BOREDOM AS A NEGLECTED ISSUE IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

by

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M.D. University of Calgary, 1961

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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Boredom as a Neglected Issue in Violence Prevention Programs in Schools

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ABSTRACT

BOREDOM AS A NEGLECTED ISSUE IN VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

The central thesis of this dissertation is that boredom is an important, unrecognized factor in the etiology of violence perpetrated by adolescents, with the result that school programs designed to prevent violence are missing an important dimension. Theories of boredom from the fields of industrial and educational psychology, psychoanalytical and existential psychiatry, criminology, and socio-cultural history are integrated into a conceptual framework to understand boredom. I propose that there are two kinds of boredom, transient and chronic, each of which is expressed as either sensation-seeking or meaning-seeking. Depending upon genetic make-up, personality, and environmental factors, the adolescent may respond in adaptive or maladaptive ways to the drive to seek sensation or meaning. Maladaptive responses, which are the concern of this study, are destructive of self or others, and include delinquency, substance abuse, and violence, as well as emotional withdrawal and suicidal ideation.

Characteristics of youth at high risk for boredom are found to bear close similarity to those of youth at high risk for violence. I argue that boredom is largely a learned response to situations of constraint and inadequate stimulation, and propose that for some youth at least, boredom may be a possible trigger to, and a justification for violence.

Current violence prevention programs in use in North American schools are examined for factors that might reduce boredom by
providing increased stimulation or meaning. Although possible sources of meaning may vary from person to person, they commonly cluster around relationships, commitment to a work, personal stance toward suffering, and belief system. Recommendations for schools have the goal of helping students increase meaning in their lives by building connectedness with others, with their environment, with their sense of purpose in life, and with their belief system.
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I could not have completed this work without the enthusiastic support of my husband, Russell Davidson. I am grateful for his suggestions, companionship, and patient proofreading.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The central thesis of this theoretical analysis is that boredom is an important, unrecognized factor in the etiology of violence perpetrated by adolescents, with the result that school programs designed to prevent violence are missing an important dimension\(^1\). I propose that boredom in youth is a serious, non-trivial problem that is currently neglected, and should be dealt with in programs to prevent violence and to reduce the anti-social behavior that is a common precursor of violence. I argue that boredom is largely a learned response to situations of constraint and inadequate use the definition of violence adopted by the US National Research Council Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior (Reiss & Roth, 1993): “behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt, or inflict physical harm on others”. Thus, although sexual harassment or causing emotional pain are serious problems and are sometimes included in a definition of violence, they will not be discussed here. Furthermore, for the purposes of this study, structural factors such as poverty or racism are not considered as violence in themselves, although such factors will appear in the context of the etiology of physical violence. The domain of study includes delinquent and anti-social behavior as well as violent behavior because the literature on delinquency often groups violent and non-violent offenders together. Furthermore, early anti-social behavior is a common predictor of later violent offending (Tolan & Guerra, 1994). For the purposes of the recommendations for education, I focus on youth from grades 7 to 12, although the issues studied affect young people from the onset of puberty until their mid-twenties.

\(^1\) I use the definition of violence adopted by the US National Research Council Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior (Reiss & Roth, 1993): “behaviors by individuals that intentionally threaten, attempt, or inflict physical harm on others”. Thus, although sexual harassment or causing emotional pain are serious problems and are sometimes included in a definition of violence, they will not be discussed here. Furthermore, for the purposes of this study, structural factors such as poverty or racism are not considered as violence in themselves, although such factors will appear in the context of the etiology of physical violence. The domain of study includes delinquent and anti-social behavior as well as violent behavior because the literature on delinquency often groups violent and non-violent offenders together. Furthermore, early anti-social behavior is a common predictor of later violent offending (Tolan & Guerra, 1994). For the purposes of the recommendations for education, I focus on youth from grades 7 to 12, although the issues studied affect young people from the onset of puberty until their mid-twenties.
stimulation and, for some youth at least, boredom may be a possible trigger to and rationalization for violence. I focus on violence prevention programs in use in North American schools, designed explicitly to prevent violence by children and youth, including components designed to reduce anti-social behavior that has not become violent. Current violence prevention programs are examined for factors that may reduce boredom by providing increased stimulation or increased meaning in life. Although sources of meaning vary from person to person, they commonly cluster around relationships, work or creative activity, personal stance toward suffering, and belief system. These sources are conceptualized as expressions of "connectedness" within the person, between people, and between people and the earth. The main recommendation from this study is that schools help students increase meaning in their lives by building connectedness with others, with their environment, with their own life purpose, and with their belief system, whether it is based on humanistic or spiritual principles.

In this chapter I provide evidence that boredom is a serious issue for adolescents. Using expressions of adolescent culture, particularly music, I document the association of boredom with anger, meaninglessness, and violence, and briefly introduce the research on boredom and on violence. Before doing this, I explore why this connection between boredom and adolescent violence is an important area of concern.

There are two important reasons for studying adolescent boredom in association with delinquency. The first is that the impact of boredom in the lives of alienated youth seems to be underestimated despite the widespread expressions of boredom seen in the music, videos, films, and magazines of youth culture (Gaines, 1990/1991; GreenDay, 1994; Offspring, 1994; Sex Pistols, 1977). The lack of attention to boredom is shown by the
scarcity of research into the meaning of boredom in adolescence and into its role in adolescent delinquency and violence. Although boredom is frequently listed as a contributing factor to violence and delinquency, it has not been scrutinized as a significant subject of study. Significantly, it does not even appear in the indices of current major references on violence such as the US National Research Council (NRC) study, Understanding and Preventing Violence (Reiss & Roth, 1993) nor in the comprehensive American Psychological Association report, Reason to Hope: A Psychosocial Perspective on Violence and Youth (Eron, Gentry & Schlagel, 1994).

A second reason for this study is to determine whether existing programs designed to prevent violence address the role of boredom and, if so, how. It is possible that programs which do not target boredom as a problem, none the less alleviate it by affecting the factors that contribute to boredom. For example, a program that offers employment opportunities to high-risk youth may reduce boredom as a side benefit. A comparison of the efficacy of violence prevention programs with or without strategies likely to reduce boredom would be useful in evaluating my argument that boredom is an important factor in adolescent violence.

This thesis offers four original contributions to knowledge of violence prevention and boredom: first, a synthesis of previously unexamined connections in the existing literature between research on boredom and on violence; second, an exploration of the notion of boredom as a learned response; third, discussion of the inadequacies and strengths of existing violence prevention programs in the light of the importance of boredom in adolescent behavior; and fourth, significant recommendations about improving violence prevention programs by attending seriously to the
problem of chronic boredom by helping high-risk youth develop connectedness through various sources of meaning in life.

Violence in society has many roots. It represents the interaction of biological, personal, and social factors (Reiss & Roth, 1993). In this study I assume that boredom is one factor among many, not a single integrating factor that would explain violent behavior. I accept the assumption of the NRC study that most violence is a learned behavior which can be prevented.

Modern psychological perspectives emphasize that aggressive and violent behaviors are learned responses to frustration, that they can also be learned as instruments for achieving goals, and that the learning occurs by observing models of such behavior. Such models may be observed in the family, among peers, elsewhere in the neighborhood, through the mass media, or in violent pornography, for example. (Reiss & Roth, 1993, p. 7)

I argue that boredom is also a learned response, influenced by observing powerful models, and that education can play an important role in preventing boredom.

The assumption that violence is learned behavior is not universally held; some scholars (Hirschi, 1969) are convinced that violence is a primary human response, but that social control modulates this behavior. The NRC position that violence is learned is supported by research on the development of prosocial behavior in children (Eisenberg, 1992; Staub, 1975, 1988, 1992). This research suggests that altruistic and compassionate behavior often appears before the age of two, and that it can be encouraged or discouraged by caregivers. That is, if humans have a propensity for violent behavior, they also have a propensity for caring behavior. Whether the primary response — the "default position" — for humans is violent or non-violent, the learned response we want to cultivate is non-violent. I believe
that the school has a role in the promotion of non-violence, and the prevention of violence.

Because early anti-social behavior has been shown to be a predictor of later violent behavior (Reiss & Roth, 1993), it is assumed that prevention of anti-social behavior in general will be beneficial in reducing violence.

The seriousness of boredom in relation to delinquency is underscored by Gordon Hogg, the Former Head of Willingdon Penitentiary in Burnaby, B.C., who commented in an interview that when young offenders are taken into custody, and asked why they committed their offense, the most common response is "I was bored" (Hogg, 1995, personal communication). Although it is possible that the young offenders are merely offering a rebellious response calculated to anger the authorities (by implying that neither the question nor the interviewer merit serious consideration), I believe that they are giving the reason for their actions and that boredom must be considered as an underlying cause of some delinquent behavior. In order to design appropriate programs to prevent boredom, we must understand what it means to adolescents to be bored.

 Communities have tried to reduce youth boredom by providing recreation centres and programs to attract young people. Many times, young people "hang out" outside the recreation centre instead of going inside and participating. One might ask why, if they are bored, they don't join in the centre's activities. Is it that boredom as they conceive it is not relieved by playing hockey or going for a swim? Most people think of boredom as a mild, transient annoyance that is a normal part of life. Perhaps it is because boredom is seen to be a fleeting and common problem that appears too trivial to justify delinquent behavior, that it has not been the focus of more research.
When I have addressed community groups on the topic of adolescent boredom, audiences have often responded with incredulity: "How can teenagers possibly be bored? They have everything -- cars, stereos, video games, sex -- what on earth do they want?" But for at least some adolescents, evidence abounds that boredom seems to be associated with an intensely negative state. For example, Donna Gaines (1990/1991) researched the lives of "dead end kids" in an attempt to explain the suicide pact of four New York teenagers. Her subjects were school drop-outs or youth in court-mandated training programs. Often unable to find meaningful work or purpose, they drift in marginalized, alienated clusters always viewed with suspicion by police. Gaines writes in graphic street language of the pervasive boredom in their lives:

Like most kids in shit jobs, they are most skilled at getting over on the boss and in developing strategies to ward off boredom. It is not unusual to see kids at the supermarket cash register or the mall clothing shop standing around with a glazed look in their eyes. And you will often hear them complain of boredom, tiredness, or whine, "I can't wait to get out of here." (Gaines, 1990/1991, p. 153)

These young people are well aware that their future holds little that is better than the tedious, low-paid service jobs they hate.

Boredom and Adolescent Culture

Because evidence from formal research is limited, I use examples from music, video, and magazines to illustrate adolescent preoccupation with boredom and the frequent linking of boredom and anti-social behavior in expressions of adolescent culture.
Music

Gaines (1990/1991) documents the anomie of alienated teenagers as expressed by their music. She categorizes the young people by their allegiance to certain alternative rock bands. Their clothes, haircuts, and artifacts such as skateboards or tattoos identify these young peoples with specific bands portraying the angst and the anger of a generation whose lives are threatened by nuclear weapons, environmental devastation, and a bleak employment future.

The kids start talking about nuclear war, inspired by a Megadeath song. "You talk about the future and everything and like, there might not be a future 'cause they're still makin' all these weapons and everything, and I think about peace a lot." They don't talk about these things in school, so most such serious thought is provoked by the music adults hope to censor. It's a sad irony — because the only place where taboo subjects like sex, death, suicide, loneliness, and terror are discussed is in their music. (Gaines, 1990/1991, p. 208)

Although the lyrics portray the extreme behavior of a small minority, the widespread popularity of the bands suggests their message is a broader cultural expression of adolescent boredom and despair. That is to say, the marginalized youth reflected in the music may be the "canaries in the mines" warning us of unrecognized distress in even our well-functioning young people.

Kim Clark-Champnis, a writer/producer with Much Music TV, produced a documentary series tracing rock and roll from the early sixties to 1995. He points to violence between mods and rockers in Britain and the evolution of "heavy metal" music with its blatant sexism, racism, and
violence as responses to the meaninglessness of modern life (Clark-Champnis, 1995, personal communication).

Abundant examples of the term boredom in association with anti-social or destructive behavior are found in the lyrics of the recent derivatives of rock music, especially in what is called "Metal" or "Grunge". The lyrics of Green Day's (1994) Dookie album provide a convincing illustration of anger, rage, and boredom. Green Day is a California band popular with grade eight and nine students in British Columbia.

The restlessness and frustration of boredom are highlighted in "Burnout", the thoughts of a suicide bomber in "Having a Blast", and the themes of loneliness, meaninglessness, and anger in "Longview". These themes are alternately projected outward and then internalized, as the singer first blames others for his boredom and apathy, then admits he locked the door to his own cell in a house with unlocked doors, and blames himself for having no motivation. The emptiness drives him to fantasies of violence as he asks if you ever want to lead a long trail of destruction and mow down any bullshit that confronts you.

(Capitalization in the originals)

"BURN OUT"

I declare I don't care no more
I'm burning up and out and
growing BORED
In my smoked out BORING room
... I'm not growing up, I'm
just burning out
And I stepped in line
to walk amongst the
DEAD...
"HAVING A BLAST"

I'm taking all you down with me
Explosives duct taped to
my spine
Nothing's gonna change
my mind.
I won't listen to anyone's
last words
There's nothing left for you
to say
Soon you'll be dead
anyway.

"LONGVIEW"

Sit around and watch the
tube but nothing's on
Change the channels for
an hour or two...

Bite my lip and close my eyes
Take me away to paradise
I'm so damn bored I'm
going BLIND!!!
And I smell like shit

Peel me off this velcro seat
and get me moving
I sure as hell can't do
it by myself
I'm feeling like a
DOG IN HEAT...

I GOT NO MOTIVATION
WHERE IS MY MOTIVATION
NO TIME FOR MOTIVATION
SMOKING MY INSPIRATION

Sit around and watch the
phone, but no one's calling...
My mother says to get a job
But she don't like the
one SHE'S got,
When masturbation's lost its fun
You're fucking breaking
Rock Videos

Jeremy, the 1993 music video of the Seattle band, Pearl Jam, won four MTV Music Video Awards the year it was released (Cummins, 1994). In under four minutes Jeremy's story unfolds in a series of split second images of isolation, alienation, and rejection, building to the seemingly inexorable climax of his suicide in front of his classmates. The video is packed with symbols of mindless patriotism, irrelevant schooling, and frozen relationships with peers and family, including Jeremy's uncaring parents who are shown as cardboard cut-outs. Religious symbols representing the devil, the fall from innocence in Eden, and the kiss of Judas appear so rapidly they must be absorbed subliminally. (I viewed the video frame by frame.) Words written on a chalkboard flash by: "Genesis 3:6... bored... ignored... harmless... because I say so... bored... black... numb... disturb... harmless... child... problem". The lyrics repeat the phrase, "Jeremy spoke clearly". Student Rahab Cummins wrote of the video,

Jeremy is a form of eulogy, it is a mourning tribute to a type.... This is not simply raising questions about teenage suicide to parade social awareness, nor is it a condemnation of suicidal behavior, rather it is a serious indigment [sic] against the elements in Jeremy's environment which condemned him to choose suicide. Jeremy killed himself because he was all alone. (Cummins, 1994, p.2)

Film

Movies directed to adolescent audiences often build on the issues of boredom and meaninglessness. For example, Pink Floyd The Wall
is a profoundly disturbing movie about the emptiness of Pink, a rock musician who turns to drugs and incites neo-Nazi violence because he cannot resolve his grief over the childhood loss of his father in World War II. As disturbing as it is, however, the movie may be giving us valuable insights into our society and its young members. One song, "We Don't Need No Education", portrays students with faces like stuffed scarecrows, marching on a conveyor belt that drops them into a meat grinder and spits them out as identical sausages.

**Magazines**

Specialty magazines like *Rolling Stone* cover rock and alternative music with articles about the musicians and the lyrics of popular albums. The topics often reflect the deep concerns of young people for their future and the future of the planet. A striking feature of these magazines is the number of full page liquor advertisements. At the low end of the market, limited editions of "fanzines" (slang for fan magazines) are produced in many cities by amateur desk-top publishers to support certain bands and their ideologies. I recall "Victor Vomit", a young man with shaved head and a safety pin through his nose, who was the editor of an Ottawa fanzine, coming to the office of Canadian Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War to research an article on the threat of nuclear weapons. Although the office staff were startled by his bizarre and rather threatening appearance, they were impressed by the fact that his fanzine reflected not only the angry, alternative music he favored, but also his commitment to take action against nuclear bombs.
Adolescent culture provides abundant evidence of the anger of youth, overt exhortations to violence, and repeated complaints of boredom. Adolescents are acutely aware of the threats to their future arising from environmental deterioration, world population pressures, and the shrinking job market coupled with a perceived lack of concern by the older generation for the welfare of youth.

Scholarly Research on Boredom

While I contend that boredom is a preoccupation of youth, it appears not to be a concern of scholars. Most of the research on boredom in adolescence has been in the context of boredom at school, although the studies often reveal boredom as a constant state (Farrell, Peguero, & White, 1988; Larson & Richards, 1991; Linton & Pollack, 1978; McGiboney & Carter, 1988; O'Connor, 1976; Robinson, 1975; Sundberg, Latkin, Farmer, & Saoud, 1991; Tolor, 1989). Most empirical studies correlate boredom with alienation and personality factors, but do not analyze the meaning of boredom to adolescents, or the quality of boredom that appears to differ between mainstream young people and delinquents. For example, one phenomenological study of adolescent boredom deliberately selected as subjects eighteen well-functioning teenagers (Ridgeway, 1985). Boredom in this group was found to be a trivial and passing problem easily handled by the young person, a conclusion that suggests that there is a qualitative difference between boredom in the well-adjusted and boredom in the dysfunctional adolescent. The more serious, chronic boredom in youth, which is the focus of my concern, does not appear to have been studied in relation to delinquency and violence. A computer search of the Criminal Justice
Abstracts using the subject word "boredom" yielded only 68 references, of which only one (Ellis & Thompson, 1989) is devoted to the issue of boredom. The other references mention boredom in passing, as one of several causes of delinquent behavior, but boredom itself is not the primary subject of study.

Outline of Thesis

In the following chapter, I review theories of boredom in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, education, and history, limiting the psychological review as far as possible to the etiology of boredom rather than therapeutic aspects. In Chapter Three I synthesize the various theories into a conceptual framework for understanding boredom in adolescence, distinguishing transient from chronic boredom, and sensation-seeking from meaning-seeking expressions of boredom. Responses to boredom may be adaptive or maladaptive, the maladaptive responses being the central focus of concern in this thesis. Chapter Four lays the groundwork to show the relationship between boredom and violence by comparing the risk factors for violence with those identified for boredom. Chapter Five discusses the view that violence is a learned response and introduces the notion that boredom is also largely a learned response and thus amenable to change through education. I propose the role that boredom may play in some adolescent violence. Chapter Six reviews promising directions in prevention of adolescent violence and the approaches taken in existing violence prevention programs. These programs are analyzed for factors that may reduce boredom either because they explicitly address it, or because a strategy would coincidentally affect risk factors associated with boredom, or would increase sensation or meaning in life. In Chapter Seven I conclude that to prevent
boredom educators must help young people find sources of meaning that increase their connectedness. I recommend modifications to existing violence prevention programs and new components with an emphasis on integration with the community.
CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF BOREDOM

We have seen that boredom is a concern of youth, but what do we know of its nature, its different forms and its etiology? In this chapter I analyze boredom by considering its etymology and usage, theories of boredom from the perspectives of psychology, education, psychoanalytical and existential psychiatry, and its socio-cultural history.

The notion of boredom has received relatively little attention from scholars, perhaps because it has typically been conceptualized as a transient, trivial state of mind that is an unavoidable part of life. Works have appeared in several fields – notably in education (Farrell, et al., 1988; Morton-Williams & Finch, 1968; Robinson, 1975; Vodanovich & Verner, 1991; Wasson, 1981), in criminology (Cape, 1972; Ellis & Thompson, 1989; Field, 1986; Gaines, 1990/1991; Zuckerman, 1979), and psychology and psychiatry (Frankl, 1959, 1969, 1975; Fromm, 1941, 1951, 1981, 1986; Geiwitz, 1966; May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958; Smith, 1981; Yalom, 1980) and history (Healy, 1984). This research has not been integrated into a single theoretical construct that would clarify what is meant by boredom, why some people suffer from it more than others, why it is sometimes pathological, whether it is related to criminal behavior, or how it might be prevented.

Much of the empirical research began in industrial psychology (Barmack, 1939; Fenichel, 1951; Fiske & Maddi, 1961; Zuckerman, 1979) in response to concerns about worker motivation, efficiency, and safety doing monotonous factory jobs. In criminology, many studies allude to boredom,
but only as a factor in delinquent behavior, not as the subject of research (Hirschi, 1969; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991). In education, there have been few studies of boredom, a surprising finding in the light of how commonly boredom is seen to be a problem in the classroom (Robinson, 1975). The powerful, destructive condition apparently familiar to adolescents and featured in some rock music is just beginning to gain attention in social-psychology as an issue for drop-outs and street kids (Gaines, 1990/1991). In psychiatry, both the psychoanalytical school and the existential school have proposed theories of boredom (Fenichel, 1951; Frankl, 1955/1973; Fromm, 1981; Geiwitz, 1966; Maddi, 1967; May, et al., 1958; Perkins, 1989; Wangh, 1979; Yalom, 1980). References to boredom in literature and history provide important insights into its increasing prevalence and the personal devastation it brings both to highly productive scholars and clerics, and to those marginalised in society (Healy, 1984).

Boredom as a profoundly disturbing state has been described for centuries, albeit under other names (Healy, 1984). It particularly devastated the religious and the nobility. For example, King Solomon's description throughout the whole of Ecclesiastes shows the torment suffered by one with unbounded wealth and power, consumed by boredom and meaninglessness. "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:14 New International Version, 1983). The historical evolution of the term boredom offers helpful insights in understanding adolescent boredom.
Etymology and Usage

The term *boredom* does not appear in English until 1750, and its etymology is unknown, although it may have come from the Old English "borien", related to the Old Norse "to pierce" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989). The connection between the drilling or piercing and the meaning "to weary" is not clear and may refer to an anecdote now lost, or it may be that boring meant wearing down as in the action of a drill. Boredom is defined as ennui or tedium (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989). The French term "ennui" is derived from vulgar Latin "anodiare" which means to hate (Klein, 1966), a root that reappears in English as the word "annoy".

*Roget's Thesaurus* (1977) lists synonyms which show the wide affective domain encompassed by the term boredom: languor, displeasure, joylessness, cheerlessness, unsatisfaction, ungratification, grimness, discontent, discomfort, malaise, painfulness, disquiet, inquietude, uneasiness, discomposure, vexation of spirit, anxiety, angst, anguish, dread, nausea, existential woe, existential vacuum, dullness, flatness, staleness, tastelessness, savorlessness, ashes in the mouth, emptiness, spiritual void, death of the heart or soul, unhappiness or dislike.

The condition we recognize as boredom has been described since ancient times by other names. "Acedia" was a state known to hermetic monks as early as the Fourth Century as a capital vice, a descent into meaninglessness and apathy where the significance of life and God were questioned and no answer could be found. By the 14th Century, this vice was called sloth, defined in the *Catholic Moral Dictionary* as deliberate boredom (Healy, 1984). Shakespeare referred to "weariness" and later "spleen" and
"mellancholy" to describe the condition. "Langeweil", the German word for boredom, literally means "lon@ while", an expression that introduces the perception that time drags when one is bored.

The picture of boredom that emerges from its etymology is more congruent with the deep angst described in adolescent music than is the image we might have of boredom as a passing irritation. Adolescents use the term loosely, however, to cover a continuum of negative feelings, short and long-lived, which Robinson (1975) described as including anxiety and fear of failure, but which today seem increasingly to include anger as a dominant feature. In seeking to clarify the meaning of the term for young people, I questioned a group of teenagers, "841-KOZ", who work for the BC Department of the Attorney General performing street theatre to help young people avoid or leave gangs. After one of their performances, I asked them what it means to young people to be so bored they will commit an offense. They replied that there is no place for them. They are not allowed in the schools after hours; their working parents don't want them at home after school; the malls and convenience stores do not permit loitering. "Who wants us?" they asked, and "Where do we belong?" At first glance, they appear not to have answered the question of what it means to be bored, but perhaps their answer indicates the broad context in which the term is used by young people and its association with anger and a need to be cared about, rather than a desire for diversion.

The related concept, anomie, shares common roots with boredom, but differs from boredom in being normlessness rather than meaningfulness — a state without standards more than a state without purpose. Webster's Dictionary (1984) defines anomie as "lawlessness: a state of society in which normative standards of conduct and belief are weak or
Lacking". Merton's strain theory (Clinard, 1964) proposes that anomie arises from the disjunction between an individual's aspirations and the opportunities for realizing success. Merton noted that at the same time that American society emphasizes wealth as the symbol of success, lack of education and social skills limit the entry of disadvantaged youth into the legitimate occupations that might lead to financial success. Clinard (1964) describes how this theory of anomie was enlarged by De Grazia to include the breakdown of the society. De Grazia defines anomie as

the disintegrated state of a society that possesses no body of common values or morals which effectively govern conduct. . . . The study of anomie is the study of the ideological factors that weaken or destroy the bonds of allegiance which make the political community. (De Grazia, in Clinard, 1964, p. 9)

Bored individuals do not necessarily respond outside social norms, but those who do are the subjects of concern in this study. Thus two sets of risk factors are important: those that are associated with boredom per se and those that are associated with anomic responses to boredom.

Several authors distinguish a normal, transient form of boredom which is responsive to changes in the environment, from a chronic, debilitating state that seems to be pathological. The framework developed by Healy (1984) is helpful in setting out the differences between the common experience of boredom as an unavoidable but innocuous feature of life, and the compelling dysphoria which is the focus of this study. Healy differentiates three kinds of boredom which he calls "boredom₁", "boredom₂", and "boredom₃". Boredom₁ is a transient annoyance with a clearly identifiable external cause, such as doing something for the nth time, or having to be immobile. It passes quickly when the situation changes.
Boredom$_2$ is also transient, but differs from boredom$_1$ in that the cause appears less obvious. According to Healy, the irritation of children who cannot find something to do during the holidays, or the vague restlessness of nobility seeking distraction would be typical of boredom$_2$. Whether the cause is evident or obscure, simple solutions such as visiting friends or starting a project generally relieve passing boredom. Boredom$_3$, a chronic state which Healy calls "hyperboredom", is characterized by extreme discomfort, distress, and a loss of a sense of meaning in life. Measures of boredom, such as the Boredom Proneness Scale, correlate with measures of depression, such as the Beck Depression Inventory (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). More research is needed to define the overlap between boredom and depression, and their distinguishing features. I will use "chronic boredom" to refer to Healy's "hyperboredom" and "transient boredom" to refer to Healy's "boredom$_1$" and "boredom$_2$". Transient boredom and chronic boredom are distinguished not simply by their temporal duration, but also by the level of compulsion and dysphoria involved. The distinction between chronic and transient boredom is somewhat artificial because transient boredom may be a forerunner of chronic boredom, and also because chronic boredom may be triggered in some individuals by the same circumstances that produce transient boredom in others.

Literature Review

Theories of boredom have developed from industrial, physiological, and educational psychology; from psychoanalytical and existential psychiatry; and from historical analysis. The studies from psychology and psychoanalytical psychiatry deal mainly with boredom in its
transient form, while existential psychiatry addresses boredom as the symptom of a profound loss of meaning in life. The historical perspective explores the social and cultural factors contributing to the prevalence of boredom in modern society and its association with increasing levels of discontent, alienation, and violence in our communities (Healy, 1984). Let us look at the major theories in each of these fields.

**Psychology**

Smith (1981) reviewed the psychological literature, excluding existential psychiatry, and found an average of only one article per year from 1926 to 1981 on the subject of boredom. These studies are concerned mainly with what Healy would call boredom$_1$ or boredom$_2$ -- the transient forms of boredom -- although some writers recognise that some individuals are boredom-prone regardless of their situation.

Early studies on boredom were primarily physiological, measuring responses to experimental situations designed to replicate the characteristics of many industrial jobs: monotony coupled with a simultaneous demand for alertness. The dangers of decreasing attention resulting from low levels of stimulation were most evident in long distance truckers who sometimes hallucinated after many hours on the road (Heron, 1957). The conception of boredom as a state of inadequate external stimulation led to explorations of the impact of various levels of stimulation, ranging from sensory deprivation (Heron, 1957) to repetitive and monotonous experimental tasks (Fiske & Maddi, 1961). These studies assumed that boredom has an external cause in the characteristics of the situation, and that the boredom would disappear with appropriate
manipulation of the environment, (e.g., music piped into a factory might reduce the monotony of the work). This assumption, that modifying the situation will prevent boredom, underlies the approach advocated by some educators in articles such as "Designing Boredom Out of Instruction" (Kopp, 1982).

Many empirical studies on boredom were based on "activation theory" (Fiske & Maddi, 1961), which suggests that individuals seek to maintain an optimal level of arousal. It was the contention of such studies that when understimulated, people seek sensation, and when overstimulated, they withdraw. Finally, if they are constrained from leaving a situation of understimulation most people become bored and often drowsy (Barmack, 1939; Fenichel, 1951; Geiwitz, 1966). Fenichel (1951) reduces boredom to a motivation/control problem: "boredom arises when we must not do what we want to do, or must do what we do not want to do" (p.359).

The empirical research on boredom is generally based on the use of either Zuckerman's (1979) Sensation Seeking Scale (ZSS) or the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). The two instruments, ZSS and BPS, appear to measure different characteristics and their correlation is inconsistent, (Ahmed, 1990; Tolor, 1989). The ZSS seems to measure the need for sensation, while the BPS comes closer to measuring the need for meaning. Neither distinguishes transient from chronic boredom, perhaps because the difference was either not noted or not seen to be significant.

The ZSS has four factors: Thrill and Adventure Seeking, Experience Seeking, Disinhibition, and Boredom Susceptibility. Zuckerman (1979) defines sensation seeking as "a trait defined by the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience" (p. 10). Zuckerman
himself noted that the Boredom Susceptibility factor is the only one that has not been reliably identified for both sexes and has not shown good internal consistency and retest reliability.

Zuckerman's identification of sensation-seeking as a trait is very interesting in the light of recent research (Benjamin & Hamer, 1996; Ebstein, 1996) linking a personality trait called "novelty seeking" to a particular variant of a gene that allows the brain to respond to dopamine. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in the brain's "pleasure centre" in the limbic system. According to these researchers, people high in a novelty-seeking quotient tend to be extroverted, impulsive, extravagant, quick-tempered, excitable, and exploratory. This research has been replicated with three populations: Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews of both sexes, and a group of Americans made up mainly of white males. Benjamin and Hamer (1996) propose that there are four aspects of normal temperament that are genetically controlled: novelty seeking, avoidance of harm, reward dependence, and persistence. A person may exhibit varying degrees of the four temperamental dimensions. The heritability of the four temperamental dimensions was calculated from identical twin studies. Because temperament is relatively stable throughout life, the influence of parents in modulating the genetic propensities of the child is speculated to be in the formation of the child's character. This research is relevant to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder which is discussed later in the context of both boredom and violence.

Zuckerman refers to Eysenck's conclusion that extroverts are more likely than introverts to resort to delinquent behavior as a result of "stimulus hunger" (Eysenck & Gudjonsson, 1989). The ZSS has an external orientation, measuring the tendency to seek external thrills to compensate for an inner feeling of understimulation.
The BPS correlates with instruments that measure depression, sadness, and loneliness, but it can distinguish boredom from clinical depression (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986). Psychiatrist Bibring (Healy, 1984) noted that the distinction is that the bored cannot find a satisfying goal, while the depressed cannot believe in their ability to achieve a desired goal. The locus of the emotion is different in the two. The depressed feel *themselves* inadequate; the bored experience the *world* as insufficient. The BPS emphasizes an internal rather than an external orientation and the individual's adaptability and connectiveness to the environment (Farmer & Sundberg, 1986).

A significant finding of the industrial studies is that individual differences in boredom-proneness are more important than the attributes of the situation. People in the same repetitive job might find their work frustrating and boring, or rewarding and interesting. If the boredom passes with the end of the work day, it is transient, situational boredom. If it persists in leisure hours, it is more likely a problem of the individual, and more likely to be chronic boredom. Younger workers are found to be more boredom prone than older workers (Smith, 1981). Extroverts habituate more quickly, and are thus more prone to boredom than introverts (Esman, 1979; Leong & Schneller, 1993). Boredom correlates positively with dogmatism, perhaps because individuals high in dogmatism think less clearly and efficiently than less dogmatic individuals, consequently are less aware of stimuli and less aroused by novel stimuli in their environments (Leong & Schneller, 1993). The boredom-prone show low inhibitions and low persistence. Low inhibitions means quick boredom if gratification is delayed; low persistence means low finishing, low sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. From this theory, very active, quick-moving persons should
have low levels of boredom because they are constantly initiating new
situations. People try different strategies to alleviate boredom by increasing
stimulation by singing, humming, finger-tapping, or daydreaming. Students
often resort to disruptive behavior. Some people seek to increase the
complexity of a simple, repetitive task by drawing on internal resources of
creativity or by fantasizing to provide diversion. For example, a story or song
might be invented to accompany a counting task. There is a higher rate of
boredom among children and adolescents than among adults because adults
are more skillful in initiating new activities and finding complexity and
interest in their surroundings (Fiske & Maddi, 1964).

