A boredom theory of youth criminality

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A BOREDOM THEORY OF YOUTH CRIMINALITY.

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Boredom, although a regular occurrence among the general youth population of the modern society and a possible causal factor of truancy, drug use, suicide and crime, has been widely neglected within the fields of education, psychology, sociology, and criminology. As a tiresome, dull, and unpleasant experience, ‘boredom’ meaning lack of interest and weariness, by its own definition, does nothing to inspire a great deal of interest or research which I claim has been an especially notable lacuna of much research. Since it is the intention of this thesis to show that boredom is a causal factor of youth criminality which must be recognised and studied further, it is essential that boredom is thoroughly researched for both theoretical and practical reasons within the field of criminology. In a two part documentary analysis on boredom and youth criminality, this thesis demonstrates what makes an activity or situation boring, what causes a person to experience boredom, and how boredom is connected to youth criminality and crime.

Conceptually, boredom has been described variously as a transitory negative state, an emotion, and an adverse drive, and has been shown to be more prevalent among males than females. Younger members of society are also found to be more susceptible to boredom than older individuals. It is well documented that youth crime is predominantly committed by males, increases significantly during adolescence, and peaks between the ages of 18 and 20. It will therefore, be postulated in this thesis that boredom may explain both the predominance of adolescent male offenders and the reason for their offending. Empirical research will, however, be necessary to test this hypothesis.

In connection with youth criminality, high sensation seekers and some extroverts are also more likely to experience both boredom and crime. Interestingly, as a result of socialisation, males from an early age are more likely than females to be sensation and thrill seekers. However, since gender roles are becoming more androgynous, this thesis also suggests that more females will begin to experience boredom similar to their male counterparts which may result in further increases in female offending. It therefore will be important to also test this hypothesis in the near future.
DECLARATION.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief, incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education. In addition, I certify that this thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text, nor does it contain any defamatory material.

Signed...

Date.../02/02
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INTRODUCTION.

In asking a number of juveniles in NSW detention centres the reasons why they offend, Freeman (1996), found that 13.2% of those who committed shoplifting offences said the reason for their offending was to relieve boredom; in break and enter offences a total of 13.7% stated it was to relieve boredom and to experience excitement and thrills; whilst a total of 29% said the main reasons for motor vehicle theft offences were also for excitement, thrills and to relieve boredom. Scitovsky (1999, p.3), likewise found whilst interviewing members of juvenile street gangs in correctional institutions, many offenders “often list their desire to relieve the terrible boredom they suffer as one of the origins of their criminality.”

Amongst two groups of young people between the ages of 14-25yrs, White, Aumair, Harris, and McDonnell, (1997) also revealed that 56.2% of youths claimed that boredom was an underlying factor for vandalism, graffiti, drug use, joy-riding, drinking and smoking. Even the Western Australia Legislative Assembly, (cited in Patterson & Pegg, 1999, p.26) has recognised that the “lack of facilities and programs, and the resulting boredom” (italics added) are strong factors driving some youths into antisocial and criminal activities. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Klapp (1986, p.28), three groups of juveniles in Sydney “showed significant agreement .... that the four most important causes of delinquency were peer influence, thrill-seeking, desire to prove oneself, and boredom.”

From the accounts of young offenders interviewed by Freeman (1996) and Scitovsky, (1999), and young people interviewed by White et al. (1997) and Klapp (1986), the experience of boredom for some individuals seems to entice them into seeking stimulation from any source that is interesting, entertaining, novel and exciting. Breaking and entering, motor theft, shoplifting, as well as drug use, vandalism, graffiti, and other forms of deviant behaviour which produces “intense sensations and experiences” (Caffray & Schneider, 2000, p.547) emerge as sufficient stimuli to satisfy individuals’ general need for high arousal. According to sensation-seeking theories the excitement and thrilling sensation experienced during criminal acts “operates as an incentive or reinforcement [which] increase[s] the likelihood of future participation” (Caffray & Schneider, 2000. P.547). Since the illegal and
diverse exploration (Klapp, 1986) of crime provides excitement and stimulation, I hypothesise that crime can alleviate boredom. I also predict that the alleviation of boredom would be a great incentive for sensation seekers to commit crime. Furthermore, if crime does alleviate boredom, I suspect that it would encourage a continuation of criminal behaviour (Caffray & Schneider, 2000).

While this thesis acknowledges that boredom has been stated as a cause of offending for particular juvenile offenders interviewed by other researchers, I claim there has been insufficient recognition that boredom is an important issue to generate extensive empirical research. Only an estimated one study per year has been dedicated to boredom, none of which has been conducted in the field of criminology (Smith, 1981; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990; Sundberg, Latkin, Farmer, & Saquid, 1991; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993).

The notion that something as obvious as boredom could be an underlying cause of youth criminality appears to elude many researchers who generally prefer to research the traditional social issues of poverty, unemployment, delinquent peers, and poor parenting (Weatherburn & Lind, 1998; Western, 1996). Evidently, 'boredom,' meaning a "lack of interest, [and] weariness" (Schwarz, 1990, p.49), does nothing to inspire a great deal of interest or research. Most researchers with past experiences of boredom would in all probability rather avoid such an aversive topic. However, since many young people have demonstrated and expressed time and time again during interviews that they are bored and wish for more stimulation which, I hypothesise, crime provides, I claim the lack of research in boredom has been a notable lacuna in many fields including the field of criminology.

Since boredom has not been empirically researched in connection to youth criminality, this thesis will present a two part literature analysis on boredom and youth criminality to show that boredom should be thoroughly researched for both theoretical and practical reasons within the field of criminology. This paper will seek an explanation of what makes an activity or situation boring, what causes a person to experience boredom, and how boredom emanates and dissipates, and argue the centrality of boredom as a causal factor of youth criminality and youth crime, previously unexplored in the field of criminology. Unfortunately, one major flaw
that must be acknowledge with a literary research is the lack of data analysis to substantiate any claims made. This is a problem that can only be rectified by future research. The intention of this thesis is simply to raise the profile of boredom in connection to youth criminality. As the topic of this paper is youth criminality, the terms young people, youths, teenagers, and adolescents will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to people under the age of 18 years as noted under s 3 Youth Offenders Act 1994 (W.A.), (Kenny, 1997, p.157).

The first section of this thesis will be devoted to youth crime, wherein an analysis of youth crime and the causes of youth criminality will be presented. In addition, in explaining the connection between boredom and youth criminality from a theoretical framework, current criminological theories of youth criminality from theorists Merton, Sutherland, Agnew, Matza, and Zuckerman, will be analysed. It will be argued that it appears necessary to incorporate into the field of criminology a new integrated theory which recognises the alleviation of boredom as a strong motivational factor.

The second section of this paper will present a deeper analysis of boredom. Commencing with a historical perspective of boredom, this paper will examine the beginnings of capitalism and industrialism then through to the present to trace the origins of boredom. It will be demonstrated that as technology progresses boredom has become an affliction of many young people which occurs more commonly within many social environments. Several arguments will be presented to explain the increase in this phenomenon in modern society. Next, the conceptualisation of boredom will be investigated followed by ‘the structure of boredom’ which examines the determinants of boredom. This thesis will also examine boredom proneness to analyse the differences between individuals in relation to age, gender, and class.

Boredom is a complex multidimensional construct (Vodanovich & Kass, 1990) which some authors suggest is produced by either:

1) high arousal
2) low arousal
3) constraints
4) meaninglessness
5) perception of time
6) unpleasantness and
7) subjective monotony

(Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Brissett & Snow, 1993; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990; Shaw, Caldwell, & Kleiber, 1996; Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Barbalet, 1999; Berlyne, 1960; Hill, 1975; Geiwitz, 1966; Klapp, 1986). While I recognise that boredom is a multidimensional construct produced by one or more factors previously mentioned, I argue that in this hectic day and age of commercialism and consumerism, boredom can also arise in part from an individual’s inability to use their imagination. According to Keen (1977), Lewinsky (1943), and Polly et al. (cited in Watt & Vodanovich, 1999, p.5), “the ability to generate internal stimulation or activity [through imagination] may .... reduc[e] the likelihood of boredom.” I suspect the instant gratification of commercialised entertainment has reduced individuals’ utilising their imaginations to prevent boredom.

Earlier research has shown that boredom differs in severity and duration ranging from a fleeting or temporary state to a more chronic kind of boredom (Brissett & Snow, 1993; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Goetzl, 1975; Klapp, 1986; Darden & Marks, 1999; Sundberg, et al. 1991; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990). As a result, Goetzl (1975), Klapp (1986), Darden and Marks (1999) and others, recognise that there are generally two types of boredom which largely coexist. Ordinary boredom (Klapp,1986) known also as exogenous boredom (Goetzl, 1975) or response boredom (Berstein, cited in Iso-Ahola & Weissinger) which is “superficial, vague and temporary” (Kuhn, cited in Darden & Marks, 1999, p.15) and ‘endogenous boredom’ (Goetzl, 1975) or ‘ennui’ (Klapp, 1986) known today as “clinical depression” (Darden & Marks, 1999, p.15), which is described as a deeper sort of boredom.

According to Goetzl (1975) and Kuhn (cited in Darden & Marks, 1999) there are a number of distinct differences between the two, the most significant one for this thesis being that ordinary boredom is associated with social and environmental factors whilst chronic boredom ‘ennui’, is the result of internal factors that are
viewed as a “sense of psychic poverty” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p.238). In addition, Farmer and Sundberg, (cited in Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993) found that boredom differed from ennui insofar that ordinary or response boredom includes the element of a lack of interest while ennui contains an element of sadness. Although I acknowledge the importance of endogenous boredom insofar as possibly being connected to suicide and depression, the main focus of this paper will be exogenous or response boredom which I argue is more directly related to youth criminality. Goetzl (1975, p.72) also recognises that “prolonged exogenous boredom [can just as easily] lead to .... non-productive daydreaming, and ultimately to disturbances of the psychic equilibrium and to mental deterioration” (italics added).

Since boredom differs in severity and duration, it may be experienced differently from one individual to another depending on environmental, age, and gender factors (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Shaw, et al. 1996; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Sundberg, et al. 1991), personality pre-dispositions such as sensation seeking and extroversion (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996) as well as the sub factor of extroversion-impulsivity, which has also been depicted as having a low threshold to boredom (Cook, 1991; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990).

There is a general consensus among researchers that males are more likely to be prone to boredom than females (Sundberg, et al. 1991; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Shaw, et al. 1996; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999). Males are more likely to identify environmental factors as a cause of their boredom whereas females are more likely to blame internal factors and label boredom as ‘depression’. Interestingly, Sundberg, et al. (1991, p.219) found that females appear to suffer “more depression than [males],” whilst males appear to suffer more boredom than females. This does suggest that there may be some differences in the perception and attribution of boredom between males and females insofar as females focus upon themselves as being the problem whilst males see boredom as a fault of their surroundings. In both cases, boredom and depression have been closely related to the struggles of maintaining self-esteem (Goetzl, 1975).
Vodanovich and Kass (1990), suggest that the differences in the experiences of boredom between male and female may be genetically based. However, it may well be that as males are generally required to be more active, more competitive in both sports and occupations, and more involved in adventurous and risk-taking activities due to socialisation and cultural norms, males are more likely to experience a less stimulating situation or task as boring than females. Since society has moved towards gender equality, and females are crossing the boundaries and selecting customarily male dominant roles and activities, it will be however claimed that females are beginning to be as prone to boredom as males which, it will be argued more thoroughly later in this thesis, may account for the increase in female offending.

Sundberg, et al. (1991) also found that boredom has been commonly linked with extroverts and sensation seekers whilst depression is generally associated with introverts. Zuckerman (1978), who has defined four types of sensation seeking traits: thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility, states that sensation seekers will appear to crave all types of sensory stimulation. Depending on whether one is considered as a ‘high’ or ‘low’ sensation seeker the level of stimulation will differ. Generally, high sensation seekers will require higher levels of stimulation and more variety to reach their usually high optimal level of arousal. According to Iso-Ahola and Crowley, (1991, p.268) “[high] sensation seekers [will] have a low tolerance for repetitious or constant experiences.”

Given that boredom can, as Hill and Perkins (1985) and Geiwitz (1966) suggest be generated by monotonous tasks, it thus seems apparent that sensation seekers would tend to be more easily bored. Baldwin (1985, p.1328), however notes that beyond the peak of sensation seeking which appears to be “in the 18- to 20 year range,”... “the sensation seeking motive” will decline, thus suggesting that age is a factor in the experience of boredom.

Research has shown that younger members of society especially those that are at primary school, secondary school and university, are more likely to be prone to boredom than older individuals (Wasson, 1981; Maroldo, 1986; Shaw, et al.1996; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990). While Vodanovich and Kass (1990, p.304) have found
that both mature and young people need the same level of stimulation and possess an "equal ability at generating internal stimulation", no complete explanation has, however, been found for the age differences in boredom proneness. I suggest that as mature individuals usually have more commitments such as a full-time job, possibly a family, a house and garden to maintain, as well as generally being a taxi service for their children, mature people, may not have as much time to experience boredom and are thus far less prone to boredom than younger people. Furthermore, since mature people generally have more resources such as owning a car, as well as having a more substantial income (to take advantage of most adult leisure activities such as night-clubs, pubs, wineries, week-end retreats, etc.), mature people may experience less boredom.

While the stimulation level for older individuals or retirees may also be the same as other individuals, due to the ageing process, i.e. older individuals are generally less physically active, the type of activities to achieve the equivalent level of stimulation does appear to differ from their younger counterparts ranging from playing bowls to bingo and bridge. Since there is some indication that retirees and older people can find their optimal level of arousal in a range of less physically active activities, I suspect that older individuals will suffer less boredom. An alternative explanation is that perhaps over the years older individuals have simply become more tolerant of boredom. Given that boredom does seem to differ from one individual to another and from one gender to another, this thesis will investigate further the factors (environmental, gender, personality, and age) which appears to contribute to boredom proneness.

Boredom has been described by different researchers as, an emotion, an adverse drive or alternatively, a negative transitory state. Considering there are two distinct types of boredom, and that boredom can be experienced differently, this thesis recognises that boredom can be in different situations, a transitory negative state as reported by Watt and Vodanovich (1999), amongst others (see also: Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Brissett & Snow, 1993; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990; Shaw, et al. 1996; Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Hill & Perkins, 1985); an emotion as defined by Barbalet, (1999), Plutchik, (cited in Seamon and Kenrick, 1994) and Freeman,
Although Brissett and Snow (1993, p.243) have found that boredom is “a pathway to enlightenment, stimulating the production of fantasies, awakening creativeness, and bringing forth entertainment within;” several others have realised that boredom may also produce devastating and destructive consequences other than crime. Truancy, (Watt & Vodanovich, 1999), early school drop-out (Sundberg, Latkin, Farmer, & Squid, 1991; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992), poor school performance (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Freeman, 1993; Caffray & Schneider, 2000), drug use (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Iso-Hola & Crowley, 1991), suicide and feelings of alienation for example, (Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Klapp, 1986) have all been strongly correlated with boredom.

Freeman (1996), Begg (1993), Cavan and Ferdinand, (1975), Barlow and Ferdinand (1992) amongst others, have stated that truancy, poor school performance, drug use, and early school drop-out are all associated with crime. However, there has been no empirical research into whether boredom is a motivational factor connecting these consequences to youth criminality. I postulate that boredom can directly link truancy and/or early school drop-out to youth criminality. Furthermore, since poor school performance, truancy, and/or early school drop-out generally leads to unemployment, and unemployment is well documented as a causal factor of crime; I speculate that the experience of boredom is an additional factor which indirectly links unemployment to crime. This paper will thoroughly investigate both.

Considering that “boredom is a symptom that expresses a “deeper problem of connection between the developing person and society” (Sundberg, et al. 1991, p.221) it is interesting and extraordinary that within the field of education (Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Freeman, 1993), psychology (Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Brissett & Snow, 1993), and sociology (Darden & Marks, 1999), boredom has hardly been investigated. This thesis will show that boredom may no longer simply appear as an everyday concept, a fact of life of post-modern society which everyone at one time or another experiences (Brissett & Snow, 1993); or a concept so non-specific that rather than
being explored it has been taken for granted for many years (Barbalet, 1999), but is a major problem facing many young people with serious criminogenic possibilities.
Youth crime, criminality, and theory.

