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“I’m in the House Bored”: TikTok’s Sonic Mediation of Boredom and Class in the Pandemic Home

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the #Boredinthehouse TikTok trend as sonic and visual mediation of domestic boredom during COVID-19 lockdowns. Employing Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis, it examines how the viral sound facilitated collective expressions of boredom while exposing socioeconomic disparities through performative depictions of domestic life. Analyzing more than 4000 TikTok comments, this research focuses on how features like pools and mansions became symbols of class visibility. The findings highlight how TikTok’s music ecologies and platform conventions shaped affective responses, framing boredom as a digitally mediated critique of privilege, productivity, and domestic normality.

KEYWORDS

TikTok; domesticity; boredom; wealth; Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

Introduction

During the early COVID-19 (henceforth COVID) pandemic, many were “called to sit on the couch” in their homes (Kendall 42). Alongside these lockdowns, TikTok emerged as a pivotal space for mediating and shaping pandemic experiences, as seen in the estimated 180% rise in TikTok users from 2020 to 2021 (Tankovska). Bell, Blythe, and Sengers note that “everyone is an expert on the home” (149), but lockdowns arguably transformed one’s perspective of home and the domestic, altering it from a place where one can typically choose to stay or leave to one that became more confining and ultimately more boring. Never in our lifetime has the world experienced such a mass exodus from the (physical) public sphere and confinement to domestic spaces.

On March 4 2020, American musician and content creator Curtis Roach¹ uploaded a TikTok featuring himself lying on his living room floor, singing the lyrics, “I’m bored in the house and I’m in the house bored,” while creating a percussive beat by snapping his fingers and pounding his fist against the floor.² Sonically, the rhythmic looped structure mimicked the monotony of lockdown life. Although released a week before North American lockdowns began, the sound became an unintentional anthem of pandemic boredom, resonating with millions who soon found themselves socially isolated yet digitally connected through a shared experience of domestic boredom. The “Bored in

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the House” sound³ quickly became one of the app’s most widely used at the time. As of late 2020, Roach’s original video had 7.2 million likes and 54 million views, with 2.6 million TikTok videos using the sound. A remix by Tyga, released on March 21 2020, further expanded the trend’s reach⁴ through a more established celebrity’s endorsement. Unlike Roach’s fairly static appearance, Tyga’s version incorporated movement, showcasing domestic spaces as performative settings by filming himself moving about his house—an approach that influenced the way other TikTok creators then used the sound in their own displays of domestic spaces.

This research examines the #Boredinthehouse discourse and TikTok platform as (inter)mediators of domestic boredom, positioning the viral trend within broader discussions of social media during the COVID pandemic and contexts of mediated boredom. I use Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) to examine how the TikTok trend operates through entangled sociocultural, technological, and affective dimensions. The methodology is also inspired by diffraction (Barad, “Diffracting”); as Sarah Doyle and Tara Fenwick explain, diffractive methodologies “focus on *describing*; it’s stories about how things come together” (emphasis added) rather than causal explanations. This study is therefore about exploring *how* the world is, not *why*, while acknowledging that there is power in choosing the scope and objects of study. In this framework, #Boredinthehouse is not merely a viral trend but a site of complex interrelations between domestic life, boredom, and online music cultures. As such, I focus on reactions to depictions of domestic material wealth through #Boredinthehouse TikToks, outlining how they exposed socioeconomic inequalities in the experiences of *home* during pandemic lockdowns.

Rather than seeking a unifying interpretation, this paper offers investigations of how these phenomena exist within technologically mediated boredom. TikTok’s affordances facilitate the production, decontextualization, and recontextualization of music or sound, reflective of the wider evolution of digital music practices; the networked nature of this engagement underscores broader shifts in popular music consumption, where musical fragments become embedded in platformed media ecologies. By tracing these diffractions within the #Boredinthehouse trend, I situate boredom, domesticity, and platformed media within wider discourses of historical and socioeconomic entanglements.