Ridgeway (1985) analyzed the experience of boredom among
healthy, well-adjusted adolescent subjects. Eighteen students, aged 13 to 18,
were identified by teachers as sensitive, articulate, and introspective. These
adolescents regarded boredom as a mild, common, and passing irritation,
with solutions they could easily implement. That is, these adolescents knew
only transient, not chronic boredom. Perhaps this study is circular, because
students who experienced chronic boredom would not qualify as well-
adjusted, and therefore would not have been included as subjects. The
conclusion to be drawn from the study seems to be that the well-adjusted
adjust well to boredom.

Whether the propensity to constantly need high levels of
stimulation is genetic or acquired, or a combination of both, there are certain
characteristics of family and personality that indicate high risk for this form
of boredom. Activation theory predicts that children who are neglected or
raised without cognitive stimulation are likely to be easily bored because they
were not encouraged to develop subtleties of thought and discrimination
(Fiske & Maddi, 1961). These individuals may be less able to discern the
complexities that interest others in ordinary situations. This theory predicts that such individuals will be rigid in thinking, will experience boredom over a wide variety of situations, and will try to avoid it by constantly searching for "kicks" in the form of radically novel experiences. Many delinquents seem to be perpetually bored, and seem to break the law in an attempt to produce some excitement, or some unusual experiences (Fiske & Maddi, 1961).

Boredom-proneness is associated with frustrated needs and low skill levels, both of which would be predicted for those who were deprived of stimulation in childhood (De Chenne, 1988). De Chenne's definition of boredom as "a negative reaction to perceived environmental insufficiency" (p. 73) limits the domain of boredom to external factors and does not consider the contribution of the individual to the situation. Curiously, he comments, "there may well be a subjective state involving weariness with an uneventful internal life, but such a state would not be labeled boredom, at least in conventional usage" (p. 73). This stipulation strikes me as incorrect in the light of the etymology and usage I outlined earlier.

Sensory deprivation studies (Heron, 1957; O'Connor, 1976) reveal that subjects are unable to tolerate more than a few days of the experimental conditions and, consistent with activation theory, they use every means they can think of to increase their stimulation. While these extreme experimental conditions are not part of daily life, they demonstrate that humans have a compelling drive to seek stimulation. When we consider the degree of emotional and cognitive impoverishment suffered by some infants and children, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the sensation-seeking of some adolescents represents a long-standing deprivation.
There has been considerable debate about whether boredom is a state of low or high arousal (Berlyne, 1960; De Cienne, 1988; Geiwitz, 1966; Hebb, 1955; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993) because some people respond to boredom by falling asleep, while others become increasingly agitated. The conclusion I draw from the literature is that boredom is a state of high arousal in some individuals and low arousal in others. A few authors associate boredom with aggression, stating that boredom leads to a tendency to increase excitement, and that hitting someone, and reading about or watching violence on television are ways to fill this need (Hebb, 1955; O'Connor, 1976). There are correlations between criminality and sensation-seeking, and between criminality and a history of childhood deprivation or abuse, but we cannot conclude that all who are agitated when they are bored had dysfunctional families. What seems to be significant is that children from nurturing families are more likely to choose adaptive strategies to deal with their need for excitement, while some children who have been deprived choose anti-social strategies. It seems reasonable to infer that physiology and childhood experiences interact to influence the usual response of the individual.

Hamilton (1983) relates boredom and sociopathy in adolescence to attentional habits. She notes that failure to find workable interests may be due to deficits in attentional capacity or lack of support from parents and peers. Adolescents who are prone to boredom have difficulty learning to form the attentional habits required for a separate identity. Empirical connections between alcoholism, drug abuse, and delinquency as well as a history of childhood hyperactivity may reflect problems in the attentional habits used to avoid boredom. Furthermore, she notes that when hyperactive children grow up, they tend to remain restless, impulsive
sensation seekers. Education of attention is a significant challenge with these children and youth, but might have a rich payback in reducing anti-social manifestations of boredom.

Poor emotional adjustment and the need for constant stimulation lead to impulsivity, increased sensitivity to frustration, and an intolerance for even minimal levels of boredom (Field, 1986; Hill & Perkins, 1985). Such individuals have higher than average probabilities of becoming involved in criminal behavior and other risk taking and sensation-seeking activities (Ellis & Thompson, 1989). The excessive need for stimulation and self-gratification by recidivist criminals is matched by low resilience to frustration. In a highly structured society, thrill seeking often involves breaking the law, particularly for those who lack the tenacity or the finances needed for dangerous, but legal, activities such as mountain climbing or sky diving (Quay, 1965). Physiological studies beginning in the 1960's (Quay, 1965) and continuing with recent research on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder show that chronic criminality is associated with deficits in neural activity related to sensory input (Cook, et al., 1995). The result is that these individuals frequently find themselves in a condition of stimulus deprivation, a state which is unpleasant and leads to sensation-seeking. Chronic criminals associate the criminal life with fast cars, fast money, fast women, and fast drugs; in fact, boredom seems to create more anxiety for these people than do truly fearful situations (Field, 1986).

DeChenne (1988) proposes that much boredom may well involve what some gestalt therapists call "desensitization". Presumably, this is a psychological defense in which threatening material provokes a literal perceptual dampening; that is, the individual responds to threat by experiencing an actual decrease in the intensity of perceived stimulation.
The concept of perceptual dampening (reducing) was enunciated by Petrie (Heron, 1957) in studies of tolerance of pain and sensory deprivation. Petrie found that when delinquents who were "reducers" were punished with solitary confinement, they would "frequently carve their own flesh with razors and burn it with cigarette ends". Perhaps some individuals are extreme sensation-seekers because they have developed perceptual dampening to an extreme. The fad in current adolescent culture for self-mutilation, often involving branding, slashing, or piercing the skin in various places, could be taken as support for this theory. The young people often state that they hurt themselves in order to feel something in place of numbness. In my clinical experience as a family physician, I found this phenomenon associated with young people who had been severely abused as children.

**Education**

The literature on the association between adolescent delinquency and boredom relates more to chronic than to transient boredom, with manifestations of both sensation-seeking and meaning-seeking. The early studies of chronic boredom in adolescents related to school drop-outs (Morton-Williams & Finch, 1968) and boredom in school (Robinson, 1975). Robinson's model of adolescent boredom derived from his secondary analysis of the classic study of early school leavers by Morton-Williams and Finch. Robinson's (1975) work is the most comprehensive study of boredom in schools. The original study of 4,617 British youth aged 13 to 16 showed that youth who complain of boredom at school also complain of it after school. Robinson concludes that they are not simply waiting to do something more
exciting later, they seem to be predisposed to boredom as individuals. These studies suggest that although some teachers may not be stimulating, merely enlivening their teaching techniques may not result in reduced student boredom because a large part of the problem rests with the student. This finding reflects the similar results of studies in industry -- that some individuals are boredom-prone, irrespective of the situation.

School drop outs in the Morton-Williams and Finch (1968) study indicated what made their courses boring. Their answers reflect their perceptions of sameness and lack of variety in the courses, and their personal inability to understand the material and to succeed. Many placed the blame on the teacher. There were fewer hard workers among bored pupils than among the not-bored, and although IQ scores were available for only about half the sample, the bored were more likely to score less than 95 IQ. The teachers judged the bored students to be the least capable. High IQ scores seemed to provide some immunity from boredom, but very low IQ (below 84) was not associated with higher boredom.

Students' relationships with their teachers were significant: bored pupils generally thought that their teachers did not take an interest in them and were not sympathetic to problems of students growing up. The bored pupils expressed general hostility toward school. Of significance for educators is the finding that interpersonal competition increased the likelihood of some children becoming bored. An association was found between boredom and withdrawal into self, aggression, or decreased effort in different subjects. Teachers judged 16% of the bored pupils to be somewhat or very aggressive, compared to 9% of the non-bored.

The parents of bored children were less interested in their children's education, and were more likely to have left school themselves by
age 14. The lower socio-economic classes were over-represented among bored pupils, with parents more likely to be in semi-skilled or unskilled occupations.

Robinson (1975) concludes that the interaction among various factors was the most important general feature revealed by the study. The significant factors in early leaving were chronic failure, the lack of supportive reinforcement of the value of education from the home, especially from parents who had left school early, and failure of the school to encourage students and build confidence in their ability to succeed. These factors led to generalized boredom, anxiety, and school leaving or truancy. He notes the importance of both parents and teachers as the most significant role models for young people. Although there are not objective measures of the teachers' interest in their subjects or their pupils, students' perceptions that their teachers are uninterested and have no faith in them must be taken into account when educators consider how to reduce school drop-outs.

From this study, Robinson (1975) developed a positive feedback model of boredom, with the student at the centre, acted upon by the external influences of home, teachers, curriculum, and community. The student's own responses reinforce the negative perceptions of the adults and form a feedback loop. Robinson does not discuss the internal attributes that lead some students to suffer boredom when others in similar situations do not. Other more recent studies of truancy and boredom in school confirm the findings of Robinson (1975), and of Morton-Williams and Finch (1968). The most frequent reasons given for truancy by 50 eighth graders were boredom and dislike of school and teachers (Sommer, 1985). Other factors related to truancy were poor parenting practices, marital discord, crowding in the home, substandard housing, many children in the home, and little interest in
education. Boredom in class is reported by 45% of drug users compared to 29% of non-users in one recent study of Anglo and Hispanic youths aged 9 to 17 years (Paulson, Coombs, & Richardson, 1990).

Farrell, Peguero, Lindsey and White (1988) confirm earlier studies that boredom in school is related to various factors including lack of attachment to teachers, perceived uselessness of the material, likelihood of failure in a competitive setting, pressure by attitude peers, strictures of their families, and anxieties about their economic future.

In summary, school studies support the findings from industrial psychology, that the characteristics of the individual are more important than the situation, and those who experience boredom over a wide range of situations may be classified as chronically bored. Factors relating to the home and the characteristics of the parents predict vulnerability to chronic boredom.

Criminology

Criminologic studies of the causes of juvenile delinquency frequently allude in passing to its association with boredom, although the studies are correlational, and do not allow us to draw cause and effect conclusions. There appears to be some direct effect if we accept the statements of many young people who claim that they committed their offenses because they were bored. However, we must still explore what they mean by bored. Is their boredom of the sensation-seeking kind as measured by the ZSS or meaninglessness as measured by the BPS, or both. Researchers do not distinguish sensation-seeking from meaning-seeking, and one must infer which kind of boredom is actually being studied.
Australian youth who were asked why boys do things that get them into trouble with the police gave five significant reasons: parental inadequacy, peer influence, thrill seeking, proving oneself, and boredom (Kraus, 1977). The three groups of subjects were boys from correctional institutions, and boys living in areas of high and low delinquency. The institutionalized boys were slightly more likely to mention boredom than those from low delinquency areas. The boys were asked to comment on what they meant by "thrill-seeking" and "boredom". Thrill seeking meant wanting excitement, letting out energy, getting kicks, fun, pleasure, or enjoyment. Boredom meant filling in time, having nothing better to do. Thrill seeking was more important to these young people than filling in time, but the study does not answer why a delinquent act is more appealing to some young people than what seems to be an equally thrilling non-delinquent act such as sky diving or rock climbing, although, as mentioned earlier, these outlets may not be accessible to some young peoples because of financial constraints.

Several authors (Arnett, 1990; Binion, Miller, Beauvais, & Oetting, 1988; Coleman, Kaplan, & Downing, 1986; Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Johnston & O'Malley, 1986; Paulson, et al., 1990) have studied correlations between substance abuse and boredom, with results that vary considerably, depending upon how boredom is defined and measured. When the question is phrased using the word boredom to mean "having nothing better to do", boredom appears, but is not high on the list of reasons given by adolescents for substance abuse. Boredom as sensation-seeking is very important as a justification by young people for drug use, and would lead us to suspect that a high score on the ZSS might predict high risk for substance abuse. This is congruent with recent research
(Bower, 1992) showing drug and alcohol abuse to be related to the D2 dopamine receptor gene. This gene appears linked to “novelty seeking”, which seems to be the same personality trait that Zuckerman called sensation-seeking. Drunk driving was found to be significantly related to the total score on the ZSS and to the Thrill and Adventure Seeking, Disinhibition, and Boredom Susceptibility (BS) subscales (Arnett, 1990). This relationship was not borne out in a study of high school students, comparing self-reported frequency of truancy or substance use with scores on the BS subscale of the ZSS (Wasson, 1981). Only a weak positive correlation was found between the factors and, unfortunately, the other subscales were not tested. Wasson (1981) suggested that school climate among other factors, may account for more of the variance. The fact that the BS subscale does not seem to measure this dimension of sensation-seeking in relation to drug use may reflect the problems that led to Zuckerman’s (1979) own reservations about the BS subscale as a tool.

Sensation-seeking and boredom were studied separately as possible contributing factors for alcohol, marijuana and other drug use among Native and non-Native eighth grade youth (Binion, et al., 1988). When the students were asked why they used each of the substances, the possible answers included, among others, indicators of sensation-seeking (“for new experiences”, “to open my mind”, and “it’s exciting”) and indicators of meaninglessness (“for something to do”, “nothing else to do”, “because I’m bored”). The results showed that the reasons for use differed according to the drugs used and ethnic membership. The most common rationale for use of drugs among both Natives and non-Natives alike, regardless of drug used, involved the appeal of altered and pleasant sensations produced by the drugs, and facilitation of social interaction. These
were followed by the relief of negative affective states, including boredom. Native youth were more likely to use alcohol and marijuana to cope with boredom, while whites were more likely to use drugs and alcohol for excitement, independence, partying, and the sensation of getting high.

Iso-Ahola and Crowley (1991) found leisure boredom and sensation seeking correlated with substance abuse in adolescents. Interestingly, the substance abusers were more active — more likely to participate in athletics and social activities such as attending concerts — than non-abusers. The authors suggest that this is because of their personality predisposition toward sensation-seeking and low tolerance for constant experiences. They admit that whether leisure boredom is a cause or an effect (or both) of drug abuse is yet to be determined.

Probably the most enlightening study of the reasons that high school students give for their use of drugs and alcohol is the Monitoring the Future Project in the US (Johnston & O'Malley, 1986). This ongoing, cross-sectional and longitudinal study involves about 3500 students per year. It found the reasons for use of any drug were, in order: "to have a good time with my friends" 65%; "to experiment, see what it's like" 54%; "to feel good or get high" 49%; "to relax or relieve tension" 41%; "because it tastes good" 41%; "because of boredom, nothing else to do" 23% (p. 35). Once again, the sensation-seeking dimension dominates while the "nothing to do" dimension of boredom appears as a lesser factor.

The authors note, however, that "many of the more frequent users (and particularly the daily marijuana and alcohol users) are using these substances for psychological coping — that is, to deal with negative affect, boredom, and (for the stimulants) to gain more energy" (p. 38). Orcutt (1984) studied the relationship between alcohol use and two kinds of boredom,
"existential boredom" and "interpersonal boredom." Existential boredom meant lacking direction and purpose in life. Interpersonal boredom meant finding other people and their small talk boring. Younger and lower income respondents were more likely to report existential boredom, while their older and wealthier counterparts were more likely to report interpersonal boredom. Existential boredom correlated positively with frequency and quantity of alcohol use, while interpersonal boredom correlated negatively with both. It appeared to the authors that existential boredom led people to try to escape through having a drink, while boredom with other people led them to socialize less and drink less when they were in social groups. Curiously, the most prodigious drinkers were found to be those who were not bored, who in fact, found "happiness with other people," were "not bored with small talk" and "got restless around home". Orcutt found the ZSS scale marginally successful in accounting for students' alcohol use. Several other studies of adolescent substance abuse list boredom among the causes, but do not give empirical evidence for this conclusion (Hawaii Criminal Justice Data Center, 1989; O'Connor, 1976)

In a study of fifty adolescents, McGiboney and Carter (1988) administered the BPS and the High School Personality Questionnaire. The results indicated that boredom proneness correlated with inactivity, social dependency, disregard for rules, apprehension, and guilt proneness. In this case, the study seems to be measuring the meaning-seeking, rather than the sensation-seeking dimension, and the findings suggest there might be a relationship to introversion, although that was not measured.

Let me summarize these empirical studies before continuing with the theories arising in psychiatry and social history. The research presented thus far characterizes boredom as a disagreeable state in which
personality characteristics interact with an environment that offers inadequate stimulation to satisfy the needs of the individual. The high risk individual seems to be one who exhibits the following traits:

- has suffered cognitive deprivation that has resulted in reduced ability to discriminate subtle differences
- has an impoverished fantasy life
- is rigid in thinking
- has learned to dampen down arousal from early childhood, and therefore requires a higher level of sensation than others
- tends to sensation-seeking behaviors to fill this need
- seems to have poor emotional adjustment
- may have been hyperactive in childhood
- has not learned effective attentional strategies in adolescence
- may have a genetic predisposition toward hyperactivity and sensation-seeking
- has suffered chronic school failure
- disregards rules
- has a family that does not value schooling
- comes from a low socio-economic level.

Although the sensation-seeking tendency seems to be genetically determined, how it is expressed is strongly influenced by family and significant others. Programs to improve the adaptive strategies of sensation-seekers must include helping the dysfunctional family as well as the child, and should encourage relationships with adults and peers who model adaptive behavior. Identifying the high risk child early may allow interventions to provide cognitive stimulation and perhaps family therapy to improve the nurturing quality of the family. One point that is not clear from
the studies described here is what therapeutic interventions might benefit children who have learned to dampen down arousal in order to survive an abusive situation. Distinguishing the child who has dampened down arousal from other sensation-seeking children may be difficult. The challenge in minimizing boredom is to increase children's attention span, ability to discern subtleties of thought, and willingness to seek pro-social ways to express sensation-seeking. In the following chapters I discuss this challenge in the context of what is offered in school violence prevention programs.

The empirical research leaves unanswered the question of identifying the individual at high risk for the kind of boredom associated with meaninglessness. Psychoanalytical and existential psychiatry offer insights into this question.

Psychoanalytical Psychiatry

Freudian psychoanalytical theory contributes another perspective on adolescent boredom by introducing the concept of repression of forbidden desires. While activation/arousal theories postulate a drive to maintain a level of optimal arousal, the psychoanalytical theory of boredom assumes that individuals have a drive to reduce arousal to maintain a low tension state (Esman, 1979; Fenichel, 1951; Wangh, 1979). Oedipal fantasies which are typically psycho-sexual or sado-masochistic must be repressed in an attempt to return to a tension-free state. The attempted repression is not fully successful, and the tension remains, but its original goal is forgotten. The result is restlessness, experienced as boredom, with stimulation being sought from the outside world to replace the forbidden goal:
Boredom is the experience 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. (Greenson in De Chenne, 1988, p. 71)

Greenson's comments best fit with existential boredom, being more passive and disinclined to action than is characteristic of adolescent sensation-seekers.

Fenichel (1951) notes two states of boredom -- quietness and jitteriness -- and attributes the difference to "tonic" or "clonic" binding of the cathexis, although he does not elaborate on the significance of these forms of binding or whether they would require different treatment. His observations do not differentiate between transient and chronic boredom, and the degree of dysphoria is not clear from his description. The expression of boredom fits with sensation-seeking in which the unsatisfied need for stimulation leads either to agitation or drowsiness.

Wangh (1979) notes that adolescents are particularly prone to boredom and suggests that the cause is their retreat from the danger of attachment of an intense sexual fantasy to the primary sexual objects. "They are in turn driven to fly from the resulting labile state of boredom, for extra safety, towards intense external stimulation" (p. 521). Wangh sees boredom as an acutely dysphoric state accompanied by a drive for sensation.

What is not clear is why, when faced with the same issue of repression, some adolescents become drowsy and withdraw, while others seek stimulation. The traditional psychoanalytical approach has been criticized as insufficiently specific and comprehensive (Esman, 1979). The dynamic processes apply equally well to a diversity of other symptoms, and the theories do not explain why boredom is the result in some cases and not
in others. In addition, there must surely be instances of boredom unrelated to unconscious conflict. Caged animals seem to share the restlessness of humans in a monotonous situation, without the need of an Oedipal complex to explain their behavior.

Although psychoanalytical theories do not distinguish between transient and chronic boredom, it would be consistent with the theories to assume that the tension resulting from incomplete repression could be either transient or chronic depending upon the strength of the repression and the absence of external distractions to mask the tension. Application of Freudian psychoanalytical theories to women has been found by several authors to be inadequate to explain female behavior (Gilligan, 1982).

Various authors in the psychoanalytical tradition have speculated on other causes of boredom based on repression. For example, Bernstein (in Esman, 1979) suggests that Western child-rearing practices demand such massive repression of feeling for success in middle class society that young people have lost the capacity for intense emotional experience and are thus predisposed to chronic boredom. This does not explain the boredom of poor, inner city youth whose rearing has been different from that of middle class whites.

It is my opinion that the influence of childhood abuse, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, has been underestimated in psychoanalytical psychiatry, perhaps because the extent of such abuse was not fully appreciated until recently. As a family physician, I have noted that awareness of the prevalence and severity of child abuse has increased dramatically in the last decade. In the late 1980's, public attitudes toward victims of abuse became more sympathetic, with the result that many patients disclosed childhood trauma that had previously been kept secret. Even if some disclosures are
specious, the numbers of patients whose stories are corroborated by witnesses or even admitted by the perpetrator reveal a blindspot that requires a re-evaluation of psychoanalytical theory.

In summary, from the psychoanalytical perspective, boredom is based on repression of forbidden impulses leading to tension that is interpreted as inadequate stimulation from the environment. Psychoanalytical theory assumes an internal orientation that places responsibility for boredom on the individual, not on the environment. The theory is supported by case study reports but not by large scale empirical studies. Nonetheless, the insights of this theory may be helpful in understanding the dampening down of feelings that leads some individuals to sensation-seeking, and the repressed anger that appears to be behind the detached "cool" demeanor of some adolescents who claim to be bored. Unfortunately, psychoanalytic therapy has not been found effective in treating delinquent or violent offenders (Tolan & Guerra, 1994) and thus the elaboration of the theory seems merely academic.

**Existential Psychiatry**

Existential psychiatry assumes that humans have a fundamental drive to make meaning in life and that boredom is the primary symptom of meaninglessness. In this section I refer to four key authors in existential psychiatry, Frankl, Yalom, May, and Fromm. If we recall the expressions of boredom in adolescent music and videos cited in Chapter One, we can see that they describe meaninglessness rather than sensation-seeking. Let me give another example, this time from the rock band, Offspring, on their 1994 CD, *Smash*: 
NITRO (YOUTH ENERGY)

Our generation Sees the world
not the same as before
We might as well just throw it all
And live like there's no tomorrow
... living under the gun every day
You might be gone before you know
So live like there's no tomorrow
(Offspring, 1994)

This focus on loss of meaning is important because it suggests that adolescent boredom is unlikely to be relieved by projects that increase sensation without increasing meaning.

In the rock video, *Jeremy*, another example discussed earlier, the images are of meaninglessness not of sensation hunger. Jeremy tries to deal with alienation, loneliness, rejection by both peers and parents, irrelevance of the church and the school, and mindless patriotism. That is, where there should be a source of meaning in relationships, family, nationality, spirituality, or even in the challenge of education, everything is empty. Jeremy's suicide seems an almost justifiable response to his pain and despair. The association of boredom, meaninglessness, and violence was described by existential psychiatrists because although violence is a negative force, it imparts significance to one's life. I recall that John Lennon's assassin, Mark David Chapman, claimed to have committed the murder so that his life would be significant.

Existential psychiatry raises questions such as: "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the meaning of my life?" "How should I live?" "If life is meaningless, why should I not commit suicide?" Such questions are not regarded by most practitioners as the terrain of mainstream...
psychiatry. Furthermore, patients experiencing existential angst usually present with other symptoms, such as alcoholism, substance abuse, low self-esteem, depression, or identity crisis. These symptoms obscure the loss of meaning and lead to a different direction of treatment. A small number of psychologists and psychoanalysts, notably Frankl, 1955/1973; Maddi, 1967; May et al., 1958; Wangh, 1979 and Fromm, 1981, have explored mental illness in the context of the patient's whole existence. Greatly influenced by the works of the early existentialist philosophers Kierkegaard and Heidegger, these writers place the search for meaning at the centre of human life and the loss of ontological sense as the fundamental neurosis of our time (May, et al., 1958).

Although adolescents are only occasionally singled out by these authors, the theoretical and therapeutic insights of existential psychiatry are helpful in constructing a profile of adolescents at high risk for meaninglessness and boredom, and for developing programs to respond to them. The search for meaning is a task that usually appears when young people must choose how to make a living, where to live, and whether to marry and have children. It is also often a time when spiritual values are examined and answers sought to the questions of how one should live one's life and what is of ultimate concern. With the decline of church attendance in North America (Bibby, 1993) many young people have lost the interaction with an institutionalized framework that offers answers to how one should live one's life, but this vacuum has not been filled in other ways. Many young people turn to each other and to their heroes to find the answers. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Gaines (1992) is convinced that rock music is the religion of youth.
Two issues are central to the search for meaning, one personal or internal -- how individuals make meaning in their particular situations -- and one social or external -- how social changes lead to increased meaninglessness in our society. Frankl's work is focused on the experience of individuals and therapeutic interventions to help identify sources of meaning for them. Concerns about the increasing prevalence of boredom and meaninglessness, and about causes of these changes are peripheral to Frankl's work, but are central to that of Yalom, May, and Fromm. The latter three authors examine the impact of social change on the task of making life meaningful, and relate these changes to increasing levels of violence.

Frankl, a Viennese psychiatrist who survived two years of imprisonment in Auschwitz during the Second World War, observed that those inmates who retained a sense of meaning in their lives, despite the horrors of the camp, were more likely to survive. His book, *The Doctor and the Soul*, (Frankl, 1955/1973), in manuscript form when he was arrested, was confiscated and destroyed. Rewriting the book on scavenged bits of paper was one of the ways he continued to provide meaning in his life while in the prison camp. The other significant sources of meaning were his love for his wife who had been taken prisoner at the same time and died in another camp, and his attitude toward his suffering, which he believed was a source of meaning from which he could learn much about the human condition.

The idea of suffering as a source of meaning is an important contribution of Frankl, and one that has proved helpful to those trying to make sense of disabling illness and impending death. Perhaps it might be as significant for young people who have been deprived and abused in childhood and who are struggling to find meaning in their lives. From reactions of high school students I have observed, it appears that although
they can readily see the meaning of overcoming suffering in the case of Canadian wheelchair athlete and advocate, Rick Hansen, they cannot see the possible meaning of suffering in the life of Kurt Cobain, the late lead singer of the group Nirvana. Many young people seem to accept Cobain's suicide as an appropriate response to an unjust world, as they do the death of Jeremy in the rock video. After Cobain's death, some adolescents killed themselves and referred to Cobain in their suicide notes. Whether these teenagers or Kurt Cobain himself might have been helped to find meaning in their lives through the way they responded to suffering is an important question for consideration.

When people suffer from meaninglessness, they complain of an inability to find anything interesting in life. The condition may be a temporary plunge into emptiness, which may occur with the death of a loved one -- a painful but unavoidable part of normal life -- or it may be a long-lasting comprehensive failure in the search for meaning. This chronic inability to believe in the truth, importance, usefulness, or inherent value of any of the things one is engaged in or can imagine doing has been called the existential neurosis (Maddi, 1967). Frankl (1955) distinguishes "existential vacuum" from "existential neurosis". Existential vacuum corresponds to transient boredom -- a common but temporary condition characterized by boredom, apathy, emptiness, cynicism, and lack of direction. Existential neurosis corresponds to chronic boredom -- a severe state of despair, meaninglessness, and hopelessness. Frankl is at pains to note that while this condition is called a neurosis, it does not necessarily represent a pathological process because it is experienced by normal people as well as those with psychiatric illness. Although it may occur in healthy people, meaninglessness can be sufficiently corrosive to lead to extreme agitation,
suicidal despair, or violence. In discussing the prevalence of existential vacuum, Frankl (1959) quotes an unpublished study of 100 prosperous Harvard alumni, one fourth of whom doubted their lives had any meaning. Furthermore, he states that 20% of the neuroses he encounters are noogenic (concerned with meaning) in origin. He reports existential vacuum in 40% of college students in Vienna and 81% of college students in America. Frankl associates various symptoms besides boredom with meaninglessness. These are alcoholism, depression, obsessionalism, delinquency, preoccupation with sex, and daredevilry.

An assumption of existential psychiatry associated with Frankl is that meaning changes from person to person and from moment to moment; each person is unique and each life contains a series of unique assignments which have to be discovered and responded to (Fabry, 1968). Frankl's approach is to ask patients what life expects of them, rather than what they expect of life, thus forcing them to look outside themselves to see a responsibility to engage actively in their lives. He believes that one finds meaning in the search for one's specific assignments, and that happiness, contentment, and peace of mind are mere side products of that search. This approach is contrary to the attitude expressed in adolescent music, that there is no future because of what is happening in the external environment. Frankl would ask young people to seek what they have been called to do no matter how they see the outside world.

From his observations in the prison camp and the ideas he had been working on earlier, Frankl developed his theory of existential neurosis and a therapeutic strategy which he called 'logotherapy', from the root 'logos' which he translates as 'meaning'. Logos can also be defined as the controlling principle of the universe or, in theological terms, "the will of God."
In his several books Frankl outlines case histories which illustrate the sources of meaning that form the basis of his therapy for various patients. He stresses that meaning must be outside and beyond oneself and that those who seek meaning inside themselves may be saved the effort of reaching out, but they are condemned to boredom, apathy, emptiness, and meaninglessness. In order to apply Frankl’s concepts to young people who are struggling to find meaning, it is helpful to examine the sources of meaning Frankl identifies. He summarizes sources of meaning into three categories: creative, experiential, and attitudinal. By creative, he means what one accomplishes or gives to the world through work, creative expression, or service to others. Whether the work is simply the mundane tasks of everyday life or is a longterm goal like writing a book or building a cathedral, work that is imbued with a purpose outside oneself is meaningful. Like work, creative expression can provide transcendent meaning. Frankl often helped patients see that their lives were an expression of unique creativity, even if they had not achieved their goals. Service to something or someone outside oneself is a key element and one that Frankl found important for himself when he worked to ease the suffering of his fellow inmates in Auschwitz. Serving others meant that he had risen above the most abhorrent circumstances to strive toward a noble goal. Frankl states that non-transcendent goals are always self-defeating and the more one seeks happiness, the more elusive it is. According to Frankl, what matters is how we respond to the task, not the task itself.

Frankl’s second category, experiential sources of meaning, refers to what one takes from encounters in the world such as close relationships

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2 Frankl’s notion of transcendent meaning as “having a reference outside oneself” needs to be carefully nuanced for use in Asian cultures where the referent for the transcendent is found within the self but beyond the ego.
and the experience of responding to beauty in nature. Frankl writes that even when he contemplated the possibility that his wife had died elsewhere in the camp, he still thought of her and spoke to her as if she were present. He encouraged his patients to see that there was meaning in their lives because of the love they felt for someone, even if that person had died. He writes that the past cannot be taken away or changed, and what one has experienced one has forever. Engagement in deep experience also produces meaning. Frankl describes a moment when he looked through the barbed wire of the camp, saw the trees against the sunset and felt a great affirmation of the meaning of life.

Frankl's third source of meaning, attitude, concerns one's stand toward suffering, toward a fate that one cannot change, and one's sense of spirituality. In many of his case studies, Frankl alludes to helping patients see their suffering in a different light. Suffering may provide a new understanding or empathy, or may be the price a person chooses to pay in order to spare someone else. Frankl found that often his fellow inmates in the prison camp demonstrated the dignity of a human being who refused to submit to degradation, and who died with self-respect and integrity. I find no evidence of this kind of meaning in the music I have quoted, and no nobility in the suicides. This suggests to me that young people may not be aware that one's response to suffering can be a source of meaning in life, and that helping them see this may be a valuable intervention.

According to Frankl, spirituality is another important source of meaning. He considers spiritual health to be as important as physical or psychological health, although it is usually neglected by psychiatrists. He refers to Carl Jung, who wrote that about a third of his cases were not suffering from any clinically definable neurosis but from the senselessness
and aimlessness of their lives (Yalom, 1980). Spirituality in Frankl's terms is not limited to belief in a specific religion, but includes a sense of something greater than oneself. While his writings reveal his own religious belief, his therapeutic approach builds on the patient's personal spiritual resources (Frankl, 1969/1970).

Frankl is now ninety years old; his most popular book, Man's Search for Meaning (Frankl, 1959) has sold two and a half million copies in English alone, and is in its seventy-third printing. Frankl has passed the mantle of leadership in logotherapy to Elisabeth Lukas, a German psychiatrist who follows his ideas very closely. An International Institute of Logotherapy has been established in the United States to further the study of Frankl's system of therapy and to publish The International Forum for Logotherapy.

