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*DUC IN ALTUM*: The Construction of Social Meaning Among  
Deviant Youth in Durban

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INCMER001

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the  
degree of Master of Social Science

Faculty of the Humanities

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this study I explore social deviance through the symbolic analysis of youth who exceed as well as defy social norms. The participants comprise thirty-one youth living around the Durban CBD who engage in a program of youth development through the medium of performing arts. The enquiry sets out to establish how talented youth build a sense of meaning through behavior that pushes the boundaries of their social framework.

In aiming to define their core values and needs, I probe the depth of unconscious archetypes through a four-fold methodology of active imagination, role-play, focus group interviews and clay molding. In the context of a wilderness camp, this data is captured through recorded group sessions and photographed images. Along with narratives constructed from my four-year long association with these youth, three case studies are compiled as a concentrate within the larger field. In so doing a micro sociology emerges, allowing the participants an introspective comment on their world. It thereby critiques the deficits of socializing agencies that influence them: family, school and local community.

The theoretical framework of symbolic analysis, within the context of already established theories of gang culture and delinquency, reveals autonomous identity as a core value among participants, along with courage and self-reliance, hard work and responsibility. These values, repressed by constraining domestic and educational deficits, result in feelings of intense emptiness. This gives rise to various expressions of deviance: violence, substance abuse, illicit sex and quietly defiant disengagement.

In overcoming these obstacles participants identify the needs of separation from childhood dependency, of ordeal in expressing resilience, of death and rebirth in being reintegrated with their community, as well as of ritual, as a facilitation of their passage towards adulthood. Their deviant tendencies therefore emerge within the apparent paradox of a necessary crime: claiming, through illegitimate means, what they describe as treasured values towards

the realization of their innate potential. Their constraining experience of mainstream socializing agencies has pushed them to the margins of their society. Here these core values are further desecrated through sub-cultures that are inadequate containers of primordial or archetypal energy. Deviant youth therefore emerge as highly perceptive of the inconsistencies of their world. They defy the conventions that arrest their need to discover the potential of their treasured autonomy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Standing amidst the bustling clamor of Friday afternoon traffic, buoyant youth have converged outside a local street-corner shop: their famed spot. Unperturbed by the blaring hooters of impatient motorists, the booming subwoofers of boisterous taxis and buses; they are huddled in animated conversation among themselves. On this same afternoon they are throwing together improvised verses of a rap poem, adding rhythm and movement through vocal sound effects and pliable dance moves. The energy they exude is fuelled by the subject of this creative work: their claim that hell is a place they call home. But despite the macabre issue they dare to toy with, their artistry is exceptional. Given the intelligence and wit of their rhymes or the audacity of their newfangled dance moves, these youth could be professional artists or even occupy pivotal leadership roles with the influence they are able to wield. However they merely wander along the margins of their community. They are social deviants and they are proud of it.

These are the youth who constitute the nature of this enquiry. They are not merely a group of regular rebellious teenagers, expected to simply snap out of their bad habits and get their act together. They do not sneak out at night and discreetly experiment on a few sips of alcohol. They are openly defiant of their parents and teachers, deadly serious about their attempts to wreak havoc and to terrorize their family and local neighborhood. Even though they are relatively composed at the corner shop for that afternoon, the same evening will see them on the community sports ground or an abandoned backstreet they call 'the gully.' Here they will binge on whatever intoxicating substances are illegally plied. They might break out into a bloody brawl, knowing how to disperse and where to hide before the police arrive. They will stagger into their family homes and insult anyone who dares to question where they have been the whole weekend.

Still, these are some of the most respectful and gentle teenagers one could meet. It is clearly not in their makeup to behave aberrantly since they are the same youth who would pick up a stray dog on the street, keep company with

a lonely senior citizen or help nurse an HIV positive baby at the local hospice. They put together cogent arguments against social injustices such as the unequal distribution of wealth, the abuse of juvenile prisoners or the plight of informal traders at the city market. They do not brag or tell lies. They are plainly honest about their lives and admit to the wrong they do. At the same time they speak of not being able to pull themselves away from the offensive conduct they indulge in. They are unable to think clearly about what they are doing and unable to explain why it gives them a sense of satisfaction to do what they know to be wrong. They are compelled, drawn to deviant behavior by what they describe as forces beyond their control. It is almost as if they find meaning from breaking the rules of social convention. However it would be wrong to assume that they are merely driven by anger or frustration since their episodes of deviance are not only provoked by such outrage. Sometimes they talk about going through intense feelings of emptiness in which they are consumed by what they describe as endless desolation. At such times they quietly disengage from the activity of the world around them and look for comfort in smoking incessant amounts of marijuana, writing poetry or spray-painting graffiti on dilapidated blocks of flats. These youth are clearly not lost rebels and far from being written off, as some of their family and teachers have reclined to surmise.

This study sets out to explore the way in which deviant youth build a sense of meaning through behavior that they know to be destructive of themselves and the social agencies that they grow up in: family, school and local community. It asks why ordinary youth, not given to atypical cults or paranormal interests, would engage in behavior that sets out to desecrate what is valuable in a society that they actually long to be a part of. What is it that builds such discordant social patterns and imposes such stark fractures in the socialization of these young people? In trying to understand what drives them to fall through the cracks of their society, our task becomes a journey into the depths. In order to understand their world we must go down with them into the complex symbols they have constructed, which seem opaque to the world around and above them. It is an endeavor well articulated by the Latin expression *Duc In Altum*: delve into the depths.

The depth and complexity of symbols in human behavior patterns have long been synonymous with the psychoanalytic theories of Carl Jung. Accordingly, conscious behavior is stimulated and guided by the unconscious sphere of the human psyche. Occurring through dreams and imagination, the unconscious elicits symbols or archetypes that describe the energy with which the human person behaves. Therefore if we are to understand what lies beneath the deviant tendencies of our youth in question, it would be necessary to make use of these theories that unlock the hidden meaning of symbols: 'what we consider, on a societal plane, to be a sinful act might prove, on a symbolic plane to be a meaningful and even a necessary act' (Jacobi 1959:93). In applying this understanding to the societal influences these youth are exposed to, theorists such as Edinger propose the cause of discordance to be the breakdown of social structures such as church, family and school that leaves no adequate container for the expression of symbolic or archetypal energy (1972:68). Local sociologists such as Don Pinnock have made great strides in similar studies of gangsterism, exploring the need for ritual and rites of passage in the development of young people. Here he also places 'more value on the ritualistic performance rather than on the apparent goals of the action' (Pinnock 1997:4). In this way we come to understand the value of looking for hidden meaning behind apparently offensive behavior and thereby realize the needs that such youth are trying to communicate.

It is important to recognize that my boundary between sociology and psychology is indistinct since these disciplines overlap each other here. In employing the use of psychoanalytical tools, however, my analysis does not probe the realm of psychotherapy and rehabilitation. That is where the limitations of this study are recognized since it cannot gauge the potential of these exercises to bring about a change of behavior. My concern is rather with the understanding and interpretation of social behavior, building a micro sociology in terms of participant perspectives on their world. By asking what brings about the inconsistencies of talented youth who display socially destructive behavior, I draw attention to the interior world of deviant youth. This micro perspective allows for an understanding of the impact of social

fractures or deficits that they are exposed to. It therefore aims to contribute to the wealth of macro research that looks towards social cohesion.

Our journey into these depths begins with a contextual appreciation of the youth who participate in this study, tracing the complexity of their lifestyle that both surpasses and defies social norms. This understanding of deviance is then delineated along the framework of theories that appreciate the value of unconscious energy beneath social behavior patterns. Putting these theories into practical application of a fieldwork design, I then explore the use of a four-fold methodology to elicit data: active imagination, fantasy role-play, focus group interviews and clay molding. Conducted within the context of a wilderness camp, this approach holds the promise of engaging youth who are often disengaged by conventional environments. The data is firstly analyzed through a series of three case studies, unearthing the symbols that emerged from the unconscious play of imagination. Using these cases as a concentrate, within the larger pool of data from the rest of the participants, I plot their values and needs. It gives such youth a voice in pointing to the responsibility that their socializing agencies may assume in their development. I thereby undertake to decode the complexity of symbols that have possibly brought about their misunderstanding.

When gathered on the public space of street corners, yet closed off from the hurried world passing by all around them, deviant youth are seen to be engaged in a language specific to their own domain. It is the language of symbols that seem opaque to the restless pedestrians crossing the same street that they too stand on. Even though they brush by so close to each other in everyday life they still remain worlds apart, misunderstood and cast out from the domain of mainstream society. The goal of this explorative study is to stop the traffic on this trend of thought and turn its attention to values that are deeply buried away. It is hoped that my findings will point to the depth of meaning that these youth treasure and what holds them back from actuating such potential.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **RESEARCH QUESTION: WHY DO TALENTED YOUTH ENGAGE IN DEVIANT BEHAVIOR?**

In setting about the work of constructing social meaning, I aim to look at society from the perspective of those who constitute the nature of this enquiry. In so doing I am concerned with asking the right questions and raising awareness over what might be lying buried beneath the social anxiety caused by such fractures as youth deviance. My enquiry seeks to give a voice to the muted presence of these youth in their communities, trying to understand what they are looking for.

This chapter begins with a consideration of the context in which these youth have come to be described as social deviants, followed by an exposition of the point of tension. This is the counterpoint that raises the question about how they have been understood and what about them is still left misunderstood, thereby leading to an identification of the image I aim to construct. Finally I shall also consider the relevance of such a discourse for the purpose of youth development and social cohesion.

#### **Background and Context**

My association with the youth in question began in 2004. They intrigued me from the moment I encountered them, as stage performers of various genres including acting, singing and dancing. Besides these talents others also displayed great skill in slam poetry or rhythmic performance poetry, spray-painting murals and a natural acumen for aesthetic creativity. They were a random collection of youth at that time, without any formal organization, performing at local community and school functions. Along with other concerned community leaders, we noticed that these youth displayed remarkable talent on stage but remained quiet and reserved, distanced from the community under everyday circumstances. They live in various low to middle income working class communities around Durban but attend school in Sydenham, which lies on the outskirts of the CBD. Although most of them live

in previously zoned Colored communities, they comprise some Indian and Black youth as well. Our observation of these youth also extended to images of them as being a bad influence on other youth in the community. They are considered with much disdain for their involvement in behavior that their communities consider shameful: substance abuse, illicit sexual relationships, violence and a general demeanor of defiance for any form of authority either at school or within their families. Out of concern for these talented youth whom we considered in need of developing their self-esteem, the idea of producing regular stage productions as the basis of a youth empowerment program was conceived. It grew out of a belief that these youth possessed enormous potential to be constructive and not destructive members of their society, if they were given an opportunity to grow in this belief of themselves as well.

Together with a group of musicians, artists and deeply concerned community leaders, we started scripting musicals that now run for seasons of two to three months. We make use of a local church hall as a centre, largely because it is most available and accessible. It is centrally located on public transport routes and is within easy walking distance from all the local schools. Even though it is attached to a church, youth from various religious and denominational backgrounds attend the program. At the start of each season, we make known the opportunity to participate in a musical and everyone who attends the audition is part of the production. No one is turned away. On average about 60 youth will make up the cast and crew. They are then put through a series of rehearsals that include workshops to develop their talents in each field of music, drama and dance.