Relational methods, as advocated by Fox and Alldred, and Martí, provide alternatives to conventional representational approaches, shifting from deciphering musical texts and practices toward “approaching music as something that is felt and lived” (Martí 159). Central to this study is thus the question: *What does the #Boredinthehouse sound reveal about boredom, domestic spaces, audiovisual platforms, and perceptions of material wealth?* In framing these discussions through a relational approach to media and music, this paper explores the mediation of domestic life during a unique period of time whereby one’s domestic spaces became more physically confining through government regulations but also increasingly “visible” in the public sphere through social media platforms such as TikTok.

Sounding Out Boredom: Music, Affect, and Platformed Coping

Boredom is fundamental to this research, as it is central to the lyrics of the #Boredinthehouse sound, the wider circumstances that inspired it, and the conditions

through which TikTok users recontextualized the sound. Boredom has previously been explored from a variety of perspectives, often with a caveat that boredom is seemingly underexplored. Consequently, boredom is not necessarily underexplored, but the knowledge is scattered, lacking a central definition. It has been defined in relation to states of high or low arousal, as a reaction to (or symptom of) modernity, or as an affective reaction to a state of limbo (Heidegger). Boredom has been traced historically to concepts of ennui (Barnett), to acedia (Martin, Sadlo, and Stew; Nash and Lyon), as a byproduct of the industrial revolution (Berg and O'Neill), and as hypothetically impossible within digital culture (Buchanan). Fredric Jameson found that "boredom is a very useful instrument with which to explore the past, and to stage a meeting between it and the present" (303). As such, the historicity of boredom is a useful starting point for the #Boredinthehouse case study, recognizing that these phenomena do not exist independently from space and time and can be read in connection with historical practices.

Within the relationship between music technocultures and COVID boredom, more specifically, Lauren Fink et al. note that COVID brought about new forms of public support for music and diversified forms of musical engagement, from Italians singing on balconies to live-streamed bedroom concerts on Instagram, which exist under the broad concept of *coronamusic* (Fink et al.; Hansen). Similarly, Fink et al. note that music functioned as emotion-based coping during pandemic lockdowns, helping to regulate emotions while serving as another tool in connecting people. They call for more research into the different roles of music listening vs. music making for coping purposes, which this study partially responds to by considering the process of producing TikTok content as counteracting boredom in itself. In this framework, producing becomes less about the music itself and more about what is afforded within the use and reuse of sounds within platformization.

Boredom has also been considered as a response to situations of powerlessness "and the failure of purposeful meaning" (Wolf Lepenies, quoted in Misztal 111), which is fitting in discussing COVID lockdowns where agency was reduced, leaving many "unable to engage in satisfying activity" (Eastwood et al. 482). Many turned to social media during lockdowns to pass time as they were held in a state of limbo. Murphy, Hill, and Flaherty, building from Heidegger's distinctions between profound and superficial boredom and the idea that "boredom wishes to tell us something" (278), note that boredom during lockdowns could lead to productive experiences; superficial boredom was characterized by escapism, leading to increased social media use, whereas profound boredom was marked by a desire to retreat from social media, using the time to embrace relative solitude and ultimately reorienting one's life toward new "tribal passions" through the desire for social connections (Murphy, Hill, and Flaherty). In both superficial and profound boredom during COVID, boredom is something that can be shared, uncovering what it means to be *bored together*. In response, the current case study explores how being bored together became mediated through a viral sound, with productivity being defined in relation to content creation and social media engagement. Desire for social connection may have driven people to the TikTok platform during lockdown, but, as will be discussed, in the act of "escaping" from lockdown boredom, TikTok users were also put into spaces that influenced them to reorient their perceptions of domestic "normality."

The very act of creating content negates boredom, and due to the always-on quality of social media platforms, there is debate about whether one can even experience boredom in contemporary society. Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that since late modernity there is a sense that we have a right *not* to be bored, which is connected to the rise of a “culture of narcissism” within neoliberalism (Anderson, “Time-Still’d” 742; Anderson, “Affect”). Discourses of digital boredom center on the “multiple practices of presencing” (Hand 115) that may obscure the possibility of profound boredom. Further back in European history of thought, Rousseau noted the elitism, or privilege, of being able to do nothing, or to be without doing, whereas in contemporary society we see a similar sense of privilege in being able to be bored—to be able to remove oneself from the constant expectations of filling time (Berg and O’Neill) or of producing capital in the form of “content.”