The importance of Frankl's work to the understanding of adolescent boredom is that he studied meaninglessness in extreme circumstances -- the prison camp or the hospital room of a dying patient -- and found wisdom to help those who were suffering. The situations faced by many adolescents can scarcely be worse than those he experienced, and perhaps his therapeutic insights can help them find meaning in their lives.

Two psychological instruments designed to measure meaning in life are relevant to the present study because they have been used with adolescents and provide correlations of meaninglessness with other personality indicators. The first, the Purpose in Life Test (PIL) by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964), was followed by the Life Regard Index (LRI) of Battista and Almond (1973). Although the LRI is conceptually more sophisticated, it has been little used, perhaps because the PIL was already sufficiently established as an instrument. The PIL uses 20 items rated on a seven point scale. Eight of the items deal explicitly with life meaning, purpose, or
mission; six items deal with life satisfaction; three items deal with freedom; one item with fear of death; one with contemplation of suicide; and one with worthwhileness of one's life. The PIL has been used to measure meaning in life both with subjects in the throes of life changes and with subjects with long histories of boredom and meaninglessness. Pre- and post-testing has been used to measure treatment effects following counseling for alcoholism and depression (Jacobsen, Ritter, & Mueller, 1977).

Several serious questions have been raised about the validity of the PIL test, particularly whether the questions might actually be measuring other psychological states such as depression. The research, however, suggests that PIL measures an independent variable with only moderate overlap with the MMPI depression scale, and other measures of depression and with the Srole Anormie Scale (Yalom, 1980). Critics suggest the items may be loaded in social desirability, may reflect certain values such as assuming that the acceptance of responsibility indicates meaning in life, and may be interpreted in highly idiosyncratic ways (Yalom, 1980). In spite of his reservations, Yalom concludes that it is important to consider the results of studies using the PIL because it is the only instrument that has been widely used to study meaninglessness in a systematic manner. More recently, Chamberlain and Zika (1988) compared three instruments: the PIL, the LRI, and the SOC (Sense of Coherence) scale. The SOC is a more general scale which attempts to measure three components, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. They found the PIL the most useful, and its limitations minor, although they also comment that the LRI shows promise and that it is unfortunate that the test has not been more widely used and evaluated.
The following is a summary abstracted from Yalom (1980) of some of the studies using the PIL. I have chosen those that used adolescents as subjects or which could be generalized to adolescents. These results are important in clarifying the characteristics of adolescents who find their lives meaningless and boring. Conversely, the characteristics of those who find their lives meaningful should be helpful in designing intervention strategies to support the bored group.

**A low PIL is associated with:**
- delinquent adolescents
- high school students who abuse drugs
- alcoholics
- neurotic patients
- external locus of control (Tolor, 1989)
- introverts, (as measured by the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Gudjonsson, 1989))
- those who highly value hedonism, excitation, and comfort
- ghetto residents, blacks and Mexican Americans

**A high PIL is associated with:**
- strong religious beliefs that play a central role in the individual's life
- low death anxiety
- internal locus of control
- conservatism
- anti-hedonism
- religious-puritanical views
- idealism
- involvement in organized groups, e.g., religious, ethnic, political
- community service
- involvement with sports and hobbies
- positive world view
- goal orientation
- self-transcendent goals

Before leaving Frankl, I will discuss Yalom's ambivalent views about him. On the one hand, Yalom states that Frankl has not received appropriate credit for his formidable contributions to psychiatry; on the other
hand, he is highly critical of Frankl's books. His ambivalence appears to stem from Frankl's self laudatory style and the lack of empirical evidence in Frankl's books. To illustrate this, I will quote Yalom's comments:

Many scholars find Frankl's method offensive. His arguments are often appeals to emotion; he persuades, makes *ex cathedra* proclamations, and is often repetitive and strident. Furthermore, though he claims to present a secular approach to meaning... it is clear that Frankl's approach to meaning is fundamentally religious.

Serious readers are often troubled by many distractions in reading Frankl. In virtually every work there are numerous self-aggrandizing comments; self-citations, reminders about the many universities at which he has lectured, his many titles, the many eminent people who endorse his approach, the number of professionals who assist him, the occasions when medical students have broken out into unrestrained applause during one of his interviews, the foolish questions posed to him and his pithy rejoinders. Works by Frankl's disciples are particularly unenlightening and consist of a restatement of his remarks and an idealization of his person. (Yalom, 1980, p. 442)

Yalom's criticisms are as relevant today as they were in 1980, because the research on logotherapy arising from Frankl's followers continues to lack empirical evidence from carefully controlled studies. The *International Forum for Logotherapy* is not carried by any Canadian universities, apparently because of inadequate academic quality. I have reviewed fifty articles from the journal and have found most of them to be anecdotal, repetitive, and lacking intellectual or scientific rigor. For example, a recent article outlines a case history of a prison inmate who is counseled using logotherapy and later discharged. The author writes, "Although follow-up data are not currently available, John's chances of remaining crime-free will be enhanced if he continues to act responsibly, think rationally, and work vigorously toward the realization of life-meaning"
(Walters, 1995). Since acting responsibly would include remaining crime-free, the first part of the statement is tautological, and the contention that working vigorously toward the realization of life-meaning would help John remain crime-free is not supported by any evidence. This is typical of the International Forum for Logotherapy and, unfortunately, Frankl's ideas are rarely explored in mainstream psychiatric literature, with the exception of the few empirical studies using Crumbaugh's (1964) Purpose in Life (PIL) test mentioned earlier. In spite of his criticisms, Yalom (1980) does take Frankl's ideas seriously and summarizes the results of the research using the PIL:

1. Lack of meaning in life is associated with psychopathology in a roughly linear sense: that is, the less the sense of meaning, the greater the severity of psychopathology.
2. A positive sense of meaning in life is associated with deeply held religious beliefs.
3. A positive life meaning is associated with self-transcendent values.
4. A positive sense of meaning in life is associated with membership in groups, dedication to some cause, and adoption of clear life goals.
5. Life meaning must be viewed in a developmental perspective: the types of life meaning change over an individual's life; other developmental tasks must precede development of meaning.
(p. 459)

These conclusions underline the urgency of intervening with young people complaining of a profound loss of meaning because the symptom may indicate severe distress that may be helped by educational programs focused on finding sources of meaning in life. Supporting transcendent values, religious beliefs, and commitment to a group or cause outside oneself are key strategies.

Although American psychiatrists have also explored existential issues in the context of therapeutic interventions (May, et al., 1958; Yalom, 1980), there is no American school of existential psychotherapy, but rather a
collection of writings that carry the theme of the need for meaning in life as a significant force in human beings. Yalom's (1980) perspective on existential psychotherapy is based not only on his clinical experience but also on extensive use of insights from literature and philosophy. For example, in elaborating on sources of meaning, Yalom cites Will Durant, a philosopher and historian who collected the notions of a meaningful life as expressed by eminent men. These men found meaning in dedication to a cause such as family, the state, a political or religious cause, secular religions like communism and fascism, or a scientific venture. To help find a meaning in life, Durant suggests,

Join a whole, work for it with all your body and mind. The meaning of life lies in the chance it gives us to produce, or to contribute to something greater than ourselves. It need not be a family, it can be any group that can call out all the latent nobility of the individual, and give him a cause to work for that shall not be shattered by his death. (Durant, in Yalom, 1980, pp. 434-435)

Durant's (1932) work supports Frankl's (1955) conclusion that if an action is to give life meaning, it must lift the individual out of himself and make him part of a vaster scheme. It should be noted, however, that this worldview is very Eurocentric and therefore may not be applicable to worldviews that are not anthropocentric (e.g., the Aboriginal, Eastern, or Ecological world views). These alternative views may have much to offer and may come to the fore as Western society becomes more pluralistic.

Yalom (1980), however, sees a negative aspect to committing oneself to a great cause because "crusadism" can be neurotic if the individuals embrace a cause almost regardless of its content, taking up cause after cause in order to stay ahead of meaninglessness. This may be true for young people
who take up a pseudo-commitment to a cause that does not really engage them. On the other hand, they may find that they become committed after taking up the cause because they begin to find compelling reasons to support their actions, despite their early ambivalence.

May, another prominent American existentialist, adds an important perspective to Frankl’s work in relating violence to meaningfulness and powerlessness (May, et al., 1958). He suggests that many people feel they have no significance because they cannot influence the forces around them and they become apathetic and then violent. He states that no human being can stand the perpetually numbing experience of his own powerlessness (May, 1969). May relates the development of the schizoid personality, described as cold, aloof, superior, and detached, as an expression of technological man, and as a personality that may erupt into violence.

May touches closely on the concerns expressed by adolescents about their future, seeing modern life as inauthentic, alienated from nature and denying death: “The greater our alienation from nature -- alienation’s ultimate symbol being the atom bomb and radiation -- the closer we actually are to death” (May, 1969, p. 107). May sees that the central problem we face in our society is not a lack of ethics, but an inability to act, to take responsibility, because the nuclear arms race has left us with a deep sense of impotence in the face of a catastrophic threat to survival.

Once again I turn to the music of adolescent culture to support May’s contention. In Smash, (Offspring, 1994) the lyrics juxtapose the threats to survival of the planet, and the despair of youth:
IT'LL BE A LONG TIME

... Superpowers flex their wings
Hold the world on Puppet strings
Egos will feed while citizens bleed . . .

NOT THE ONE

We're innocent
But the battles left us are far from over
We're not the ones whose pollution blackened our skies
And ruined our streams
We're not the ones who made the nuclear bombs
That threaten our lives
. . . Still our descendants will inherit our mistakes of today
They'll suffer just the same as we and never wonder why

The album is completed with songs of violence such as
"Killerboy Powerhead", "Smash", "Genocide", and "Bad Habit", that assume
destruction and killing are reasonable responses to frustration.

May (1969) continues his theme of alienation and aloneness in modern society:

This anonymous man's never being known, this aloneness, is transformed into loneliness, which may then become daimonic possession. For his self-doubts -- 'I don't really exist since I can't affect anyone' -- eat away at his innards; he lives and breathes and walks in a loneliness which is subtle and insidious. It is not surprising that he gets a gun and trains it on some passer-by -- also anonymous to him. And it is not surprising that the young men in the streets, who are only anonymous digits in their society, should gang together in violent attacks to make sure their assertion is felt. (p. 162)

Another theme of existential psychiatry taken up by May (1958) is that of the "cleavage between subject and object that has bedeviled Western thought and science since shortly after the Renaissance". He refers often to
the idea that to understand human beings one must think of the person as, in Heidegger's term, "being-in-the-world". May finds a resonance with the writings of Laotzu and Zen Buddhism in their seeking a relation to reality which is not only non-theistic, but also does not separate subject and object.

Erich Fromm, another 20th century psychoanalyst who was deeply concerned about the loss of meaning in contemporary society, was greatly influenced by Karl Marx and the promise of socialism to return meaning to work. He attributed the problems of boredom and depression to the emphasis of capitalistic society on consumption, a pseudo-solution to the problem of boredom. In fact, he defines boredom as chronic depression that can successfully be compensated by consumption (Fromm, 1981). Fromm identifies the fundamental drive of humans to be the necessity to unite with other living beings, and sees this need as being behind all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word. In striving for unity, the healthy individual retains separateness and integrity, while the unhealthy one tries to achieve it by submission to another, to a group or to God, or by trying to dominate others.

Fromm (1981) identifies universal human needs which reflect Frankl's sources of meaning and expand upon them: transcendent creativity, rootedness, identity, and orientation to the world itself. Each of these needs may evoke a healthy or an unhealthy response. If the drive for creation is frustrated, Fromm predicts that the drive to destroy will take over. He postulates that "there is another answer to this need for transcendence; if I cannot create life, I can destroy it. To destroy life makes me also transcend it" (Fromm, 1981). Fromm balances creation and destruction on a razor's edge, in a way similar to May's balancing the sense of personal significance or power against the drive to violence and destruction. Fromm describes the
need for rootedness as a craving to fight against being torn away from nature, from mother, blood, and soil. It may be met by a healthy connection with the earth, or by an unhealthy "fixation" in nature and mother. The need for identity, which Fromm considers the most intense human need, evokes a healthy response through the full creative development of the person, while unhealthy responses include identifying with nation, religion, class or occupation instead. (Fromm does not discuss aboriginal and other cultures in which personal identity is considered to be inseparable from group identity.) Finally, the need to orient oneself in the world means to find a personal cosmology, a belief system that is rational and provides an object of devotion that gives meaning to one's existence and position in the world. Fromm states that the difference between the various responses is the difference between mental health and illness. In seeking meaning in our existence, we must struggle against many basic trends in modern culture: the idea of a split between intellect and affect, the replacement of the human being by the machine, and the replacement of joy and relatedness with thrill, excitement, and consumption.

According to Fromm boredom represents the loss of meaning in life, a loss which is so all powerful that it can cause people to love death instead of life. His orientation to the loss of meaning has political as well as personal implications. Although sympathetic to Marxist socialism, Fromm regards capitalism and Soviet communism as representing the same materialistic orientation, both equally destructive.

He connects the invention of nuclear weapons with the search for meaning being distorted toward destruction instead of creation, and writes extensively on the case for unilateral disarmament.
Man, instead of being the master of the machines he has built, has become their servant. . . . We have only one choice, and that is mastering the machine again, making production into a means and not an end, using it for the unfolding of man -- or else the suppressed life energies will manifest themselves in chaotic and destructive forms. Man will want to destroy life rather than die of boredom. (Fromm, 1981, p. 67)

The opposite of killing time is being interested, a state that seems equivalent to being engaged as Sartre phrased it. Fromm (1981) writes that unless one is interested, life is boring, and in despair, one will reach out for all sorts of means to dispel this boredom. Fromm (1981) agreed with Freud that repression is an important defence mechanism, but disagreed about the significance of the Oedipal complex in this drive. He thought there is probably nothing more repressed than the feeling of boredom.

May (1958) and Fromm (1981) attribute the underlying etiology of meaninglessness to cultural change that has brought with it alienation from the land and from religion, loss of meaningful work, breakdown of the extended family, and increased mobility resulting in loss of a sense of place (Fromm and May in Yalom, 1980). They write that in pre-industrial society there were many life problems, but lack of meaning was not one of them. Religious meaning was provided comprehensively, and people were preoccupied with survival needs. At the present time, meaninglessness is intricately interwoven with leisure and disengagement. When people had to live close to the earth, they felt a part of nature, fulfilling nature's purpose in plowing the ground, sowing and reaping. Everyday work was creative because they shared in the creation of life amongst their livestock and seed and grain. As an integral part of a family and a community, they had clear roles to play and a strong sense of belonging to a larger unit. Work was
intrinsically worthwhile. Today in North America, most people no longer attend church services regularly and, although most profess to believe in a superior being (Bibby, 1993), most people seem to face life without a religiously based system to provide cosmic meaning. At the same time, they have left the agrarian occupations that reinforced their ties to the earth and to creation. The importance of socio-cultural change is examined in detail by Healy whose work is summarized in the final section of this chapter.

Yalom (1980) identifies four ultimate concerns somewhat different from Fromm's: death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. Freedom in the existential sense is an absence of external structure, a groundlessness that he says is riveted to dread. Although Yalom does not specify what freedom means to adolescents, it seems congruent with his theory that the lack of constraints of family, church, and community leaves them filled with fear and anxiety. Isolation in Yalom's terms is the final loneliness we feel when we face the reality that each of us dies alone. Meaning is the integrating factor that allows humans to come to grips with freedom, isolation, and death;meaninglessness is the force of disintegration into despair. The individual's confrontation with these ultimate concerns is an inescapable part of human existence, but understanding or reconciling oneself to them requires deep personal reflection, a process that requires solitude, silence, time, and freedom from the everyday distractions. Perhaps most people also require a form of guidance or mentorship in this reflection. A troubling question is where young people who do not have a church affiliation or a strong family bond find that guidance.

Each of these authors places the role of spirituality or a personal orientation to the world as a central issue for meaningful life. Frankl writes from a religious perspective, Fromm, May, and Yalom from a humanistic
Many young people find that belief in God provides a framework for understanding or accepting isolation, death, freedom, and the need for meaning, whether or not they accept a particular religious doctrine. Some may seek a humanistic solution to Yalom's four ultimate concerns, while others may fail to find any meaning that helps them to resolve the loneliness and emptiness of their existence.

Let me make an important aside about the search for religious or spiritual meaning as it applies to Canadian youth. Bibby (1992) studied attitudes of Canadian teenagers toward religion, and concludes that religious institutions in Canada can expect approximately 15% of the country's young adults to continue entering their doors. "It doesn't take a calculator to compute that 85% of the younger generation are out there, figuring out how to live without the benefit of a cohesive spiritual perspective" (Bibby & Posterskie, 1992, p. 264). The great questions such as "How did the world come into being?" "What is the purpose of life?" "How can I find real happiness?" "Why is there suffering in the world?" "What happens after death?" continue to be raised by 75 to 91% of youth between the ages of 18 and 24, according to Project Can80 (cited in Bibby, 1993, p. 145). In other words, young people are seeking an orientation to meaning, but for a multitude of reasons, including the betrayal of trust by some religious leaders who have exploited young people, they are not turning to religious institutions to help them find it.

The overwhelming global problems that lead some young people to anger and despair lead others to actively protest. In 1992 when she was twelve years old, Canadian Severn Cullis-Suzuki addressed the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) in Brazil.
I am here to speak for all future generations. I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet because they have nowhere left to go.

I am afraid to go out in the sun now because of the holes in the ozone. I am afraid to breathe the air because I don’t know what chemicals are in it. I used to go fishing in Vancouver with my dad until just a few years ago we found the fish full of cancers. And now we hear about animals and plants becoming extinct every day -- vanishing forever.

In my life I have dreamt of seeing great herds of wild animals, jungles and rainforests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see. Did you have to worry about these things when you were my age? (Cullis-Suzuki, 1993, pp. 10-12)

The increasing prevalence of AIDS and violence in cities in the US and Canada mean that young people cannot be insulated from death, but must confront the question of what life means. Why do we live? How shall we live? Or, taking the existentialist position, how does a being who needs meaning find meaning in a universe that has no meaning?

Yalom, as a secular humanist, rejects the existence of a design outside of and superior to the person. He is concerned about the meaning of one’s own life, rather than the meaning of life itself, and concludes that one who possesses a sense of meaning experiences life as having some purpose or function to be fulfilled, some overriding goal or goals to which to apply oneself. This conclusion is similar to that of Camus and Sartre, who rejected any religious cosmology, and looked to the individual to create meaning. Existential psychiatry does not consider other world views such as Buddhism, Native Spirituality, or Deep Ecology, as possible sources of meaning. This omission assumes that young people have only the choices of Christianity, Humanism, or meaninglessness. Considering that only an exceptional few have the intellect and personal strength of a Yalom, Camus, or Sartre, to
create their own life meaning, this narrow perspective might lead to pessimism. Perhaps the pluralistic nature of our society will open the alternatives and help these young people in their search for meaning.

Finally, we must ask what strategies have been used in existential psychiatry that might help in the design of programs to reduce adolescent boredom. Frankl and his followers recognize that not all problems are existential, but that sometimes the loss of meaning is so powerful that no other therapy will work unless meaninglessness is addressed. In *The Doctor and the Soul*, (1955/1973) Frankl elaborates on psychotherapeutic techniques to address meaninglessness. The therapist must listen for indications of meaninglessness underlying other complaints, must allow the patient to raise spiritual issues, and must accord them central importance in therapy. His example of Socratic questioning to find the patient's sources of meaning is a valuable model. The specific techniques that Frankl devised, "de-reflection"³ and "paradoxical intent"⁴ are useful techniques for psychotherapy in general, but they do not seem to be specific to an existential approach. Furthermore, they seem of limited value in the context of this study.

Thus far we have seen that meaninglessness is a powerful, intensely negative state for many adolescents, and that it has both personal

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³ De-reflection is a technique of redirecting the patient's attention away from the symptom toward another person or source of meaning. For example, Lukas (1984) describes the case history of a child who was so anxious before school each day that he had abdominal pain. His parents were told to stop worrying about the boy's school work and focus instead on his extracurricular activities. They increased the time he spent on recreational pursuits, and found that not only did his symptoms disappear, but his school work improved as well.

⁴ Paradoxical intent is a technique of asking the patient to deliberately increase a symptom like anxiety or sweating. For example, Frankl (1955/1973, p. 223) challenges a man to respond to the next anxiety provoking situation by showing that he is a champion at sweating and can flood the floor with perspiration. Paradoxically, the symptom becomes less troublesome and often disappears with this maneuver. Other psychiatrists have used the same approach and called it "symptom prescription" (Haley, 1973).
and social determinants. Although some adolescents grow up in terrible circumstances, Frankl’s conviction that life has meaning in even the most extreme situations may be helpful to them.

In summary, sources of meaning in life are personal, and vary over one’s lifetime. Not all sources are relevant to everyone, but a list of common sources of meaning can be abstracted from the works of Frankl, Yalom, May, and Fromm with many of the items overlapping with others.

1. Engagement in a work: Whether this means life work, creative activities, hobbies and interests, the essential component is active involvement and emotional investment in the activity.

2. Service: A commitment to action that benefits others may mean altruistic endeavors or participating in a struggle against oppression.

3. Relationships: I include in this heading intimate relationships with family, friends, and identity relationships such as belonging to special groups whether they be ethnic or religious, or membership in groups dedicated to a cause (e.g. social movements).

4. Rootedness: Another source of belonging is through a connection to the earth, or a sense of belonging to a place. This sense may overlap with spirituality.

5. Personal stance: One’s attitude toward suffering and hardships may reflect a stance toward life that expresses a commitment to rise above obstacles and to live with dignity. The adoption of clear life goals, self-realization, and identity are other ways of taking a personal stance toward life.

6. Spirituality: I use this term broadly, as did Frankl, to indicate a personal cosmology, or orientation to the universe, rather than a religious affiliation. Rootedness in the earth provides this for some people, as noted above.
7. Responsiveness: This heading refers not only to reacting to the beauty of nature or art, but also to the Zen notion of mindfulness.

The quality of each of these sources that seems most important to alienated youth is a sense of connectedness. I discuss this quality further in Chapter Six.

Sociology and History of Boredom

Healy (1984) brings an historian’s perspective to the same issues addressed by the existentialist psychiatrists. His analysis of the causes of the severe, debilitating form of boredom arises from his finding that this kind of boredom has increased in prevalence since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. As discussed earlier, Healy calls transient boredom 'boredom\textsubscript{1}', or 'boredom\textsubscript{2}', and chronic boredom, 'boredom\textsubscript{3}', or 'hyperboredom'. Healy delves into historical references to the state of meaninglessness, purposelessness and dysphoria known by various other terms such as acedia (discussed earlier on pp. 18-21). Healy quotes extensively from Pascal, Voltaire, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Ibsen, Strindberg, Flaubert, Sartre, and Camus, among others. Kierkegaard, for example, wrote "how ruinous boredom is for humanity . . . boredom is the root of all evil" (Healy, 1984, p. 26), and Fromm, "one of the worst forms of mental suffering is boredom, not knowing what to do with one's self and one's life" (p. 42).

Healy notes that extreme boredom has existed since classical times, but was previously limited to scholars, the nobility, and those in religious orders. Beginning in the 17th century, boredom became more widespread in Europe and began to be addressed by scholars, and by the
wealthy who wrote letters and diaries that indicated the corrosive effects of boredom on their lives. By the 20th century, this severe, chronic form of boredom had become an important topic for philosophers, social scientists, authors, and playwrights. Healy argues that the reasons for the pandemic spread of boredom are:

1. The Enlightenment brought with it a separation of humankind from the world, an alienation from the earth and a loss of authentic self.

What Heidegger has called 'forgetfulness of Being' is our latter-day form of impiety and hubris, hyperboredom being one of its debilitating, destructive consequences; violence, vandalism, and self-destruction through drugs being some of the others. (Healy, 1984, p. 121)

2. The Industrial Revolution removed some people from the intimate connections of work and survival, and produced a class with leisure time. Leisure time is fertile ground for boredom and meaninglessness, as some hermetic monks and some nobility had found for centuries.

3. The Enlightenment also brought doubts about the certainty of God's existence, and therefore a loss of the organizing principle of culture and meaning. Doubts about the existence of God can be traced back to Peter Abelard whose radical teaching in the eleventh century infuriated Bernard of Clairvaux because he foresaw its effect on faith. The "desacralization of the cosmos", to use Eliade's phrase (cited in Healy, 1984, p. 84) has resulted from the industrial and scientific transformation of societies.

4. The materialism of Western culture provides such a plethora of consumer goods that none retains its meaning because all can be replaced.
the sheer number of things has depreciated any particular one of them . . . our reckless destruction of things has sundered us from them in spirit . . . . Everything is disposable; we live in a Kleenex culture. (Healy, 1984, p. 68)

5. Increased mobility has meant a loss of the meaning of place. The sense of being at home, of living in unity with familiar land, trees, and community, has been given up in favor of freedom of movement.

6. The central, unspoken organizing ideas which comprise "common sense" have been lost so that we do not have a coherent, self-evident Weltanschauung which is the cement of our culture. Nisbet writes "boredom is one of the most dangerous accompaniments of the loss of authority in a social order . . . boredom born of natural authority dissolved, of too long exposure to the void" (cited in Healy, 1984 p. 84).

7. Deep personal relationships, always difficult to sustain, have become more fragile. (In Canada, for example, the decline of the institutionalized church has led to diminished commitment to the religious foundation of marriage vows; changing sexual mores and frequent exposure to role models, particularly in the media, who demonstrate lack of commitment and fidelity have led to acceptance of "serial monogamy"; and employment alternatives for women mean decreased dependence on marriage as a source of economic security. The decline of the church has also meant loss of the role of a community in buttressing faltering relationships.)

Healy finds the loss of transcendent meaning, the "metaphysical void", more than wealth, leisure, personal pathology, or human nature, to be the fundamental cause of emptiness. The effect of this loss of transcendent meaning on the idealism of youth concerns him as a teacher.
Idealism, if by that is meant the urgent desire to search out and to pursue what is excellent and what is true, to cultivate and to cleave to what is beautiful and right, becomes increasingly incapable of being satisfied, or even of finding a credible object or direction, in a culture where Truth has been reduced to truth, or even more damagingly to truths, even to "truths". (Healy, 1984, p. 89)

Healy (1984) attributes wanton environmental destruction to the loss of meaning in industrial societies. He describes the source of meaning in life as the perception that one has of coherence, the sense of a centre that need not be defined rationally, but is accepted prereflectively. He is pessimistic about the possibility that we can regain this coherent sense of unity because religion cannot withstand the attacks of rationality, and only religion can offer the core meaning we lack. Healy writes in a Western context, and does not consider the world view of Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism, that do not necessarily invoke God.

The importance of Healy's work for the current study on adolescent boredom is that many young people in our society, especially those who live in the inner cities, are vulnerable to all the losses of meaning that he outlines: separation from the earth, from meaningful (or any) work, from a transcendent cosmology, from objects imbued with personal historical meaning, from a sense of place and continuity, from a culture with a consensual set of values, from stable extended families -- all losses of connectedness.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review has been to clarify the meaning of boredom, why it is sometimes pathological, what causes it, its
relationship to criminality and how to prevent it. What has been found is that the transient, trivial state of boredom is qualitatively different from the chronic, agonizing form graphically portrayed in rock music. This dysphoric state occurs in normal people but it is pathological if it leads to maladaptive responses that are destructive of self or other. Chronic boredom, clearly the subject of greatest concern in adolescence, seems to have two expressions: sensation-seeking and meaning-seeking. Sensation-seeking appears to be more common, but because meaning-seeking may be an unrecognized drive, it is possible that some adolescents are trying unsuccessfully to reduce existential angst by seeking high levels of sensation. Sensation-seeking is associated with many anti-social behaviors, ranging from drug and alcohol abuse to violence and criminality. Sensation-seeking is also common in normal adolescents, who have a propensity for risk-taking and a need for excitement, but who fulfill their needs in prosocial ways. Childhood experiences appear to work synergistically with genetic make-up to predispose the individual toward sensation-seeking. From empirical studies, meaning-seeking appears to be less common than sensation-seeking, but it may simply be less studied. The shortcoming of the empirical literature reviewed is that there is insufficient evidence to determine the prevalence of meaninglessness among young people, whether delinquent or non-delinquent. Nonetheless, the lyrics from rock music and its variants, (grunge, rap, heavy metal, hip-hop), and the volume of their sales suggest that meaninglessness is a pervasive and destructive condition for young people. The factors that increase personal susceptibility to sensation-seeking boredom include childhood deprivation and abuse, while the factors that increase personal susceptibility to meaning-seeking boredom would include a sense of hopelessness about the future: no jobs, no safety, no place where they
belong, no close family, no God, no healthy planet, -- the bottom seems to have fallen out of their world. The British band, the Sex Pistols, expressed this despair in the repeated refrain "no future no future" in their 1977 song, "God Save the Queen".

... there is no future
in England's dreaming
... when there's no future
can there be sin
we're the flowers in the dustbin...

(Sex Pistols, 1977)

The Sex Pistols were a short-lived but enormously popular band that specialized in outrageous behavior. Known for being misfits and delinquents, the band was surrounded by controversy for pushing the limits of decency. Sid Vicious, the lead singer, died of a heroin overdose at age 21 while awaiting trial for the murder of his girl friend. The hopelessness and anger of the Sex Pistols apparently struck a note with young people because their record eventually achieved gold status, despite its undistinguished music. Whether the group reflected or created despair in young people is a difficult question that raises the issue of the role of media and the entertainment industry in the world view of adolescents. On the one hand, the band members were rude, aggressive, thoroughly dislikable young men whose music grew out of their own hatred and rebellion. Only a small percentage of young people could have shared such dysfunctional pasts, but huge numbers attended Sex Pistols concerts and bought their records. We must assume that many found a resonance with the performers.

On the other hand, bizarre and extreme performers attract media attention disproportionate to their talent, and frequent exposure to the alienation and anger of such groups, associated with fame, money, and
glamour, may have led some young people to accept the same anti-social attitudes as reasonable. The influence of media on youth violence is discussed in Chapter Five.

Whether young people respond to boredom in a pro- or anti-social way seems to depend on their background, their families, their home stability and learned techniques for dealing with problems. The implications for schools will be discussed more fully later, but it seems clear that to respond to boredom we must consider carefully whether we are concerned about a transient annoyance in the average student, or the chronic, destructive condition that has serious consequences for some. Educators must consider the kind of boredom they are working to prevent, because they may put a great deal of energy into reducing a relatively benign condition and miss the opportunity to deal with a serious, destructive force.
A Proposed Structure of Boredom

In order to make sense of the diverse perspectives on boredom offered by psychology, psychiatry, and socio-cultural history, I offer a conceptual structure that integrates the research and allows us to target different forms of boredom in adolescence. The research on boredom leads me to conclude that in addition to two states of boredom, transient and chronic, there are two expressions of boredom, which I will call sensation-seeking and meaning-seeking. Adolescents who say they are bored may try to relieve their restlessness by speeding on a motorcycle, (sensation-seeking) or they may express despair that there is no relief in activity because there is nothing worth doing and nowhere they belong (meaning-seeking). I classify studies such as those of Zuckerman, Maddi, and others, under sensation-seeking, since they see boredom as a need for excitement, thrills, action, and diversion while I classify those such as Robinson, Gaines, Farrell, Fromm, and others, under meaning-seeking, since they see boredom as a state of having nothing worth doing, a lack of interest in anything, and a lack of engagement. Although the authors did not classify boredom in this way, most studies can be interpreted within this framework without distorting their meaning, permitting the drawing of conclusions that may be helpful in designing responses to the different kinds of boredom experienced in adolescence.

Chart 1 provides the framework for organizing the theories of boredom. The boundaries between the categories should be seen to be
overlapping, not only because human behavior is complex, but also because most of the authors cited did not subdivide boredom, and consequently their research often applies to more than one category.

Chart 2 illustrates the central issue of this study, the relationship between boredom and violence, in the personal responses to each of the expressions of boredom. People may respond to boredom in an adaptive, prosocial way, or in a maladaptive and destructive way that hurts themselves or others.