As the rehearsals gain momentum and the youth begin to feel more comfortable with the leaders, they speak openly about personal issues that concern them: their feelings of being misunderstood, of wanting to make their parents proud of them but not being able to pull themselves away from their deviant tendencies. They speak of feeling overwhelmed by forces that seem difficult to grab hold of and overcome. So apart from rigorous rehearsals, youth also have a space to sit down and to be listened to. Some would simply

drop by on their way back home from school whenever they feel the need to talk. Others would stop by during times of crises, such as when they have been expelled for bad behavior, not only from school but by their family as well, and need to have someone listen to their side of the story. These stories speak of concerted efforts on their part to make a new start but also of their need for help, as poignantly expressed in this letter:

I'm writing this letter to you to ask for your help with the difficulty I'm having in life and the decisions I need to make... I once made a decision to change my life and straighten my path but I failed. Then I watched a film about a man who changes his ways, which is what I'm fighting to do. So if you don't mind giving me that extra help it would be great. I am a zebra who really needs to change his stripes so please... I believe with your help I can make my wishes come true. Please help me.

Based on growing sentiments of this nature, the youth program evolved in such a way that the stage productions are merely the face value of what is offered. More central to the approach is creating a space for youth to be listened to, thereby incorporating the activity of a wilderness camp that affords them the opportunity to distance themselves from influences that they experience as constraining. They would identify these influences as their families, particularly their parents, their school environment and also the larger community. They speak of these agencies as 'narrow minded' and thereby incapable of containing what they describe as their need to explore and discover. Phrases such as 'hell hole' or 'my ghetto' speak of the frustrations they experience within these confines.

The open and boundless space of the wilderness therefore becomes an opportune location to explore and discover. This discovery does not only pertain to the natural and refreshing environment that urban youth are seldom exposed to, but also dimensions of their inner selves such as hurt or frustration that they might be afraid to reveal otherwise. On camp, these youth express themselves in ways that they are usually not given an opportunity to be appreciated. While some are tentative and reserved at first, there are those who take quite naturally to the challenge of survival beyond the comforts of domestic life. They assume responsibility for labored tasks such as carrying heavy bags of food, collecting wood and making the fire,

cleaning up the campsite and securing it against the invasion of monkeys. They also cope well with the discomforts of having to wash in cold-water showers and sleeping on the hard, uneven floors of open wood cabins. Their tenacity against the exhaustion of day hikes, the fear of abseiling or river rafting is also admirable. Within this free-spirited environment they also experience a sense of freedom in talking about hurtful memories from their childhood or even their personal struggle against self-destructive behavior such as addictions, violence and illicit sex. Leaving the campsite at the end of a five-day experience is always marked by mixed feelings. They speak of feeling stronger and motivated to return to a challenging situation back home but also nostalgic about an experience that they wish they could have more of.

A season of the program usually culminates in the staging of a production, this being an original musical that is scripted and scored along the personal narratives shared by the youth themselves. For instance, one of the first productions we staged was a modern day interpretation of the biblical parable, The Prodigal Son. The production was entitled *Forever Home* and captured the journey of a young teenager, Nate, who defiantly walks out on his parents to discover his dream of being a famous star. He unfortunately gets involved with a group of gangsters who lure him with empty promises and it is only when he finds himself alone in a prison cell, that he realizes the value of his family. With the help of a trusted friend, Grace, he finds the courage to turn back and accept the responsibility of his actions. This choice brings him the eventual reintegration into his family that he has longed for. Other productions have focused on similar themes that use the metaphor of a treacherous journey that is bravely encountered before finding a sense of reconciliation once again. These stories harness the energy that the youth in question seem to grapple with: a need to discover and explore, yet an attachment to their family that they still treasure despite the misunderstandings they experience. The image that they portray of themselves during rehearsals, on camp and on stage is the kind of image that they would like to be remembered for. They would prefer to be identified with

the kind of star quality that elicits applause and approval but they display a tragic inability to actualize this potential in their everyday lives.

### **The Counterpoint**

Inasmuch as the youth we are concerned with seek approval and recognition from their community, they seem to go about it in the strangest of ways since they appear to desecrate the standards and norms that this same community holds as valuable. Even though they long to be accepted by their parents and other figures of authority such as their schoolteachers, they express a sense of satisfaction whenever they disrespect such authoritarian influences. Whenever they break these regulatory fixtures in their society, they feel a sense of pride and speak of their behavior in terms that seem meritorious. For example, a young man who is expelled from school for violent behavior is praised as a hero since he stood his ground against authority figures at school. A teenage girl would engage in public displays of affection towards her boyfriend, knowing that this behavior is abhorred and that it would bring scandal to her parents.

In speaking about their feelings towards parents, teachers and school principals, they express much anger and feelings of hurt. Experiences of loneliness, misunderstanding and frustration at being belittled have contributed towards a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the world they find themselves in. It would seem that within these circumstances of school and home, not much time is given for them to speak and to be listened to. Parents would berate them for talking back when they express a difference of opinion. Teachers too face similar criticisms of not making time to listen and then dismissing them as 'trying to be clever' when they share witty comments in class. Many of these youth struggle to cope with the pace of a regular school syllabus because they spend a lot of their time questioning the various alternatives of approaching a certain assignment, apart from what is prescribed. In their exploration and experimentation, they often stray from what might be an expected answer, they may lose focus with the topic but they find pleasure in trying to figure out problems according to their own rules.

These deviations are not often allowed for in a class of 40 learners where a teacher only has the time and patience to accept model answers. So these youth are berated and dismissed for not being focused on what is expected. Their anger with this world, for what they see as contempt towards them, causes them to rebel against it and they want nothing to do with it. However this very act of rebelling betrays their actual desire and need to be recognized by this same world. They are well aware of the damage that they bring about in their schools and within their families. To a large extent they find satisfaction from seeing their parents angry or their principal frantically calling for security when they provoke a fight on the school grounds. Yet, they would still plead their way back from an expulsion in both these circumstances.

Parents and even some teachers speak of these youth as often being very respectful and sensitive, deeply thoughtful about their lives in a way that sets them apart from other youth. They probe and they ask why before accepting what is told to them but when they cannot find responses or when they are silenced, their enthusiastic energy turns to anger and violence. Sometimes they quietly slip away into a silent defiance. They refuse to communicate what might be wrong, they skip school for days and keep away from public interaction. Parents especially speak in terms of a child whom they love for being affectionate and dependable but then 'suddenly they just lose it and I cannot recognize this child of mine anymore... then I don't know what's going on in his mind.' It is precisely at this point that our enquiry finds its motivation. At this point where youth would rather choose to find satisfaction through running away from what they are looking for; it is here that important questions begin to surface.

It emerges that they do not completely detest the familiar environment of their home, school and local community since they do express a longing to understand the deeper significance of the influence that these agencies have on their lives. I therefore question why they would abandon this search for meaning within what is understood as the acceptable agents of socialization. Inasmuch as they seem to be dissatisfied in this context, they are equally attracted to marginal communities of youth who display behavior similar to

that of a gang. Although they would not define themselves in such terms, they ascribe to a set of rules and codes of conduct that their larger community finds unacceptable. Such conduct includes the use of violence, the marketing and abuse of illegal substances as well as fostering a territorial identity. Where does their allegiance therefore lie or is it even legitimate to hold one identity up against another, asking them to decide where they would rather be? Is it rather a case of one world making up for what they cannot find in the other; an instance in which both voices play out alongside each other in satisfying the complex issues that these youth grapple with?

This would seem to be the point or the frequency at which the focus of enquiry must be tuned. At this counterpoint we are able to listen to the voice of meaning that such youth impose on their world. My research question therefore asks: Why do talented youth engage in deviant behavior? In doing so I expose the point of contention within youth who display behavior that is socially meritorious but who also possess a darker trajectory that is marginally accepted, though abhorred by mainstream society. Beneath these complex layers of associations and identifications I hope to find an authentic voice to the social narratives of our youth in question.

### **Assumptions, Expectations and Objectives**

The search for meaning seems to be the pivotal point around which these youth construct their response to the world. Influential social commentators such as Albert Camus have raised the gravity of such questions: 'I have seen many people die because life for them was not worth living. From this I conclude that the question of life's meaning is the most urgent question of all' (Camus 1975:4). The urgent and intensive search that our youth set themselves on, to find this value, bears testimony through the way in which this understanding plays out in their behavior. Given the volatile nature in which they go about making choices, without giving much thought to the implications of their deviant tendencies, we could easily assume that they do not confer meaning in terms of what is good and what is bad. They merely act out of what they feel is necessary and what feels right in any given

circumstance. Being well aware of the implications and consequences, the moral boundaries and limitations, they would still feel drawn to behave in a manner that satisfies their innate desires. For instance, consumed by feelings of loneliness or anger they would not think twice about going down to the sports grounds to smoke a few 'sloops' (marijuana cigarettes) even though they may have an examination to write the next day. The fact that they will probably perform poorly, and the long-term implications of such a performance on their progress at school, do not compare with the drive to satisfy an empty feeling. We therefore observe that their quest for meaning and the action of making choices in this regard is not confined to a cognitive process of weighing up what is good and what is bad. They are drawing energy and being motivated from a much deeper place that is difficult for them to describe in words or through the cogent arguments that they are quite capable of putting together. They rather express themselves through sentiments such as 'I don't know why I do the things I do.' That is why they come looking for help, to try to unravel the source of this mysterious force that drives them to engage in behavior that they find hard to reconcile.

If given the opportunity to look at their lives from the perspective of what is meaningful to these youth, my expectation is that they will respond quite enthusiastically and tell stories that are explosive with rich symbolism. If their ordinary demeanor is anything to go by, given their over-the-top dress sense, animated hairstyles and exuberant imaginations, then we can certainly look forward to narratives that go far beyond and beneath a mere literal appreciation of their personalities. These are creative and artistic young people who take quite naturally to the language of symbols. They very rarely, if ever, do anything simply because they are told to do so or because they are merely going through the motions. If they are not passionate about what they are supposed to do, then they would rather not do it at all. If they cannot understand why they are made to sweep the corridors at school or to remain behind for an extra half hour after class, they will defiantly walk away. However when they know that their reputation is at stake at a dance competition or the chance to play a lead role at an audition, they will rehearse

until the early hours of the morning to place themselves in the best possible standing to succeed.

Similarly if they are given an opportunity to delve into the depths of their world, as frightening as it may seem but aware of the chance to find understanding and acceptance, I expect that they will give themselves completely to such an enquiry. It is therefore bound to be a journey of pleasant surprises and stark awakenings. In Steinberg's account of his relationship with Magadien, an inmate at Pollsmoor Prison whom he meets in a series of interviews, he tells of a similar kind of awakening to the true nature of a man who once committed heinous crimes. At one of these meetings, as they approach the end of their time together, Magadien reaches into his pocket and pulls out a rare half-cent piece minted in 1961 and offers it to Steinberg as a gift. It is a valuable collector's item, which Steinberg initially finds difficult to accept. This is only until Magadien breaks open the actual value of the gesture: 'I'm trying to tell you I'm fond of you, you idiot' (Steinberg 2004:77).

