

Making the Most of Your Time Together: Examining the Interactive Effects of Time Spent with Partner and Self-Expansion on Relational Boredom During COVID-19

Rhonda Balzarini,^{1,2} Christina Leckfor,³ Giulia Zoppolat,⁴ Megan Tracy,¹ Taylor Himes,¹ Daisi Brand,³ & Richard Slatcher,³

¹Texas State University, ²Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, ³University of Georgia, & ⁴Vrije Universiteit

INTRO

- COVID-19 guidelines resulted in many couples spending more time together than usual
- Spending more time together may be a maintenance strategy,¹ especially if couples utilize their time together to self-expand²
- However, time together may also be detrimental, as repeated exposure and routine over an extended period may lead to a lack of novelty in the relationship² and relational boredom³
- Research Question:** How does time spent with a partner and self-expansion at the start of the pandemic relate to reports of relational boredom two weeks later?

METHODS

Data from the Love in the Time of COVID study were utilized (N = 671 individuals, 33 countries):

- Age: M = 33.8, SD = 12.1
- Gender: 85% Female, 13% Male, 2% Other
- Relationship Length (yrs.): M = 8.97, SD = 10.08

Measures:

- Time spent with a partner (1 item, 5-point scale): M = .55, SD = 1.50
- Relational self-expansion (1 item, 7-point scale): M = 3.89, SD = 2.02
- Relational boredom (1 item, 7-point scale): M = 3.04, SD = 1.63

Data were analyzed using linear regression and mediation in PROCESS macro⁴

¹Baxter & Dindia, 1990, ²Aron et al., 2013, ³Harasymchuck & Fehr, 2010, ⁴Hayes, 2018

More time with a partner and greater self-expansion were associated with lower boredom two weeks later, but the interaction was not significant.

