NAME
Jenessa Karen Green

DEGREE
Master of Arts

TITLE
A Potential for Helping Children Heal: A Juxtaposition of the Dehumanizing Effects of Violence and the Humanizing Effects of Creativity

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Chair
Sharon Bailin

Carolyn Mamchur, Professor
Senior Supervisor

David Paterson, Assistant Professor
Member

/Adam Horvath, Professor, Faculty of Education
Examiner

Date: April 4, 2003
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A Potential for Helping Children Heal: A Juxtaposition of the Dehumanizing Effects of Violence and the Humanizing Effects of Creativity

Author:

Ms. Jenessa Karen Green

(Author's Signature)

April 4th, 2003

(Date)
ABSTRACT

Through a selective literature review, this thesis explores the polarized relationship between the various studied consequences of childhood trauma and the qualities of creativity with the purpose of demonstrating that healing is possible. Childhood trauma is described as any experience during childhood that leaves children at risk for abnormal development. In this thesis, creativity is defined in terms of a practiced process that engages children in acts of humanization.

There are several consequences commonly experienced by children who are exposed to violence in their homes, communities or countries. Children tend to exhibit aggressive, regressive, hypervigilant and withdrawn social behaviours because of the powerlessness, distrust, disengagement, negative perspectives and harmful mimicry associated with trauma. Traumatized children develop their identity in relation to violent experiences, and this can have a negative affect on their self-esteem and abilities to make positive choices. The dehumanization from violent experiences can lower children's chances for a successful future.

Creativity, as it relates to healing, engages the individual in a process that demands complete attention, a balancing of skills and challenges, and an understanding of clearly defined goals. Less emphasis is placed on judgement, products and personality traits because success is based on the individual's ability to use the process to engage in self-discovery. Rather than shift social paradigms, a creative practice, in this context, can bring about optimal experiences,
a creative practice, in this context, can bring about optimal experiences, described as those moments when life feels as though its in perfect order.

When juxtaposed, the qualities of creativity and consequences of childhood trauma reveal remarkable polar relationships. Whereas violent situations render children alienated, the creative process creates an empowering experience through the communication of feelings and ideas. Violence is related to children's distrust in other people and themselves, but the creative process is motivated by a sense of pleasure, stemming from faith in their creative abilities. With the help of encouraging role models, children may develop the self in relation to empowerment, trust, engagement and positive perspectives. It is feasible that by engaging in an authentic creative experience, traumatized children might mitigate some of the consequences of childhood trauma.
"The first sentence of every novel should be:
Trust me, this will take time but there is order here,
very faint, very human."

(Ondaatje, 1987, p. 146)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose for Study

The purpose of this thesis is to contrast the relationship between the literature on the consequences of childhood trauma with the literature on the qualities of creativity as it relates to healing. In researching and comparing the literature on these two concepts, the polarity of their details becomes apparent. By exploring the contrasts found in this relationship, the possibility exists of having traumatized children experience and engage in creative acts as a means of healing.

The opposition between the consequences of childhood trauma and the experiences found in creativity is extraordinary. For example, whereas violent experiences create a situation of dehumanization and alienation (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny and Pardo, 1992), total involvement and participation in a creative process is rooted in relationships and humanization (Drews, 1974; Kramer, 1971). “For every child has creative drives which, if encouraged in an atmosphere of controlled freedom can mean growth and satisfaction and joy, and a gain in self-esteem. To do something active and creative in this world ... is in itself therapeutic” (Kramer, 1971, p. X). A child who brings order to his internal world, is likely to discover meaning in his external experiences. Particularly, creativity might increase the child’s participation in the world and connection with and caring for other people, as well as raise his self-esteem. The significance
of healing can only begin to be understood by exploring the polarity between childhood trauma and creativity.

Need for this Study

The level of violence is increasing in communities throughout the world and children are exposed to overwhelming levels of aggression. Children respond to this violence with varied reactions in an effort to make sense of their surroundings. Some children disengage from the world, while others are likely to mimic learned violent behaviours throughout their lives. Considering this dangerous trend, there is a concern about what might happen to the values of future generations. Jones and Newman (1997), age 15, report: "On October 13, 1994, a little boy was murdered in the Ida B. Wells [housing projects in Chicago, Illinois]. Five-year-old Eric Morse was thrown out of a fourteenth-story window by two other little boys, supposedly because he wouldn't steal candy for them" (p. 87). Could the extreme exposure to violence, accompanied with a lack of understanding of those experiences be partly related to the fact that these two boys ultimately engaged in violent behaviour themselves?

Many sectors in society appear hesitant when it comes to addressing child-related issues such as violence. In general, politicians are not eager to champion children's causes. Perhaps one reason for young people's political powerlessness is because they cannot vote. Therefore, child advocates and other interested adults are responsible for forcing children's issues on the political table.

Help for traumatized children is not likely to come from the corporate
sector because children are not a self-sustaining consumer group. Although in some countries, children are members of the work force, often they are poor and limited to the illegal economy. Generally, businesses focus money and marketing on increasing children's desire to consume rather than advancing the next generations' mental and physical well-being. Business interests are frequently driven by the need for immediate growth and not the long-term welfare of its future consumers.

Education is one of the few factions in society that has a vested interest in child-related issues. Without healthy and active children, their ability to learn is minimized (Rutter, 1994). It is within the realm of education that traumatized children's needs are most likely to be addressed. There exist several different opinions about the best way to help traumatized children: drugs, psychotherapy, incarceration, group homes, orphanages and so on. This paper is suggesting that the practice of creative expression could be additional or alternative means for helping traumatized children heal.

Personal Commitment

My interest in the topic of traumatized children and creativity began in the fourth year of my undergraduate degree at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. I wrote a paper on the empowerment of street youth in Brazil through the development of their creative voices. While researching and writing that essay, I began to notice some interesting patterns between the qualities of violent childhood experiences and creativity. It seemed that where violence developed
one reaction in children, creativity encouraged the exact opposite.

Shortly after graduation, I was accepted into a youth internship program sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Rotary Club of Kemptville, Ontario. They arranged my four and a half month contract at an orphanage, Hogar Rafael Ayau, in Guatemala City. This was my first experience working with children who have experienced or witnessed violence.

Hogar Rafael Ayau houses an average of 150 boys and girls, ranging in ages from three weeks to roughly thirteen years old¹. Within the one square block compound there are: four dormitories for the children which are segregated based on gender and age; a swimming pool; a playground for the boys and another for the girls; a dining hall and kitchen; a school; a bakery which also sells baked goods to the public; and a Greek Orthodox Church. The whole compound is surrounded by an eight-foot brick wall which is topped with barbed wire and broken glass. At the front entrance, an armed guard is posted twenty-four hours a day.

The nuns each contribute their unique skills to the survival of the home. Madre Ines, the Mother Superior, handles legal, political and financial matters, as well as helps design the curriculum for the school. Madre Maria is responsible for managing the daily needs of the children and the dozen or so nannies. Madre Yvonne is internationally famous for her use of mushrooms, herbs and barks as natural remedies for various illnesses. She not only cares for the children’s

¹ Because of inaccurate birth records and the malnourished condition of the children when they are first brought to the orphanage, it is sometimes impossible to know their exact ages.
health, but also runs a small clinic for and sells medicines to the public in order to help raise money for the home. Together, with a handful of volunteers, the orphanage stands as an oasis for traumatized children in Guatemala.

My official role at the orphanage was to teach basic computer skills, English and swimming. However, I was interested in understanding the children’s reactions to their experiences with violence. I attempted to discover their world by participating in their pretend games. Using dramatic play, I taught important life skills, such as how to shower and use cutlery. Each lesson was a constant battle because they had extreme difficulties being engaged for longer than a few minutes at a time.

One afternoon, Madre Ines assigned me to a three-year-old boy who had been so neglected that he had never learned to walk or talk. His mother was an extremely poor street vendor and prostitute. In an effort to protect her child from the dangerous streets, she had tied him to a chair while she was away working. The deep scars on his little wrists will always remind him of how unfair life can be. I attempted to engage him in dramatic play with the other children in the hopes of encouraging his discovery of basic skills. Through song and games, I helped him learn to walk and make basic language sounds. Again, I began to notice patterns between the experience of violent trauma and the qualities of creativity. Violence and neglect had denied this child the ability to walk and talk, and this had left him feeling helpless and alienated. Yet, creative activities both empowered him to walk and encouraged him to communicate with other children.
My second experience working with troubled children was at a group home, the *South Coast Children's Society* (SCCS) in Southern California. The home housed about 30 boys, ranging from age 8 to 17 years. Most of the boys had been removed from their homes due to violence, neglect and sexual abuse. Before SCCS, many of the boys had been sent to either a less secure, co-ed facility or foster care. Due to their inappropriately sexual or violent behaviour, these boys had been removed from other facilities and placed in SCCS. In other words, SCCS was one of their last chances before a youth detention centre. Indeed, while I was employed at the group home, several boys ran away, got involved in criminal behaviour and were sent to a juvenile jail.

My formal title at the group home was *care staff* and I helped the boys through their daily routines. The group home demanded a high level of supervision, and the ratio was never more than three boys to one care staff. I attempted to make the most of my experience in the role of warden, for both the boys and myself. After cooking breakfast, for example, I attempted to lead group discussions during the meal. In the evenings, I often took three boys on outings, usually for a quiet walk around the neighborhood. The boys amazed me with how much they were able to observe and analyze, although they often used this information to manipulate staff and peers.

At least once a week, one of the boys lost control of his emotions to the point where he was a danger to himself and others. If necessary, the care staff would restrain that child, dragging him to a padded room known as the *safe room*. The boy was required to remain in the safe room until he had calmed down. In order to re-enter into the community, he had to discuss his feelings
with a care staff. Although the safe room appeared necessary on occasion, I always felt that the child used the discussion of his feelings as a way of manipulating the system. I wondered if there could not have been a more effective and genuine way to reach the boys.

The following narrative, Sergio, is the story of my various experiences outside of the safe room door. Although it is a graphic description, it captures some of the boys' dehumanized responses to their violent and tragic experiences.

"FUCK YOU! FUCKERRRS! I know you can hear me - MOTHER FUCKERS!"

The safe room shook and roared as though it contained a lion. The young woman settled down on the cold floor beside the rattling door. She sighed, looking at the little runners next to her. They were well worn, a size 3, laces frayed at the ends.

"Sergio. It's me."

"Go away!" The door shook some more. "CAN YOU HEAR ME FUCKERS! LET ME OUT!" This said, he resigned himself to simply screaming, the door pounding each time he threw his body against it. Luckily, everything was well padded in there, so he couldn't hurt himself - at least not physically.

"What happened? Why are you in the safe room?" The thundering door went silent.

"They hate me! They want me dead! I'll show them, those fuckers! They should suck my DICK!"

He started to cry now, soft and breathless. She waited, resting her head against the wall, the tiles warming beneath her.

"I'll show them," he muttered. "I'll kill myself and then they'll be sorry! I hate this stupid fucking place!" A sudden bang on the door. "FAHRRRRHACKERS!!" She could hear his body slide down the wall.

"I just saw Leroy. He's in pain and he's sad. How come?"

He didn't respond. She stood up and peeked through the spit-covered window. He was now curled on the floor in the corner, his back to the
door, his head hidden against the wall. His pants were wet at the crotch. "Sergio. Can I open the door?"

"Do what you want. I don’t care."

"I’m just going to open it a crack. Just to let some air in. And so that we can talk. Is that okay?"

"Whatever," he whimpered.

She opened the door and choked on the smell of urine. "There, is that better?"

"Why should you care?" He rolled over to face her now, his little body still in a ball. The skin on his face and chest was flush. His dark hair was sticking up with sweat.

"Are you cold? Do you want a shirt?"

He looked down at himself and then back up at her. His eyes welled with tears. "I - I want new pants."

"Okay, I’ll fetch you some clothes. I’m going to close the door again, all right?"

She walked down the corridor to the general hall. The other boys went about their chores, peeking up at her as she passed. She picked out a clean sweat suit from the closet, something that looked his size, and then headed back. She could hear Leroy wailing from the other safe room, threatening to kill Sergio.

"I’m back." She glanced through the window. "Can I open the door?"

"Yeah. Did you get me the Pokemon shirt?" He hadn’t moved, but he was shivering.

"I’m not sure. Here," she handed him the clothes. "I’m turning around so you can change."

"You can look, I don’t care." She heard him changing. "I said you can look ... I don’t care."

"Do you feel warmer?" ignoring his offer.

"Yeah."

He sat up with his back against the wall. She opened the door wider and sat cross-legged on the floor just outside the safe room. They watched each other while she waited for him to settle. He pulled at his shirtsleeves and began to chew on one of the cuffs.

"Why did you hurt Leroy?"

"I dunno," he shrugged, still looking down.

"What did he say or do that made you feel so angry?"

"Nothin’." He began to tug at his little brown toes. She waited, watching him pick and chew himself. Then she tried again.
"What did you two argue about?"

"The Play Station." He looked up at her, his eyes wide and tearful. "It was my turn, and he wouldn’t give it up! If you’re killed, then it’s supposed to be the next person’s turn - everybody knows that. But he said that I was . . . that I was . . . stupid," he mumbled that last word through the cuff, looking back down at his toes again. "Never mind!! I don’t care! Do whatever!" They sat in silence again.

"Can I get out now?" he said finally.

"No."

"Why not? I want to go back to my room. I’m tired. I don’t want to talk about this. Just tell him I’m sorry, okay?"

She sat up on her haunches. "Sergio. It doesn’t work like that." She waited, and then said, "Do you feel sad right now?"

"No, I’m not sad! I just want to go back to my room! I don’t give a shit - about you or anyone! Why should I feel sad?!"

"I thought that you and Leroy were best buds. It sounds like you were embarrassed. And angry, that he would say those things about you in front of all the other boys."

He sat quiet, rubbing his feet into the carpet of the safe room.

"Is that true? Are you embarrassed and angry?"

He looked up and stared at her for a moment. "Give me my fucking shoes back, you bitch! You don’t care about me!" He paused. "You’re a fucking bitch and you’re cunt smells!"

She stood up and closed the door, feeling sick. "Sergio. Why are you hiding behind bad words?"

He started to fake-cry. "Don’t close the door! I'm sorry. Please, I don’t like it when the door is closed! It’s scary in here! Please, it smells."

"Sergio, please sit against the wall." She knew this trick.

The door suddenly rattled with a thump. "FUCK YOUUU!! BITCH!! FUCK YOU!! LET ME OUT!!"

She sighed as she slid against the wall across the shaking door.

"FAHHCKERRS! I DON’T WANT TO BE IN THIS ROOM ANYMORRRRE!!"

His voice was piercing. She stared at his runners, perfectly lined up next to one another. The sole of one was pealing away from the rest of the shoe, making a gaping mouth like a puppet or a cartoon character. "CUUNT!! BITCH!! MOTHER FUCKERRRR!!"

Sergio had written his name across the toe. It was done with careful
consideration of each letter, but still the 's' was backwards.
"I hate you! DO YOU HEAR ME?! DO YOU HEAR ME BITCH?!
She pulled her arms over her knees, resting her chin on her forearms, and she waited.
"Sergio. I'm still here - when you're ready."

The boys often manipulated the system, the care staff and the other children. It was extremely difficult to trust them and during my first month there, they often played me for a gullible fool. The boys distrusted everyone, and consequently, they were never trusted in return. This pattern of distrust left them dehumanized and alienated.

SCCS has art therapy sessions once a week and I was extremely interested in the effects that this might have on the boys' behaviour. However, I was disappointed to see that it was more of an arts and crafts group. The activities were too simple and did not demand any personal investment. Sewing pre-cut wallets or stringing large beads on a piece of yarn may have offered some stress relief, it did not demand genuine engagement. Generally, they disliked the art therapy sessions, and often threats and arguments were necessary in order to get them to participate. For most of the boys, the simple, child-like activities appeared to humiliate them. I continued to wonder if creativity and art could play a more prominent role in helping these traumatized children heal from dehumanization and violent experiences.
Definitions

_Traumatized Child_

For the purpose of this paper, a traumatized child is defined as any youth under the age of 18 years, who has experienced or witnessed an act or acts of violence in her home, community and/or country.

_Violence_

Definitions of violence vary depending on the author's focus; for example, what and who should be included and excluded, and for what reasons. For the purposes of this study, violence is defined as a physical or mental act of aggression perpetrated by one or more persons against one or more persons. The main focus of this paper will be situations involving long-term violence, termed _chronic violence_ (Garbarino et al., 1992). For children, “a violent event is an action initiated by a human being that makes a child feel threatened, unsafe, or that results in harm to another person. This definition underscores the fact that these actions are of human design and that the child perceives the action as dangerous or harmful” (Groves, 2002, p. 18).
Creativity

Like the concept of violence, creativity has many varied definitions depending on the focus and scope of the author. In fact, some theorists, such as Torrence (1988) claim, “creativity defies definition.... Creativity is almost infinite. It involves every sense - sight, smell, hearing, feeling, tasting and even perhaps the extrasensory. Much of it is unseen, nonverbal and unconscious. Therefore, even if we had a precise conception of creativity, I am certain that we would have difficulty putting it into words.” (p. 43). Although creativity appears to be mysterious and beyond definition, there are parameters that can be applied for the purpose of describing its qualities clearly enough to demonstrate how they are in opposition to the consequences of childhood trauma. In Chapter 3, the definition of creativity is expanded. For the purposes of this paper, the definition of creativity is a practiced process involving genuine skills and participation leading to self-actualization through optimal experiences.

Universality

The key quality inherent in the concept of creativity is its universality: “Some researchers ... view creativity as inherent in all persons” (Taylor, 1975, p. 2). Creativity theorists, such as Barrow (1998) state, “imagination is one characteristic that distinguishes humans from some other form of life” (p. 83)
Novel

Creativity is partly the imaginative clutter in a person’s mind that can manifest itself in a mixture of products, personality traits and processes. However, the novelty found in creative expression is what begins to distinguish it from other functions in life. Spearman (as cited in Taylor & Getzels, 1975) defines creativity as “the power of the human mind to create new content...” (p. 2).

Appropriate

The third major qualification for a product, person or process to be considered creative is that it must be appropriate (Weisberg, 1993). For the purpose of this paper, the appropriateness of creativity is dependent upon increasing a child’s sense of humanity and healing.

Rebellion

Another essential quality of creativity as it relates to healing is its tendency to necessitate a sense of insurgence against the norm, creating new perspectives on reality. Maddi (1975) notes, “a common effect of creative endeavor is a disruption in the social status quo, regardless of the subject matter involved, or the insightfulness of the creative person into the implications of his actions” (p. 181).
Method

The method chosen for this thesis is one I will call a selective literature review.

"The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed" (Hart, 1998, p. 13).

Through a selective literature review, this paper will explore and compare the remarkable polarity in the relationship between childhood trauma and the experience of creativity. Because the responses to violence in childhood and the creative experience are both such vast topics, it is beyond the scope of this paper to review all the literature on this subject. This thesis intends to understand the research in this area and explore its applications and development. As a selective literature review, it promises to explore only the relevant literature comparing the remarkable opposition between childhood trauma and creativity.

Chapter 2 explored the traumatized child's experience. It will include definitions of danger and safety, as well as the child's perspective on both of these concepts. By looking at the child's experience with violence in his home, community or country, it is possible to understand the dehumanizing consequences of childhood trauma.

Chapter 3 explored a definition of creativity as a process and practice, relating this definition to healing or self-actualization. It will investigate several theorists' descriptions of creativity. By exploring the roles of judgment,
engagement, skills and awareness in building optimal experiences
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996), creativity can be seen as a process of
humanization.

Chapter 4 compared the experiences of childhood trauma and the qualities
of creativity. It will describe how the two concepts are extraordinary in their
opposition. By exploring the function of trust, power, engagement, perspective
and mimicry in both creativity and violence, the astonishing polarity of these two
experiences will become clear.
CHAPTER 2
THE CHILD AND VIOLENCE

"A sick child can be cared for and fed, but no one has invented a replacement for childhood"
- Jacques Danois, French Novelist

Introduction

In order to explore the possibility of creativity as a source of healing for children, it is essential to understand their reactions to violent experiences. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationships that exists between the consequences of childhood violence, which are obviously negative; and the attributes and responses of engaging in creative experiences, which are obviously positive. The language used to describe the concepts of how one reacts to violence and how one experiences creativity are remarkably similar in their bi-polar opposites.

One consequence of violence, for example, is disengagement: The turning away from the present world in which one lives; experiencing life as if through a filter; protecting oneself from the emotional drain of a violent past; and disconnecting with the external environment. On the other hand, when an individual is in the throes of creativity, she feels deeply engaged and connected to the world in which she lives.

To explore this relationship, and to understand the consequences of

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violence manifested in childhood behaviours, I will discuss the experience of children exposed to violence in terms of their internal perspectives of danger, both real and fantastic. Risk factors, which are related to feelings of danger, lead children to define their world in terms of the violence that they have survived. Once I have established an understanding of how a child can perceive himself in relation to his dangerous surroundings, I will then examine three external sources of violence: family, community and country.

A discussion on the psychic perspectives and sources of childhood violence allows for a foundation in understanding the consequences of violence manifested in the behaviours of children. Their pasts are tragic and heart wrenching, but acknowledging their experiences is essential for recognizing the potential power of creativity as healing.

The Traumatized Child

“Children who live through war and other forms of social crisis may adapt in ways that produce impaired development, physical damage, and emotional trauma. What is more, these children may be missocialized into a model of fear, violence, and hatred” (Garbarino et al., 1991, p.16). When compared to other children who have not had these same violent life experiences, traumatized children are more likely to have developmental problems, and tend to be comparatively unhappy (UNICEF, 2000). A risk factor is any circumstance that is correlated with emotional, social, intellectual and/or physical delay or stress during childhood development (Guy, 1997). Because violent experiences make
children more susceptible to acquiring abnormal cognitive and emotional qualities, healing is an important issue for them.

Although it is not uncommon for a child to experience one or two of life's hardships during childhood, a child is considered at risk when she is exposed to several risk factors at once. Guy (1997) emphasizes, “risks have a multiplier effect when they cluster. Just as people who are worn out and under stress are more likely to get sick, children whose lives are overloaded with risks are more likely to have difficulties” (p. 17). Some examples of risk factors that can adversely affect development during childhood are poverty, lack of education, improper prenatal care, and exposure to violence (UNICEF, 2000). The human element behind the violence that some children face contributes to the risk factors they must reconcile. Groves (2002) notes, "traumatic events initiated by humans carry more psychological risks than do natural disasters. The fact that humans carry out the violence seems to add an extra element of terror for children" (p. 18). When risk factors are compounded, there is a greater chance that consequences will affect a child's cognitive, physical and emotional growth.

Many situations can endanger a child, however violence is one of the crucial factors that negatively influence development. Violence during childhood is overwhelming because children do not have the capacity to make sense of something so unpredictable and threatening. Garbarino et al. (1991) poignantly demonstrate: “As those who have been there tell us ... the real essence of real violence is terror, dismemberment, disfigurement, peeing in your pants from fear, being splattered with the guts of your friends, chaos so profound you can
hardly bear to recognize it for what it is” (p. 7). Any child who is exposed to violence is at risk of developing problems throughout childhood and life.