Despite the tough exterior that they present, these youth have a very gentle nature that is highly sensitive to the world around them. For instance, it is not strange to see them spending time at the local hospice for HIV positive babies or even visiting the elderly at a frail care centre. They do so without raising much attention to their visits and without a need to satisfy any outside motivation such as merits for a Life Orientation class at school. They do so out of a sense of empathy for people whom they understand to be fragile. One could assume that they identify themselves with this vulnerability and thereby express a part of themselves that they might not feel safe enough to explore in their ordinary circumstances. This sensitivity also extends to questions about the world and why people suffer. They probe questions about human existence and posit theories about what will happen at the end of the world. These images include that of animals assuming domination over humans and taking revenge for their suppression, or a new world beginning where money and wealth don't exist and everyone lives off the abundance of natural earth. From such discussions, it seems that they convey hidden messages about

their attitude to the world and how they see themselves as being part of this social order. It therefore points to the importance of giving them an opportunity to explore, fantasize and imagine these ideas since they contain clues to building an understanding of what they hold as valuable. We gather, from this observed behavior, that they communicate more effectively through the use of symbolic language rather than literal discourse.

Within the 'narrow minded' confines of the social institutions that these youth grow up in, they seem to feel ignored as if there is no time and space to consider their unique and complex understanding of their world. It is this feeling of being stifled that may be the stirring influence of their anger and frustration with family, school and mainstream community. They cannot find an adequate place for themselves so they disengage and rather set themselves apart on the margins where they can find engagement with others who have a similar bearing. Their being ignored and not being listened to finds them angry at their world, considering it a harsh and painful place to live in. Hence, their need to defend themselves and what is valuable to them through means that are in opposition to that same world. These assumptions find some footing in the experience of research such as those of Kiepenheuer: 'An intensive quest for the meaning of life underlies all these wrong turnings' (1990:9).

The objective of this study is to give these youth an opportunity to speak through the symbols that they find difficulty expressing within their ordinary circumstances. I will therefore probe the depth of meaning they ascribe to behavior that their society understands as merely offensive. Although they themselves would accept that such behavior is deviant, I shall set out to prove that there is another deeper level of meaning that often escapes the understanding of those responsible for their socialization. I expect that from such an opportunity I will find a legitimate voice for youth who actually have a contribution to make in a society that they perceive with a sensitive and empathetic bearing. It is my goal to uncover their values and what they may need in making use of the wealth of this treasure. Although the main thrust of this enquiry is one of exposing hidden meaning behind apparently offensive

behavior, it points towards what might be a greater social malaise. However it is beyond the scope of this analysis to be suggestive of rehabilitative or healing initiatives. Being descriptive rather than prescriptive, the importance of such findings is that it will speak to and inform those who are responsible for the socialization of such youth. What they are probably trying to say is that they are unhappy with a world that ignores them and is therefore awry since it casts out those who actually hold treasures of potential value. Such sentiments are expressed in a rap-song piece that some of our youth composed for one of our initial stage musicals:

We are the signs of a world gone crazy  
We are the signs of a promise gone hazy  
We are the signs of a world gone sick  
And we are the signs of a clock that goes tick, tick, boom!

## **Relevance**

The explosion of violence and other criminal activity among South African youth has received widespread coverage in the media. The infamous case of Morne Harmse is particularly engaging for the purpose of this study since it is loaded with symbolism that is both shocking and intriguing. In August 2008 the then 18 year old Krugersdorp teenager walked into his school yard, put on a grotesque looking mask and pulled out a samurai sword that took him on a rampage. He killed a 16-year-old learner and injured another, as well as two of the school gardeners. He then dug his sword into the ground, sat on a low wall and smiled. In what has been described as 'arguably the most barbaric act of schoolboy violence in South Africa' (*The Independent on Saturday* 2008:1), we can trace similar patterns with our youth in question although extremely magnified in the case of Morne Harmse. The incident struck fear and outrage among those closely related to the incident largely because the gravity of his actions seemed not to cause any remorse in the otherwise quiet young boy. It seemed as if he was proud of the tragedy he had just brought about. Social science practitioners, consulted on the horrific circumstances of the case, found complex issues and questions that emerged from an initial inquiry. For instance, the attack was not specifically targeted at anyone as in the case of children retaliating for being bullied. Evidence of occult worship

and Satanism also appears very slim in this case, prompting a deeper consideration of the symbols used: 'It is quite possible that putting on the mask could have given him another persona with unrealistic sentiments about his abilities and power, resulting in an altered ego state' (*The Mercury* 2008:5).

The youth who participate in this study show similar tendencies towards unrealistic expressions of their power through acts of violence. These acts may not be as fatal as that of Morne Harmse but participants take on similar personas through war-like dress codes and hairstyles that make them unrecognizable at times. They would put on long, dark coats and dark glasses, spike their hair in the style of science fiction warlords or even wear exaggerated make-up especially around their eyes and lips. The weapons they wield also evoke a similar kind of horror in the form of Japanese nun chucks, pocket daggers, broken glass bottles and batons. Since these are symbols or metaphors, it emerges that the intention of using such weapons is not to cause harm or death. In the analysis of Harmse's case, it appears that he did not intend to harm or kill anyone but rather to create chaos and terror. This anger is understood to stem from deep-seated feelings of helplessness and loneliness as well as a low self-esteem (*The Times* 2009:6). The eccentricity or abnormality of the Harmse case, even the case of our youth in question, is by no means isolated. These are not atypical youth but rather ordinary young people who express extraordinary tendencies towards social deviance. They are also a microcosm of a much larger social malaise among South African youth: '... the small-boned boy with the heart-shaped face is a symbol for everything that has gone wrong with the youth' (*The Mercury* 2008:5).

The escalating rate of crime and violence in South African schools has raised the urgent concern of those responsible for the management and development of this socializing agency. This concern is evidenced in such conventions as a recent meeting with the national president, ministers of education and 1500 principals from schools around Durban on 7 August 2009. A general sense of lawlessness, drug abuse and violence were recognized as

signs that schools had broken down in its essential task of preparing young people to take on active roles of leadership in their local communities and the country at large. Experienced and seasoned educators spoke of the 'systematic moral degeneration of our youth' (*Sunday Tribune* 2009:1) and the need for action to be taken before such lawlessness becomes the norm in South African schools. The convention also called for constructive measures to be put in place so that issues of drug abuse, violence and sexual exploits among students can be addressed. In the absence of corporal punishment, more innovative methods were called upon to instill discipline and curb devious tendencies. In this regard, the convention highlights the need for a more thorough exploration of these urgent social issues that have reached alarming proportions.

In a sample study of more than 12 000 South African learners across 260 schools, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention investigated the extent of violence in schools. The study focused on four primary types of violent experiences: threats of violence, physical assaults, sexual assaults and robbery. Among the most critical evidence of such behavior, it was found that 15.3% of learners reported experiencing at least one of the aforementioned violent incidents over a period of 12 months between 2006 and 2007. By means of extrapolation these statistics imply that 1,821,054 learners in South African schools have been victims of violence while at school (Burton 2008:16). The most common incident experienced was threats of violence, with one-tenth of learners reporting to have been threatened. Regarding the occurrence of actual physical violence one in twenty of the sample group reported being physically assaulted, which means 731,252 learners.

In this regard many learners spoke of being assaulted either by individuals or groups, often from targeted victimization. Fights or brawls are common at school, often caused by disputes in sports such as football, teasing or even carelessly bumping into a fellow learner. Some learners spoke of gangs that hang around the ablution blocks, using this site to sell drugs. They would easily beat up anyone who ventured close to their territory but did not have anything to do with their business. These assaults also involve the use of

illegal weapons such as guns and knives, while others speak of regular classroom stationery used as weapons such as pencils or the blades from pencil sharpeners (Burton 2008:17). The ease and desperation with which these acts of violence are carried out are telling signs of the volume of anger and frustration that young people carry with them. The damaging results of such anomalies are not only confined to themselves in terms of their personal struggles. It is also amplified in the terror and chaos that it brings about among their local networks of school, family and community.

The notion of South African schools taking on the image of war zones is a rapidly growing expression of the fear and concern about what is going wrong with our youth. The urgency of these sometimes fatal circumstances have resulted in schools being barricaded with security gates, armed patrol guards and metal detectors. Concern for safety and security has resulted in many perpetrators of crime and violence being expelled from school with no other recourse to their development. However these regulatory and controlling measures do not look into the underpinnings of such behavior that still persist despite the strength of safety and prevention measures. Educators and community leaders keenly express these sentiments in calling for communities to work towards creating stable foundations for youth development (*Daily News* 2009:1).

It has also been recognized that little attention has been paid to the voice of youth themselves, which needs a platform in designing effective responses to the issues that threaten their well being and development. The establishment of forums, whether at school or local community establishments, are essential in youth giving voice to and taking on responsibility for such urgent issues as crime and violence (Burton 2008:83). The importance and relevance of this study is therefore highlighted in these concerns. It seeks to probe and contribute to the existing discussion on youth deviance by taking an introspective look at the voices of young people who engage in such behavior. They need not be treated merely as outcasts, expelled out of concern for the safety of others. They too have a voice and it is a voice that needs to be engaged, not silenced and that is the contribution I aim to bring about. In

responding to issues such as the breakdown of discipline and the rising levels of violence in schools, weaknesses of these macro-institutions may be informed by a process of listening and interpretation. It is my expectation that deviant youth have a valuable contribution to make in pointing to what has gone wrong in their development and the responsibility that society holds in bringing cohesion to these fractures.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **SETTING THE CO-ORDINATES: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The variegated image of our youth in question, presents a labyrinth of pathways towards an authentic understanding of their nature. To some they are heroic figures who break down boundaries and set new standards. To others they conjure the image of defiant law-breakers who disrespect the boundaries of social interaction. They achieve the admiration of celebrity status from their talented artistry and are simultaneously condemned to notoriety by their misdemeanor. Yet, none of these conflicting images invalidates the other. Both identities are equally descriptive of the complex disposition that they straddle.

In navigating through these trajectories, it is essential to locate the foundation from which I can construct the authentic understanding I am looking for. By this I mean a valuing of their core needs, unbiased by the imposition of social fears and reservations about their apparent behavior. This chapter sets out to firstly determine the nature of deviance among participants, followed by a consideration of how this problem has been addressed by traditional macro analyses. In being fair to the diverse yet confluent images I have identified among these youth, I shall then propose a symbolic theoretical framework that probes the depth of conscious behavior.

#### **Tracing a Pattern of Deviance**

In speaking of youth as deviant, we must firstly appreciate that all social groups who make up a society 'possess complexes of conduct norms' (Sellin 2008:105). The sub-culture that the youth of this study have retreated into has its own set of conduct norms that legitimize their behavior within that social group. However the conflict arises from the larger community, into which they desire to be incorporated, since this community considers their idea of legitimate behavior to be aberrant. The ambiguity of social deviance now becomes apparent and it is therefore necessary to consider the contextual elements that define what is good for one group and not for the

other. As it stands, the notion of 'us' and 'them' seems to describe the nature of this social conflict that drives youth further away into the margins and leaves them with the constant sense of being misunderstood. It is, in a sense, a double-edged sword that cuts a deep chasm. It labels such youth as a threat to the existing order and pushes them away, while at the same time their frustration attracts them to the boundaries where they feel free to experiment with these limitations. At the peripheries they engage in extending such control bars far beyond the approval of their community.

