arabic language well, so i have no idea what is being said. Its weird because I can recite well, but I don't understand what exactly I am saying. So when others are reciting, its very boring, and I focus on really unimportant things like " hey is that a new shirt so and so is wearing?", or " that person's voice sounds nasally, I wonder if they're sick?..". I get bored and inattentive very rapidly, and so i use this time to make to-do lists, and think about all the freedom I will have when I get out of class. I try to stay focused on the lesson, but I find it hard to grasp what the translation of the text is when its being discussed, and I know that if I admit to my aloofness in class-I'll have to stay behind overtime. UM NO. I feel very jittery, and grit my teeth a lot only because I know I'm limited in my movement (when I have the folding shelf on my lap, and am sitting on the floor, so I can't shake my legs like I do when I'm feeling bored). So once I got over not being able to move, or express my inattentiveness, I slump with defeat, and start imagining fun scenarios (but at least it's religion oriented!), and because I'm dramatic one thought leads to another and the drama builds. I got caught losing my place in the reading when it was my turn to recite, and tried to play it off like my finger slipped from it's place, and I confused the line I was supposed to continue from. Did this work? I don't know, I think I'm more slick than I really am (but I doubt it). I still vaguely follow my finger along even when I'm not paying attention by waiting for pauses in reciting to know which section I'm on next. The worst part of this class was feeling embarrassed and ashamed when the tutor caught me glancing at the clock- multiple times.

Joe- Journal 3
I felt bored while waiting for the bus today (the bus comes every 30 minutes). So I was stuck outside to 30 minutes as I had just missed the bus. I was listening to music, and simply pacing back and forth. It was pretty dreadful, just waiting (I hate waiting). I would pace around the bus stop, counting my steps, singing the songs that were Playing within my head. I kind of zone out
during things like this, kind of shutting down my brain and just absorbing what I see. The things I usually think about when I'm waiting for the bus is usually somehow related to graphic design, just like looking at the logos and how they were made for a certain object.

**Ben- Journal 1**
I was in the bus station after school waiting for the bus. It was very cold outside and I could not wait for the bus to get here and get into the bus. I noticed that when I am bored I tend to start thinking about other things. This might be other important issues in my life, or even just start to analyze the environment around me. For example, when I am waiting for the bus I immediately noticed that the temperature is very cold. At the same time, I noticed that someone is wearing white sneakers, I started to think about why those sneakers are so white, it might be that they are new, do they look good, and where can I get one. So I guess how I feel when I am bored is that I try to distract myself with something that is meaningful or atleast seemingly more interesting that the state that I am in, whether it is through action or thought.

**Ignacio- Journal 1**
Yesterday, today In the very first hours of the day to be precise I couldn't sleep and felt the need to do something, I was bored. What I did to entertain myself is not the important part, however, what I did was go through all the news feed from Facebook, Instagram, twitter and snapchat until I was sleepy enough to actually fall asleep. After going through all the feed I started thinking very deeply on the topic. I realized that being bored is a good thing, but it depends. It can be a bad thing as well. In my opinion it has to do with personality. In reading week I had things to do such as study, going out to discover downtown by myself and find new places bars and cool stuff to buy, etc. I realized that when I was bored, that was the alarm that told me to do something. I am 55% extrovert and 45% introvert, that means that I most of the time I'm outgoing and can be with people having fun, but I enjoy my alone time. So because I'm more on the extrovert side, when I feel the boring alarm I act, in result I am active and the boring disappears. Thats the key thing I decided to act. Many people feel bored but they don't act, leading to a accumulation of boredom leading to feeling more bored and I might say even depressed. It makes sense, If I feel bored but I don't act the feeling will remain and If every time I feel that way and I don't do something I will feel depressed because being always bored without putting some excitement on your life will lead to a depression. Personality can be changed. I know people that are 100 % introverts but as time goes by they start acting and going places because they got tired of being bored seeing the ceiling. I hope you get the idea of my thoughts. In conclusion it can be a good thing if you decide to act and bad if you don't because it accumulates. When I felt bored I acted, I am aware of my feelings and as I told you as an International student many heavy feelings are felt and I learned to know them and meditate about them. People should be aware of their feelings because how can I act if I'm not aware of what I'm feeling, instead just accept what "reality" is, reality is relative, because what I feel is different from what other person feels and their maturity.

**Ignacio- Journal 3**
Just finished my daily doses of classes, on my way home. I felt the feeling of not wanting to do anything. After an exhausting day the only thing in my mind is sleep. Half way on my trip home I started listening to music to enjoy the experience a little more. When I arrived home I felt
bland, you know nothing in my mind just on autopilot. I woke up afterwards and kept doing the routine of homework.

**Sing- Journal 1**

I was on the bus from school, it wasn't a tiring day, but just a normal day. and it is the first day after study week. i still have this "relaxation inertia" it's a pain to change back gears to study again. I think it was midway when i started to feel bored. i didn't really notice exactly when it happened but i was suddenly lost in thought. That day i had a good math class, i liked the class, it was interesting. i didn't really think about it but i had the sudden urge to remember the stuff discussed then just hours ago, it was good i came up with some really interesting stuff. But before i knew it, the topic suddenly shifted to my future goals... perhaps i correlated it from the fact that im studying right now and what i want to do with it. again before i knew it im nearing the stop that i have to get off. time flies... Now i do think there may be some benefit to boredom.
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