A child who witnesses or experiences violence often exhibits a psychic response to violence known as *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD) (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Pynoos and Eth (1985) describe PTSD: “Psychic trauma occurs when an individual is exposed to an overwhelming event and is rendered helpless in the face of intolerable danger, anxiety or instinctual arousal” (p. 23). Although many studies have been done on PTSD and adults, researchers have only recently turned their focus to PTSD and its effects on children. Because a child’s cognitive, physical and emotional abilities are still developing, the effects of PTSD can affect the physical growth of the brain (Groves, 2002). A devastating violent event is likely to over power the child’s mind. He’s likely to manifest harmful psychic responses, which are then related to further psychic, emotional, cognitive and physical delays. These responses contribute to the risk factors that accumulate because of exposure to violence, as well as limit the number of coping strategies that a child can use to survive such terrifying experiences (Guy, 1997).

A child’s *social map* is her perceptual gauge that she uses to judge her environment and it is developed from life experiences and human interactions. Garbarino and Kostelny (1996) define the social map as “the process by which the child forms a picture or mentally draws a map of the world and his or her place in it” (p. 38). In order to create a social map, the child must use all of her developmental abilities to interpret and judge the world, including linguistic, social, cognitive, physical and imaginative. It embodies what the child believes her world to be (safe, dangerous, loving, aggressive) and how she feels about that
world (secure, threatened, happy, angry). From this social map, the child will develop expectations about herself and her surroundings (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).

The social map (Garbarino et al., 1992) can be further understood within the context of Bowlby's (1979; Cassidy, 1999) attachment theory, which is the basis for the internal working model. Bowlby (1979) contends that during infancy, a child develops beliefs, expectations and emotions about her caregiver, which are founded on the receptiveness of the parent (Cassidy, 1999). "Attachment theory is a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others and of explaining the many forms of emotional distress and personality disturbance, including anxiety, anger, depression, and emotional detachment" (Bowlby, 1979, p.127). Securely attached children tend to have successful social interactions, whereas insecurely attached children tend to develop maladaptive and destructive social behaviours.

The initial relationship between infant and caregiver is the basis for the child's later understanding of the world. Like the social map (Garbarino et al., 1992), the internal working model guides future social relationships, as well as effects the child's perceptions of self, others and environment. "An individual [develops] within himself one or more working models representing principal features of the world about him and of himself as an agent in it. Such working models determine his expectations and forecasts and provide him with tools for constructing plans of action" (Bowlby, 1979, p.117). A child who does not develop a secure bond with the primary caregiver tends to develop an insecure internal working model.
The situation of violence centres a child's social map (Garbarino et al., 1992) or internal working model (Bowlby, 1979) on the concept of danger. Danger is when violence exposes a child to the threat of being hurt physically, emotionally or mentally, or killed. Garbarino et al. provide two definitions of danger: objective and subjective. In a situation of violence, these two concepts are central for a child's perceptions and feelings about her surroundings.

Objective dangers are those people, events or things that empirical research demonstrates can cause physical, mental or emotional harm. An example of an objective danger is that everyone has a 1 in 1.9 million chance of being killed by lightening (Garbarino et al., 1992, p.5). Children who are exposed to violence face objective dangers, as in the case of Doreen (as cited in Berck, 1992), a 14-year-old girl living in a homeless shelter in New York City. “Some people came into the hotel looking for this guy once. They came in with knives into the hallway and they stabbed him, in front of me and my brother” (p. 56).

Objective dangers are those dangers that can be empirically proven to threaten a child’s safety.

Garbarino et al. (1992) define subjective dangers as those people, events or things that are perceived to be dangerous by the threatened individual. Subjective dangers are socially or individually constructed recognition of potential dangers. A child who is afraid of the dark, for example, feels threatened but may not be in any actual danger. Subjective dangers are the fearful interpretations of the surrounding environment. Garbarino et al. (1992) argues that if a child falls below the societal standard of subjective danger, she is termed
neurotic or fearful; as in the case of a child who is afraid of sharks in an ocean where none exist. If a child falls above the societal standard of danger, she is considered reckless or fearless; for example, a child who swims shortly after a shark has been sighted. The child's relationship with the experience of danger is determined by how the child perceives herself in relation to the objective dangers in her environment.

Children's social maps are affected by both objective and subjective dangers. Objective dangers are the centre point around which children must orientate themselves. They must come to define objective danger as a part of their reality. Subjective dangers are the way in which children handle their reality.

The social maps of children who witness or experience violence must address the problem of chronic danger. Chronic danger is any situation involving unending objective and subjective dangers. The concept of safety is defined in relation to danger; without knowledge of one, the other does not exist. Because of chronic danger, children can lack a clear understanding of what it means to be safe. Doreen (as cited in Berck 1992) for example, is a 12-year-old child of a homeless family in New York City. She lived in a situation of unending danger and confesses, "I felt like I was never safe" (p. 57). Even during moments when Doreen was empirically safe, she still believed that she was in danger. Chronic danger causes children to misread objective dangers and safety because they lack the concept of safety to contrast with experiences with danger.

Most children are capable of coping with the strains of danger for a short
period. However, when danger becomes overwhelming for a child, his social map can no longer cope with the constant threat. Rickel and Becker (1997) note that “when exposed to stress, humans respond with alarm, then with resistance (a time where the individual appears to be coping, but internal, maladapted physiological responses continue) and, ultimately, with physical exhaustion and illness” (p. 61). Social maps help children find meaning and predictability in a violent world. However, chronic danger can quickly overwhelm their perceptual gage, leaving them unable to cope.

Children who can no longer make sense of their world and whose perceptions are so skewed that they have difficulty functioning in reality, are likely to manifest behavioural and emotional responses that are considered a stress disorder (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). For example, children who are exposed to high levels of violence may demonstrate regressive behaviours such as bedwetting and clinginess (Macksound, 1993). Because their world is overwhelming, they may express emotional outpourings in an attempt to cope with feelings of danger. In chapter four of this paper, I will explore these consequences in greater depth.

Children who experience or witness violence often interpret their overwhelmed social maps so that it becomes self-fulfilling. Merton (as cited in Drews, 1974) defines this self-fulfilling prophecy as: “an expectation or belief in any event becomes a factor working towards its fulfillment” (p. 90). Children make choices using their social map by seeking out experiences based on their perceptions of the world. However, their social maps can become the motivation for their experiences. "Deeply damaging events engender a powerful compulsion
to repeat them. The individual looses the capacity to perceive new situations objectively. Instead he is inclined to interpret them in terms of past experiences, to respond to them in distorted ways, or to distort them to fit his compulsive needs” (Kramer, 1971, p. 39). By creating expectations (I am surrounded by enemies), a social map stimulates behaviours (I must not trust any one) (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996). Children’s social maps are rooted in the violence and danger of their reality. They likely are going to seek out further negative experiences based on their perceptions of the world and their role within it. They not only identify themselves and their environment in terms of their dangerous reality, but their actions are also based in their experiences.

To summarize, social maps are an essential aspect to gaining insight into the perspectives of children who experience or witness violence. Social maps are the mechanism by which all children come to understand their world. When children live in chronically dangerous environments, they recognize themselves in relation to that reality. As they become overwhelmed by their violent surroundings, they are likely to develop stress disorders.

Sources of Violence

The relationship between childhood violence and creativity as healing is best understood when one has a complete recognition of the child’s violent experiences. Although social maps explain his internal perspectives, the external violent sources constitute an essential factor in the child’s experience of chronic childhood danger. These external realities are as specific as the individual traits
affecting children’s social maps. Jones and Newman (1997), 15 years old, comment on their violent neighbourhood of Ida B. Wells in Chicago, Illinois. They remark that violence learned in childhood generally brings about further violence to a family, community or nation.

*Violence breeds violence in the Wells. It's like a chameleon that changes color to adapt to its environment - when these kids are surrounded by violence they become violent also. Or like the Blob - when it touches you it sucks you in and it just keeps getting bigger and bigger. When it started, the Blob was little. It ate the first guy, it got a little bigger. It ate the second guy, it got a little bit bigger. Ate the third guy and got bigger. And by the end of the movie the Blob was huge. When young people around here are touched by violence, it changes their whole persona. And if there's not reform, there's going to be more and more violence.* (p. 153).

Further insight on the *blob* of violence that permeates the lives of children can be gained by discussing three general sources of violence: family abuse, communal violence and war.

*Family Violence*

Family violence is an act of psychological, physical or emotional aggression that occurs within the family unit (Guy, 1997). The 1996 Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Violence and the Family (as cited in Rickel & Becker, 1997), defines family violence as “acts of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological maltreatment, chronic situations in which one person controls or intends to control another person’s behaviour; and misuse of power that may result in injury or harm to the psychological, social, economic, sexual or physical well-being of family members” (p. 73). An important aspect of family violence is
that the abuser uses his power advantage within the family to legitimize the abuse to the victim. In effect, the victim believes that she is responsible, or at the very least, that the abuser is not to blame for the violating actions.

Home is a place of objective danger for the child who experiences or witnesses violence within the family unit. Garbarino et al. (1992) tells of how “for Tamika, a child who has a confirmed diagnosis of gonorrhoea, home is not a safe place...” (p. 126). Tamika’s internal social map is adversely affected by the external experience of sexual abuse. Sheridan (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) shares her experience with family violence: “My real name is Monica Sheridan, but I go by my street name, which is Red.... I was molested by my uncle between the ages of four and eight. I was abused by my father. I ran away when I was eleven years old” (p. 61). Frequently, family violence forces the child to make a decision between two dangerous alternatives, life at home, or life on the streets (Webber, 1991).

Child abuse violates and robs an individual of childhood innocence in the most sacred of all institutions, the family. Kalmer (1977) defines child abuse as “... the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18 by a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare under circumstances which indicate the child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened” (p. 158). In the United States, five children die each day because of abuse and neglect, and family violence against children causes 18,000 serious disabilities each year, as well as 141,700 injuries. Moreover, incidences of child abuse continue to rise (Rickel & Becker, 1997). The US Department of
Health and Human Services (1993) states that of substantiated cases, “an average 8.9 children out of every 10,000 are abused in the home” (Kalmer, 1977, p. 45). Children who are victims of violence within the home - a place of security from the dangers of the larger world - are deeply wounded.

Statistics can only reveal the frequency but they say nothing about the reasons for domestic violence. Although no causes can claim legitimacy, there are a few correlates between increases in family stressors and instances of child abuse. Caregivers who normally have appropriate parenting skills may become abusive when they are under intense pressure. Richman (1998) argues that family violence “... occurs everywhere in the world; it is likely to rise in frequency when the family unit is under strain” (p. 20). Child abuse cases cannot be linked to any one demographic group, and there are examples of victimization across economic status, cultures and countries.

Poverty is an example of an issue influencing a family’s stress level. In the United States, parents and their children make up one third of all people in homeless shelters (Berck, 1992). A few other correlates that attempt to explain why child abuse happens are: substance use, the parents’ own experiences with childhood abuse, lack of education and unemployment (Rickel & Becker, 1997). Parents may lack the skills and resources to discipline their children properly. Some parents may have psychological disorders that may lead them to think that certain dangerous behaviours are acceptable. Although it is not the function of this paper to examine the causes of child abuse, it is important to acknowledge some of its correlates in order to understand fully the nature of the violence facing children who witness or experience violence.
Beyond direct victimization, a child can be harmed by domestic violence when she witnesses acts of aggression within the home. Rickel and Becker (1997) argue, “witnessing the abuse of a parent may be as harmful as being a victim of abusive behavior” (p. 74). Because of the parent-child bond, a child finds it difficult to make sense of the violence perpetrated by one caregiver against another (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Frequently, she feels that she should choose sides in disputes, adding even more confusion to her sense of place within the family. A child tends to learn aggressive behaviours from watching and mimicking her parents (Ogbu, 1981). She may adopt a tough demeanour as a way of protecting herself against the dangers around her. A child who witnesses violence within the family comes to accept that the home is not a place of safety.

Violence can enter into children’s homes in other ways as well. An attack within the home from someone outside the family unit is likely to make a child deeply afraid (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Children experience psychological strain when they witness a parent’s suicide. As Pynoos and Eth state, “nothing, perhaps, is more disillusioning to a child than becoming aware of a parent’s attempted suicide or death by suicide” (p. 34). Witnessing parents engaging in drug and alcohol abuse is another form of domestic violence. Children are inevitably drawn into the tragedies that surround such self-destructive behaviours. The strain of addiction is often correlated to an increase in abusive parenting techniques (Rickel & Becker, 1997). All of these examples are real threats to both children’s external and internal conceptions of safety within their home.
Neighbourhood Violence

A violent neighbourhood is any community where the safety of its citizens is in question due to empirical and subjective dangers caused by other people. These aggressors are often members of the same community. In the Western world, one of the clearest examples exist in the United States where some areas have become so dangerous that even emergency services are reluctant to enter (Canada, 1995). Unlike violence in the homes, community violence is strongly correlated to poverty and poverty-related problems (Garbarino et al., 1992).

For children, community danger negatively affects their daily routines and abilities to perform the functions of childhood, such as exploration, play and socialization. Garbarino et al. (1992), for example, recount the story of Lafayette and Pharoah:

As Lafayette and Pharoah played on the jungle gym in mid afternoon, shooting broke out. A young girl jumping rope crumpled to the ground. Lafayette ran into his building, dragging behind him one of the triplets. Pharoah, then seven, panicked. He ran blindly until he bumped into one of the huge green trash containers.... He pulled himself up and over, landing in a foot of garbage. Porkchop followed. For half an hour, the two boys huddled in the foul-smelling meat scraps and pizza boxes, waiting for the shooting to stop, arguing about when they should make a break for home. (p. 40).

For the child who lives in communal violence, childhood means that she must always be aware and fearful of her surroundings, because danger can occur at anytime, in any place.

The nature of dangerous neighbourhoods is rooted in the fact that the violence is unending and unpredictable. Canada (1995) explains, “for the handgun [young] generation there is no post traumatic stress syndrome because
there is no ‘post’... growing up under these conditions” (p. x). Canada (1995) argues that there is no post because the violence is never-ending. As in the case with violence in the home, a child living in a violent neighbourhood must develop in relation to the new and overwhelming experiences that surround him. “In coping with traumatic events, the child is forced into patterns of behaviour, thoughts, and feelings that are themselves ‘abnormal’ when contrasted to those of the untraumatized child” (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996, p. 40). Because the daily reality is rooted in chronic fear, a child can lack the concept of safety by which to measure the severity of the dangers that he faces.

There are many factors related to neighbourhood violence, and poverty is one of the most important examples. When a community is under economic hardship, and its members feel a communal sense of hopelessness, violence often results (Jones & Newman, 1997). Instead of cohesion, members must battle over the limited resources available to them. Rickel and Becker (1997) argue, “depravation, segregation, lack of opportunity, and other conditions to which children of poverty are exposed, particularly in inner cities, breed violent behaviour. Post-traumatic stress disorder has been documented in children living in environments where these conditions flourish” (p. 86). Although wealthier communities are also afflicted by violence, poverty commonly magnifies issues, or creates new ones where there were none. Moreover, because members of the community are themselves poor, they do not have the resources to invest in their neighbourhoods. Without a redistribution of wealth back into poor communities, the cycle of violence is likely to continue.
Public housing communities breed the conditions for neighbourhood violence. According to Garbarino et al. (1992), 1.6 million children in the United States lived in government-funded housing (p. 44). There are several reasons why these conditions are horrendous environments to spend one’s childhood. First, there is very little green space where a child can safely play, begging the question: “Is it possible for us to grow into full humanness in concrete canyons?” (Garbarino, 1988, p. 142). Second, Garbarino et al. (1991) comment that the “buildings and grounds are in constant disrepair... [and] many windows in the ten-story buildings are boarded up” (p. 134). Teachers and residents must cover windows to protect children from stray bullets, sending children the message that even adults are afraid. Third, schools are poorly equipped and the buildings are as unsafe and unsanitary as the homes in which the children reside. Because of fear and despair, most of the mothers interviewed in No Place to Be a Child said that living in public housing is like living in prison (Garbarino et al., 1991). People are congested and anxious, creating the perfect conditions for aggressive behaviours among community members.

Because of chronic violence and desperate poverty, ghettos tend to be geographically isolated from the more prominent neighbourhoods (Garbarino et al., 1992). Middle class values, which are derived from better job opportunities and educational experiences, are generally absent. Garbarino et al. (1992) comment that during the 1970s, the middle class fled the urban communities for the more spacious and secure suburbs. They argue that the middle class “helped maintain traditional values of education, work, and family stability, and buffered some of the worse effects of poverty” (Garbarino et al., 1992, p. 43). The poorer,
less-mobile families who were left behind lost connection with the influence of middle class stability. 

Generally, isolation makes members of violent and poor communities feel like pariahs within the greater society. Alienated and rejected from wealthier neighbourhoods, the situation of poverty often dehumanizes its victims, who can easily lose hope for a better life. Berck (1992) cites 16-year-old Maria P., who suggests this sentiment in her poem:

*In the Homeless Hotel*

Homeless we are called without a place to live,
Somewhere you can call a home
A place where we can give.
We are not pigs,
We're human beings with a race and creed.
We are not animals that just mate and breed...
Being homeless is the saddest thing,
Because some good people are suffering.
The banging on doors,
The screams in the night,
Even shootings on ground floors,
The pushers in flight...
But what about me?
Like you, I once had hopes and dreams.
But they're growing dim
... And I'm only sixteen. (p. 15)

The isolation that Maria expresses tends to perpetuate violent situations because community members have no one to turn to for help. Maria also conveys the fear people feel when living in such volatility. Jones (personal communication, November 3, 2002) suggests, “one harms another living human being as a result of desperate needs.” The people in poor and violent
neighbourhoods have very little resources with which to defend themselves against the danger of their communities.

People living in such desperation, fear and alienation logically feel a need to defend and protect themselves and their limited resources (Canada, 1998). The high number and power of weapons found in urban ghettos is correlated with the violence found there. Machel (2001) states that “the most widely used weapons of mass destruction are not nuclear or biological; they are the estimated 500 million small arms and light weapons that are fuelling bloodshed and mayhem around the world” (p. 119); 1 for every 12 people. The State of America’s Children Yearbook (as cited in Canada, 1995) reports: “A child dies from gunshot wounds every two hours while a police officer is killed by guns every five days and nine hours” (p. 145). Canada (1995) cites that between 1979 and 1991 the total number of children killed by guns in the United States reached nearly 50,000; more than the number of American soldiers that were killed in the Vietnam-American war (p. 67). As the numbers and power of weapons increase, so too does the severity of the violence.

Children are not only the perpetrators and the victims of neighbourhood violence, but they are also the witnesses. Garbarino et al. (1992) report that 40 per cent of 1000 Chicago high school and elementary school children had witnessed a shooting, 33 per cent, a stabbing and 25 per cent, a murder. “A visitor to Washington D.C., eighth-grade classroom asked the children, ‘How many of you know someone who’s been killed?’ Fourteen out of nineteen children in the class raised their hands” (Garbarino et al., 1992, p. 46). In Los Angeles, California, 10-20% of homicides are witnessed by children (Garbarino et
al., 1991). As in the case of family violence, witnessing neighbourhood violence has a lasting and adverse effect on a child’s development.

Narcotics and addiction are also major contributors to the violence found in ghettos. Garbarino et al. (1992) attest that “drug abuse is both the cause and effect of this deterioration” (p. 42). In other words, the amount of drugs available attracts more addicts, while the addicts’ demand increases the supply. Because of the illegality of drugs and the desperation surrounding addiction, drug dealers use violence as a means of controlling their market. When violence erupts because of drug-related disputes, innocent bystanders are often victims. As Maria (as cited in Berck, 1992) describes: “people would shoot out the window and we didn’t know if it was coming our way, so we would duck and hide on the floor. It was like Vietnam” (p. 56). Whether or not the culpability is found in the drugs or the addicts, narcotics are related to high levels of neighbourhood violence.

When a community is infested with large amounts of narcotics and addicts, there is an increase in drug use among young people (Canada, 1998). As a function of childhood, children learn behaviours by watching and emulating adults. When the adults around them are drug users, children associate this behaviour with being an adult. Using narcotics can even be accepted as part of the right of passage into adulthood (Canada, 1995). Because of the dangerous nature of the drug trade, children directly involved in narcotics are more likely to witness or experience violence.

Violence found in these communities creeps into the homes, lives and behaviours of the children forced to grow up in such dangerous conditions.
Family violence is correlated with the stress of raising children in violent communities (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Children learn aggressive behaviours on the streets and then bring those attitudes home, making disciplining a child an even greater challenge (Richman, 1998). Because of drug addiction and poverty, break-ins are common and sometimes deadly. In some cases, children are the perpetrators as they attempt to gain control and protect the limited resources available to them. Children develop their sense of selfhood in relation to the violence found in their communities.

**War and Conflict**

Children are caught in the midst of actual conflict where they are victimized by the aggression around them. Children either are innocent casualties in the wrong place at the wrong time, or they participate as soldiers (Machel, 2001). As well, children are exposed to violence when they flee their home for safety. Refugee camps are cesspools of poverty with warring factions living as neighbours fighting over limited resources (Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill, 1994). In any situation, war is terrifying for children, as 12-year-old Maida (as cited in UNICEF, 1994) from Yugoslavia demonstrates in her heart-wrenching poem:

War is the saddest word that flows from my quivering lips.  
It is a wicked bird that never comes to rest.  
It is a deadly bird that destroys our homes, and deprives us of our childhood.  
War is the evilest of birds, turning the streets red with blood, and the world into an inferno. (p. 39).
Wars and military operations create the conditions for horror and violence in children's lives. Political violence can erupt between two or more countries or between two or more factions within one border (Cairns, 1996). War is always socially constructed, and it is often institutionalized aggression. Cairns (1996) states, “at any one time in recent history children all over the world have been suffering in what may not have been defined legally as war” (p. 10). Unlike neighbourhood hostility, political violence disrupts communities that may have been previously secured for years (Richman, 1998). Obviously, war increases the intensity of former stressors, such as poverty, gender inequality, violence in the family and lack of opportunities (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Children and their families are suddenly forced into horrid situations, resulting in the loss of homes, security, limbs, and in some cases, lives.

In times of war, children’s safety and well-being are in jeopardy. 13-year-old Kazimir (as cited in UNICEF, 1994) remembers,

A grenade had landed on our shelter. We had to climb over the dead bodies to get out. Meanwhile the snipers kept shooting at us.

My father was one of those wounded and was taken away to the hospital. We’ve not seen him since, but I hope that he is still alive, perhaps in one of the detention camps.

I try not to talk about these things, but I get so upset and keep having nightmares about what happened. (p. 14).

Soldiers, often from both sides of the conflict, invade communities and commit heinous crimes against children and their families. “In times of war, children witness and experience terrible atrocities. The physical, sexual and
emotional violence to which they are exposed shatters their world. War undermines the very foundations of children's lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and breaking down their trust in adults” (Machel, 2000, p. 23). This report estimates that in the 1990's more than two million children died because of war, while six million were physically wounded and 20 million were displaced (p. 2). Although children are not involved in the decisions that cause political violence, they are directly affected by the fighting.

Perhaps the most devastating consequence of war is the child soldier: Defined as any person under the age of eighteen who is used for combat in any capacity (Cairns, 1996). UNICEF (2000) reports that roughly 300,000 children are exploited in conflicts as soldiers, servants and sex slaves. Children, sometimes as young as eight, are given weapons and trained to kill. As a function of childhood, children are eager to please adults, and therefore they are very easily indoctrinated. An abducted child soldier in the in northern Uganda describes:

I did learn some things when I was with the rebels. I learnt how to shoot, how to lay antipersonnel mines and how to live on the run. I especially knew how to use an AK-47 twelve inch, which I could dismantle in less than one minute. When I turned 12 they gave me an RPG because I had proved myself in battle. (as cited in Machel, 2001, p. 119).