Strategies that may be adaptive in one situation may be maladaptive in another, especially if carried to an extreme. An example may be helpful here, before I set out the categories in more detail. Consider, for example, a situation of transient boredom such as an individual listening to an uninteresting lecture. Adaptive responses to increase stimulation might include doodling, tapping, or humming. An alternative adaptive response might be to withdraw by daydreaming or falling asleep, or by leaving quietly. (Depending upon the circumstances, those responses might be maladaptive because they make the lecturer angry or disturb the other students.) Maladaptive responses might include increasing stimulation by rude, disruptive behavior, or impulsive acts such as angry outbursts or quitting school. Adaptive responses to increase meaning in the situation might include mentally reframing the lecture as something important to one's future, or increasing the complexity of the situation by asking questions. Maladaptive ways to respond to perceived lack of meaning in the situation might include disruptively challenging the lecturer about the relevance of the material, or dropping out.
### Chart 1

**A Conceptual Framework of Boredom**

**BOREDOM**

**States of Boredom**
- Transient
  - [Healy's Boredom₁ and Boredom₂]
- Chronic
  - [Healy's Boredom₃]

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<tr>
<th>Expressions of Boredom</th>
<th>Sensation Seeking</th>
<th>Meaning Seeking</th>
<th>Sensation-Seeking</th>
<th>Meaning-Seeking</th>
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<td>Existential Psychiatry (Frankl's existential vacuum)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Educational Psychology (classroom management)</td>
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<th>Zuckerman's Sensation Seeking Scale (ZSS)</th>
<th>Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS) Purpose in Life (PIL)</th>
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Chart 2
Responses to Boredom

BOREDOM

Transient

SENSEATION-SEEKING
'nothing exciting to do now'
Adaptive  Maladaptive

MEANING-SEEKING
'nothing worth doing now'
Adaptive  Maladaptive

Chronic

SENSEATION-SEEKING
'nothing exciting to do in life'
Adaptive  Maladaptive

MEANING-SEEKING
'nothing worth doing in life'
Adaptive  Maladaptive
The same uninteresting lecture might exacerbate the frustrations of one suffering chronic boredom with effects that continue afterward such as anger, use of drugs or alcohol, dangerous thrill-seeking, or violence. It is important to note that emotionally healthy people may make maladaptive responses to boredom from time to time. Adolescents in particular, because of their propensity for impulsivity and risk-taking, may respond to boredom with actions they regret later. Furthermore, some people assumed to be emotionally healthy, such as intellectuals, the nobility, and the religious in the examples given earlier, may lapse into chronic boredom. The group of interest in the current study is the group of adolescents who respond to boredom by maladaptive sensation-seeking and/or maladaptive meaning-seeking behavior. Violence is a subset of maladaptive behavior.

Responses to Transient Boredom

Sensation-Seeking

Adaptive Responses

In general, when faced with the irritation of too little stimulation, one might choose to increase the level of stimulation in prosocial ways, or decrease the irritation of the situation by falling asleep. Stimulation could be increased by calling a friend, initiating a new project, going for a walk, reading a book, or watching television, to name only a few strategies. Some people, when they are unable to leave a boring situation, add to the perceived complexity of the environment by such activities as
making lists, drawing the people around them, or imagining stories about those in the room. Others withdraw their attention by daydreaming, meditating, or sleeping.

**Maladaptive Responses**

When individuals who are unable to withdraw from a boring situation respond in a way that results in harm to themselves or others, the response is maladaptive. Such responses would include over-reacting to a short-lived inconvenience by inappropriate rudeness and anger, or by impulsive acts that have harmful consequences. The impulsivity of Western adolescents and their propensity for risk-taking can result in dangerous responses to transient boredom, even among usually well-adjusted youth. For example, the adolescent who skips a boring class and goes for a joy ride or takes a dare to shoplift or try drugs may be lucky enough to escape serious consequences, or may be caught up in unforeseen tragedy.

**Meaning Seeking**

The other category of transient boredom is transient meaning-seeking. This short-lived sense of meaninglessness that Frankl called the existential vacuum often occurs as a result of a sudden loss of a significant source of meaning. The end of a relationship, termination of employment, or completion of a significant project can leave a person temporarily adrift and unable to re-invest in someone or something else, unable to find anything worth doing. The religious, particularly in the West, may experience periods of questioning the spiritual meaning of life that may be
transient or very long-lasting if no renewal of faith or different resolution to spiritual questions is found. Non-theistic religions (some aboriginal, some forms of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other Asian religions, and ecological spirituality) are not dependent on belief in the existence of God in order to have meaning. Meaning is found through spiritual discipline and following the ethical path of their faith.

**Adaptive Responses**

Individual responses to meaning-seeking are often directed outside the self, either to friends, counselors, clergy, or to God. The person may try to develop new relationships, new attitudes toward loss, new work, or projects to take the place of what is no longer available. Many people find prayer important as a response to a transient loss of meaning. Meditation, especially in a natural setting, is used by followers of Deep Ecology to find a sense of connectedness with the earth and the universe.

**Maladaptive Responses**

Sometimes an impulsive response to a transient loss of meaning may bring tragic results. For example, a student who normally deals with boredom without difficulty may find a transient lack of meaning suddenly unbearable and may react with a dangerous activity in response to a trivial irritation. Thrill-seeking may be an attempt to fill a void in meaning, rather than a need for more sensation. Another example of a maladaptive response would be individuals who decide to quit a class or a job because of
the frustration of a particularly boring task. Again, it is the inability to persevere in the face of set-backs that results in the maladaptive response.

On a societal level, one might consider the destruction of the rainforests, or the pollution of waterways to be a maladaptive response to the loss of sacred meaning to our relationship to the land. In this case, one must hope that the loss of meaning is transient, not chronic.

Responses to Chronic Boredom

Sensation-Seeking

Adaptive Responses

Many people who seem to need a constant high level of stimulation fill this need by risk-taking activities. Careers such as professional sports, race-car driving, acting, or politics provide the needed level of excitement; or the person may choose to fill the need through leisure pursuits like sky-diving, white-water rafting, rock-climbing and so on. Sometimes forcing oneself to face a major challenge not only increases sensation, but also may increase the sense of meaning in life because the success affirms one's place in the universe as a being of some consequence. The extreme example of this would be climbing Mount Everest, but less dramatic triumphs over fear often have the same effect. Young people who participate in personal challenge programs like Outward Bound often feel more meaning in their lives because they have proven their competence in the face of danger.
Surprisingly, Zen meditation is an adaptive strategy for sensation-seeking in that its goal is to prevent perceptual accommodation to external or internal sensory stimuli. The practitioner is trying to stay completely sensitive to the stimulation of the beautiful harmonies of an ever-changing, ever new world which we screen out (and make boring) by our ego-selfish self-referencing. Zen and Buddhism fit here rather than in meaning-seeking, because it is not cognitive meaning but one's participation in the harmony and beauty of the changing whole that grounds life. One is actually trying to bypass cognition in order to participate directly in sensory experience.

Maladaptive Responses

Risk takers can always miscalculate and suffer injury or death in the course of a dangerous activity, but activities that are not only dangerous but destructive must be classed as maladaptive responses to the chronic need for stimulation. Thrill-seeking may be behind substance abuse, break and enter offenses, vandalism, rape, and other violent crimes. In fact, many delinquents seem unable to live without the thrills of breaking the law, and find socially acceptable behavior intolerably boring, as has been discussed earlier. The combination of adverse childhood experiences and the predisposition for sensation-seeking seems to increase the likelihood of delinquency. Other destructive forms of sensation-seeking might include infidelity, sexual risk taking, and self-mutilation.
Meaning-Seeking

Adaptive Responses

Earlier cited historical examples of adaptive responses to meaning-seeking include monks or nobles who dealt with a profound loss of meaning that arose as a result of excess leisure time. Although some found profound meaning in their relationship with God and their chosen path, others found that when their survival needs were met without effort, they felt overcome by lassitude and purposelessness, and lost faith in God and their place in the universe. Intellectuals plunged into scientific study or writing, the religious set out to visit the poor or care for the ill and needy, the wealthy established salons for their entertainment. One might argue that these responses are diversionary rather than adaptive, because they do not resolve the boredom, they merely postpone the suffering temporarily. I classify them as adaptive because they are not destructive to self or others. Fromm and May would argue that by taking up activity the individual is avoiding confronting the fear of death and the possibility that life is meaningless. We return to Yalom's dilemma of a meaning-seeking creature who is thrown into a universe that has no meaning. Sartre and Camus resolved the dilemma by engagement, commitment, and action, but for many people the need for a spiritual meaning that gives purpose to their lives remains fundamental even when they have lost their faith in a specific religious doctrine. Healy does not reach a conclusion that offers an adaptive solution to the search for meaning after the "departure of the gods", but suggests that the pervasive sense of meaninglessness reflects a deteriorating culture in the process of collapse. Perhaps the limited Western view is at the
root of this dilemma, and a more pluralistic religious perspective, or one based in Eastern religions like Buddhism might offer a different and more adaptive approach to the problem.

There are signs of change in our society that will perhaps lead to a revitalization of the spiritual. One example is the evolving African American celebrations known as Kwansaa, which are an example of a life orientation that includes symbol, myth, and ritual, without (as yet) a specific religious doctrine. Kwansaa does have a strong ethical dimension accompanied by personal reflection or meditation. Another example is the renewal of Native spirituality which connects ethics and morality to spiritual traditions in search of a holistic relationship with the earth and living beings. And finally, the great social movements of our day (environment, peace, feminism, and social justice), began with ethical/moral issues, and are gradually adding a spiritual component that connects justice and sustainability with reverence for the earth and a commitment to caring for one another. These movements may provide the basis for a new "religious" attitude that does not conflict with reason.

Another source of chronic meaninglessness in society is the disappearance of work as technology replaces more and more tasks previously done by humans. Rifkin (1995) suggests that an adaptive strategy would be to legislate a shorter work week and to provide new jobs in the non-profit or volunteer sector of our communities, supported by various tax incentives and government grants. This suggestion is congruent with the importance of altruism and service to others that is stressed by existential psychiatry. Furthermore, a shorter work week and increased volunteer time might also provide for more stable parenting arrangements that involve several caring adults with each child. The African proverb, "it takes a whole
village to raise a child," points to a shortcoming of our impersonal cities where parents work long hours and children are often placed with relative strangers. The different economic arrangements proposed by Riffkin might alter the patterns of child rearing in ways that would include a whole community and be conducive to less violence.
Maladaptive Responses

If we accept the sense of meaninglessness expressed by rock music as an expression of adolescent hopelessness, we can also find in the lyrics their responses to hopelessness. Sex, drugs, alcohol, and violence are reified by band after band, sometimes as a way to find meaning, sometimes to substitute thrills and excitement for genuine meaning. The drop-outs portrayed in Gaines' study which was discussed in the first chapter personify the despair of dead end kids, but also illustrate the connections between the deprivations they suffered in childhood and the way they respond to meaninglessness in adolescence. They bring to the situation poor social skills, low self esteem, and a history of experiencing and observing violence. They have available to them few skills or creative responses to a bleak future, and most often resort to destructive actions, including the suicide pact that prompted Gaines' study. Some refuse to acquiesce; their most hopeful sign of strength is their sheer gutsiness.

Depression must be considered a maladaptive, albeit involuntary, strategy for responding to chronic meaninglessness. Substance abuse and suicidal actions may be symptoms of depression with underlying meaninglessness. Results of Cognitive Therapy suggest that often depression can be lifted by practicing written exercises to halt negative habits (Burns, 1990). Although this school of therapy does not specifically address the issue of meaninglessness, perhaps it has something to offer in this regard.

In a maladaptive attempt to fill the need for relationships, adolescent girls may form liaisons with abusive males, or choose to get pregnant because they believe the baby will fill their need for someone to
love them. One motivation for joining gangs is to fill the need for belonging, although in many cases, the relationships in the gang are not intimate or rewarding.

Conclusions

Boredom in adolescence can be a minor annoyance or a corrosive poison that may lead to violence and other forms of destruction depending on the blend of genes, personality, and circumstance. Clearly, the individual patterns of response that are superimposed on genetic predispositions are the result of complex interactions often reinforced from infancy. Let me review some of the characteristics that help us identify children and young people at high risk for maladaptive expressions of boredom.

First, children who are sensation-seekers or who have ADHD may have a genetic tendency that puts them at risk for boredom, but it is important to remember that the majority of these children do not go on to become delinquent. Their risk increases if they are raised in a situation of deprivation or abuse, particularly if they lack cognitive stimulation. Some of the children who require greater than normal stimulation, may have learned to dampen down their perceptions in order to survive intolerable pain.

Children who have not been nurtured intellectually and emotionally are at risk because they have not learned to attend to subtle behavioral cues or cognitive stimuli. These children may be unimaginative, rigid in thinking, and have an impoverished fantasy life, all of which contribute to boredom-proneness. Other factors that indicate high risk are poor emotional adjustment, and the belief that someone or something else is to blame for their difficulties. Extroverted children and youth are at higher risk of
boredom, and although the majority find acceptable outlets for their sensation hunger, some may turn to criminal activities for thrills and excitement. A child from a low income family that does not value schooling is at risk, particularly if the parents are unpredictable and use harsh and erratic discipline.

Risk factors for boredom that is expressed as meaninglessness include having few close relationships, a parent who abuses drugs or alcohol, chronic failure at school, and a history of physical or sexual abuse. Introverted personalities are at greater risk, as are children from minority groups. Those who lack a sense of belonging to a community, and those who are without a spiritual orientation are more likely to have difficulty finding life meaningful. Like the sensation-seekers, the bored meaning-seekers are more likely to believe their problems are caused by others, but may be ridden with guilt that they deserve what they have. Because meaning is often found through engagement and relationships with others, those who are not committed to anyone or anything outside themselves are at high risk. Such individuals are unlikely to consider service to others as important, and therefore miss an opportunity to find meaning through altruism. Those who cannot establish clear life goals, and whose opportunities are limited because of the obstacles of race, ethnicity, and poverty are at high risk for meaninglessness and boredom. Many of these factors reflect a disconnectedness from self, from others, and from the earth.

Risk factors are only signposts; they don't all occur in the same child, and neither do they predict boredom whenever they occur. They should alert us to children who may need active nurturing interventions and should also remind us of the obligations the whole community has toward children in difficult circumstances. Some children show a remarkable resilience in the
face of hardships and rise above their surroundings. In the next chapter I
describe factors that have been found characteristic of children at high risk of
violence in adolescence and compare the risk factors they share with those
who are bored.
CHAPTER FOUR

BOREDOM AND ADOLESCENT VIOLENCE

In this chapter I continue my analysis of the relationship between boredom and violence by considering the research on adolescent violence. I argue that boredom plays a significant role in some violent behavior because it is perceived by some young people to be a cause of and a justification for violence. That is, for many young people boredom is an intolerable stress that must be relieved. Intense boredom may contribute directly to delinquent actions that are exciting and dangerous, or it may be a less direct and less conscious factor that contributes to anger, drinking, or drug use. Although young people will sometimes claim that they committed their offenses because they were bored (see Chapter One), I will argue for a more complex interplay of risk factors that predispose to chronic boredom and learned responses to relieve it. Specifically, I suggest that in many situations the individuals' interpretation of boredom as intensely dysphoric, their responses, and their rationalizations of these responses are, to a significant degree, learned responses.

In recent years, the study of violence has shifted from early theories that explain violence on the basis of a latent drive or instinct to a

5 Early theories (Freud, 1930/1955; Lorenz, 1971) locate the cause of violence in universal biological instincts or inescapable drives. Lorenz, a Nobel Prize winning ethologist, described the aggressive instincts of males in many species and extrapolated his findings to humans. Freud proposed opposing internal energies of Eros (positive energy) and Thanatos (destructive energy). These theories are of limited usefulness in the context of adolescent violence because they are based largely on studies of adult males, and consequently have been found inadequate to explain female violence. They also do not explain non-violence on the part of the majority of males, or non-violent
view of violence as learned behavior that results from the complex
interaction of individual predispositions with the social environment (i.e.,
with family, school, community, and society). The latent drive theories are
not relevant for my purposes which focus on educational interventions and
thus I will consider individual and environmental theories. In order to
establish and articulate the role of boredom in the etiology of violence, I begin
by comparing the risk factors (both individual predisposition and social
environments) for violence with the risk factors for boredom identified in
the previous chapter. The similarities in the lists provide further evidence
that boredom and violence share extensive common roots. In addition, the
differences in the lists suggest that some factors associated only with violence
deserve more careful scrutiny because they may distinguish a subgroup of
youth at higher risk for violence than the rest. In the next chapter I discuss
theories that underlie most school violence prevention programs. Social
cognitive learning theories are the most common basis for these programs,
but control theory (Hirschi, 1969) continues to be influential. In reviewing
these theories I am able to show where boredom fits into current theoretical
analyses of how individuals from high-risk backgrounds progress down the
pathways to violence. Thus, although boredom has not expressly been
recognized in these theories, the theories are consistent with and can be used
to support my contention that boredom is a factor in violent behavior.

societies. The notion from these theories of a build up of aggressive energy
that required discharge, resulted in therapeutic strategies of "catharsis". Empirical studies have shown that the discharge of such pent up energy
toward safe targets increases rather than decreases aggression (Parke & Slaby,
1983). Furthermore, as deterministic theories, they take no account of the
influence of learning, and offer little hope for positive change.

The theory that violence was the inevitable result of frustration
(Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939, in Eron et al., 1994) was found to
be too narrow; frustration did not always lead to violence, and violence had
other causes besides frustration. Nonetheless, this theory of the etiology of
violence opened the discussion to include external factors.
Cultural influences on the pathways to violence and the notion that North American society is a culture of violence (Miedzian, 1991) are discussed in terms of their relevance to education.

If I am correct that boredom often contributes to violence, then it is appropriate to consider whether or not interventions to reduce boredom may reduce violence and, if so, what kinds of interventions would be appropriate. In the final chapter, I offer recommendations for school and community programs to reduce boredom and violence.

Comparing Risk Factors for Boredom and Violence

Two comprehensive reviews of violence have appeared in the last three years, one from the US National Research Council, *Understanding and Preventing Violence* (Reiss & Roth, 1993, hereafter referred to as NRC), and the other from the American Psychological Association, *Reason to Hope: A Psychosocial Perspective on Violence and Youth* (Eron, Gentry, & Schlegel, 1994, hereafter referred to as APA). They provide similar summaries of current theories of violence — the NRC study from a public health perspective, the APA from a psychological one. I will use these two reviews supplemented with details from their primary sources to clarify the role of boredom in the etiology of youth violence.

The NRC Commission of Behavioral and Social Sciences in Education established its study in response to requests from three US federal agencies — the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control. A panel of 19 specialists in violence collaborated to integrate research across biomedical and biobehavioral disciplines in order to recommend policy for all major US federal agencies that fund research or
programs dealing with violent behavior. The 464 page report is supplemented by three volumes of commissioned scholarly review articles on specific topics. My second major source, the 491 page APA report, is the product of a 12-person commission studying youth and violence. This commission articulated the state of psychological knowledge related to violence and youth, and recommended public policies and directions for future research. A strength of the NRC book is that each chapter represents the consensus of the panel.

In contrast, the APA book is an edited collection of papers followed by policy recommendations arising from the research presented. Because both books use US studies, sections of the book on racial and ethnic violence, gun legislation, and justice policies relate specifically to the US, not Canada. The theoretical aspects, however, are relevant to Canada. Furthermore, the recent debate on gun control in Canada suggests that comparisons with American statistics and legislation may be helpful in framing Canadian policy. Cultural similarities in our common British heritage, child-rearing practices, schooling, entertainment, and economic organization in both countries make it reasonable to seek insights from US research on violence and to modify them to fit the Canadian context. Furthermore, because social changes in Canada often seem to follow those south of the border, US experiences may help us avoid some of the pitfalls they identify. Nonetheless, one must use caution in applying American studies because there are substantial cultural and legal differences that bear on the greater prevalence of violence in US society (e.g., the history of establishment of law and order preceding settlement in Canada, and following settlement in the US, and American assumptions of primacy of individual over collective rights).
The NRC and APA books provide similar lists of factors identified through hundreds of studies over the past 30 years to characterize youth at high risk for violence. Let me summarize the risk factors for violence and with each factor show the similarities with the risk factors for boredom that were described in the previous chapter. These similarities must be interpreted with caution because the studies on boredom are in different fields, in different decades, with different populations, and for different purposes. Nonetheless, the fact that the same factors recur for both violence and boredom across so many diverse experimental situations raises three important questions: Why do the majority at risk not become bored, but a small group do? Why do the majority of the bored not become delinquent, but a small group do? and Why do the majority of the delinquent not become violent, but a small group do? The researchers I cite in this section argue that the pathway followed by the small violent group results from a series of learned steps beginning with their interpretation of the intentions of others, their repertoire of responses, and their evaluation of possible consequences of their actions. I argue that boredom is a learned interpretation of a physiological state of tension, with a learned repertoire of responses, and that boredom itself becomes a risk factor for violence. The risk factors for both boredom and violence are grouped under two categories: individual factors which include prenatal, genetic, temperament, intelligence, and gender; and environmental factors which include family, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, school and peer influences. Let me begin with the individual risk factors that predispose people toward violence, starting before birth, with the effects of poor maternal health.
Individual Risk Factors for Violence

Five factors affecting the individual are most commonly discussed as contributing to violent behavior: prenatal, genetic, temperament, intelligence, and gender.

Prenatal Factors

Maternal malnutrition, illicit drugs, alcohol, (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome), tobacco, exposure to toxins in the environment, and physical trauma are all risk factors for violence because they adversely affect the developing brain of the fetus (NRC, p. 124). The association between brain dysfunction and risk of future aggressivity is important since several causes of brain damage and cognitive deficits are potentially preventable and consequently demand attention from both public health and educational perspectives. Low IQ may be the result of brain injury caused by violence against the fetus, the pregnant mother, or the growing child. The United Nations publication, Violence Against Women in the Family (1989), points out that pregnant women are at increased risk of being abused by their partners (p. 21). Exposure to toxins such as lead in the environment is associated with brain dysfunction, cognitive defects, and increased violence (NRC, p. 12). Lead is found in old paint in houses, in old plumbing, and in exhaust residues from leaded gasoline. Although leaded fuels have been banned, researchers are concerned that persistent residues deposited on sidewalks and soil may be carried on shoes into living areas where toddlers play on the floor. The use of lead in paint and plumbing has been prohibited.
for years, but old paint, old plumbing, and heavy traffic are more common in inner cities where the stressors associated with violence are already high. Exposure to lead in childhood is cumulative because lead is retained in the body and excreted extremely slowly. Protection of the developing fetus and child from injury or toxins is important for the child's health and has the probable side benefit of reducing the risk of future violent behavior.

In the research on boredom, I have not found prenatal risk factors specifically identified, but harm to the developing brain is important because low IQ and childhood difficulties in cognition are recognized as risk factors for boredom (Fiske & Maddi, 1961; Leong & Schneller, 1993).

Genetic Predispositions

Most researchers acknowledge that genetic makeup plays a role in behavior. However, since the vast majority of those with a high-risk genetic predisposition do not go on to become violent, it is likely that environmental factors are more powerful than genetic factors. Of the characteristics of high-risk children that appear to be inherited, temperament seems to be the most significant factor. The recent evidence of a genetic link between the dopamine R2 receptor gene and the tendency toward what the authors call novelty seeking (Benjamin & Hamer, 1996; Ebstein, 1996) is important in identifying a possible genetic basis for a personality trait associated with delinquency. I continue to use the term sensation-seeking for this trait because it appears to be the same characteristic that has been identified in the boredom literature (Zuckerman, 1979). The gene is also associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Cook et al., 1995), which has been recognized as a risk factor for violence (APA; NRC) and
for boredom (Hamilton, 1983). ADHD is a risk factor for substance abuse, although about four-fifths of children with ADHD do not go on to become substance abusers (Manuzza et al, in NRC). The same gene may be associated with increased risk of alcoholism but some of the evidence for this association is conflicting (Holden, 1994). One should not use this gene as a predictor for anti-social behavior because only a small percentage of people with the gene are identified as delinquent or criminal. Benjamin and Hamer (1996) suggest that genetics may contribute about 10% and the nurturing environment about 90% to the development of character and temperament. Children who are sensation-seekers or who have ADHD may have an increased risk for violence if they are raised in a situation of deprivation or abuse, particularly if they lack cognitive stimulation (NRC).

Other Features of Temperament

Unusual fearlessness and impulsivity in childhood are associated with risk for violence (Pepler & Slaby in APA; NRC) and for boredom (Zuckerman, 1979). The fearlessness appears to be a stable characteristic that reveals itself early and eventually shows as a tendency to risk-taking. Fearlessness is, however, also a feature of "resilient" children who grow up unscathed by their high risk circumstances (Werner, 1989). Resilient children are discussed later in this chapter. Other factors in temperament that may be associated with later antisocial behavior include temper tantrums in infancy, restlessness, and a poor ability to delay gratification and to control impulses (APA). These factors manifest themselves in school as disruptive behavior in class, disobedience, quarrelsomeness, and boredom.
Extroversion is noted as a risk factor for violence (Eysenck & Gudjonsson, 1989) and for sensation-seeking boredom (Esman, 1979), but the relationships are complicated in two ways. First, extroversion is also a characteristic of many resilient children who become exceptionally well-adjusted and productive adults despite childhood deprivation or abuse (Werner, 1988). Second, boredom expressed as meaninglessness is more common in introverts than extroverts (Yalom, 1980). These complications mean that extroversion and introversion are not simple predictors for either boredom or violence but should be interpreted in combination with other factors. For example, a teacher should be concerned about future violence in an extroverted child who is aggressive and anti-social, but less concerned about a smiling, sociable, extrovert with no other significant risk factors.

Young people who believe they are generally powerless to influence the course of the events around them, (i.e., have an external locus of control) are at high risk for both violence (APA; NRC) and boredom (Tolor, 1989), particularly meaning-seeking boredom. Resilient children, in contrast, have the sense from early childhood that they can readily influence events across a wide variety of contexts (i.e., have an internal locus of control) (Werner, 1989). Helping young people to assume an internal locus of control must therefore be an especially important goal of violence prevention programs.

Intelligence

Low intelligence is thought by some researchers to be a factor in violent behavior because in comparison with other inmates, violent offenders have particularly low IQ scores. Early school failure is a significant
risk factor for violence, perhaps contributing to the adoption of aggressive behavior at an early age. Nonetheless, a history of violence by age eight is a much more powerful predictor than is low IQ (Eron, Huesmann, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984). It should also be remembered that low IQ may be the result of violence toward the child or the pregnant mother, or may be the result of malnutrition or cognitive deprivation, and that separating out the influence of IQ may be spurious. Low IQ was identified in the British study of early school leavers (Morton-Williams & Finch, 1968) as a risk factor for boredom. The study noted, however, that children with IQs below 85 did not complain of boredom.

**Gender**

Because 89% of violence is perpetrated by males (NRC), considerable research has focused on factors specific to males, such as the male hormone testosterone, or the Y chromosome. As noted in Chapter Two, males are also more boredom-prone than females (Sundberg, Latkin, Farmer, & Saoud, 1991; Wasson, 1981). Hormonal studies have shown some relationships between testosterone and violence, but have not demonstrated useful applications. For example, abnormally high levels of testosterone are associated with increased aggressivity, but the studies are confounded by the fact that testosterone levels are affected in complex ways by alcohol, and drinking alcohol is a common precursor of violence (NRC). Another piece of evidence implicating testosterone is the finding that abnormally high levels of androgens *in utero* affect fetal and child development and result in a more aggressive personality (NRC). These studies do not explain why most men, including those with high testosterone levels, are not violent. Chromosomal
abnormalities such as an extra Y chromosome (XYY) were suspected as a cause of criminality, but have shown only weak association with aggressive and violent behavior (NRC).

Recent evidence of increasing violence by female adolescents has stimulated investigation (Artz, 1995) that is relevant to this study because it reveals differential risk factors for females. Artz's ethnographic study identified six 13- and 14-year-old girls in Sooke, British Columbia, who had each perpetrated vicious attacks on other girls at their school. The girls and their families participated in extensive interviews over the course of one year. The interviews revealed for each girl a history of physical and/or sexual abuse; alcoholic parent(s) with violent, chaotic relationships; and the lack of a reliable, warm, caring adult. Five of the six sets of parents had stayed together despite years of intense anger and fighting. A striking characteristic of those intact couples was the aggressive domination by the men, and the submissive role of the women. Artz (1995) found the perception of male/female roles to be a powerful determinant of her informants' behavior. The violent girls defined themselves through their relationships with males, saw marriage and parenthood as the goals of their lives, and longed for acceptance by their fathers.

Research on gender differences in susceptibility to boredom indicates that females are at lower risk for boredom as measured on Zuckerman's scales (Kurtz & Zuckerman, 1978), and are less likely to have ADHD (Ward, 1996), but are more likely to have a low score on the Purpose in Life Test (PIL) (Yalom, 1980). The meaning of these conflicting reports is not clear, and one wonders whether the PIL studies continue to be relevant in the light of changes in women's roles over the past 15 years. For example, movement toward equal job opportunities for women may offer hope for a
meaningful career for those young women who are seeking employment. For those who are not, Artz's work suggests that the dream of marriage and family continues to hold meaning for some adolescent females at least, whether or not it is a realistic predictor of future meaning in life. Further research into gender differences in both violence- and boredom-proneness (meaning-seeking as well as sensation-seeking) may reveal important influences on behavior of each sex and areas that may be affected by intervention.

**Environmental Factors**

The environmental influences on a child begin with the family and extend to the effects of socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, school, and peer group. (The socio-cultural changes affecting Western industrialized society are discussed later.) The child's temperament and behavior affect the responses of the family and the school community and are reinforced or modulated by those interactions. For example, aggressive children may elicit coercive responses from family and teachers, and escalate their aggression as a result.

**Family**

The environment of family and neighborhood seem to interact with genetic predispositions to increase risk of violence. The characteristics of high-risk families include poor parent-infant bonding, poor supervision of the child, use of harsh and unpredictable discipline, coercive interactions (coercion by both the child and the parent), lack of warmth and caring, and
permissive attitudes toward violence (APA; NRC). Various forms of breakdown of family relationships are associated with high risk (APA)—disharmony, separation or divorce of parents, and separation of children from their parents. Alcoholism, drug abuse, criminal behavior, or psychopathology in the parents increase risk, and witnessing or suffering violence within the family is strongly associated with later use of violence by the child (Gibbs, 1995; Pepler & Slaby in APA). Although abuse of children is often brutal, neglect is as likely as abuse to predict later violence. It is noteworthy that the history of neglect seems to span the generations; parents in high risk families frequently have a history of lack of a caring adult/friend in their childhood (Milner et al., in APA).

Research on boredom cited earlier describes high-risk families similar to the above (Fenichel, 1951; Fiske & Maddi, 1961; Kraus, 1977; Sommer, 1985; Zuckerman, 1979), with the exception of the factor of criminal behavior by a parent, which I did not find reported in association with boredom. The dysfunctional relationships in these families not only leave children emotionally impoverished in childhood and without models to emulate in adulthood, they also distort a powerful source of meaning—in intimate relationships. The breakdown of children’s primary attachment to their parents seems to interfere with most children’s ability to form future attachments to significant others. The literature I have reviewed on both boredom and violence repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the nurturing environment in early childhood and the need for interventions that either assist parents or provide surrogate caring adults.

If we consider the child trying to construct meaning through the sources outlined in Chapter Two (work, service, belonging, rootedness, personal stance toward hardships, spirituality, and responding to beauty) we
find high risk families counterproductive because relationships are painful and entangled, and belonging to the family is often a source of shame. Because the ability to find meaning in work, creative endeavors, or nature, is usually fostered by an adult, severely dysfunctional families need outside models for this learning. Similarly, learning about spirituality is more difficult if the family does not model a religious or spiritual orientation.

It is important to note here that the positive contribution of spirituality can be perverted so that a religious doctrine contributes to violence (Miller, 1983). Miller studied child-rearing practices in Nazi Germany using, among other sources, evidence from old parenting manuals. The manuals advocated beating children to civilize them -- advice the authors based on their interpretation of scripture to mean that children come into the world as savages and must have the devil beaten out of them. Other studies (Greven, 1990) support Miller's findings of religious justification for advising that loving parents beat a child until the child's spirit is broken. For example, in 1732, Susanna Wesley wrote a letter to her son John (who later was a founder of the Methodist Church) detailing her harsh methods of child-rearing.

When a child is corrected it must be conquered, and this will be no hard matter to do, if it be not grown headstrong by too much indulgence. And when the will of a child is totally subdued, and it is brought to revere and stand in awe of the parents, then a great many childish follies and inadvertencies may be passed by . . . . I insist on the conquering of the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. (cited in Greven, 1990, p. 66, italics in original)
An example from a 1977 book, *How to Rear Children*, (Hiles, cited in Greven, 1990) suggests that breaking a child's will is still current in some parenting manuals, particularly those from Christian fundamentalists.

*The spanking should be administered firmly.* It should be painful and it should last until the child's will is broken. It should last until the child is crying, not tears of anger but tears of a broken will. As long as he is stiff, grits his teeth, holds on to his own will, the spanking should continue. (cited in Greven, 1990, p. 67, italics in original)

In such a religious context, some children internalize the idea that they are corrupt and sinful, and that their fathers are acting out of love. That is, they use the religious perspective to make sense of what is happening to them. Unfortunately, making meaning in life from this base of brutal punishment is not likely to be helpful in producing caring and compassionate adults. The resilient children studied by Werner (1989) rejected their parents' harsh judgment and beatings, and vowed never to treat their own children violently. From their accounts, they have succeeded in breaking the cycle of violence in their families.