The literature involving the relationship between media technologies and boredom during COVID exists alongside more established assumptions concerning increased social media use, youth resocialization in pandemic contexts (Southwick et al.), and the spread of (mis)information. It extends these discourses into affective responses and coping strategies, as connected to psychological factors, such as boredom proneness or sense of meaning or purpose in life. While the current study doesn’t directly engage with the psychology of boredom, it connects that subject to the use of media or music technologies within the experience of domestic boredom, and to the perception of boredom as related to displays of material wealth, which can also be associated with how meaning is conceived in one’s life.

Entangled Methods: CTDA and Relational Reading of TikTok Trends

This study employs Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) to survey the discursive ecology of the #Boredinthehouse TikTok trend. Because of the varied understandings of “boredom,” I find that considering the phenomenon from the perspective of *how* technological and cultural discourses around boredom are intertwined, reveals more than the *why*. The object of study is therefore the original Curtis Roach “Bored in the House” TikTok, the videos created with his sound, and the comments therein. CTDA, as developed by André Brock, builds on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methods, particularly those established by Foucault, to examine how discourse and power are co-constituted through digital technologies. CTDA is useful within this case study as it explicitly engages with the affordances and technocultures of the TikTok platform alongside an analysis of the discourse. It recognizes that meaning is produced not only through language but also through the technological systems and social structures that shape how discourse circulates and is received.

The 50 most-liked TikToks using the original Curtis Roach “Bored in the House” sound were collected from the homepage for the sound, where the content tends to be arranged descending from most-liked, rather than by personalized algorithms. Within the most-liked #Boredinthehouse TikToks, only posts using Curtis Roach’s original challenge format were selected, and, within that, only those that included depictions of houses, which tended to be those with visual indicators of a high level of material or domestic wealth. From these 16 TikToks, 7540 comments were extracted, which was reduced to a data set of 4405 English-language comments. For context, most users

recreating Curtis Roach's trend do not maintain his stance facing the camera, with a single shot, lying on the floor. Instead, most use the original sound but Tyga's more physical performance, picking up on the lyrical focus on *house* to gesturally depict being "bored" *throughout* their "home." While CTDA is the primary methodological framework guiding this study, I also draw on diffraction as a lens through which to explore the data, recognizing the relational and messy (Postill and Pink) nature of digital meaning-making. I am concerned with the music ecology of TikTok (Avdeeff, "Music") and how the decontextualization and recontextualization of sounds on the platform become intertwined with wider social structures and ways of being in the world. In Barad's words, "the point is not merely that knowledges have material consequences but that practices of knowing are *specific material arrangements that participate in reconfiguring the world*" (Meeting 91).

The emphasis on relationality, as opposed to cause-effect relationships, works well when examining TikTok users' use and reuse of audiovisual content; it becomes less about correlations that emerge from within the #Boredinthehouse discourse and more about taking the explorations into new and unpredictable places through provocations (Murriss and Bozalek). With this approach, I am not looking to uncover an *objective* reality of the #Boredinthehouse TikTok trend, as something frozen in time. Instead, I consider ways to think about music, social media, and affect that are not centered on singular interpretations that assume a positionality removed from the phenomena.

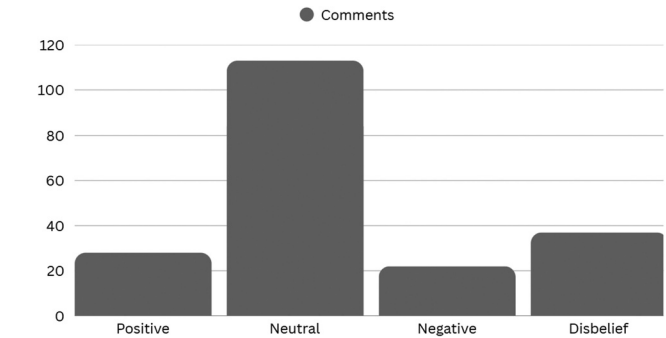
Findings and Discussion

By opening up one's domestic space, or one's *home*, to the digital public sphere through the #Boredinthehouse TikTok challenge during pandemic lockdowns, the trend countered the widespread (and often celebrity-endorsed) narrative that "we're all in this together."⁵ The mediation of domestic spaces through this trend and sound, coupled with pandemic boredom, showed that we were *not* all in this together, at least not materially. The following discussion explores the comments on #Boredinthehouse TikToks that associated neoliberal perspectives of success with a perceived inability to experience boredom, thereby equating material wealth with the exclusion of boredom. In line with the CTDA method, first the relationship between discourse and platform will be outlined, followed by broader critical engagement with the discourse and sociocultural implications.