### **Norms and Expectations**

On an ordinary school day, while a class is given a set of math problems to work through, the teacher attends to administrative work at her desk. She expects that each learner will be quietly engaged in the prescribed work assignment, producing a set of answers that she will review at the end of the lesson. One of these learners, a research participant, is seated at the back of the classroom and having trouble fending off the annoying jabs of his classmate who tries to distract his attention. The learner in question allows this taunting to continue for a while until he swiftly pulls out his knife and stabs his classmate on the leg, leaving a severe wound that soon finds him in the casualty unit of the local hospital. Although no formal charges are laid, the learner who inflicted the wound is expelled from school and not permitted to apply for readmission. Later that afternoon, when he comes down to the youth centre to talk about the incident, he is clearly outraged at being expelled. He finds nothing wrong with his actions, considering it a legitimate attempt to merely protect and defend himself. In this telling example we see the conflict that arises from a sub-culture that ascribes to norms and expectations divergent from that of the larger community in which it is located.

In this particular community, and in all of the communities from which our participants are drawn, violence is actually tolerated to the extent to which punishment is warranted. A parent may therefore slap their child for being mischievous and a group of adult men may tackle a shoplifter or a burglar to the ground and 'give him a good hiding (beating)' before calling the police.

This kind of behavior is considered legitimate and therefore expected. It carries through the socially accepted understanding that anyone who poses a threat to the composure and safety of a family or a community deserves to be punished as a means of getting the perpetrator to own up to the damage that has been caused. It also sets an example against potential threats of this nature, thereby becoming an act of deterrence as well, in maintaining control over the community. However, the boundaries of such violence do not extend among children or teenagers. They are not expected to engage in any violence, most especially the kind of violence that inflicts such serious injuries as in the aforementioned example. If a child, out of anger, engages in a fight with a peer and no serious injuries result, both children are verbally reprimanded and reconciled. However, when blood is drawn, the boundaries have been clearly traversed.

Within the social networks that our youth associate, taking on the characteristics of street gangs, it is understood and accepted that anyone who poses themselves as an enemy is to be dealt with according to the principle of drawing blood. One often hears the warnings that they mete out to each other: 'I'm after your blood.' Even if school teachers or prefects break up these fights prematurely within the confines of a school playground, they continue with vengeance at another agreed time and place: often on a Friday night at a deserted sports ground or sometimes behind a dilapidated block of flats. Here there are no limits to the intensity of violence meted out against each other but the victor is commonly understood to be the first person that draws blood from their enemy. Weapons such as knives and clubs are permitted and only the two concerned individuals may have it out. If any of these rules are broken, then the two groups that support either of them will engage in open warfare. The group that causes the most number of enemies to run away or lie reeling on the floor is victorious. These are some of the laws that govern the socialization of youth within their sub-cultures. Such laws are clearly offensive to the larger community, as evidenced when the police are finally called in at the alert of adults who witness these often horrific scenes of bloodstained youth.

The clear geographical chasms drawn between our youth in question and their encompassing communities, is also indicative of the different cultural space that develops their own moral compass. Erikson goes on to point out that any community operates in such a manner that its mainstream members confine themselves to a particular 'radius of activity' (2008:96). They naturally consider any behavior that meanders away from such a radius to be inappropriate and immoral. Therefore anyone who engages in such conduct is considered unacceptable to the larger community. To this extent, a deviant person is one who has moved outside of the margins of a large group and when such people are called to account, the group is thereby making a statement about the nature and placement of its boundaries. Controlling agents are often found in the presence of police authorities that have the responsibility of protecting the cultural integrity of the community.

When the youth, who constitute this study, are expelled from school and home or when they are labeled as bad influences in their communities we see clear lines being drawn at the boundaries. They are not allowed back to school until they have 'dried out, kicked their drug and alcohol habits and started behaving like law-abiding youth should behave.' At home, those parents who can afford rehabilitation clinics would check in their children and those who don't have recourse to such facilities would send them off to a relative who lives in a far off place like Kokstad, Harding or Ladysmith. In these circumstances the youth tend to show signs of being more settled with themselves, as opposed to their volatile tendencies back home. They know that these are temporary arrangements and so they develop mechanisms of coping until they can return home, where they long to be. However, once they do return the cycle of deviant behavior starts up once again.

Norms and expectations among our youth, within their various communities, also apply to associations with the opposite sex. A girl should never be seen talking to a boy alone. Groups of girls and boys going out together is encouraged but exclusive relationships are generally met with disapproval until they have at least matriculated. Virginitly among girls is highly valued, such that if a young man brings home a future wife who is known to have

been in a previous sexual relationship, he is shunned by his family because of his 'inappropriate choice.' Likewise, a young man known to be promiscuous is never welcomed by the family of a prospective wife. Within the cultural space of our youth in question, boys are expected to pursue girls with the intention of getting her to have sex with him. It is considered a victory and increases his status within his group.

A girl, however, is expected to tease and to lead the boy into believing that he can have his way with her but must then disappoint him when he tries to entice her into a sexual encounter. She improves her status by the number of boys that she can flirt with and distract from their present relationships. The resulting brawls, especially among girls, are therefore expected and they take place within the same rules as previously mentioned, much to the entertainment of the boys. However, a family whose daughter engages in such behavior faces the threat of being ostracized by the community unless they exact an appropriate punishment on her. Such forms of punishment would include a physical beating from her father or observing a lengthy period of about three months in which she is not to go out on any social engagements. Sometimes the young girl is sent to live with a family relative far away from home, until she has shown signs of being remorseful and made a sincere commitment to behave in a more respectable manner that would not give scandal to her family.

Smoking cigarettes is generally permissible among our youth in question. Their parents are aware of their smoking and do not punish them for doing so, neither do they encourage it. Drinking alcohol is also permitted, even for youth who are below the legal age limit. At family gatherings and parties, youth would enjoy champagne, wine and beer in the company of their adult family members. In this environment, however, they are to understand that drunkenness is not allowed and a young person would be publicly reprimanded if they reached such a state. Be that as it may, there are still clear ambiguities about such expectations since it is a common scenario for adults to indulge in alcohol to the extent of being inebriated. In such states, men would engage in behavior that is otherwise considered unacceptable

such as flirting with married women or making use of obscene language, even in the presence of their children. So what these youth are told and what they see do not add up in their process of socialization.

Boundaries are also clearly drawn with hard drugs such as mandrax, cocaine and ecstasy. Although marijuana is generally considered aberrant, some parents would gently permit it: 'At least it's just marijuana.... as long as he doesn't overdo it.' Be that as it may, our participants consider intoxication and 'overdoing it' as a test of their claim to being invincible. The more 'sloops' (marijuana cigarettes) smoked and the harder the drugs that can be tolerated by their system, the greater recognition they receive. These limits, however, are constantly pushed to the tragic extremes of overdosing, with consequential cardiac and respiratory illnesses.

Another expression of defying social norms takes place in a more silent and unassuming manner. Some youth choose to rather disengage themselves from family and school by quietly retreating into their own spaces, not speaking to their parents or teachers and also clearly defying their authority. A bright and intelligent youth would therefore go to school and deliberately ignore teachers by not even greeting them or addressing them in the conventional titles of Sir or Miss. They would skip classes and hide away in the school toilets or other deserted areas of the school grounds, seldom handing in homework and hardly participating in class yet managing to pass their exams. At home they would lock themselves in their rooms and never join their family for meals, not even emerging to greet a visiting relative. It is hard to break through to them and often these are the most baffling patterns of behavior since parents and teachers cannot find a way of knowing why they choose to engage in such veiled retreats. At the youth centre those who give themselves to such seasons of withdrawal would sometimes venture a small opening into their world with those whom they feel comfortable talking to. They would simply say that they are alright on their own, that they do not need to always smile just to make other people happy. They would rather be 'real' and honest, even if it makes other people angry: 'That's not my problem,' they quickly remark, 'I don't live my life for them.'

The behavior that brings our participants into conflict with their communities is the act of traversing their social boundaries through engaging in violence, alcohol and drug abuse as well as illicit sexual activity. They also defy social norms to the extent of presenting themselves in ways that come across as being disrespectful and rude. These are the characteristic patterns of behavior that set them apart. Knowing full well the expectations and limits that are imposed on them, they nevertheless display a desire to push these boundaries even in the face of negative sanctions.

### **On Being Smart**

Apart from the negatively sanctioned acts of deviance that our participants engage in, they are also capable of excelling beyond average performance levels in various fields. As previously mentioned, one of their defining features is a talent for the performing arts: singing, dancing and acting. They display a tendency to be naturally expressive and bold in their performances. When on stage or a rehearsal space, they take on different personalities as opposed to the reserved stance they would take up in a classroom, for instance. Here they are not afraid to take on challenging roles, to attempt songs with tricky melody lines and to essay complicated steps in a dance routine. Tutors who conduct *ad hoc* workshops with the group speak of their pleasure in working with youth who are able to take so easily to disciplines that usually trained artists spend many years acquiring. Here they speak of a natural giftedness that merely needs guidance and mentoring to bring it to full realization of its potential.

Wilderness camp instructors also express similar sentiments when they accompany the youth on various activities at the respective campsites. At these weeklong camps, instructors are firstly impressed by their resilience against the fear of abseiling, river rafting and other challenging ventures. They also speak of a level of maturity and intelligence among the participants which they find to be well beyond the standard that they are used to with other youth their age. They are able to engage our participants on controversial

discussion topics such as terrorism, war, racism and other subjects that youth groups generally shy away from. For instance, they would challenge views that dismiss criminals as the monsters of society, arguing that society is responsible for these members who share equal rights with others. So they would strongly disagree with mainstream views of punitive justice that deny citizens their rights and privileges. These are telling examples of the way in which they might see themselves through the experience of these offenders being punished by the system of punitive justice.

In these fields they demonstrate a deep sense of empathy, presenting cogent arguments that are far from the kind of textbook responses that are often called for in a classroom situation. Some of their teachers too are very observant of the fact that many of these youth are naturally gifted, excelling in subjects like math and life sciences without spending much time in front of their books. They are therefore quite capable of figuring out complex problems and puzzles. Combined with their tenacious and energetic characteristics, they therefore possess the hallmarks recognized in gifted children who have the potential to make significant and extraordinary contributions to the common good (Terry *et al* 2008:62).

Given the unique and exceptional inclinations of our participants, it becomes clear why deviance does not only need to be defined by what is negatively sanctioned but also by what merits praise, as in the examples of soldiers who go beyond the call of duty and scientists who break rules to develop new theories (Haralambos & Holborn 2004:330). It is therefore understandable why people who are capable of such behavior would also be considered outsiders or social deviants in the sense that they display a certain aptitude that 'varies too widely from the average' (Becker 1963:4).

This understanding of deviance is a pattern that is commonly picked up among gifted youth who, at the same time, engage in the other extreme end of the social average. In an arresting account of the illegal drug market in Baltimore, the fictitious character of DeAndre is described as one of the smart kids who are always at the centre of such criminal activity (Simon & Burns

2009:49). In the case of our participants too, some of the most talented and intellectually gifted youth are ringleaders among the drug syndicates in their communities. They sometimes speak about their involvement in these groups and the way in which they carry out their tasks with extreme precision and discipline: 'You got to be smart,' they wryly exclaim, 'it's all about being smart.'