Youth crime has been described as a universal phenomenon (Barlow & Ferdinard, 1992) which has over decades plagued many residents, businesses, and schools of local neighbourhoods (Moynihan, 1993; Clinard & Meier, 1995). However, in recent years, a substantial amount of bad publicity from the media has generated “more heat than light” (Gill, 1993, p.125; see also: Malcolm, 1999; White, 1997a; Freeman, 1996). Almost like a witch hunt, the media has produced extensive news reports on what many lay people would believe are the facts on youth crime. The media would have us believe that youth crime has risen, young offenders have become much more aggressive and violent today than in the past (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992) and neighbourhoods are being overrun by youth gangs, which certainly is not the case.

Since young people naturally congregate in groups (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991), Malcolm (1999, p.30) recognises that the minor offences committed by these groups will tend to be “noticed and reported more readily than other forms of offences,” thus accounting for the over-representation of new reports on youth gangs/groups. However, Malcolm (1999) also realises that as the nature of media is to generate profit by persuading “sufficient members of the public to buy the newspaper, or tune in to a particular radio or television channel” (p.30), stories of juvenile crime are often reworked to make them sound more exciting or important to provoke public interest. Accordingly, headlines such as ‘Juvenile Drug Gang’s Crime Spree’, ‘Kids who Kill’, ‘City of fear; Brat Pack Stalk Elderly,’ or ‘Police Target Youth Gangs,’ tend to generate the required amount of interest to sell newspapers or tune in to a specific T.V or radio station (Freeman, 1996; Malcolm, 1999). Consequently, media coverage does nothing for the total youth population who are thus misunderstood and misconceived by the public as a result of misleading information from the media.

Although Hogg and Brown (1998) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998) may reveal that official crime rates have in fact risen, and “young people make a significant contribution to the overall crime problem” (Gill, 1993, p.126), contrary to media claims, on the whole, youth crime has not increased nor have
Youth crime, criminality, and theory. 11.

Youths become more aggressive and violent (Malcolm, 1999; Freeman, 1996; White, 1993). In truth, there is some suggestion that youth crime has actually decreased (White, 1997; Monihan, 1993) or remained static over the past few years (White, 1997a). Of course, due to deficient and inadequate State and National official crime statistics, it is difficult to know the full extent of young peoples’ involvement (Wundersitz, 1996; Mason & Wilson, 1988). Farrington (1996, p.1) reports that “official records of offending only reveal the tip of the iceberg of juvenile crime,” apparently “less than 1 in 3 crimes committed get reported” (Gill, 1993, p.124).

While it is a problem that as a result of under-reporting, the overall magnitude of youth crime can not be established; it is important to understand that most of the evidence suggests that the majority of young offenders are minor offenders rather than aggressive and violent criminals (Trojanowicz & Monash, 1992; Malcolm, 1999; Freeman, 1996). According to Begg (1993), Monihan (1993) and Malcolm (1999), there is only a small percentage of the offending juvenile population who are involved in more serious and violent criminal activity. Furthermore, the bulk of youth crime, as Begg (1993, p.137) has found, “consists of offences that are [mostly] inconvenient" such as vandalism, graffiti, shop-lifting, theft and small time burglaries (Cavan & Ferdinand, 1975; Wundersitz, 1996; Freeman, 1996) which, whilst costly (Geason & Wilson, 1990), and unfortunately distressing for some (Begg, 1993), are frequently reported solely for insurance purposes.

Reviewing the extensive range of literature on juvenile offending, most research studies have also found that the majority of youths “are not specifically motivated to engage in law breaking; rather, many of them drift into infractions by responding to situational pressures and inducements” (italics added; Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.7; see also: Monihan, 1993; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992). Stewart, Smith, Stewart, and Fullwood (1994) and Gibbons and Krohn (1991), found that youth crime generally occurs as a spur-of-the-moment impulse. Without fully comprehending the consequences of their actions, individuals coming together with their peers subsequently get caught up in the excitement of a moment in which crime can occur. Clinard and Meier (1995, p.183) concur, noting that few acts of
vandalism "are ever planned in advance; it is essentially spontaneous behaviour." Due to the spontaneity of most of vandalism, Geason and Wilson (1990) therefore suggests that the damage caused by such acts may not always be as many lay people like to think, malicious.

This does not, however, mean that all young offenders are 'little angels' who do not know or realise what they were doing. On the contrary, some acts of vandalism, graffiti, and other offences can be quite intentional. Shannon (1998, p.1) found that some delinquent and criminal acts are seen "as a form of exciting leisure-time activit[ies], [while others] are seen as means of adjustment to one's social environment (gangs), and some are seen as types of career activity that develop in settings where other opportunities are scarce." Cavan and Ferdinand (1975, p.132) further observed that group vandalism "takes on definite recreational features."

Given that "such activities probably occur most often during leisure time and in leisure settings" (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996, p.885) it is of some concern that such criminal pursuits are occurring as a substitute to conventional leisure and recreational activities. Evidently, it does appear that the unorthodox use of leisure is a serious issue which requires further investigation. This is strongly supported by Gordon and Caltabiano (1996, p.885) who state that "despite increased attention to adolescent leisure pursuits over the past two decades, researchers have generally overlooked leisure-related factors as correlates and causes of drug use and other deviant activities."

Without making light of the issue of youth crime and criminality, there is a collective realisation that the majority of juvenile offenders do not advance to adult criminality (Clinard & Meier, 1995). According to Emler and Reicher (1995) criminal activity among youth begins to wane when many adolescents realise that the repercussions become a lot more serious when they reach their late teens or early adulthood (Emler & Reicher, 1995). Zuckerman (1978), Baldwin (1986), and Stewart, et al. (1994), suggest that the primary reasons for the decrease in criminal activity are maturity and employment. Whichever is the case, Begg (1993), Monihan (1993), Gibbons and Krohn (1991), and Clinard and Meier (1995), accept that since "the prevalence of offending increases to a peak in the teenage years and then
decreases in the twenties" (Farrington, 1996, p.2), the "escalation of delinquency careers is [thus] uncommon" (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.63).

In Cambridge, a study conducted on delinquent boys for example, found that between "14-15 years were the peak age for first arrests, while convictions peaked at 17" (Emler & Reicher, 1995, p.73). Freeman (1996, p.2) further found that juveniles "aged between 16 and 17 years account for over 53 per cent of all [court] appearances." Incidentally, Freeman (1996, p.5) also found that contrary to popular belief, "the majority of young offenders (69.7%) do not re-appear in the Children’s Court after their first proven offence.” This is supported by Wundersitz, (1996, p.134) who found that “only a very small proportion (4.5%)” appeared after the first offence before the courts. However, these findings must be approached with caution when we consider a number of important factors. Firstly, nearly all young people will at some stage during adolescence break the law (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992; Begg, 1993; Moynihan, 1993), some of which may never come in contact with police or the courts given that the clear up rate of juvenile crime is low (Wundersitz, 1996). Secondly, some offenders may continue to offend undetected even after their first appearance.

Considering humans are social creatures and young people especially prefer the company of others, very few criminal offences are committed by the lone offender. Farrington (1996, p.4) found that "burglary, robbery, and theft from vehicles were especially likely to involve co-offenders.” While adolescents do commit crime with other peers, Emler and Reicher (1995, p.182) argues that co-offending occurs “simply because most things adolescents do they do with others.” However, Reiss (cited in Gibbons and Krohn, 1991, p.71) observed that, “four or more co-partners in a delinquent episode is relatively uncommon after age 14 or 15.” Consequently, only two or three friends will together share in the adventure, excitement and thrills, and the entertainment of committing acts of vandalism, graffiti, burglary, shop-lifting, joy-riding, etc.

Whether these individuals comes from a low-income background or high-income background, Gibbons and Krohn (1991, p.73) observes that all social levels “are about equally involved in minor acts of law breaking.” However, youths from
low-income areas have been reported to progress to more repetitive forms of serious criminal activity (Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992; Gibbons & Krohn, 1991). Thus, whilst youths from low economic backgrounds generally begin as sporadic offenders like their wealthier counterparts, poor youths, due to the lack of opportunities of employment, are more likely to become chronic offenders.

While several points relating to youth crime and criminality have been discussed, the predominance of the unemployed and young males in committing crime cannot go unnoticed. Malcolm (1999) and Stewart, et al. (1994) both found that the unemployed and poor youth are over-represented in juvenile offending. Stewart, et al. (1994, p.24) found that long term local unemployment as well as poverty was especially associated with “higher rates of crime” in neighbourhoods. Whether unemployment causes crime or crime causes unemployment remains controversial (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991). Weatherburn (1996, p.223) did find that “offending youths during periods of unemployment offended about two and a half times more frequently than during periods of employment.” However, Belknap (cited in Watts, 1995, p.5) claims that the relationship between income inequality and crime “is often far stronger than the relationship between unemployment and crime.” Overall, cross-sectional studies have found there is a positive relationship between unemployment, poverty, and crime (Weatherburn & Lind, 1998).

While the current rate of unemployment among youths is high (Hogg & Brown, 1998), Emler and Reicher (1995, p.165) realise that the chances of directly entering into employment at 16 is low; “probably no better than 25 per cent.” However, this percentage could even be lower especially if the individual has had a poor school performance, been a habitual truant and has left school early (Emler & Reicher, 1995; Cavan & Ferdinand, 1975). Cavan and Ferdinand (1975, p.264) reports that “habitual truancy .... sharply increases the likelihood of being delinquent.” Furthermore, poor school performance, truancy and early school dropout have been causally associated with unemployment and poverty (Emler & Reicher, 1995; Stewart, et al. 1994; Weatherburn, 1996; Cavan & Ferdinand, 1975; Polk & Warren, 1996). Given the current state for the unemployed, adolescents trying to legitimately obtain the cultural goal of society, “to be economically
successful” (Western, 1996, p.47), appears futile. Emler and Reicher (1995, p.165) therefore argues that “delinquents were the realists while non-delinquents had based their commitments on an illusion.”

Although females have been involved in crime for just as many decades as their male counterparts, extensive research has illustrated that juvenile crime “is an overwhelmingly male phenomenon” (Freeman, 1996, p.2; see also: Wundersitz, 1996; Farrington, 1996; Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Cavan & Ferdinand, 1975; Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992; Maccoby, 1986; Emler & Reicher, 1995). Wundersitz (1996) found that although the statistics may be recorded differently in each jurisdiction and there is a slight variation in the definitions of some offences, the predominance of male offending is noticeable in all Australian jurisdictions. The Western Australia police statistics (Mukherjee, Carcach & Higgins, 1997) for arrests and cautions of juveniles shown in Tables 1 and 2, and of property and violent crimes in Tables 3-3a exemplify this.

Whilst official statistics do show a vast difference between offending for males and females over a range of crimes, Emler and Reicher (1995, p.75) however found in self reports that “the average ratio of males to females admitting activities is fairly constant [at] 2:1,” thus, girls did admit to a lot more offences such as theft, vandalism, and assault, although in smaller numbers than boys. Gibbons and Krohn, (1991) on the other hand, claim the differences between male and female offending is based more on the frequency of involvement rather than by the actual type of acts committed or the number of offenders. Crime statistics however support Barlow and Ferdinand (1992, p.67) view that female share of offending “did not represent either the volume or the severity of delinquency as was the case for their male counterparts.” Females tend to commit fewer crimes, the ratio between males and females is about “20 to 1,” according to Barlow and Ferdinand (1992, p.67) which is depicted in Tables 3-3a.

Clinard and Meier, (1995, p.138) believes there may however be an increase in female offending as females begin to experience “increased learning opportunities for women, together with changes in traditional sex roles.” These days as the movement towards sexual equality continues, Adler (cited in Gibbons & Krohn,
1991, p.58) notes that “crime rates among women are rising more rapidly than crimes rates among men,” ....“and the gap between male and female rates of criminality continue to narrow.” Whilst reported statistics of juvenile female offending in Western Australia do not demonstrate this, there is growing evidence from a number of other studies from America and Britain, that the gap between male and female rates of criminality is in fact narrowing (see: Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Clinard & Meier, 1995; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992). It will therefore be interesting to observe future trends in young female offending in Australia.

Table 1: Western Australia: Annual breakdown of cautions, 1991-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991*</td>
<td>1,756</td>
<td>1,243</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3,804</td>
<td>2,616</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>4,657</td>
<td>3,197</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>4,770</td>
<td>3,197</td>
<td>67.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>8,268</td>
<td>6,138</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9,506</td>
<td>7,250</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>8,989</td>
<td>6,797</td>
<td>75.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>10,401</td>
<td>7,838</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>10,609</td>
<td>7,784</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11,267</td>
<td>8,272</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74,027</td>
<td>54,332</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Not a full year, August-December Only.
Source: (Ferrante, Fernandez, & Loh, 2001, p.52).
Table 2: Annual breakdown of Age-specific rates of arrests of juveniles (10 to 17yrs) per 100,000 population, by gender, 1997-2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons Arrested</th>
<th>Males Arrested</th>
<th>Females Arrested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>rate</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3,153</td>
<td>1,476.3</td>
<td>2,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>3,128</td>
<td>1,441.0</td>
<td>2,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3,484</td>
<td>1,589.9</td>
<td>2,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3,341</td>
<td>1,507.0</td>
<td>2,717</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Property Crimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Break, Enter and Steal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3353</td>
<td>2,936</td>
<td>3,301</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>3,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>3,814</td>
<td>3,298</td>
<td>3,780</td>
<td>3,467</td>
<td>3,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Theft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>1,462</td>
<td>1,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>1,494</td>
<td>1,351</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>1,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Damage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>1,560</td>
<td>1,576</td>
<td>1,260</td>
<td>1,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>1,347</td>
<td>1,756</td>
<td>1,729</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>1,461</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** In Western Australia, a juvenile is any person aged 10 to 17 years.


Violent Crimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homicide</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assault</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>1233</td>
<td>1107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>1489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Robbery</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** In Western Australia, a juvenile is any person aged 10 to 17 years.

Source: Adapted from published data (Mukherjee, Carcach, & Higgins, 1997; Ferrante, et al. 2001; 2000; 1999).
Since youth crime has been described as one of the major social problems of our time (Gill, 1993) resulting from multiple social factors such as social isolation, poor schooling, poor parenting and family break-down, poverty, relationship with peers, unemployment, homelessness, (Gill, 1993; Freeman, 1996; Wundersitz, 1996) and certain personality pre-dispositions (sensation seeking, impulsivity, and extroversion); no single theory within psychology, biology, sociology or criminology can explain all of youth criminality (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992; Hogg & Brown, 1998; Stewart, et al. 1994). Consequently, collectively, a number of theories have been formulated to explain the broad spectrum of youth crime and criminality.

Theories of Youth Criminality:

Strain Theory.

Robert K. Merton in 1938 modified Durkheim’s concept of anomic to establish what he describes as strain theory. The assumption of Merton’s theory (Mason & Wilson, 1988; Mason, 1996; Clinard & Meier, 1995), is that individuals will remain law-abiding and unified while they have access to institutional means to pursue conventional goals such as financial and material success (Merton, 1938, 1967 & 1968). Merton, (1967, p.83) states that “human society achieves its unity primarily through the possession by its members of certain ultimate values and ends in common.” However, when there is a discrepancy between one’s aspirations and expectations, strain or frustration will be produced which will result in the breakdown of cultural norms (Merton, 1968), thus, illustrating the cultural condition in which there is an imbalance between the emphasis on goals and conventional means (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992; Clinard & Meier, 1995; Emler & Reicher, 1995).

Unfortunately, in a society like Australia in “which [it] places a high premium on economic affluence, power and social ascent for all its members” (Merton, 1967, p.131), not all individuals are in a position to succeed due to the inequalities in the structure of social classes which creates social disadvantages. According to Merton (1968, p.199) “advance[ment] toward[s] the success-goal is
relatively rare and notably difficult for those armed with little formal education and few economic resources.” Mason and Wilson (1988, p.29) further found that “some individuals, because of factors such as class or race cannot achieve [prescribed] goals and the subsequent status,” and as a result, strain or tension develops. Members of the lower class find that the opportunities to achieve the goals of the dominant social norms are limited (Shannon, 1998): usually they are only available to middle-class youngsters. Fundamentally, the strain produced by a lack of environmental opportunity which is prevalent among the lower socio-economical classes therefore leads to crime (Merton, 1968; Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992).