**Socio-economic Status, Race, and Ethnicity**

The influence of race, minority, or low socio-economic status on propensity for violence or boredom likely results from social, intellectual, and physical deprivation, lack of opportunities for advancement available to others, and hostility from the dominant culture. Social circumstances that increase risk for violence include living in poor housing in high crime areas in inner cities (APA; NRC). Although low income in large families is associated with high risk for violence in North American society, this
association is not present in many other cultures where poverty and large families predominate. Merton (cited in Clinard, 1964) suggests that this difference is at least partly the result of the emphasis on material wealth in North America coupled with limited availability of legitimate opportunities to achieve success.

The boredom literature associates low socio-economic status with adolescent boredom expressed as sensation-seeking (Robinson, 1975), and also associates the emphasis on material wealth with difficulties in finding meaning in life (cf. Yalom, 1980; Fromm, 1941).

Being a member of a minority increases the risk of being violent (APA) probably through the interaction of many associated factors such as unequal educational opportunities, limited access to employment, job ceilings that prevent advancement, parents' responses to the injustices minorities suffer, and cultural expectations within the minority group (e.g., the culture itself may take an oppositional stance to the dominant culture) (Ogbu in APA).

I found only a few studies of boredom that measured effects of race or ethnicity (Kurtz & Zuckerman, 1978; Paulson, Coombs, & Richardson, 1990; Sundberg et al., 1991; Yalom, 1980). Unfortunately, most of these studies are not useful for my purposes because they are concerned with transient rather than chronic boredom. The exception is the finding that minorities in the U.S. are more likely than the dominant culture to lack purpose in life and, therefore, to be bored (Yalom, 1980).
Evidence of the interaction of predisposition to violence and social environment is revealed in children's behavior by the time of entry to kindergarten, around age four. By that time, children can be identified by nursery teachers, social workers, or visiting nurses as showing some of the following risk factors: cognitive deficits, poor language development, poor social skills, aggressive behavior, cruelty to animals, impoverished imagination, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and poor ability to delay gratification (NRC). Of these signs, aggressivity and cruelty are associated with violence, but the other factors may also identify children who will later show themselves as bored sensation-seekers, the majority of whom do not go on to become violent adults. The stability of aggressive behaviors from childhood to adulthood has been recognized for many years (APA), and this persistence of behavior leads many authors to recommend early action to modify any factors amenable to intervention before aggressive patterns are crystallized. Cognitive deficits and early grade school failure are strong indicators of high risk for aggression and violence (APA) and, as mentioned earlier, high risk for boredom (Robinson, 1975).

Schools may inadvertently provide opportunities that increase rather than decrease the likelihood of violence (NRC; Staub, 1971, 1975, 1988). The factors associated with violence are commonly found in inner city schools that are poorly funded. With large numbers of students in a limited amount of space, individuals find it difficult to physically remove themselves from confrontations. The impersonality of large high schools where students and teachers do not know each other well seems to contribute
to the risk of violence (Staub, 1971, 1975, 1988). Building features may facilitate the commission of violent acts because frustration is increased in crowded areas, and supervision is difficult in isolated rooms and corridors. The imposition of regulations may contribute to feelings of anger, resentment, and rejection. For decades, advocates of school reform have recommended alternatives to increase the engagement of students and families using democratic decision-making, individualized programs, smaller classes, and fewer barriers between the school and the community (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989).

In the literature on boredom, school-related characteristics identified as contributing to boredom included lack of variety in curriculum and presentation of material, lack of respect and caring for students, competition, inflexible rules, and limited choices (Morton-Williams & Finch, 1968; Robinson, 1975). Chronic failure and a sense that courses are irrelevant to students' lives also contribute to frustration, anger, and boredom. I suspect that physical features of school buildings may also contribute to boredom because of the bleakness of the surroundings. As well, the rigid arrangement of desks and rooms may restrict teachers' abilities to develop varied teaching methods or individualized programs of learning, and therefore decrease the likelihood of student engagement with the material. Limited teaching resources also contribute to boredom by making it more likely the teacher will rely on lecture and note-taking methods of instruction. Such methods are likely to lead to transient boredom, but they also contribute to chronic boredom by eroding students' opportunities to become deeply absorbed in the subject matter.
Peer Relationships

Rejection by peers is a risk factor for violence that appears in the early school years (APA; NRC). Children who are aggressive are generally disliked by their peers, isolated from prosocial interactions, and may go on to become bullies and suffer further rejection (Parke & Slaby, 1983). Watching abnormally high amounts of violent television is another documented factor associated with aggression and rejection by peers (Pepler & Slaby, in APA; NRC). Huesmann (1986) suggests that aggressive children who are rejected by their peers may choose to increase their viewing of violent television. They learn more violent behaviors from television characters and become more aggressive towards their peers, leading to further rejection. The influence of media in the etiology of adolescent violence is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter in the section on theories of adolescent violence.

Although rejection by peers is not described as a risk factor for boredom, it would be expected to increase boredom by limiting social interactions that provide both stimulation and meaning. Watching television may be a sensation-seeking response to boredom, and choosing violent television a response to environmental influences, such as abuse or rejection.

Before proceeding further I will summarize the risk factors that appear common to both violence and boredom: similar tendency to sensation-seeking (possibly genetically based), early childhood experiences of cognitive deprivation, abuse, family dysfunction, parental substance abuse, chaotic family relationships, harsh and erratic discipline, and lack of a stable, caring relationship with an adult. In school, the common risk factors for
boredom and violence are patterns of failure, rejection by peers, sensation-seeking, and dropping out. This considerable overlap of risk factors for violence and boredom suggests that the factors are interrelated and in some cases mutually reinforcing. An exception to the overlapping factors is a group of high-risk characteristics that reveal early tendencies to aggression and violence, but which I have not found reported in association with boredom. These characteristics include temper tantrums in infancy, cruelty to animals, physical aggression to peers and siblings, low empathy, parent criminality, parents showing permissive or encouraging attitudes toward violence, and watching abnormal amounts of violent television (APA; NRC). One must be cautious about attributing significance to the fact that these factors are not reported in association with boredom because the factors may simply have been overlooked by researchers. On the other hand, if these factors were shown by empirical studies to differentiate those children most likely to become violent among a larger risk group, they would offer early indicators of a need for intensive intervention. For example, if a grade one teacher has, within a group of children from high risk families, a child who has been caught inflicting burns on cats, who talks about watching violent television programs, and who is known for aggressive behavior toward his peers, the teacher should single out the child for immediate therapeutic interventions. The family should be assessed to determine whether the child is safe and what specific help is needed in the home and the school to prevent a further progression to serious violent offenses. Research into this cluster of risk factors might be fruitful in improving predictions of future violent behavior.

Thus far we have seen that biology, cognition, and personality influence the individual's propensity for violence, and that the family,
community, and society interact with that propensity in complex and often reciprocal ways. Some interactions with the social environment promote prosocial behaviors instead of delinquency. Several authors have found protective factors by studying high-risk children who have overcome the obstacles of their environment. These studies are particularly relevant to the design of intervention strategies because they indicate powerful influences for prosocial behavior and, significantly, may be connected with a lack of chronic boredom. In other words, the factors that support alternative patterns to violent behavior are closely aligned with the individual's capacity to avoid boredom.

Protective Factors

As suggested above, several factors appear to reduce the likelihood of violence in adolescence (Werner, 1984, 1988, 1989; Eron & Huesmann, 1984; APA). These include high IQ, a shy and inhibited temperament or a fearless, affectionate, and sociable temperament, social isolation, coming from a high income family, being first-born, interacting with a caring parent or adult, especially in a small family with low discord, and regularly attending religious services.

I will explore the work of three authors, Werner, Staub, and Higgins, in making the connection between these factors and meaning. A 35-year longitudinal study (Werner, 1984, 1988, 1989) of 658 children born in 1955 on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, includes data from the mothers' pregnancies. Werner focused attention on the high-risk group in the study -- children growing up in poverty, with single, poorly educated mothers, or with parental histories of substance abuse or psychopathology. Of that group, a
sub-group of resilient children emerged, making up nearly one quarter of the high-risk cohort. These children were successful in school and in later careers, and did not become delinquent or antisocial. They established stable families and overwhelmingly report themselves as happy and satisfied with their lives. The factors that seem to be protective against the high-risk environment are all strongly reminiscent of the factors that were described in the previous chapter as providing meaning in life. The resilient group seem to have both dispositional characteristics that were protective, and certain protective features in their environments. As children, they were identified early as engaging, sociable infants who attracted the positive regard of adults wherever they went. They approached life on their own terms and had an extraordinary ability to elicit nurturance from surrogate parents if their biological parents were absent or dysfunctional. Superior intelligence was not a distinguishing feature, but tenacity, determination, fearlessness, and a will to achieve were. The presence of a reliable, nurturing adult seemed to be essential to their establishing a sense of trust. The nurturer was most often the mother, but also common were teachers, neighbors, baby-sitters, or members of the clergy. The example of a mother who is gainfully and steadily employed seems to be an especially powerful model of identification for resilient girls reared in poverty. These children had many good friends at school and participated actively in clubs and extracurricular activities. They experienced "required helpfulness" as children because they were needed to care for younger siblings or someone who was ill.

Several authors (cf. Staub, 1992; Skager, 1989) recognize that having important responsibilities (as opposed, for example, to simply being required to clean one's room) is significant in developing a prosocial orientation and is congruent with finding meaning in involvement, attachment, and service
to others. The influence of religion was marked, and continues to the present, as these subjects speak of their faith as a fundamental strength in their lives. They believe that life makes sense and that they have some control over their fate. Werner refers to other studies of children in difficult circumstances, (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976; Ayala-Canales, 1984; Moskovitz, 1983; cited in Werner, 1989) and notes how these children construct their spiritual belief and their place in the world. She concludes that a sense of meaning persists among resilient children even if they are uprooted by wars or scattered as refugees to the four corners of the earth. It enables them to love despite hate, and to maintain the ability to behave compassionately toward other people (Werner, 1984). Werner emphasizes the powerful effect of children encountering people who give meaning to their lives and a reason for commitment and caring. Although the influence of the spiritual dimension in the lives of these children seems very strong in Werner's own papers on resilient children, its role is greatly diminished in the secondary literature addressing promising areas of intervention (APA) where Werner's work is cited.

In summary, these children had at least average intelligence, were very sociable, competent in communication skills (language and reading), and showed an internal locus of control. They created strong external support systems in family, school, work, neighborhood, or church. These support systems provided rewards for the child's competencies and determination, and offered a belief system by which to live.

A second author who has spent more than twenty-five years studying the childhood roots of violence and nonviolence is Staub (1971, 1974, 1975, 1987, 1988, 1992). Staub's work is discussed in greater detail later because of its relevance to education, but in the context of protective factors against violent
behavior, Staub emphasizes the importance of learning empathic responses in early childhood. Empathy is dependent on the child's having a sense of personal worth and being able to trust and feel responsible for the welfare of others. Staub also stresses the importance of children having responsibilities for the care of siblings or animals, and learning altruism in childhood. In researching the motivation of people who risk their lives to come to the aid of a stranger in distress (e.g., Germans who rescued Jews during World War II), Staub found a high incidence of novelty- and adventure-seekers who valued courage. Staub examined records of the Carnegie Hero Commission and interviewed individuals who risked their lives to save another, and suggests that such heroic people are characterized not only by sensation-seeking, but also by a history of taking initiative and engaging in dangerous activities such as parachuting (Staub, 1974). The significance of this research in terms of boredom is that sensation-seekers who find prosocial outlets for their need for high stimulation, and who have a strong moral basis to their lives may represent the opposite end of the continuum from the sensation-seekers who take a negative path and become violent.

A third author concerned with resilience, Higgins (1994), studied 40 resilient US adults who came from families described as extremely or catastrophically stressful (one child was raised in a Satanic cult, tortured, and beaten), confirmed the importance of a nurturing adult in sustaining the ability of a child in desperate circumstances to overcome the environment and become a caring and compassionate adult. An additional insight from Higgins' work is the importance of youth groups (e.g., Boy Scouts, YWCA) that provide adult mentors and models of families that are not destructive and violent to one another. Higgins (1994) describes the faith of resilient adults as faith in their and others' ability to make a better world. She
comments that most of her subjects did not participate in a church, but had strong symbolic representations of their belief in something outside themselves and the idea that they had been called to a special task. These adults stressed the importance of literature, film, art, and television in inspiring them and providing information about other kinds of families and other ways to interact. Resilient adults were deeply involved in social activism, in fact, 85% of them felt their activism was almost a mission. In offering advice to those who deal with children known to be in difficult circumstances, one responded "Those of you who touch the life of a child constructively, even briefly, should never underestimate your possible corrective impact on that child. The more resilient the child, the more mileage he or she will gain from your help" (p. 324). The most helpful adults believed the children could succeed and told them so. "For the teacher who put out for that kid and wondered if it mattered: tell people that it does matter" (p. 319, italics in original). These studies on resilience show that predictions of delinquency and violence cannot be based on risk factors alone because some children rise above their surroundings. Their strengths and the influences that help them succeed offer insights that are helpful in formulating strategies for other high risk children and, as I have tried to illustrate, many of these factors are closely associated with the success of these individuals in finding meaning in their lives.

In summary, the risk factors for violence and the risk factors for boredom overlap for all but a few characteristics, most of which show in early childhood. The set of characteristics unique to violence may be particularly important signals of severe pathology. I conclude that boredom and violence arise in similar circumstances, and I will argue in the next section that their interaction is important in increasing the predisposition to violence. Factors
that have been shown to be protective against a high risk environment are congruent with the sources of meaning described in the previous chapter; their importance in the lives of resilient children supports the contentions of existential psychiatrists that meaning provides a foundation for emotional health.
CHAPTER FIVE

VIOLENCE AND BOREDOM AS LEARNED RESPONSES

In this chapter I continue my argument that the relationship between boredom and violence is important, and propose that the intolerable state experienced in chronic boredom triggers learned violent responses in some youth, and may provide a rationalization for antisocial behavior including violence. I also argue that since boredom and violence are, to some extent at least, learned behaviors, they are susceptible to educational intervention. In order to support this conclusion, I turn to current theories of how high-risk children become aggressive and violent, and use the same theories to suggest how high-risk children become bored. Furthermore, when young people learn that peers (and even police and social workers) blame boredom for youth violence, they are able to avoid taking personal responsibility for their actions and are more likely to repeat them.

Theories Underlying School Violence Prevention Programs

Current theories (Bandura, 1973; Hirschi, 1969; Dodge et al., 1990; Ferguson & Rule, 1983; Guerra & Slaby, 1990; Greenberg & Speltz cited in APA; Parke & Slaby, 1983; Shure cited in APA) explain violence as the interaction of personal factors with the influences of the family, community, and society. Because my central concern is violence prevention programs in schools, I will focus on theories widely applied in current school programs: social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), social cognitive learning theories
(Dodge et al., 1990; Ferguson & Rule, 1983; Guerra & Slaby, 1990; Greenberg & Speltz cited in APA; Parke & Slaby, 1983), and social control theory (Hirschi, 1969, Hawkins & Lam, 1987; Hawkins, Douek & Lishner, 1988; Hawkins, Von Cleave & Catalono, 1991). These theories are outlined below. Other theories such as sociological theories of anomie, deviant subculture, or gang affiliation (Binder, Geis, & Bruce, 1988) enter my discussions only peripherally (by their relationship with meaning in life) because I focus specifically on theories directed at changing individual aggressive response patterns through school violence prevention programs. There is overlap with other approaches, however, because of the interaction between school and community. What seems important is recognizing that violence does not have a single cause, but results from the interaction of many factors and influences that ebb and flow over time. Furthermore, some of the maladaptive responses are learned and therefore may be correctable through interventions by public schools.

Theories that are currently applied to violence prevention provide a basis for intervention at the level of risk factors, (i.e., by social programs, community supports, legislated social reform) and at the level of learned responses to frustration and conflict (i.e., by school and community programs). Responses are learned both in school and outside, and collaboration with the community increases the effectiveness of educational interventions.

Individual factors may act reciprocally with environmental factors, to modify one another. For example, a difficult baby may increase the stress felt by an exhausted single mother to the point that she cannot respond warmly to the baby's cries and begins to reject the infant. The baby responds to the rejection by demanding more attention, and raises the stress level even more. The reciprocal interplay between the child and the environment is also
evident in the aggressive child who is rejected by peers and becomes more aggressive in response.

**Social Learning Theory**

One of the most reputable and enduring theories, social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), provides a general framework to help understand how children learn aggressive behaviors by observation and direct experience, and how their learning is reinforced by rewards and punishments. Social learning theory has been an important basis for our understanding of violence, and has a large body of research to support its contentions (APA). Rather than assuming that violence is an inexorable human drive, learning theory assumes that violence is often a learned behavior (Bandura, 1973). In other words, many of the factors which correlate with violence actually contribute to violence because they help children learn to be violent. The learning takes place in early childhood through direct experiences or observation of live or filmed models. Observation of the consequences of violent action (reward or punishment, and suffering of the victim) affects the likelihood that observers will imitate the action or accept it as normal behavior. If observers then behave violently, they find themselves pleased with or ashamed of their actions and thus develop a system of self-reward or punishment that reinforces the learned behavior. Those who regard violence as normal may simply disconnect self-evaluation from behavior (APA). Bandura's work exposes the powerful effects on children of watching television violence, and shows that cartoon characters are as effective as real people in influencing behavior. The children showed increased aggression immediately after the viewing, and often imitated the
actions they had observed. In the absence of prosocial models, an effect of observing violence on television is that children may learn to accept as normal the modeled behavior that most absorbs their attention -- today this modeling is frequently the actions of popular characters such as the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers or Ninja Turtles, who resolve their problems by violence. According to social learning theory, parents are important in providing models for behavior and in setting the rewards and punishments for children's learning. If parents model aggressive behavior, reward children with praise for using violence to prove their toughness, and condemn children as weak for avoiding confrontations, the children are likely to internalize both the examples and the rewards for aggression. After a time, children may not evaluate themselves as good or bad for using violence because they see the behavior as normal.

Social learning theory would seemingly apply equally well to learning prosocial behaviors from influential role models. Rock musicians and bands committed to social justice, human rights issues, nuclear disarmament, or saving the rainforest have been effective in raising awareness and stimulating action on those issues, as was demonstrated when rock bands took up the cause of the Ethiopian famine and raised millions of dollars for relief.

**Social Cognitive Learning Theories**

Using social learning theory to explain how children learn behavior, various researchers have identified the distinct steps in learning what is observed or experienced, in order to define differences in cognitions of aggressive and nonaggressive youth. I discuss nine closely related models
that build on social learning theory and provide insights into how learning may occur. The various accounts are not competing models of violence, but complementary insights into particular stages in the evolution of learned responses to conflict. The practical aspect of the theories is that each stage offers the possibility of intervention at a different level.

The first model describes social information processing (Dodge et al., 1990) as a five step sequence of encoding, mental representation, response access, response evaluation and selection, and enactment. At each stage, aggressive children have been found to have inappropriate cognitions that lead to the likelihood of the final action being aggressive. Let me describe these stages more fully: at the first stage, encoding, children assess a situation based on reading social cues such as facial expressions. Aggressive children have been found to attend to fewer social cues than do non-aggressive children, and to attribute hostile intent to the other person in ambiguous situations. This attribution of hostility often leads children to respond aggressively to a neutral situation, while perceiving their own actions as self defence. The second stage, mental representation, depends on children being able to take the perspective of the other -- to have empathy -- a difficult task for aggressive children. At the next stage, when considering possible responses, aggressive children have fewer strategies on which to draw than non-aggressive children. Unfortunately, they also evaluate possible consequences poorly and, because they have not thought through the negative consequences realistically, they may select an aggressive response, believing it to be the most likely to succeed. Thus, in addition to showing poor judgment in selection, aggressive children may also simultaneously rationalize the enactment of an aggressive response. Other research detailing
various steps in the pathway to violence fits within the sequence from encoding to enactment proposed by Dodge et al. (1990).

Further research into the encoding step focuses on attribution, that is, the evaluation of the intention of someone who threatens or causes an injury. Ferguson and Rule (1983) studied how perceptions of the intention of someone who caused harm affect the recipient's response; that is, how encoding and representation affect the outcome. The authors found that retaliation or revenge are less likely if someone is perceived as having unintentionally caused harm. Helping the young people to clarify the intention of the other, therefore, often reduces the likelihood of an aggressive response; hence the value of empathy training in reducing violence.

The cognitive script model (Huesmann, 1988), which relates to the response access stage in the information processing model, assumes that children form a series of cognitive schemas like rehearsed scripts they can invoke in conflict situations. The more frequently children use a given script in fantasy and in action, the more likely they are to use it again. This theory assumes that if children have more prosocial scripts in their repertoire, and have had the opportunity to rehearse them, they will be more likely to choose a nonviolent alternative. This theory is important in the discussion of video games which follows later in this section, because these interactive games provide for rehearsal of violent scripts.

Another formulation congruent with information processing theory addresses the stage of evaluation of a response by emphasizing the problem-solving aspects (Shure cited in APA). This model uses techniques such as thinking aloud, role playing, transferring training from hypothetical to real life situations, and providing performance feedback to teach young people to weigh consequences and make choices based on more thoughtful
consideration of information. The problem-solving model applies the concepts of social learning theory by providing children with appropriate models and direct experience of mimicking what they have observed. The model helps children learn to evaluate their actions and find satisfaction (self-reward) in prosocial actions.

The cognitive mediators model (Guerra & Slaby, 1990) interprets the stages from encoding to enactment as "habits of mind" that include beliefs, processes, and thinking style. For example, aggressive young people may have generalized beliefs that support the use of violence, habitual ways of solving social problems using coercion, and a characteristic style of thought that is more impulsive than reflective. This theory provides the connection between the observation of aggressive behavior and the habitual adoption of it by suggesting that the child's learned beliefs and problem-solving style influence each of the steps in a given situation.

The cognitive-social learning mediators theory (Perry, Perry, & Rasmussen, 1986) also addresses the attitudes children bring to every situation. The authors predict that children who expect hostility from the social world behave in ways that elicit responses that become increasingly coercive, both at home and at school. This theory fits with the early stage described in social information processing theory (Dodge et al., 1990) when the child learns to interpret a situation as hostile; cognitive mediator theory predicts that the child later generalizes that interpretation to encompass the whole social world. This generalization that "it's a jungle out there" is extremely important in setting patterns of response to a wide range of situations.

The social interactional model described by Patterson et al. (1989, cited in APA) integrates the risk factors discussed earlier in this chapter and
argues that their importance in childhood is the effect they have on parenting. When children go to school, pre-existing risk factors affect children's achievement and peer relations which, in turn, affect the likelihood of violence. In adolescence, the risk factors are mediated by increased risk for depressed mood and involvement in a deviant peer group. According to this model the primary focus of intervention in childhood should be on the parents, and as the children get older the focus should shift to the school and peer groups.

The developmental-organizations model (Greenberg & Speltz cited in APA) focuses on inadequate attachment as a risk factor in development and social learning. The authors suggest that when children behave disruptively at home, it may be to increase the proximity of their caregivers who have been unpredictable. Insecurely attached children may learn models of relationships characterized by anger and mistrust, and finally, the quality of attachment may motivate children to respond positively or with resistance in social interactions.

The ecological model of Parke & Slaby (1983, p. 559) is very useful in drawing together the risk factors with the stages and the outside influences that lead a child to become violent in adolescence. Parke's diagram (Chart 3) summarizes the interacting factors leading to violence.
Chart 3
The Development of Aggression

FAMILY
Relevant Variables
- Type of child-rearing tactics
- Family interaction patterns (parent-child, husband-wife, sib-sib)
- Levels of intra-familial stress

CHILD
Relevant Variables
- Individual characteristics (temperament, activity level, premature status)
- Social skills

COMMUNITY
Relevant Variables
- Community attitudes concerning children's rights
- Community attitudes and values concerning appropriate child-rearing tactics
- Availability of informal support systems
- Availability of formal support systems

CULTURE
Relevant Variables
- Attitudes to the appropriateness of physical violence for solving social problems
- Levels of other forms of violence (entertainment media, homicide, assaults, etc.)
- Attitudes towards children's rights and parents' rights

An analytical model of aggression
adapted from Parke, 1982
Parke’s ecological model includes cultural influences on the child. These influences are extremely important for both boredom and violence and are discussed more fully later because they parallel models raised in Chapter Two with respect to boredom, but add the dimension of violence.

To review briefly, according to current theories based on social cognitive learning theories, violence in adolescence seems to occur through a complex series of interactions between the predispositions of the child, the environmental risk factors, and the influences of family, peers, school, media, and other aspects of culture. The interactions lead to learned attitudes and beliefs that generalize to form a worldview that influences habitual responses to conflict. The social cognitive learning framework is useful because most of the factors and learned patterns are also influenced adversely by the tensions and habits of mind associated with boredom. The specific interventions used in schools to prevent violence are described in the following chapter.

Social Control Theory

The final theory of adolescent violence I discuss, *social control theory* (Hirschi, 1969), is relevant both to boredom and to school programs to reduce violence. Social control theory states that humans are controlled by their affiliations with institutions (i.e., the family, the school, the church) that demand certain standards of conformity. To the extent that a youngster fails to become attached to a variety of control agencies, his chances of becoming delinquent are increased. Hirschi (1969) proposes that four aspects of affiliation are important: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief.
Attachment refers to affectional relationships; commitment to the investment made in conventional activities, including recognition of the personal cost of breaking rules; involvement means participation in activities related to future goals or success; belief refers to acceptance of the moral validity of social rules. Social control theory relates closely to the search for meaning through its emphasis on the importance of attachment, belonging to a group and engagement in purposeful activity. Hirschi's aspects of affiliation are also similar to the factors described by resilient adults: the important role of mentors, the children's determination to live differently than their parents, the involvement of the children in school groups and clubs, and their overriding belief in the goodness in life. Interventions aimed at improving the four elements of social control in schools are discussed in the next chapter.

**Violence as Learned Behavior**

Anthropologists who have compared societies characterized by collaboration and non-violence with those that are violent and warlike (Eisenberg, 1992), have found that the gentle societies use warmth and positive redirection of children rather than punishment to teach them acceptable behavior. Violent societies use ridicule and physical punishment in child rearing, -- some, such as the Ik in Africa, even failed to ensure that children were fed (Skynner & Cleese, 1993). The Ik have been studied extensively because their change from a cooperative, hunting society to a violent, competitive society is recent. The cooperative social structure of their community ended when they could no longer hunt because of new national park boundaries drawn as a result of African independence from
colonial rule. The Ik became violent and callous when their very survival was threatened by a shortage of food and water. Adults began hoarding selfishly and forcing children to fend for themselves soon after they were weaned. Turnbull's descriptions (cited in Skynner & Cleese, 1993) reflect a sadistic, cruel, hate-filled culture with no compassion for children or the elderly. Turnbull describes adults watching a toddler crawl toward a fire, making no effort to warn it, and then laughing uproariously when the child was burned. Sources of meaning previously found in relationships, connection to the land, cooperative hunting, and altruism seem to have been greatly contracted, and the stance toward suffering and hardship adopted by the adults seems devoid of nobility. By contrast, the Ladakhi people of Northern India, originally Tibetan Buddhists, are described as the gentlest and happiest of peoples (Skynner & Cleese, 1993). They raise their children with very little coercion and an emphasis on loving example, an approach colored by their belief that a child may be the reincarnation of a loved and revered ancestor. The Ladakhi seem to have retained most of their sources of meaning and, although the loss of their homeland is a source of great pain, they have adopted a positive stance toward the hardship of being displaced. The profound differences between these two groups, both of which have suffered upheaval and hardships, supports the contention that violence is learned behavior and that loss of meaning exacerbates conditions in a society in distress. The Buddhist refugees are able to sustain their culture, partly because their religion and their customs maintain their over-riding respect and caring for one another, and partly because the Indian government and the outside world responded to their desperate plight; the Ik were not so fortunate in eliciting aid, and their culture appears not to have provided the basis for a compassionate response in the face of overwhelming deprivation.
Cultural Influences

The influence of culture is explored by Miedzian (1991), who argues that Western society raises young males to define their masculinity in terms of violence. This notion of a culture of violence is important to adolescent boredom because many of the examples of violence described by Miedzian are from entertainment, the place young people turn to relieve boredom. She elaborates on the glorification of violence in sports, music, television, movies, toys, and commercials, and claims that these cultural expressions teach boys to equate violent behavior with masculinity. Miedzian illustrates how violence is a feature of competitive sports such as hockey, football, boxing, wrestling and even Little League baseball. She points out that children's toys modeled on violent television superheroes, such as Power Rangers or Ninja Turtles, exploit the commercial market of children who watch cartoons, but are inadequate tools for learning playfulness because they limit imagination and stimulate only the stereotypical action sequences the child has observed. Music, videos, television, and movies glamorize violence in association with power, money, sex, and excitement.

Miedzian describes the violence of video games as having the same effects as other depictions of violence. Their significance here is the extent to which they are used by young males to relieve boredom. Since the publication of Miedzian's (1991) book, extremely violent games have appeared, such as Mortal Kombat, in which the player pursues, attacks, maims, and kills various victims whose deaths are portrayed in realistic detail. Such games provide the opportunity to observe violent models, to plan and rehearse stalking, and to kill without any connection to the reality
of suffering of the victim, or any risk of punishment. In games available in video arcades, the players point and shoot at victims, and when they hit their targets they see great chunks of flesh and blood fly off the people hit. Their actions are dissociated from any portrayal of the victim's fear and pain. Bandura (1973) found in his studies on aggression that violence was more likely to be accepted by the viewer when neither the suffering of the victim nor the punishment of the perpetrator were shown with the violence. War historian Gwynne Dyer writes in a syndicated column entitled "Society teaching children to kill ruthlessly" (1995) that computer and video games use the same techniques that were used by the US military to desensitize their troops headed for Vietnam so that they would not be inhibited against killing. Dyer refers to research done in the final years of World War II that found that only 15 to 20% of soldiers ever fired their weapons in battle (Grossman, 1995). In fact, the researchers found that the average and healthy man has an inner and usually unrealized resistance towards killing a fellow man and is likely to turn away from that responsibility, even in combat. The desensitization and conditioning training used by the military include replacing bull's eye targets with pop-up targets that resemble human beings, in order to make shooting at humans seem familiar; and operant conditioning to make shooting so reflexive men don't have to think. The training succeeded so well that 95% of the troops in Vietnam shot to kill. Dyer concludes his article by citing Lt. Col. David Grossman's 1995 book, On Killing, "The same tools that more than quadrupled the firing rate in Vietnam are now in widespread use among our civilian populations." Grossman, a psychologist and U.S. Army Ranger, notes that military training includes obeying orders, and restricts killing to combat situations with defined parameters. Those prohibitions are lacking in the situation where
young people play video games in a comfortable setting, eating candy, drinking soft drinks, surrounded by peers, and learning to associate pleasure with violence. Grossman's (1995) book is an extraordinarily compelling account of the effects on our society of unleashing the techniques used to desensitize soldiers, without the controls of military training.

Let me discuss the role of television more fully because many researchers regard television as second only to the family in its powerful influence in socializing children. It is relevant to the interaction between boredom and violence because watching television is a common response to boredom. Teens in Canada watched an average of 17.1 hours per week in 1994, the most recent year reported by Statistics Canada (Davis, 1996). Although this figure is down from 18.6 hours per week in 1988, the author speculates that this drop may be because of video games and Internet access. After more than four decades of research into the effects of television on children, the vast majority of researchers have reached consensus that watching violence on television is harmful. The large number of studies include cross-cultural, longitudinal, laboratory, field, and naturalistic studies. I will not repeat a full literature review here, but will summarize the conclusions from the APA and NRC whose reviews cover forty years of research.

The serious implications of the central place of television in North American homes are outlined in the APA report in a chapter that addresses the role of television in the development, maintenance, and facilitation of aggression and violence among children and adolescents (Donnerstein, Slaby, & Eron in APA). The authors refer to the US Surgeon General's Commission report of 1972, which indicated that television rarely showed the consequences of violence, characters children could identify with
were just as violent as other characters, and cartoons were especially violent. The conclusion of the report was that "there was a direct, causal link between exposure to televised violence and subsequent aggressive behavior on the part of the viewer" (cited in APA, p. 223). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) report (1982), concluded that "violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the program" (cited in APA, p. 14). The serious long-term effects of watching appear to be cumulative; they help shape the developing child's character and personality, including the willingness and readiness to engage in violence (APA, p. 14). Behavioral and physiological indifference also result from watching television violence; this desensitization effect has been of concern because it results in greater acceptance of violence as normal, and reduces empathic responses to those who are injured. Viewers also have an exaggerated perception of how dangerous the world is, and tend to have increased mistrust in others (APA, p. 14).