Platform Vernacular and the TikTok Politics of Commenting

The #Boredinthehouse TikToks and associated comments can be situated within wider platform ecologies, recognizing how platform-specific language emerges, including speech patterns, slang, syntax, and the like. To provide an overview of the 4405 English-language comments, the most frequent words include "bored," "house," "rich," "pool," and "mansion." These terms are indicative of both the aesthetic themes of the TikToks and the discursive trends.

Sentiment analysis conducted manually on a random sample of 200 comments, as seen in [table 1](#), shows that a large proportion of the comments are neutral in tone, with positive comments toward depictions of material wealth being slightly more common

Table 1. Sentiment Analysis of the “Bored in the House” Comments.

than negative comments, and a higher prevalence of comments expressing disbelief regarding creators’ capacity for boredom in certain types of houses. This is largely in line with previous research into discourse analysis of large social media data sets whereby comments are predominantly neutral, regardless of how viral trends are then reported in the mainstream press, which tends to be more polarizing, encouraging wider audiences to “take a side” or ideological stance on an issue (Avdeeff, “Say It”). In the #Boredinthehouse case study, many of the comments are sarcastic in tone, trending from significantly neutral to perspectives of disbelief, with the implication being that viewers are engaging with boredom and the domestic, but from a point of view that may be more observant than judgmental of depictions of wealth.

The largely neutral response, combined with the fact that most comments are quite short (average character length, $n = 30$), also aligns with commenting conventions entrenched in the TikTok technoculture, with established responses to videos, particularly on TikToks that are likely to go viral or are created by users with a high number of followers. For example, responding with a singular “first,” “early,” or emoji is a way to increase one’s own visibility on the platform.

The 10 most-liked comments from the data set offer further insight into the discursive themes of the comments, which focus on questioning how someone could be bored in a mansion and on the presumption that someone *should not be bored* if they are perceived to have a high degree of material wealth (see Table 2):

Table 2. Most-liked “Bored in the House” TikTok comments.

Comment	Number of Likes
That’s your house? I would never be bored in that house. Damn	103,317
We can’t lose you that’s why your stuck in there sorry	90,069
bro it’s bored in the HOUSE, not a freaking PALACE	72,945
Do y’all need a gardener? Or a pet?	40,536
hi do you need an art teacher? hahaa	39,399
Bored	25,430
he do be bored tho	18,856
Ok so u rich rich drop that credit card info	17,655
If you are bored in this house, what’ll you be in my house? 🤔	10,190
This guy got Kylie lmfao	9,350

Within these most-liked comments, and in the wider data set, there is a shortening of words like R U (are you) and ur (you are), which connects to older ways of texting due to the restrictions of the T9 keyboard⁶ and SMS character lengths. It is unlikely that most of those participating in, or commenting on, this challenge have experience using T9 phone keyboards, and typing this way is more challenging than writing out entire words, considering the ubiquity of AutoCorrect. Further examples from the discourse include:

boii ur in a mansion
 how r u bored in that house? – I mean mansion?
 Y r u bored tho?