According to Merton (1938, 1968) besides conformity there are four methods of adaptation to strain in which individuals may adopt as a solution to the means­-ends integrative problems, they include: innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Clinard and Meier, (1995, p.108) explains that “the particular adaptation depends on the individual’s acceptance or rejection of cultural goals and adherence to, or the violation of, accepted norms.” Some individuals may accept cultural goals but reject the legal means to achieve these goals (Innovation); Others may reject the cultural goals of success but will still continue to accept legal means to pursue such goals (Ritualism); Others may withdraw from societal goals completely, neither aspiring to succeed by either legal or illegal means (Retreatism); Lastly, individuals may adopt completely different goals and means to those held by society (Rebellion).

The most favoured of adaptations for the means-ends problems is however the adaptation of ‘innovation’. According to Gibbons and Krohn (1991) Merton’s ‘innovation’ describes individuals who pursue conventional goals through illegal means such as committing crime. For some individuals who have the least opportunity to succeed legally such as those in the lowest spectrum of society’s class structure or those who are unemployed, monetary and material success which is seen as “the primary goal to which people aspire” (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.121), can only be achieved through the execution of theft, burglary, and robbery. Disturbing as this sounds, Merton (1968, p.199) reports that “crime constitutes a normal response to a situation where ....there is little access to conventional and legitimate means for becoming successful.”
While Merton’s theory appears sound in respect to explaining some forms of criminality, there are however several flaws which undermine its position. Emler and Reicher (1995) found that Merton’s theory did not take into account age and gender differences in youth criminality. Secondly, Merton’s theory only accommodated for individuals of low economic status, thus his theory does not include the possibility of individuals within the middle and upper class behaving criminally. Trojanowicz and Morash, (1992, p.57) further reports that Merton’s sociological approach “does not discuss individual motivational factors” (italics added). Furthermore, “strain theory is not so convincing as an explanation for violent crimes” (Mason, 1996, p.26). Finally, Downes and Rock (1982, p.124) highlights that ‘status frustration’ “did not seem to fit descriptions of boys involved intermittently in offences of the fighting/joy-riding/theft/vandalism variety.” Concurring with Barlow and Ferdinand, strain theory “will not [therefore] apply to most delinquents, ... because other more persuasive factors...will account more directly for their delinquency” (1992, p.215).

While Agnew did not attempt to rectify the number of flaws of strain theory just mentioned, Agnew, noticing that Merton’s strain theory only concentrated on one type of strain, the failure to achieve valued goals, added an interesting element to Merton’s strain theory by suggesting, there are, other types of strain which could result from “the removal of positive stimuli (the end of a relationship, being fired from job), or the presence of negative stimuli (unpleasant school experiences, poor peer relationships) ....” (cited in Clinard & Meier, 1995, p.110).

According to Agnew (cited in Gibbons & Krohn, 1991), as a result of some young people experiencing overall difficulties at school such as failing subjects, disliking school-work and/or teachers, as well as the pressures to succeed from parents and teachers, strain may occur which could result in individuals rejecting school, rebelling against school authorities, and becoming delinquent. Stinchcombe (cited in Barlow and Ferdinand, 1992, p.162) found that “alienation and rebellion in school were most intense among lower-middle-class boys who despite heavy parental pressure to succeed were still failing.” According to Stinchcombe (cited in Barlow and Ferdinand, 1992, p.162) “their strain was sharp and their alienation pervasive,” which ultimately led to delinquency.
Agnew (cited in Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; see also Agnew, cited in Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992) reports that unfortunately remaining in school whilst failing subjects and receiving poor marks may further exacerbate the strain already being inflicted. The overall perception is that school is unpleasant and hostile which one must escape from through truancy if one is to remove the strain. Conceptually, Agnew (cited in Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.132) therefore believes that rather than visualising strain as "due to the blockage of goal-seeking behaviour, it might better be thought of as the blockage of escape from painful situations." Once freed from such unpleasant and painful experiences, humans are less likely to misbehave. However, the expectations of society and many parents demands that young people either have full employment or secondary education before they can leave school, thus many youths remain trapped in an environment which continues to incite further misbehaviour and deviancy.

Differential Association:

One of the most well-known theories of our time in relation to youth criminality is Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential association which conceptualises that both conventional and non-conventional behaviour is learned through small intimate groups (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992; Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992; Western 1996; Mason, 1996; Emler & Reicher, 1995). Depending of course on the intensity, duration, and frequency of relationships that individuals come in contact with, individuals through association and the process of interaction and communication (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992), will learn and possibly adopt the norms, values, attitudes and behaviour of the group (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992; Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992).

Evidently, if individuals are mostly associating with criminals, Trojanowicz and Morash, (1992) and Barlow and Ferdinand (1992) recognise that individuals in learning the attitudes of criminals, the techniques to commit criminal acts and the "specific direction of motives, drives, rationalisations, and values" (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992, p.60), will have a greater chance of becoming involved in criminal behaviour. However, "whether one becomes criminal or not depends upon whether one has more exposure to the former or the latter type of culture" (Emler & Reicher,
1995, p.42). While Sutherland does acknowledge that personality may be associated with some forms of criminality, the importance of the type of environment one is involved in (criminogenic versus conventional) can not be understated. Sutherland maintains that "differential association would still determine which individuals .... would become criminal or delinquent" (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.146).

Drift Theory:

While Merton and Agnew concentrated on the discrepancies between aspirations and expectations of society, and Sutherland acknowledged that criminal behaviour was learned through the interaction with criminological individuals and groups; Matza (1964), pursued the developed of what he termed 'drift theory' which incorporated 'human will' within its theoretical framework. Rather than visualising criminality by the usual method, the scientific observer's perspective, Matza's aim, according to Clinard and Meier (1995, p.47), was to "develop an appreciation for deviance, [by approaching deviance] from the standpoint of the deviant .... comprehend[ing] and illuminat[ing] the [offender's] view and interpret[ing] the world as it appears to him [sic]." While much research has been done, the traditional approach to criminality was "with an eye only to correcting [the behaviour], not understanding, it" (Clinard & Meier, 1995, p.47).

According to Matza's theory (Trojanowicz & Morash, 1992, p.67) "psychological makeup and environmental factors do not destine an individual to become a delinquent. There is, .... a movement between convention and crime, and impinging factors, one of them being the individual's 'will' [which] can influence which route is ultimately chosen." The movement between societal norms and crime Matza (1964) argues, is called 'drift'. Matza, (1964, p.28) notes that "drift stands midway between freedom and control." Consequently, since youth criminality is a transitory phenomenon, individuals reacting to societal demands will flirt between society's values and norms and criminal norms, drifting back and forth committing to neither the one nor the other, but with some degree of 'free will,' will choose whether they are free to break the law or abide by it (Matza, 1964). According to Matza (cited in Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.82) "while human actors are to a considerable degree constrained or influenced by social and environmental forces
that surround them, they are at the same time reactive individuals who are able to
exercise some degree of freedom or choice over their behaviour.”

However, Matza (1964) explains that when a youngster does drift into
delinquency he or she is still influenced by the high morals of conventional society.
To reduce the guilt that most individuals will develop before they commit an
offence, individuals will use a method known as neutralisation. Gibbons and Krohn
(1991), Emler and Reicher (1995) and Barlow and Ferdinand (1992) observe that, in
order to dispel guilty feelings and rationalise or justify their criminal acts, five
techniques of ‘neutralisation’ will be implemented. These include:

- denial of responsibility for one’s behaviour
- denial to injury
- denial of the victim
- condemnation of the condemners
- and the appeal to higher loyalties

Unfortunately, because the use of neutralising definitions make “disapproval
behaviour acceptable [in the eyes of the beholder] or at least tolerable in that
stimulus situation” (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.152), Minor (cited in Barlow and
Ferdinand, 1992, p.51) postulates that neutralisation “may not only allow deviance,
but also encourages it.”

While, Matza, (cited in Barlow and Ferdinand, 1992, p.52) recognises that
“most adolescents (especially males) [will] lie in a sort of limbo between the
demands of middle-class convention and law, on one hand, [and] the demands of
male subculture, with its emphasis on acting out, on the other,” Matza (1964) does
support the notion that since “large numbers of juvenile lawbreakers refrain from
further misconduct near the end of the adolescent period without any sort of
treatment intervention directed at them” (cited in Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.106)
individuals evidently mature out of criminality. According to Matza, (1964, p.22)
most delinquents “grow up, come to terms with their world, find a job .... get
married and indulge in...only an occasional spree .... [thus] anywhere from 60 to 85
per cent of delinquents do not apparently become adult violators.” However, given that human actions are chosen through the individual exercising his or her free will, Matza posits that “perfect predictability of human behaviour will never be achieved in scientific theories” (cited in Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.86).

Although Matza’s position has been highly criticised and rejected by many theorists because it ignores the possibility of rebellion against adult authorities and the resistance of societal norms and values; breaking away from traditional and general behavioural predispositions to “the microsocial contexts in which special acts occur” (Emler & Reicher, 1995, p.46) and his approach from the individual’s perspective insofar as understanding criminality can not go unnoticed and does deserve recognition. Thus, while Matza’s theory may appear contentious, I believe that with some fine tuning, integrating the factor of boredom into his theory, ‘drift theory’ can be a sound and influential theory in explaining youth criminality.

Sensation Seeking Theory:

One theory which has acknowledged the concept of boredom in its theoretical framework is Zuckerman’s Sensation Seeking theory. Falling between Eysenck’s extroversion, which is divided into sociability and impulsivity (Cook, 1993), and psychoticism, is Zuckerman’s sensation seeking which is defined as an “uninhibited, nonconforming, impulsive, dominant type of extraversion” (Eysenck & Zuckerman, 1978, p.485) which is composed of four distinct factors: thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility (Ragheb & Merydith, 2001; Zuckerman, 1978). Zuckerman, (cited in Hall, et al. 1998, p.387) explains that thrill and adventure seekers chase “exciting situations through participating in risky activities ...., [whereas] experience seekers will seek excitement through the mind, the senses, and a non-conforming style of life.” The disinhibitors or “extroverted sensation-seeker” (Zuckerman, 1978, p.46) will seek sensations through social stimulation and disinhibitory behaviours (usually associated with alcohol and drug use), whilst individuals who are predisposed to boredom susceptibility will avoid as often as possible boring people and repetitive situations and activities.

Although sensation seeking is primarily hereditary insofar as “one of man’s [sic] primary needs” is to seek sensation and stimulation(Zuckerman, 1978, p.39),
Zuckerman acknowledges that because some extroverts and sensation seekers appear to be "chronically under-aroused," (cited in Seamon & Kenrick, 1994, p.337), sensation seeking is a general trait which depends "for its expression, on a range of environmental possibilities" (Zuckerman, 1978, p.40). Thus, most sensation seekers require constant variety, novelty, and challenges in all sensory modalities from the environment (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996). If however the environment does not provide activities which satisfy sensation seekers,’ individuals may be impelled to seek satisfaction through committing crime (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996). However, Zuckerman (1978, p.96) points out that individuals who become involved in criminal activity "are not led into their activities by peers, or driven to them by compulsive neurotic needs," but rather they are motivated by the need for "constant variety in stimuli in order to reach their own high optimal level of arousal."

According to Caffray and Schneider (2000, p.544) "the majority of theories, implicitly or explicitly, suggest that adolescents are motivated by their desire to enhance or avoid particular affective states." Consequently, since sensation seeking comprises the positive affects of excitement and lack of boredom, research involving sensation seeking has shown "this construct to be important in predicting adolescent behaviour, especially involvement in crime and minor violations" (Caffray & Schneider, 2000, p.547). For sensation seekers, Downes and Rock (1982, p.125) found that crime especially provides three links to excitement: either as "the means to buying excitement;....[as] the raw material of excitement;.... and [as] a by-product of the pursuit of actions that are exciting in themselves." While sensation seeking "increases from childhood to adolescence" (Zuckerman, et al. 1978, p.148), Zuckerman, et al. (1978) and Baldwin (1986) reports that sensation seeking fortunately does decrease with maturity, thus suggesting that once again adolescents do eventually grow out of criminality.

While there is "no clear link between any one factor .... for a child to commit an offence" (Malcolm, 1999, p.31), I believe that a theory which encompasses in its framework 'boredom' as a factor of youth criminality may provide a more substantial explanation of youth criminality and crime than those currently endorsed
Youth crime, criminality, and theory. 27.

in criminology. The three main theories which could support the factor of boredom in their theoretical framework would be Matza’s ‘Drift Theory’, Agnew’s ‘Negative Strain Theory’ and Zuckerman’s ‘Sensation Seeking Theory’. Alternatively, the theories of Matza, Zuckerman, Sutherland, and Agnew, could be integrated into one which includes boredom and all its attributes. As an example I would suggest that a Boredom Theory of Youth Criminality may include the following propositions:

- Criminal behaviour is learned through the association of others (Sutherland’s view).

- Sensation Seeking personality predisposes individuals to seek either legal or illegal activities such as crime to alleviate boredom, produce excitement, and to reach their individual optimal level of arousal (Zuckerman’s view).

- Depending on the intensity, duration, and frequency of boredom, individuals will drift in and out of crime using the techniques of neutralisation to remove guilt and blame (Matza’s view).

- Boredom and deviancy usually go hand in hand generally occurring during school hours and times of leisure.

- However, most young people will grow-out of criminality as a result of maturity or a growing tolerance to boredom, the finding of employment, or marriage (Matza and Zuckerman’s view).

Before such a theory can be formulated or endorsed however, it is important that we know as much about boredom as possible. For this reason the second part of this paper explains the origin, the meaning, and the structure of boredom as well as the factors which contribute to one’s proneness to boredom. Fortunately, one thing which remains common to all adolescents is that most of their time is spent eating, sleeping, going to either school or work, pursuing leisure activities and generally behaving like normal conforming law abiding citizens (Barlow & Ferdinand, 1992). Thus, “even the most committed of [offenders] spend only a tiny proportion of their time in criminal activities” (Emler & Reicher, 1995, p.181), hence, “most youngsters
are juveniles most of the time, rather than delinquents” (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991, p.5).
The origins of boredom: A historical perspective.

Although "a penal system of exiled whites" (Saunders & Evans, 1992, p.100) for Britain before federation, Australia at a quickened pace soon adopted the British ideology of capitalism and industrialism to become a thriving industrial nation. New technologies, factories, and advancement in machinery meant many fundamental changes to the 19th century society including a shift from agriculture to industrialism, "private ownership of the means of production" (Sargent, 1995, p.20) and a split within the class system. The capitalist or bourgeoisie which now controlled and owned the means of production, as well as held the power and acquired the wealth, became one class, whilst, the labouring poor or working class, working for the capitalists in manual labour, became another (Giddens, 1997).

For the new 19th century capitalists, making money, maximising profits and gaining capital was the motivational element and sole purpose of work. For young people life during these times were not so easy, for many years children as young as seven were expected to work alongside grown adults in a number of labouring jobs (Giddens, 1997). However, as "a response to the economical needs of industrial capitalism" (Giddens, 1997, p.415) insofar as to make money, formal education was needed to assure an endless supply of educated individuals for a pliable workforce which could be renewed and maintained (Klapp, 1986; Sargent, 1995).

Child labour thus "was slowly eradicated from the industrial societies" of first world countries (Clarke & Critcher, 1985, p.156) as many western societies became 'child-centred' (Giddens, 1997) and education became essential "to train and prepare [children] for the more difficult and complicated jobs awaiting them" (Scitovsky, 1999, p.2.). As the term adolescence was unfortunately not yet socially constructed, 'childhood' was the only stage between infancy and adulthood which signified the time period of schooling (Clarke & Critcher, 1985; Giddens, 1997). Adult status was still consequently achieved at the tender age of 13-14yrs when many children went out to work to claim "some of the privileges of adult life, .... [such as having] the freedom and .... the money to spend" (Clarke & Critcher, 1985, p.156).
With no choice for many but to work the expected 70 hours a week on production lines or in other forms of manual labour (Ragheb & Merydith, 2001), many young people along with their adult counterparts unfortunately found themselves exploited and treated like objects by today’s standard. As the sounds of “repetitious production machinery echoed in the streets” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p.245), individuals stuck in low paying menial semi-automated jobs which required “enough attention to prevent mind-wandering but not enough for the complete absorption of mental activity,” (Barbalet, 1999, p.638), found their labour to be uncreative, unrewarding, dissatisfying, and monotonous (Lewinsky, 1943). Rather than experiencing the opportunity to perform tasks which were the least boring such as those totally automated or non-automated, individuals having to perform semi-automated tasks suffered what Klapp (1986) terms ‘a stimulus under-load’ which resulted in many cases of individuals experiencing boredom.