The mere presence of violence in the media, the lack of nonviolent role models, the constant imaging of a society in which "the good life" can and must be attained, and the media portrayal of aggression as a means to solve conflict were influences described by many youth who testified before the APA Task Force on Violence and Youth. (p. 219)

Although some researchers do not support these conclusions, Comstock & Strausberger (1990) write "the literature gives little comfort to those who assert that the findings are evenly divided, the studies are inferior, or that violence on TV does not influence behavior" (p. 32). In 1985, the APA joined other professional groups (American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child Psychiatry) in taking the position that violence in the mass media needs to be reduced.
The NRC reached similar conclusions and cite an extensive meta-analysis prepared for the panel by Comstock and Paik (1990) covering 188 studies and 1,126 comparisons between 1957 and 1990:

> Overall, the vast majority of studies, whatever their methodology, showed that exposure to television violence resulted in increased aggressive behavior, both contemporaneously and over time. (cited in NRC, p. 371)

I suggest that another negative effect of television may be to reduce the protective factor of hope for the future that has been found to be important in resilience. Simplistic presentations of good and evil that do not offer solutions to the real problems of life, and endless revelations of corruption and betrayal of trust on the part of corporate and political leaders contribute to cynicism and hopelessness. I am not suggesting that television should not expose these stories, but I argue that the unbalanced emphasis on the baseness of human nature increases cynicism and mistrust by youth and adults alike -- the dark side of humanity is countered by too few televised role models of healthy, constructive behavior. We rarely see, for example, men and women working out real conflicts non-violently, loving one another for showing virtues of constancy, faithfulness, politeness, compassion, wisdom, trustworthiness, or spirituality. Time constraints of television programming mean that character development is usually limited to stereotypical portrayals that permit the rapid development of plot; there are few examples of warm, complex, ordinary people solving problems by perseverance and goodwill. Advertising promotes the notion that happiness requires high levels of stimulation -- parties, pubs, dancing, and fast cars -- and that buying a product will improve relationships. The notion that relationships are built not only on exciting times, but also on the daily tasks of living together seems
not to be commercially useful. Sharing, solving conflicts by talking, living simply, cleaning and maintaining a household, being together in silence, moving slowly, observing patiently, giving time to children, are activities that don't fit into seven-minute segments, and would be unlikely to arrest the attention of a "channel surfer". In summary, the implicit messages of plots and advertising undermine the likelihood that children and youth will learn sources of meaning by observing models on television. Thus, when they turn to television to relieve boredom, they are likely to learn to want increased sensation and to be offered little that fulfills the need for meaning.

Because of the increasing incidence of female adolescent violence, I informally investigated whether current movies feature women in more violent roles than in the past. Females at high risk for boredom are likely to turn to movies for stimulation and, if social learning theory is correct, watching violent female models in films would result in an increase in female violence. I had no trouble locating examples -- when I asked an employee at a video store for movies that feature murderous, vengeful women as anti-heroes, I was offered 15 films that were currently popular, including *Basic Instincts, Fatal Attraction, The Hand That Rocks the Cradle, Thelma and Louise,* and *Batman Returns.* The films all portray women as brutal, callous, vengeful, and sadistic. In some, such as *Basic Instincts,* the woman murderer is beautiful, sexually attractive, wealthy and, in the end, untouched by the law. In many of these movies, the women appear to be enjoying slashing, knifing, shooting, and torturing their victims; the violence is exceedingly graphic, close-up, and realistic. From the conclusions of research on violence in the media, the presentation of these violent models in combination with the rewards they have accrued and the complete absence of punishment for their actions should predict an increase in brutal assaults.
by females. Widespread dissemination of these models of women would likely affect social expectations about females so that women would be assumed to be as violent as men.

If we were to choose to apply social cognitive learning theories perversely in order to teach our children to be as violent and as bored as possible, to need high levels of sensation, and to have as few sources of meaning as possible, it seems to me that we would do very much what we are doing now: surround them with violent images through music, films, videos, toys, newspapers, and sports. We would give them war toys to both trivialize death and glamorize war. We would promote individual competition, lack of commitment to close relationships, and status based on possessions. We would make children unwelcome in adult surroundings such as churches, parties, meetings, stores, art galleries, and offices. We would design our houses so that the children played in an area away from the adults. We would encourage child care by a series of strangers rather than the children's own parents. We would indicate that children are not valued by paying child care workers at the bottom of the wage scale. We would offer women the choice of staying at home isolated from the intellectual and social stimulation of the workplace, or going out to work, isolated from their children. We would organize schools as they were fifty years ago – hierarchical, authoritarian, and rigid in discipline. We would use corporal punishment and shaming. We would compare students with each other and with an external standard of performance on a fixed curriculum. We would build in gender, race, and class bias. Although most schools have moved from such a model toward a more supportive and nurturing one, the authoritarian model continues to have supporters who call for stricter discipline, and a return to "basics".
Social Alienation and Despair

The foregoing discussion of learned patterns and cultural influences omits a perspective on boredom and violence that was introduced in Chapter Two -- the historical and sociological changes described by Healy (1984) and the existential psychiatrists. These authors find increased meaninglessness and boredom in many people even without risk factors of childhood deprivation and abuse. They attribute the rise of chronic and debilitating boredom to profound social changes that began with the Industrial Revolution and the Age of Reason and now include the threat of nuclear war and the danger of environmental collapse. I have already discussed the diminished sources of life-meaning in Western societies resulting from purposeless leisure time, a loss of meaningful work, an alienation from the land, destruction of natural surroundings, a culture of consumerism, and for some, loss of a spiritual orientation. Healy and the existential psychiatrists predict violence in association with this pervasive loss of meaning, but do not offer a model that explains how loss of meaning leads to violence. In the context of this thesis, the question cannot be ignored, because the expressions of youth culture I quoted in chapter one indicate that, at least in the minds of rock musicians and their fan groups, loss of meaning is associated with violence. Recall the preoccupation in alternative music with hopelessness about the future of the planet because of the threat of nuclear war and the destruction of the environment. Hopelessness about the future of the world does not appear in the factors that increase risk of antisocial behavior and violence, either because it is not a risk factor or because, as far as I could determine, it has not been the subject of research in this
context. I assume that the effects of profound social changes may be mediated by boredom to lead to violence in the same way as other risk factors, and that existential angst should be added as a risk factor for both boredom and violence, as the research by existential psychiatrists implies. Because I have not found research literature that connects the global issues of our time to current theories of violence, particularly to social cognitive learning theories, I offer my speculations on the effects of widespread loss of meaning on the pathways to violence. It seems most likely that the existential meaninglessness of some young people is a background factor that becomes one of the habits of mind described by Guerra and Slaby (1990), contributing to anger, hopelessness, apathy, or despair. Whether it leads to adaptive or maladaptive responses depends upon the presence of the other risk factors discussed earlier and the influences of the personal social environmental. Because of the enormity of global problems, many young people feel powerless to affect them, and thus assume an external locus of control, and a habit of mind that avoids responsibility for their actions. I suggest that most young people are not constantly musing about global problems, but that a deep loss of meaning that remains constant despite superficial improvements may be felt by some young people who have a particular awareness of the issues. I wonder whether anxiety about our human future contributes to frustration about one's personal future, and thus to a "shorter fuse" in conflict situations. Finally, believing that not only is one's future limited by social circumstances, but that one may not have a future at all, seems to be behind the claim of some young people that there is no reason to behave morally because nothing makes any difference to the eventual outcome.

Limited opportunity for advancement has been identified as a risk factor for violence and boredom, but what about the "end of work" that
Rifkin (1995) describes violence as resulting from technology. Violence and child abuse have been found to increase in periods of increased unemployment (Staub, 1992), but the effects of a permanent reduction in the number of people working are not yet known. Without major social readjustment, increased poverty seems inevitable and, from the evidence presented thus far, I would predict that the loss of work would result in increased meaninglessness in Western society. Fromm (1981) writes of existential hopelessness leading to great vulnerability to popular acceptance of dictatorial regimes or ideologies such as Nazism, that offer relief from overwhelming personal insignificance. It appears to me that an important area for future research is how the threats to one's personal future and the future of the planet are perceived by violent and non-violent youth. The interactions of helplessness, hopelessness, and anger seem particularly relevant. When rock musicians write of nuclear weapons, pollution, or destruction of the rainforest, are they describing a pervasive anxiety of youth, or are they directing anger arising from their personal lives at an older generation as a way of justifying their anti-social behavior? A significant difficulty in studying concerns about catastrophic possibilities such as environmental collapse or nuclear war, is that such threats have been found to be so profoundly frightening they are blocked from consciousness by the psychological defence of denial (Caldicott, 1985).

Thus far I have presented evidence that violence is to a large extent learned behavior affected by individual predispositions and social interactions. Not only may children learn violent behavior within the family, violent themes are so pervasive in North American culture that masculinity is almost equated with violence (Miedzian, 1991).

Anthropological evidence also supports the notion that violence is learned;
the examples of the Ik and the Ladhaki people also suggest that meaninglessness is associated with a more violent society. Recent changes in industrialized societies make the challenge of finding meaning in life even more difficult than in earlier times; isolation, lack of connectedness with others, with the earth, and with a purpose outside the self bring boredom into close association with violence. In the following discussion, I argue that boredom is also learned in our society in similar ways to violence, and that changing learned perceptions of and responses to boredom may reduce the likelihood of violence.

A Proposed Model

In this section I use the learning models that have been applied in the study of adolescent violence to analyze the pathways from risk factors to boredom. This analysis is important to my argument that boredom provides a trigger and a rationalization for aggression for some young people, and that defining the steps that lead to boredom may reveal where interventions can effectively reduce violence. My analysis differs from the perspectives on boredom in Chapters Two and Three because I use social learning theory and cognitive learning theories to formulate a model that incorporates risk factors and external influences on learned behavior.

Applying the perspective of social learning theory to boredom, I propose considering boredom to be, to a significant extent, a learned interpretation of an emotional and physiological state — learned both from observed models and from direct experience. This is a departure from the usual notion of defining boredom as the emotional/physiological state itself.
I begin with the transient experience of boredom and show how it often generalizes to become the chronic, destructive form over time.

To begin my argument, I suggest that children may first learn to recognize an emotional and physical state of tension that accompanies situations perceived as inadequately stimulating, and then learn to label that state as boredom. The importance of recognizing that the labeling is learned is that accepting other interpretations of the state as possible, opens up a number of response options. I will offer some alternative interpretations of the state of tension, before continuing to describe how the learning may occur. The examples I give are not meant as prescriptions that would solve boredom in North American schools, but rather as alternative ways to conceptualize boredom. In the final chapter I propose specific recommendations for educators.

The first example of an alternative interpretation of the discomfort felt in a situation of constraint and inadequate stimulation is that of Eastern religions. A practicing Buddhist, for example, would likely experience the discomfort as a symptom of a deeper cause, and prefer to deal with the cause rather than providing symptomatic relief. The experience of boredom as a painful yearning to escape would be seen as a sign that one is clinging to the illusory world that offers only suffering, rather than letting go of the attachments that make the situation painful. Vietnamese Buddhist master, Thich Nhat Hanh's (1991), description of Buddha's enlightenment illustrates this different perspective on the external world, that teaches that it is our interpretation of suffering that imprisons us, not the suffering itself.

An alternative I have not discussed is attempting to reduce the dysphoria of the state by prescribed medication such as methylphenidate (Ritalin), antidepressants, or sedatives, or by illicit drugs or alcohol.
Guatama felt as though a prison which had confined him for thousands of lifetimes had broken open. Ignorance had been the jail keeper. Because of ignorance, his mind had been obscured, just like the moon and stars hidden by the storm clouds. Clouded by endless waves of deluded thoughts, the mind had falsely divided reality into subject and object, self and others, existence and non-existence, birth and death, and from these discriminations arose wrong views -- the prisons of feeling, craving, grasping, and becoming. The suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death only made the prison walls thicker. The only thing to do was to seize the jailkeeper and see his true face. The jailkeeper was ignorance. . . . Once the jailkeeper was gone, the jail would disappear and never be built again. (Hanh, 1991a, p. 121)

Hanh's (1991) book, *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life,* is a series of lessons on using everyday cues such as red traffic lights as reminders to practice mindfulness. According to Hanh (1991b), being caught in an interminable traffic jam is an opportunity, a part of Buddhist discipline, rather than necessarily a situation of intolerable frustration. Children who observe adults who use settings of constraint and low stimulation as conducive to spiritual practice, have a powerful model to side-step the escalating tension of boredom. For example, children attending Quaker meetings experience lengthy periods of silence with a group who are seated in simple, almost austere surroundings, speaking only "when the Spirit moves them". Another example might be an adult who has retreated for daily meditation to a place of low stimulation, observed sitting, eyes closed, and almost motionless, for an hour. In the case of a practicing Buddhist, the call to exercise compassion makes a violent response to a situation of constraint inconceivable.

The state we call boredom, that a Buddhist might regard as one example of suffering, might be interpreted by early hermetic monks as the sin of *acedia,* a sign of losing their spiritual path and being alienated from God.
They would see this as a sign of moral weakness and feel a commitment to deal with the condition. Frankl would label the state as indicating meaninglessness and help the sufferer to find sources of life meaning. Environmentalists might regard the feeling as a signal that they needed to retreat to nature for a time in order to restore themselves. A specialist in stress management might view boredom as an example of stress and thus open the range of possible responses to include relaxation and reorganization.

In other words, the state of discomfort we call boredom can be reinterpreted in more positive ways, each with possible responses that may be useful in dealing with adolescents. In the representation stage, children may learn by observation to construe their state of tension negatively and blame their discomfort on the outside world, not on their own interpretation of the situation. In addition, they may learn to blame the situation for either lacking sufficient sensation or lacking sufficient meaning. Finally, they may learn to wait for the situation to change instead of considering their own power to alter their circumstances, particularly if their experience in early childhood was of powerlessness in the face of parental abuse or neglect. In other words, all of the following are learned attributions of the state: the label, the interpretation of the state as undesirable, the cause as external, the situation as deficient in either sensation or meaning (or both), and the situation as immutable. Whether the experience is interpreted as transient, relatively innocuous, and under personal control, or as chronic, noxious, and externally controlled and immutable makes a significant difference to the responses likely to be chosen. The notion of "habits of mind" is useful in understanding that children who experience transient boredom repeatedly may develop an attitude that generalizes to construe everything as boring.
Another learned step occurs when children observe adults responding to boredom with strategies that provide the children with a repertoire to draw upon each time they feel the dysphoria they define as boredom. For example, a child may learn from models in the home that when adults find boredom intolerable, they drink, they strike out at those they blame for their boredom, or they leave. The children observe that the reward for such behavior seems to be a temporary reduction of boredom. When young people use strategies of substance abuse, aggression, or sensation-seeking, they may feel rewarded by a temporary reduction of boredom. The strategies modeled by adults or peers, live or televised, may be adaptive or maladaptive, with violence being one of the maladaptive responses to boredom.

Early reinforcement of preferred strategies comes both from the parents' responses to the child's behavior, and from the child's self reward or punishment. In a healthy family this self-regulation is internalized from the parents, but in a high-risk family it is likely to be based on distorted messages that lack coherence and cannot be relied upon to shape meaning. For example, a bored child may be ignored or hit by a parent one day for taunting a pet or sibling, and rewarded another day by the parent's laughter in response to the same action. Self-monitoring is often faulty in high-risk children who may confuse the early physiological signs of boredom with anger or frustration, and respond aggressively as a result. Teaching children to discern subtle differences in their emotions may help them to choose more reasoned responses to a feeling. The feedback provided in well-adjusted families helps the sensation-seeker to find appropriate outlets, and to recognize acceptable limits. In the high-risk family, where the boundaries of appropriate behavior are not clear, the child may find antisocial or criminal behavior provides the reward of excitement and thrills, while following rules
leads to boredom. Social learning theory would also predict that young people would learn from the models in alternative rock bands, that boredom is corrosive and drives people to impulsive, violent actions. That is, I suggest that the use of boredom as a justification for antisocial behavior is learned from powerful models, particularly peers and the heroes of adolescent culture.

One connection between childhood risk factors and learned responses of boredom is that children who have suffered cognitive deprivation and poor adult modeling are unable to discern details that others recognize as interesting and engaging. From their experience they are likely to have problems recognizing subtle signs of another person's intent and, like aggressive children, they may assume hostility from another because that assumption has often been accurate and protective in the past. Poor development of cognitive skills also results in the child having few behaviors to choose from. (Recall from Chapter Two, that the bored were noted to have rigid behavioral patterns.) Thus, the stages of encoding, representation, and response access for boredom are similar to the stages for aggression, although maladaptive responses to deal with boredom include some that are non-violent. Aggressive children select and enact different responses from those selected by the bored but not aggressive. Once again I point out that not all violent children are bored, and not all bored are violent; the pathways are twisted and crisscrossing, and only some of the paths end in violence.

The information processing model described earlier was shown to be useful in identifying the steps from encoding to enactment in a confrontational situation. This model can be applied to a situation perceived to be boring, with equally useful results. Let me consider how a classroom
may be perceived as an example of a constraining and inadequately stimulating setting. The stage of encoding in the classroom situation would include how students perceive their teacher and the subject matter. Dealing first with the teacher, if students attribute lack of variety and lack of personal concern to the teacher, perhaps it is because they do not perceive the complexity of the teacher as a person, and see only a stereotype. I would assume that the more distant and authoritarian the teacher, the more accurate this perception; the more personally responsive and caring the teacher, the more the teacher interacts in a non-stereotypical manner, the more the students are challenged to add complexity to their encoding. The next stage, representation, requires empathy. Bored children suffer the same problems as violent children in understanding another's perspective, for two reasons. First, they have had inadequate parental modeling of how to read social cues, and second, they have lacked a warm, nurturing relationship that seems to be necessary for the development of trust, which is a precursor to learning empathy (Staub, 1988). The response access stage requires the student to consider ways to respond to the teacher that may alleviate the feeling of boredom. That is, the student needs to learn a repertoire of responses that increase the perceived complexity or the perceived meaning of the situation, without drawing upon the maladaptive responses previously learned (such as acting out in class). It seems likely that if students become engaged in a more authentic relationship with a teacher, the subject matter may be found worthy of more attention.

The cognitive scripts model is also helpful in analyzing the pathways to boredom. Typical scripts that are played out in response to boredom might resemble the following: "I can't stand this; it's so boring I can't learn it," or "This teacher is so boring I hate her," or "I'm so bored I think I'll punch out
George". Social cognitive theory would predict that if children were taught more useful scripts to replace their familiar ones, the result would be both enhanced relationships and improved academic learning.

As we have seen, applying social cognitive models to the study of boredom allows us to explain the interaction of risk factors for violence with learned attitudes toward boredom. These models suggest a child may learn a predisposition to boredom and learn to respond aggressively from a series of options that include both aggressive and nonaggressive choices. If an aggressive response is rewarded by relief of the dysphoria of boredom, or by the reactions of peers, it is likely to be repeated. So too, children who are inclined to be violent often respond in an aggressive manner to deal with the tension of boredom. Again, responses that are rewarded by relief of boredom and anger, or by reactions of peers, are likely to be repeated.

In either case, whether the child began by being bored or by being aggressive, the response to the situation is tilted toward using aggression and blaming boredom. At various steps, alternatives are possible; most children take relatively adaptive routes, but some progress through increasingly maladaptive responses. The maladaptive responses link with the pathways to violence by providing actions that seem intrinsically rewarding because they are perceived to reduce the dysphoria of boredom. The models of peers and heroes who rationalize anti-social behavior by claiming that boredom drove them beyond their limits provide another reward -- that of belonging to a group who blame "the system" for their boredom, and ultimately for their actions. There is a patina of honor around blaming one's delinquency on boredom because the implication is that society does not measure up to the standards of the person who is bored. Blaming the system for boredom is a way of rebelling and denying personal responsibility at the same time. I
suggest that the early experiences of boredom are likely to be transient, but the pre-existing risk factors make it more likely that the learned steps will be reinforced by frequent exposure to models of maladaptive responses, and that bored demeanor will be rewarded by the adolescent peer group. The repeated exposure to bored models and the rewards for assuming a bored stance toward life lead to the habit of mind that characterizes chronic boredom. Consequently, intervening to prevent chronic boredom may reduce the likelihood of some delinquent acts (including violence) by removing an important contributing factor.

In this chapter I have discussed the theories of violence, particularly those that underlie school violence prevention programs, and showed that social control theory and social cognitive theories are useful in explaining how young people learn the pathways to chronic boredom. I considered the effects of the increase in profound boredom that has resulted from the progressive loss of meaning in Western industrial society, and finally, I suggested how existing models support the view that violence and boredom are to a large extent learned and mutually reinforcing.

In the next chapter I evaluate common school violence prevention programs and their likely effect on boredom. In light of the potentially significant role of boredom in the pathways to violence, I suggest modifications to increase the impact of violence prevention programs by including strategies to address boredom.
CHAPTER SIX

SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Violence prevention programs fall under the rubric of values education and are part of a long tradition of school efforts to socialize children and reduce delinquency. Many programs designed to reduce other forms of delinquency such as drug abuse, truancy, or teenage pregnancy may also help to prevent violence because delinquency is often a precursor to violence. In this chapter, I focus on the common programs designed specifically to prevent violence, most of which are based on social cognitive learning theories and social control theory; however, I will comment on several programs that take a different approach to violence prevention such as stress reduction and policing. Systematic evaluation of programs is limited, but several authors (DeJong, 1994; Posner, 1994; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Wilson-Brewer, Cohen, O'Donnell, & Goodman, 1991) who have reviewed the current state of violence prevention programs in North America highlight promising strategies, while criticizing the lack of empirically-based evaluation. Most authors recognize that the current sense of urgency about adolescent violence leads schools to choose programs that appear most promising or most affordable. Unfortunately, administrators often choose to focus on the widest possible implementation of programs without providing for evaluation. Tolan and Guerra (1994) review the available empirical studies of community-wide violence prevention programs, including a few school programs. I describe additional recent
empirical studies and draw tentative conclusions of the effectiveness and promise of various programs.

My purpose in describing the violence prevention programs in detail is to lay the groundwork for the discussion in the next chapter of how most existing programs have, at best, a modest effect in preventing boredom. I then suggest how programs might be created or modified, based on the conclusions about the role of boredom in violent behavior and the recognition of boredom as a learned response. My recommendations for violence prevention programs in schools include important strategies of collaboration with the community.

Overview

School violence prevention programs have evolved as a series of components or modules that are often implemented separately. The core of the most common programs includes some of the following: interpersonal communication skills, empathy training, conflict resolution, peer mediation, anger management, bullyproofing, bias awareness, parenting skills, and modification of school atmosphere. Some school programs have also been developed that apply Hirschi's (1969) social control theory (increasing bonding to the school, commitment to conventional activities, involvement in activities important for the student's future, and moral reasoning, or belief). These programs are important because they are based on a well established theory of delinquency prevention. Glasser's (1990) Quality Schools approach is sometimes described as a violence prevention strategy based on control theory that Glasser has adapted from industrial management. One unusual approach to violence prevention that I describe
is the use of stress reduction training for students and teachers -- a remarkably effective intervention (Hamilton, Hare, Hierlihy, & Kilbourn, n.d.; Wilson-Brewer, et al., 1991). To complete the section on the common school violence prevention programs, I discuss increasing policing and security as an administrative, non-teaching approach to violence prevention.

Let me begin by describing the theoretical underpinnings of the various strategies in violence prevention. Social learning theory is applied in communication and empathy training programs which use modeling, direct experience, and practice of new skills. Initially children are rewarded by the teacher and their classmates for choosing the modeled behavior, and ideally they gradually internalize the rewards so that they find satisfaction in the behavior itself. Children are taught to attend to many cues in the expressions and behavior of others (information processing theory), and are provided with immediate feedback about how their behavior affects others. They discover how easy it is to misinterpret the intentions of another person (attribution theory). They brainstorm and rehearse new response patterns (cognitive scripts theory), and learn to weigh the likely consequences of their actions (information processing theory). In discussing feelings, children learn that those who are excluded from groups feel hurt and angry. The teacher encourages the class to build an inclusive group, leads role-playing on how to invite others to join in play, and rewards inclusive behavior. Role-playing with immediate feedback is aimed at providing children with a repertoire of nonviolent scripts while teaching them that reliance on coercive behavior leads to rejection by others. Children who are included are more likely to develop friendships and less likely to become bullies. The repeated rehearsal of new scripts and the rewards of improved relationships reinforced by repetition in stories, films, and posters are predicted to help children adopt
prosocial habits of mind that will be stable and will transfer to other circumstances. These skills form the core of Second Step, the most commonly used program in British Columbia elementary schools (Hamilton, et al., n.d.). This program, developed by Seattle's non-profit Committee for Children, provides training for teachers and administrators, kits of audio-visual materials, and ready-to-use lessons based on large black and white photographs with questions on the back. The Vancouver Public School Board has developed an additional module called In Step, for training parents in the same skills their children are learning through Second Step.

A recent, carefully designed and controlled study (Grossman et al., 1996) of Second Step, used three parent and teacher behavior report scales to measure behavioral change (the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist and Teacher Report Form, the School Social Behavior Scale, and the Parent-Child Rating Scale). In addition, a random sub-sample of 588 students were observed by blinded, trained personnel in the classroom, playground, and cafeteria to detect changes in aggressive and prosocial behaviors. Data were collected before the intervention, and at two-week and six-month intervals after the completion of the program. Although the change scores on parent or teacher ratings were not significant, an overall decrease in physical aggression and increase in neutral/prosocial behavior were recorded by the observers, with persistent effects six months later. The authors conclude that Second Step appears to lead to a moderate decrease in physically aggressive behavior and increase in neutral and prosocial behavior in school. The study did not compare the number of referrals to the office, or recorded incidents of aggression or violence in the classes before and after the intervention. Such indicators would measure the effect of Second Step on more serious infractions of school rules.
Teaching techniques in violence prevention programs are interactive and experiential. Teachers model the strategies and use storytelling, small group discussion, role play, simulation games, and rehearsal of new "scripts" to engage children with observed and direct experiences. Other means of teaching empathy include the use of photographs that show children in conflictual or ambiguous situations. Students are asked what the children in the photo are likely feeling. Trainers emphasize the difference between asking "What would you feel if you were that child?" and "What do you think that child is feeling?" The second form is preferable because it forces the child to consider the other person's perspective, and it avoids the possibility of reinforcing negative responses such as the child answering "I wouldn't care!"

Evaluation of Programs

The question that most concerns educators is "what have we learned from the evaluations of existing violence prevention programs that might inform future efforts?" Unfortunately, empirical evaluations lag far behind program implementation, and most evaluations do not measure behavior of individuals before and after an intervention, in comparison with a control group. Rather, they measure changes in attitudes, generally in the form of self-reports, without validation by official records of behavior, such as suspensions, arrests, or charges laid. Often the evaluation measures only those details required by a funding agency, such as the number of contacts made with youth, rather than the effects of the program. Some evaluations define success simply as program completion. The frequent lack of a control group is a serious deficiency because without comparison with control
subjects, changes in behavior resulting from the intervention cannot easily be distinguished from those resulting from maturation or external factors. A further complication is that programs often initiate multiple components simultaneously with the result that the influence of a single component is not measured. In the future, the multifaceted programs may best be compared by meta-analyses to determine which components are most effective. Unfortunately, most school boards do not have sufficient funds for carefully controlled studies that might clearly reveal what works to prevent adolescent violence. Despite these shortcomings of the literature as a whole, some excellent studies have been done and more are underway. Educators can draw several conclusions about what is most effective and what directions show the greatest promise.

The obstacles to effective program design, implementation, and evaluation are daunting. Funding and lack of trained staff capable of carrying out valid evaluations are two obstacles, but the most discouraging is the problem of assuring adequate program implementation. The problems of implementation reported by half the respondents in a recent survey (Wilson-Brewer et al., 1991) were teacher overwork, stress, and burn-out. As well, the resistance of teachers who were told to implement a program they did not support (either because they were not confident in the approach or they resented the added work load) contributed to poor implementation. Lack of uniform program application throughout the educational system was cited by another 25% of respondents in the above mentioned study. Often only a few classrooms within a school implemented the program, frequently without the involvement of community, counseling services, or parents. Half of the respondents cited denial of the existence of a gang problem as the major barrier to making their programs work. Many were concerned about how to
measure the effects of their interventions in age-appropriate ways, and expressed frustration that the *pro forma* reports required by funding agencies did not address the program's impact on children and youth.

A frequent comment by facilitators at conferences I have attended of the National Association of Mediation in Education, is that often one teacher will begin a conflict resolution training program in a classroom and find that without the support of administration and other teachers the training has little effect on the children. Sometimes schools choose to implement one module, usually conflict resolution or peer mediation, but for funding reasons do not train the entire staff, involve parents, or provide for follow-up visits by trainers. According to these facilitators, most of these schools add the other modules later as they realize that each component acts synergistically with the others. They cite lack of support by the principal and senior administration as the most common reason for poor program results.

The school is only one of several institutions and agencies (e.g., family, justice system, government ministries, community organizations) concerned with preventing adolescent violence. Studies show that interventions in high-risk families are consistently the most effective strategies for preventing adolescent violence (Tolan & Guerra, 1994). Three strategies in particular have been found to be effective: training parents in behaviors that decrease coercive relationships, supporting the emotional cohesion and shared beliefs of the family, and helping the family respond to external pressures such as unemployment. These strategies are important to educators because the first two can be incorporated in parenting courses in schools, and the third may be a basis for collaborative action with school counselors and community agencies. The finding that less coercive relationships with youth lead to less violent behavior provides support for proactive non-coercive strategies of
classroom management. School interventions have been evaluated recently by several researchers (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1995; Grossman et al., 1996; Hamilton, et al., n.d.; Tolan & Guerra, 1994; Wilson-Brewer, et al., 1991).

From the surveys of empirical research (Wilson-Brewer, 1991; Tolan & Guerra, 1994) three strategies have been found effective. The first is increasing parental involvement, particularly parental access to teachers, parental support for school activities, and increased opportunities for parents to have a valued role in the school. The second type of successful intervention is improving student motivation to attend and perform in school and engage in prosocial community activities. The third approach is to offer youth in general more opportunities for prosocial involvement in communities.

Critics of school violence prevention programs (Posner, 1994) point out that hundreds of programs have been established in the U.S. without careful empirical research to demonstrate their efficacy. This is more than an academic criticism because in the past programs that appeared to be theoretically well grounded were found to be counterproductive with delinquents (Tolan & Guerra, 1994). For example, the program, Guided Group Interactions, which aimed at replacing the antisocial activities of delinquent youth with prosocial activities, sometimes had the opposite effect, presumably because it provided more time for the delinquent youth to be together.

Program Components

The modular components I discuss below are communication and empathy skills, anger management, conflict resolution, peer mediation,
bullyproofing, bias reduction, parenting education, media literacy education, outdoor education, cultural pride, peace studies, and school atmosphere. Then I describe sample programs that incorporate some of these modules, followed by other major programs that take a different approach such as emphasizing violence as a public health issue, or building on stress reduction techniques, Hirschi's (1969) social control theory or Glasser's (1990) concept of quality schools.

Programs are assessed in terms of their likely effect in either increasing sensation or providing a source of meaning such as (from Chapter 2): 1. engagement in a work, a creative endeavor or a movement; 2. service or altruism; 3. relationships; 4. rootedness or a sense of belonging to a group; 5. personal stance toward suffering; 6. spirituality; and 7. responsiveness to beauty in art or nature. The first five program components, communication and empathy skills, anger management, conflict resolution, bullyproofing, and bias reduction should significantly improve relationships -- one of the most important sources of meaning. They may also have subtle effects of increasing a sense of belonging to a group because a school implementing these programs establishes a culture of respect and inclusiveness of all students. Some students may also feel a commitment to a movement toward a non-violent society as a result of these interventions.

Communication and Empathy Skills

Communication and empathy are two components that are often infused into elementary school curricula. Communication skills involve learning to listen carefully, reflect back what the other person has said, ask questions for clarification, and add personal comments in the form
of "I" statements that present feelings, while avoiding condemning the other. For example, "When you shout at me, I feel scared and I don't want to play," instead of "Don't yell at me, you creep." The theory behind this approach is that children do not always realize how their behavior affects others, but when they hear explicit, respectful explanations of how others are reacting to their words and actions, they often decide to change. Communication skills not only increase sensitivity to how others feel, they form a necessary foundation for learning conflict resolution.

Empathy is taught through the use of stories, pictures, and role plays that help children understand what others are feeling by attending to their facial expressions and words. Taking the role of another person in a mini-drama can be a powerful revelation of a different perspective.

**Anger Management**

Anger management training is introduced after communication and empathy skills, and is emphasized in the higher grades. It begins by teaching children and youth to become aware of physiological changes such as rapid heart rate, breath holding, dry mouth, and muscle tension that signal the "anger mountain". Children learn to stop when they feel those changes, take several deep breaths, and repeat "self-talk" to help them calm themselves: "Slow down, I can handle this. Take a breath. Ask for more information." They learn to take time out and to re-evaluate their attributions of hostility to the other person and to conceptualize the situation differently. In class they brainstorm ideas of non-coercive strategies to resolve problems and ways to extricate themselves if a problem cannot be solved at the time. Once again, the teaching techniques rely heavily on role-
playing, discussion, and modeling. With performance feedback and coaching, teachers help students rehearse new scripts, plan alternative responses, and weigh the consequences before they choose a response. Some anger management programs stress the importance of bystanders' intervening to defuse a situation rather than encouraging the escalation of conflicts (Protherow-Stith & Weissman, 1991). Bystanders often contribute to a fight by shouting insults and by enclosing combatants so that they cannot escape from each other (Artz, 1995). The Boston Violence Prevention Program slogan "Friends for life don't let friends fight" encourages young people to think of the consequences of pushing a friend into a fight that may end in death (Protherow-Stith & Weissman, 1991).