### **On Being a 'Skank'**

Thus far we notice that our understanding of deviance has been confined merely to the notion of a social audience being the critical variable in judging whether an action is clearly within or outside society's boundary (Erikson 1968:275). However, deviance is also voluntarily and willingly engaged in as an act of defiance often aimed against basic institutions such as family and school. Goffman makes the observation that such activity is often characterized by collective behavior focused in sub-communities or sub-cultures who themselves take on the identity of deviants (1963:143). Those who monitor or control their behavior as socializing agencies do not only impose the identification but it is also an identity that the group would ascribe to themselves out of contention with the larger group from which they willingly disassociate.

In willingly traversing boundaries, they express pride in their deviant conduct that further strengthens their status and influence within the group that they socialize. Our youth in question speak of such behavior as 'skanking,' a colloquial word that has come to describe any action that is disapproved of by their larger communities. Any youth who participates in such behavior is likewise called a 'skank' and it therefore becomes a title of respect within their sub-culture. It is a much-celebrated term, one that affords recognition of courage and non-conformity to the extent that one has become set apart from a restraining and therefore oppressive association. Taking such a stance is understood to be one of courage and bravery since it also involves the acceptance of punishment that is meted out for such choices. To this extent, those who engage in deviant behavior emerge as heroes within their sub-culture. They are respected and held in high esteem but such praise only

exists within these marginal groups and it stands as a reason why they often retreat to such spaces. Still, this does not sufficiently account for why they would also long for the recognition of their larger community.

The disassociation that our participants experience, from their own communities, is largely attributed to their frustration and anger with members of their family and authority figures at their schools. It also stems from a dissatisfaction of having to constantly meet expectations that they don't fully understand and the refusal of parents and teachers to engage them in healthy debate leaves them feeling disconnected. The constant claim of being misunderstood and unfairly judged gives them a feeling of being unwanted. They therefore do not feel any obligation to abide by the norms and expectations of their family and school. Oftentimes it is fuelled by anger and they would deliberately disobey their parents and push the boundaries of school rules, in a sense desecrating what these social institutions hold as valuable. Some would stand outside the school gate, dressed in their school uniform, and pop open a bottle of beer while the school principal drives out on a Friday afternoon. Some girls especially would dress provocatively and defiantly go to a dance club despite the disapproval of their parents who might be well-respected in the community for maintaining good community standards. In full knowledge of the disappointment and anger that they can bring about, these youth will defiantly provoke anxiety: 'I'll show them,' they often threaten, 'I'll show them what I can do.'

Even though our participants express much anger and a great willingness to be separated from their community, it is the same people from whom they ultimately seek recognition. When they perform at community shows, for instance, their greatest happiness comes from knowing that their school principal, teachers and parents are seated in the audience. Upon knowing this, they would make every effort to put on their best performance for that particular audience. So the question that emerges in this regard pertains to the causes of their frustration and anger. What is it that makes them unhappy about social institutions, such as school and family, such that they make a

choice to deviate rather than to conform and find the recognition that they seek?

### **Macro Understandings of Social Deviance**

The plethora of literature that gives attention to deviance among youth has largely centered on a structural analysis of social stratification. As such, deviance or delinquency is often associated with middle to low income communities since 'the actual distribution of facilities and opportunities varies greatly among social positions' (Cohen 1966:76). A conflict of values therefore emerges between social classes and responsibility for the deviant act is lifted from the individual who performs the deed, locating the cause among macro issues that need to be addressed in order for social cohesion to be restored. Alleviating poverty, developing schools and other socializing agencies, as well as widening opportunities for employment become key strategies in curbing the problem of deviance and crime.

Social strain is a concept that has formed the basis of theories such as those posited by Robert Merton. He identifies that social goals like success in education and work are normative but 'access to the means of achieving them is not freely or equally available to all' (Aday 1990:63). This is where deviance can take the form of either acquiring these goals through illegitimate means or rejecting them altogether. Merton's theory speaks of deviance as 'modes of adaptation' in the sense of strategic adapting to make up for structural disadvantages (Lemert 1967:4). The participants of this study, however, do not express such a pragmatic conscious process. They are not quite clear themselves why they engage in behavior that they know to be wrong and with which they are therefore dissatisfied. This is where David Matza's theory of subterranean drift speaks to the apparent inconsistency of youth who drift away from a community in which they actually seek recognition. Accordingly, deviance is not a decisive form of behavior but rather a state of drifting between two worlds: 'a limbo between convention and crime' (Matza 1964:28). Their subterranean values or the values of their marginal sub-culture supply a need for breaking from the constraints of

convention but Matza argues that this does not adequately provide for the freedom they seek. Freedom, understood as self-control, is not achieved since these sub-cultures involve delinquent behavior which they are not happy to entirely commit themselves to (Matza 1964:29). It is for this reason that our youth in question would constantly seek readmission to schools from which they have been expelled, or reconciliation with families that they have offended. In subsequent chapters, I shall place such theories within the perspective of Edward Edinger's notion of inadequate social containers (1972:68), considering how youth channel primordial energy into secular sub-cultures that do not adequately respond to the meaning that such energy exudes.

Research in this field has largely tended to focus on social deficits from the external perspective of what must be remedied since deviant behavior makes real the threat that such patterns impose on the social well being of a community. Apart from protecting the safety and security of all society's members against the terrorizing effects of violence, such as territorial gang wars, an equally devastating influence on the macro economic enterprise is also at stake. With growing numbers of youth disengaging from active participation in mainstream society, a strong and competent workforce that nurtures a healthy economy cannot be guaranteed. Tienda and Wilson (2002:5) have observed that an increasing number of urban youth around the world engage in deviant behavior due to deficits such as poverty and inadequate education. The growing rate of urbanization in developing countries is viewed as one of the strains that create poverty pockets in large cities, leaving poor urban youth systematically more isolated from mainstream social institutions. It not only leads to cultural and social exclusion but also hampers their development or adaptation into society (:13).

The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention considers a South African context of violence among youth by making the observation: 'children who are exposed to more risk than protective factors are more likely to use violence, while children who are exposed to more protection than risk are more likely to develop pro-social behavioral repertoires' (Ward 2007:9). Among the

influences that expose youth to acquiring violent behavior, as part of their repertoires, are family and school: two socializing agencies that are meant to develop youth in pro-social behavior patterns. However a large number of South African youth are exposed to domestic violence in their homes and the trend of absent parent figures further denies children an adequate socializing environment. Schools are also chaotic and difficult environments in which teachers are limited in the time they are able to dedicate to learners, sometimes spending less than 46% of school time on teaching (:22). Coupled with such deficiencies of socializing agencies the study goes on to observe South Africa's constantly growing Gini Coefficient that marks an increasing gap between rich and poor, justifying violence on the part of street gangs. Youth membership in such gangs is seen as granting access to luxury goods such as brand name clothing, which they perceive as integral to their full participation in society.

The question of youth participation in the development of South African society has historically been regarded as a considerable challenge, from the pre-transformation era to beyond democratization. The culture of youth deviance, most especially through violence, can be traced from the social frustrations of forced dislocations and oppressive education policies that saw youth in violent confrontations with apartheid police. Children in detention and prison without trial, during these volatile years, prompted the strengthening of children's rights movements and social development institutions under a new government. These initiatives have sought to keep youth away from excessively punitive state interventions and contamination with adult custodial institutions, focusing on an effective reintegration into society. At the same time, such measures of juvenile justice are aimed at controlling the continuing rate of juvenile delinquency (Van Der Spuy *et al* 2004:174). However, South Africa's high levels of violent crime have persisted with 20.1% of the country's population, being youth aged 15-25, considered most at risk for committing violent crime (:163).

The persistence of youth deviance, despite the numerous efforts of policy makers to address such volatile issues, is a phenomenon that has now

become widely recognized especially through the media of film. A gritty depiction of urban life in the television drama *The Wire* drew much attention to the real life struggles against drug dealing and corruption on the streets of Baltimore, Maryland. The controversial series faced much criticism for failing to acknowledge the many hopeful initiatives that tackle socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment. However, a strong counter argument in defense of *The Wire* attests to the harsh reality that problems of social deviance and crime have always persisted despite the interventions of social development organizations. *The Wire* therefore directs our attention to a new appreciation of social isolation 'by making us aware of how scholars, policy makers and the general public form opinions about the problems of urban inequality without a full appreciation of their complexity' (Chaddha *et al* 2008). Following the thought patterns of such introspective endeavors, the aim of this present study is to offer a complementary understanding to the macro issues that constitute social deviance among youth. It delves into the depths of this complexity, where essential micro perspectives may hold meaning to the world constructed by social deviants.

The established theories of deviance, especially those that posit the influence of social structure and strain, are valuable to the extent that they open up understandings of deficits within socializing agencies. However, these understandings also need to be informed by the micro-theories that look into the realm of meaning. Such an enquiry asks what is the relationship or the interactive process between a research subject and their environment, probing the insider's perspective on their own world (Cohen and Short 1961:132). Unless the realm of meaning is addressed through enquiries such as these, individuals who make up social groups will be deprived of any agency towards their development. They will be further alienated and frustrated by expectations that are placed upon them, as pointed out by the participants of this study: 'There's a lot we wanna say but they won't listen... they always think they are right and that is not the case. We also wanna have our say.' In giving deviant youth an opportunity to have their say, this micro perspective probes the realm of meaning. It thereby initiates a conversation

with macro understandings in fostering a more comprehensive appreciation of this complex social phenomenon.

### **The Construction of Meaning through Symbols**

At this juncture it is important to clarify my use of the word 'meaning' since it is often used in the sense of referring to objective knowledge conveyed by a sign, such as a red traffic light which means stop. However a more subjective use of the word is applied in the context of this study, such as in the instance of someone describing a deeply moving experience as something meaningful. Such an experience conveys 'living meaning which, laden with affect, relates us organically to life as a whole' (Edinger 1972:108). In this way, we are able to understand the innate desires that motivate participants' actions. It is a perspective that allows us to see the world through their own eyes, thereby offering a complementary outlook to macro perspectives that would consider them from the outward glance of social deficits that influence them. Here we are interested in what desires drive them to behave in the way that they do, within their social context.

We consider the actions of our participants according to the Jungian understanding of processes that bear within them a hidden meaning. These actions are not merely symptoms. They do not arise from other stimuli such as poverty and inadequate education but rather seek to become indicative of deeper psychic realities (Jacobi 1959:93). That is why we cannot speak of their behavior as symptomatic. For example, drug abuse is not merely a symptom of delinquency. Drug abuse is a symbolic action that points to a hidden and unrequited desire. In understanding deviant behavior as symbolic, rather than symptomatic, I endeavor to probe the experience of these youth and explain their social action in terms of the meaning they give to it. We might therefore say that the symbol itself is neither good nor evil. It is beyond these deterministic classifications. It contains both meanings as potentialities and the turn it will take for the individual depends solely on their state of consciousness and on the way in which the symbol is assimilated in building a response to their exterior world (:99). My concern therefore delves

beneath the literal value ascribed to deviant behavior, tracing the energy that drives such conduct.