The differences in the level of boredom between semi-automated, automated and non-automated work, explains Barbalet (1999), was that while automated work was highly monotonous, it did not require the full attention of the individual, thus automated tasks allowed day-dreaming, free thought, and conversations with other workers which reduced feelings of boredom. Non-automated tasks on the other hand required the full attention of the worker to do the task, however, the tasks offered were various and interesting thus feelings of boredom hardly ever arose. Not surprising, for those individuals working in semi-automated jobs inevitably the work of many lost all meaning, and boredom became a defensive mechanism against the meaninglessness of productivity (Klapp, 1986; Sargent, 1995; Barbalet, 1999). Boredom had become an affliction of the unsatisfied urban worker.

As most western societies continued to progress into a technological age of mass information which Giddens (1997, p.526) describes as “the basis of the production system” of the new post industrial society; boredom began to be more prevalent for other individuals in modern society (Barbalet, 1999; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001). Boredom had unfortunately crept in unexpectedly “with progress” (Klapp, 1986, p.31). The significant growth of automation added to this increase. Whilst the reduction of the working week from 70 to 40 hours as a result of
automation and union agitation (Barbalet, 1999; Scutt, 1992) allowed many people extra free leisure-time, for others, automation gave them more free-time than they bargained for. Eventually they found themselves out of a job as automation reduced and eradicated many blue collar positions.

The new modern technological society with its expansion of non-manual work (Giddens, 1997), and “the growing internationalisation of the economy” (Hogg & Brown, 1998, p.148) could no longer sustain unskilled workers. A new breed of workers was required to fill the different specialised occupations now offered (Giddens, 1997). According to Sargent, (1995, p.250) characteristically, it was the ‘gifted child’ “who [was] guided and oriented towards achievement.” For many young people who were not perceived as ‘gifted children’ or who were not interested in furthering their education, unemployment was a unpleasant possibility. Alas, the promises made by education, the deliverance of skills required to enter and succeed in the workforce (Sargent, 1995), were hollow promises as more and more under-skilled workers joined the growing unemployment queues and questioned their future.

Where once “two-thirds of all 16- to 19-year-olds were in full time work in the mid-1960’s” (Polk, 1997, p.191), with downsizing of work-forces, and the “growth of part-time and casual work” (Hogg & Brown, 1998, p.148), less than 20 percent of young people in present-day Australia are in full employment (White, 1997a). While a large majority of the youth population extend their education to improve their job prospects, unemployment remains high due to the disappearance of jobs. Hence, those individuals that are without qualifications unfortunately remain unemployed (Polk, 1997). As a result, Hogg and Brown (1998) Polk (1997) and Wundersitz (1996, p.146) states that there is “developing in Australian society, an underclass of youth who have never had a job and are unlikely to have one in the future.”

As neither “school nor the economy could offer them much in the way of hope for the future” (Polk, 1997, p.192), individuals are confronted with endless monotonous hours of searching for work, watching T.V., and doing nothing which has increased the prevalence of boredom. Consequently, technological progress has
bored a new underclass of bored individuals whose life is filled with uncertainty and
general meaninglessness (Stewart, et al. 1994; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001). With no
prospect of any future, many individuals have, however, turned to others in similar
situations in “search of friendships, recreation and ways simply to pass the time”
(Polk, 1997, p.191). Drifting into the streets and into other public spaces, bored
youths with little or no money go in search for possible entertainment (Stewart, et al.
1994). Unfortunately, “because these youths come together in rejection of the
boredom .... and what is on offer to youngsters, excitement often takes the form of
challenging the values of adult society, hence, they engage in anti-social acts most of
which will be offences” (Stewart, et al. 1994, p.66).

According to Klapp (1986), and Brissett and Snow (1993), ‘consumer
technology’ has also contributed to the significant increase in the prevalence of
boredom. Klapp (1986), Brissett and Snow (1993), and Hamilton (cited in Iso­
Ahola & Weissinger, 1990) proposes that society has become overloaded by stimuli
insofar as too much variety and too much irrelevant information has contributed to
an overall desensitisation of stimuli. Klapp (1986, p.9) claims, boredom essentially
performs “a defensive function as a barrier against” the irrelevant and meaningless
information which he describes as “noise”. In addition, an increase in boredom has
developed because people have become accustomed “to a certain level of
stimulation, [accordingly when] that level is no longer stimulating, what was once
interesting becomes boring” (Darden & Marks, 1999, p.30).

More does not always mean a good thing explains Brissett and Snow (1993,
p.250), who states that, “to have the resources to do what one wants, when one
wants, and how one wants does not necessarily eventuate into satisfaction,
happiness, or enjoyment.” A good example concerning this is demonstrated by
Gordon and Caltabiano (1996, p.886) who reports that “the more leisure
opportunities and facilities available, the more likely is the individual to experience”
leisure dissatisfaction and boredom. Contrary to this, Darden and Marks (1999,
p.30) recognises, that individuals will still “demand something new.” Klapp (1986,
p.29), notes that signs of boredom will inevitably produce an endless supply of “TV,
film, stage shows; recording hits; sports spectacles; foods, beverages, .... computer
A historical perspective of boredom.

33.

Games, new styles of clothing and furniture, and so on,” for the ever thirsty consumer. However, while individuals continue to seek and buy more and more goods to satisfy their desire for comfort, Scitovsky (1975, p.38) acknowledges that “the price of comfort falls relative to the price of stimulation, the market pushes the consumer into buying more comfort and less stimulation.”

If we thus take into consideration the constant demand for variety, the decrease in stimulation with comfort, and finally, the knowledge that most young people have come to depend on a continual supply of today’s artificial consumer stimulation to constantly entertain them (Brissett & Snow, 1993), it is plausible that individuals encountering the same old mundane adult sanctioned and adult controlled activities in and out of school, year in year out within their adolescent world (Shaw, et al. 1996), may lead many to experience boredom. Furthermore, in the adolescent world where there is no opportunity to sample the different pubs and clubs, the variety of alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, the R rated films and stage shows, or partake in all other activities that the adult world has to offer; the world of an adolescent could understandably bore any spirited young person if they could not generate internal stimulation by imagination, or afford the vast array of activities society has on offer for youth when the novelty deteriorates from one or more of the activities available. Unfortunately, since boredom arises when the novelty wanes, young people, especially adolescents in low income households, may seek out alternative stimulation such as crime which is fun, exciting, and thrilling.

Therefore, although today there are many more leisure and recreational facilities and consumer goods available than there were in the past (Malone, 1999), boredom and crime may simply arise because there is nothing legally to do, and nowhere available to freely go, where one is not bothered by authorities (Malone, 1999; Malone & Hasluck, 1998). Malone and Hasluck (1998, p.24) recognise that in a capitalist society, “money is a large deciding factor” for what facilities and activities are available to the ordinary person. Whether it is the cinemas, ten-pin bowling, go-kart racing, roller or ice-skating, or any recreational sport, most will cost on average $10.00 for a session roughly lasting 2 hours (Malone & Hasluck, 1998). Consequently, for the average teenager experiencing the high unemployment among
A historical perspective of boredom. 34.

Australian youth (Malcolm, 1999), the commercialisation of recreation facilities and public space, as well as exorbitant prices for daily recreational/leisure activities and consumer goods (Malone, 1999; Patterson & Pegg, 1999), may mean many young people and/or their parents will simply be unable to afford to take advantage of legally stimulating activities found in commercial leisure and entertainment outlets (White, 1997; White, 1999; Malone & Hasluck, 1998; ). Therefore, the “lack of money has a big impact on where young people go and what they do” (White, 1999, p.32).

Young people without finances to pay for consumer goods and services will thus have to endure either hours of watching the same old programs on T.V. at home or at friends, hanging around the streets looking for something to do; or find somewhere to congregate with friends such as at the local shopping mall (White, 1999). However, even some of these free activities are restricted. The less attainable things are, the more likely one may feel a sense of deprivation, constraint, and boredom. (Sundberg, et al. 1991). Since leisure “occupies the most central place for modern adolescents” (Raymore, 1995, p.204) and is supposed to provide the most enjoyment in an adolescent’s life, some young people (but not all) as a result of being in a state of boredom, may as a last resort vandalise or deface property, shoplift, or commit some other offence to lash out and be noticed (Shaw, et al. 1996). On the other hand they may simply become involved in crime because as Baldwin (1985, p.1328-1329) notes, “delinquency and crime are available for everyone, rich or poor, .... there are few barriers to prevent 12-15 year olds from entering delinquency and crime, .... [furthermore, it provides unlimited] thrills and adventures [which] is most rewarding in the [early to] late teens.” Hence, crime may be the way to go to eliminate boredom.

Thus, while boredom may have once been identified as an individual’s failing, Darden and Marks (1999, p.16) acknowledges that although it is still experienced by the individual, boredom is now yet “another symptom of the malaise of post-modern times,” which has unfortunately begun to affect the masses directly as crime becomes the entertainment for the bored few (Begg, 1993). It is clear that “the exuberance of youth requires .... imaginative and socially acceptable
opportunities for release if it is not to be diverted to criminal ends” (Brumhead, Searle, Trowbridge, & Williams, 1990, p.20). The importance of analysing the concept of boredom therefore cannot be understated.
The conceptualisation of Boredom.

Boredom has for many years been perceived by most adults as a symptom of the unmotivated adolescent (Brumhead, et al. 1990) who has "too much time available, and too little to do" (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990, p.2). However, a substantial amount of research has revealed that "just as hunger is a sign of the need for food" (Scitovsky, 1999, p.1), boredom signals to the individual that internal and external stimulation is insufficient to satisfy some kind of need that the body or mind requires. Whilst there is no argument over boredom being the sign of some internal need, there is a great deal of controversy over the nature of boredom i.e. whether it is an emotion, a drive or a transitory state, and how boredom is produced.

Consequently, although the complaints of being bored may be simple and directly expressed by children and adolescents, the same cannot be said with regard to answering the questions above. I would postulate that the experience of either type of boredom is reliant on a number of underlying factors, for example, the individual's state of mind at the time or their perception of their surroundings, activity or situation; the environment or context in which boredom is stated such as whether the situation provides low or high stimulation, and the method in which boredom is produced, for instance, whether boredom is produced by high or low arousal from some internal need from either the peripheral system or from the cerebral cortex. Thus, I believe like its structure, boredom's conceptualisation is complex in nature.

However, unlike researchers who argue that boredom can only manifest itself in either one state of an emotion, or as an adverse drive or as a transitory negative state, I suggest that boredom can at any given time, embrace one or another of the distinct, yet different forms. As yet, no researcher has conducted an investigation to find out whether boredom can have a multi-variant appearance which can explain the different expressions of boredom within the same or different contexts. It does appear that rather than conceptualising boredom as multi-variant, researchers prefer to contradict one another by treating boredom as having only one form, i.e. being either an emotion or an adverse drive. While each is correct in their explanations as will be shown next, they fail to acknowledge or accept other equally true possibilities.
The conceptualisation of Boredom. 37.

which may be different components of the same one single schema of boredom. E.g. boredom can be at any given time expressed as an emotion, a transitory state, an adverse drive, or even as a demand for action or to be entertained.

Thus, it would be correct to acknowledge that as one feels bored, then an individual would outwardly show signs of the emotion being expressed. For instance, when one is angry, the individual may outwardly express this emotion by either shaking his or her fist, going red in the face and having a furious look, or yelling and screaming. Someone who states that they are feeling sad may show signs of teary eyes, a down-turned smile/mouth, slouched shoulders and/or a slow deliberate heavy footed walk. According to Klapp (1986), Wilkinson and Campbell (1997), and Seamon and Kenrick (1994), when different people express feelings of boredom, there are outward signs like fidgeting in one’s chair, doodling, flicking one’s pen, playing with one’s hair, pacing around, or by even switching the channels back and forth on the T.V. In addition, the individual may hold a sad, nonchalant, frustrated, or discontented expression on their face, or the individual subjected to low stimulation may start yawning.

Barbalet (1999), Smith (1981), Shaw et al. (1996), Geiwitz (1966), and others further explain that most individuals report that boredom is unpleasant and something which most people would prefer to avoid (see also: Lewinsky, 1943; Maroldo, 1986; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001). Moreover, it is reported that boredom can project negative perceptions such as frustration, dissatisfaction, sadness, or loneliness, which is likewise described as an essential component of an emotion (Bourne & Russo, 1998; Seamon & Kenrick, 1994; Wilkinson & Campbell, 1997).

Like other emotions, boredom even includes a cognitive interpretation of “the arousal and the context in which it occurs” (Bourne & Russo, 1998, p.375). Hill and Perkins (1985), Smith (1981), Berlyne (1960), Geiwitz (1966), among others, all report that subjective monotony, perceived unpleasantness or dissatisfaction, and perceptions of the lack of novelty, or non-stimulating tasks or situations, are all cognitive factors related to boredom (see also: Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001). However, Wilkinson and Campbell (1997, p.51) points out that it is
past experiences of boredom which affect our beliefs and thus “influence our appraisal of a situation and subsequently the emotion we experience.” Whether we label the emotion as boredom, anger, anxiety, etc., depends “on the basis of the situation we are in .... [and] on our appraisal of the situation” (p.53).

Boredom like other emotions, can also, according to Seamon and Kenrick (1994), Bourne and Russo (1998), and Wilkinson and Campbell (1997), elicit some ‘generalized drive’ which can be evoked from either the autonomic nervous system (part of the peripheral system which includes the sensory and motor neurons that involves physiological arousal such as an increased variability in heart rate, or a change in skin conductance) or from the brain’s reticular formation which automatically activates, and, with the aid of the cortex, controls arousal. What actually occurs during stimulation is that the body’s peripheral system transmits impulses to the reticular formation in the brain stem which then sends facilitating impulses to the cerebral cortex which therefore generates excitation as a response to a stimulus (Berlyne, 1960; Cook, 1991; Hall, Lindzey & Cambell, 1988).

According to Cook (1991, p.79) “once excitation reaches a certain level [generally the optimal level of arousal], protective inhibition damps it down” and counteracts the excitation. Cook (1991, p.78) explains that “inhibition means the stopping or slowing down of one process by another.” Depending on an individual’s threshold level of excitation, inhibition will be generated at a point where an individual will seek a reduction. Eysenck, (cited in Hall, et al. 1988, p.377) recognises that as introverts reach “their point of maximum arousal at a lower level of stimulation than extroverts,” introverts will seek a reduction and inhibition much sooner. While if “stimulation creates less excitation .... [extroverts] may show stimulus hunger” (Cook, 1991, p.81) and require more excitation or stimulation.

Although Eysenck (cited in Cook, 1991) acknowledges that it is very hard to confirm the general activities of the reticular formation and cortex without a EEG- (electroencephalograph); Darden and Marks (1999), suspects that within a classroom or lecture theatre where the external stimuli may be perceived as low, under-stimulating, and uninteresting by the student, the reticular formation of the brain stem (see: Figure 1.) also commonly known as either the reticular arousal system (Berlyne, 1960) or the ascending reticular activating system (Eysenck, cited in Cook,
will automatically increase arousal and sustain it at a high level to compensate for sensory deprivation (Berlyne, 1960). Zuckerman (1978), and Darden and Marks (1991, p.22), all agree on the notion that the classroom lecture is the perfect setting for boredom to occur for extroverts and high sensation seekers as it “is a ritual, which most of us repeat too often for it to be continuously interesting, surprising, and unique.”

Figure 1. An inside look into the major structures of the brain.


Since extroverts and sensation seekers require higher quantities of arousal than other individuals to reach their optimal level of arousal, being constrained to remain in class can be quite an unpleasant and uncomfortable experience. According to Zuckerman (1978), and Darden and Marks (1991) the reason behind the unpleasantness and discomfort is that while the reticular formation generates more excitation for the extrovert and sensation seeker to compensate for sensory deprivation, the normal moderating functions of the cerebral cortex to produce inhibition will be automatically incapacitated. Consequently, once inhibition is incapacitated, the reticular formation will unfortunately produce more and more excitation passing the satiation level of the individual, thus causing a highly emotional state (Geiwitz, 1966; Barbalet, 1999).