Conflict Resolution

Another violence prevention component, conflict resolution training, draws heavily on a model by Fisher and Ury (Fisher & Ury, 1983) of the Harvard Negotiation Project. In this model, conflict is not regarded as an evil, but as an inevitable human condition that can be a useful stimulus to creative thinking. This conceptualization is consistent with the view that the response to conflict is learned. People often have a habitual approach to dealing with conflict, perhaps by dominating the other, smoothing over the situation, compromising, or denying the problem. Compromise may be a successful technique in some situations, but often leaves both parties dissatisfied with the solution. Collaborative conflict resolution requires active, respectful listening, and a commitment to a "win-win" solution rather than the "win-lose" or "lose-lose" patterns. When people learn to set aside their positions on a disagreement (e.g., "the property line cannot be moved")
and present their interests instead (e.g., "I need road access"), there is room for movement from rigid demands, with greater possibility of a solution that is acceptable to both parties. Simplified techniques of conflict resolution can be taught to primary students; older students use similar techniques to resolve progressively more complex and difficult conflicts.

Peer Mediation

Peer mediation programs apply the same principles as conflict resolution, but use student mediators to help disputants arrive at a mutually acceptable solution. To initiate a program, students are usually asked to nominate peers they would trust to help them in a conflict and, from the list of nominees, teachers select a group of trainees who seem to be leaders, whether or not they are conformists or academically successful students. Once trained, student mediators are assigned duties in rotation so that there are always a specified number on the playground at recess and lunch time. Usually mediators wear identifying T-shirts or beanies, and work in pairs in different quadrants of the playground. When conflict arises, a mediator offers to help the students resolve the problem. The disputants almost always agree, but if they refuse help, the mediators turn the problem over to the teacher-supervisor on the playground, who then follows the usual school disciplinary procedures for dealing with such problems. Mediators are taught not to intervene when a fight has already broken out, and to notify the supervisor about serious conflicts, particularly if weapons are involved. If the disputants accept mediation, they are reminded of the simple ground rules for the process, and go with the mediators to a quiet place. Typical rules state that disputants will listen to each other without interrupting, will not
hit each other, and will try come up with a solution themselves. When they have a solution, the mediator writes it down, the parties sign it, and shake hands. Mediators meet weekly with trainers to review solutions reached that week so that they can improve their skills in achieving meaningful solutions. Peer mediation programs have shown remarkable effectiveness in reducing playground violence.

In Canada, a peer mediation program implemented in three elementary schools was evaluated in a well designed program, using a multiple baseline approach (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1995). The results show an average of 50% fewer incidents of playground physical aggression reported by trained observers following the implementation of the program. In a change not planned by the researchers, one school decided unilaterally to decrease the number of mediators on the playground from eight to two at any one time. The number of violent incidents climbed to its pre-intervention level and dropped again two weeks later when the number of mediators was again raised to eight.

**Bullyproofing**

The Norwegian government launched a nationwide campaign to reduce bullying after three young adolescents committed suicide because of severe bullying by peers (Cleweus, cited in APA). The Norwegian programs emphasize improved supervision of students at recess; the development of class rules for behavior; consistent, firm, and non-corporal sanctions against bullying; and staff training to deal with student conflict. Implementation resulted in greater than a 50% decrease in violence on the playgrounds. Other programs follow similar patterns, often adding class discussions about
how students feel toward bullies, and rehearsal of scripts for dealing with victimization. Because the class discussions are not personalized, bullies and victims can listen without being defensive, but the message is clear that students intensely dislike bullies. The discussions also help victims recognize that others have suffered the humiliation of bullying. To reinforce the unacceptability of coercive behavior, teachers may ask students to devise a project to teach other students about how to respond to bullies, (e.g., writing an "Ann Landers" column to answer questions about dealing with bullies). Bullyproofing requires a clear no-bullying school policy accompanied by lessons on how to make friends and improve relationships with others, and how to be assertive under stress (scripts and learned responses). One of the obstacles to dealing with bullies is the collusion of the victims in not telling on the bully. Programs try to change this group norm so that bullies cannot rely on the silent submission of their victims.

It is important to note that the Norwegian programs were implemented because of the suicides of young victims of bullies, and thus had the support of national outrage at bullying behavior. Press coverage and nation-wide implementation presumably contributed to the effectiveness of the programs. In North America, bullyproofing is usually implemented as one component of a violence prevention program.

The programs described thus far comprise the commonly used components of violence prevention programs in schools, but they do not exhaust the range of programs that have been developed. Other important approaches that have not been widely implemented are described next.
Bias Reduction

Reducing the stresses that may lead to violence is an important strategy in multi-cultural societies such as ours. One approach to reducing discrimination against minorities is through revising texts and curricula that provide a predominantly European male viewpoint, to make them inclusive of the contributions of Native Indians, women, and minorities. Teachers are helped to recognize their own biases, revise their teaching to make it more inclusive, and teach critical thinking that encourages students to consider different points of view. Experiential programs are less common than other strategies to reduce racism and bias, possibly because the experiences are perceived as risky and difficult to implement. Concerns about parental support for a program, or that it may backfire and cause worse problems, may make teachers reluctant to deal directly with classroom bias. One approach that seems to be less problematic is teaching empathy skills, then discussing how a child who suffers discrimination might feel, and concluding by assigning projects in which students teach others about the importance of decreasing discrimination against minorities. Some programs aim at building community among diverse students by using a problem that must be solved by collaboration across ethnic lines as a tool to integrate students.

Parenting Education

Some schools have introduced parenting programs as a strategy to break the cycle of family violence. The courses may be provided for all students or may target boys specifically, for example, by offering a six-week
Home Economics option for grade six boys. Teaching parenting to boys is thought to be valuable because a nurturing father has been found to be particularly powerful in raising prosocial boys (Miedzian, 1991). In Toronto, a program called *Boys for Babies* teaches child growth and development by regularly bringing mothers and babies into the classroom where three or four boys are assigned to each baby. There is usually a waiting list for this program as there are more students wanting to enroll than mothers and babies available. Parenting courses usually begin by teaching prenatal nutrition and the importance of avoiding drugs, tobacco, and alcohol during pregnancy. Students may learn about fetal and infant growth and development, and the needs of infants of various ages, particularly the importance of affection, cuddling, play, and limit setting. They learn ways to manage the infant or child without using violence, while providing safe and consistent surroundings. This program has considerable potential to reduce violence because it teaches students how to deal with younger siblings, it models good relationships for children who have not experienced warm, consistent nurturing in their homes, it demonstrates how infants can be stimulated cognitively so that they develop well, and it shows the kinds of responsibilities one takes on with parenthood.

The importance of children having serious responsibility for the care of others is emphasized in the case histories of resilient adults (Higgins, 1994). If young people are helped to understand healthy family relationships, they may be able, when they establish their own families, to avoid dysfunctional patterns they learned in childhood. Not only do parenting programs show promise in improving relationships, but they may also reduce some risk factors that contribute to boredom and violence (described in Chapter Four), such as prenatal exposure to toxins and injuries, poor
parent-infant bonding, cognitive deprivation of early childhood, poor supervision of the child, lack of warmth and caring, harsh and erratic discipline, and coercive interactions.

An outstanding example of comprehensive parenting education is described by Miedzian (1991). The Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia has been providing parenting education to children from kindergarten to grade eight for nearly twenty years. Mothers and babies come into the classroom for a half hour weekly in the lower grades, and monthly as the students get older. The program has been very popular and has expanded to nine minority schools in the district. Informal reports suggest that teenaged pregnancies have decreased over the years of implementation of the parenting training because the students appreciate the commitment needed to raise a child and they recognize they are not ready to take on such an onerous responsibility.

In another popular program aimed at reducing teenage pregnancies, pairs of students are assigned the task of caring for an egg for a week. They must protect the egg from being broken, never leave the egg alone, and set an alarm to wake them every four hours in the night to simulate feeding time. Although this simulation provides a realistic experience of the serious responsibilities associated with parenting, I feel it is poor strategy to teach teenagers that the reason to avoid pregnancy is that babies are a terrible nuisance. It seems preferable to teach that parenting is a wondrous and satisfying experience that makes people willing to accept hardships for the sake of an infant they love. Teaching the joys and challenges of parenting by having actual babies in the classroom provides similar exposure to the amount of work and commitment needed to be a
good parent, but this lesson is combined with discovering the obvious delight babies bring, even to strangers.

Media Literacy

As mentioned earlier, many researchers are concerned about the adverse effects of media violence on the behavior of children. One strategy to reduce this negative impact is to teach children how television manipulates the "truth" so that a certain viewpoint is favored. Children may study advertising, documentaries, or news reports in order to expose bias and techniques that manipulate a viewer's impressions of a situation. Children in grade one may focus on violence in cartoons and on advertising aimed at children; older students may study the plots of their favorite shows to find the hidden messages that endorse violence, racism, or sexism.

If media literacy programs are to affect boredom, there are several issues that must be addressed. For sensation-seekers, television programs offer rapid sequences of light and sound, with images of sex and violence designed to be exciting and hold attention. The passivity of the viewer limits the genuine experience of heightened sensation, however. A course on media literacy must lead students to question spectatorship instead of engagement in activity. For meaning-seekers, media literacy education should expose ways in which various media promote disconnectedness from enduring sources of meaning. For example, advertising promotes the association of consumer goods with being desirable and lovable, although authentic sources of meaning in relationships do not depend on one's hair gel or perfume. As mentioned earlier, both programs and advertisements link happiness with high levels of excitement (e.g., rock concerts, drinking, surf-
boarding, driving fast cars) rather than with meaning found in committed relationships, service to others, overcoming hardship, spirituality, or responding to nature. Media education has a potentially powerful effect on helping children discriminate real from illusory sources of meaning, particularly if the result of the education is to reduce watching television and increase personal engagement with others.

Outdoor Education

Occasional schools provide outdoor experiential education programs (as physical and environmental education options) that offer opportunities for prosocial risk-taking, such as rope courses, rock climbing, mountaineering, or wilderness survival. The assumption is that instead of trying to discourage sensation-seeking, which is a known risk factor for delinquency, a more effective response to the need for thrills and excitement is to present young people with prosocial risk-taking where success contributes to a sense of self-efficacy. An important aspect of self-efficacy is that it counteracts helplessness and the sense that one's life is controlled by external forces. Outdoor education programs also provide opportunities for young people to respond to the beauty of wilderness, to experience a place that may take on personal significance, to struggle cooperatively with others in dangerous circumstances, perhaps to have to trust another person in order to survive. All of these components have the potential of building meaning and connectedness for the participants. A comprehensive program using this strategy, Youth at Risk (Wilson-Brewer, et al., 1991), is described later.
Cultural Pride

In Canada, Native communities are addressing the problems of violence, child abuse, and alcoholism by programs that build on cultural and spiritual traditions. Examples of these approaches include spiritual healing circles, spirit camps, and coming of age ceremonies such as vision quests.

These highly stimulating and challenging activities build on many sources of meaning -- belonging, rootedness, spirituality, relationships, commitment to a movement of cultural identity, personal stance to hardships, and response to beauty in nature. In bringing together these powerful sources of connectedness, Native healing programs show great promise for reducing boredom and violence and building strong communities.

Peace Studies

History, Social Studies, and English teachers often integrate peace-related themes to help students think critically about the roots of war and the glorification of violence. Some teach the history of peacemakers, and the role of courageous individuals who have resisted oppression and injustice. An example is a year long high school course, Facing History and Ourselves, (Miedzian, 1991) which teaches about the Holocaust and the massacre of Armenians by the Turks. A comprehensive series of films and texts help students understand the progressive changes in thinking that allow people to become desensitized to the pain of others, and able to perpetrate horrendous acts. The goal is to sensitize students so that they will be resistant
to the pull of neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Clan, or other similar groups, and be aware of the responsibility of bystanders to react against injustice.

The peace studies approach offers role models in literature and film to counteract pervasive models of superheroes who rely on force and violence to achieve their goals. An effect of such courses may be to enhance the students' ability to face hardship with integrity and courage, and perhaps to become committed to movements for peace or human rights.

School Atmosphere

Trying to change the entire atmosphere of the school in order to promote academic excellence, citizenship, or cooperation has been a focus of educational reform for decades. In the case of violence prevention, the desired change is toward all teaching and nonteaching staff modeling nonviolent communication and problem solving. The goal is to consistently demonstrate that coercion is not necessary and that each student is a valued member of a community. Glasser (1990) blames coercion for the boredom of students who hate school, and recommends "school within a school" programs that permit students to progress through material at different rates. He suggests noncoercive techniques to encourage quality work that is meaningful to students. Glasser contends that discipline problems are minimized when students are given the responsibility for choosing how to learn a subject, time to understand it fully, and have available individual tutoring when needed. Cooperative learning groups, decreased competition, "study buddies", and peer tutoring of younger students are some of the common components of this strategy. Changing the school culture is difficult because it requires teachers to give up some of their control, and to trust that
proactive classroom management is workable. Proactive management includes collaborating with students at the beginning of the year to set acceptable guidelines for behavior and consequences for breaches of good conduct. Teachers who have used a coercive style of discipline for years may not be receptive to a different strategy.

Often the changes that sweep an entire school are catalyzed by a passionately committed principal whose determination inspires teachers and parents to initiate changes that increase parent involvement and support from the community, and improve student bonding to the school. The fundamental principles that underlie these changes are respect for the students as individuals, belief in the ability of children to rise above their circumstances, commitment to values of justice, caring, compassion, and service, and a willingness to abandon cynicism in order to try new approaches.

Major Programs

Thus far in this chapter I have discussed modules that are commonly used in violence prevention programs in Canada and the U.S. Let me now describe a few specific programs to show how school districts build integrated curricula emphasizing different components. I described the Second Step program earlier, and now turn to two large U.S. programs, the New York Public Schools' Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (DeJong, 1994), and the Violence Prevention Project for Urban Youth (VPP) of the Boston Department of Health and Hospitals (Protherow-Stith & Weissman, 1991), both of which have been widely copied. I then describe two less common approaches, stress reduction and outdoor education (Wilson-Brewer, 1991).
have chosen these four examples to illustrate the comprehensive nature of violence prevention curricula, the perspectives of education and public health, and varying central themes such as conflict resolution, changing norms in an inner city, outdoor education, or stress reduction. All four examples include many components based on social cognitive learning theory, and additional strategies of parental involvement and collaboration with community agencies.

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), summarized in DeJong's (1994) detailed review, is sponsored jointly by the New York City Public Schools and a nonprofit organization, Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Its cosponsorship has proven advantageous because a large portion of its funding is raised from foundations by ESR. Because this money must be used as specified in the grants, school boards are prevented from sidetracking staff into other projects or trying to expand the program beyond staff capabilities. This financial stability has been very important to the development of the program. The kindergarten to grade 12 program (with a new module for special needs students) includes a 20-hour after-school training program for teachers, and a 51-lesson curriculum for classroom instruction in creative conflict resolution and cultural understanding. A module on peer mediation may be introduced after a school has one year's experience with the conflict resolution work. To fulfill RCCP's goal of comprehensive school change, the program requires the support of the highest administrative levels. In training workshops, teachers learn the skills of facilitation, leading cooperative groups, role-playing, group
dialogue, proactive classroom management, shared decision-making, team-
building, and conflict resolution. An important feature of RCCP is that expert
consultants visit each teacher 10 to 12 times in the first year, and two or three
times in the second year, and provide monthly follow-up sessions in
individual schools. The elementary curriculum includes lessons on effective
communication, conflict resolution, assertiveness, cooperative learning,
affirmations, appreciating diversity, recognizing and countering bias, a study
of peacemakers, and visioning the future. The secondary curriculum focuses
on norms of classroom conduct, conflict resolution, negotiations, intergroup
relations, and bias. Parents are taught communications and conflict
resolution, and they, in turn, teach other parents. In 1995, more than 3000
teachers and administrators and 70,000 students participated (DeJong, 1994).

Evaluations of this program, based mainly on surveys of teachers' and
students' and tests of students' recall of the techniques of conflict resolution,
showed that administrators were positive about the program, and that more
than three quarters of the teachers rated the training as very good or excellent.
Most (67%) reported that implementation of the program was good. Between
66 and 78% of teachers felt the program had a positive impact on student
behaviors. Students were able to define terms such as conflict, active
listening, and mediator. Despite the limitations of the evaluations, Wilson-
Brewer et al. (1991) find the consistently high ratings from participants to be
convincing evidence that the program is beneficial. The authors report
anecdotal evidence collected from children and adults that gives a dramatic
indication of the difference the program makes. For example, one student
commented,

I learned in the Program that when you're angry at someone, say
things like 'I feel' instead of 'you are.' So I called (my friend)
and told him I was upset. He understood and we made up. The program stopped the fight from going on. (p. 39)

From the perspective of reducing boredom, RCCP has the potential to improve relationships, increase belonging to the school, and perhaps help students develop a desire to engage in a work or service to others.

**Boston Violence Prevention Program**

A Boston public health physician began violence prevention training for adolescents as a result of her experiences dealing with victims of violence brought into the Emergency Department (Protherow-Stith & Weissman, 1991). Protherow-Stith approaches violence as a public health problem which is preventable. The ten lesson program she developed begins with four information lessons on the risks of death and injury faced by inner-city males as a result of violence. The remaining six lessons use role-plays, brainstorming, and discussion to learn anger management, conflict resolution, alternative responses to aggressive provocation, and bystander responsibilities to defuse fights. As a public health strategy, the program includes training for health professionals in the hospitals to engage and counsel adolescents admitted with traumatic injuries. A major effort to mobilize media support resulted in billboards, print media, television, and radio coverage of the slogan, "Friends for life don't let friends fight".

An evaluation of the Boston Violence Prevention Program's impact on high school students' knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behavior shows that this curriculum has a positive impact on many students.
1994), but the survey measures primarily how well the students understand the strategies, not how much their behavior has changed. One valuable component of evaluation that was intended to compare numbers of violence-related injuries sustained by adolescents who appeared for emergency hospital treatment proved to be too expensive, and was discontinued. Further evaluations of the VPP are in progress.

This program may improve relationships in similar ways to other programs described, but its emphasis on education about the risks of violence raises the question of how best to change attitudes toward dangerous activities. Many people seem not to be motivated to change their behavior because of fear of illness; anti-smoking programs have shifted their emphasis away from the risk of cancer to a positive "break free" message because of this insight. My conclusions thus far in this thesis suggest that the risk-education component of the VPP offers little in terms of increasing sensation or meaning in life, with the exception of the message about responsibility in relationships, "friends for life don't let friends fight". A multivariate analysis of the program components would be very useful in weighing the relative contributions of risk-education and relationship-building to the success of this program.

Stress Reduction

Two programs that teach stress reduction as a violence prevention strategy are Project Stress Control, in Atlanta, Georgia, and a Canadian program, Société Internationale du Programme de Diminution des Tensions (SIPDT). The Canadian program has been implemented in 6400 classes of 600 schools mostly in Ontario and Quebec. The objectives include
learning tools to manage and cope with tension and stress, reducing psychosomatic disorders stemming from a build up of tensions in the body, reducing interpersonal conflicts and violent behavior, and increasing the attention span of students. The SIPDT program was evaluated in 1986-87, with very positive results reported (Hamilton, et al., n.d.), although the methodology is not described. Participants (teachers, parents, and students) noted a 54% decrease in violence at school, accompanied by a positive change in students’ attitudes shown by improved attention span in class (78%) and interpersonal relationships (68%). An improvement in students’ self-discipline was noted by 80% of the teachers. About 70% of teachers reported feeling less tired at the end of the day. Teachers (85%) also said the program helped them recapture students’ attention while reducing classroom disciplinary problems (Hamilton et al., n.d.).

The Atlanta program reached 30,000 elementary students and 1500 teachers from 1984-87, and has continued to expand to the present. The multiphasic program includes stress reduction training, progressive relaxation, biofeedback, deep breathing exercises, centering/meditation, stress-free learning, positive thinking, yoga and imagery/visualization skills. In addition there are cultural field trips, nutritional education, student rap groups, an overnight camping trip, communication and problem solving skills training, more frequent parent contacts, greater parental involvement, a community advisory committee, and an eight-week instructional after-school program aimed at increasing learning and improving study skills. The intervention, although described as stress reduction, might better be described as a determined effort to increase attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief as Hirschi (1969) recommended in his social control theory.
The Atlanta program was evaluated in 1984-85 after it had been in use for one year with fourth and fifth grade classes. The results in one school (four classes) showed a 50% decrease in office referrals (150 to 75) and a 40% decrease in suspensions (19 to 11) over the one year period. A second school using the same program showed a 47% decrease in referrals for those classes that participated in the program (130 to 69). These programs involved multilevel interventions that were not linked directly to outcome measures, making it difficult to identify the components that were most effective. A further problem with the evaluations was that control groups were used only sporadically, and mostly for attitudinal rather than behavioral change. This approach seems to merit further study using controls and staged introduction of each intervention.

Because this program included a number of components that could be considered religious practices (i.e., meditation, yoga exercises, breathing practices), I was curious to know if any parents objected to the program on religious grounds. The Director, Jennie C. Trotter, told me (June 12, 1996, personal communication) that there had been a challenge early in the program's history, from parents who believe that closing the eyes in meditation invites in the devil. The project directors argued that the program uses relaxation methods, not religious practices, and that the practices have been reported by Benson (1975) in his book, *The Relaxation Response*, in the context of health research. Parents made strong representation to the City Council in support of the program, and the Council voted to continue it, with provision for students to be excused from the relaxation component.

I also inquired whether the project had a measurable effect on children with ADHD. Ms. Trotter commented that although ADHD children
had not been identified and studied, the teachers had noted that kindergarten children who habitually rocked themselves stopped this behavior after learning stress reduction skills.

The Atlanta program combines components that address sensation-seeking and all but one (service to others) of the common sources of meaning and thus, from the perspective of this thesis, would be expected to be the most effective of the violence prevention programs evaluated here.

**Youth at Risk**

One example of a program based on outdoor education supplemented with a number of other components, is the *Youth at Risk* program of the Breakthrough Foundation in San Francisco. The program begins with a four- to seven-day outdoor education camp staffed by local volunteers and a team from the Breakthrough Foundation (DeJong, 1994). The camp is an intensive experience with course instruction, guided group discussions, and rigorous physical activities, including a one-day "ropes course". In interactional groups, young people talk about self-defeating conclusions they may have formed about themselves; staff encourage them to find a "breakthrough" to a different view of their potential. The program emphasizes setting goals and improving relationships. After returning home, participants are involved in follow-up with parents and local volunteers in service projects such as cleaning up graffiti or teaching leadership to younger children. Local mentors commit to being in contact with their assigned participants at least three times per week.

According to DeJong (1994), the *Youth at Risk* program has had several positive evaluations of its original ten-day program, but the author does not
provide details. The program has recently been shortened to a week or less in order to reduce costs, and the shorter programs have not yet been evaluated.

This program offers the high stimulation of dangerous activities combined with many sources of meaning such as relationships, stance toward hardships, response to beauty in nature, belonging to a group and a place, and service to others. The program does not address spirituality, but otherwise provides opportunities I would predict to be very effective in preventing both boredom and violence.

The Security Approach

For completeness, I will describe the security approach to violence prevention because it impacts on the atmosphere of the school. Increasing security in schools by the surveillance method includes using metal detectors, security patrols, police presence in the schools, and setting policies of "zero tolerance" for violence or possession of weapons on school property. Zero tolerance means that instead of treating these offenses as internal disciplinary matters dealt with by expulsion, administrators call the police and lay charges. Developing proactive school policies to deal with violent offenses is an important responsibility of school administrators whether or not they take the surveillance route; many Canadian schools involve students in developing a student code of conduct in addition to the administrative guidelines. Canadian schools have tried to minimize the intrusion of security systems and instead emphasize positive strategies to change students' attitudes toward violence. Many schools have a police liaison officer in the building, but the officer is often in civilian dress and engaged in preventive strategies as much as enforcement.
I have been unable to find empirical studies that show that adding metal detectors and security guards to increase safety in schools has resulted in a significant decrease in violent offenses. Whether or not the technical surveillance approach used in many U.S. schools results in significant decreases in violence, however, it is likely to continue to be used to show that the school is taking every possible step to prevent violence. The atmosphere created by such intrusive measures seems antithetical to a noncoercive approach. By providing a prison-like feeling, the approach is likely to undermine efforts to improve student bonding in the school.

The security approach does not increase sensation or meaning, and would not be predicted to be effective in reducing violence through the mechanism of reducing boredom, whether or not it is successful in making weapons less available in schools.

Programs using Social Control Theory

Interventions based on a combination of principles of social learning theory and social control theory have been attempted in school programs to reduce delinquency (Hawkins, Douek, & Lishner, 1988; Hawkins & Lam, 1987; Hawkins, Von Cleave, & Catalano, 1991). These interventions are part of ongoing longitudinal studies involving both primary and middle school classes. The researchers seek to increase the four elements of social control -- attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in the moral validity of social rules -- using teacher modeling of positive reinforcement, cooperative group learning, proactive classroom management, parent involvement, reduced competition, opportunities for involvement in conventional activities, skills for involvement, and rewards for conventional behavior.
Particular emphasis is placed on improving bonding with the school, with individual teachers, and with peers.

Programs based on social control theory aim at improving students' bonding to the school, teachers, and peers. Evaluations of these programs in primary grades show mixed results (Hawkins, et al., 1991), with positive effects on improved school attendance, children reporting a wider circle of friends, and significant reductions in numbers of children referred for disciplinary actions, suspended, or expelled from school. However, the authors did not conclude that bonding to schools was improved after a year of intervention. In the same study, reductions in aggressive behavior were found for white, but not for black boys, and self-destructive behavior was reduced for white, but not for black girls. Because 31 of the 37 teachers were white, the authors suggest that teacher reporting of behavior was likely biased in favor of white children, but they do not comment on the difficulties of attempting to improve bonding of black children in a predominantly white school, using white teachers as the change agents. In each of the studies, the degree to which teachers implemented the experimental strategies and their success in using them varied significantly. Teachers in the experimental groups were chosen neither for their enthusiasm for the experimental programs nor for their history of being innovators, but were assigned randomly on the grounds that programs must be designed for implementation by all teachers. The studies offer some promising directions, but conclusions about the efficacy of the interventions must be tempered by the problems of degree of actual implementation, the varying skills of the teachers, the relatively short duration of the implementation and follow-up, and the confounding factors of ethnicity of teachers and students. In contrast to the evaluations of these limited programs to increase attachment,
commitment, involvement, and belief, there are the more dramatic results of the "stress reduction" program in Atlanta, Georgia, that involved changes in the whole school. The Atlanta program seems a better example of the implementation of social control theory than the programs of Hawkins and his associates. Research distinguishing the effects of the stress reduction components from the social control components of the Atlanta program would be very helpful.

In summary, although empirical evaluations of programs are flawed and spotty, the available information indicates two programs that seem to stand out in the magnitude of their impact: stress reduction training, (particularly in association with other interventions that increase attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in moral rules) and peer mediation (implemented after conflict resolution training has been completed for the entire school). Other positive strategies based on social cognitive learning theory and social control theory such as Second Step, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, and the Boston Violence Prevention Program, show promise in the initial evaluations, and require further study. Pro-social risk-taking in the context of a comprehensive outdoor education program (Youth at Risk), seems to be helpful when it is followed by active mentorships and community service components. Anecdotal evidence of whole school change supports the notion that positive change is more likely in a setting that reinforces prosocial behavior with models, direct experience, and rewards for desired behavior. It also seems clear that the earlier interventions are introduced, the more consistently they are implemented throughout a school, and the more they involve the parents and the community, the more likely they are to have long-term effects. Interventions
beginning in high school seem to have the least impact in changing behavior, but this conclusion must be tempered by the fact that programs that have been studied have usually been of short duration and often only partially implemented in large schools. The enormous challenges of procuring and sustaining funds for violence prevention programs underscore the need to focus on interventions that have demonstrated efficacy.

Limitations of School Violence Prevention Programs

A troubling question remains after this review of school violence prevention programs: How do programs based on social cognitive learning theories help reduce the kind of violence portrayed in alternative music such as this song by The Offspring?

BAD HABIT

When I go driving I stay in my lane
But getting cut off makes me insane . . .
I open the glove box
Reach inside
I'm gonna wreck this fucker's ride
(Offspring, 1994)

The underlying rage and profound disconnectedness from other people expressed in this song seem to be orders of magnitude different from the role plays studied in conflict resolution and anger management classes where issues are somewhat mundane --curfews, allowances, responsibilities in the home, and so on. If violence by the young man in the song above is to be prevented, reestablishing human connectedness with him seems essential; it is also key to helping him find meaning in life. How connectedness might be addressed by the schools is the question I discuss in the next chapter.
Educators attempting to bring about long-term behavioral change often choose to target either overt behavior or underlying belief systems (Schwartz, 1994). Many school violence prevention programs take the position that children and youth must learn how to live with one another non-violently. They emphasize training students in new behavior, assuming that once the children become accustomed to these patterns and scripts, their attitudes will soften. Some researchers (Guerra & Slaby, 1990) try to bring about change in a set of cognitive beliefs about violence (including beliefs that aggression is a legitimate response that increases self-esteem, helps avoid a negative image, and does not lead to suffering by the victim); but the researchers are not trying to change the underlying world view of the subject (although the change in narrow beliefs may be the starting point of a more fundamental change in world view). Projects with the reverse perspective -- that changes in behavior commonly follow changes in belief system -- may be based on various philosophies: secular morality, religion, or political ideology. This second approach has the potential of engendering fundamental reforms in youths' world view, but their appeal can be limited, because the young people must first accept the validity of the underlying philosophy. For example, in order for programs based on Biblical teachings to be effective, students must first accept religious moral authority.

Programs to affect boredom using the first approach (beginning with behavior change) may be effective with some young people, but meaninglessness and profound disconnectedness seem to be issues of world view or belief system, and may, therefore, respond better to the second approach. The programs I have described thus far are based on secular morality and avoid introducing political or religious ideology as a justification for moral behavior, (although one might argue that citizenship
education assumes the desirability of capitalism and democracy). In the
countries of the former Soviet Union, where moral behavior was justified by
Marxist ideology, the collapse of communism has removed a significant base
of stability behind obedience to the law and cooperation with others.
Appealing to principles of democracy and justice to help change attitudes of
the alienated young people portrayed in the music I have quoted seems
unlikely to succeed in North America. Approaching behavioral change from
the direction of a belief system based on religion or spirituality is usually
avoided in public schools for ethical reasons I discuss in the next chapter.
Because such an approach offers some students a possible source of meaning
and a justification for moral behavior, it is worthy of consideration provided
that the ethical concerns can be resolved satisfactorily.

From the evidence I have presented in this study, I conclude that to
respond to the alienation associated with the corrosive dysphoria of chronic
boredom, it is necessary to focus on increasing the sources of meaning in the
lives of disconnected young people; increasing levels of stimulation may be
important for some young people, but activities that increase meaning at the
same time are more likely to sustain youth involvement. Initiatives
designed to increase sources of meaning should, above all, increase
connectedness.