Beyond the shortening of words, which is not unique to TikTok, the ways in which trends emerge in the structure and content of comments can be interpreted as part of the collective experiences and cultures afforded through the app. The relationship between intellectual property and content has developed in platform-specific ways. For example, directly recreating others' videos or challenges or trends is expected and would not constitute *theft*; however, recreation without acknowledgment of the originator can bring about polarizing responses and accusations of appropriation. While TikTok comments are not generally exposed to the same level of scrutiny by users, it is common for people to comment in the same way as others, instead of *liking* the first person who commented with a similar statement. As such, starting a comment with “How . . . ” is common throughout this data set, usually as a starting point to ask: How are you bored in a house like that? To demonstrate the syntax trend across the TikTok comments:

how can you be bored
 how can YOU be bored?
 how u be bored in THAT house
 how can you be bored in that kind of big house
 How do u get bored

The technoculture of TikTok, made possible through app affordances and its foundation in the audiovisual, facilitates platform-specific modes of engagement, particularly as seen here in the comments. As will be further explored, these conventions can inadvertently perpetuate and amplify existing socioeconomic perceptions and biases. Examination of the platform cultures is central to the CTDA framework, in order to examine the relationship between platform, discourse, and power.

Mansions, Pools, and Perceptions: Class Visibility in the Digital Home

This section explores how domestic spaces and class are made visible through the #Boredinthehouse trend, building from the TikTok technoculture and platform affordances. Before social media, “home” was almost entirely within the private sphere. People generally had to be invited into homes on a personal basis and tended to see homes that would be materially similar to their own. Social media platforms, and particularly YouTube in the early instances, opened up homes in ways that were not formerly possible. As much of the research into bedroom cultures has shown, bedrooms have become public in the digital sphere, the home something to be curated for public display.

In response to this new access to others' homes, and counter to the prevailing lockdown idiom that "we're all in this together," a common narrative within the TikTok comments is a questioning of how someone could be bored in what appear to be upper-middle, or upper-class, houses:

How can you be bored living in a mansion and a hover board. I bet we all would like to have those things 😊😭
 How r u bored in your mansion filled with everything u could ever imagine
 that a mansion not a house ma'am use a proper audio pls
 If I had a house like that I'll never be bored again 😊
 SO HOW ARE YOU BORED IN THAT MANSION? EXPLAIN
 You have a millionaire mansion how are you even bored?
 How are you bored when you have a HUGE house and a pool!

And in relation to the use of the word *house* in the lyrics, we see comments implying that what viewers are seeing is not a *house* but a *mansion* (or palace, or similar). There is a sense that users are making connections between types of domestic spaces and markers of material wealth. I would not go so far as to say that there is a typology emerging in what constitutes a house vs. a mansion from this discourse; however, features within a large house, such as expansive space, elaborate fixtures, visible technology, and a pool are widely noted. Unexpectedly, drawing attention to the presence of a pool in one's home as an indicator of wealth was a common theme in the discourse. Even in homes that would not be considered mansions, having a pool seemed to preclude the potential to experience boredom. These comments raise questions about the relationship between pool ownership and the perceived negation of boredom: How is it that a pool is perceived as negating the potential for boredom in ways that houses framed as *normal* (pool-less) would not?

The perspective that material objects, whether a large house or a pool, impede the potential for domestic boredom in ways that a "normal" house would not is intriguing as all houses have the potential to be full of material objects, and most of the "mansions" in these TikToks depict expansive space instead of an abundance of material goods. Throughout, there is less attention being paid to the relationship between *people* in domestic spaces and the potential for boredom. For example, even in sparsely decorated large homes, several comments note:

Go for a swim since u have a pool idkkk 😊
 How can you be bored when you have a pool?
 how r u boared u have a freaking pool and a canine spoiled jk

Interestingly, the focus on the pool as a preclusion to boredom reflects historical distinctions in private vs. public pool use, as outlined in Jeff Wiltse's social history of American swimming pools. He notes that the mid-twentieth century witnessed a significant socio-spatial reconfiguration of leisure, marked by a shift from communal public swimming pools to private pools and exclusive social club facilities. This transition represented a distinct retreat from public life, driven by a desire for privacy and social exclusivity in response to the desegregation of public pools along markers of race, gender, and class. The domestic confinement enforced by the pandemic lockdowns could therefore be interpreted in relation to this historical inclination toward privatized leisure and social retreat. Consequently, the #Boredinthehouse

trend may be read not only as a contemporary affective response to pandemic isolation but also as a digitally mediated manifestation of a long-standing societal trend toward privatized leisure and insular social practices, amplified (and enforced) by the demands of the pandemic.