Wilkinson and Campbell (1997, p.42) observes that “too much emotional arousal can [unfortunately] cause problems such as having difficulty concentrating or co-ordinating thoughts and actions effectively” (p.42). Therefore, “a human being or
animal in the throes of agonising boredom [due to constraints] .... [will generally show] the restlessness, agitation, and emotional upset that usually coincide with high arousal” (Berlyne, 1960, p. 189). In addition, individuals will begin to show physiological reactions such as writhing in one’s chair, fidgeting, or doodling (Klapp 1986; Wilkinson & Campbell, 1997). Freeman, (1993, p.31) further notes that young people may even experience “violent swings of mood” during boredom.

Although Berlyne (1960), establishes that boredom can result from high arousal, he maintains that boredom is an adverse drive aroused by internal needs which produces negative emotional states, rather than being an emotion in itself. According to Seamon & Kenrick, (1994, p. 337) humans are not “motivated to only reduce physical needs such as hunger and thirst .... Human beings and other animals are motivated to increase their arousal under certain conditions,” such as sensory deprivation. Thus, “boredom too is a syndrome of deprivation. Hunger initiates food-seeking behaviour. Thirst initiates water-seeking behaviour. And boredom initiates challenge-seeking behaviour” (Bowman, 1975, p.24).

Depending on the intensity of the need, boredom as “our subjective awareness of this condition” (Bowman, 1975, p.24) will subsequently motivate an individual to find more optimally challenging and sensorily stimulating activities (Seamon & Kenrick, 1994), or suffer as Berlyne (1960) describes, a negative emotional state. Consequently, as humans are highly curious and exploratory creatures, Berlyne (1960), Baldwin (1985), and Ragheb and Merydith (2001), suggest that for some individuals, boredom can be described as an adverse drive which is evoked from an innate need for either highly stimulating experiences or excitement. However, boredom can also be an adverse drive which triggers the individual’s reticular formation system and cerebral cortex to reduce the unpleasant stimulation through the cerebral cortex automatic function of inhibition (Klapp, 1986).

For instance, when the stimulation has passed the individual’s level of satiation to the point of being unpleasant, or whilst in a highly arousing situation, the cortical arousal has continued to increase to an unpleasant level as a result of trying to compensate for an individual’s low level of arousal, boredom can occur. As mentioned earlier, once the cerebral cortex has been incapacitated excitation will
continue, thus the individual must either physically or mentally leave the stimulating situation to reduce the unpleasantness.

While an emotion and an adverse drive can both be produced by innate needs which would explain the reasoning behind boredom being recognised as both a drive and an emotion; unlike an emotion which is aroused by cortical or cognitive arousal and needs cognitive appraisal, a drive does not require a cognitive interpretation of the stimuli. Furthermore, boredom cannot be a drive Barbalet (1999, p.636) argues, because boredom does not arise from “all experiences of homogenous or unchanging stimuli or activities.” Barbalet (1999) therefore concludes that boredom must be an emotion.

Both concepts however do neglect to outline that boredom can also encompass a negative transitory state or mood which describes the current position of an individual’s mind “I’m bored” (Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1991; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999) or a temporary situation “I’m so bored, there is nothing to do,” which is loosely referred to by Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990, p.2-3), as a reflection of “a mismatch between optimal experiences and the experiences that are perceptually available to the individual.” An extensive range of research has pointed to a growing dissatisfaction among young people over leisure experiences (Gordon & Caltiabiano, 1996; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001). It appears that many of the activities available during leisure create boredom because they are not optimally arousing or challenging. According to Iso-Ahola and Weissinger, (1990, p.2) “boredom results if leisure skills are greater than the challenge of leisure opportunities.” However, Iso-Ahola and Crowley (1991, p.262) also found that “a lack of personal leisure skills, combined with restricted recreation opportunities, is likely to cause feelings of boredom in leisure which in turn may give rise to delinquency and drug use in free time.”

Since boredom appears to differ in duration as well as severity (Brissett & Snow, 1993), it can be reasonably concluded that such variations in boredom experiences may explain why boredom is perceived differently by individuals and defined differently by researchers. It is therefore my firm belief that, boredom at any
given time, can be an emotion "I feel bored," which falls somewhere between loathing and melancholy or pensiveness as shown by Plutchik’s model (Plutchik, cited in Sundberg, et al. 1991, see: Figure 2) which is produced by extremely high stimulation; an adverse drive "I’m bored, I need something to do," which is produced by low and high stimulation as demonstrated by Berlyne (1960), Baldwin (1985), and Klapp (1986), and a transitory state “I’m bored” which describes the current state of an individual. As boredom can take any of the forms postulated, rather than having just one singular definition, I argue that boredom should be accepted as a subjective multi-variant condition or feeling which characteristically arises from both sensory deprivation and excessive satiation as a result of either low or very high stimulating situations. However, this is yet to be examined, therefore, the confusion over the concept of boredom will continue.

Figure 2. Plutnik’s model of the relationship between the primary emotions.

![Figure 2. Plutnik’s model of the relationship between the primary emotions.](image)


Although it is important that the meaning of boredom be established, we must not however get bogged down with its contradictions or lose sight of what it is we as researchers are trying to understand and eventually trying to reduce. The most significant aspect of boredom that needs to be researched and understood is the effect of boredom rather than its meaning. While contradictions currently remain, there does appear to be an agreement that boredom is complex in nature and a multi-dimensional construct (Brissett & Snow, 1993; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001), which results from a number of possible determinants (see: Figure 3.) including arousal, constraint, repetitiveness/monotony, unpleasantness, and a lack of momentum and
meaninglessness (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990; Hill & Perkins, 1985; Barbalet, 1999; Berlyne, 1960; Hill, 1975; Klapp, 1986), as well as possibility the lack of imagination. Geiwitz (1966), however, recognises that no study as yet has found any one factor which appears to be the sine qua non of boredom. It therefore would be appropriate to take this opportunity to analyse each determinant of boredom individually.

Figure 3. Possible determinants of Boredom.
**Structure of Boredom.**

**Arousal:**

While most individuals will need a moderate level of stimulation to maintain their own optimal level of arousal, the need for highly stimulating activities and experiences significantly increases when the energy levels and sexual levels are at their highest during the stage of puberty among adolescence (Baldwin, 1985; Seamon & Kenrick, 1994). Adolescents are able to tolerate high levels of stimulation such as loud music and all types of thrilling and action packed activities. As the individual ages, and the novelty of the experience and sensory rewards begin to wane due to habituation, (Klapp, 1986; Baldwin, 1985), the need for highly stimulating activities and experiences eventually declines (Zuckerman, et al. 1978). Inevitably the ageing process (declining health, declining strength and deterioration of muscular tissue) reduces the need for highly stimulating experiences and thus individuals seek to maintain a more pleasurable homogeneous level of arousal which is less risky, dangerous, and strenuous (Baldwin, 1985).

Since individuals are different from one another the optimal level of arousal, or OLA, will vary from one person to the next (Zuckerman, 1978; Seamon & Kenrick, 1994; Berlyne, 1960; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996). Certain individuals will require only a low to moderate level of arousal to reach optimal level, some may find their OLA may be moderately higher, whilst others may need a much higher level of arousal before the optimal level is reached. When the level of arousal however falls below the optimal level or increases above the optimal level of the individual, the person will seek to return it to the ideal level required for normal functioning. This can be achieved by either seeking out “situations whose complexity..... level is slightly greater than the individual’s level,” (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993, p.4) or by reducing the internal tension and the complexity of situation by either escaping from the situation or sleeping or using drugs (Ragheb & Merydith, 2001; Caffray & Schneider, 2000; Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Thompson, 1975).
According to Lewinsky (1943, p.148) boredom is more likely to occur during “the period of forced attention and concentration and the beginning of daydreaming.” Lewinsky (1943), Geiwitz (1966), and Mikulas and Vodanovich (1993) states that unless the individual can either physically escape the low stimulating or highly stimulating experience by leaving the room or task at hand (Hill & Perkins, 1986); or mentally escape by generating intrinsic stimulation through day-dreaming about something more stimulating (Keen, 1977; Lewinsky, 1943; Klapp, 1986; Polly, et al. cited in Watt & Vodanovich, 1999) or by daydreaming about something less stimulating, the individual will remain bored. Thus, “constraints may keep one in a boring situation” (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993, p.7).

Constraints:

According to Geiwitz (1966, p.594) constraints are “a feeling that if you were perfectly free to do anything you wanted to do, you would not be doing what you are doing, you would choose to do something else.” The freedom to choose a task or situation that is optimally arousing for the individual (Brissett & Snow, 1993; Patterson & Pegg, 1999), is clearly lacking when one is constrained. It thus follows that constraints can restrict individuals from reaching or maintaining an optimal level of arousal required to prevent boredom. Unfortunately, Mikulas and Vodanovich, (1993, p.7) observes that “constraints [can] take many forms including physical, social, legal, and practical/financial.” Furthermore, they can be found in many situations including as Ragheb and Merydith (2001), Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990), Brumhead, et al. (1990), Patterson and Pegg (1999) suggests, during periods of free time, at school and university, in church, or at work and home. For young people wishing to beat boredom it is, however, the interaction of social, legal, and financial constraints which causes most frustration. While this is mostly in educational institutions, the social constraints on leisure can be just as burdensome for young people. Shaw, et al. (1996, p.283) found that “those students who reported boredom in school [are] also more likely to report boredom out of school.”

Work has been identified in our society as being “important for status, power, and social identity, as well as for the individuals .... social participation and sense of belonging” (Sargent, 1995, p.270). Clarke and Critcher (1985, p.156) realised that
because “the boundary between the dependence of full time education and relative independence of work [has] moved up the age scale,” and the introduction of the concept of adolescence has lengthened the transitional period to adulthood, society has itself created a major dilemma for new generations of young people. Due to working and earning, young people were once from as young as 13-14yrs able to rightly claim the status of adults which thus entitled them to participate in the adult world. According to Begg (1993, p. 136), since young people today do not “contribute to the legitimate economy,” this has disempowered young people, thereby reducing their social status and social identity to that of student and child. Young people therefore having no adult status are no longer permitted to participate in most adult activities. Ironically, Giddens (1997, p.39) notes that while young people “may wish to go to work [and thus partake in the adult world, they are] constrained to stay in school.”

Unfortunately, for most highly aroused and spirited adolescents “the extension of freedom that normally takes place in the family home is not accompanied by parallel deregulation at school” (Greenberg, 1999, p.208). Highly restricted by the rules and regulations of schooling, individuals are forced, whether they like it or not, to partake in obtaining an education to improve their employment prospects in a capitalist society. For some students the loss or denial of autonomy (Greenberg, 1999) as a result of constant rules, time schedules and constraints of not being allowed to leave the school premises, or even leave the classroom at will, in addition to school being perceived as dull, uninteresting, unchallenging and boring, (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991) may eventually take its toll leading to many school, social, and psychological problems such as poor school performance, truancy and/or misbehaviour, drug use (Gordon & Caltabiano, 1996; Iso-Hola & Crowley, 1991), and low self esteem (Greenberg, 1999; Thompson, 1975; Dehlinger, 1975) which may conceivably result in alienation, depression and/or suicide (Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Klapp, 1986).

Darden and Marks (1999, p.23) reports that when the teacher’s appearance and clothing is especially drab looking and unpleasant, and the teacher “is immobile, .... inactive, [and] monotonous, [the teacher] contribute[s] to student boredom.” In
addition, Shaw, et al. (1996) found that the type of subjects being taught were an additional contributor to boredom. Students interviewed by Shaw, et al. (1996) stated that boredom was mostly experienced during History, Maths, and English lessons due to the subject matter and teaching style. Supporting Shaw, et al. (1996), and Darden and Marks (1999), Freeman (1993, p.30) states that:

Teachers are to a large extent responsible for much of the boredom of their pupils. Poor teaching trails boredom in its wake, acting as a deterrent to good learning. Because of it, many children underachieve in their school work.

This is also recognised by Watt and Vodanovich (1999), and Mikulas and Vodanovich (1993) who reported that boredom was a contributing factor to poor school performance and diminished grades. Interestingly, Zuckerman, (1978) found that among male high sensation seekers who report boredom at school, they also appear to perform poorly at school. Freeman (1993, p.30) further notes that boredom has been described as “probably one of the most frequent reasons for pupil failure in school.”

Unfortunately, when a young person experiences constant failure at school, boredom may be chosen as a protection against the psychic pain of failure. Eventually, “boredom spawns more boredom” (Dehlinger, 1975, p.49) which in turn spawns disinterest in learning and disassociation with the school. The student’s self-image “is affected by his [sic] difficulty to change the situation” (Thompson, 1975, p.125). However rather than “making a harsh self judgement” (Dehlinger, 1975, p.49) and facing the fear of failure and finding accomplishments from other tasks, bored students “often react to the failure by rejecting their rejectors” (Polk & Richmond, cited in Barlow & Ferdinald, 1992, p.161).

Consequently, as Hirschi (cited in Barlow and Ferdinald, 1992, p.162) states “academic incompetence leads to poor school performance to disliking of school to rejection of school’s authority to .... delinquent acts.” Stewart, et al. (1994), Barlow and Ferdinald (1992), Freeman (1996) Weatherburn (1996), and others concur, stating that poor school performance as well as a lack of attachment to school is a predictive indicator of offending behaviour (see also: Stewart, et al. 1994). Raheb and Merydith (2001), Watt and Vodanovich (1999), Shaw, et al. (1996), and Mikulas
and Vodanovich, (1993), have further found that boredom has also been described as a causal factor of many other problems within the school environment such as early school drop-outs, truancy, misbehaviour in the classroom, as well as frequent deviant behaviours at school by young males (see also: Sundberg, et al. 1991; Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991; Maroldo, 1986; Klapp, 1986; Wasson, 1981; Smith, 1981).

Freeman (1993, p.29) recognises that because young people do not like being bored, “either alone or in groups, they [will] devise means of avoiding boredom .... [consequently], they will try anything to relieve this unpleasant experience.” Supporting the fight-or-flight paradigm, Thompson (1975) suggests that young people may respond to boredom by fighting and misbehaving in the classroom, or behaving in a deviant manner or individuals may take flight in the form of truancy or dropping out of school early. In addition, as the common goal is to relieve or escape the negative feelings of boredom, committing crime such as vandalism, graffiti, drug taking, etc., may be a common form of flight for groups of young people.

Concurring, Caffray and Schneider (2000) states that because adolescents may wish to enhance positive affective states and avoid or reduce negative states which occur during the school period, young people may become involved in risky behaviours as a way to accomplish this goal. This is further supported by Greenberg (1999, p.206) who states that teenagers “who are unable to achieve popularity on the basis of personal attributes and who lack alternative sources of self esteem e.g. from school, success, or a warm friendships with parents” may find committing crime may be perceived as a way to achieve popularity and increase self esteem.

In most cases of boredom at school, research studies have found from self-reports, that boredom occurs more often among boys than girls (Maroldo, 1986; Wasson, 1981; Sundberg, et al. 1991; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999). Further, it is usually boys that drop out early from school, become truant, or misbehave in the classroom (Wasson, 1981; Barlow & Ferdinald, 1992; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Cavan & Ferdinand, 1975), and predominantly commit crime (Wundersitz, 1996; Stuart, et al. 1994; Emler & Reicher, 1995; Freeman, 1996; Begg, 1993; Cavan & Ferdinand, 1975). According to Cavan and Ferdinand, (1975) because early drop-outs find it hard to gain employment due to poor grades, as a result of their
detachment from school and truancy, many turn to crime to generally obtain money for luxuries and entertainment which they cannot acquire through legal means. In addition, White (1999, p.33) further believes that “a major factor in the commission of [most] non-economic crimes was a sense of boredom and a need for excitement.”