In the final chapter I recommend strategies for public schools to reduce
boredom and violence by building connectedness through the sources of
meaning described throughout this thesis. I recommend interventions in
five major areas: modeling, the role of the spiritual, changing school
atmosphere, increasing protective factors, and addressing learned behavior.
CHAPTER SEVEN

A ROLE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ideally, a full program to prevent adolescent boredom and violence would begin in early childhood, involve parents, communities, and schools, and address both sensation-seeking and meaning-seeking. Such a program would concern itself with reducing risk factors that predispose to boredom, and would intervene with children and youth as they begin to experience situations of constraint and low stimulation, before such situations evoke frustration and acting out. Children would be taught to interpret such situations as positive signals of a need to reduce their tension, and to use their skills to increase the meaningfulness of the situation and its interest for them. Preschool enrichment programs would be extended to include very young children at high risk, in order to ensure nurturing and stimulation from infancy (as noted earlier, fantasy play and learning to attend to subtle details of experience are particularly important in preventing a predisposition to boredom). Schools and communities would provide opportunities for children and youth to participate in highly stimulating activities, such as performing arts or exciting sports. Although some of these activities serve mainly to reduce transient boredom, they are likely to interrupt dysfunctional patterns leading to chronic boredom. These activities may also lay the groundwork for a maturing youth to build a meaningful life because they provide opportunities to learn to relate to others, and skills that promote a sense of self efficacy.
Meaning and Connectedness

The sources of meaning described in Chapter Two cluster around personal relationships (love and friendship, sense of belonging, involvement in groups), engagement in the world (work, creativity, commitment to a cause, altruism, response to beauty), personal stance toward suffering, and belief system. Significantly, Green (1985) describes a similar list important in the development of conscience. He writes of the necessity to attend to conscience as craft, as membership, as sacrifice, as memory, and as imagination. These categories closely resemble meaningful work, belonging, service, rootedness, and creativity. The parallels between the development of meaning in life and conscience seem compelling reasons to address these issues on schools. Each source of meaning is important as a response to the disconnectedness and alienation expressed in alternative music. In the following discussion I use the term connectedness to denote the particular quality of these sources of meaning that seems most significant as a response to alienation of youth. For example, commitment to a cause may provide a source of meaning, but without connectedness to people or to nonviolence, it may not reduce alienation. The difference between finding meaning in the relationships in a gang and finding meaning in wider relationships is one of connectedness to a larger community. Engagement is a related term which implies personal agency in finding meaning, but lacks the sense of interdependency that I wish to convey. Connectedness between relationships and work is important to sustaining the meaning of both; connectedness between one's belief system and one's actions is important to behavioral change.
Connectedness is a central concept in many religions, especially those of aboriginal peoples, who often use such a term to describe a notion of harmony of all that has been made by the Creator. The aboriginal notion that problems arise when individuals lose their connectedness is one that I find useful. Native healing circles and evolving practices in Native justice are concerned with re-establishing connectedness of offenders with the community and, through spiritual practices, with re-establishing the offenders' connectedness with their own spirituality and with the rest of creation. If connectedness is restored, it brings a deep respect for others that precludes further offending. Non-Native justice systems may gain valuable insights from these attempts to build justice on principles of community responsibility for determining appropriate punishment and restitution, and later for integrating an offender back into the group. Victim-offender restitution programs take a similar approach to restorative justice.

Connectedness is a concept that is also central to global education, where environment, development, peace, and human rights are explored as interdependent areas of concern that cannot be dealt with in isolation -- there cannot be peace without justice; there cannot be sustainable development without concern for the environment and the rights of women and minorities; there cannot be forests unless alternative sources are found for fuel and building materials. Even the term "environment" is criticized by many people because it represents a disconnection between humans and that which surrounds them. A better term is ecology, which places humans in a web of life where all parts are interdependent.
Building Connectedness

Modeling

Many examples of the importance of modeling the attitudes and behaviors of building a life rich in meaning and resolving conflicts nonviolently have been illustrated in earlier chapters in this thesis -- the case histories of resilient adults, Frankl's experiences in Auschwitz, the research on how children learn empathy, and research in social cognitive learning theories. Mentors are powerful figures in the lives of resilient adults, and important agents in successful violence prevention programs. Let me suggest ways in which mentorships might be enhanced to increase connectedness.

Consider, for example, midnight basketball as an approach taken in community policing to involve youth in a sport that engages them and keeps them out of trouble. This activity increases connectedness between the police and the young people, among the young people, and among the police officers. How might this connectedness be strengthened? Perhaps an all-night cafe owner might model respect and inclusivity by welcoming the group for coffee and donuts at the end of the game, thus validating the growing relationship between youth and police, and connecting that positive experience with another part of the community, a small business. Perhaps the area where the basketball game takes place could be improved by the group cleaning up, repairing, planting, making welcome signs, or other changes to identify the area as one where youth belong. This action may, through service to improve the community, give disconnected young people a sense of place and belonging to a neighborhood. Perhaps the school might
invite the older teenagers to coach younger students in basketball during the school day, thus inviting those at risk to become role models as well. As mutual trust begins to be established between police and young people, individual officers are likely to take on an informal mentorship role with some of the youths. I suggest that training officers to become sensitive, effective mentors might be useful in increasing the likelihood that this relationship would be an important influence on the young people. In this regard, Paulo Freire's (1970/1993) work with the oppressed offers a useful perspective on how best to support the struggles of those who believe themselves to be powerless to change their lives. Freire's analysis of how well-intentioned people may build dependency rather than supporting the wisdom and strength of others to solve their own problems, seems particularly relevant to learning to mentor. Liberation, according to Freire, is neither a gift, nor a self-achievement, but a mutual process (p. 7). The relationship between police officer and youth is more than a offering a hand up, it involves mutual connectedness and growth.

Peer tutoring is an important modeling strategy that may improve both the literacy and numeracy of the younger children, and the self esteem of their older tutors. Bringing in retired people as tutors makes another link with the community. Some American schools have offered adult education in poor neighborhoods by inviting willing adults to join junior and senior high school classes. The mature students receive free upgrading education, and serve as role models for their classmates, often insisting on silence so that they can concentrate. This initiative could be a powerful source of connectedness between generations, particularly between older and younger males. Mature students and parents in the school and on
the playground may become mentors to some of the young people, and may provide relief from the burnout being experienced by overworked teachers.

Storytelling is a powerful way to create connectedness and an excellent approach to learning about personal stance toward hardship and suffering. Recall the resilient adults who describe the impact of literature and role models on their determination to build stable lives. The school might invite guest speakers like Rick Hanson, the Canadian wheelchair athlete, to tell their stories of overcoming great obstacles and disappointment. An important source of inspiring stories can be found within the local community, where people might bring to the classroom their histories of courage and perseverance as immigrants, refugees, veterans of wars, and survivors of injustice or tragedy. The school and community could recognize with annual photographs and awards those people whose courage or service to others made them noteworthy, particularly acknowledging members of minorities who are often not recognized as inspiring role models.

The Role of the Spiritual

Many sources of meaning have been touched briefly in earlier discussions and will be discussed more fully later, but the most problematic for schools is addressing religious or spiritual belief systems as a source of meaning. For many people religion or a sense of something greater than themselves provides the connectedness on which they base everything in their lives. In the following discussion, I use the term religion to indicate specific faith traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Native Spirituality. I use the term spiritual to indicate a broader concept that may include religions, but also represents the orientation not associated with an
institutionalized religion, that is commonly expressed in environmental or peace literature to situate humans in a cosmology. A spiritual orientation usually includes the assumptions that there is a meaning to life, a reason for each of us to be alive at this time, and a direction that humans must take that is harmonious with nature. Although for many people, the purpose of life is not spelled out, and is not necessarily imputed to a deity, there is a sense that personal choices and lifestyles are significant to the unfolding of the whole.

It must be recognized that some people who have no religious or spiritual orientation, nevertheless commit themselves to living moral lives. Religion is not necessary to define what actions are moral (Hamm, 1979). The young people I am concerned about are those for whom spirituality may provide a source of meaning that would positively affect their behavior as well as their satisfaction in life.

In his book, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Robert Coles (1992) finds that children as young as nine or ten years old have considered and developed personal belief systems, with complex interpretations of religious teachings they have received. Even children who have not been exposed to religious education have worked out metaphysical responses to the questions of the meaning of life, whether there is a God, and what happens after death. These children describe the deep effect of their beliefs on the way that they struggle to live moral lives, regardless of what religious education, if any, they had received. Coles also reflects on the thirst that humans seem to have to explore spiritual questions, and the early age at which that thirst is evident. The power of spiritual questions continue through adulthood. Kierkegaard (cited in Swenson, 1941) at age 22, wrote in his diary,

> I need to understand my place in life, and to see what the Divinity means that I should do; I need a truth which is a truth
for me, and ideas for which I can live and die . . . What I need is the power to live a complete human life, and not merely a life of knowledge, in order that my thought may not be based merely upon something objective, something not my own, but rather upon something connected with the deepest root of my existence, something through which I am linked with the divine, and to which I could cling if the whole world were to fall in ruins about me. (p. 10)

Despite the documented decline in support for institutionalized religions in Canada (Bibby, 1993), belief in the existence of God remains high — just over 80% — with the proportion of blatant atheists around 8% (p. 128). Bibby states that not only do the vast majority of Canadians believe in God, almost half the population maintain they have actually experienced God's presence. On the other hand, young people, in particular, are leaving institutional religion. In 1992 only 18% of 15- to 19-year-olds were attending religious services regularly, (compared to 23% in 1984), with 19 year olds least likely to attend (Bibby & Posterskie, 1992). These authors find that while religious involvement is seen as "very important" by only about 10% of teenagers, 46% are giving that rating to the quest for truth, and 24% to spirituality (p. 53) (italics in original). If young people are not taking their quest for truth or spirituality to the religious institutions, where are they seeking their answers? For some, rock music is their religion (Gaines, 1990/1991), for others, perhaps family or television provide guidance, and for some, like the lyricist in this song, there seems to be a vacuum.

SOMETHING TO BELIEVE

I believe that reality's gone
Disillusion's real
I believe that morality's gone
And there's nothing to feel
If you take the sacred things
The things we hold dear
Empty promise is all you'll find
... And give me something
Something to believe in...

_Smash_ (Offspring, 1994)

The thorny question is whether the school as a secular institution should provide opportunities for exploration of the spiritual dimension of life, and if so, how this might be done in the Canadian setting of religious pluralism. The issue has often been framed as the danger that schools may indoctrinate children in religious beliefs not shared by the parents. With increased immigration from non-European countries, many religions are likely to be represented in Canadian classrooms today. Whose religion should be included in school discussions, and how can children be protected from indoctrination?

These issues cannot be ignored; policies to address them are in a state of evolution as school boards and provincial Ministries of Education attempt to find a position that is both just and sensitive. Public school policies fall on a continuum from attempting to remove any references to religion, to attempting an inclusive recognition of many faith traditions as well as a secular humanist perspective. The Toronto School Board has issued an approved series of school opening exercises that includes inspirational quotations from nonreligious sources as well as from scriptures of many faiths (Board of Education, City of Toronto, 1985). Some schools choose to draw attention to special days of religions represented in their population, (i.e., in addition to Christmas, the school may recognize Hanukkah and Ramadan among others).
The most extreme form of the first approach (eliminating all reference to religion in schools) does not support a goal of connectedness because it assumes a separation between the religious basis of a society and its culture. At the personal level, it assumes a separation between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of life. For schools, the implication of removing all reference to religion is that religious justifications for moral behavior cannot be discussed, leaving values education dependent only on secular humanism (or political ideology, such as democratic citizenship) as justification for moral behavior. For some young people these philosophies are not sufficiently compelling to affect their behavior. In the realm of curricular content, this approach isolates many aspects of Canadian culture from their historical roots. To give a few examples, Canadian laws are based on Judeo-Christian principles, and some familiarity with those principles is needed in order to understand their intent. Present relationships between Native and non-Native Canadians are influenced by the tragic history of some Christian residential schools; understanding current problems is helped by knowledge of the positive and negative impacts of Christian missionaries on Native peoples. From the perspective of core curriculum, understanding Canadian authors (to say nothing of other literature) often requires an understanding of Biblical allusions. Without some discussions of religion, immigrant children lack a basis for understanding the cultural assumptions of their new homeland, and Canadians of European descent may lack significant insights into their own culture as well as an important dimension of the culture of their new classmates. In the realm of ethnic relations, the exclusion of religious discussion limits the growth of understanding that may develop from learning more about another person's viewpoint. Avoiding discussion of religion may also lead to simplistic understandings of religious
wars. Finally, education seems disconnected from life if, when young people seek answers to the questions of "Why are we here?" and "What is the meaning of life?" the one place they cannot turn for help is the school.

Schools, by attempting to build inclusivity and connectedness, might assist students who seek answers to these questions. Behind these initiatives are principles that include assuring students' freedom not to participate, respecting faith traditions and perspectives of a pluralistic society, and demonstrating flexibility and openness to inclusion of parents and members of the community as participants, speakers, and teachers.

Some may raise the question of whether respecting the beliefs of others includes satanic and other cults. Although it might be argued that such cults provide meaning, they do not support connectedness because they are exclusive and advocate harming others. Clearly the school cannot support any organization that advocates breaking the law, or causes harm or injury to anyone. Neither can it allow children to be placed in danger; students participating in studies outside the classroom should be accompanied by a parent or teacher. Schools can, however, provide an important lesson in teaching young people how to recognize and avoid cults which foster the harming of others. (Pamphlets on this subject are available from most university chaplaincies).

One possible approach through curriculum would be to offer as an option, studies of what gives life meaning, including discussion of the spiritual as a source of meaning for many people, and existentialism or secular humanism as a source of meaning for others. Such a course could include novels, film, drama, music, and guest speakers to engage students in discussions of different ways of finding meaning in life even in the face of suffering. This is the approach that I feel would be most effective in helping
the students develop a personal stance toward hardships and suffering. A related approach would be to develop a course on "dimensions of being human", which would include health, relationships, work, and spirituality.

Another possibility would be to offer an optional course on exploration of a religion, based either on the religious affiliation of the family, or the interest of the student (with the permission of the parents). I visualize such a course being offered in the community rather than in the school, so that it could be taught by appropriate religious educators. Students, in collaboration with teacher, parents, and religious educator, would design the study to be completed in the course, including their goals, and the criteria for evaluating their learning. The purpose of the course would be to provide time for those who wanted to deepen their understanding of their own faith tradition, and to allow students seeking a personal spiritual orientation to learn more about a specific religion.

Courses on comparative religion or history of religion may be ways to help students understand perspectives of various religions, and may lead them to seek out those in the community who can help them with further explorations of a faith. For some students the courses may be only an introduction to the study of religion from outside, and may not contribute to a personal spiritual orientation because the students may not learn or experience the practices and discipline of a faith tradition. Some young people are likely to be suspicious of any organized religions, but still interested in exploring existential questions. An approach that may include those young people is to invite students to take the responsibility for choosing speakers and topics, thus allowing them to retain control of the direction of their exploration.
Another approach that respects religious pluralism is to use the common teachings of several religions to teach values or spiritual practices. The *Virtues Project* is based on a book for parents who want to teach their children values based on religious teachings (Popov, 1992). The author uses brief scriptural quotations from seven religions, Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, to focus on virtues such as compassion, honesty, justice, and generosity. Because the principles are compatible with Native Indian spirituality, several Native communities have adopted the *Virtues Project* for use in conjunction with their spiritual teaching (Popov, 1995, personal communication).

Another inclusive approach that builds on commonalities among religions is demonstrated in the Prison Ashram Project (Lozoff, 1985). This unusual program established by Bo Lozoff and his wife Sita, uses the teachings of many religions to help prison inmates learn meditation as a spiritual discipline. Lozoff has written several books about how to find peace and freedom within, by opening to spiritual power. Lozoff's refusal to accept payment for his lectures sets him apart from unscrupulous evangelists and gurus who have turned religious teaching to profiteering. His books usually feature a large section of letters from inmates and his replies to their painful struggles. Lozoff's approach is based on Hindu, Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist scriptures. Such an approach does not require the recipient to join a particular faith, but requires acceptance of something outside oneself. The letters from inmates are moving evidence of the transformative power of adopting a spiritual discipline. Despite Lozoff's rejection of the role of guru, this program, like many violence prevention programs, is heavily dependent on its charismatic leader, and thus may not be transferable to schools. The teaching of a spiritual discipline has, however, much in common with some
of the stress reduction programs that offer meditation, breathing exercises, yoga, and Tai Chi, without reference to their religious association. Interestingly, the stress reduction trainers assume that this separation of the discipline from its dogma makes the practice physical, not spiritual.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) has a sub-program, Alateen, often associated with schools. AA is based on the acceptance of a power greater than oneself, but it is not associated with a particular religion. AA literature denies that it is a religious organisation because members interpret God "as they understand Him". Bill Wilson, the founder of AA, learned from the demonstrated failure of the Oxford Movement in helping alcoholics, to excise religion but leave the benefit of spiritual experience (Chappel, 1990). Members may be Buddhist, Muslim, Christian or have no religious affiliation. At the same time, however, the program regards substance abuse as a spiritual disease which requires a spiritual cure. Although there are not studies using multivariate analysis to compare the effectiveness of AA with other treatment programs, one longitudinal study of alcoholics by Vaillant (in McCrady, 1990) found that a substantial portion of those who successfully resolved their drinking problems described increased hope or faith as the most important factor in their being able to change.

Sometimes simply encouraging students to become involved in the environmental or peace movements can introduce them to a spiritual perspective. In my experience as an activist in both movements, I have noted an increasing use of prayer and meditation in major meetings. Native elders are often invited to open environmental conferences with an invocation or a sweetgrass ceremony. There is an ethic associated with environmentalism that what one does locally affects the whole. Furthermore, there is a sense that humans must become aware of their interdependence with nature.
because alienation from nature will lead to a tragedy that is of cosmic significance. The Native attitude of regarding the earth and life forms as sacred supports the behavioral changes needed to sustain the natural environment. Peace meetings often include times for meditation or prayer and invite speakers on the spiritual dimensions of conflict resolution. In 1992, I attended a conference on Humanitarian Ceasefires, bringing together key decision makers who were either involved in organizing ceasefires to permit the immunization of children in war zones, or had the potential to do so in the future. Canadian Native Indian architect, Douglas Cardinal, led a sweetgrass ceremony during which we meditated on his statement that every act is a spiritual act. Social movements today present ethical standards for living that support connectedness with or without a spiritual orientation, and may provide students with a place to consider what is of ultimate concern. A student who joins a non-governmental organization may find sources of meaning besides the spiritual—a sense of belonging, service to others, commitment to a cause, and meaningful work.

Before leaving the importance of the spiritual in giving some people life meaning, let me describe the role of religion in the 1993 U.S. Gang Summit that resulted in a nationwide truce among rival gangs. The conference was reported by the editor of Sojourners Magazine, one of the only media representatives permitted to observe the event (Wallis, 1993). The gathering of 164 current and former members and leaders from the largest and most powerful urban gangs was the result of the gang truce movement, a grassroots initiative that spread through many U.S. cities in response to the terrible number of killings in gang warfare. During four turbulent days of discussions and strategy sessions, former felons who had tried to kill each other embraced and pledged to work together against
poverty, racism, and violence in their communities. Wallis writes that he had not been to a church conference in years where they prayed as much as they did at the Gang Summit. When conflicts flared, as they often did, they would stop and pray, both Christian and Muslim prayers. Opening and closing prayer circles included Christian, Muslim, Native American, Hebrew, and Spanish prayers. The intensity of the emotions that led to the Gang Summit seems to have been matched by a religious passion that permitted discussions to continue through extreme tension.

In summary, I suggest that trying to help students find meaning in their lives without discussion of spirituality offers an impoverished view of human experience, whether or not the students eventually find personal meaning in a spiritual belief system. Many approaches to helping students find meaning in life through a spiritual orientation are appropriate for public schools provided that the rights of freedom of religion of parents and students are upheld, and provided that the school applies to a proposed program the same careful evaluation and safeguards it would with any other school initiative. Support for such programs must come from the highest levels to ensure that the curriculum is well conceived and executed, that teachers are well prepared in terms of religious knowledge of the major traditions (perhaps by requiring a course in World Religions in teacher education programs), and that ethical issues and possible problems are addressed in advance of implementation.

Changing School Atmosphere

Many of the suggestions I make in this section are not new -- they have been described many times before in proposals for educational
reform. What I think may be new is considering these reforms in the context of reducing boredom and increasing life meaning. This goal is important for its own sake but, as I have argued, if such reforms succeed, they may reduce violent behavior in at least some adolescents. Many books have been written about improving school atmosphere and the relationships within the school (c.f. Power, et al., 1989). Key areas of concern that would increase connectedness include increasing participatory decision-making, adopting proactive discipline methods, fostering mutual respect among teachers, students, and staff, initiating projects to build community, decreasing competition, increasing involvement of parents in all aspects of the school, and working with the community so that the school seems to have no walls.

To build connectedness, schools need to be small, and students need to know their classmates and teachers well. Behavior management should emphasize cooperation and responsibility to the group rather than obedience to power backed up by punishment for transgression. Changing class every 45 minutes is not congruent with deep engagement in the subject matter nor with connectedness with the teacher and classmates. The policy of sending children from small elementary school classes into large classes in very large middle schools at the very time that they are at highest risk of both boredom and violence seems particularly counterproductive. The implicit assumption of this transfer seems to be that with increasing maturity students have a decreasing need for close relationships. Many students seem to require even more support in adolescence than in the earlier years. One school in Victoria, BC has implemented a program to match high-risk students with teachers who will act as mentors to them both in and out of school. The group of teachers who have volunteered for this program accept a caseload of four to six students each. If a student misses class, the teacher
calls home, collects the assignments the student has missed, and offers help in getting caught up. The teachers help with arranging appointments with social workers, probation officers, and doctors. In other words, the teacher takes on the role of concerned surrogate parent. While this may seem like coddling, many high-risk students simply cannot set priorities and follow through on details of daily life because their lives are in extreme turmoil. The Victoria YM-YWCA learned several years ago that to run a program to help get young single moms off the streets, the leaders had to provide a van to bring the moms and babies to the meetings. It was not rebellion that kept them from attending otherwise, but an inability to organize themselves and the babies in time to catch a bus. This strategy of supporting high-risk adolescents by providing nurturing care assumes that reducing at least some of their stresses will enable them to begin to take control of some parts of their lives, and that gradually they will develop greater stability and independence.

Increasing connectedness through the curriculum would mean, in addition to initiatives already mentioned, teaching a global perspective on issues in every subject area, specific programs to reduce racism, and environmental studies to understand the interconnectedness of living things and their physical setting in order to learn responsible lifestyles. In order to increase the students' sense of place and belonging to the earth, schools might develop organic gardens in school yards, with beds that children plant, tend and harvest, perhaps sharing their crops with the community in the fall. In elementary school, children might study "how we show caring in our community" rather than impersonal lessons on how communities meet their needs for food, shelter, and safety. Recalling the insight that resilient children had serious responsibilities for the care of others, perhaps schools
should consider ways to involve students in non-trivial service work that is presently needed in the community. Such tasks as growing food for the homeless, providing infant care in a centre in the school, or operating a second-hand clothing shop for children fill real needs. Providing a drop-in day care at the school would afford the students opportunities to practice child care under the guidance of professionals. Such an arrangement would also make it possible to provide the young children with fantasy play and games to increase cognitive skills. Integrating children and youth into the community as authentic contributors to community life seems to be essential in helping them find meaning in their lives. Service projects offer a possible source of meaning for children and youth, but unfortunately miss an important opportunity for connectedness when they are intended simply to raise funds for worthy causes. What is more valuable is service that requires personal commitment to other people, such as reading to a blind person, or shopping for an elderly neighbor. Whole class projects should engage all the students in actions that require cooperation and effort and should, if possible, involve personal contact with the recipients.

Cunningham Elementary School in Vancouver, British Columbia has an excellent project to increase cross-cultural understanding and build community. First, children in grade seven are taught portrait photography by the school artist in residence, then they study fables and the brief morals they teach. The children then write a favorite value statement from their family (i.e., "waste not want not" or "do unto others as you would have them do unto you"). Next, the children take portraits of one another's families in a studio set up in the school, with assistance from grade ten tutors who record the exposures and names in a master record. Finally, parents are invited to a gallery viewing of the mounted photographs with the family
sayings beneath. This project is an effective demonstration of respect for the values of different families; the faces show many races and ethnic groups, but the sayings have great similarity even when they are written as translations from Chinese or Punjabi. The project touches on world-views rather than on the foods or festivals of diverse cultures, and it does so in a way that builds connectedness. The community is also involved because the project has several sponsors who provide the funds for publication of some of the photographs and for a traveling exhibition.

Children whose families are transient and chaotic face difficulties in developing a sense of place where they belong. Schools might help by discussing how one makes a home in a community, even if the home is likely temporary, and by initiating projects whereby a class makes enduring improvements to their community. Children know they have left behind a permanent record of their involvement. Greater involvement with parents might result in their feeling increased belonging to the neighborhood as well, and an investment in the community.

Work/study co-ops and similar arrangements that alternate employment experience with periods of study can be designed to build on the meaning of work and the association of the school with the community. They increase connectedness when employers came to the school to talk about how to prepare for an interview, how to behave to hold a job, how to dress, and so on. Expanding these programs so that students gain service experience that is recognized by the employer and the school would be an important addition.

Increasing the hours the school is open would provide safe haven for those children who have nowhere to go after school. After school time is ideal for optional exploration of activities that increase meaning.
envision a wide variety of options including issue-related clubs, Alateen meetings, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, or Big Brother and Big Sister groups, performance opportunities in theatre, music, radio, or television, sports that include all levels of ability, and free lessons in such skills as playing the guitar, step-dancing, or traditional games children played in pretelevision times. These programs would decrease both transient and chronic boredom and increase connectedness with volunteers from the community. I recommend volunteers, including older students, rather than paid employees because people seem to be more highly motivated by intrinsic values than external rewards (Grusec & Dix, 1986). Furthermore, the modeling of service to others is important for children and youth to observe and experience. Thinking back to the problem of decreasing availability of work in our society, I suggest that some people who are out of work or retired might volunteer as tutors, mentors, theatre directors, coaches, or confidantes, provided that their role was clearly seen to be essential to the young people and their community. Retired seniors are particularly important as volunteers because they can share the wisdom of their life experience with young people. In many Native and South Asian societies cultural and spiritual meaning continues to be passed from elders and grandparents to children. While the school cannot replace an absent extended family, retired seniors who are searching for a way to contribute meaningfully to society should be welcomed.

Teachers need to be supported in their work in order to prevent the burnout that is increasingly common in recent years. There is a need for connectedness within the profession to provide support for dealing with difficult problems that have become the responsibility of the school. Sharing the responsibility for educating the young more widely by involving parents
and community may be one way to help reduce the level of stress in the classroom and to increase sources of meaning for community members through work, creativity, belonging, commitment, and service. Successful violence prevention programs in schools involve large numbers of parents in meaningful work and decision-making in the school (Tolan & Guerra, 1994).

Building meaningful relationships is facilitated by most of the violence prevention programs I have described. In some cases, considering other sources of meaning at the same time may alter the perspective in courses such as Language Arts to make it more effective in increasing connectedness. For example, discussion of loneliness and loss in the context of the importance of relationships and our stance to suffering could be helpful. Asking why we should live nonviolently, and discussing spiritual as well as prudential justifications for moral behavior connects behavioral choices with world-view. Parenting courses could allow for discussions of what it means to create life, or what is meant by love in different cultures and different religions. Discussion of the role of neighbor and the responsibility of individuals to the community is important in increasing connectedness through belonging, relationships, and service.

Increasing Protective Factors

Although some of the protective factors described in Chapter Four arise from the temperament and intelligence of the child, others arise in the environment and are susceptible to modification. The influence of a warm, nurturing adult, and of a spiritual orientation have been described previously. Because the example of a mother who is gainfully employed has
been found to be a source of identification for girls (Werner, 1989), schools might offer volunteer positions to women in communities where employment is limited, providing a bridge to employment and opportunities for women to model a commitment to work and service. The school can support strong external support systems for children through collaboration with families, churches, and community organizations. Risk-takers, such as those described by Staub (1974) in his study of heroes, can be helped to find prosocial ways to increase the excitement in their lives, perhaps through training in search and rescue, or wilderness survival courses. Membership in organizations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and participation in social movements are protective factors that can be incorporated into after school programs in schools.

**Learned Behaviors**

Violence prevention programs have been built on the notion that violence is learned behavior. Treating boredom as learned behavior means first helping students to interpret their discomfort differently. Stress reduction programs have the potential to affect boredom in several important ways. By naming tension and discomfort experienced by students *stress* rather than *boredom*, they reframe the condition as common, under personal control, and responsive to simple exercises that anyone can do. This strategy effectively removes one of the triggers to aggression and may reduce the use of boredom as justification for violence. In the first place, the dysphoric state may be perceived as stress and dealt with, and in the second place, as a result of the regular relaxation practices, the state may not occur with the same intensity.
Learning to accept boredom as a common experience under personal control is an important step in developing an internal locus of control. Students may be helped by discussion of additional strategies to reduce boredom in many different contexts in school and outside. For example, they may be taught that meeting with others, taking up a hobby or sport, or walking in the woods are more likely to reduce boredom than is watching television.

The recommendations thus far have been in the context of reducing boredom by increasing connectedness in order to prevent violence. Reducing boredom in itself is an important goal for educators, and a contribution that is needed in our society even for those who seem to be functioning well. One group who commonly complain of boredom and meaninglessness are the rich (Healy, 1984). Douglas Coupland (1995) describes the vacuous life of the most wealthy and famous Hollywood stars in his recent book, *Polaroids from the Dead*. He notes ironically that the houses in the exclusive area where the stars live do not have sun decks because current antidepressant medications cause photo-sensitivity! The very wealthy may become disconnected from their earlier sources of meaning as they find that fame and money force them to be isolated behind fences and triple security systems. I suggest that disconnectedness is, for the rich, the result of pursuit of the illusion that meaning can be found in fame and money. Schools that teach children about authentic sources of meaning provide education of relevance not only to the alienated and delinquent, but also to the disconnected who seek solace in the music of despair.
Sick of people – no one real
Sick of chicks – they're all bitches
Sick of you -- you're too hip
Sick of life -- it sucks...

Sick and tired – no one cares
Sick of myself -- don’t wanna live
Sick of living -- gonna die.
(Suicidal Tendencies in Mieazian, 1991, p. 255)

Areas for Further Research

My conclusion that boredom in adolescence is a serious, non-trivial condition that contributes substantially to violence in some youth is an important issue for further investigation that could significantly affect theories in psychology, criminology, and education. Let me begin by suggesting areas of interest in the theoretical analysis of boredom.

Boredom

Empirical studies are needed to evaluate and refine the conceptualization of boredom that I have presented, and to confirm that boredom occurs in transient and chronic states, expressed as sensation-seeking and meaning-seeking. Instruments to differentiate the states and expressions of boredom need to be developed and tested in order that the incidence of boredom, especially the chronic state, can be determined not only for adolescents, but also across races, ethnic groups, genders, socio-economic classes, and religions. Risk and protective factors for boredom could be inferred from these studies. In studying race or ethnicity in relation to boredom and violence, it is important to note subjects’ socio-economic status,
educational level, aspirations for the future, whether the group studied is a minority or majority, and whether the subjects are new immigrants or well established.

To evaluate the significance and prevalence of boredom among adolescents, (especially in the form of meaninglessness) and its relationship to violence, important variables include risk factors for both boredom and violence, measures of sensation-seeking and meaning-seeking, measures of aggression and violent behavior (especially objective measurements such as court appearances or suspensions from school), attitudes toward violence, music preferences, television viewing habits, sources of meaning in the individual's life, their relative importance, and the activities and attitudes associated with each source of meaning. One significant question for further research is whether the cluster of risk factors associated with violence but not with boredom indicate a subgroup of children at exceptionally high risk for violence. This is an important question because intervening with such children would be of the highest priority in violence prevention.

The question of whether adolescents have an underlying existential angst related to the state of the earth, the future of work, or the threat of nuclear war is worthy of study to determine whether there is a habit of mind that predisposes youth to hostility and despair. This is particularly important in relation to the life choices of individuals in terms of work, study, marriage, sense of hopefulness or despair, internal or external locus of control, and whether or not they choose to abuse drugs or alcohol.

The themes of boredom, anger, despair, and violence expressed in adolescent culture raise many troubling questions about the emotional health of large numbers of North American youth, and the chasm between them and older generations. Are the lyrics they sing significant indicators of
their emotional state, or trivial words unworthy of attention? What weight should be placed on the music and clothing preferences of youth as indicators of their mental health? Could insights gained by studying these preferences help in the diagnosis and treatment of depression and prevention of adolescent suicide, as well as the prevention of violence?

**Programs to Reduce Boredom**

Comparisons of the effect on boredom of interventions aimed at increasing sensation with those aimed at increasing meaning would be very important in clarifying theoretical issues, and valuable because schools and recreation centres must choose where to invest scarce resources for optimal results. Empirical studies of the effects on boredom and violence of trying to increase specific sources of meaning for at-risk adolescents would be helpful in designing programs for schools. Studies of the meaning and importance of spirituality in the lives of adolescents would be helpful in determining what role, if any, the school might play in spiritual education.

With respect to a specific program that shows great promise, the Stress Reduction program in Atlanta, determining the relative contribution of the social control component and the relaxation component to the success of the program, would be helpful, as would studies of the effect of the program on children with ADHD.

**Conclusion**

When I began this study of adolescent violence I was skeptical that the young offenders who claimed that they committed their offenses
because they were bored actually believed it themselves. I suspected that boredom would turn out to be a red herring thrown to annoy authorities who harassed the inmates with irrelevant questions. What I have found is that boredom is profoundly significant not only for its contribution to violence, but also because it indicates an alienation that is not limited to young offenders, but seems widespread among adolescents. Now when I see skateboarders with their backward baseball caps and their Walkman radios plugged in their ears, or when I pass video arcades full of young males plugging quarters into machines that let them rehearse shooting humanoids on a screen, I wonder whether I am seeing normal, healthy individuation or young people in a painful struggle against meaninglessness. I hope that the urgency that is feeding the present proliferation of violence prevention programs will lead to a serious re-evaluation of how many communities, schools, families, and churches may have left young people adrift. The programs that show great promise to restore meaning in life reflect old wisdom passed down in many traditions.
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