In addition, Wiltse argues that the post-1950 proliferation of private pools effectively resegregated swimming along class lines, thereby diminishing equitable access to public recreation for many socioeconomically marginalized communities. From this perspective, the digital public of domestic spaces on platforms such as TikTok functions as a contemporary mechanism through which existing socioeconomic disparities are rendered visible, underscoring how access to materially comfortable and experientially stimulating environments, whether physical or digitally mediated, can remain distinct along class lines.

Related to the gendered response to this social phenomenon, previous research by Tina Kendall on YouTube tutorials to relieve boredom found that it was mostly young women who were making these types of videos. She questions why the work of boredom management would predominantly fall to young women, while connecting this to the role of affective labor in the attention economy. The #Boredinthehouse challenge, in contrast, was participated in by both young men and young women, suggesting that mediating the affective labor of boredom did not primarily fall to women. Within the 50 most-liked TikToks using Curtis Roach's "Bored in the House" sound, 40% ($n = 20$) are by male creators, 36% ($n = 18$) by female creators, 16% ($n = 8$) with both male and female participants visible, and 8% ($n = 4$) that did not contain people. Scrolling through the rest of the TikToks from this sound suggests that this gender split is consistent throughout. This begs the question of whether this reflects a wider shift in the gendering of content creation on the platform or in the relationship between boredom and the desire to shift into a state of productivity.

Within the TikTok comments, however, gendered differences occur in comments to women in large houses. While "flexing" gestures are highly ingrained in TikTok conventions, and existing research primarily identifies flexing as a male-dominated activity, it is noteworthy that accusatory comments regarding TikTok creators "flexing" in the #Boredinthehouse data set are predominantly directed toward female creators when depicting certain markers of material wealth in their house:

Bruh she really be flexin on it doe 🤔
 This flex is not subtle
 Are u actually bored or flexing? 😏

Social media "flexing" can be considered as a form of conspicuous consumption, a practice deeply embedded within digital self-presentation (Yusainy et al.; Rosida et al.; Yusuf and Yusuf). As a social signaling strategy, these overt depictions of material wealth are often performative acts, undertaken to elicit specific audience reactions to enhance engagement metrics. There are challenges in determining the meaning of these accusations, though, as they can be interpreted either as celebration and admiration for the performance of material wealth or as an attempt to discredit authentic portrayals of domestic material wealth. Given that these videos frequently display homes consistent with upper-middle-class familial environments, they may not constitute flexing in an

inherently performative or inauthentic manner; rather, the perceived “flex” could be more accurately interpreted as a display of *conspicuous affluence*.

Further, although there were only two videos in the top 50 most-liked that involved people undertaking domestic labor, such as cleaning and cooking, these were both created by women. This is not enough content to draw conclusions from but can be read in connection with whom domestic labor historically tends to fall to, the rhythms of domestic labor, and the boredom associated with such labor. In contrast to the accusatory discourse of “flexing,” the comments for male creators in similar upper-middle-class homes were more likely to ask for a house tour, implying an ownership role rather than that of domestic caretaker. The comments demonstrate a reinforcing of traditional gendered expectations around domestic spaces where “flexing” implies a perceived bragging about material wealth, while “house tour” implies an invitation to explore a male-controlled domain. These findings have implications for understanding how digital platforms, despite their potential for disruption of gender norms, can inadvertently perpetuate and amplify existing societal biases and power structures.

Boredom as Digital Affect and Social Critique

The final section reframes boredom not as a neutral affect but as a socially stratified and digitally mediated phenomenon, taking into account its relational and collective dimensions and the tension between being *bored together* and socioeconomic differences. The discussion explores the comments on #Boredinthehouse TikToks that associated neoliberal perspectives of success with a perceived inability to experience boredom, thereby equating material wealth with the exclusion of boredom.