Frequently, armies force children to commit dehumanizing acts as a way of forcing their loyalties. “In a number of cases, young people have been deliberately exposed to horrific scenes to harden them or to sever ties with their communities” (Machel, 2000, p. 7). Despite the efforts of many humanitarian aid organizations, the child soldier continues to exist.
Armies use children in active battle for a number of reasons. As a result of the number of casualties, armies may be forced to conscript soldiers at younger ages in order to meet their quotas. Some cultures have different perspectives on what constitutes childhood, thus it is acceptable to have people under eighteen trained as soldiers. The concept of the child soldier includes various boot camps and other junior army leagues that exist in many parts of the world, even first world nations (Cairns, 1996). Sadly, some children are recruited because they are considered expendable, cheap labour (UNICEF, 2000).

Whereas boys are typically targets for recruitment as soldiers, girls are used mainly for the sexual pleasure of male soldiers. According to Machel (2000, 2001), the number of cases of rape, sexual mutilation and assault increases dramatically during armed conflicts. A girl (as cited in Machel, 2000) abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Sierra Leon remembers:

I was defiled by some older boys [could not remember how many] when we were being marched to the rebel camp. After returning from Sudan, I was a wife to one rebel commander, then another junior commander and then two 'older' rebel soldiers. I had one child who died when he was a few days old. I was a slave to the rebels for 19 months. I do not think that I will marry again. (p. 17).

Girls are frequently named wife without ceremony or consent. This title is given by the male soldiers in order to declare a girl as their property (Machel 2000). When soldiers become tired of their wives, they may sell them to other men (UNICEF, 1996).

Because of poverty and violence, children are frequently sold into, or captured for sexual slavery. “In Guatemala, for example, some parents among internally displaced communities were forced to prostitute their children”
(Machel, 2001, p. 57). Many soldiers on leave buy sex from prostitutes, some of whom are under the age of 18 and not participants of their own free will. Although slavery and poverty begin to explain the supply-side of child prostitution, there is no explanation for the demand.

After the war ends, and the communities attempt to piece together their broken lives, land mines and unexploded ordinances still threaten children's safety and well-being (UNICEF, n.d.). 14-year-old Khaliq (as cited in Machel, 2000) was interviewed while he was receiving treatment for the loss of his leg after he stepped on a land mine near Kandahar in Afghanistan. He muttered over and over, "We were playing. We were playing" (p. 29). Many children share in Khaliq's mournful regrets.

While traveling through Cambodia in 1998, I was overwhelmed by the number of children who were missing limbs. Although the war had ended over twenty years ago, the country is littered with land mines and other explosives (UNICEF, n.d.). Children are often wounded or killed by land mines, and they commonly witness the injury or death of friends. "Land mines are indiscriminate weapons triggered by innocents and unsuspecting passers-by" (UNICEF, n.d.). Some of the bombs look like toys and lure the curious. Others remain buried or hidden until they are activated. The cruel reality for most of Cambodia's child amputees is that their future prospects are limited by their disabilities.

Children who are able to survive the horrors of actual conflict are usually able to do so because they flee their country. Some children escape with their families while others flee alone. Some refugees meet family members in the host
country but some enter a new world knowing no one (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). The lucky ones leave for a wealthy country, such as Canada, Great Britain or the United States. In these countries, refugees are able to benefit from government services that attempt to provide a normal life until the situation at home improves (Richman, 1998). The unlucky refugees, however, linger in camps where their safety remains constantly in question.

In a broad sense, a refugee is any individual who has fled from danger and/or oppression in one country or area and is resettling indefinitely in another. The Geneva Convention (1951) defined a refugee as: “people who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group are outside their country of nationality and are unable or unwilling to return to that country” (as cited in Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994, p. 29). Due to the violence in their own land, these individuals flee to another country seeking asylum.

Many children are persecuted because of their families’ beliefs or actions. “Refugees come from divergent backgrounds with varying experiences and reasons for seeking asylum, and the degree of political involvement varies between and within refugee groups” (Richman, 1998, p. 10). Macksound (1993) notes that many boys leave because they fear compulsory conscription. She discusses that families also send their girls to safer countries in order to protect them from rape and forced prostitution. Many times, the children have survived violent acts against them, and they may or may not have disclosed these experiences to their parents (Rutter, 1994). Refugee children and their families use all their energy, skills and money to seek safety outside their borders.
It is common for refugees to live indefinitely in a camp in a neighbouring country. Although immediate safety is achieved, the conditions are unusually horrible and degrading. People wait for government officials to decide over their fate, praying that the fighting will stop so that they can return home. Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill (1994) emphasize, “the impact of incarceration in a camp, no matter where or when, is dehumanizing” (p. 11). Families struggle to find comfort in over-crowded, makeshift homes with very little privacy (Rutter, 1994). There is rarely enough food and medical supplies for everyone and this can cause violence to explode among neighbours (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill). After the initial relief of immediate safety, children and their families must endure the boredom and helplessness of waiting for an unknown future.

The lack of ties also can cause stress within the family unit. Families worry about those who were left behind, or are anxious about violence and theft within the refugee camp. Under these conditions, adults lack the skills and energy to cope with both their stressful environment and raising their children. “Family disruption, the depression, and the poverty stimulate a lack of appropriate supervision” (Garbarino et al., 1991, p. 46). Beyond parents’ personal issues, there are the concerns about objective dangers that threaten their child’s well-being (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). A child can also learn that the family is not a place of safety, but rather a source of anxiety, sadness and violence.

Refugee camps are extremely traumatizing environments for children. Here, children witness and experience violence daily, as well as live in a state of constant instability (Garbarino et al., 1991). They may or may not attend a
temporary school, or school may be suddenly cancelled due to a lack of resources. Because of the vague status of being a refugee, friends that are with them one day may suddenly be gone the next (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994).

Moreover, the overcrowding found in the camps is a breeding ground for serious illnesses. "Close living conditions promote disease transmission - an outbreak of measles was in progress as we visited [a refugee camp in Cambodia]" (Garbarino et al., 1991, p. 46). Refugee camps do not provide the environment necessary for healthy growth and development, and the general sentiment is a feeling of being "halfway to nowhere for an eternity" (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994, p. 52).

Conclusion

Domestic abuse, community violence and war are unique in their specifics, yet several themes connect these sources of violence. In each situation, poverty, lack of opportunity and a sense of helplessness contribute to a rise in stress, which is correlated with an increase in violence. The general issues are often linked, even though the details of the correlates may vary from case to case.

The feeling of perpetual fear shared by children who witness or experience violence is also a common theme of external sources of violence. These children develop their conceptions of self and human values in relation to their dangerous environments. They learn about their world, create their viewpoint of reality and develop a sense of identity from within their home, community and/or country. The social maps they create in childhood affect their abilities for success and
happiness in the future. When their identity is created within a world of violence, children can respond negatively and the consequences can be horrifying.

Children can suffer as the victims, as well as the perpetrators of violence. Traumatized children are often alienated, afraid and dehumanized. The death of Eric Morse (Jones & Newman, 1997), a five-year-old boy from the South Side of Chicago, demonstrates the consequences of rearing children in chronically violent environments.

On Thursday, October 13, [10-year-old] Johnny and [11-year-old] Tyrone saw [5-year-old] Eric Morse and his older brother, Derrick [eight years old], outside of one of the high-rises in the Ida Bees [a poor and violent housing project in Chicago]. Johnny and Tyrone asked Eric and Derrick to come upstairs to look at their clubhouse - a vacant apartment on the fourteenth floor. The four shorties [children] went upstairs and pulled off the boards covering the door to apartment 1405. When they got inside, Johnny and Tyrone grabbed Eric and held him out of a window. Eight-year-old Derrick grabbed his bother and pulled him back in. Then Johnny and Tyrone took Eric to a second window and held him out. Derrick grabbed Eric again, but this time Tyrone bit Derrick's hand and he had to let go. Eric fell fourteen stories. Derrick ran down fourteen flights of stairs to try to save his brother - he thought that he could catch him before he hit the ground. Eric was pronounced dead ten minutes later. (p. 90).

The incident, which was apparently sparked by Eric's refusal to steal candy from a local grocery store, caused emotional impact that rippled through everyone in the Ida B. Wells community. None were as affected that day as the children, whose faith in humanity and safety was further shattered by the actions of their peers. Jones and Newman (1997) note bitterly that no counsellors were provided to help the children make sense of the violent death of a 5-year-old boy.
Fundamental experiences with violence have grave and long-lasting consequences. When a child learns that her world is unsafe, she will respond with behaviours and beliefs that will affect her mental, emotional and physical well-being. In order to understand the role of creativity as healing, it is crucial to recognize the consequences of these violent perceptions and realities for children who experience or witness violence. The next section will explore the qualities of creative engagement in terms of healing in order to juxtapose these qualities with the consequences of childhood trauma discussed in the previous chapter.
CHAPTER 3
CREATIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALING

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the various qualities and effects resulting from engaging in creative activities with the purpose of juxtaposing these with the conditions and experiences that occur because of violence. A major factor convincing educators to create conditions that invite children to engage in creative activities could be that the humanizing experiences resulting from these creative acts are the natural antidotes to the dehumanizing consequences of violence. Through a creative experience, children may come to achieve order in their inner experience.

For the purpose of this paper, creativity is defined as a form of self-expression. It recognizes the necessity of genuine skills and knowledge of the domain, as well as a reflection on experiences and inner imagination. In exploring this definition, I will explain the significance of creativity as a genuine process through a skilled practice. What is meant by healing and well-being will be explained through an exploration of the humanistic philosophy of self-actualization (Drews, 1974). Creativity, as I have chosen to define it, holds the potential to find wellness through increased self-esteem and engagement in the world.

Defining creativity in relation to self-actualization rests on the premise that inherent in the creative process is a potential for healing. Such an
assumption is different from the use of creative products as tools to help psychiatrists and other professionals interpret the needs of their patients. As Gardiner (Kramer, 1971) comments on Kramer's work: "For every child has creative drives which, if encouraged in an atmosphere of controlled freedom, can mean growth and satisfaction and joy, and a gain in self-esteem. To do something active and creative in this world ... is in itself therapeutic" (p. x). The belief behind a healing-centred definition of creativity is that purposeful engagement in the creative act can increase one's self-esteem and sense of meaning. Eva Zeisel (as cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) finds, "my craft helped me very much to make life meaningful, because once you make a pot and it is outside of you, it makes your life kind of justified and not flimsy. After all you go through, at the end you die, and it [creativity] makes life much more ... satisfying. It justifies your existence" (p. 230). By practicing a genuine and authentic open-ended creative process, one can become more engaged in life, which is a requirement for well-being.

Defining creativity as a process that can enable healing requires an exploration of both the concepts of healing and creativity. The definitions will be limited so that they relate only to the qualities of creativity as a potential for healing. These qualities are inherently humanizing, and once defined, they can be placed in opposition to the dehumanizing consequences of childhood trauma.

Many theorists describe the process of creativity, yet I have selected Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory on optimal experience because it is extremely comprehensive and helpful to my purposes. The essence of creativity as a potential for healing is rooted in the theory of art as therapy developed by Edith
Kramer and her mentor Fridel Dicker-Brandeis. With this understanding of creativity as a process that can empower healing, it is possible to recognize the relational polarity between the qualities of creativity and the consequences of childhood trauma.

Self-Actualization

Humanistic philosophers believe that human beings are born good and at peace with themselves and the world. People inherently possess the skills and abilities to function healthily in society. Maslow (as cited in Drews, 1971) comments, “I can see no evil in a baby, no malice, no sadism, no joy in cruelty, no guile, no phoniness or hypocrisy” (p. 91). The individual becomes alienated from himself, others and his environment because of negative socialization. He perceives life as isolated, which is related to an array of destructive emotional responses. “Solipsism, from solace, alone and ipse, self... is the hypothesis that the self is the only existent thing” (Barron, 1975, p. 147). Because of perceived isolation, the alienated individual is not able to live up to his full potential as a human being and is unable to make positive contributions to society. Generally, he leads an unfulfilled and unhappy life, which is to say that he is unhealthy.

The concept of healing can have different meanings depending on the paradigms and contexts with which one approaches the topic. For Csikszentmihalyi (1993), “becoming an active, conscious part of the evolutionary process is the best way to give meaning to our lives at the present point in time, and to enjoy each moment along the way” (p. 11). For the purposes of this paper,
the process of healing is defined as self-actualization, a philosophy intended to empower people to recover from the wounds inflicted by society; wounds such as the experience of childhood violence. Self-actualization "is an ability to move beyond the fulfillment of basic needs and to seek higher values" (Drews, 1974, p. 104). By accepting the definition of healing as self-actualization, one can explore the relationships between the consequences of trauma and the qualities of creativity.

Self-actualization can be defined in contrast to the alienation of solipsism. Barron (1975) comments that by becoming self-actualized, one "may break out of solipsistic confinement and participate in a human community in which spiritual evolution is being worked out, or, better, in which spiritual evolution of the species is recognized as the main task" (p. 148). Whereas survival instincts are the major determinate in an ordinary individual's life, self and societal existence and expansion of being are the motivational forces for the self-actualized person. Self-actualization is rooted in the development of self-acceptance, an awareness of one's surroundings and an empathetic relationship with others. Interpersonal relationships are genuine and profound and are a basis for further self expansion. Learning opportunities are recognized in all encounters within the self, others and the environment. "Such a person is more potentially aware, not only of the stimuli from outside, but of ideas and dreams, and of the ongoing flow of feelings, emotions, and physiological reactions that he or she senses from within" (Rogers, 1980, p. 127). The self-actualized individual is engaged in a life that is meaningful and exciting.
How does one move from the alienated individual to one who is self-actualized? Many humanistic thinkers consider creativity to be the most powerful of all human activities because it can promote healing by developing a sense that life is meaningful and engaging. “All of these men who are vanguard thinkers discuss creativity in the context of the needs of the individual to grow into a more adequate and mature person” (Drews, 1974, p. 93). Creative activity is viewed as the best remedy to the solipsistic sensations of alienation and loneliness. Barron (1975) has clearly found this to be the case: “My general thesis has been that creative imagination may reduce meaninglessness and mitigate the situation of ‘the self alone’. It does so through the great forms in which consciousness shows itself evolving: art, science, religion, community” (p. 155); in other words, creativity. Through participation in the creative process, the individual becomes engaged in a life that is purposeful, and it enables the individual to view her existence as meaningful and significant.

Similar to the humanistic understanding of creativity’s purpose, Edwards (2000) defines creativity in terms of Via Creativa, which are personal and universal truths discovered through a creative path. Edwards believes that by participating in the creative process, the participant can gain insight into greater universal truths. “The Via Creativa is a way of life in which a person creates in order to discover a deeper sense of self in relationship to the cosmos” (Edwards, 2000, p. 4). By traveling through the inner experience by means of the creative process, it is possible for the individual to gain new self-understanding and reconnect the self to the greater world.
The participant can come to the greater truths by two paths: The Left-Hand Path, and the Right-Hand Path. Edwards (2000) explains the Left-Hand Path through the writings of Ursula LeGuin. "LeGuin firmly believes that imagination is a sacred place, the bridge between mind and body, and a realm where the truth of ultimate things can begin to be revealed to the writer" (Edwards, 2000, p. 20). Her creative path leads her from an internal search for truth and self-understanding, to an external expression of her discoveries through writing.

The second path, the Right-Hand Path, is explained through the creative philosophy of John Updike. Updike determines truth from the external world, exploring these discoveries through the creative process. "Thus, Updike's writing process is a struggle between accepting the harsh reality of the world and making it liveable through the deceptions of fiction" (Edwards, 2000, p. 16). According to Edwards (2000), the aesthetic in either path of creativity brings order to the chaos of the universe, making it comprehensible and recognizable. Essentially, by participating in the creative process, it is possible for the participant to journey down a spiritual, healing path and gain a sense of humanization.

Although there are many ways that theorists approach the definition of creativity, self-actualization and concern for healing are essential to the context of this paper. Creativity is viewed as one of the most effective ways to heal from alienation caused by the destructive influences of socialization. The creative process can allow an individual to regain order within the self. "Through any genuinely creative expression and its self actualizing energy flow, we free ourselves" (Havelika, 1999, p. 218). Although healing can be defined within the
concept of self-actualization, simply employing any form of creativity will not necessarily lead an individual to change. A more refined definition is required to understand better what is meant by creativity as a potential for healing.

Process

Generally, there are three approaches to defining creativity: product, person or process. Healing, as it relates to creativity, tends to be found in the description of the creative process. The process approach is likely to exclude dangerous qualities found in the judgment of creative people and products. The risk of judgment lies in external expectations of the creative product and its creator, as well as a possible devaluation of the participant. Creativity within the context of healing involves recognition of the appropriateness of the creative product and its relevance within the greater purpose of self-actualization.

For the purposes of this paper, the definition of creativity is founded on the premise that creativity must be inclusive if it is to be viewed as a potential healing process. Inclusiveness means that all human beings are considered to possess the creative capacity to participate in both process and practice. “The claim here is that it is a natural part of being human to want to change the world, to experience this wish consciously, and to set about using whatever resources are available to do so” (Feldman, 1988, p. 289). The parameters of an inclusive process and practice distinguish a definition of creativity within the context of healing and provide for clarity when exploring the qualities of creativity as they are polarized from the consequences of childhood trauma.
Commonly, *creativity* and the word *creative* refer “to novel products of value, as in ‘The airplane was a creative invention’” (Weisberg, 1992, p. 2). Without the creative product, it is difficult to distinguish creativity from other forms of human expression. Bailin (1994) considers that the very idea ‘to create’ suggests that one “bring into being something which did not exist previously, or at least not in that form. It would not make sense to say that a person created if nothing is produced” (p. 63). Rogers (1962) also acknowledges that the definition of creativity should include a tangible product. “Though my fantasies may not be extremely novel, they cannot usefully be defined as creative unless they eventuate in some observable product - unless they are symbolized in words, or written in a poem, or translated into a work of art, or fashioned into an invention” (p. 65). The purpose of the product is simply as a reference to define creativity.

When considering creativity within the context of healing, concentrating a definition on product has limitations. Product-centred definitions of creativity tend to focus on extrinsic motivation, which can be dangerous to the quality of the process. “We define as extrinsic any motivation that arises from sources outside of the task itself; these sources include expected evaluation, contracted-for reward, external directives, or any of several similar sources” (Amabile, 1996, p. 119). Amabile’s (1996) *Intrinsic Motivation Principle of Creativity* finds that creativity appears to be enhanced when intrinsic motivation is encouraged. Under specific conditions, extrinsic motivation can decrease creativity levels and in some cases, the creative processes might be rendered inauthentic. Amabile found that extrinsic motivation is beneficial when the production of outcomes is important, but intrinsic motivation was more effective “at those heuristic stages
of the creative process where novelty is most needed” (p. 127).

Weiner (2000) further comments that in North America product-centred theories include a hidden cultural bias towards competition. He asserts, “competition, - not merely in terms of talent and quality but also in terms of resources for production, dissemination, and successful marketing - determines what will stand out” (p. 208). In most cases, Amabile (1996) and Weiner (2000) observe that competition detracts from the intrinsic motivational factors that can promote an authentic creative process.

A product-centred creative experience is contrary to the goals of the creative process as it relates to healing. When Csikszentmihalyi (1993) observes painters, he remarks “it seemed clear that what was so enthralling about painting was not the anticipation of a beautiful picture, but the process of painting itself” (p. xii). Creativity defined within the context of healing, the product is only of value in that it helps the individual find an authentic conclusion to a process of creative self-expression. The product-centred approach tends to focus on extrinsic motivation, which could undermine a healing-related definition of creativity.

A second common approach to defining creativity is to focus on the personality traits associated with those individuals who are considered creative. Many theories, particularly psychological and cognitive models, argue that certain personality characteristics and values allow some people to be more creative than others. Some person-focused definitions attempt to answer what creativity is by analyzing famous creators, while others compare two groups in order to define which characteristics are commonly associated with creativity.
Often, these theorists examine the unconscious psyche in order to account for the differences in creative individuals. Although the definition of creative traits varies slightly, two common examples are non-conformity and flexibility. Through controlled experiments, theorists like Torrence (1988) seek to define creativity by testing for these personality characteristics. Person-centred definitions of creativity explore the significance of the individual over the creative process or product.

Although Csikszentmihalyi (1988) recognizes that judging personality traits can add to an understanding of creativity, he believes that it is impossible to come to a definition solely from this perspective. He argues that when defining who is creative, one cannot be separated from the cultural values of her society. Setting objective standards to define creativity is limited by the subjectivity of the judges. Objective standards in a definition can never apply to examples of creativity across genres, cultures or time. “To study creativity by focusing on the individual alone is like trying to understand how an apple tree produces fruit by looking at the tree and ignoring the sun and the soil that support its life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p. 202). When considering creativity as it relates to healing, a person-centred focus might lead to exclusionary judgments that may weaken the main purpose of self-actualization.

Contrary to the purpose of creativity as it relates to healing, person-centred definitions are likely to judge the character of the creator. Many humanistic philosophers and psychologists argue that creativity is a characteristic granted to all human beings by virtue of being human (Drews, 1974). Bailin (1994) argues that creative thinking is simply a part of ordinary thinking and not
something that is granted only to geniuses. Sternberg (1988) believes that "creative thinking must be omnipresent in all of us, which means that it is neither necessary nor possible to increase anyone's capacity to be creative" (p. 172). For Csikszentmihalyi (1996) "to be human means to be creative" (p. 318). Defining creativity as a quantifiable concept can alienate people, limiting their participation in and pleasure from the process. The subjectivity of judging creative people is dangerous because it could deny an individual's creativity, which is argued to be an essential human quality.

Although judgment of personality traits may not benefit a description of creativity that includes healing, judgment remains necessary in order to define creativity in this way. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) states that without judgment "there is no way to get evidence for a 'creative' process taking place in a person's mind independent of social validation" (p. 203). Judgment, like the creative product, sets parameters around the concept of creativity. A lack of regulations would allow any product, person or process to be called creative. Without a positive and inclusive conception of judgment, it would be difficult to recognize a creative process.

Judgment is also essential to acquire and develop the skills necessary for participating in the creative process. Learning new skills requires a constant dialogue with and feedback from the instructor. Teachers, for example, often comment on a student's work and abilities in order to help the student improve her skills. In the end, the student might find that it is easier to express her creative ideas because the teacher has helped her to develop her abilities. The content is up to the student, but the teacher's instruction and judgment might
enable the student to develop the necessary talents to go beyond what she had done in the past, yet while remaining recognizable within a form.

Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990, 1993, 1996) provides an explanation for educational judgment found in the creative process. He (1988) argues, “creativity is not an attribute of individuals but of social systems making judgments about individuals” (p. 198). His system theory is based on the interaction between a domain, field and the individual. The domain is the genre of creativity, for example art, physics or ice dancing. He defines the field as the group of experts responsible for judgment. They must be knowledgeable about the domain in order to have a legitimate recognition of what is and is not creative within that context. In art, for example, the field is the gallery owners, the critics and the media. Finally, this system necessitates the individual: the artist, the physicist or the ice skater.