While there have been very few studies conducted on the differences in the experience of boredom between girls and boys at school, Fogelman (1976) found that the type of activities of girls and boys appear to play an important part. According to Fogelman, (1976, p. 203) “imaginative activities were more popular with girls than boys,” furthermore, girls were more passive in play whilst boys’ activities were more active yet logically based. It could be reasonably conjectured that given the number of virtual reality games, Nintendo and Play Station games, Gameboy games, PC games, video games, etc., which are essentially aimed at the younger male population and commonly played during leisure time at home by adolescent boys, these games have stifled boys’ imaginations to the point that they can not mobilise their imagination when they find themselves bored at school. A good example of how times have changed and how virtual reality games have replaced traditional types of boys’ activities was illustrated in an advert for Kellogg’s ‘Cornflakes’ broadcast on Channel 7 (2001, at 9.10pm). One boy asked his parents if he could go to a friend’s place to play cricket. On the next segment of the advert the boy turns up at his friend’s place to play cricket, however, cricket was not played outside with a bat and a ball, but on the T.V. in the lounge-room via a virtual reality cricket game. Today, for some children, it appears the norm to play traditional sports on the small screen.
Goetzl (1975, p.102) states that "there is a tendency to forestall the experience of this boredom by showering on our young exciting distractions and diversions, that is, entertainment from without" rather than from within. While the link between virtual games and the lack of imagination may be coincidental, as a mother of a twelve year old boy who has lavished her son with most electronic games available, I have experienced first hand the lack of imagination in my son. Therefore, I do believe that virtual reality games which do not enhance or encourage imagination in boys, are a contributing factor for boys experiencing boredom more often than girls, at this stage further investigation is needed.

As the general nature of boys' play appear to be more active than girls (Baldwin, 1985), it could further be reasonably speculated that when boys are subjected to less stimulating situations such as the classroom, there is a greater possibility for boys to experience boredom which may consequently lead some boys into seeking alternative stimulation from elsewhere. Freeman (1993, p.31) notes that "without stimulation, schoolwork becomes just a rather boring and easy matter of taking in and producing what teachers says, [thus] the flame of discovery burns low."

Since boredom leads to some individuals seeking alternative stimulation, it can be conclusively shown that, if there is no change in the level of stimulation at school, truancy and early school dropout will follow which could eventually lead students to crime as a source of extra sensory stimulation if legal means prove ineffective. It can also be reasonably inferred that since boredom appears a contributing factor to poor school performance, truancy and early school dropout which have all been identified as factors relating to unemployment; Boredom may also be identified as a contributing factor for unemployed adolescents becoming involved in crime, either simply to occupy their time and provide the necessary sensory stimulation or as a source for obtaining money to pay for entertainment which could alleviate adverse feelings of boredom. Both links are illustrated schematically in Fig. 4.
Figure 4. A schematic view of the experiences of boredom in schools.

Sensation Seekers

School-work and the teacher

Educational Institutions
Formal constraints

Perception of time
(Lack of Momentum)

Subjective Monotony
(of school and school-work)

Meaninglessness

Lack of stimulation
(low arousal)

BOREDOM

Seek legal alternative stimulation
Truancy

Poor school performance
Early school drop-out

Seek alternative illicit stimulation

Crime

Unemployment

Sensory Stimulation

Success
Although young people often try to follow adult ways, Giddens (1997) reports that since the introduction of the stage of adolescence, young people are consequently treated as children in law as well as in the social environment which ultimately socially, financially, and legally excludes them from freely choosing the right activities, situations, or environments for maintaining an optimal level of arousal. Aside from one’s driver’s licence which can be legally acquired from the age of 17 in most States of Australia, most other adult activities which are perceived as exciting and good in the adult world such as smoking, drinking, going to nightclubs and hotels, and watching R rated films at the cinemas, are all legally off limits to the adolescent sensation seeker until the general age of 18 (Baldwin, 1985; Brumhead, et al. 1990). However, even when an individual is eighteen and able to partake in activities of the adult world, due to the possibility of being unemployed given the current high unemployment rate, or living in lower class neighbourhoods or both, financial constraints add an additional burden insofar as they prevent many young people from engaging in the range of legal but costly activities and venues that society has to offer (Sundberg, et al. 1991; Baldwin, 1985).

Consequently, young people must seek alternative stimulation from free activities and venues. However, when groups of young people are engaging in leisure activities which may or may not be totally legal, some law-abiding citizens (usually the neighbourhood’s busy-bodies) will raise the alarm and report that there is a general disturbance at for example the park, local shop, street, etc., which requires police or private security assistance. White, et al. (1997, p.67) recognises that, “the [mere] visibility of young people, and the public nature of their activities ....,” will invariably lead them to be “in contact with a wide variety of authority figures” (p.112). Regarded as “too old for playgrounds, too young to be valued community members”, (Malone, 1999, p.22), and too irresponsible to use such spaces properly or respectfully, most young people will unfortunately find themselves being denied the right to socialise with one another at most free public spaces.

According to Malcolm, (1999, p.29) the main factors for youth exclusion may be “the way in which young people spend their leisure time and how they use what is often termed public space.” Generally, youths will make a nuisance of themselves
by ‘hanging around’ in groups at the local shops, shopping centres and shopping malls, streets and parks. Whilst technically not criminal, such behaviour elicits the misconception that all young people are ‘no hopers’, ‘troublemakers’, or ‘delinquents’, who are involved in all kinds of criminal activities (Malone, 1999).

However, many youths enjoy the experience of just ‘hanging out’ or ‘hanging around’ rather than participating in adult-sanctioned and structured leisure activities (Brumhead, et al. 1999). ‘Hanging around’ provides young people with the opportunity to socialise and discuss things that have been happening in their lives, to gossip and tell jokes, and provide time to confide in friends about problems that are troubling them (Brumhead, et al. 1999). Furthermore, Barlow and Ferdinald, (1992, p.53) found that “hanging out with friends is an occasion which boredom can be turned into fun, and sometimes the fun is illegal.” Whilst ‘hanging out’ is interpreted as having a negative impact on adolescents, the important point that Barlow and Ferdinald (1992) is making is that it does at times reduce the adverse feelings of boredom which may actually satisfy “important developmental needs” (Raymore, 1995, p.206) such as sensory stimulation for an optimal level of arousal.

Unfortunately, with constant media attention on ethnic youth gangs, and juvenile criminal activities (White, 1997), most of the public are under the misconception that all young people are bad and troublemakers. This has directly impacted on how young people are perceived and treated in public space. Shopkeepers, businesses and privately owned shopping complexes will, for instance, become anxious that youth presence will not only drive customers and potential customers away, but will thereby infringe on the prospect of making a profit (White, 1993). Subsequently, unless young people are ‘consumers’ or ‘potential consumers’ (White, 1997), the mere attempt to socialise with friends will be quickly banished by the police and private security guards who as White, (1994, p.59) acknowledges, are told that “they must be especially vigilant in the monitoring of youth activities,” to keep the peace and keep the voters happy (White, 1993; 1997a). Young people will therefore be told by authorities to “move on, [and] find another space.” However, Malone (1999, p.22) defensively asks, “where does this ‘other’ space exist?”

Since hanging-out is thus not socially acceptable and leisure activities can be expensive for both parents and teenagers, the only other legal and socially acceptable
alternative apparently left is for young people to participate in organised and structured recreational activities such as sport (Shaw, et al. 1996; Freeman, 1996). While Gordon and Caltabiano (1996) report that physical activity is declining amongst Australian youth, Iso-Ahola and Crowley (1991) observes that sport can lead to a significant decrease in antisocial behaviour and in the frequency of individuals seeking unlawful strategies to alleviate boredom. According to Hall (cited in Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1991, p.261) “sport supplies a splendid motive against all errors and vices that weaken or corrupt the body. It is a wholesome vent for the reckless courage that would otherwise go to disorder or riotous excess.”

However, while sport has been postulated to be a great alleviator of boredom, not all young people are sport-minded nor have the athletic ability to participate or even like to participate in sporting activities. Scitovsky (1999) observes that the general rationale behind many juveniles' involvement in crimes such as vandalism, drug use, joy-riding, graffiti, etc., is that such activities do not require the level of skill which is required for many sports. Gordon and Caltabiano (1996, p.885) also found that “sport participation could potentially limit rather than enhance individual development because a competitive environment is considered counter-productive to the development of prosocial behaviour.” Gordon and Caltabiano (1996) further state that “participation is believed to offer opportunities for repeated failure and, therefore, loss of self-esteem” (p.885).

Mason and Wilson (1988) also found that sports can actually have an adverse effect especially on boys. According to Mason and Wilson (1988, p.3) “boys participating in major sports that is, more popular and highly publicised sports tend to be more delinquent, .... [whilst] highly aggressive sport, has been seen to have a greater number of male participants who are involved in delinquent acts” (italics added). This is echoed by Gordon and Caltabiano (1996, p.886) who found that “adolescents who seek challenges in risky activities (e.g., substance abuse) tend to be more active in leisure, with reported participation in football, gymnastics, skateboarding, [and] roller-skating.”

Raymore, (1995, p.206) therefore warns that “requiring adolescents to participate in activities they dislike may actually do more harm than good,” insofar that some young people may rebel against both the enforcement of approved adult
sanctioned activities and adult authority. Furthermore, the competitive and aggressive approach that is demonstrated on the playing field may continue off the field, thus increasing the possibility of young boys being involved in violent acts. In addition, boredom can just as well arise in sports, if an individual feels he or she is constrained to non-optimal activities which appear meaningless, unchallenging, and unrewarding (Iso-Ahola & Crowley, 1990). However, in spite of the fact that sport can contribute to an individual’s involvement in crime, Ritson (1994, p.86) acknowledges that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” thus sport is still better than no structured activity at all.

Subjective monotony, Meaninglessness, Unpleasantness and the Perception of Time:

Subjective monotony as it has been termed, has been well established by most researchers (Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Geiwitz, 1966; Berlyne, 1960; Klapp, 1986; Sundberg, et al. 1991) as the cognitive component of boredom. People generally agree that a monotonous and repetitive task or experience which is “lacking in novel stimulation” (Smith, 1981, p.331) will be boring and tedious. According to Lewinsky, (1943) and Barbalet, (1999) it would be erroneous to state that monotony in itself is a determinant of boredom. Most people for example, would perceive sleep as enjoyable even though it is a monotonous daily routine. A scientist working on a major break-through in cancer research would seldom think that the repetitious work of cross-checking samples and data was boring. In fact, the scientist would more likely consider such research as totally captivating. Even the monotonous rocking movements that a mother makes to soothe a baby off to sleep could hardly be recognised as boring for either the mother or child. Darden and Marks (1999, p.21-22), observes that whilst the tasks of the mother and scientist for example are ritualistic, monotonous, and continuously rehearsed, the task per se is not described as boring because “it is meaningful for the actor in its context ...., the performance [task, activity, or situation] meets the actor’s expectations, .... [and is] pleasant” which boredom essentially is not.
It is as Smith, (1981), Barbalet, (1999), Ragheb and Merydith, (2001), and Hill and Perkins, (1986) report, a monotonous activity that holds no meaning, or purpose, or delivers any intrinsic rewards for those performing them that will eventually lead to boredom. Furthermore, it is the under-stimulation of the task which evidently elicits the “perception of a situation as monotonous” (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993), unpleasant, and uninteresting (Smith, 1981), and not the monotonous task or activity per se, that contributes to boredom. However, to Getwitz’ (1966) surprise, subjective monotony when compared with the constraints and arousal components plays a much smaller role in generating boredom.

One factor of boredom which I believe can be both an effect and a cause of boredom is the lack of momentum or the perception of time. In many instances of boredom individuals have reported that time literally appears to stand still or stretch out endlessly (Ragheb & Merydith, 2001; Darden & Marks, 1999; Barbalet, 1999; Brissett & Snow, 1993; Thompson, 1975). Even the German word for boredom ‘Langeweile’ means a ‘long time’ (Thompson, 1975; Barbalet, 1999). However, I suggest that the perception of time for most individuals may be the result of either social, legal, or financial constraints which incidentally cause boredom.

For example, being stuck between two time markers (childhood and adulthood) ‘adolescence’ is in itself a social constraint and/or legal constraint which, in delaying a teenager’s social destiny, produces the perception of being in a state of limbo (Brissett & Snow, 1993), a period of longing (Lewinsky, 1943) which often generates a “sense of frustration and impatience” (Brumhead, et al. 1990, p.22) and consequently causes boredom (Lewinsky, 1943). The occasion of ‘hanging-out’ which is notable among youths further perpetuates the feeling of being in a state of limbo.

According to Herman and Schwendinger (cited in Barlow & Ferdinand,1992, p.53):

Typically, a day in the life of an adolescent ‘hangs’, and the adolescent ‘hangs’ with it; he or she is suspended in a meaningless and often suffocating limbo. Countless hours are spent literally just ‘hanging around’ and complaining about it. These youth can at least depend on the company of their peers to provide some stimulation and enjoyment.
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Brumhead, et al. (1990, p.23) also identifies that as a teenager one is expected to “wait until you’re old enough,” which again demonstrates the waiting game. However, within the consumer market young people are for example old enough to be consumers of goods which are technically within the adult world. The consumer world caters to, and even entices young people into the adult world of consumerism. A similar scenario occurs at educational institutions in which although young people are generally denied autonomy and the extensive freedom of adulthood, are recognised as being responsible and old enough to make important life long decisions about their future and choice of career. While “being a teenager [is] marking time” (Brumhead, et al. 1990, p.22), which does at times result in the distortion of time and periods of boredom, since the introduction of ‘adolescence’ Keen (1977, p.80) notes that in today’s society it is, unfortunately, a “necessary part of the passage from one stage of life to the next,” which young people must endure.

The social constraint of schooling can further produce a different kind of distortion of time. Many young people report that time goes very slowly during classes especially when the subject is either English or History, but time appears to quicken during play and lunch, thus to state an old favourite adage of mine, ‘time flies when you are having fun’ (Shaw, et al. 1996). At school, whether boredom comes before or after, the perception of time appears to be subjective. From my own personal experiences of boredom, I would say that boredom came first, followed by endless glances at the clock or my watch. Either way there is a definite lack of interest of the situation or task at hand (Thompson, 1975). Ragheb and Merydith (2001) recognises that time is distorted due to the lack of mental or meaningful involvement and sometimes physical involvement. Barbalet (1999, p.637) in concurring, states that “the absence of meaning of an activity promotes consciousness of time as an empty interval.” Consequently, the “bored person has lost momentum or intentionality” (Keen, 1977, p.78).

The “intention, choice, and purpose that yield the sense of personally relevant anticipations and future possibilities so characteristic of momentum” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p.24) and meaningfulness (Barbalet, 1999) are also simply lacking for those young people who are unemployed. Since no work means no social identity
and no work also means no steady income to allow individuals to engage in the rhythm of social life through commercial social activities, individuals do unfortunately find themselves lacking momentum which appears to progress to boredom. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, work is “valued for the sense of stable social identity it offers” (Giddens, 1997, p.306). Thus, if one is not working one has no social identity. Without a social identity one is regarded as a non-productive and unworthy member of society. Furthermore, without a social identity, “one has no sense of going anywhere, that one’s actions will have any consequences, [or] that one should get prepared for anything” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p.239).

Unemployment in a fast-paced society such as ours therefore means a complete disengagement in the “ebb and flow of human interaction” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p.241) which is a fundamental feature of social life (Keen, 1977). Socially speaking, boredom hence “speaks to a lack of entrainment or synchronisation with others. It is a situation where an individual experiences being out of synch with the ongoing rhythms of social life, for if momentum and flow are tied to any one thing, it is the recognition and participation in the rhythmic experiences of life” (Brissett & Snow, 1993, p.239). Unfortunately, for youth, when “more than one-third of the unemployed are young people aged 15-24” (Hogg & Brown, 1998, p.147) the chances of obtaining full-time employment is becoming increasingly difficult.

In a sense boredom is therefore a feeling of many parts, it is a feeling of disengagement of oneself from life in general, it is a feeling of nothingness and rhythmlessness due to unemployment or the ‘adolescence’ time marker, it is a feeling of disinterest or dissatisfaction towards an activity or situation, and it is also in part a feeling of impatience, frustration, and restlessness (Darden & Marks, 1999; Barbalet, 1999; Brissett & Snow, 1993). Unfortunately, for the unemployed such feelings may continue intermittently until employment is found, whilst similar feelings may continue for teenagers in limbo until they either gain employment, reach adulthood or find some other purpose to their life.
Boredom Proneness.

Personality Differences:

While everyone occasionally experiences boredom during their life time (Brissett & Snow, 1993), Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990), Hill and Perkins (1985), Iso-Ahola and Crowley (1991), and Gordon and Caltabiano, (1996), have reported that some individuals are considered to be more susceptible to boredom than others due to their personality traits (see also Sundberg, et al. 1991; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Watt & Vodanovich, 1992; Shaw, et al. 1996; Hill, 1975; Farley & Farley, 1967; Zuckerman, 1978; Eysenck & Zuckerman, 1978; Leary, et al. 1986).