### **A Theory of Archetypes**

In probing the symbolic world of deviant youth, Jung would invite us to delve deep into the realm of our collective unconscious that helps us understand apparent conflicts between what we can see, namely the ego, and that which lies beneath this surface (Hopcke 1999:14). The human unconscious is not merely a collection of forgotten memories or unpleasant experiences but rather an enormous field of energy that influences our conscious behavior. Jung called our conscious self the 'I' or ego and referred to our unconscious as the Self since it is much larger than the conscious mind. The image often quoted is that of the ego, or conscious mind, as a cork floating in what is the vast ocean of the Self or unconscious. The ego has the tendency of considering the unconscious to be outside of the human personality, as evidenced in common expressions such as 'I just wasn't myself when I did that'. This is only because the total psyche, in the sense of our complete human personality, is much larger and also more complex than what our conscious minds can understand. Therefore those actions that we sometimes find difficulty in identifying with ourselves do not come from outside but rather from deep within us (Johnson 1986:9). This is what builds a sense of meaning that we identify with our social world.

The Self, or unconscious mind, exists beneath the personal experience of memory. It has a transpersonal dimension that is universal, in the sense of being a collective underpinning of all human behavior. It is for this reason that the unconscious is spoken of in terms of 'the axis of the universe, eternity as opposed to the temporal flux, protective structures capable of bringing order out of chaos' (Edinger 1972:4). To this extent the unconscious is understood to contain primordial images that are patterns or blueprints for the ordering of conscious life. These images are what Jung called the archetypes. They help us penetrate the first principles of human behavior and are therefore seen as the source of energy that connects every person to the world around them

(Jacobi 1959:32). It is for this reason that the connection between unconscious and conscious mind is considered vital for the socialization of an individual.

Jung observed that archetypes manifest themselves in symbolic form, often in dreams and also through imaginative experiences. This manifestation also extends itself to mythology, cultural patterns, religious symbols, literature and art largely because these are all products of human imagination. In looking at the symbols found in dreams and imagination, we find that they correspond to images that appear in ancient myths as well as in art or religion. Such images as the virtuous maiden, the wise old man or the courageous hero appear as idealized models of behavior patterns in the sense that they become a mould for the kind of characters that fit exactly in our dreams, our imagination or in literature. We could also say that every person has distinct personality traits that exist on the level of their unconscious and these inner personalities appear during unconscious activity such as dreams and imaginative experiences (Johnson 1986:29). The archetypes are the energy that may help us understand the root of conscious behavior since they show us which images or figures exert a strong influence on our conscious actions.

Central to our understanding of conscious behavior is the connection between ego and Self because it is when the unconscious enters into relation with the conscious mind that the archetype takes on a recognizable form, such as those already quoted as examples of hero and wisdom figures. The archetypal energy becomes recognizable and then takes on an image or a symbol. The symbol therefore becomes the manner of manifestation by which the archetype can be recognized. Although Jung describes the symbol as the image of archetypal energy, the archetype can never be encountered directly but only indirectly (Jacobi 1959:75). That is why we speak of the symbol as pointing us towards a deeper truth that cannot be directly inferred from conscious action. An example of such a symbol may be located in going back to the case of our participant who uses a knife to stab his classmate. We could say that the energy motivating this action is that of the hero archetype that drives one to engage in battle with those perceived as

enemies. This is still an incomplete analysis but for now it points to the level at which this enquiry will continue probing the symbol.

In trying to access this deeper truth of the archetypes, my research design will therefore have to create opportunities for these symbols to emerge from within the unconscious world of our participants. In examining these worlds, I shall undertake an analysis of symbols that they would associate with their everyday lives. These associations will help make the necessary connections that otherwise lead to misunderstanding.

### **Alienation and Conflict**

Considering that the unconscious contains archetypes that resonate with a universal energy, it is easy to see why it has deep implications for the human process of socialization. Edinger provides a theory of understanding this role when he speaks of individuals within a society sharing a common living myth or deity. The inner God-image, being the image of the Self or unconscious mind, is projected by the individual as the religion of the community and this collective religion contains the energy of the Self for all members of that community. Therefore an adequate container for this energy is maintained. Social cohesion is thereby maintained since the community of believers enjoy a shared projection of unconscious religious energy. However, if the religious container loses its capacity to carry this energy then the individual loses that inner connection with the Self. This results in the kind of emptiness and meaninglessness that is so commonly traced in modern society (Edinger 1972:65). We could also say that a sense of disconnectedness or alienation comes about from not being in touch with the energizing force of our conscious behavior.

The experience of alienation comes about because religious institutions lose the capacity to lead individuals into probing the depths of symbols. When such images are no longer a strong focus of religious worship and ceremony, then the opportunity for projection is frustrated. The experience is all the more disorientating since the real effects of the disconnection are experienced

on the level of our unconscious, which is not apparently clear to us. Edinger calls this the breakdown of religious projection and offers various possibilities for the way in which an individual deals with this alienation from self. The possibility that seems to converge most clearly with the observed behavior of our participants, is that of reprojection into secular or political ideologies. According to this understanding the unrequited religious energy has withdrawn from its religious container and reprojects itself into secular movements. It is a pattern that I have observed among our participants, that these secular movements such as gangs cannot adequately contain religious, unconscious energy. It is because they do not hold a universal and primordial influence among all the members of that society (Edinger 1972:68). The result is social conflict because there is no longer a shared or common projection of the Self.

For the purpose of this study, Edinger's theory on the breakdown of religious projection and subsequent social conflict will be extended to include other socializing agencies such as school and family. Just as the values of religion do not find an adequate container in the symbolic life of religious institutions, so do the values that our participants ascribe to. This could be the reason behind the apparent conflict of their gifted identity and their identity as social deviants. The clues that allude to this possibility are gathered from an observation of their behavior. As we have already pointed out they display traces of courage, responsibility, dedication and commitment: values which any society would consider admirable and to be encouraged in their members. However these youth do not consider themselves full members of their society but rather project these universally accepted or primordial values into the secular movement of street corner gangs and drug syndicates or even the private enclosures of their personal space. This enquiry therefore sets out to find the root of their disconnection. What is it that has alienated these youth from projecting their values into the more adequate containers of this energy, these being the socializing agencies of their community such as family and school?

It is important to clarify that the concern of this enquiry is not primarily with the deficiencies of these agencies. Focus is rather concentrated on the needs and values of these youth, thereby allowing them to point out how they respond to the deficits they perceive in their society. In paying attention to the multi-faceted dimension of their behavior, I am probing the depth of their unconscious identity and considering how they have configured their world. It is a search for their unconscious response to the world around them and what this response might reveal about the underlying reasons for their apparently deviant behavior.

### **A South African Context**

What we gather from Jung's theory of archetypes is that human behavior is naturally influenced by our unconscious archetypal images. These images, however, need adequate containers in order to project themselves in a way that maintains social cohesion. Harding points out that in the case of child and youth development, the transpersonal and timeless structure of the archetype must be released and activated by personal contact with adult members of a society (Harding 1965:145). The role of adult members in such institutions as school, family and even government is therefore crucial to the socialization of youth. In considering the South African context, the history of youth development has been documented through turbulent moments in which socializing agencies have fallen short of taking adequate responsibility for what we may consider the archetypal needs of youth (Pinnock 1984:2). By this I mean the subliminal energy that is frustrated and therefore reprojected through sub-cultures that condone acts of violence and crime.

### **The Ritual of Street Gangs**

Don Pinnock is widely recognized for documenting the social constitution of gang-related activity as an act of deviance. It is a perceptive study that takes us through the inner life of the Western Cape gangs over two decades between 1980 and 2000, observing their beliefs, customs and rituals. His initial study focused largely on the impact of social inequalities and oppression

as causative elements. The activity of gangs is seen to be a survival technique in the face of a socio-economic system that reproduces poverty. Therefore the efforts of control through policing become futile in putting a stop to what came to be known as 'the ghetto brotherhoods'. Another important causative factor is identified within the context of relocations in which poorer communities were removed from the inner city and wealthy suburbs, only to be sealed off in townships. Along with this disconnection from the centre of society, the labor and products of these communities were left wanting of a viable market. Those hit hardest by this dislocation are the youth since 'they are physically weaker, have less job experience and can gain easier access to support within a gang' (Pinnock 1984:100).

Pinnock's analysis of gang culture within a macro-social perspective was later developed by a further study of deeper issues at play within the internal process of adolescent development. Based on similar lines as Edinger's understanding of ego re-projection, he focused on the kind of questions that ventured behind the acts of violence, placing 'more value on the ritualistic performance than on the apparent goals of the action' (Pinnock 1997:4). It led to an appreciation of gangs as a fulfillment of the need for rites of passage in the development of young people. Pinnock observed that young men engaged in their own rituals of transformation within gangs that even echoed elements of ancient hunting rituals and Arthurian legends. In the absence of these expressions of archetypal psychic energy, the transformation into adulthood and desperate search for respect is therefore re-projected into an alternate, albeit inadequate, container. The result is social conflict through gang violence. What is acceptable behavior among the street gangs brings fear and anguish within the larger community.

The relevance of Pinnock's work is located in its incisive account of the needs that emerge when considering a symbolic understanding of behavior that is deviant. The presence of myth and the religious symbolism of initiation point to natural needs that come to be expressed through unnatural behavior when a society cannot provide for them. What emerges quite clearly from these findings is that young men are actually trying to desperately fulfill their natural

need to gain the autonomy and independence of adulthood but their means of achieving this is thwarted by the lack of wisdom figures characteristic of heroic journeys. This lack of guidance and mentoring leads them to overstep the limitations that their society holds as valuable. Even though the study is located in Cape Town and pertains to the activity of established street gangs, it still resonates with the participants of this research who mainly live in various middle to low income communities around Durban. They may also not be the kind of street gangs that wreak havoc in the way that the Cape flats has been terrorized by blazing guns and speeding cars but our youth certainly bear hallmarks of the ritual and street laws that are synonymous with gang-related activity. Their show of violence may not consist of gun wielding, drive-by shootings but their gruesome battles with knives and broken beer bottles speak of the same conflict that lets terror reign on their communities. It forces them into the margins where such activity is only condoned because it belongs to a sub-culture that has grown frustrated by controlling agencies that merely preserve the centre.

### **A Socio-Political History of Deviance**

The history of marginalized youth in South Africa can be traced to what has arguably been referred to as the 'lost generation.' This phenomenon was observed during the political upheavals of the mid 1980's and early 1990's. The term 'lost generation' referred to those youth who were considered to be beyond the control of the state since they were a development of the revolutionary movement of the 1976 uprisings that sought to overthrow the state-imposed system of oppressive 'bantu education'. As the political atmosphere began to change and eventually usher in a new democratic government, youth considered themselves forgotten in this negotiation and therefore took to the streets in violent protests. Fear and concern centered around the possible threat that such activity would present to the as yet fragile process of transformation. Convinced that these youth were not entirely 'lost', various research programs were commissioned by entities such as CASE: the Community Agency for Social Enquiry and JEP: the Joint Enrichment Program. A series of conferences on marginalized youth resulted from these

enquiries and found that these youth were far from being lost but merely held political and social views that disabled them from connecting with mainstream society. The results that they were looking for took on a sense of urgency to the extent that the social values of diplomacy and negotiation were being undermined. However, when youth development became a matter of priority and these youth were given a voice, they came to be socialized into the more acceptable means of social transformation. So what emerges from this endeavor is the kind of clarity and understanding that can be achieved when deviant youth are engaged rather than ignored. In this case, the conflict surrounding their identity as either heroes or villains came to be reconciled such that they were not merely observed as instigators of violent direct action rather than being committed to fundamental political change. After all, the zeal to stand up to an oppressive authority was the product of articulate young people who nurtured a highly politicized consciousness (Seekings 1993:96).