The three components interact within one another, creating a systemic approach to defining creativity; one in which judgment is qualified by cultural values. In this system, the field defines the requirements for creativity in the given domain. The individual may begin developing these skills due to a personal interest, however in order to be recognized by the field, she must have a strong proficiency in that domain. The lasting significance of her recognition depends greatly on whether or not she is able to go beyond what was done before in that domain. The creator’s novelty is limited by the field’s ability to recognize the appropriateness of her creativity. The field “decides whether an individual performance that departs from the standard rules of the domain is ‘creative’ and thus should be added to the domain, or whether it is simply ‘deviant’ and thus
should be ignored or censored” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p. 201). By incorporating a systematic approach to defining creativity, Csikszentmihalyi is able to account for the cultural values that affect judgment.

The importance of judgment in the definition of creativity depends on the purpose of those defining it. Generally, judgment is important for theorists who define creativity as special talent creativeness (Drews, 1974). What is important for special talent creativeness, or big C creativity is the development of a great work that might shift paradigms in the chosen genre. For such distinguished products and persons, judgment is essential for creating criteria as to what is and is not notably creative.

The goal of a healing-centred definition of creativity is not to find special talents but to create a sense of engagement within alienated individuals participating in the creative process. Maslow (as cited in Drews, 1974) terms such a definition of creativity as self-actualizing creativeness (p. 104). Judgment should be limited to an interaction between individual, field and domain so that it helps the individual to achieve the goal of self-actualization. Products and person-centred approaches are generally more concerned with discovering and defining the big C creativity of great historical works. Judgment in this instance is limited to simply enabling the individual to engage in a practice of creative processes with the hope of achieving self-actualization.

Product and person approaches still have relevance to a healing-centred description of creativity, but these approaches are not central to the definition. Rather than question what and who has or lacks creativity, the process approach focuses on the how in order to define creativity: how does the meandering of
human imagination transform into something more tangible? The creative process is more mysterious than creative products or personality traits because it is difficult to set up tests and generate experiments that might answer the how question. There are no concrete rules that one can use to know when creativity is occurring. The process approach explores the creative thought progression that must address traits in order to gain insight into a definition of creativity.

Generally, the creative process is viewed as an interaction between the individual’s inner and external worlds. His environment includes both present and past experiences. For example, the creative process might involve an individual’s emotional response to a violent experience during childhood. Rogers (1962) defines the creative process as one that grows “out of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people or circumstances of his life on the other” (p. 65). A healing-focus approach to a creative process should incorporate all aspects of the creator, including issues that may have caused feelings of alienation. The process is focused on the relationship between his external environment and his internal understandings of himself.

Unlike the person and product-centred approaches, most process-centred definitions are founded in the humanistic philosophy. Most humanistic thinkers firmly believe that creativity is inclusive; that all human beings possess the basic capacity to be creative. They “see creativity as a distinct human quality and thus one that must be cherished and fastened” (Drews, 1975, p. 96). From this premise, most humanistic creative theories focus on the process because of the general concern with human means and systems over ends and products. Drews (1974) comments that for most humanistic thinkers, the importance of creativity
is that the process brings about a sense of personal transformation. “Humanistic psychologists ... are more concerned about the quality of life, inner and outer, than with the invention or creation of scientific artifacts or aesthetic productions” (Drews, 1974, p. 96). They often consider the creative process to be an on-going means to an end greater than the products that may result.

In humanistic thinking, the creative process develops relationships between the individual and the world, potentially countering the alienating consequences of negative socialization. “We may as well admit at the beginning that psychology knows very little about special talent of the genius type. I shall say nothing more about it, confining myself instead to that more widespread kind of creativeness which is the universal heritage of every human being that is born, and which seems to co-vary with psychological health” (Maslow, 1976, p. 87). Engaging in a creative process connects the individual to others, which might help to mitigate the alienation and sense of insignificance from living in such a large universe. The process of creativity can engage an individual to find happiness and inner peace.

When juxtaposing the qualities of creativity as a possible healing process against the consequences of trauma, one must begin with a definition that emphasizes a process-approach. Because of the potential danger of external motivating factors, such as the competition and judgment found in other approaches, a process conception has greater potential to offset the negative and dehumanizing consequences of childhood violence. In this way, the process of creativity might potentially be a mechanism for healing; a point that I will explore further in the next chapter. This being said however, the process approach is an
incomplete definition. In order for creativity within the context of healing to be truly understood, further parameters must be considered.

Practice

Along with a process-centred approach to defining creativity within a context of healing, it is also important to recognize creativity as a practice. A practice means that the creative process must be an on-going activity, one that is repeated beyond the completion of just one product. For example, an individual might paint one picture, thus demonstrating that he completed the creative process. However, in order for creativity to be considered a potential for healing, the process must be practiced and incorporated into his routine. The individual will never proclaim that he has now accomplished creativity. In order for creativity to relate to self-actualization and healing, he must continue to paint as a continuous method of being genuinely engaged in the world.

Walberg (1988) compares practicing the creative process to the *Matthew Effect* from Merton's economic theory: “‘To him hath’, according to Matthew, in the Bible, ‘shall be given, and he shall have abundance’” (p.344). Merton claims that in order to become wealthier, a person must first have the capital to invest. The experience gained from and the money made on that investment could then be used to further increase an individual’s wealth. In other words, it takes money to be able to make money, and making money often takes time and experience.

Walberg (1988) extends Merton’s theory of the *Matthew Effect* to creativity, beginning with the premise that all human beings are born with the
basic capital to be creative. The more that parents, teachers and the rest of society invest in a child's creative capital, the more likely that child will be proficient in expressing creativity. “With respect to creativity, something more than mastery, it can be imagined that early encouragement, specific goals, clear attainments, continued effort, and appropriately high standards are required” (Walberg, 1988, p. 350). The child learns to value and enjoy her creative capacities as she continues her creative practice. As Kramer (as cited in Hofstadter, 1974) comments, “there is but one way to practice creativity, namely to practice it. Practice means: imagine what to do and try to do it; then observe what you have done, comparing it with what you had imagined, and consider what is next to be done and then do it; and so on” (p. 146). With practice, an individual will have more experience to draw on for future creative endeavours, increasing the complexity and depth of her practice.

However, practicing creativity is not enough for this process to bring about potential wellness. It can only have potential healing qualities when the participant makes a genuine commitment. Kramer (1971) states, “we must remember that only those things that are emotionally invested have reality in art” (p. 119). When defining creativity as healing, it is important to respect the need for authenticity in a creative practice.

How does one gain authenticity in a process of creativity? Kramer (1971) considers creativity to be healing only when the creator is engaged sincerely in the process. Otherwise, she argues, artwork is stereotyped and the process is not particularly helpful. Authenticity is achieved through repetition of the creative process, and its skills until both are intricately connected to the creator's identity.
Kramer (1971) observes that in the beginning of a creative practice, all people desire to create artwork that is pleasing and easy. The creator must go through this process of producing stereotyped art, copying, identifying with negative images and repeating old work before the potential healing process of creativity begins. “The only way one learns to paint is to paint. Experience has the last word” (Kramer, as cited in Hofstadter, 1974, p. 146). To prevent banality from occurring, the creative process should be practiced purposefully and continuously.

Included in this practice is some knowledge of what existed previously in that domain. To be an effective writer, it helps to have read moving and inspiring pieces. Sternberg (1988) claims, “it is impossible to have novel ideas about something if one knows nothing about it” (p. 137). Weisberg (1988) comments that creativity is defined as originality that goes beyond what was done before. In order for an individual to expand his abilities, he must learn new skills and knowledge. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) remarks, “one cannot be creative without learning what others know but then one can’t be creative without becoming dissatisfied with that knowledge and rejecting it (or some of it)” (p. 90). An individual is likely able to express himself better through writing if he has read the great works of other writers. In this way, he may be able to speak with authority and intention, which could potentially allow for healing to begin.

Connected to the importance of knowledge is developing the necessary skills so that the process results in an authentic and purposed expression. Bailin (1991) confirms that contrary to common belief, the practice of creativity is not carefree and chaotic. Rather, its details must be deliberate and methodical.
Through practice of the creative process, skills become tools for creative expression. Bailin (1994) concludes; “rules, skills and knowledge are indispensable to creative achievement. In them is embodied the practice of the discipline at the specific moment and mastery of them is vital to the advancement of the tradition” (p. 106). Although she speaks of the larger concept of creativity, this same argument is relevant for individuals seeking healing through the creative process. Skills and knowledge must be developed in order to practice the process of creativity in a genuine and intentional way.

The key here is that the individual should be at ease with the mode of communication and self-expression that works best for him. His struggle should not be with the techniques but with the content. Since it takes great courage to express one's understanding of self in relation to one's past, energy should be spent on maintaining the authenticity of the subject rather than abilities. Vincent van Gogh practiced his creative process by drawing “repeatedly till there is one drawing that is different from the rest, which does not look like an ordinary study, but more typical and with more feeling.... I say this because I want you to know that if you see something worth while in what I am doing, it is not by accident but because of real intention and purpose” (Miller, 1988, p.54-55).

Practicing the process is the most effective way to overcome the challenges of technique and skills, and this may allow the individual to find healing in the creative process.

Imagine an individual who is able to engage in the world by creating mathematical patterns. This creative process is only possible because this person began by learning basic principles. Beginning in childhood, she accomplished
certain skills in problem solving until they became second nature to her. Through influential teachers, and because of her own interest, she learned about the theories and lives of previous mathematicians. As she accomplished these skills and gained this knowledge, she begins to identify herself as a mathematician. Prince (1975) emphasizes, “that both learning and problem solving are necessary for achievement which in turn is necessary to human satisfaction and self-esteem. This, of course boils down to: creative activity necessary to self-esteem” (p. 249).

By practicing her creative domain, our imagined mathematician can discover self-understanding through the practice of a genuine and skilled creative process. Her skills allow her “to experience the power in self expression and creative processing that results in a product which the creator feels is significant and worthy and representative of the creator’s inner vision” (Mamchur in conversation, 2002). She may never contribute new concepts and theories to the domain of mathematics, but she may become more engaged in her world and happy with herself and her existence.

Optimal Experience

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1993, 1996) theory of optimal experience more completely describes this process of creativity as it relates to healing. His focus is on happiness, the definition of which is exceptionally similar to the sense of wellness or healing described through the self-actualization of humanistic theorists. Through Csikszentmihalyi’s explanation of the creative experience, I
hope to demonstrate an understanding of the oppositional factors that create a relationship between the qualities of creativity and the consequences of violence.

Optimal experience is defined as that moment when an individual feels that life is in perfect order; it is the merging of the self with a greater significance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) believes “optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery - or perhaps better a sense of participation in determining the content of life - that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness” (p. 4). During moments of optimal experience, the individual is fully engaged in her world and is at the peak of confidence in herself and her abilities. Like Maslow (1976) and Rogers (1962, 1980), Csikszentmihalyi also believes that the experience of meaninglessness is common among human beings. However, optimal experiences allow the individual to control her thoughts, fate and future. The feeling of order found in creativity is exhilarating, deeply enjoyable, and potentially healing.

Although Csikszentmihalyi (1996) discusses many activities that are related to optimal experiences, one of the clearest examples is engagement in creativity expression. Creative experiences contain the conditions that can involve an individual in an optimal experience. For Csikszentmihalyi (1996), creativity is defined as when “a person has not only met some prior expectation or satisfied a need or desire but also gone beyond what he or she has been programmed to do and achieve something unexpected, perhaps something even unimaginined before” (p. 46). Through creative engagement, the individual might have the courage to extend beyond what society and the self conceive to be that individual’s potential (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). The optimal experience is a
process by which the individual can gain a sense of doing something new and appropriate, granting him wisdom of purpose, which might heal him from past dissatisfaction and trauma.

The concept of happiness and healing through optimal experience may appear simple; yet creating such an experience can be quite complex. Optimal experience requires such total and genuine focus on a creative activity that the world and time seems to disappear. However, how the optimal experience functions is more complicated.

The theory of optimal experience begins with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 1996) concept of consciousness. He asserts that consciousness is controlled by both the biology of the brain and by individual self-direction, or free will. Csikszentmihalyi's model of consciousness dictates that the brain collects information from both the individual's internal and external worlds. Once the information has been collected, consciousness allows the brain to evaluate and act. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) explains, "without consciousness we would still 'know' what is going on, but we would have to react to it in a reflexive, instinctive way" (p. 24). Csikszentmihalyi's conception of consciousness enables human beings to be complex creatures capable of imagination, destruction, creativity and trauma.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993, 1996), it is impossible for an individual's consciousness to focus constantly on all available stimuli. Rather, the individual must use his attention to focus on what information should appear in the consciousness. "It is attention that selects the relevant bits of information from the potential millions of bits available. It takes attention to retrieve the
appropriate references from memory, to evaluate the event, and then to choose the right thing to do” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 31). Attention determines what will, or will not register in the mind, and this focus is essential in order to participate in the practice of creativity. Attention keeps the mind from acting haphazardly. “What we recall is not random, but is directed by numerous constraints, both explicit and implicit. The fact that we are able to recall an idea which will meet multiple criteria provides the explanation for how we are able to search effectively - of how, for example, a poet can come up with the right word without examining myriad alternatives” (Bailin, 1994, p. 75). Attention is a necessary function because it is impossible for the mind to include all available information when evaluating the external or internal experience.

If the individual finds the activity personally relevant to his purposes, he will focus his attention towards that end. From her teaching experience, hooks (1994) observes, “all students, not just those from marginalized groups, seem more eager to enter energetically into classroom discussion when they perceive it as pertaining directly to them” (p.87). An individual is likely to become disengaged from his activity if he does not care about it. Such a lack of interest will not lead him to an optimal experience, but will rather leave him feeling isolated and lonely.

To clarify this concept, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) gives the example of a person driving a car. When a driver is first learning, his full attention is focused on the operation of the vehicle; his driving is slow and deliberate. He is engaged in the act of driving because he is concerned about his safety. As he becomes more comfortable however, his attention focuses on other activities, such as his
cell phone, the radio or his lunch. He no longer finds relevance in concentrating all of his attention on the activity. When something unusual happens, such as spotting a police car, he is required to reengage his full attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 30-31). The driver’s attention shifts depending on the personal importance of the activity.

Out of all the information that attention enables the brain to collect, some things are considered important, some less so and some are ignored all together. The order that an individual organizes data depends on what she values, and this order will affect her feelings about the stimulus. “The outside event appears in consciousness partly as information, without necessarily having a positive or negative value attached to it. It is the self that interprets that raw information in the context of its own interest, and determines whether it is harmful or not” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 38). Ordering thoughts and stimuli happens so rapidly that most people do not even recognize the process. Yet, this ordering of information has a positive or a negative effect on an individual’s sense of well-being.

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1993, 1996) description of consciousness, attention and order is remarkably similar to Garbarino et al.’s (1992) conception of the social map; both notions describe the way in which the individual views the world and her place in it. Although the brain collects data, the social map (Garbarino et al) or consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi) creates order from all the available information. For some individuals, the order created within their social map or consciousness leads them to interpret their lives in a way that creates a positive sense of self.
Kramer (1971) describes the potential negative effect that ordering can have on an individual’s sense of wellness. “Deeply damaging events engender a powerful compulsion to repeat them. The individual looses the capacity to perceive new situations objectively. Instead he is inclined to interpret them in terms of past experiences, to respond to them in distorted ways, or to distort them to fit his compulsive needs” (p. 39). As Garbarino et al. (1992) discussion about the social map, not all people process and order information in a way that allows them to conceive and achieve beneficial goals. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) notes that both internal and external experiences affect the order of consciousness and this can have either a negative or a positive effect on the individual’s sense of happiness, as well as his ability to heal from traumatizing events.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993, 1996) claims that unless otherwise controlled by attention, the brain will wander chaotically, which is an extremely unpleasant psychological state.

When no external stimulation engages attention - such as a conversation, a task that must be accomplished, a newspaper to be read, or a program on TV - thoughts begin to drift randomly. Instead of pleasant, logical thread of mental experiences, disconnected ideas appear out of nowhere, and even if we make an effort to do so, it is impossible to return to a coherent line of thought for more than a few minutes. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 32).

Csikszentmihalyi (1993) gives the example of prisoners who reported that their minds inevitably wandered in crazed and jumbled ways while they were in solitary confinement. The absense of external or internal stimulus leaves the
consciousness without a system of order. When consciousness lacks attention and focus, the mind tumbles uncontrollably into psychic chaos.

Rather than allow the consciousness to ramble haphazardly, attention is generally attracted to the negative, termed psychic entropy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996). “The normal condition of the mind is chaos.... When attention is not focused ... the mind typically begins to be filled by disjointed and depressing thoughts” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 190). Csikszentmihalyi (1993) claims people focus on unfavourable thoughts because more potentially negative options. He provides the example of one’s health. The positive option is simple: good health. The negative possibilities are somewhat endless: various diseases, murder, accidental death, suicide and so on.

Csikszentmihalyi (1993) explains that there is an evolutionary function for this depressing focus. “The mind turns to negative possibilities ... because this is the best way, on average, to anticipate dangerous situations” (p. 35). As a function of human evolution, it is important that people are prepared to battle the dangers found in nature. Therefore, not only is the modern human subjected to this natural, evolutionary inclination towards the negative, but as well, the consciousness is simply exposed to negative alternatives (Csikszentmihalyi).

The consequence of psychic entropy is that an individual perceives the universe as a dangerous and lonely place. This concept is exceptionally similar to Barron’s (1975) discussion of solipsism, and both theorists describe the individual as having “a feeling that there is no meaning to life and that existence is not worth going on with” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 12). Attention on the negative creates conflict in consciousness that causes the emotional stress in the
individual. Dissatisfaction wastes psychic energy, and the individual loses interest in participating in life’s experiences. “Moreover, the subjective experiences of fear, anger, and so on are unpleasant; thus the more often we have them, the more miserable life becomes” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 37). The longer that an individual allows her consciousness to remain in a state of psychic disorder, the more challenging it becomes to regain control over it. Like the self-fulfilling prophecy, she will interpret situations and events so that they reinforce her negative viewpoint.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993, 1996) notes that psychic entropy manifests in two forms: anxiety and boredom. Anxiety is the emotional response to the perception that life’s challenges are too overwhelming to handle. Situations of chronic danger, such as described by Garbarino et al. (1992), result in the anxious response of trauma, which is the inability to make sense of the violence to which one is exposed (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) remarks that if “trauma is severe enough, a person may lose the capacity to concentrate on necessary goals” (p. 202). Anxiety causes individuals to become fatalists, believing that they are powerless to change the direction of their lives. Anxious individuals are unlikely to conceive of and achieve goals, leaving them both unhealthy and unhappy.

Another form of psychic disorder is boredom, which is the perception that life offers no significant challenges. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) describes that “people report feeling most listless and dissatisfied when they are alone with nothing to do” (p. 33). The longer an individual is apathetic, the more he lacks the attention to imagine and accomplish any new significant goals. A bored
individual is disinterested in life's problems. His fatalism leads him to believe that he can do nothing, thus perpetuating his listlessness. Because he perceives life as meaningless, he is likely to turn to drugs or television to ease the discomfort of indifference (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). The consequence of such solipsistic endeavours is a furthered sense of apathy and psychic stress.

Although Csikszentmihalyi (1993, 1996) uses this term boredom, the concept of disengagement better describes the emotional response of individuals affected by trauma. The overwhelming external experiences caused by exposure to violence often lead affected individuals to turn away from the world. Rather than being involved in the optimal experiences that make life meaningful, such individuals might hide emotionally within themselves; by becoming anti-social or depressed; or by engaging in activities and narcotics that will numb them from their disengaged perspectives on life. The indifference does not come from a feeling of superiority that is often connected with the term boredom, but from a disengagement of an overwhelming world (in conversation with Mamchur, 2002).

An individual's perception of self in relation to external events dictates the quality of her response, either negatively or positively. As a fatalist, she is doomed merely to react to external events, leaving her feeling helpless or anxious in the absence of control. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) comments that:
If one assumes that external events must determine psychic outcomes, then it makes sense to see the neurotic response to suffering as normal, and the constructive response as ‘defence’.... But if one assumes that people have a choice in how they respond to external events, in what meaning they attribute to suffering, then one can interpret the constructive response as normal and the neurotic one as a failure to rise to the challenge. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 239).

Often, boredom, disengagement or anxiety leads an individual to believe that she is helpless to the decisions being made around her. When that individual is able to change her internal perception so that she perceives that choices exist, then she moves closer to an optimal experience. Despite external circumstances, her internal perceptions of existence are crucial to finding a sense of healing.

It is possible that just as an individual’s perceptions can be negative, she can also perceive life as positive and meaningful. To do this, she must gain control over her consciousness and engage in the world so that she is neither bored, disengaged, nor anxious. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) asserts, “people who learn to control their inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy” (p. 2). In order to perceive life as meaningful, the individual must focus attention on something significant and gratifying, such as a creative expression. Through the practice of a creative process, it is possible to control the mind’s natural inclination to focus on the negative.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes this control over the inner experience as a sensation that the world and the self are in a state of flow. He defines flow as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great
cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (p. 4). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) believes that any individual can experience flow by participating in an engaging activity. Moreover, he recognizes that flow appears to affect everyone in virtually the same way, regardless of individual or cultural differences. “One of the most often mentioned features of this experience is the sense of discovery, the excitement of finding out something new about oneself, or about the possibilities of interacting with the many opportunities for action that the environment offers” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 177). The description of flow is remarkably similar to the qualities of creativity, which emphasize the significance of the creative process in achieving an optimal experience. When an individual is in a state of flow, the world is in focus and this provides him with clarity of thought, solidarity of meaning and a sense of purpose in life.

Flow can be healing because it tends to counter the psychic entropy harmful to identity and self-esteem. Creative expression enables a person to capture the sense of flow essential to the optimal experience. By countering psychic entropy, flow found in the creative process might allow an individual to control his inner experience. “A person can make himself happy, or miserable, regardless of what is actually happening ‘outside’, just by changing the contents of consciousness” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 24). Not only does the individual’s perspective change, but controlling the consciousness can also lead him to make the external choices necessary for a more fulfilling life. Kramer (1971) comments, “creative work can help a child master anxiety and make emotional preparations for change” (p.65). Engagement and flow can lead to the discovery or rediscovery of a meaningful existence, bringing the individual closer to self-actualization.
The creative process is related to healing in that it enables the participant to practice controlling the consciousness, which can lead to an optimal experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) comments that a “person can make himself happy, or miserable, regardless of what is actually happening ‘outside’, just by changing the contents of consciousness” (p. 24). During a creative exercise, the participant is able to reduce his external and internal worlds into smaller, more understandable symbols (Kramer, 1971). Through creativity, he has the space to reflect upon his experiences.

Because of its similarity to flow, Kramer's (1971) interpretation of Freud's theory of sublimination can provide greater insight to the understanding of optimal experience. Like Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993, 1996) and Barron (1975), Kramer (1971) notes that human beings often experience life as meaningless because of an exposure to negative stimuli. Disturbing experiences, such as childhood violence can create chaotic energy in the psyche. Catastrophic energy related to negative experiences is rooted in the same emotions Csikszentmihalyi (1996) describes: fear, anxiety, sadness, loss of purpose, meaninglessness, hatred, anger and so on. Generally, these forces build up inside the individual until they erupt externally. The explosive nature of this energy often destroys any objects, people and even aspects of the self that the individual believes to represent blame for her sufferings. Because of the uncontrolled nature of these explosions or implosions, the consequences are not often productive or socially constructive.