Gilbert Simondon noted that individuals come into contact with society only through the mediation of collectives, which Gwénaëlle André takes further by differentiating between a collective and a community. Those engaged with the #Boredinthehouse trend would not necessarily be considered a community, but they do form a collective and in this case are also responding to a collective experience of domestic boredom through pandemic lockdown. From a relational perspective, the individual is thus understood through their relationship to these digital collectives, brought together ephemerally through a viral sound. The #Boredinthehouse trend extended which collectives one might encounter, thereby influencing one’s perceptions of their own socioeconomic status and material wealth. There is the potential here to alter one’s sense of *normality*, as defined by the process of constructing meaning in ordinary experiences (Miztal). In other words, one’s *frame* for defining a “normal house” is altered through the experience of seeing into the “normality” of others. Building on Erving Goffman’s argument that *frames* help provide a sense of safety and predictability and help to make sense of one’s own circumstances, Barbara Miztal notes that frames also provide a useful basis for understanding the relationship between normality and boredom:

By conceptualizing the idea of normality as an outcome of people’s potential to construct meaning of their ordinary experiences and by looking at boredom as the state of meaninglessness, we can also gain an essential insight [in]to collective life, as these phenomena are symptomatic of deeper social processes [with. . .] consequences [that] are detrimental to the quality of social life. (102)

Tina Kendall, drawing on danah boyd's work on collective imagined communities on social media, argues that the potential for shared experiences of boredom connects teens through communication platforms, while Andreas Elpidorou finds that the democratic aspects of boredom potentially extend it to be something that affects us all. It's also important to note, though, that the *affect* may not be the same. Social standing and socioeconomic status affect, or even transform, the experience of boredom, which is often connected to feelings of purpose or meaning in one's life. As such, the feeling of lack of autonomy can enhance the negative experiences of boredom, whereby the privilege of boredom is connected to the ability to use time productively.

Within the #Boredinthehouse discourse, there exists a sense that boredom can be a shared affective response *within* segments of socioeconomic status; and boredom can be shared *in response to* certain depictions of socioeconomic status *other than one's own* by means of questioning others' potential to be bored in relation to their perceived material status. This is not to suggest that commenters are necessarily experiencing poverty or lacking agency; rather, it points to the idea that boredom is not a universally experienced emotion. Instead of acknowledging the potential privilege embedded in the capacity to feel bored, there emerges a perception that boredom is incompatible with material wealth, as if affluence should preclude such affective states. Historically, "conspicuous leisure" has been interpreted as a demonstration of wealth (Thorstein Veblen as quoted in Berg and O'Neill), and boredom as an "elitist disease" (Rousseau, quoted in Berg and O'Neill). The #Boredinthehouse discourse continues this narrative, framing performative depictions of wealth as antithetical to the conditions of boredom.

The historical economic "privilege" of boredom aligns with Berg and O'Neill's argument that boredom has shifted from a symptom of elite leisure to a marker of precarity, where the inability to act meaningfully is tied to structural inequalities. During COVID lockdowns, being "Bored in the House" became mundane, but the inequitable experience of that boredom was made explicit through its sonic mediation on TikTok. Within neoliberalism, boredom is often framed as a failure of individual imagination or effort, rather than a structural condition, which helps to explain the disbelief expressed in response to the perceived wealth of TikTok users, as they use the #Boredinthehouse sound in performative displays of "boredom." Roach's viral sound, on the one hand, transformed domestic pandemic boredom into a shared performative experience, but, on the other hand, exposed users to *homes* outside their own socioeconomic status in ways not commonly possible before social media.

Taken together, these results suggest that this collective experience of pandemic lockdown, through its sonic mediation, highlights profound social divisions. This observation suggests that digital platforms, such as TikTok, while seemingly democratizing expression and creating shared cultural moments, can also serve as platforms to amplify existing societal inequalities. The collective experience of boredom becomes a vehicle for revealing the unequal material conditions that underpin it, transforming an individual affective state into a site of social critique. This has broader implications for understanding how online collectivity can unite and divide, and how digital spaces can simultaneously foster connection and manufacture controversy.