Personality traits, Seamon and Kemick, (1994, p.426) explains, are “behavioural characteristics that differentiate people from one another.” Some people may be described as sociable, adventurous and/or impulsive, whilst others might be described as quiet, shy, and reserved. Given that there are an estimated “17, 953 trait terms” (Seamon & Kenrick, 1994, p.428), it follows that each trait is clustered with others and placed into one personality or dimension. Sociability, friendliness, talkative, active and outgoing characteristics or traits for example are components of extroversion, whilst shyness, unsociability, being reserved and quiet, are characteristics associated with introversion.

Further, the personality traits of impulsivity, according to Watt and Vodanovich, (1992, p.688), characteristically include “acting on the spur of the moment and experiencing restlessness, distractibility, and difficulty in concentrating.” In addition, impulsive individuals have the “inability to tolerate boredom” (Watt & Vodanovich, 1992, p.689). Included as a component of impulsivity, is venturesomeness, which Hall et al. (1998) found “reflects an interest in dangerous and thrilling activities,” and as such it shares much in common with the sensation seeking trait which also contributes to extroversion” (p.373).

Falling between Eysenck’s extroversion, which is divided into sociability, impulsivity (Cook, 1993), and venturesomeness (Hall, et al. 1998), and psychoticism, is Zuckerman’s sensation seeking. According to Zuckerman (cited in Eysenck & Zuckerman, 1978, p.485) sensation seeking is defined as an “uninhibited, nonconforming, impulsive, dominant type of extroversion” which is composed of
four distinct factors: thrill and adventure seeking, experience seeking, disinhibition, and boredom susceptibility (Ragheb & Merydith, 2001; Zuckerman, 1978). Pulkkinen (1986, p.154) also states that, sensation seeking is related to a "lack of concern with social mores, responsibility, and self control."

Because some extroverts and high sensation seekers appear to be “chronically under-aroused” (Seamon & Kenrick, 1994, p.337), Zuckerman (1978), Eysenck and Zuckerman (1978), Klapp (1986), and Gordon and Caltabiano, (1996) have found they are more prone to boredom. Extroverts and sensation seekers will therefore continuously seek various novel visual and other sensory arousal-producing stimuli so as to maintain an optimal level of arousal and prevent boredom (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Sundberg, et al. 1991; Ragheb & Merydith, 2001). However, Zuckerman (1978, p.46) claims that not all sensation seekers will be “incapable of facing long periods of time with little external stimulation.” Low sensation seekers for example, can have the best of both worlds inasmuch as they enjoy embracing stimulating activities (although they prefer less risky activities than high sensation seekers), and can also cope well with periods of quiet reflection and a quiet conventional life.

Since impulsivity and boredom susceptibility both have “an aversion for repetitive experiences of any kind, .... [and] dull and boring people” (Vodanovich & Kass, 1990, p.298), and thus have a much lower tolerance to repetition and boredom, it comes as no astonishment that Watt and Vodanovich (1992) found a significant relationship between “impulsivity and monotony avoidance” (p.689), whilst Zuckerman (1978) found similar results for repetition avoidance in boredom susceptibility. Hence both impulsivity and boredom susceptibility will avoid monotonous tasks. Extroverts on the other hand will attempt to “build more variety into their responses on a monotonous task .... [or] attempt to increase the amount of stimulation received and so maintain, .... an optimal level of cortical arousal” (Hill, 1975a, p.12). However, individuals who are described as “patient, placid, and imperturbable” (Wyatt, cited in Hill & Perkins, 1985, p.238), or introverted, are less likely to become bored and therefore less likely to attempt to generate more stimulation or variety in a monotonous task (Hill, 1975a).
A weak but positive correlation was also found between neuroticism and boredom among females. Hill and Perkins (1985) found that females who have poor emotional adjustment were more likely to experience boredom. According to Hill and Perkins (1985, p.238) “the person characterised by a high level of neuroticism is emotionally vulnerable and likely to experience frustrations and emotional upset (the affective component of boredom) particularly strongly.” This is also supported by Hill (1975, p.130) who found that “feelings of boredom were more prevalent among the more emotionally labile women.”

Wasson (1981, p.901) has found that persons who score “high on a scale of susceptibility to boredom are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour than those who score low on susceptibility to boredom.” In a study conducted by Gordon and Caltabiano (1996), it was found deviant behaviour was mediated by low self-esteem and high sensation seeking. Freeman (1996) also reports that motor vehicle theft offenders appear to be high thrill/sensation seekers. In addition, Iso-Ahola and Crowley (1991) found that sensation-seeking is further related to smoking, underage drinking, and drug use and abuse. Those that are predisposed to impulsivity have also been associated with criminality. Pulkkinen (1986, p.154) found that convicted criminals are invariably “more impulsive, hostile, self-centred, and immature” compared to their non-criminal counterparts. Interestingly, Maccoby (1986, p.276) found that children predispose to the characteristics of “impulsivity, hyperactivity, risk-taking, [and] aggression,” were more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour and criminal behaviour.

It thus appears that individuals who constantly need to avoid repetitious tasks or situations to prevent boredom, as well as those who have an insatiable need to seek dangerous, thrilling and novel adventures, may find that “crime provides immediate and often easy gratification of [their needs and] desires” (Gottfredson & Hirshi, cited in Clinard & Meier, 1995, p.131). Although the concept of need has been widely discussed throughout this thesis, Murray (cited in Hall, et al. 1998, p234) more thoroughly outlines how relentless and impelling needs truly are:

A need is a construct .... which stands for a force .... in the brain region, .... which organises perception, apperception, .... and action in such a way as to transform in a certain direction an existing, unsatisfying situation. A need is sometimes provoked directly by internal processes
of a certain kind .... but, more frequently .... by the occurrence of .... environmental forces. Thus, it manifests itself by leading the organism to search for or avoid encountering or, when encountered, to attend and respond to certain kinds of [forces] .... Each need is characteristically accompanied by a particular feeling or emotion [e.g. boredom] and tends to use certain modes .... to further its trend. It may be weak or intense, momentary or enduring. But usually it persists and gives rise to a certain course of overt behaviour .... Which .... changes the initiating circumstance in such a way as to bring about an end situation which stills .... or satisfies the organism.

While it is generally accepted that most traits are genetically based, Eysenck (cited in Clinard & Meier, 1995; see also Cook, 1993) and Zuckerman (1978) report that some traits can be shaped by upbringing and environmental conditions. For instance, “parents who provide stimulating environments for their children are likely to be high sensation seekers themselves” (Zuckerman, 1978, p.99). Furthermore, Baldwin (1985), found that young males may learn to be sensation seekers from others. According to Baldwin, (1985, p.1328) males learn to find “high levels of [thrill and adventure seeking] rewarding [in] sports that involve action, speed, or danger (e.g., skiing, surfing, .... motor-cycles, and automobile racing)” by either modelling others or by learning from friends, popular peers or the media.

However, there has been some suggestion that sensation seeking may also be related to hormonal factors (Zuckerman, cited in Cook, 1993). Zuckerman (1978) and Pulkkinen (1986) explains that certain chemicals of the brain such as monoamine oxidase (MAO), and metabolite, and chemical neurotransmitters such as dopamine and noradrenaline, as well as high levels of the hormones androgens, gonadal, and estrogens, play a significant role in whether an individual is a low or high sensation seeker. According to Bourne and Russo (1998, p.97) hormones are especially involved in the reactive behaviours of fight or flight, furthermore, they “can either inhibit or activate the transmission of nerve impulses.”

Consequently, Daitzman (cited in Zuckerman, 1978, p.99) found that “high sensation seekers among college students have high levels of both types of sex hormones .... [which activate] neurotransmitters such as noradrendaline [or metabolite],” which may counteract the normal inhibitory properties of the chemical inhibitor, monoamine oxide. Thus, since high sensation seekers appear to produce large amounts of noradrendaline and metabolite and high levels of hormones, “high
sensation-seekers should have low [monoamine oxide] levels [whilst] low sensation-seekers should have high MAO levels” (Zuckerman, 1978, p.96). This would support Pulkkinen’s (1986, p.155) findings that the “excitability of the central nervous system seems .... related to biochemical characteristics of the sensation seeker including low MAO levels and high levels of gonadal hormones.” However, such findings are highly inconclusive therefore further research is needed.

Since sensation seeking has emerged as a trait which is influenced by genetics, socialisation and possibly hormones, (Vodanovich & Kass, 1990; Baldwin, 1985; Zuckerman, 1978), there is growing evidence to support the differences in gender boredom as well as the relationship between age and boredom proneness.

**Gender and Age Differences:**

Amongst the studies that have researched the topic of boredom, two major commonalities have emerged, the significant difference in gender/boredom and boredom/age relationships. It has been consistently reported that adolescent males and young adult males are more inclined to be prone to boredom than their female counterparts (Maroldo, 1986; Sundberg, et al. 1991; Watt & Vodanovich, 1999; Shaw, et al. 1996; Smith, 1981; Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Wasson, 1981; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993). Only Hill (1975), reported a positive correlation between boredom proneness and younger females. However, it must be pointed out that in the study conducted by Hill (1975) on occupational boredom and individual differences, his sample consisted of only women. While this does not discredit his findings that younger women are more prone to boredom than older women, it does prevent any comparison between males and females on his part, to establish whether females in general were as prone or more prone to boredom than males. Nevertheless, Vodanovich and Kass (1990), Sundberg, et al. (1991), Shaw, et al. (1996), Maroldo (1986), and others (see also: Baldwin, 1985; Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Fogelman, 1976), have identified specific elements which have contributed to the significant differences between males and females in terms of being prone to boredom.

From an early age, both females and males have been steered into their traditional respective roles. Girls for example, are generally expected to be more
passive, compliant and submissive, and by nature, delicate creatures (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991). Boys, however, are taught and encouraged to be macho males who are more active, physically aggressive, competitive, risk-takers, and sensation and thrill seekers (Maccoby, 1986; Patterson & Pegg, 1999; Baldwin, 1985), and to some extent egotists who “inflate their abilities, [to the point that they] may come to believe that their work, [the activity at hand or situation], is not challenging enough and is boring” (Sundberg, et al. 1991, p.217). Alternatively, as males are more inclined to need more stimulation as a result of being more active, competitive, and sensation and thrill seekers, etc., Vodanovich and Kass (1990, p.303) found that “when their environment lacks variety and/or a sufficient level of stimulation” it may lead them to perceive “situations as boring” (p.303).

Social control mechanisms and one’s upbringing further play a major role in gender boredom differences insofar that Clarke and Critcher (1985) and Vodanovich and Kass (1990) found that there is stricter supervision and more restrictions on females than males both in the family home and in public. Males, who are generally depicted as leaders, are vigorously encouraged to be self-reliant, independent and are likely to be frequently left alone more often than girls. Since in reality females are in “sexual danger in their everyday lives” (Evans, 1992, p.199), parents are however more likely to discourage young girls from being too self-reliant and independent (Raymore, 1995; Vodanovich & Kass, 1990). In order to protect their daughters, parents consequently assign to girls more home duties such as house-work and babysitting siblings and encourage more participation in extra school activities (Shaw et al. 1996) which unfortunately tends to reduce their free time.

It could be easily interpreted that as free time is restricted and in some instances females report less choice in “their discretionary activities” (Shaw, et al. 1996, p.290) boredom would be more prevalent in females. However, females “show a greater variety of activities than males” (Raymore, 1995, p.205) ranging from cooking, reading, talking on the phone, listening to the radio, visiting friends and paid work, e.g. baby sitting for neighbours and family friends, which often prevents boredom from arising (Shaw et al. 1996; Clarke & Critcher, 1985; Raymore, 1995; Maroldo, 1986). Males on the contrary appear to “narrow their activity range” (Raymore 1995, p.205) during adolescence, generally preferring to
watch and play sport or engage in playing virtual reality games, which could invariably account for their perceptions that the external environment sometimes lack variety. Moreover, as boys are inclined to “habituate to objects sooner than girls,” (Vonanovich & Kass, 1990, p.303), and “males are more apt to become bored with respect to repetitive environmental stimuli” (Vonanovich & Kass, 1990, p.303), I surmise that it could be reasonably conjectured that if habituation occurs, stimuli may lose its novelty and therefore become boring. Klapp (1986), Thompson (1975), Berlyne (1960) and Baldwin (1985), reports that habituation means individuals become unresponsive to repeated stimuli. Since the “novelty of the experience is a major element in the rewards of sensory input, declining novelty [would therefore] reduce the sensory rewards for continuing active play,” and eventually could produce boredom (Baldwin, 1985, p.1327).

An alternative explanation for the difference in boredom proneness among males and females may however be related to the fact that “men tend to make more stable and less complex attributions for their boredom” (Watt & Vodanovich, 1999, p.5), males are more inclined to just simply blame boredom on external causes. Orcutt (cited in Iso-Ahola & Weissinger, 1990, p.13) on the other hand, found that the relationship between boredom proneness and males is “more complex” than Watt and Vodanovich (1999) report. Boredom (as a result of a loss of purpose) appears to exist more often when in the company of other male peers. While this needs further investigation, when comparing the attributional differences between males and females, overall, females tend to over analyse the situation insofar as analysing themselves and reaching the conclusion that boredom is “due to internal causes” e.g. ‘depression’ (Vodanovich & Kass, 1990, p.304). Unfortunately, much of the evidence to support attributional differences between males and females is mainly speculative (Watt & Vodanovich, 1990), therefore, future work in this area is evidently required.

While traditional roles and social controls do remain to a certain degree for most females, the roles of males and females have become less distinct, thus many females today partake in the more competitive and aggressive dominant male world (Gibbons & Krohn, 1991; Emler & Reicher, 1995). Unfortunately, the movement towards sexual equality has its consequences, Adler (cited in Gibbons & Krohn,
Boredom Proneness. 66.

1991, p.58) explains that females have become more competitive with males “both in criminal and non-criminal activities.” Since it is well documented that female offending is rising, and boredom is connected to crime; I believe it is plausible that some females may have begun to experience boredom the same as males. Of course, this remains speculative until future research can be conducted.

There is also a general consensus amongst researchers that boredom is a phenomenon widely associated with the younger members of our community (Sundberg, et al. 1991; Hill, 1975; Brumhead, et al. 1990; Scitovsky, 1999; Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993; Lewinsky, 1943). While most of the evidence which supports age differences in boredom and boredom proneness remain highly speculative, Vodanovich and Kass (1990) suggests that school is one location where boredom is most prevalent. It would perhaps be reasonable to suspect that the difference between young people and older individuals proneness to boredom may be the result of the whole school experience.

Alternatively, the relationship between boredom and age differences may be related to one’s ability to control one’s emotions in boring situations. It appears that older individuals have more control over their emotions than younger people (Vodanovich & Kass, 1990). Bowman (1975, p.28), however, explains that it is more likely that older people have just grown more tolerant towards boredom, “age itself involves a generalised decline in the intensity with which we respond sympathetically to the world at large.” Since “sensation seeking [does] increase from childhood to adolescence” (Zuckerman et al. 1975, p.148), then “decline .... with age” (p.147), and sensation seekers have been found to experience more episodes of boredom, I suspect that a correlation exists between boredom proneness, age and sensation seeking. This would logically explain the connection between the declining intensity of which Bowman (1975) speaks, and the growing tolerance to boredom with age. This, however, needs to be substantiated, by further research.
Preventing and Reducing Boredom: What can be done.

While I concur with Dehlinger (1975, p.54) that “even in the most ideal educational setting” boredom cannot easily be eradicated, there are methods which can reduce boredom’s stranglehold on young people in and out of school remarkably. Dehlinger (1975) recognises that if teachers, especially, are aware of the problem much can be done to reduce the prevalence of boredom in schools. For example, by reducing the monotony of school lessons or by telling a joke or an anecdote, teachers can make all the difference between having an attentive student and having a bored one. Thompson (1975, p.130) states that every human being “has a need to perceive his [sic] time as being meaningfully structured,” thus, a perceptive teacher who puts meaning into the lesson and its content can also keep students from becoming bored. Barbalet (1999, p.640) concurs, stating that “boredom can be avoided or displaced by a realisation, formation or construction of meaning in the actor’s circumstances or situation .... or by a subject finding meaning in contiguous or associated activities.”