About half way through my contract at the Guatemalan orphanage, someone donated a metal play structure complete with a slide, swings and
monkey bars. The repairman spent several hours while the children were in school, firmly planting the base of this structure into the yard. Just before the children returned, I went to see this new toy. It stood securely in the ground, shiny and glorious, and I was very excited to watch the children as they discovered the new games that this toy could inspire.

Unfortunately, the play structure did not survive long enough for new games to be discovered. It was subjected to the only game the children ever played. They jumped on the slide until it hung from its hinges; they threw rocks at other children hanging from the money bars; and they spun the swings around the supporting bar until the chains snapped. It took only three days before the remains of the silvery new structure had to be removed from the yard because it was no longer safe for anyone to play on it.

Kramer (1971) suggests that this explosive energy is extremely powerful and if the individual could redirect it into a more constructive and creative end, then the individual could avoid the catastrophic consequences of uncontrolled psychic forces. Sublimation is this redirection of energies, and Kramer (1971) describes it as "chaotic aggressive energy ... channelled into constructive action" (p. 81). Miller (1988) also notices the need for injured individuals to release traumatic energy. "Suicide, addiction, criminal behaviour, terrorism, and participation in organizations that sexually exploit children all can provide this kind of outlet - unless ... one can find it in creativity" (p. 43). Like Csikszentmihalyi's (1990, 1993, 1996) idea of control of consciousness, sublimination is the redirection of awareness from one subject to another, which is a shift in psychic energy towards a positive flow.
For Kramer (1971), the practice of a creative process is essential for creating sublimination, and that both are necessary for healing. By expressing chaotic energy through art, she believes that the individual can shift inertia and anxiety towards self and life satisfaction. “Creative behavior is then an overt manifestation of sublimation, an unconscious process through which libidinal or aggressive energies are converted into culturally sanctioned behaviors” (Taylor & Getzels, 1975, p. 5). Like Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1993, 1996) flow, this energy redirection from creativity can bring about optimal experiences and healing.

In order for an individual to experience flow or enable him to redirect negative energies towards a more positive end, there must be definite and clear conditions set. The practice of a creative process is one example of an activity that has the necessary conditions to create a flow or subliminal experience. Through the merging of action and awareness, flow demands specific goals and constant feedback, as well as a balance between skills and challenge.

Unlike the inattentive and chaotic drifting of psychic entropy, flow activities create a merging between the individual’s actions and his self-awareness. “The essence of flow is a highly concentrated mental state focused on the task in hand where the mind and body work effortlessly and pleasurably as one” (Mann, 2001, p. 36). Because flow experiences require intense concentration, the body and inner self merge, and the self becomes defined by the activity. Awareness of the self is lost in this total focus in the flow experience. The ego or the self is completely absorbed in the activity until the two are inseparable - the individual is the activity and the activity is the individual. Spencer (1952) for example, explains that the “problem of creative writing is
essentially one of concentration, and the supposed eccentricities of poets are usually due to mechanical habits or rituals developed in order to concentrate” (p. 113). Conceptions of time become distorted, and what feels like minutes may actually be hours. During the flow experience, concentration is so focused that the individual is unaware of self, time and surroundings beyond what is connected to the creative activity.

Concentration can enable the individual to regain a perspective of the negative because it is held in light of the new positive order the process has created within the consciousness. A dancer (as cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) emphasizes the importance of concentration in a flow activity: “Your concentration is very complete. Your mind isn’t wandering, you are not thinking of something else; you are totally involved in what you are doing.... Your energy is flowing very smoothly. You feel relaxed, comfortable and energetic” (p. 53). As this process becomes a practice, a more positive perspective can become the normal state of mind. The self is redefined in terms of this new focus, and confidence increases with each pleasurable engagement in flow.

Whereas psychic entropy is defined by its lack of goals and sense of isolation, flow necessitates a clear goal and plenty of feedback. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) remarks, “unless a person learns to set goals and to recognize and gauge feedback in such activities, she will not enjoy them” (p. 55). Focusing on the creative process requires an imagined goal that the individual can work towards. The objective is necessary in order to know when the activity is completed. “[The artist] will not know precisely what the work will look like, but he must know when he has arrived at a result which is satisfactory” (Bailin, 1994, p. 70). The
artist who has no end in mind at the beginning of the creative exercise must still have some idea when the process is complete. Otherwise, the experience of creativity would be ceaseless and tiring and not at all the pleasure that it is described to be. The process of flow is self-affirming because achieving goals validates the individual's existence, and this can reverse the feeling of apathy experienced in psychic entropy.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) comments that psychic disorder is often described as the perception that life provides too few or too many challenges. In other words, people suffering from psychic entropy feel that they are either bored or anxious. The feeling of flow, however, develops when an activity is balanced between the challenge of engaging in the activity and the individual's skills and talents. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) observe, “when high challenges are perceived to be matched with high skills - a subjective condition we have come to call flow- that a person experience the highest levels of well being” (p. 196).

Amabile (1996) notes that in order for an individual to be engaged in an activity, he must be challenged. If the activity is too easy, then he will lack interest, and if the activity is too difficult, then he will feel stressed. It is within this expanse between boredom and anxiety that the perfect balance for flow and engagement can be found.

The condition of flow that requires a balance between skills and challenge is related to another quality of the optimal experience: the complexity of being. “Following the flow experience, the organization of the self is more complex than it had been before” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p .41). As the disengaged person becomes proficient in an activity, she must increase the challenge in order for the
activity to maintain her interest. As the activity becomes more complicated, she must then seek further information and experiences from varying sources to improve her skills, thus accomplishing her task. The increased complexity of being might bring her closer to becoming a self-actualized person. Finding harmony between an individual's skills and the activity's challenge has a profound potential for healing because it enables the solipsistic individual to engage in the world as a more complex being.

The complexity of being necessary to a genuine flow experience is rooted in the qualities of differentiation and integration (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Differentiation begins with the time and effort required for the acquisition of new skills; the individual's identity becomes intricately tied to her new abilities. As her skills become more complex, her identity becomes increasingly distinct. She gains a talent that not everyone shares, and she is able to identify the self as unique and special. She has the increased sense of self-satisfaction that accompanies hard work towards the accomplishment of a clearly defined goal. The individual's achievements allow her to be differentiated from others, and this sense of individuality is a positive for self-identity.

Conversely, the same skills gained from engaging in a flow activity also allow the individual to integrate the inner self with the greater world. By participating in the flow activity, the alienated individual is forced to engage in the world. In order to develop the skills required to accomplish her goals, she must interact with others and their ideas, thus expanding and integrating herself in a larger sphere. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) comments that "when the flow episode is over, one feels more 'together' than before, not only internally but also
with respect to other people and to the world in general” (p. 41). Rather than the chaos of isolation and alienation, engagement in an optimal experience demands a reconnection with something greater than the self.

Through engagement in a genuine creative process, the participant develops a harmony between skills and challenges. As the participant increases his skills, he is likely to develop a sense of uniqueness. As well, engagement in a creative process will potentially lead him to connect with others who share his interests and skills. Through both integration and differentiation, the creative process can enhance the participant’s complexity by continually increasing the skills and challenges of the activity. The creative process has the potential to create an optimal experience for the participant, and through such engagement in the self and the world, it is possible for him to find healing.

The pleasure that the individual gains from flow is the motivational factor behind this process of integration and differentiation. Without the positive feelings associated with the creative process, the individual might not seek out the experience; thus healing cannot occur. “An essential feature of sublimination is the great amount of genuine pleasure the substitute activity affords” (Kramer, 1971, p. 69). The more an individual integrates herself with the rest of society, as well as differentiates herself as a possessor of unique and rare skills, the greater her sense of wellness. “These moments have been reported as peak experiences, as oceanic feelings, as a time of cosmic consciousness - when ‘the doors of perception are cleansed’ and a oneness with the infinite is sensed” (Maddi, 1975, p.176). The pleasure comes from the feeling of having meaning and purpose
beyond daily existence. Engaging in complex flow activities, such as creative expression is pleasurable because it restores order in the mind.

Because genuine flow in the form of an authentic creative practice is pleasurable, the incentive to pursue the activity comes from within the creator. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to this condition of flow the autotelic experience, while Amabile (1987, 1996) calls it intrinsic motivation. Amabile (1996) explains, “it may be possible to introduce an intrinsic orientation that will enhance the creativity of persons who do not initially have an extraordinarily high level of interest in the domain” (p. 249). Rather than create for external benefits, the autotelic experience is based on the internal pleasure the individual achieves from participating in the creative process. The more the self is invested in the activity, the more identity is tied to the flow endeavour. The creative process can only build a sense of self and identity if the individual is deeply invested in the activity. Therefore, unless the motivation comes from within the participant, the creative experience is not genuine and not a potential source for healing.

Amabile (1996) uses an analogy of a maze to clarify the concept of intrinsic motivation. The open-ended quality of creative activities is represented by a maze with many different exits. She asks the reader to imagine that an individual enters the maze and, through his own internal motivation, he explores the many paths to various exits. Eventually, he might discover the one which best fits his self-determined goals, or perhaps the process of exploration is the only end that he needs. The open-ended maze is enjoyable because the participant’s interests are intrinsically tied to the activity.
However, it is likely that if the participant knew one exit had a suitcase with one million dollars, he might seek to find the fastest route to the million-dollar exit. He is not likely to investigate the different options or challenges his skills. It is unlikely that such an experience would develop the self into a more complex being because he has not invested any of himself in the activity. The internally motivated version of the maze is much more likely to provide the participant with the pleasurable flow of an optimal experience.

Although there are many activities that have the potential to create a flow experience, not all will be successful. Flow requires a merging of action and awareness through a balance of skills and challenges. By becoming differentiated from, as well as integrated with the world, the individual experiences the pleasure that comes from engaging in an internally motivated activity. The practice of a creative process is one of the best examples of an activity that can meet these conditions, allowing one to achieve an optimal experience. It is through the flow of a creative experience that one might find self-actualization and healing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the significance of creativity as it relates to healing. The understanding of wellness is based on the humanistic theory of self-actualization, which is the belief that creativity can lead an individual to become fully integrated and engaged in the world. Creativity is defined as both a practice and a process involving an assessment of skills as opposed to a judgment of personal value. I discussed the limitations of personality traits, products and
judgment, without negating their importance. In order for the creative experience to have healing potential; it is essential that creative expression be authentic and genuine, based on acquired skills and knowledge.

The process of humanization through creative expression is found in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990, 1993, 1996) theory of optimal experience, expanded by Kramer’s (1971) used of sublimination and Garbarino et al.’s (1992) description of the social map. Finally, by understanding the significance of action and awareness, goals and feedback, skills and challenges and integration and differentiation, one can better understand how the process and practice of creativity can be viewed as a potential for healing. In her experience working with traumatized and aggressive children, Kramer (1971) comments:

To attain such profound influence on their emotional life, art had to become an absorbing passion to which the boys gave much of their time and energy. This, I believe, is essential in working with aggressive children in general. Rather than catering to their relentlessness by offering distraction, one must give them substance. Interest, once awakened, must be allowed to build up to great intensity, organizing force of constructive action carried out with passionate feeling (Kramer, 1971, p. 218).

Here, Kramer describes the essence of creativity as a potential for healing. For these children art is authentic and pleasurable, and so they invest genuine time and energy. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993, 1996) describes in the optimal experience, Kramer (1971) tells of how art is an ‘absorbing passion’ for these children, one that is an ‘organizing force’ in their lives. Creativity creates order in a world that is deeply lacking.

With this in-depth understanding of creativity as it relates to healing, I will continue on to the next chapter where I will explore the qualities of
creativity against the opposing consequences of childhood trauma. It is possible to understand creativity as a potential agent of healing in the specific context of the traumatized child described in the previous chapter 2.
CHAPTER 4
JUXTAPOSITION: CREATIVITY AND VIOLENT EXPERIENCE

Introduction

Despite the desperate aftermath of violence, hope lies in the power of creativity. It is the goal of this thesis to explore the opposing relationships between the qualities of creativity and the consequences of childhood trauma due to exposure to violence. In essence, the polarity between the creative and the violent experience is humanization. Whereas the violence elicits a sense of dehumanization in its victims, creativity encourages and engages the participant in a humanizing expression of the self. It is the oppositional qualities found within the practice of a creative process that may allow a child to use creative expression as a mechanism for healing.

Chapter 2 achieved the following: first, it defined the experience of the child who witnesses or experiences violence, including three sources of violence; home, community and country; secondly it demonstrated the significance of compounding risk factors on a child's psyche, which can lead to an eventual breakdown of the child's coping mechanisms (Garbarino et al., 1992); third, it explored the concept of the social map as the internal perspective of a child's relationship with her external environment, and its significance on a child's reaction to violent experiences (Garbarino et al., 1991).

Chapter 3 explored a definition of creativity as it relates to healing; qualified as self-actualization. Through engaging in the creative process, the
participant can experience flow, which is the moment when one feels that the world is in perfect order. As the creative process becomes a practice, the participant is likely to gain control over his consciousness and engage in and pursue optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996). Engagement in a creative process is likely to help the participant find humanization and healing through self-expression and flow.

It is the belief of this thesis that oppositional relationships exist between the experience of the distressed child and the engagement and humanization found in the creative process. This chapter will examine and describe some of the key traumatic responses a child might have to violence, as well as explore the converse qualities of creativity. There are numerous concepts that demonstrate the relationship between the consequences of childhood trauma and the qualities of creativity. I will explore five major ideas: trust, power, engagement, perception, and mimicry.

When exploring the consequences of childhood trauma, it should be expected that children have responses to violence. As Macksound (1993) points out, “it is important to remember that it is normal for children to show stress reactions or exhibit problem behaviours after scary and painful experiences” (p.32). Likewise, it is normal for children to want to communicate and express their internal world as well as for them to be drawn to creativity. By providing a space where children are free to come to terms with their emotions and experiences, they might find healing and happiness as they develop into healthy adults.
It is essential to recognize that traumatized children are not simply helpless victims of their experiences. By engaging in a creative process, it is likely that children might come to recognize those strengths and skills that allow them to survive and cope with the repercussions of violence. As Tolson (as cited in Jones & Newman, 1997) a middle school teacher in a chronically dangerous community in Chicago comments: “It’s difficult for some teachers to see the skills that you [traumatized children] have.... But it’s a matter of training a teacher so that she can pull all of that out of you and use it for education” (p. 39). Tolson recognizes that many children's coping strategies tend to go unnoticed by adults and even the children themselves.

A legitimate and serious concern when considering creativity within the context of healing is the fear of causing more harm to the traumatized child. However, if the process and conditions are set so that the child is truly in control of her own creative experience, then the power of therapy is in the hands of the child who needs it. Benedek (1985) comments, “... a thorough exploration of trauma offers a child immediate relief and causes no further distress” (p. 9). Eva Zeisel (as cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) notes, “When making a pot you can’t bring any evil into the world” (p. 231). Finally, Macksound (1993) recounts that there were definite healing benefits to creativity and the “boy that had witnessed the torture of someone he knows may be able to express what he felt by drawing what he saw.” (p. 53). The creative process can potentially bring about healing through organic growth and self-discovery controlled by the child.

Creativity as it relates to healing should be a sincere process, one that is based on the reflection of true feelings and consideration of external experiences.
Two artists, Edith Kramer and Fridel Dicker-Brandeis (as cited in Wertheim-Cahen, 1998), struggled to help the doomed children of Terezin during Nazi Germany. While hidden behind the ghetto walls, they helped traumatized children to find meaning through the medium of art. Dicker-Brandeis (Wertheim-Cahen, 1998) "used art expression as a means to heal and prevent children from falling apart" (p. 41). Although Dicker-Brandeis was killed in the death camps, Kramer continued developing the concept of art as therapy for decades after World War II.

In both recognizing consequences of trauma and qualities of creativity, it is important to remember that children who experience or witness violence are unique individuals with different temporal traits, histories, cognitive abilities, levels of support, and resiliency skills. "There is no one to one relationship between symptoms of distress and causes of distress. For example aggression may be related to many factors such as confusion in school, frustration, bullying, past experiences of violence, domestic violence and abuse, bewilderment about their situation, anxiety about caregivers or about safety" (Richman, 1998, p. 81). Because so many variables are involved in childhood trauma and creativity, it is essential to recognize the individuality of children. They may display one, several or none of the manifestations of trauma and qualities of creativity discussed in this chapter.

The consequences of childhood violence and the qualities of creativity are distinctive, personal and life shaping. In order to understand the oppositional relationship between trauma and creativity, one must include the creative voices of children who experience or witness violence; thus exploring creative
expression as it relates to their attempts at healing. Although this exploration is based on documented research, I feel that the creative voices of children who have witnessed or experienced violence are crucial in gaining a deeper insight. This chapter will include the voices of children who experience and witness violence, including those children from my personal experiences while working in both Guatemala City and California.

Trust

The truth of what went down [on the street] is too horrible for straight people like you to believe. If I tell you what really happened, and if you write about it, then people aren't going to trust anything I say. I'm just a dumb street kid, a liar, a 'problem child' as my parents say. Who's going to believe me? Even if they believe it, they'll figure it's my fault. So, you might say I'm cutting out the dirtiest bits so people will believe the rest of it. (Eugene, age 16, as cited in Webber, 1991, p. 17-18).

Eugene demonstrates distrust, which is a common consequence of childhood trauma. Because of abusive violations, broken promises and the secret keeping involved in violent experiences, children tend to lose faith in the world as a place of safety (Faulkner, 2003). “When a child is victimized, the agency of harm is very identifiably human and personal, as opposed to the more physical, biological or remote social forces that lie behind other stressors” (Rickel & Becker, 1997, p. 62). Commonly, traumatized children lack trust in others, their environment and themselves, as well as distrust the faith that others have in them. Eugene's social map likely distorts the concept of trust, making it difficult
for him to form relationships with others. Distrust is extremely dehumanizing because it tends to leave children like Eugene feeling isolated and alone.

Understandably, children victimized by adults are likely to conclude that all grown ups are dangerous and not to be trusted. "Children may have lost faith in adults who could not protect them or who commit atrocities" (Richman, 1998, p. 42). Even witnessing violence committed by adults can challenge children's trust in adult self-restraint (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Children tend to be suspicious of adults if the grown-ups in their lives are unable or unwilling to protect them from dangers. Canada (1995) argues, "children need to look to adults for a sense of protection and security" (p. 109). However, in situations of chronic violence, adults are usually as helpless as the children in their care. Parents with substance abuse problems are often unwilling to protect their children. Violent experiences teach children to be suspicious of all the adults in their lives.

Like traumatized child's relationships with adults, distrust tends to negatively affect the bonds between children, challenging the ability to socialize with peers. Rutter (1994) observes that refugee children often show stress by being "unable to form relationships with other children." (p. 93). When other children are responsible for a child's violent experience, the victim is particularly distrustful of her peers. For example, during "Mozambique's conflict, young boys, who themselves had been traumatized by violence, were reported to threaten, kill or starve girls if they resisted the boys' sexual advances" (UNICEF, 1996). Those young girls learn to suspect all children, especially boys, as potential threats. Paul (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) remembers how his older
brother abused him: "It was a constant thing, like every day him beatin' up on me" (p. 33). Violence teaches a child to be suspicious of everyone.

Socialization is a necessary function of human development because self-identity and humanity are created through interactions with others (Rutter, 1994). Hofstadter (1974) claims that in order to form an identity, one must have a comparison or a dialectical relationship with an other. "In order to have identity it has to set itself off against what is other than itself and find, in relation to the other, its own being, its ownness" (p. 116). Children who are unable to trust relationships tend to have trouble socializing and learning from others (Garbarino, 1988; Kalmer, 1977). Not only can distrust leave children feeling isolated and alone, but it can also affect their self-esteem and cognitive abilities.

The secrecy surrounding violent experiences further compounds children's distrust. Children are more likely to maintain secrecy because they fear the abuser will bring further harm to them or their family (Faulkner, 2003). Pat, (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) comments, "My foster father did it [molested me] and said, 'If you tell anybody, I'm going to kill you'" (p. 66). Abusers are able to use their power position to ensure secrecy and shame in their victims, and even child bullies find success in the ability to frighten their victims into silence.

Due to non-abusive adults' own fears surrounding their children's experiences with violence, caregivers may demand secrecy from their children. Richman (1998) stresses that as a safety measure, refugee parents "may impress upon their children that they must not tell anybody anything about themselves" (p. 41). Terr (1985) comments that children are likely to interpret adult
responses of shame and fright as indicators that violent experience should not be discussed. The secrecy that is often required from victims of violence can further dehumanize and isolate children.

Sceptical children usually find that other people are quick to distrust them. Edwin (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) remarks:

Sometimes when I am walking down the street and there are old ladies and old men looking scared, like checking their wallets, it bothers me 'cause I never stole anything in my whole life. Never. And I'm not planning to. (p. 111).

Because of the stigma that accompanies children at risk, they are often left with the burden of proving their worth and value as people (Groves, 2002). Eugene's (as cited in Webber, 1991) quote at the beginning indicates that other people rarely have had much faith in his abilities. He reflects the images that others, including his own parents, have had about him. "I'm just a dumb street kid, a liar, a 'problem child'" (as cited in Webber, 1991, p. 17-18). Because most people lack a reference point with which to understand the experience of traumatized children, they can often be harsh in judging his behaviours and actions. A common response to children who demonstrate behavioural problems is disinterest, frustration or fear, all of which relate to feelings of suspicion about the children's motives and behaviours.

While working at the group home in Southern California, the boys forced me to reconcile my own prejudices about youth who demonstrate challenging behaviours. One day, I took three eight-year-old boys to McDonald's for lunch. When we were finished eating, they had an hour to run around on the McDonald's play structure. After watching the boys play at the group home, I did
not trust them to behave appropriately for the wealthy families of Newport Beach. I watched the boys very carefully, constantly commenting on any aggressive action or word choice. On the ride home, they were unusually quiet, and I could tell by their faces that they were angry with me. When I asked them what was wrong, they told me that I had made them feel like “group home boys”. In retrospect, I realized that they behaved as any other eight-year-old boys would in that situation. However, I had embarrassed them and reinforced negative self-images by letting them know that I did not trust them. It is common for both adults and children to have trouble trusting an individual beyond his circumstances.

Unlike the consequential suspicion associated with childhood violence, the qualities found in the creative process depend upon the trust created from positive relationships. Christian (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993), who was severely beaten by both parents throughout his childhood, discusses why creativity helped him regain his faith in other people. "I got into FACES\(^3\), where you had to trust people. You had to give in order to get" (p. 21 - 22). From the imaginative beginnings to the on-going conclusions of product, the creative process is fuelled by the desire to communicate and connect with other people.

During the process of creativity, children often develop an imaginary relationship as they connect with others through the creative medium. Most children who play create strong relationships with their imaginary characters, and those relationships teach them about human interactions in their external

\(^3\) Improvisational drama program for youth who have experienced or witnessed violence, sponsored by Mimonides in New York City.
world (Guy, 1997). In some genres of creativity, the connection between the creator and his audience exists only because the two parties imagine the relationship. While the author writes, for example, she often imagines the reader's interpretations of her ideas in order to make the work understandable. When the reader reads the novel, he develops a relationship with the author through her story and her characters.