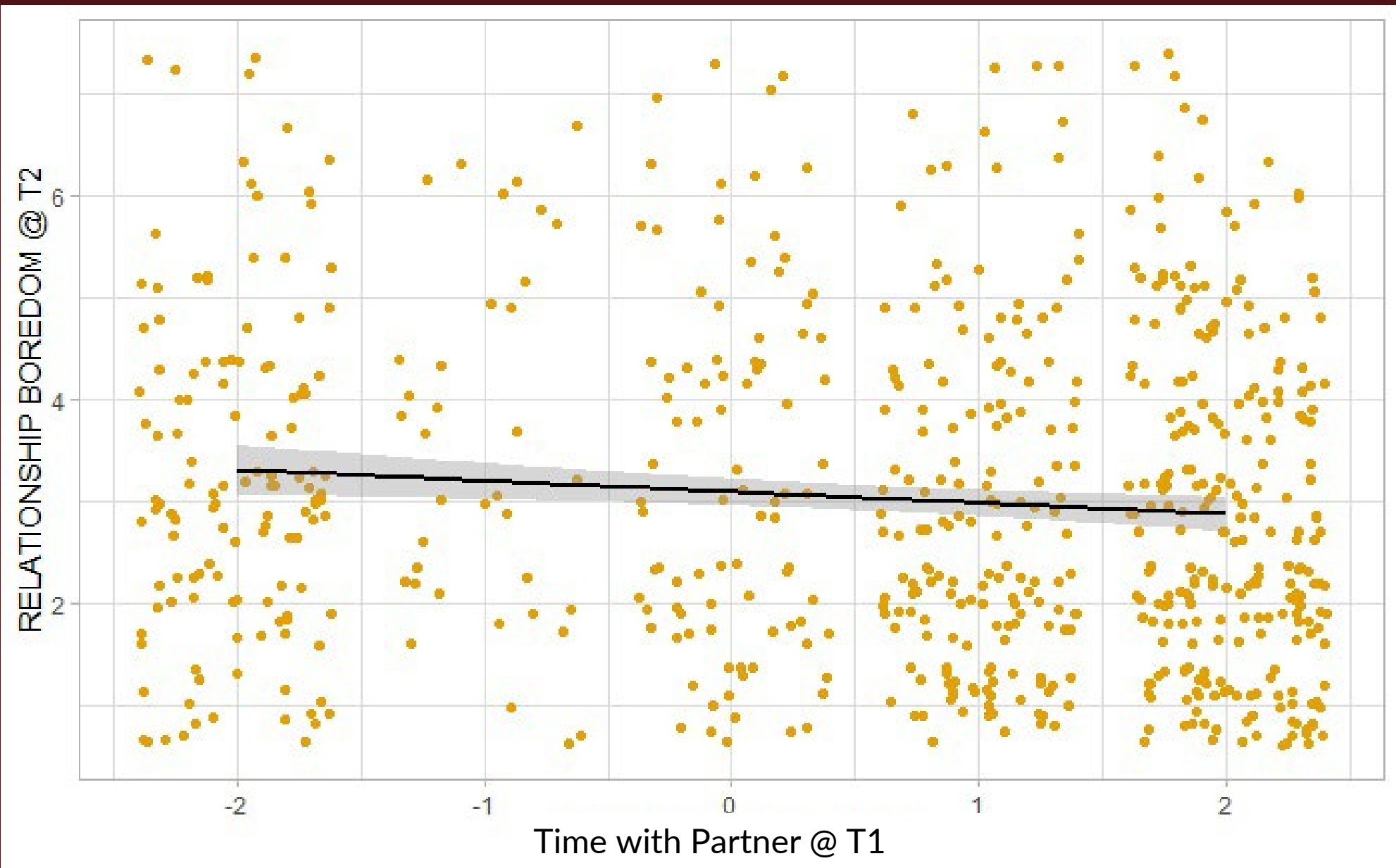


Figure 1. Main Effect of Time with Partner on Boredom

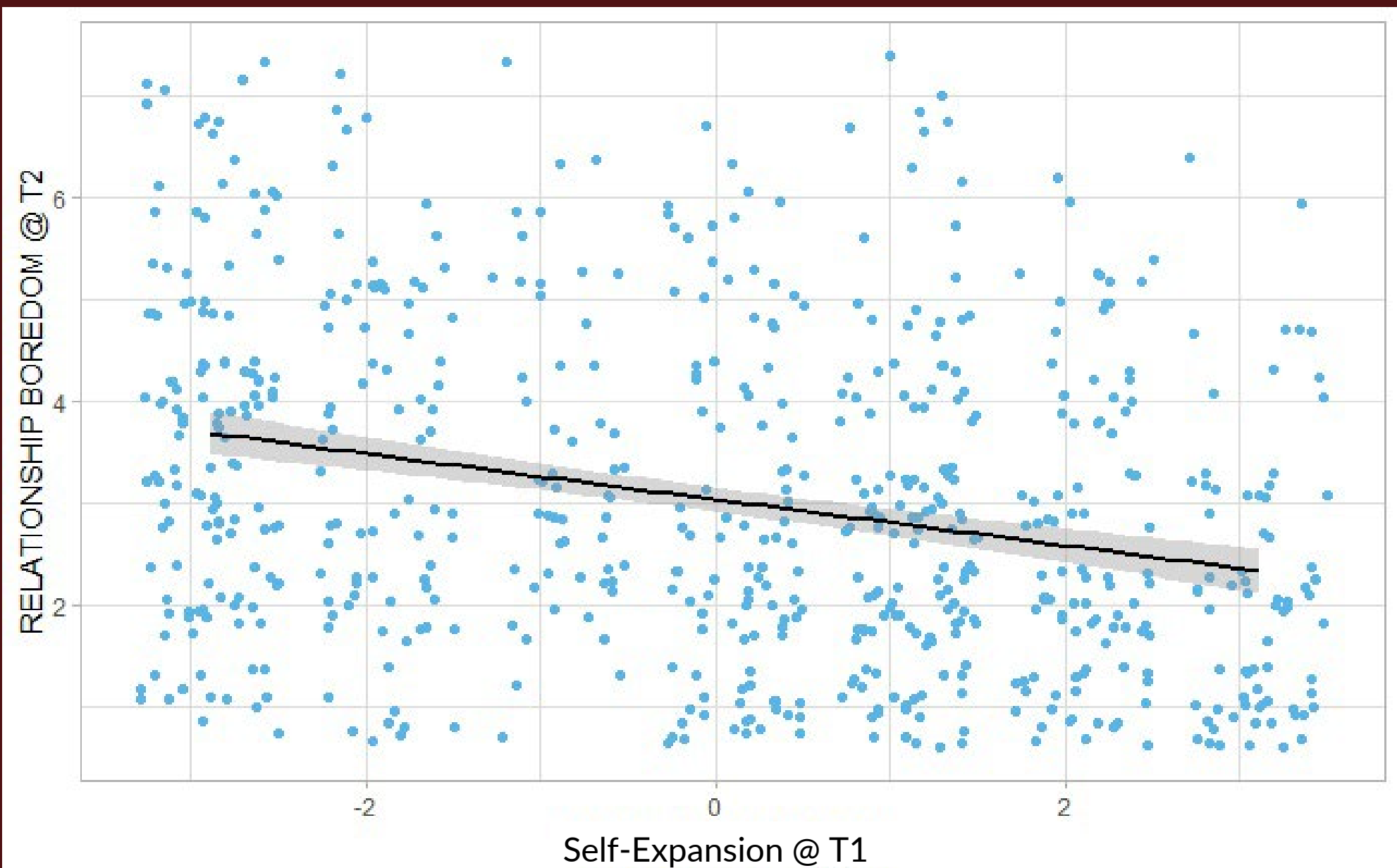


Figure 2. Main Effect of Self-Expansion on Boredom

However, there was a significant indirect effect of time with a partner on boredom two weeks later through self-expansion.