Almost a decade after the attempts to give marginalized youth a voice, it has been observed that youth development has slipped further away from the centre of social policy. The most common references to youth are that of crime, HIV prevalence, poor examination results and a growing disinterest in politics or economic development. Many of the youth development initiatives that were established to meet the needs of marginalized youth had collapsed and a growing sense of youth being the 'lost generation' started to re-emerge. Concern began to likewise surface over the failure to understand youth after the struggle for a democratic South Africa: 'where are they now, economically, educationally and socially?' (Everatt 2000:2).

It is within this framework that Everatt makes claim to the need for a more authentic understanding of youth in South Africa. Crime, unemployment and HIV/AIDS have been elusive issues due to ignorance on the part of policy makers who struggle with the deeper issues at play among youth. These issues have to do with the fact that youth have demonstrated a 'retreat into their own cultures whose codes are opaque' (Everatt 2000:25). The challenge is, therefore, to understand the needs of youth by entering into the world of social meaning that they have constructed for themselves.

What I hope to achieve, from the findings of this research, is to spin the debate on deviant behavior among youth by proposing an understanding that is founded on the micro level of internal processes within individuals that make up a social community. In attempting to portray an authentic appreciation of youth deviance, it is not my intention to make a judgment on their behavior from an external perspective but to build an account of what these youth have to say about the worlds they have constructed. This involves learning to speak the symbolic language that they use to communicate among themselves, which an outside observer may not adequately grasp. It means stepping into the darkness of their shadowed identities that often inflict fear upon their families, their teachers and elders of their community; fear which drives them further away into the margins. By making use of this introspective approach, I hope to offer an enlightened contribution to the existing body of literature that does not take sufficient account of the internal issues that provoke deviant behavior among youth. A mere consideration of the impact of deficits from socializing agencies is an incomplete social analysis without delving into the depths of complex, symbolic realities among deviant youth.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PLOTTING THE JOURNEY: RESEARCH DESIGN**

Working to find the symbolic significance of deviant behavior would involve a creative research design that respects the discipline of understanding symbols. It is one that straddles various domains and patterns of associations that give a voice to unconscious energy directing conscious behavior. Before setting out to describe the fieldwork design, as a means of eliciting data from the depths, I shall firstly consider the motivation behind the constitution of our sample group and the dynamics that make for a concentrated study. This chapter then proceeds to map out the modus operandi for engaging these participants, paying attention to the efficacy of a four-fold process of gathering data: active imagination, role-play, focus group discussion and clay molding. The choice of fieldwork location, being a wilderness camp, is also an important consideration within this discussion since it speaks of the value of exploring complex symbols in an unconfined space. I shall then explore the use of matter, in the form of clay, for the symbolic integration of such a process.

#### **The Research Group**

Among the youth who regularly participate in the program of stage productions, workshops and camps it must be pointed out that not all of them could be easily described as deviant. Some of these youth do not present any problems of conflict within their social worlds in the sense that they perform well at school, they display healthy relationships with their parents and also participate in mainstream community activity. To this extent their construction of meaning would take place along a different trajectory from those who are more disengaged from such associations and who display the kind of behavior that has been reprimanded by authoritarian figures at school and at home. Such youth make up the vast majority of those who sign up for auditions at the start of each season. The task of selecting a sample group of participants for this study would therefore need to take into consideration

observed behavior patterns, along the lines of which of these youth have been presenting problems that have warranted concern.

From a database of youth who first visited the centre between 2004 and 2009, I made a list of potential participants whom I spoke to individually about being part of a research project. At this stage they were merely informed that a study would be conducted regarding the tendency of some youth to disengage from mainstream society and engage in deviant behavior. Most simply laughed that they were being chosen because of their bad reputation: 'so you mean you are going to take my skanking seriously,' commented one of them, making use of the colloquial term for behaving badly in their community. I considered this kind of humor as an indication of their willingness to participate since they are often witty about opportunities that interest them. It also speaks of a willingness on their part to be engaged on an issue that has caused much controversy and despair and they have therefore remained largely quiet about it. In this sense they would not be afraid to engage in such discussion and most probably be forthcoming in sharing an experience that they do not get an opportunity to discuss from their point of view. Very often they are only engaged by parents and school principals on the level of answering to the expectation of school and family convention.

My initial list of 35 candidates was compiled according to those whom I have known to be engaging in drug and alcohol abuse, brutal altercations and brawls, illicit sexual behavior and also those who have been withdrawn and defiant of their parents. I was careful not to include those who do engage in such behavior but of whom it is not publicly known since they might have revealed this to me confidentially. Another important motivation for my choice of candidates is that I have had a considerable amount of contact with their parents or other members of their family, thereby allowing some material for a contextual analysis of my data. Out of the 35 youth whom I approached individually, 31 enthusiastically accepted the invitation with only 4 declining due to reasons of not being available during the projected timeframe for the fieldwork.

Among the ethical considerations of this study is that of the participation of minors. Some of the participants are younger than 18 and the general informed consent procedure therefore involves their parents and legal guardians. In this regard I am also aware of the need to inform participants of the nature of this study, in a language that they can easily understand. These considerations may be gauged from the accompanying notes documented as Appendix 1 entitled Briefing Session Notes. Also documented is the indemnity and consent form, Appendix 2, which includes parental or other adult permission for those who are still minors.

The team of leaders, who accompany each group on the camps, are familiar with the participants and there is a comfortable acceptance of their presence as assisting with the practical and logistical concerns. However, they do not join the group for sessions of role-play and focus group discussion. This is to ensure that anonymity is respected, in the sense that only those who directly participate in the study are aware of what is disclosed by whom. This is also a reason behind using pseudonyms in drawing up the case studies.

Considering the element of confidentiality, although a great level of trust already exists between the youth and myself through the lengthy period that I have been working with them, I am careful not to abuse this privilege. To this extent, my findings and analysis do not refer to confidential material that any of them have previously disclosed. Given the ongoing nature of my work with these youth, apart from the actual research, much of what they reveal through informal interaction does influence this project in terms of participant observation. Aware of my responsibility to disclose these remarks and be open to their possible difference of opinion about my analysis, the participants have been exposed to the findings of this work. In this regard they have not expressed any disapproval of the account that has been written up about their lifestyle, their needs and values. I am also aware that their knowledge of my participant observer status on the camp does not influence their behavior since they do not conduct themselves any differently from what I have thus far experienced in working with them.

At a briefing session held two weeks before the start of the camps, participants had an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the nature of the project while at the same time maintaining some uncertainty about what exactly would be asked of them. This was to ensure that their responses would be spontaneous and natural, not rehearsed, since that is the value of working with unconscious data. At this initial stage of the project, the participants were expectedly most excited about the prospect of going on camp and therefore began by asking questions about regular camp activities. However they were also intrigued at the opportunity they were being given to express and to talk about how they make sense of their world. One of the girls commented rather eagerly: 'your ears are gonna be ringing after listening to our stories.'

It was important at this stage to point out to them that the project is not about finding answers or solutions but rather to pose the right questions that can point us towards a better understanding of issues that don't seem to make sense. Participants were informed of the use of recording equipment for each session, at which they expressed no reservations. These and other matters relevant to the conditions of scientific research were discussed with the group, as documented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

To facilitate a concentrated study, the large group is divided into three smaller units of approximately ten youth, with each of these units going on camp during one of three weekends. The large group was divided up at the briefing session and this was done according to their own preference. One of the key reasons for this arrangement is that participants need to feel most at ease with the people whom they are to engage in discussion. It would be futile to have created random groups or imposed an arrangement on them in which they would not feel comfortable talking about personal issues. Participants therefore grouped themselves into three groups and were given some time to acquaint themselves with those whom they might not have had the chance to meet previously. During this time, an exuberant atmosphere prevailed in the room signaling that there was a general satisfaction with the constitution of each group. As such three groups consisted of nine, ten and twelve youth

with a fairly equal distribution between male and female. However, because younger youth felt more comfortable among themselves, the age distribution among the groups varied. The group of twelve was an older group between 18-22 while the two groups of nine and ten each consisted of some older youth but largely a younger representation of 14-17. The demographic for each group was such that there included a majority of Colored and Black youth, with a few Indian youth especially between the two younger groups. The distribution according to residential context was also fairly balanced so the associations discussed in focus groups would be richly representative of various urban communities along the periphery of Durban's CBD.

### **Going On Camp**

It doesn't take much to get youth out of their familiar surroundings, especially if the offer is to a place of boundless discovery and freedom as in the instance of Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands. Luscious grasslands, cascading waterfalls and majestic mountains seem like a fantasy world come true for any teenager who feels hedged in by the mayhem of traffic and conglomerate structures that define an urban landscape. Hours before the scheduled time of departure, sleeping bags and backpacks are strewn across the entrance hall of the church where youth have already gathered in eager anticipation of the departure to Umgeni Valley. One of the bags sport a large red logo 'Bad Girl,' a telling sign of the label that many of these youth wear in defiance of what they feel is expected of them. However it speaks well of the kind of energy that is about to be tapped on this much anticipated adventure.

Wilderness camps and other such outdoor experiences have long been recognized as effective methodologies for youth development and therapy especially in the case of troubled youth. The camp experience of community living, being away from home and within an outdoor, recreational setting is considered an opportune atmosphere for young people to feel most at ease with themselves (Thurber *et al* 2007:242). However for the purpose of this study, the prime objective is not to provide a therapeutic experience in terms

of youth revisiting hurtful memories to bring closure. Although they may make reference to such experiences in their role-play and discussion, the aim is to draw on these associations for the purpose of creating a more cohesive understanding of their problems. This understanding may go on to enlighten further endeavors to seek reconciliation and reintegration with family and community but that would be beyond the scope of this study. Be that as it may, a wilderness camp holds the advantage of being a liberating environment for youth to speak freely and honestly about their lives, uninhibited by the influences of family, school and community that they feel confined in. To that extent, the quality of data produced is most beneficial in understanding their innate needs and values.

The value of wilderness camps is noted as an opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of youth since it improves their self-esteem and confidence. Through performing basic but essential tasks such as carrying firewood for the campfire or preparing a donkey boiler for hot water, they become assured of their potential and therefore more expressive of issues that they do not often feel confident to talk about. The wilderness therefore becomes a propitious space to explore human personality and behavior (Mishna *et al* 2001:155). This kind of propensity to exude greater confidence in the context of a camp has already been demonstrated by the youth of this study, through previous experiences of being away. They take easily to the demanding challenges of a campsite and often speak more freely about themselves as compared with the experience of working with them in their more familiar settings. The physical distance and separation gives them a sense of feeling safe to speak openly, as they would sometimes comment: 'better to tell these stories here and leave them here, far away from home.' For these reasons, the choice of Umgeni Valley as a fieldwork location emerges as most fitting for delving into the depths of meaning that lie beneath the complex nature of these youth.