Whereas violence tends to degrade human interaction, the creative process encourages these bonds because it demands that children engage with others. When the student learns techniques from her art teacher, the two are connected because of the creative process. During most creative processes, particularly those had within educational settings, real and strong bonds form among the participating children. Through both of these connections, the children and adults develop new and appropriate views of the world and themselves. Havelka, (1999) observes:

Creativity is at work not only in poetry, music, painting, ballet, sculpture, and the minor arts but also in the new establishment and reorganization of personal relationships. This creative involvement of one person with another person reveals new feelings of inner growth, new ways of confirming the other individual, and a deeper, sharper, and more spontaneous awareness of them. (p. 219).

Unlike children's experiences with violence, the creative process allows a space to socialize around a common, humanizing theme.

Because of a shared interest in the creative expression, it is likely that the facilitator of creativity could restore faith in that child's understanding of and capacity to trust. Guy (1997) comments that in a study of traumatized youth, the "one factor that seemed to make a difference in the lives of these young people
was having caring people in their lives ... who reinforced a positive self-image" (p. 20). The creative process provides an excellent opportunity for children to find positive and healing role models. Groves (2002) claims that the "first and most important principle [for helping traumatized children] is that we must recognize the power of a nurturing, respectful, and caring relationship with an adult to help a child recover from adversity" (p. 101). Unlike the relationships formed in violent situations, the bonds during the creative process can be related to healing.

A consequence related to childhood trauma is that children tend to lose faith in themselves and their abilities as human beings. Marshal (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) muses, "I don't know much about myself. I just know that I suck" (p. 156). Because violence teaches children that their world is unsafe, they often assess their self-worth in relation to their external situations. The theory of self-fulfilling prophecy demonstrates that children will rise or sink to the level of external expectations (Drews, 1974). Like Marshal, children who are stigmatized by other people and their situation are often destroyed by their loss of faith in themselves.

Such personal distrust is confirmed by the very nature of violence, which is unpredictable and deadly. When threatened, it is common human instinct to do whatever it will take to survive even if that means breaking moral and legal codes. However, the consequences of children's actions tend to affect their sense of self-worth. Because of the unpredictability of their violent reality, these children might not be able to trust their own abilities to remain safe and to be a good person. Frequently, children who witness or experience violence are not
practiced in altruism and reflection. They tend to act without forethought. Children who live in situations of chronic danger may use instinct to survive another day, but they often suffer from the emotional scars (Jones & Newman, 1997).

Unlike violent survival instincts, the creative process requires that children trust both their intuition and engage in reflective thought. Johnson-Laird (1988) defines intuition as deciding "what to do without reflecting on how the decision should be made" (p. 205). The creative flow could not exist if every time an artist attempted to paint, he agonized over each stroke of the brush, each motion of the hand. In fact, when an individual experiences a lack of intuition, he will likely comment that he is suffering from an inability to perform, such as writer's block. This anxiety is often related to the artist's self-doubt. Unlike the survival instinct that slowly degrades a child's faith in his abilities, participation in a genuine creative practice requires that children learn to trust and develop their intuitive decision-making skills.

As well as intuition, the creative process involves stepping back and analyzing the work in order to see if it communicates the intention (Bailin, 1991). The reflective thought necessary in the creative process depends greatly on self-trust. While engaged in the throes of creative expression, children must be able to determine the right word, the correct stroke or the exact movement of the arm that will allow them to communicate the intended idea. The creative process can continue only if the child has faith in his abilities and the self-trust to know what is right (Kramer, 1974). Whereas violent situations enforce self-doubt through a
constant reaction to external threats, the creative process demands that children trust their internal world.

Unlike the distrust and fear associated with childhood trauma, the creative process demands courage from children. They must trust themselves to speak with authority and intention. The violent experience teaches children to fear their abilities and the intentions of others. The creative process, on the other hand, allows them to speak without hesitation and submission.

The creative process of flow is related to healing the specific consequence of distrust through increasing the child’s complexity through integration and differentiation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, 1996). As the child develops her abilities as a creator, she is able to view herself as differentiated from others. She now possesses a skill that others may not share. “For example, a person is differentiated to the extent that he or she has many different interests, abilities, and goals” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 156). She has the skills that allow self-expression, and trust stems from her ability to leave her mark upon the world, no matter how small. Unlike violent experiences, differentiation found in the creative process is constructive and leaves no long-term self-loathing consequences, but rather is potentially healing.

However, a person who is only differentiated “might be a genius, but is likely to suffer from inner conflicts” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 157). The process of creativity also demands that a child integrates and engages himself with the world; “he or she is integrated in proportion to the harmony that exists between various goals, and between thought, feelings, and action” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 156). A creative practice may help a child trust the other people involved
in the process. The practice of creativity allows a space to reflect and communicate universal truths, and a child can use this space to understand the self in relation to the greater world.

No longer an isolated being who exists outside of the realm of humanity, the child can conceivably regain faith in his abilities and worth as a human being. Warren (1984) states that the “arts can motivate in a way possibly no other force can, because it is only through the arts experience, through making a mark that no one else could make, that we express the individual spark of our own humanity” (p.4). Whereas childhood violence demands simplicity through conformity, submission and alienation, the creative process requires complexity from becoming both integrated and differentiated. The creative process is related to healing in that it might help a child regain faith in his own abilities to regain trust in the self and others.

In my experiences working at the orphanage in Guatemala City and the group home in Southern California, I found that issues of distrust affected the children’s behaviours and life philosophies. Violent experiences dehumanized these children so early on in their lives that their identities developed in a social vacuum, void of the experiences and abilities to perceive humanity in themselves and others. The children’s perceptions of the world, of me and of themselves made it extremely difficult for trust to develop. They rarely relied on me as a friend or a protector, and seemingly minor incidents cost me the little confidence I was able to gain. Their experience with violence and their mistrust of the world led them to be incredibly manipulative of each other and of me. My inability to perceive the world as they did often left me to be suspicious of their motives. Our
relationship was a balancing act between betrayal, fear and tenuous levels of trust. For these children, the innocence and curiosity of childhood had been replaced with an early knowledge that human beings are capable of terrible evil.

Distrust is a major consequence of childhood trauma, and violence often related to a child loosing confidence in himself, in others and his environment; as well as he may recognize that others have no trust in his abilities. However, within the nature of creativity exists the antithesis to childhood trauma because the practice of a creative process depends on the development of trusted relationships, both real and imagined. The creative process develops intuition and self-trust because it makes the child a more complex being through integration and differentiation. Ultimately, one hopes that by participating in the practice of a creative process, the suspicious child will learn to recognize and understand the concept of trust. Such a process would hopefully engage the child to become humanized in relation to the trauma of childhood violence.

**Power**

You couldn't feel safe ... because when you stepped out your door [into the shelter hallway] you had the guys selling drugs. The police would bang on your door with the guns in their hands and you would open the door and there was a gun in your face and you'd be so scared you couldn't talk. The police came around looking for one of the drug dealers who killed someone or shot someone ... All the time. It was like an everyday thing. (Maria, age 14, as cited in Berck, 1992, p. 54).

In this quote, Maria expresses the consequence of powerlessness that tends to result from childhood trauma. Powerlessness is a situation where the
victim is at the will of the aggressor. She looses her self-determination and freedom to make choices. "Sudden and frightening experiences as well as chronic environmental stresses can make children feel very scared, helpless and out of control" (Macksound, 1993, p. 89). As soon as the gun is pointed in Maria's face, she can no longer choose her future because it is being decided for her. Her mental, physical and emotional states are at the will of another, and her safety is dependent on the actions of the police and drug dealers. In situations of chronic violence, a child develops her social map and identity around a constant condition of powerlessness. When a child is owned by, or owns violence, her choices are lost because of childhood trauma.

As a function of age and size, children are less powerful and have fewer choices than adults. Children generally have little or no control over what happens to them. They cannot vote, influence foreign policy or mobilize action, and children's voices are often silenced by the needs and desires of adults (Goodwillie, 1993). Because their cognitive, emotional and physical abilities are not fully developed, children may have more difficulties coping with violence than adults (Terr, 1985). They have less capacity to make sense of situations that are beyond their control. As victims or aggressors, the erratic nature of violence leaves children with little or no choice over the past and present experiences that will affect their self-esteem and identity in the future.

Children who live in danger learn that the nature of violence is chaotic and unpredictable. No one, especially not a child, is able to control violence and its consequences. When violence is introduced to a situation, victim, aggressor and witness are all at the mercy of the chain of decisions and events that follow. Once
violence "... has come into existence, it begins to react with and transform the consciousness of its creator, and that of other human beings who come into contact with it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 123). Violence alters children's social maps, distorting their perception of safety, danger and power.

Children are quick to learn that adults are limited in their ability to control the power of violence. Likewise, adults are often frustrated by their incapacity to help children reconcile the lessons of aggression. Tolson (as cited in Jones & Newman, 1997) works at Donoghue Elementary School, located between two Chicago housing projects. As principal of the school, she must deal with difficult situations related to the high level of violence. She remarks, "the difficult thing about it has been when you return the child who was stabbed to the same classroom with the child who did the stabbing, it's difficult to ask them to concentrate on what they need to concentrate on" (p. 167). Smith (as cited in Jones & Newman, 1997) is a mother of four who lives in one of the Chicago housing projects near Donoghue Elementary School. Smith comments on the dangers of her environment: "See my children stay in. They do not go outside-we have activities in our house that keep them occupied" (p. 97). Powerlessness is a common consequence of childhood violence, affecting both children and adults. Children who witness or experience violence learn that aggression is powerful. Frequently, violence appears even more powerful than adults' abilities to protect children's safety.

There is another group who are surprisingly powerless in violent situations: child-aggressors and child-soldiers (Machel, 2000, 2001; UNICEF, 1996). Canada (1995) for example, describes a fight between a two boys outside
of the Rheedlen community centre in Brooklyn. It was known that Boy A had recently acquired a gun. As the fight continued, his peers expected him to take it out and demonstrate his power. However, as soon as Boy A pulled the gun out, the situation was no longer in his control. Because this was Boy A’s first time exhibiting his weapon, he was able to spare Boy B. Canada comments that the next time Boy A finds himself in that situation, his peers will expect him to shoot, or else they will view him as weak; a threat to Boy A’s survival and status. Once aggression is introduced to a situation, children are powerless regardless of where they stand in relation to the violence.

Violence creates a situation of objectification where those involved are forced into reaction, rather than action. Freire (1973) describes powerlessness as a dehumanizing experience. He argues that lack of choice transforms the powerless from subjects of self-determination to objects who are at the whim of those with power. Freire (1973) claims, “to the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others, to the extent that his decisions are no longer his own because they result from external prescriptions, he is no longer [human]” (p. 4). The objectified victim of violence must respond and adapt to the situation forced upon him. For the child who witnesses or experiences violence, danger is dehumanizing because he perceives the world as disempowering, rarely experiencing the humanization from freedom of self-choice.

Whereas childhood violence is characterized by its lack of choice, the definition of a creative process must include the ability to choose. Johnson-Laird (1988) states, “to be creative is to be free to choose among alternatives” (p. 202).
In order to engage in a creative process, children choose from their internal and external resources. The participating children decide, for example, which experiences to express; what internal motivations to use; how to use materials; and which genre best expresses what they have selected to communicate. In her research, Amabile (1996) reports that children “who were given a choice about materials to use in their work exhibited significantly higher creativity than did children who had the choice made for them (p. 249). The quality of choice found in the creative process is opposite from the consequence of powerlessness found in the experience of childhood violence.

Through a creative practice, a child must learn to choose among options, promoting empowerment through human interaction and collaboration. The adult facilitators, as well as her peers, should be available for support to help her with both ideas and skills. Likewise, the child learns the value of her abilities when she assists others. Through observation and experience, the creative process allows the child not only to exercise her own abilities to choose, but to watch others engage in the process. Her social map will recognize the significance of choice, and that recognition that will enable her to exercise this freedom throughout her life. Whereas violence degrades the ability to recognize and exercise choice, creativity promotes it.

I witnessed many children struggle with the concept of choice while working at the group home in Southern California. Never before had I encountered such a fatalistic society. When faced with the consequences of poor decision-making, most of the boys declared that they were not responsible for their actions: “It’s his fault, he made me do it. I had no choice.” At first, it
seemed that they simply wanted to avoid the consequences of their actions. However, I realized that identifying choice is something that can be forgotten through exposure to violent experiences. Although I often tried to give options whenever possible, however, making choices - and appropriate ones at that - was a slow struggle of rediscovery.

Because the creative process requires decision-making, practicing creativity could potentially help a child remember how to exercise choice. The rediscovery of this skill may change his self-perception from a helpless object of violent experience, to an active agent of creative change (Barron, 1975). Through the human interaction commonly found in a creative practice, the child could associate with decision-making role models. In the process, “alienation gives way to involvement, enjoyment replaces boredom, helplessness turns into a feeling of control, and psychic energy works to reinforce the sense of self, instead of being lost in the service of external goals” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 69). Practicing choice through the creative process might bring the concept of choice into the child’s social map. Contrary to the situation of violence, where dehumanization occurs through the removal of the capacity to conceive of choice, the experience of creativity may re-humanize by developing the child’s understanding of self-determination.

Powerlessness is a consequence not only of a lack of choices, but also of a loss of control. Because of time constraints, safety measures or a lack of consideration, children are not likely to be consulted about changes affecting their lives. Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) explain that violent situations often force refugee parents to keep plans secret until after the family
has escaped. For their children, “this basic absence of a real freedom of choice and of movement is a fundamental cause of their powerlessness, the source of their anguish” (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994, p. 52). Angie Sanabria (as cited in Abramson, n.d.) describes how her life changed after social services took her and her brother because of a neighbour’s accusations of abuse. “When I was fourteen, a single incident changed my family’s life forever. ... One minute I was living with my mother, and the next minute I got taken away. I didn’t have time to tell anyone where I was going, not even my best friend Edwin” (Abramson, n.d.). The consequence of loss of control is a sense of powerlessness that negatively affects the identity and self-esteem of traumatized children.

The child witness to violence has a tendency to feel that he lacks control over his world. In the case of a parent’s suicide, Pynoos and Eth (1985) explain that the child is unlikely to comprehend the emotional complexities surrounding such an act. Groves (2002) describes her four-year-old patient’s panic and confusion as he tries to make sense of his mother’s violent death. “The uninjured child witness is unprotected from the full emotional impact of the violence, and may suffer immediately all of the painful symptoms of a post-traumatic stress disorder” (Groves, 2002, p. 24). The child who witnesses an act of aggression is often overwhelmed by the feeling that he has lost control and that he is powerless to the violence that surrounds him.

A consequence of childhood trauma and powerlessness is hypervigilance; a psychic state in which children become overly sensitive to external stimuli (Macksound, 1993, Pynoos & Eth, 1985, Groves, 2002). The social map of
hypervigilant children does not allow them to distinguish safety from danger, and they react with fear even when they are not being threatened. 10-year-old Jose (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993), who lives in a violent neighbourhood in the United States, comments, "Most of the time I'm terrified" (p. 37). Likewise, children who experience or witness violence are likely to misinterpret facial expressions and tone of voice. Groves (2002) comments that hypervigilant children act "as though they are permanently poised for fight or flight, a lifelong state of arousal, with the accompanying surges of adrenaline" (p. 47). Children manifest their powerlessness in various ways, such as bedwetting, excessive crying, clinginess, nightmares and night terrors and they tend to be anxious when they are exposed to high energy levels in small spaces, such as classrooms (Macksound, 1993).

Macksound (1993) offers the example of Maya, a four-year-old girl "who has temper tantrums every time she is separated from her mother. She is unable to play by herself.... She has changed from being a happy child to being anxious and tearful" (p. 64). Because of violent experiences, Maya has learned that she has no control over her ability to be safe and remains in a constant state of anxiety.

While the experience of violence is defined by a sense of powerlessness, and expressed in hypervigilance, control is extremely important when engaging in a genuine creative process. "In every day life there are so many imponderables that can affect us, events over which we are powerless.... In flow, however, we feel up to any eventuality" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 182). When the child's skills are balanced against the challenges of the activity, the child's actions and
self-awareness merge. A chess master (as cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1993) recalls, “although I am not aware of specific things, I have a general feeling of well-being, and that I am in complete control of my world” (p. 182). In a state of flow, the child is so focused on the task, that he is in control over his creative practice, and this is a powerful feeling. Unlike the confusion of reality that stems from a sense of powerlessness, the focus of flow provides a child with an engaging clarity of thought.

For any human being, but particularly for children, violent experiences are related to feelings of disorder and psychic entropy. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) recognizes that chaos within consciousness negatively alters one’s perceptions of the self, as well as one’s relationships between internal and external worlds. However, the qualities of creativity are quite the opposite in that they tend to bring about order in the mind. By engaging in a creative flow, the child regains control of his perspectives of himself and his external world. Unlike the chaotic consequences found in childhood trauma, the creative process, with practice, can become a mechanism for optimal experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996).

Control of experience and consciousness, as defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1993, 1996) is related to the creative process because it allows children to have say over the symbols, subject matter and materials. Power over the creative process could permit some children to learn techniques to control and change the contents of their social map, at least in those negative areas that they determine hinder their development as human beings. “People who learn to control their inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives...”
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 2). As they work to understand the larger world through symbolism, they are better able to resist the psychic entropy and traumatic powerlessness related to violent experiences.

Powerlessness is a tragic consequence of childhood trauma because children develop their social maps within the context of dehumanization. Because they understand the world to be an uncontrolled and unpredictable place, they cannot form patterns and make assumptions about their environment (Kalmer, 1977). Miller (1988) comments that when “vital needs are frustrated and children are ... abused for the sake of adults’ needs by being exploited, beaten, punished, taken advantage of, manipulated, neglected, or deceived without the intervention of any witness, then their integrity will be lastingly impaired” (p. 168). Trauma has degraded children's abilities to make positive choices. Violence “renders children helpless in the face of intolerable dangers” (Pynoos & Eth, 1985, p.26) and helplessness is terribly disabling. The dehumanizing effect of powerlessness is found in the self-perception of a being who can only adapt to, rather than change their internal and external worlds.

In order for children to express themselves effectively, they must develop competent skills as well as gain knowledge about their genre. The pleasure of learning during the creative process is due to their personal engagement in the experience. “All students, not just those from marginalized groups, seem more eager to enter energetically into classroom discussion when they perceive it as pertaining directly to them (hooks, 1994, p. 87). The creative practice is valuable to children only when they are able to gain the genuine feeling of success stemming from authentic mastery. Whereas childhood trauma robs children of
control and power, one quality of the creative process is that it engages children in becoming masters of positive and humanizing creative skills.

A genuine creative process allows children to control the symbolic representations of their larger world. Through symbolism, children can find healing (Kramer, 1971). Groves (2002) discusses her experience using puppets to help traumatized children express their aggression in a psychologically safe space. “The favourite puppets are a shark with a large mouth and exaggerated teeth; a dinosaur, also with sharp teeth and a tiger. Children use the puppets to gobble at smaller puppets; they hurl them across the room; they ... engage in hand-to-hand combat using the puppets.” (p. 48). Whereas violent experiences are related to an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and loss of control, the creative process offers children empowerment through creative mastery.

Many theorists, psychologists and educators have described the creative process as humanizing and self-affirming (Barron, 1975, Kramer, 1971, Warren, 1984, Winner, 1982). Creativity is a trait that is granted to all human beings. To engage in a creative practice integrates and differentiates a child so that he can become empowered by the complexity of his character (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996). “We all have a need to make this ‘mark’, not because we necessarily wish to be the reminders to a future generation of a long-lost culture ... but because each creative mark reaffirms the self: it says ‘I am here’, ‘I have something to express’” (Warren, 1984, p. 4). Whereas violence dehumanizes a child through lack of choice and control, the practice of a creative process guides a child towards self-actualization through choice, control and empowerment.
Engagement

"Being molested still has a big impact on me. It's like being cut with a razor and not feeling the pain until a long time afterwards" (Monica, as cited in Goodwillie, 1993, p. 62).

As a consequence of childhood violence, some children become disconnected from both their internal perspectives and their external environment. The alienation and psychic entropy associated with being cut off from the meaning and connectedness of life is dehumanizing. Disengagement is a coping mechanism that can help children survive the immediate overwhelming experience of violence (Rickel & Becker, 1997). Children who repress or misunderstand their emotional responses to danger tend to obsess over violence; numb their emotional responses; reduce their involvement in the external world; detach themselves from others; become hypervigilant; and/or demonstrate aggressive or regressive social behaviours. The creative process, on the other hand, necessitates engagement; a connectedness through the exploration of emotions, the development of communication skills and the merging of the self and the awareness.

Children disengage from the world because violence leaves them powerless and distrustful of others' abilities or willingness to protect (Garbarino et al., 1991). Because of their fear, detached children are less likely to want to engage in the curiosity and exploration that characterizes childhood.
When violence disrupts this connection [with adults], children may respond by withdrawing, avoiding exploration, and ceasing to see adults as protective. Children feel alone and vulnerable. They draw pictures of their families in which the parents are smaller than the children or they draw adults as superheroes, expressing the wish for all-powerful protection" (Groves, 2002, p. 48).

Disconnected children are not involved in the discovery of childhood and this lack of attachment to their external world often leaves them feeling alienated and lonely.

The frequency and depth of violent experiences that some children face may be related to their emotional disengagement from the external world. For these children, danger simply becomes a part of life, killings and injury happen all the time and detachment from events and emotions is necessary for survival. Disassociated from their psychic responses and their world, traumatized children can “seem unaware of the objective dangers around them - that is, they feel safe when the odds of harm 'ought' to make them afraid” (Garbarino et al., 1992, p. 4). The lessons of violence frequently teach children that responding to their emotions are a sign of weakness (Richman, 1998).

LeAlan Jones (Jones & Newman, 1997), age 13, interviews his 17-year-old sister about her experiences with violence.

_LeAlan: "How many of close friends of yours got killed through the years?"

Janell: "I don't know. I can't count all them. ... It's been a lot, though."

_LeAlan: "Could you name a few?"

Janell: "Like I said, Jermaine, And Yuk. Slick. Meatball. Cheezy and Vell. Shawn and Kenny. There's been a lot of people."
LeAlan: "Would you say twenty-five?"
Janell: "Probably more than that..."

LeAlan: "You think it was around fifty?"
Janell: "I don't think it was that many."
LeAlan: "But around thirty or forty?"
Janell: "Probably somewhere in that area."

LeAlan: "How do you feel about all these deaths when you just sit around and think about it?"
Janell: "Well, I know I didn't do nothing to nobody to make them do something do me, so I don't really have to worry too much." (p. 62 - 63)

Although Janell recognizes the pervasiveness of danger in her life, she appears disconnected from her feelings about her exposure to violence. It is likely that in order for her to cope with the loss of so many friends in such a short time and at such an early age, she has become detached from her own emotional responses. Macksound (1993) notes that for victimized children, "concepts such as justice, morality and altruism all become defined in relation to the social reality of violence" (p. 43). In many situations, violence is so normalized that children become desensitized to events and emotions in order to cope with the reality of their existence.