Within the sonic and audiovisual trends on TikTok, it has become important both for users to capitalize on trending sounds to build their content and drive engagement and for commenters to engage in potentially inflammatory ways, to

also drive engagement to their own profiles and content. The historical privilege of being bored, as signified through the pool, is therefore contrasted with a “perform-or-else” neoliberal ideology (Kendall) that exists on TikTok and other social media platforms. The accusations of “flexing” form a critique of the perceived inauthenticity within this space, especially when displays of boredom seem out of place alongside depictions of material wealth, suggesting a perceived failure to adequately “perform” one’s privileged status. TikTok’s affordances, which prioritize engagement and virality, inadvertently create a feedback loop where certain types of content, often contentious, gain traction. Both technological affordances and platform technoculture work in tandem to increase visibility and engagement with these themes and subsequent socioeconomic hierarchies. As such, although much of the discourse responding to the #Boredinthehouse trends is neutral in tone, the neutrality of the platform and black-boxed algorithm are absent. Platform and algorithmic design, in this case study, are contributing to increased visibility of socioeconomic distinctions, by rewarding content and types of engagement that perpetuate further engagement.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study explores how the #Boredinthehouse TikTok trend functioned as a site of entangled boredom, in relation to domesticity, digital media, and socioeconomic visibility during the early stages of the COVID pandemic lockdowns. Central to this analysis is the argument that boredom, as mediated through TikTok, is not a universal or neutral affect but one that is shaped by material conditions, platform affordances, and historical contexts of domestic spaces. Curtis Roach’s viral sound did not simply reflect a shared experience of lockdown boredom but exposed the unevenness of that experience, particularly through the representations of domestic material wealth and the responses produced in response to these depictions. By employing Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) and a relational methodological lens, this paper demonstrates how TikTok’s sonic trends can operate as affective and discursive spaces where users negotiate identity, class, and belonging, often through humor, irony, or critique. The #Boredinthehouse trend reveals how digital platforms mediate not only boredom but also broader cultural narratives around privilege, productivity, and domestic life.

This study is limited in its use of only English-language comments and the most-liked TikToks using Curtis Roach’s original sound, which does not capture the diversity of user experiences during pandemic lockdowns. Additionally, while the analysis focused on discourse and platform-specific conventions, further research could explore embodied practices, cross-platform comparisons, or longitudinal shifts in digital boredom beyond the pandemic context. The current research considers how digital platforms shape affective experiences and render visible the socioeconomic structures that underpin them. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of work that challenges static interpretations of music and media, advocating instead for relational, technocultural approaches that foreground process, entanglement, and lived experience.

Notes

1. Curtis Roach's TikTok handle is @curtistootrill.
2. Here is a link to Curtis Roach's TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@curtisroach/video/6800471860761971974?lang=en>.
3. When discussing TikTok phenomena in this text, the term "sound" is used to reflect platform vernacular; it is defined as audio or music recordings that are used as the basis for new TikTok videos.
4. Here is a link to Tyga's TikTok : <https://www.tiktok.com/@tyga/video/6806520676862774533?lang=en>.
5. Of note is Madonna's March 2020 viral Instagram post in which she is seen naked in a bathtub, with a caption suggesting that COVID is "a great equalizer" and that "We're all in the same boat. And if the ship goes down, we're all going down together" (<https://www.spin.com/2020/03/madonnas-covid-19-bathtub-message-its-the-great-equalizer/>).
6. T9 (Text on 9 keys) was a predictive text system used on early mobile phones with numeric keypads. It allowed users to type words by pressing each number key once per letter, relying on a built-in dictionary to guess the intended word. This method shaped early texting habits, especially under the constraints of limited character counts and slower input speeds, before the rise of smartphones and AutoCorrect.

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Notes on Contributor

Melissa Avdeeff is a Lecturer in Digital Media at the University of Stirling. Her research explores relational aspects between music, technology, and society, with a particular focus on the discourses that shape and emerge from these intersections. Rooted in Popular Music Studies and informed by critical theory, her work examines how digital platforms mediate cultural production and identity, often through case studies of key figures such as Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, and Lil Nas X. Her interdisciplinary publications span topics including the development of the AI Popular Music Imaginary, the audio uncanny valley in AI-generated music, TikTok's music ecology, and platform-specific responses to Taylor Swift's queer allyship. She also writes on methodological approaches to studying AI music. Avdeeff is a co-founder of the European Taylor Swift Research Network and serves on the editorial board of *IASPM Journal*.

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