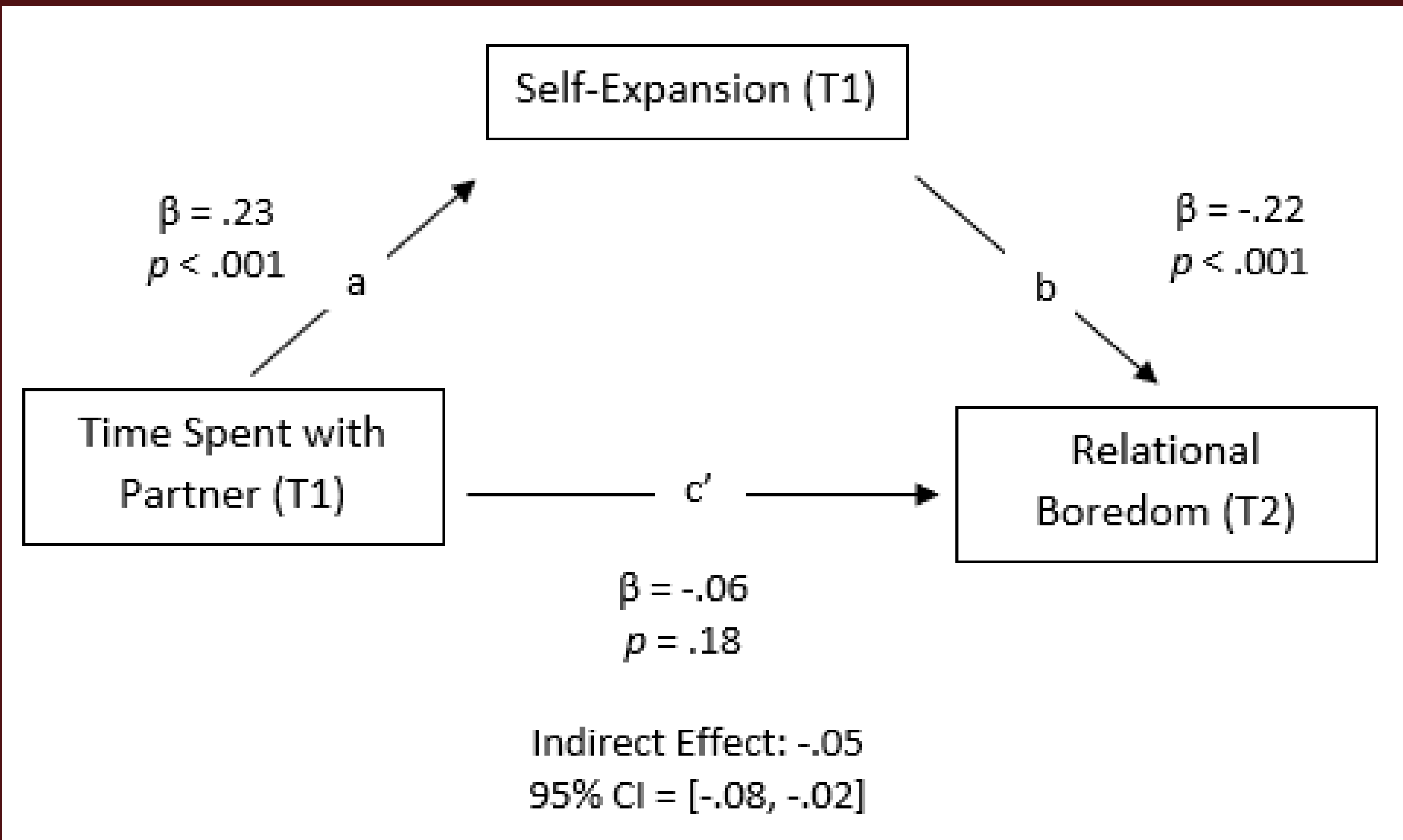


Figure 3. Indirect Effect of Time Spent with Partner on Relational Boredom through Self-Expansion

RESULTS

At the onset of the pandemic:

- Spending more time with one's partner was associated with lower relational boredom two weeks later, $\beta = -.10, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.19, -.03]$ (see Figure 1).
- Greater self-expansion was associated with lower relational boredom two weeks later, $\beta = -.28, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.28, -.17]$ (see Figure 2).
- Greater self-expansion did not significantly moderate the relationship between time spent with a partner and relational boredom two weeks later, $\beta = -.06, p = .124, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.07, .01]$.
- However, there was a **significant indirect effect through self-expansion** (see Figure 3), such that spending more time with a partner was associated with greater self-expansion (a-path), and greater self-expansion was associated with lower relational boredom two weeks later (b-path).

DISCUSSION

- Couples who spent more time together as a result of the pandemic experienced less boredom by engaging in novel, self-expanding activities together
- In our recent work, we examine the downstream associations and have found that when couples utilize their time spent together to self-expand, they experience less boredom, and subsequently report:
 - + Relationship Satisfaction
 - + Connection
 - + Passion
 - + Sexual Desire
 - + Sexual Satisfaction