Disconnected children often feel that there is a sense of excitement in being afraid. Like Janell, they have difficulty recognizing dangers and are likely to put themselves in situations that awaken feelings of fear (Berck, 1992). These self-destructive tendencies are related to their social maps' distorted perceptions of risk and safety. Disengaged children are found "engaging in impulsive and
dangerous activities such as running into streets in front of cars or climbing out
onto dangerous high places” (Macksoud, 1993, p. 132). For some children,
danger offers the kind of excitement that might validate their negative self-
perception. They commonly perceive danger as thrilling, whereas safe activities
are considered boring and lacking challenge.

When the overwhelming experience of violence is too much for children,
some react by repressing their emotions. Benedek (1985) defines this
disengagement from childhood suffering as a numbing of responsiveness,
“beginning some time after the trauma, as shown by at least one of the following:
markedly diminished interest in one or more significant activities, feelings of
detachment or estrangement from others, constricted affect” (p. 8). In other
words, some children report that they are no longer able to identify feelings and
they claim that when they express emotions, they feel as though they are just
pretending. Alik, (as cited in UNICEF, 1994), a 13-year-old refugee from Sarajevo
recalls,

From the group, they [the soldiers] chose the ones they were going to
kill. They picked my uncle and a neighbor! Then they machine-gunned
them to death.... I saw it all! Now I can’t sleep. I try to forget, but
it doesn’t work. I have such difficulty feeling anything anymore.
(p. 59).

The feeling of disengagement that Alik describes is likely to stay with him into
adulthood.

Numbness can have serious consequences for the child’s ability to find
happiness and healing. As Miller (1988) explains, “every aggressive reaction on
the child’s part to this abuse was suppressed, and this suppression laid the
foundation for destructive behavior in adulthood" (p. 148). Such children may spend their lives looking for cues from others in order to know how to respond with an appropriate emotion.

Some children behave aggressively because they have numbed their emotional responses as a way of coping with violent experiences. They tend to lack empathy, particularly for the recipients of their aggressive actions (Macksound, 1993). Without an emotional connection to others, disengaged children have difficulty reflecting on the consequences of their behaviours. Violence has taught them that survival depends on their reactions to perceived threats. Disconnected from their feelings, they are inclined to feel anxious and unhappy, but they often cannot associate specific stimuli to their reactions (Katch, 2001). They are likely to explode suddenly and without apparent reason. Their aggressive behaviours frequently isolate them from their peers, further escalating this behaviour.

An aggressive response to disengagement is particularly true for child aggressors who must numb their feelings in order to perform what is demanded from them. For example, child soldiers are trained to sever their emotions from their actions, making them more efficient killers (Machel, 2001). A 12-year-old soldier from Sierra Leone remembers: “When I was killing, I felt like it wasn't me doing these things. I had to because the rebels threatened to kill me” (Machel, 2001, p. 7). Canada (1995) describes this phenomenon of disengagement as being cold. “Being ‘cold’ meant you displayed no emotion during times when others would be terrified” (p. 61). Canada (1995, 1998) explains that in violent
environments, children must learn how to dominate their emotions and separate themselves from the events taking place around them.

Children who witness or experience violence have few resources, and so they are likely to rely on their fight or flight instinct. If they are not able to act their feelings out aggressively, then it is helpful to remain below the radar of the aggressors. Christian (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) frequently witnessed his sister being beaten by their father.

He had really huge hands and he put them over her face, and she couldn't breathe because his palms were over her nose and mouth and she couldn't breathe and she kind of dropped to her knees and then her arms went limp and I figured she was dead.... I wanted to help her then, but it would be worse if you tried to interfere.... So the best thing you could do for the other person was keep your mouth shut, make no noise, sit down someplace and do nothing, just do nothing to aggravate them. Then, later, you could talk to her, like bring her food or cold towels or try to help her afterwards. But you couldn't jump in. Jumping in was suicide. (p. 19).

Children who witness horrible scenes such as the one Christian described, are likely to disappear inside themselves as a way of emotionally and physically protecting themselves.

Children who are disengaged from their emotions and external surroundings tend to have difficulty communicating ideas, thoughts and feelings, particularly about their experiences with violence. “The normal reactions to such injury should be anger and pain; since children in this hurtful kind of environment, however, are forbidden to express their anger and ... they are compelled to suppress their feelings” (Miller, 1988, p. 168). They are susceptible to restricting their participation in activities because they cannot express their
own emotions or understand the feelings of others. Because of their isolation, they lack the interaction necessary to learn communication skills (Garbarino et al., 1991). Consequently, their social proficiencies become degraded, perpetuating their isolation and anxiety, as well as their inability to express their internal experience.

Because disengaged children tend to lack effective communication skills, they are at risk of stunted social development (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994). Young children in particular, are subject to demonstrate their anger, anxiety and upset about violent experiences with regressive behaviours. “Regressive behavior - such as thumb sucking and loss of bowel and bladder control - has been noted by mothers of children living amid urban violence” (Garbarino et al., 1992. p. 57). Regressive social behaviours only serve to further isolate and dehumanize children.

Engagement in a creative process offers qualities quite opposite to the disengagement and dehumanization related to childhood trauma. Creativity focuses the child in the moment, humanizing his experience. Relationships found in a creative process offer qualities quite opposite to the disengagement of childhood trauma. Engagement in creativity is essential to human identity since creative expression is a characteristic granted to all humanity (Winner, 1982). Creative activity engages the child to experience the humanization that is related to being a subject of the self rather than an object of others.

By engaging in the creative process, the child can create the flow of an optimal experience: the moment of complete engagement in and merging of the self, the emotions and the task at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996).
Creativity requires that the child is completely involved in his experience (Goldberg, 2000). As the child becomes completely aware of the creative activity, his external and internal experiences merge. “You are so involved in what you are doing [that] you aren’t thinking of yourself as separate from the immediate activity.... You don’t see yourself as separate from what you are doing” (as cited in Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.53). When the mind and body unite towards a common goal, self-awareness is simultaneously lost and gained. Unlike the disengagement common to violent experiences, the creative practice demands complete absorption in the moment.

The creative process tends to bring children into a concentrated, relaxed emotional and mental state. Creativity uses internal resources, such as feelings, beliefs, ideas and imagination to bring meaning to both process and product (Kramer, 1971). During the creative process, the mind slips into a meditative state and the truth of inner experience is often revealed (Edwards, 2000). Progoff (as cited in Edwards, 2000) discusses the Intensive Journal that often reveals the inner thoughts of its writers: “Without intending it, they find that they are drawn beyond themselves in wisdom to levels of experience that have the qualities of poetry and spirit” (p. 11). While violence demands a repression of awareness and expression of experience, a successful creative process requires that children explore and voice their feelings.

Whereas violence generally necessitates that children repress and hide their emotional responses, the creative process is motivated by the desire to express and share their inner world. Before children can externalize emotions and thoughts in a creative process, they must engage in the fantasies and
daydreams of their inner imagination. Communicating those thoughts and emotions is essential for gaining a powerful sense of connection to something greater than the self. Without external expression, creativity does not exist. By externalizing their ideas and feelings, they are likely to transcend their personal experience by communicating a universal truth (Edwards, 2000); this experience is both humanizing and healing.

While violence demands the repression of emotions, creative expression requires the exploration of feelings. In fact, if the child does not genuinely explore her emotions, her creative expression will lack authenticity (Kramer, 1971). Miller (1988) comments that “Picasso ... did not have the opportunity to express himself spontaneously as a child ... it took forty years before he was able to paint like a child, that is, to let his unconscious speak” (p. 14). Because creativity speaks of universal truths, the child must explore her emotional responses in order to effectively communicate her ideas, thoughts or images. Unlike violence, which generally requires a child represses her emotions and detach from her experience, creativity demands the exploration of both.

Moreover, looking at feelings is characteristic to the creative process and is related to healing. “Little children often express their traumas in a painting the moment a brush is put into their hand” (Miller, 1988, p. 14). When children release their emotions through creative expressions, they tend to feel a great sense of relief. They begin to free themselves from the burden of their emotional baggage (Guy, 1997). Adamson (1984) believes that under the right conditions, “art is a safe and constructive medium for aggression” (p. 64). When faced with
conflict, children who have begun to reconcile their anxieties through a creative process might not be so likely to use violence to express their emotions.

In the world of violence, detached and cold reactions are essential for survival and "chance and necessity are the sole rulers of beings who are incapable of reflection" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p.15). On the other hand, when children are absorbed in a creative flow, they must reflect on their experiences and explore their external and internal worlds. When young children play, for example, they are working hard to understand the rules of their environment and social relationships. "Children are able to deal with complex psychological difficulties through play. They seek to integrate the experience of pain, fear, and loss." (Garbarino et al., 1992, p. 208). A creative practice requires reflection on both content and outcome of the expression. It demands clear goals and defined feedback, even in situations such as play that appear to be free of structure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1993, 1996). Because a creative process slows down children's worlds, they are better able to reflect on violence and to engage in an optimal experience.

The creative process is defined by a need to understand the emotions of others through empathy and contemplation. Creative expressions often require that a child put himself in another person's situation. For example, one way to create a genuine character in a story or play is to empathize with that role, reflecting on the emotional responses that character would have if he were real. The nature of pretending is to discover what it would be like to be another person and to have another role in life. Unlike the disassociation or fear that is a
common consequence to childhood trauma, a creative process engages children to practice compassion.

Whereas disengaged children seek dangerous thrills that can cause both psychic entropy and physical harm, the creative process offers risks through positive challenges, promoting personal growth. “Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person’s capacity to act” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 52). A genuine creative practice demands that the child take risks in order to go beyond what he has done before. Each time the child is successful, he expands his abilities. As he becomes more complex, he will seek greater challenges that requiring higher skill levels. Participating in a creative practice engages a child in positive excitement, such as the thrill of performing in front of an audience, entering a project into a science fair or getting the words of his poem exactly right.

Curiosity and exploration are naturally engaging in childhood, but often absent in the lives of children who witness or experience violence. Creativity practices this inquisitiveness through problem finding and solving (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Through an exploration of internal and external worlds, children first discover a question and then learn the best way to solve the problem. Because children are just beginning to explore the world, their creative process does not necessitate grandiose discoveries that will change the course of human evolution. Problem finding and solving for children means simply that they engage in a personal connection with their subject (Warren, 1984). Unlike the dehumanizing and alienating aggressive problem solving techniques found in violent environments, the creative process offers discovery.
Whereas violent experiences tend to diminish a child's communication skills, creative expression demands a high level of expressive abilities. The dancer, Isadora Dunan (as cited in Dokter, 1998) once commented, “if I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it” (p. 9). Creative expression offers a safe, pleasurable and exact method for communicating one’s inner world. Adamson (1984) also believes that by participating in the creative process, people are able to communicate what may have otherwise been impossible for them to express. “Art obliges us to communicate with the inner self, and in so doing, to engage in a dialogue with both our destructive and creative forces” (Adamson, 1984, p. 8). Children who find it difficult to communicate verbally, may be more comfortable expressing their feelings through non-verbal communication, such as playing a musical instrument or creating computer graphics.

Creative expression tends to promote the communication of emotions and thoughts in a constructive way, which can have a calming effect. Macksound (1993) explains:

For example, a boy that has witnessed the torture of someone he knows may be able to express what he felt by drawing what he saw, and then sharing it with adults. He may also benefit from any other play activity to distance himself from what he has witnessed and to help him relax. Following stressful events, it is important to encourage children and to provide them with the opportunities to engage in enjoyable activities such as play, drawing and reading. (p. 53).

Fridel Dicker-Brandeis (as cited in Wertheim-Cahen, 1998) taught art to child-prisoners of Nazi concentration camps and developed deep bonds with her students. She “used art expression as a means to heal and prevent children from
falling apart” (p. 41). Participation in a creative process invites communication and releases hurtful emotions and thoughts; this may in turn help children come to terms with their experiences.

Engagement in creative flow might allow aggressive traumatized children find a sense of connectedness. The explosive behaviours that may lead to solipsism and psychic entropy can be safely expressed within the creative environment. "One of the psychological tasks for all young children is to learn to manage aggressive impulses in socially appropriate ways.... One senses that these aggressive urges are literally bubbling over for these children” (Groves, 2002, p. 48). Expressing their emotions through creativity might give children the confidence and skills to connect with other people. By engaging in a process of creativity, they might overcome the solipsism associated with violence. Whereas violence strains interpersonal relationships, creativity offers children new methods of positive socialization.

Characteristic to the flow found within the creative process is a total absorption and engagement in the task. In order to develop a creative expression, the child should both imagine a future and reflect on her past. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) describes that during a creative flow experience: "People report forgetting their troubles because the intensity of the experience precludes ruminating on the past or the future. A chess master recounts, 'when the game is exciting, I don't seem to hear nothing - the world seems to be cut off from me and all there is to think about is my game'” (p. 184). Violence often results in children choosing and focusing their attention mainly on their violent experiences; the
creative process redirects these isolating thoughts and allows the mind to focus completely on the present activity.

Exposure to violence bombards children with exhausting negative memories and experiences, often forcing children to disconnect by abusing substances and engaging in other self-destructive behaviours. Contrary to this dangerous escape from reality, an authentic creative practice engages children in their world, relieving stress (Kramer 1974; Macksound, 1993). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues, "by creating a temporary world where one can act with total commitment, flow provides an escape from the chaos of the quotidian. But this escape does not represent a descent into entropy, as when one dulls one's senses with drugs or simple pleasure; it is an escape forward into a higher complexity, where one hones one's potential by confronting new challenges" (p. 184). A creative practice provides children with pleasurable spaces to explore various issues important in their lives. Although children continue to deal with their experiences, they are able to do so in a way that is exciting, safe and enjoyable.

The disengagement and alienation related to childhood trauma causes psychic entropy and chaos, while the experience with creativity creates order within the consciousness (Csikszentmihalyi 1990, 1993, 1996; Kramer, 1971). The practice of creativity allows for recognition of thoughts and feelings that may lead to happiness and healing. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) argues, "... the best way to live is by learning to control consciousness, and that to control consciousness one must cultivate certain skills [which] eventually set us free to be in harmony with the universal order (p. 169). The more personally relevant the subject matter is to the child, the more psychic attention she focuses on the activity (hooks, 1994).
Csikszentmihalyi recognizes that controlling consciousness is the ultimate goal for most human activities, and the creative process is a positive means to achieving this end.

**Perception**

Children who witness or experience violence are likely to develop a dehumanized perception of themselves and their environment in relation to their exposure to danger. Because of children’s cognitive and emotional immaturity, or because of the overwhelming nature of violence, children are not likely able to make sense of their experiences. 13-year-old Kathleen Rehwaldt (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) comments in her remarkable poem:

*Everywhere*

In the back of the closet  
Under the sink  
Behind the chair in the corner.  
That’s where the pain is.  
Under the bed  
Beside the stove  
Inside the box in the basement.  
That’s where the addiction is.  
Behind the curtain  
Beneath the couch  
Wedged between the magazines  
That’s where my life is. (p. 206).

Children who are exposed to violence have a tendency to develop misperceptions about the dangers they face, past, present and future. The inability to reconcile their relationship with violence can lead to the manifestation of abnormal behaviours: an obsession with violence and risk-
taking; confusion between fantasy and reality; an over-reaction to potential threats; a view of the world as isolating and lonely; a belief that the future is hopeless; or worse, the perception that a premature death is unavoidable. These perceptions dehumanize children, deeply damaging their self-esteem and chances for a successful future. However, by engaging in the creative process, it may be possible for children to change their negative views so that they are humanized; thus potentially increasing their chance to heal from the consequences of childhood violence.

Danger consumes a lot of space in the social maps of children who experience or witness violence. Frequently, they fixate on danger, seeking out violence in the hopes of validating and working through their violent experiences. “Child witnesses may be drawn to thrill seeking as one way to reassure themselves of their capacity to tolerate the shock of the traumatic occurrence” (Pynoos & Eth, 1985, p. 27). Unexamined trauma is likely to negatively affect the child’s opinion of himself and his world long into adult life.

Because the child has not been able to reconcile his horrifying experiences, violence likely plays too large a role in his social map. Miller (1988) describes the obsession of Buster Keaton, a comedian who, as a child, was abused by his parents: “In spite of remembering what happened to him, Buster Keaton undoubtedly repressed the trauma of being abused and degraded. That is why he had to repeat the trauma countless times without ever feeling it, for the early lesson that his feelings were forbidden and were to be ignored retained its hold on him” (p.41). Because of the secrecy and normalization that tends to surround childhood trauma, the child is frequently denied the space and time to alter his
perceptions of and relationships with trauma, himself and his external environment.

Most children who experience or witness violence suffer from low self-esteem because they perceive themselves as isolated and alone. Generally, they are unable to share their feelings and connect with other people. They tend to believe that they have very little value, which can contribute to self-destructive behaviour. Miller (1988) explains that:

"Alcohol, cigarettes, nail biting - all serve the same purpose: to prevent feelings from coming to the surface at any cost; as children these people never learned to experience their feelings, to feel comfortable with them, to understand them. They fear feelings like the plague and yet can't live entirely without them; so they pretend to themselves that getting high on drugs in a disco can make up for all they have lost. But it doesn't work.... They don't know that all this was once done to them: they were robbed of their soul, their feelings were destroyed, their rights disregarded. Others were using them, innocent victims; to compensate for the humiliation they had once suffered themselves. For there is no way for mistreated children to defend their rights" (Miller, 1988, p. 41).

Children who are exposed to violence tend to believe that what they have to say is not important to other people. When children believe that they have no value, it becomes easier to participate in activities that may mask their unhappiness but are detrimental to healing.

Because traumatized children perceive danger as disproportionately important, they tend to explore obsessively violence in both their fantasy and real worlds. Katch (2001) notes that in her kindergarten class, children exposed to violence reported that they could not stop thinking about it. She recognizes that violence in media, video games and play occupies their fantasy time in compulsive and unproductive ways. Garbarino et al. (1992) document the
findings of three prominent child-advocates, Macksound, Dyregrov and Raudin. They “concluded that the repetitive nature of the traumas these children experienced had an addictive effect” (p. 49). Violence tends to influence their social maps and it affects their interpretation of the present, as well as influences their decisions for the future. Children who are exposed to traumatic levels of violence are likely to become obsessed with the concept in both their play and reality.

While working at the group home in Southern California, I repeatedly witnessed the boys’ obsession with violence. Video games, books, magazines, movies and television provided excellent sources for their violent compulsions. For most of the boys, entertainment was only satisfying when it was rooted in violence. Non-violent activities were either a disappointment, or else they were altered until the meaning was violent in nature. Their interpersonal relations provided the forum to act out their violent impulses. They often misinterpreted actions, words or stories as aggressive, which was one of the major causes of fights among them. The boys saw the world as violent, perceived most actions as aggressive, and then reacted with more violence. Because I did not share the same violent life experiences, I was rarely able to relate to these emotional responses. In other words, within my social map, violence occupied a much smaller space.

Although some children may attempt to understand their experience through obsessive and destructive behaviours, other children particularly younger ones, are likely to develop magical thinking in order to explain what they cannot understand (Terr, 1985). Magical thinking is a misperception of reality
either because of cognitive immaturity or because of a pervasive sense of helplessness. "Inner-city children who contend with the horrors of community violence may tie these real horrors with the horrors of the fantasy world" (Garbarino et al., 1992, p. 5). Magical thinking is a confusion of reality and fantasy, such as when children have difficulty distinguishing dreams from memories (Groves, 2002). Because of a cognitive or emotional inability to make sense of overwhelming violent experiences, younger children confuse their imagination with reality in order to understand what has happened to them.

Magical thinking is related to the perspective of powerlessness resulting from childhood trauma (Garbarino et al., 1991; Macksound, 1993). The overwhelming helplessness associated with violence is so dehumanizing that they perceive responsibility for what they have experienced or witnessed. Goldberg (2000) comments that "children who cannot express their upset over a lack of control in their lives are compelled to find ways of pretending that they are not as helpless as they feel" (p. 51). Even if in their fantasy they blame themselves, these children simply cannot accept that violence has rendered them powerless. They "wonder if their secret wishes have real power: 'If I don't like my sister, will she die?'" (Groves, 2002, p. 47). They illogically perceive their actions, decisions or thoughts as powerful enough to have caused negative outcomes.

Magical thinking is often related to hypervigilance, defined earlier as the perception that the external world is threatening when it may not be, or that threats appear larger than reality. Hypervigilant sensitivity to danger results in children feeling threatened as a normal psychic state. For example, Canada
(1995) recounts that because of chronic danger experienced during his childhood, "we all learned to play at lunchtime with one eye always alert for [the older boys'] approach" (p. 32). Canada and his friends perceived the world as a constantly threatening place. His fight or flight responses were heightened, which lead to an over-reaction of his protective instinct. It is likely that hypervigilant children are responding to the perception of their world as dehumanizing and destructive. They may demonstrate aggressive or withdrawn behaviour because they believe that they are defending themselves (Groves, 2002).

Children who perceive themselves as lacking value tend to conclude that they are alone in their experience and that they are alienated from society. Anthony (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) expresses the alienation and fear associated with childhood trauma this sentiment through poetry.

All Alone

I'm so all alone,
Trapped in darkness...
Others whispered dark thoughts
about me under their breaths.
. . . I sit alone thinking. . .
I weep away the night,
For tomorrow will be the same;
More angry faces will shout words
that offend me . . .(p. 112).

Children are subject to feel lost and alone in their overwhelming world regardless if the source of violence comes from their home, community or country. Solipsism is the philosophical theory about the nature of reality that assumes the individual knows and can know nothing beyond her own modifications and emotional states (Barron, 1976). The trauma that children
suffer tends to separate them from not only their communities, cultures, friends and family, but it also alienates them from themselves. The consequence of solipsism often results in an inability to communicate their distress and vulnerability (Cairns, 1996). Overpowering memories invade the present, disrupting their concentration on schoolwork and social relationships (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994).

When children witness injury or death, they tend to assume that they will suffer the same fate. Garbarino et al., (1991) interview ten-year-old Javier from Nicaragua, asking him what he hopes to be when he grows up. Javier answers, “I don’t know... It doesn’t matter... I’ll probably be killed like my father before then” (as cited, p. 83). Terminal thinking is often the disturbing reality for many children who experience or witness violence. Childhood trauma can further alter children’s social maps so that they lack the entire concept of future. Garbarino et al. (1992) note that in dangerous environments “children develop a sense of ‘futurelessness’, or a profound fatalism about their lives. They come to expect more violence directed at them and death at an early age” (p. 63). Terr (1985) comments on her observations of the children kidnapped in 1976 from Chowchilla, California. “A frequently observed difficulty in this group was a foreshadowing of the future or a sense of lack of future possibilities” (p. 63). Because of the dehumanizing effects of trauma, many children disengage from planning and hoping for a future.

Terr (1985) notes that the trauma of violence can cause some children to misperceive time because children’s cognitive operations of time are not fully
developed before age twelve. In other words, some children are unable to perceive a future because violence has denied them an understanding of the concept. "It is very difficult to live in war. You just wait for the moment you will die" (Sanel, age 12, as cited in Machel, 2001, p. 80). Without foresight, children who are exposed to violence are dehumanized because they “cannot apprehend problems situated outside their sphere of biological necessity. Their interests center almost totally around survival, and they lack a sense of life on a more historic plane” (Freire, 1973, p. 17). Because of violent experiences, traumatized children tend to lack a sense that there is more to life than violence, and consequently, they have difficulty imagining a future.