In order to prevent loss of interest and meaning and therefore boredom, Freeman (1993) believes that teachers must increase students’ intrinsic motivation. According to Freeman (1993, p.36) “circumstances that provide a feeling of autonomy and that support individual competence tend to encourage intrinsic motivation.” Furthermore, intrinsic motivation can also be achieved and enhanced by challenging learning (getting young people to question fixed facts). Freeman (1993) believes getting young people actually involved in their learning rather than bombarding them with facts, encourages class participation and displaces boredom. A flexible teaching approach using “a variety of instructional styles, for example discussions, projects, lectures, independent study, .... [and] peer teaching” (Freeman, 1993, p.38) and a little imagination “teaching geometry in terms of football pitches and the movements of the football” (p.38), can likewise be an effective way to involve young people in learning as well as making the lessons meaningful to students.

Although Dehlinger (1975) has found that boredom is perceived for some individuals as an effective impenetrable shield which protects them against failure, criticism, and ridicule from teachers, parents and/or peers; Goetzl (1975) found that
the use of boredom as a defence mechanism can lead to a loss of self-esteem. According to Goetzl (1975) when boredom is used as a protective shield, a struggle, or conflict occurs between maintaining the protective stance of boredom and sustaining any meaningful or rewarding involvement with persons and objects in the external world thus generating a loss of self-esteem. Fortunately, Freeman (1993) states that to some extent, it is possible to counter the negative effects of boredom, by being “exceptionally positive and reinforcing any learning that is accomplished” (p.39). Dehlinger (1975, p.50) concurs, stating that, “the cycle may .... be broken if the student realises, or is shown, that he [sic] has already .... accomplished something worthwhile .... This recognition can then lead to some pride in the accomplishment and .... help boost a person’s self esteem.” Consequently, the boost to one’s self esteem can encourage students to surrender his or her “posture of boredom” (Dehlinger, 1975, p.48). Hence, enhancing a student’s self esteem is an effective way to avoid or reduce boredom, and, as an added bonus, improve the student’s potential for learning at the same time.

Watt and Vodanovich (1999), Lewinsky (1943), Keen (1978), and Klapp (1986) further acknowledges that alternatively, the problem of boredom can be reduced by enhancing a young person’s creativity and imagination. Klapp (1986), found that people cope with boredom by imagination, daydreaming, exploration and curiosity, and by one’s mental game-playing. Goetzl (1975, p.76) concurs, reporting that “those blessed with a rich fantasy life are well protected from boredom, [whilst] those afflicted with boredom are characterised by a marked inhibition in the production of daydreams.”

One of the best ways to improve one’s imagination and beat boredom, Scitovsky (1999) argues, is reading. Scitovsky (1999) explains that books are generally inexpensive, they provide variety through the extensive and endless range of romance novels, dramas, mysteries, action-style books, science fiction, comedy, biographies, etc., and if encouraged at an early age, they can enhance internal stimulation. Furthermore, reading books may promote interest and meaning if individuals can relate in some way to the contents of the book. Therefore, rather than
buying expensive toys and games to amuse our children, Scitovsky (1999) asserts that parents should buy books and continuously encourage reading.

Interestingly, Fogelman (1976) found that bored children of both sexes were less likely to borrow books from the library, read books or comics, or meet friends outside school. It appears for some young people that reading and other forms of leisure activities have been replaced by television. In a study conducted by Gordon and Caltabiano (1996), it was found that 37.7% of those surveyed did not engage in any physical activity whilst, over 93.5% of the sample watched television. Malone (1999), finding similar results to Gordon and Caltabiano (1996), asked respondents why they preferred watching T.V to engaging in activities outside their homes, the main response was “it is boring, there’s nothing to do” (Malone, 1999, p.20). While many young people engage in watching T.V to combat boredom, Scitovsky (1999) unfortunately found that television viewing does not produce enough mental stimulation to totally eliminate boredom, generally watching T.V is only a temporary solution.

Since boredom generally occurs between doing nothing and engrossing activities such as school, school work, and/or sport, Malcolm (1999), Malone (1999), and Patterson and Pegg (1999) recognise that while the problem of boredom needs to be addressed immediately in schools, boredom, the lack of money and free facilities are the key issues that most young people complain about outside school hours. As one respondent explains: “There is a lack of activities to do unless you have a stack of cash” (Malcolm, 1999, p.34). A respondent in another survey said:

I was bored, so I had nothing to do .... They .... could have more parks or something like that or more amusement things. More better places to hang out. More things to do. To be specific, more concerts or arcades, things local, like around the vicinity of where you live or more malls (Goldstein, 1990, p.126).

Unfortunately, the Western Australia Legislative Assembly report that:

Because of the lack of facilities and programs, and the resulting boredom, these young people often congregate in public spaces where they are often involved in illegal or anti-social activities (Patterson & Pegg, 1999, p.26).
Given the connection between boredom and crime and other social problems that some young people face (e.g. poor school performance, truancy, unemployment, poverty), to have any success in combating crime in local communities, I believe that it is important that current needs of young people are recognised. Researchers and society in general must find as soon as possible schemes and strategies which successfully cater to young peoples' need for stimulation, need for overcoming boredom and the need to accomplish both inexpensively. Furthermore, since it is in all likelihood that the problem of boredom is not going to go away, the urgency of evaluating all current programs and schemes cannot be emphasised enough.

Fortunately, there are some projects that have been reported to be successful. White (1997a, p.175) for example, found that the introduction of the Midland Gate Streetwork Program for youths had excellent results, “vandalism has declined considerably, shop-stealing has been reduced, and relations between older customers and young people and between shop keepers and young people have improved .... [in addition] the attitude now is that a win-win solution can be devised for everyone concerned.” In the ACT, Brumhead et al. (1990) also found that the introduction of a car club the ‘850 Car Club’ was effective in occupying adolescent boys after school and on weekends. Instilling the skills and knowledge of road vehicles, courtesy on the roads, and other driver education, as well as allowing off-road driving of unregistered cars on dirt tracks on a designated property, with over 90% of one town’s juvenile male population attending the club, the club’s success is well established.

Not all responses to young people are however as successful or encouraging as those just mentioned. In some cases, for example, the ‘Operation Sweep’ in Western Australia in 1994, only exacerbates the hostility between young people and law enforcement, creates more social problems and further instils youth exclusion and alienation (White, 1998). Regardless of this information, in 1999, police once again swept through the city of Perth targeting young people as the problem rather than concentrating on the underlying causes of crime (Mendez & Pryer, 1999). Not surprising boredom and youth crime was not eradicated.
Conclusion.

The objective of this thesis was to investigate the relationship between boredom and youth criminality. The first part of this thesis was devoted to youth crime, wherein an analysis of youth crime and the causes of youth criminality was presented. As a universal phenomenon, youth crime has over many decades plagued many residents, businesses, and schools of local neighbourhoods in Australia. However, in recent years, the media has unfortunately misled the public into believing that youth crime is out of control and teenagers are becoming more violent and aggressive. Contrary to media claims, youth crime has not increased nor have youths become more aggressive and violent. In truth, there is evidence to support a decline in some offences. Furthermore, the majority of criminal acts committed by youth such as vandalism, graffiti, shop-lifting, theft and small time burglaries are mostly minor nuisance crimes which are inconvenient, costly, and distressing to the residents, schools and businesses of local neighbourhoods.

Although females have been involved in crime for just as many decades as their male counterparts, extensive research has illustrated that in all Australian jurisdictions youth crime is overwhelmingly a male phenomenon. There has, however, been a noticeable change in the number of offences being committed by females today from the past. Female offending has been shown to be increasing in all other offences except in property damage, serious assault, homicide and motor vehicle theft. Since crime rates among women appear to be rising more rapidly than crimes rates among men, there is some suggestion that the increase in female offending may be due to increased learning opportunities for women, together with changes in traditional sex roles, which had previously placed a premium on submissiveness and a 'stay at home' attitude. It thus seems apparent that the gap between male and female rates of criminality may well continue to narrow. It will be interesting to observe future trends in young female offending.

It was found that the unemployed and poor youth are likewise over-represented in juvenile offending. Local long term unemployment was especially associated with higher rates of crime in neighbourhoods. Whether unemployment causes crime or crime causes unemployment remains controversial. However, it was
found that youths offend more frequently during periods of unemployment. While a large majority of the youth population do extend their education to improve their job prospects, unemployment remains high due to the disappearance of jobs through automation, downsizing of work-forces, and the growth of part-time and casual work. Consequently, individuals who have unfortunately had poor school performances, been habitual truants or have left school early are more likely to remain unemployed and be more at risk of becoming involved in criminal behaviour. Thus, there is some concern that in Australian society an underclass of youth who have never had a job and are unlikely to have one in the future is developing.

As neither school nor the economy can offer these individuals much in the way of hope for the future, they are confronted with endless monotonous hours of searching for work, watching T.V., and doing nothing which has increased the prevalence of boredom in today's society. Consequently, a new underclass of bored individuals whose life is filled with uncertainty and general meaninglessness has emerged. With no prospect of any future, many individuals have turned to others in similar situations in search of friendships, recreation and ways simply to pass the time. It was demonstrated that bored youths with little or no money will drift into the streets and into other public spaces in search for possible entertainment. Unfortunately, what is on offer for young people may be either too expensive, too unappealing since it has lost its novelty, or off limits due to legal constraints. Thus, some individuals may engage in criminal acts to either finance their entertainment or to act as entertainment in itself.

Of course, not all young people who find themselves bored will commit criminal acts. Those that are fortunate enough to have the money to pay for commercial entertainment, for example, may not need to search for alternative sources of entertainment. In addition, individuals who have a high self esteem or can mobilise their imaginations may find the intrinsic stimulation sufficient enough not to require external stimulation. However, there is a growing suspicion that a large number of young people are unable to mobilise their imaginations due to the extensive range of external stimulation that they have come to depend upon. Thus, for these youths coming together in rejection of the boredom and what is on offer,
excitement often takes the form of challenging the values of adult society by engaging in anti-social acts which are likely to be criminal offences.

Fortunately, it has been shown that the majority of youths in cohort with their close friends are not specifically motivated to engage in law breaking, rather, many of them drift into crime that generally occurs as spur-of-the-moment impulses. Since the prevalence of offending increases to a peak in the teenage years and then decreases in the twenties, it was found that most do not progress to adult offending. From late teens or early adulthood the majority of youth criminality appears to wane as maturity, employment and other underlying factors emerge.

While youth crime has been described as one of the major social problems of our time which is said to be the result of multiple social factors such as social isolation, poor schooling, poor parenting and family break-down, poverty, relationship with peers, unemployment, homelessness, and certain personality predispositions (sensation seeking, impulsivity, and extroversion), one causal factor which has been extensively ignored by many disciplines despite being a major social problem, is boredom. The second part of this thesis presented an in depth analysis of boredom. Examining the historical perspective of boredom, this paper found that boredom has increased dramatically since automation, consumerism, and technological progress. For many young people boredom is now a common occurrence in many social environments especially, for example, during school hours and leisure.

Next, the conceptualisation of boredom was investigated followed by ‘the structure of boredom’ which examined the determinants of boredom. This thesis also examined boredom proneness to analyse the differences between individuals in relation to personality, age, and gender. Boredom is best seen as a multidimensional construct which can be described as an emotion, an adverse drive, a negative transitory state, or even perceived as a protective shield against criticism, ridicule or failure. It is demonstrably connected causally to many devastating and destructive social and psychological problems such as truancy, early school drop-out, and poor school performance, as well as drug use, suicide and feelings of alienation. Furthermore, as this thesis has argued, boredom is also a strong motivational factor
for the commission of criminal acts: directly and indirectly, boredom can impel some young people towards criminality.

It has been well documented that when constrained in environments such as a school classroom or lecture theatre which is monotonous, or low in arousal, individuals who require high levels of stimulation may experience the unpleasantness of boredom. As a result, it was found that some bored youths, unable to achieve their optimal level of arousal, may be impelled to physically escape its unpleasantness by either misbehaving in the classroom and disrupting the class, or by becoming truant and committing crime. It was further demonstrated that individuals who regularly misbehave at school, repeatedly are absent from school, or drop-out early, seldom gain full-time employment.

Consequently, finding themselves unemployed and again bored, some individuals having past experiences of the positive aspects of crime (the alleviation of boredom and high stimulation), will be more likely to engage once again in crime to keep themselves occupied and to escape the negative effects of boredom. For those young people who are particularly predisposed to sensation-seeking tendencies, such as an insatiable need for stimulation, thrill and adventures, or the need to avoid boredom, seeking illegal activities may be the only free alternative which can cater to their needs.

An extensive range of research has also pointed to a growing dissatisfaction among young people over leisure experiences. It appears that many of the activities available during leisure create boredom because they are not optimally arousing or challenging. It has been found that boredom results if leisure skills are greater than the challenge of leisure opportunities. Furthermore, a lack of personal leisure skills, combined with restricted recreation opportunities, is likely to cause feelings of boredom in leisure. Since leisure occupies the most central place for modern adolescents and is supposed to provide the most enjoyment in an adolescent's life, some young people (but not all), may as a last resort vandalise or deface property, shoplift, or commit some other offence to lash out and be noticed as a result of being in a state of boredom. On the other hand they may simply become involved in crime because as Baldwin noted, delinquency and crime are available for everyone, rich or
poor, there are few barriers to prevent 12-15 year olds from entering delinquency and crime, furthermore, it provides unlimited thrills and adventures which is most rewarding in the early to late teens. Hence, crime may be perceived as the way to eliminate boredom. Given that such activities occur most often during leisure time and in leisure settings, it is of some concern that such criminal pursuits are occurring as a substitute to conventional leisure and recreational activities. Despite increased attention to adolescent leisure pursuits over the past two decades, it was found that researchers have generally overlooked leisure-related factors as correlates and causes of drug use and other deviant activities. Evidently, it does appear that the unorthodox use of leisure is a serious issue which requires further investigation.

It has been shown that sensation seekers, some extroverts and individuals that are impulsive or intolerant to repetitious activities are especially prone to boredom as a result of their constant need for more stimulation and variety. Furthermore, young adolescent males and young adult males have also been shown to be more prone to boredom than females. It was demonstrated that because males tend to limit their activities to either playing sport or watching it, they are more inclined to perceive less stimulating situations such as school as uninteresting and boring. Females, who generally participate in a variety of high and low stimulating activities ranging from listening to music or talking on the phone to baby-sitting for family and friends, tend to experience less boredom. Thus, the lack of variety and lesser stimulation may explain why males experience more boredom.

An alternative explanation is the influence of socialisation, males are found to be predisposed to sensation seeking activities and thrill seeking sports from an early age, while females are inclined to be involved in less active and aggressive activities. Since males are generally taught to be more competitive and aggressive in sports, and are encouraged to be risk takers, males may inevitably find less stimulating situations boring. However, there is the likelihood that because males habituate to objects and activities sooner than females and tend to prefer novelty over monotony, boredom is therefore likely to occur more often in males than females.
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There is some suggestion, however, that hormones may also play a role in males susceptibility to sensation seeking and boredom. Several researchers have found that high sensation seekers appear to have high levels of the hormones androgens, gonadal, and estrogens, which may activate the chemical neurotransmitters noradrenaline and metabolite and inhibit the inhibitor known as monoamine oxidase, thus increasing excitation and the need for higher levels of stimulation. However, results at hand are currently highly speculative and inconclusive, therefore, further investigation is necessary to determine whether hormonal factors are significant in the relationship between gender and boredom.

Boredom was also found to be more common for younger people that older individuals. Since school is one location where boredom is most prevalent, the difference in the proneness to boredom between young people and older individuals may be the result of the whole school experience. Alternatively, the difference may be due to one's ability to control one's emotions in boring situations. It was found that older individuals appear to have more control over their emotions and are more tolerant to boredom than younger people. On the other hand, since the ageing process (declining health, declining strength and muscle deterioration) has a way of slowing people down and also reducing the need for highly stimulating situations, it is plausible that older people are less likely to become bored. While it remains speculative, there is substantial evidence to support the idea that since sensation seeking increases during childhood and adolescence, then decreases with age, sensation seeking may therefore be a factor which is interrelated with age and the proneness to boredom.

It has been demonstrated that there is currently no single theory within psychology, biology, sociology or criminology which can explain the broad spectrum of youth crime and criminality. Since boredom is a symptom that expresses a deeper problem of connection between the developing person and society and is an additional motivational factor for youth criminality and crime, this thesis has shown the necessity to incorporate into the field of criminology a new integrated theory which recognises the importance of boredom as a causal factor of youth criminality.
References


References