Children who lack the perception of or have little hope for the future tend to make choices based on immediate gratification. "I don't plan anything for tomorrow because I don't know if I'm going to make it through today" (Pat, age 17, as cited in Goodwillie, 1993, p. 53). Generally, children who think terminally live moment-to-moment, dismissing choices that might help them obtain a better future. Violent experiences affect their choices and patterns of behaviour because traumatized children are not likely able to imagine that the future could be better than the present. Reality is simply too bitter. Canada (1998) worked with “boys who through their own experience know the odds of dying - or being shot, or being imprisoned outweigh those that they will graduate from high school” (p. 18). No matter what they decide, they believe that their path is predetermined by the violence in their environment.
It makes sense, therefore, that terminal thinking becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; the child makes dangerous decisions based on her violent reality (Canada, 1998). She likely makes choices without regard for the future because she perceives her prospects to be hopeless or non-existent. Her social map indicates that it is more sensible to follow the patterns of behaviour to which she has become accustomed (Garbarino, 1988). Decisions and actions based on terminal thinking tend to increase her involvement in violent situations, which in turn, increase her chances of becoming a victim of violence. Thus, she is likely to fulfill her perception that the future is limited by violence (Garbarino et al., 1993; Terr, 1985).

Jones and Newman (1997) record an excellent example of self-fulfilling prophecy due to terminal thinking. They interview one of their peers, 13-year-old George, who lives in Chicago’s Ida B. Wells housing projects. The two boys confront George about his decision to drop out of the eighth grade in order to sell drugs.

*LeAlan:* Man, why ain’t you in school?

*George:* School ain’t shit.

*LeAlan:* How you gonna be something if you don’t go to school?

*George:* You ain’t learning shit now, so why? Why?

*LeAlan:* You ain’t learning shit out here. I bet I’m gonna see your ass twenty-five years from now begging for a quarter so you could get a drink!"

*George:* I ain’t gonna be alive in ten years because I’ll be selling my drugs and they’re gonna pop my ass. No one’s gonna be alive in twenty more years!
LeAlan: I'm gonna be alive! I know I am!

George: Your ass ain't gonna be alive in ten years! (p. 45).

George's decisions for his present and hopelessness for his future are based upon past lessons of violence. Within his social map, even school is too long term a commitment. His terminal thinking has lead him to make choices which will benefit his status and survival in the short term but will likely increase his chances of dying before reaching adulthood.

Children who perceive adults as unable or unwilling to protect them are likely to believe that they have little chance of surviving violence. Protection is one of the most important roles of parenting for any species. In situations of chronic danger, children are often left vulnerable, which contributes to their perception of impending doom and futurelessness. Terr's (1985) study of the kidnapped victims in Chowchilla, California recorded the responses of the children.

One of Dr. Terr's most intriguing and sobering findings was about the ways in which the kidnapping experience altered the children's views of their own safety. She found that many of them ... suffered from nagging worry that it would happen again, and that for some children, their view of the future began to change. They could not imagine themselves ever feeling safe. A few of them even had trouble imagining the future at all.... And she found this change in worldview to be the most enduring legacy of the kidnapping experience for the children. (Groves, 2002, p. 36).

Because adults were unable to prevent the kidnapping, the children lost faith in their parents' abilities to protect them. It is common and understandable for children who experience or witness violence to perceive adults as either aggressive or helpless. These children's early recognition of adults' weaknesses
calls into question their own chance for survival; if adults are unable to live through danger, then children are left feeling extremely vulnerable to violence.

Unlike the dehumanized perception consequential to childhood trauma, the experience of creativity offers connection to the self, others and the universal quest for life’s meaning. By engaging in a creative process, it is possible for children to begin to comprehend their overwhelming violent experiences. The creative process offers other perceptions to children. Engaging in creativity provides the time and space for children to explore new perceptions of themselves, their violent experiences and their external world. As they focus on the life affirming characteristics of creativity, such as truth seeking, problem finding and problem solving, traumatized children are likely to have less psychic energy to obsess over violence and death. By participating in genuine creative engagement, children can potentially develop a normal perspective on the life cycle. Someday, they may even be able to reconcile their excessive angst about death so that it is no longer an anxious preoccupation.

Edwards (2000) discusses Via Creativa, which refers to the creative process as it relates to healing and truth seeking. “The Via Creativa entails living the fundamental questions of life so seriously that they permeate and motivate one’s artistic endeavors” (p. 4). Through a creative path, the child who is exposed to violence can come to understand new truth and perspectives on both his internal and external realities. He can use the creative process to understand his external world, which then reflects on his internal perspectives of the self. The child can also use the creative process to explore his internal perceptions, and as
he comes to make sense of his emotions, he is likely to make positive choices in
his external world.

It is likely that the creative path can bring about a sense of well-being and
humanization through the child's new awareness. For example, while painting a
picture, the child might find an optimistic and healing connection with her
internal and external perceptions. The truth that she discovers in the tranquility
of art might allow her to alter her internal perspective of the self, one that is not
so centred on violence. John Updike (as cited in Edwards, 2000) notes that
creativity "serves as a type of therapy and religion at the same time" (p. 16).
Violence orientates the child's social map around an overemphasized concern
with danger. However, the creative path allows the child to discover new truths
based on powerful and engaging experiences. Because much of her psychic
energy is focused on the life-affirming qualities of creativity, she might concern
herself less with the negative consequences of childhood trauma.

The child's identity cannot be severed from her violent experiences.
Therefore, any self-discovery made while engaged in a creative process will likely
include the child's perspectives on danger. Several theorists (Groves, 2002;
Garbarino et al., 1992; Macksound, 1993; Richman, 1998; Kaprielian-Churchill &
Churchill, 1994; Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Dokter, 1998) argue that the qualities of
self-discovery and communication found in the creative process can help reverse,
or at the very least, ease some of the negative consequences of childhood trauma.
Groves (2002) recounts that during a counseling session a girl "talks with her
counselor about what happens as she draws. 'It's like the feelings come out on
the tip of my marker.'... We hear this girl's relief at being able to let go of the
intense feelings that get stirred up in the face of trauma” (p. 80). For the child who has been exposed to violence, the significance of the creative process lies in the releasing of emotions and experiences that have been repressed because of the nature of violence.

Whereas childhood trauma can leave a child feeling alienated and alone, the creative process empowers him to perceive himself as a contributing member to the human community. While engaged in creativity, the child must work to reflect his new viewpoint back to the audience, thus universalizing his experiences. Goldberg (2000) remarks, “the artistic mind uses its creative work as a mirror to recognize and heal troubling, disavowed aspects of its inner conflictual life” (p. 42). For example, a child shares writing about his dog dying, only to discover that the other children find truth in his story. They may even relate stories and poems of their own experiences with death, and the child no longer feels alone in his suffering. Unlike the solipsistic violent experience, the creative process is concerned with the desire to understand and share creative perspectives about life and the self.

Whereas childhood trauma repeatedly teaches a child that destructive behaviours are empowering, creativity demonstrates empowerment through creative expression (Warren, 1984). The flow found in the creative process is reported to connect the self to a sense of something greater. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) observes, “often people mention experiencing self-transcendence in flow, as when a musician playing a particularly beautiful melody feels at one with the order of the cosmos, or a dancer feels his body moving to a rhythm .... one achieves the ‘oceanic feelings of clarity, distance, union, and oneness’” (p. 185).
The creative process allows the child to see herself as a creator; a spokesperson of her experience; and an individual who has value and expertise. Unlike the alienation associated with childhood trauma, creativity offers a deep sense of connectedness through self-discovery.

Violent experiences tend to fixate a child's anxieties around the significance of danger and death. It is common for a child who has been exposed to violence to perceive her future as bleak or nonexistent (Garbarino et al., 1992). The quality of sublimination found in creativity (Kramer, 1971) is the possible redirection of and replacement for her obsession with death; thus, she might regain hope in the future. Edwards (2000) argues that the creative writing process allows the participant to experience her death in the reflection of the creative act. “This type of writing is a way to fend off the writer's own thoughts of the truth of death; it serves as a type of therapy” (Edwards, 2000, p.16).

Childhood trauma can focus a child's social map on the inevitability of death to the point of despondency. In opposition, creativity offers the quality of reconnecting with life, which might lead a child towards healing.

Because children are not fully developed, they have difficulties understanding the nature of their violent experiences. Childhood trauma thus affects their perspectives of themselves, their world and their sense of purpose in life. In an attempt to make sense of their reality, some children may become obsessed with violence, engaging in risky, aggressive and/or hypervigilant behaviours. Consequently, children often experience the dehumanizing perspectives of psychic entropy, solipsism and terminal thinking.
In opposition to misperceptions related to childhood trauma, the creative process demands an exploration of new perspectives about the self and their external world. Sharing these discoveries reconnects children to themselves, the human community and a cosmic sense that life has meaning. Because much of children's psychic energy is focused on life-affirming creative expressions, they have less time and effort available to fixate on danger and death. A creative practice does not deny children's violent experiences, but rather allows them to reconcile their worst nightmare: that life is meaningless; that an early death is inevitable; that they are valueless. Healing is found in the humanization of new perspectives gained while engaged in the creative process.

Mimicry

Mimicking is an essential function of human development because it is one of the most important ways in which a child can learn to survive his environment and function in his society. The child who witnesses or experiences violence tends to learn that aggressive behaviour is a powerful tool for success and survival. Garbarino et al. (1992) note, “exposure to violence ... increases the likelihood of the child’s engaging in future violence and other antisocial acts” (p. 66). A child is likely to mimic the behaviours of his aggressor as a way of understanding his experience and surviving his environment. Exposure to positive role models can help the child cope with the many stressors of childhood trauma (Guy, 1997). Whereas copying violent behaviours often leaves a child
dehumanized and isolated, the role modeling found in a creative process is humanizing and engaging, and it can be related to healing.

Many theorists from a variety of backgrounds recognize the repetitive nature of violence as it manifests itself in children's social maps. Rickel and Becker (1997) argue that the use of severe punishment accounts for and increases the likelihood that children will adopt harsh responses towards others, including their own children. Children survivors, who never find meaning in their violent experiences, are at risk of developing a dangerous acceptance for the legitimacy of violence. Macksound (1993) notes that children “acquire aggressive behaviour patterns as a result of modeling. They will frequently imitate aggressive role models” (p. 95). Violence is likely to be legitimized in the eyes of children who experience or witness aggression.

For example, Mark (as cited in Goodwillie, 1993) remembers:

I had skipped school, and the school had called my house. So I went home and opened the door, and my father goes, You skipped school, didn't you? And he punched me three times and I fell to the ground. So, he beat me for about thirty-five or forty minutes, and he eventually picked up the hammer off the table and hit me in the head with it. After that, I crawled away and I went upstairs and I grabbed the shotgun that was on my brother's side of the bedroom.... I made the sign of the cross and I asked God to help me do the right thing and I shot him. (p. 14).

Mark learned from his parents that violence is a powerful tool for problem solving. Therefore, murdering his abusive father seemed like the only logical solution to the serious problem of violence in Mark's home. Children may recognize aggression as an effective method of protection and control, and they
tend to revere aggressors as positive and exciting role models.

For children who must continue to live in violent situations, learned aggressive behaviours might be necessary for them to survive their surroundings (Ogbu, 1981; Jones & Newman, 1997). Jones (Jones & Newman, 1997) notes that "Telling someone you love them is soft, and if they see you're soft in the projects it's like a shark seeing blood - they're going to attack!" (p. 55). Under such dangerous conditions, children who lack these aggressive social behaviours might be in danger of being hurt or killed. Ogbu (1981) recognizes that some parents explicitly teach their children aggressive behaviours. In other words, some parents recognize that without these skills, their children will not survive in their dangerous environment, nor be successful in their violent society.

Canada (1995, 1998) comments that in the absence of adult role models, younger children will mimic older ones. "We didn't have any relationships with the men on our block, but we, like all boys, desperately wanted to learn how to become men ourselves. Our only male role models were the older boys, and we copied their behavior and attitudes in all ways" (Canada, 1998). Frequently, the younger boys were taught that men proved their manhood through the use of brutal violence. Children who did not respond to situations with aggressive social behaviours might become subject to attacks by more aggressive children. Canada (1995) describes a childhood lesson in aggressive responses:
"Butchie was ... very big for his age [13 years].... [He] had one flaw: he would not fight. Everyone picked on him.... I don't know what set the older boys off, or why they picked that Saturday morning, but it was decided that Butchie had to be taught a lesson. The older boys felt that [he] was giving the block a bad reputation.... The older boys took Butchie and 'stretched' him.... When [he] was completely, helplessly exposed, two of the boys began to punch him in his stomach and chest. The beating was savage. Butchie's cries for help seemed only to infuriate them more. I couldn't believe that a human body could take that amount of punishment. When they finished with him ... [they] just walked away talking, as if nothing had happened. To those of us who watched, the lesson was brutal and unmistakable. No matter who you fought, he could never beat you that bad. (p. 17).

Because Butchie neither understands nor uses the aggressive social codes recognized by the rest of the children, he is punished. The children who witness acts of brutality learn an important lesson about survival in their chronically dangerous environments. As the witnesses get older, they continue the cycle by teaching younger children the aggressive social behaviours that they had learned.

Aggressive responses are dehumanizing and alienating because they tend to strain children's interpersonal relations. "Negative relationships, characterized by harshness or rejection, undermine trust and promote fear and anger in children" (Guy, 1997, p. 65). Often, aggressive role models leave children feeling isolated and alone in their experiences. If the children cannot demonstrate violent behaviours, then they may question their value. In her poem, Nobody really cares anymore but me, Sharneen (as cited in Berek, 1992) comments on this solipsistic response to negative role modeling.

No one wants to cry for me.
Nobody wants to care for me.
Who will sit down and then
Stand up for me.
Nobody cares anymore but me...."(p. 109).
In both my experiences working at the group home in Southern California and at the orphanage in Guatemala City, I noticed that most of the children were lonely despite the fact that they live surrounded by their peers. Because of the high levels of aggressive social behaviours, the children were rarely able to connect with one another on a deep and meaningful level. Violence impeded the forming of genuine friendships. Aggressive behaviours isolate and alienate the children, and this may be related to their low self-esteem and continued aggression.

Contrary to violent situations, which tend to leave children without positive adult protection and role modeling, creativity requires a facilitator to teach the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in a creative practice. Because the teacher and children share a common interest, the creative process allows for natural relationship development. “People who have overcome difficult ... situations often point to one person who nurtured them at a crucial time in their development. It may have been an adoring grandparent, an understanding teacher, an inspiring coach or a thoughtful mentor” (Guy, 1997, p. 83). The facilitator is a role model both for creativity and for positive problem solving. The relationship created between adults and children is a humanizing quality of creativity.

Whereas the world of violence contains adults who are unable or unwilling to listen to children, a genuine creative process involves a facilitator who can ensure a safe and receptive audience. Groves (2002) comments, an “effective intervention is to give children permission to talk, to tell their stories about what
they have seen" (p. 101). The creative practice is founded on the idea of communication, and the facilitator must illustrate how that process should look. The children can then mimic the healthy examples set by the facilitator, who epitomizes the role by not reacting to their stories with embarrassment, anger or other negative emotions.

The creative process should function much like Garbarino et al.'s (1992) developmental approach to education. Their approach views the child as central to the process of learning, and it is rooted in a strong relationship between the adult and child. The method responds to the child's daily abilities. When the child is having a strong day, the facilitator introduces new materials and skills. On fragile days, such as when the child is exhibiting regressive, aggressive or withdrawn behaviours, the facilitator can respond by allowing the child to review acquired skills; thereby increasing the child's confidence.

Because of the trusted relationship between the facilitator and the child, the adult is able to ensure that the creative process is psychologically supportive of the child’s needs to communicate repressed experiences. “Teachers can help children who live in dangerous environments cope with traumatic events and complex feelings and concerns; they can be powerful psychic healers” (Garbarino et al., 1992, p. 221). Unlike the relationships found in violent environments, the creative process allows the child to experience a relationship that is both safe and supportive.

Canada (1995, 1998) describes in detail the enormous importance of positive role modeling for children who have been exposed to violence. The role model must create a sense of security and instill the concept of safety within the
children's social maps. Although Canada uses martial arts rather than a creative process to reach his students, he exemplifies flow and engages them into optimal experiences. Under his intense leadership, the children learn to copy his powerful and affirming example.

I begin the class and then I’m lost in teaching. I’m trying to bring magic back into the lives of these kids. To bring a sense of wonder and amazement. I can feel the students losing themselves and focusing on me.... I have crowded out all the bad things out of their minds.... I know all the tricks. I yell, I scream, I fly through the air with the greatest of ease. I take my black belt students and I slam them on the floor and they pop up like those weighted weebles dolls that can’t stay down.... And by the time the class is ending their eyes are wide with amazement and respect, and they look at me differently. And I line them up and .... I talk to them about values, about violence, about hope. (Canada, p. 176 - 177).

For Canada (1995, 1998), the role model must be that adult who is available to listen, to show concern and love, and most importantly to protect the children even if it is just for a short time. The role model must be able to ensure a safe space so that children can once again recognize the concept of safety within their social maps.

Whereas in violent situations, adults and older children tend to demonstrate aggressive and degrading behaviours as commanding methods of change and empowerment, a genuine creative process offers a positive alternative: flow and optimal experiences. A child can mimic the positive examples of both the facilitators and other children in the class. The facilitators introduce alternative perspectives as well as offer both a process of self-discovery and a space of safety. Because the child is in control of her creative process, she can incorporate the truth of her life into her work. The alienating consequence of violent role models found in childhood trauma is another dehumanizing risk
factor that a child must reconcile. An authentic creative process offers engagement in genuine and healthy relationships with adults who are concerned with sharing positive attributes, providing a sense of safety and listening with genuine interest.

Conditions

Engaging in creative acts provides an opportunity for artists, teachers and other concerned members of society to develop a practical program where having traumatized children engage in creative acts might help them find healing and comfort. In order for such a process to provide any potential support for children, certain conditions must be explored. A supportive creative program requires a "nurturing setting that combines warmth and caring with a clearly defined structure . . . . and explicit limits that are consistently enforced" (Garbarino et al., p. 151). The details of such a program vary depending on the specifics of the children's situations, but the essential qualities share common conditions.

A practical application of a creative process, used specifically for the purpose of healing, is dependent upon the skills and caring nature of the facilitator. It is essential that facilitators be experts in their creative genre (math, science, art, music, drama and so forth). The facilitator expertise is essential so that the child is able to gain a level of skills and abilities which is satisfying. It is just as important, however, that the facilitator is able to teach these expert skills in a caring, respectful manner. The facilitator should create and maintain a safe environment that allows the child to experience empowerment, trust,
engagement and an increase in self-esteem (Eng, 1999). The facilitator acts like a teaching guide as the child moves towards seeing herself as her own teacher with determination, intrinsic motivation and experiences. The facilitator's role is to direct the child through the creative process, teaching her the genuine skills so that the child can communicate effectively.

A successful and healing setting demands a basic level of safety, both physical and psychological, and the child must recognize this security as real. "The way children enter into a creative space, ensuring physical and psychological safety, such things as greeting them at the door, calming them down before entering, speaking with each one individually as they enter, allowing only one in at a time" (Dye, 2001, 113). The child must view the adult facilitator as able and willing to protect.

Respect is essential among and between the participating children and facilitator, and it is key to establishing a secure environment. Through a holistic approach, the facilitator honours each child as a complete human being with feelings, experiences, previously acquired knowledge, strengths and weaknesses (Dye, 1999). By practicing respect, the children might come to recognize trust through experience and role modeling.

Likewise, the child needs to respect the program and the genuine products which he will come to produce. An audition entry process might be useful simply to determine the level of commitment from the student before he enters into the program. Attendance requirements and expectations should be clearly explained to the child so that he is aware of the work that is required of him. If the creative process is to be healing, the child must view it sincerely, and not as a hand-out.
The program's focus ought to be centred on intrinsic motivation, with very little emphasis on competition or judgement of the child (Amabile, 1996). However, this does not suggest an absence of ability to judge the quality of the child’s creative product. In gaining a sense of expertise, which assumes judgement, the child gains satisfaction. Because the child chooses his creative expression, the empowerment of that ability to choose will likely lead to a furthered interest in that topic, and he might seek out skills and knowledge in order to better express his ideas. When an "experience is autotelic, the person is paying attention to the activity for its own sake; when it is not, the attention is focussed on its consequences" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.68). It is feasible that the result of an intrinsic experience will lead to empowerment, self-trust, engagement and an altering of perceptions.

By providing a genuine program in a physically and psychologically safe environment, it is possible that children will be able to engage in the creative process. The flow the child experiences and witnesses can help ease some of the trauma, as well as provide opportunities to discover lost and new skills.

Conclusion

Lying hopeless tears are falling,
Feeling helpless, what to do?
Keep on working to find the answers,
Turning failure to dreams come true.
The curtain closes, is the act finished?
Am I not doomed as sorrow’s bride?
My role has meaning, and life continues,
A happy ending to know you’ve tried.
(Leigh Ann, as cited in Goodwillie, 1993, p. 177).
The consequences of childhood trauma that I have discussed in this chapter are considered risk factors that contribute to the dehumanization of children. Because of their violent experiences, children are plagued by distraction and anxiety, and this affects their emotional, cognitive, spiritual and physical growth. However, the qualities of a creative practice are related to the coping mechanisms that help children both rediscover humanization and potentially heal from their violent experiences.

Creativity offers the necessary conditions for any child to develop a positive sense of identity. During the creative process, the child loses self-awareness because he becomes completely absorbed in the moment. He redisCOVERS positive qualities that make him different from, and yet integrated with others. As a complex being, he can come to view himself as a creative person whose ideas are simultaneous individual and universal (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). “The arts can motivate in a way possibly no other force can, because it is only through the arts experience, through making a mark that no one else could make, that we express the individual spark of our own humanity” (Warren, 1984, p. 4).

Creativity is a potential form of healing available to everyone because it is innate in all people. Graham Greene comments that “Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation” (as cited in Winner, 1982, p. 15). The creative process is potentially an easily accessible and universal form of healing for parents, teachers, children and communities around the world. As Greene notes,
creativity is the mechanism by which human beings are able to seek solace and a sense of humanity.

Would that creativity as a healing process be introduced into the lives of children who witness or experience violence, certain conditions would most certainly need to be considered. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into great details when exploring the conditions, here are a few examples of what might be required for a successful project.

Such a facility would require an audition process, not so much for judgement of talent but to ensure a commitment from the children. Simply offering a venue for creative expression is not enough to convince the children that the creative process is not simply another hand out by others trying to 'fix' the children's problems.

The children should have time at the beginning to explore various creative genres; for example, math, science, creative writing, music and art; until they find the one which speaks to them. Again, this might ensure that the children are genuinely in control and can make choices over their creative experience.

Such a facility would need genuine creators as facilitators, so that the children might share the creative expression with an individual who was an expert in that field. In that way, the exchange could be genuine and the connection sincere. The children may continue with psychological therapy outside of the creative process, however, such a facility should be seen as separate.

The need for such a facility which centres on a healing-focused creative process is clear. Children's experiences today quickly become the memory of the
next generation. Those children who develop their identity through the creative process are likely to imagine and practice the empathy and altruism necessary to make positive changes in the future. “We have limitless powers of imagination, they affirm, and we can impose our own order creatively on anything we deal with - even ourselves. The crucial variables are how we view life and what we want our place in it to be” (Drews, 1974, p. 90). Unlike the consequence of violence that has taught children that they are powerless and without choice, the creative process empowers children to use their imagination to envision a better, more humane world.
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