As we arrive, the afternoon sun glistens on the lush mountaintops and crisp edges of the steep incline overlooking the valley of Shelter Falls: our designated campsite. The youth are quite accustomed to the drill: bags

remain at the top while food, utensils and firewood are first carried down the steep incline to the bungalows nestled in a narrow valley with a briskly flowing stream. As the arduous task of carrying baggage finally reaches its end we acknowledge the great depths that we have descended into and prepare to unpack the material for our symbolic journey of discovery.

### **Engaging Alienated Youth**

In portraying the social landscape of these youth, through their eyes and with their voice, it is important to engage them through the language that they construct. It is largely metaphoric and cannot be fully appreciated on a literal plane. The technique adapted for this study, elicits these symbols through the exercise of active imagination, followed by the acting out of this fantasy through role-play. It then acquires greater lucidity through the focus group discussion on associations with their everyday life, and then concludes with the expression of this energy through clay molding. In this way the material that feeds our construction of meaning is gathered from the kind of activity that youth do best: play.

#### **Active Imagination**

Working with unconscious material has often been associated with dream analysis but Jung also reminds us that the unconscious generates fantasies that are full of vivid symbolic images, through our imagination. Active imagination therefore allows one to enter a state of imagination, instead of a dream, while one is fully awake and conscious during the experience. In this imagination, the images that appear 'are in fact symbols representing deep interior parts of ourselves' (Johnson 1986:139). The process of active imagination is a more accessible and reliable method of working with youth for the purpose of this study since they would not be easily inclined to recording their dreams such that they would remember the important details for analysis. Moreover, active imagination allows for a greater sense of focus over the kind of material that is elicited from the unconscious since it involves

a stimulus to initiate the process. This stimulus is given in the form of a story that participants must complete through the use of their fantasy.

At the start of an active imagination experience, Jung would emphasize the importance of clearing the mind in order that images appear spontaneously (Casey 2001:9). This takes the form of a guided meditation, which the participants are already quite accustomed to during their personal growth workshops. It involves creating an awareness of breathing and acknowledging the work of the senses as participants feel at ease within their personal space. The invigorating ambiance of the valley is most effective in this regard as a stilled silence descends on the group, taking in the animated sights and sounds of a green textured landscape with flowing water, the feel and smell of a fresh breeze. The meditation runs for 20 minutes, during which time there are visible signs of being composed: gentle breathing and relaxed postures. While still occupying these positions, a stimulus for the role-play and subsequent discussions is presented. Participants are asked to close their eyes and call to mind the following imaginary scenario:

As you wander across the sports field, you stumble across a medallion.  
You pick it up and dust it off, uncovering an enchanting message:

Across the field from where you stand  
Lies a secret tunnel tightly canned  
Beneath the weight of a boulder  
Oh, what strength upon your shoulder  
To roll it away and without any delay  
Quickly down the tunnel travel  
To a whole new world about to unravel  
Of strange places and stranger faces  
Along a path that traces  
A find of great pleasure  
What could it be, what could it be... a hidden treasure!

The group is given a silent time of 20 minutes to play out this fantasy in their minds, paying attention to what happens on this imaginary journey: What are the places they find themselves in? Who are the strange faces they meet and are all these faces to be trusted? What is the hidden treasure that they find? The value of posing these questions is that it guides the fantasy in such a way that all participants will be able to reflect on the same content along the process. The more detailed nuances that each participant gives to their story

will pick up their personal life history or narrative. This will hopefully make for a rich diversity of responses to the focused questions that will be presented to them for discussion.

In self-critiquing my approach with the first group, I found that I was anxious about getting started to the extent that I overlooked the need for participants to settle themselves down especially after the task of setting up camp. My impression was that many of them had difficulty entering into their fantasy world since they were not accustomed to their surroundings and needed some time to freshen up before we get started. On the following two camps, I made arrangements for us to leave much earlier than initially planned such that participants had ample time to settle in and take a refreshing swim in the river before engaging with the active imagination exercise.

### **Role-Play**

Following the imagination experience, the second step involves an enactment that requires each participant to express their fantasy through a drama that they act out. They are to make an improvised use of props and characters that they select from the rest of the group. No other materials are allowed to be used. For instance if there is a need for a chair or a tree, these would have to be personified through one of the cast. A time frame of five minutes is allocated to each participant to voluntarily come forward, select a cast from the rest of the group and brief them on the basic storyline. They are reminded that it is important not to 'dress-up' the role-play but allow it to be spontaneous, even if it seems incoherent and embarrassing. The action is captured on an immobile video camera that does not impede the spontaneity of the role-play since it occupies a discreet position. The use of a video camera is most useful in capturing the unconscious actions and gestures that are likely to emerge from the drama.

The symbolic elements of each role-play are held together and given clarity through the characteristic dynamics of active imagination and psychodrama. The relevance of these methodologies for our enquiry is that they place

emphasis on viewing the world from the protagonist's subject frame of reference, addressing the individual way in which they perceive the world. Through the gentle direction offered by these methodologies of revelation the various symbols gain cohesiveness, as opposed to their fragmented appearance in everyday life. They also give the platform for a concentrated and transparent expression of these otherwise opaque representations of the inner world (Casey 2001:2).

As the participants get into character, all inhibitions seem to evaporate and allow for a free expression of their story: 'Yey, yesterday the role just took over me. Yo!' In this sense they allow themselves to be carried away into the fantasy worlds they create so a lot of the action is boldly exaggerated. One of the loudest examples is that of an encounter with celebrities, driving the protagonist into seemingly violent screaming episodes of uncontrollable excitement. In a similar outpouring of energy the death defying encounters with fire-spitting dragons and evil witches are dramatized with boisterous mimed action of fierce battle, accompanied by animated vocal sound effects. Another creative use of sound effects is in the practice of beat-boxing, usually used to set the rhythm of rap music. In some scenarios it serves to accompany singers and dancers at auditions. In other stories it creates ambiance at scenes depicting gangsters on the street.

Active imagination, being an expression of the unconscious, is often distanced from the ego or self-conscious parts of ourselves. One of the feared tendencies is for this self-consciousness to suppress unconscious and valuable expressions of the Self especially in the presence of other people (Johnson 1986:9). However this does not happen among participants largely because everyone is expected to let go of inhibitions even to the extent of looking silly in public. No one is singled out or laughed at; rather a safe space has been created for young people to be at play with each other. In fact my observation is that some characters become so completely consumed in their supporting roles that their exaggeration tends to overshadow the central action. In these cases I intervene in my capacity as director to re-direct the focus of attention. However the nature of some role-plays is such that chaos

needs to be accepted as necessary, especially in scenes of gang fights and a bank robbery. This kind of freedom is what allows for exploration and the revelation of previously suppressed aspects of self (Casey 2001:4). It is encouraging to observe the participants taking so easily to this opportunity to emerge transparently through stories that they are often not so free to express.

For the most part, the action is unplanned. In the briefing session prior to each role-play I pick up the tendency of some participants to prolong the preparation and focus on details. It is my task to make sure that the allotted preparation time is not exceeded and many find themselves on stage with nervous expressions of 'I don't know what to do.' I then offer an assuring comment: 'You will be fine. It's YOUR story.' Once the action gets going the nervousness dissipates, body postures straighten up, voices become louder and the action settles into a brisk pace. The suspense is therefore heightened all the more so because no one, including the protagonist, can be certain about how exactly the story will reach its end.

A key feature of the psychodramatic technique is the opportunity for group members to step in and out of each other's worlds, affording different perspectives of the same story. Thompson comments that this is another means of quietening the ego to allow unconscious alter egos to emerge (1999:27). As a participant observer in the action, I intervene at various key moments in the role-plays by asking protagonists to swap roles not only with characters but also with props such as a rock, the kitchen cupboard, or even become the embodiment of an entire room. The role reversals elicit much humor and participants are both shocked and amused to step back from the central action, watching themselves being impersonated. At times this retreat of the original protagonist allows the story to deviate from the plot that is intended. Although it is corrected in the reversal back into original roles these diversions are still helpful perspectives of the group's assimilation, as will be pointed out in the next chapter.

A striking observation is the firm conviction with which most participants step into the role of the protagonist, from being an auxiliary support character or a prop. It is with a clear sense of ease that they are able to identify with the experiences of another person's life story: a school fence becomes a gun-wielding teenage offender, a doorway becomes a shrieking fan in the presence of her much admired celebrity, a scar-faced victim becomes a fire-spitting dragon. Role reversals such as these give depth to the symbols that by nature are layered with meaning (Edinger 1972:108).

A sense of urgency becomes an important dimension especially in those role-plays that take on the characteristic of an enchanting nature. The defeat of the dragon, for instance, is a task governed by a time frame: 'It is prophesied that you are the only one who can defeat the dragon and we are running out of time. Quickly, we need to get a move on.' Similarly the 70-year-old virgin who revisits unforgiven memories is also restricted in the time he has to do so: 'I wish I could do it now because I feel the end is now.' In other instances events and experiences that take months or even years to accomplish are made possible in a minute, such as being awarded a recording contract. Conversely the usual swift action of making a surgical incision on an animal is drawn out over a much longer time frame as in the story of a pet dog and cat that are afforded the opportunity to speak and save themselves from being cut open. A common feature of active imagination is the manipulation of time as it removes chronological complexities so that 'the protagonist's perceptions become uncluttered and lucid' (Williams 1989:120).

The element of space also becomes a subject of manipulation as human characters enter the minutely dimensioned world of smurfs, while a vast kingdom is explored in only a few steps. Stark differences of dimension also emerge in examples such as a story that takes place in the openness of a playing field, preceding the meager confines of a prison cell. Furthermore a portrayal of places that are hard to find or embodying a sense of physical depth feature in most role-plays performed by the participants. From diamond wells to gold mines, forbidden kingdoms and mountaintops, these spaces

become expressions of the rich and as yet untapped territory that constitutes their unconscious worlds.

### **Focus Group Discussion**

The key advantage of using focus group interviews is that participants gain the opportunity to interact with each other in expressing their sense of meaning around a focused topic: 'It involves group discussion in which participants focus collectively on a topic selected by the researcher' (Wilkinson 1998:112). To this extent, the researcher takes on the role of a moderator who animates and guides the discussion but ultimately creates a space for the participants to interact with each other in constructing their own response. It therefore gives insight into participants' unconscious motivations, making for an authentic perception of their worldview (Morgan & Spanish 1984:255).

I chose to conduct the focus group discussions on the day after the active imagination and role-play experience since this allows sufficient time for the various symbols that emerged to begin finding their associations. For instance, the images of witches, celebrities, gangsters or smurfs would have had time to emerge into a more conscious awareness in terms of what they remind the participants of in real life. This is the kind of material that they bring to the discussion, creating a dialogue between unconscious symbols and conscious thought. A series of three focus group discussions begin on the morning of the second day, continuing in the late afternoon and then concluding on the morning of the final day. The first discussion probes the constitution of the fantasy world created in the mind of the participant. The second discussion concerns the various characters that entered in and out of the story, beginning with the lead characters and then moving on to the supporting players in the story. The third and final discussion centers around the treasure itself and the meaning that can be gathered from this discovery.

The motivation for using focus group interviews as a method of gathering data is that it engages a collective construction of meaning around a specific topic.

Seeing that our purpose is to probe subjective data such as experiences and perceptions, a focus group is helpful in creating a space where participants are able to both give their own opinions and also receive the opinions of other participants, which may compare in varying degrees with their own. To this extent, it allows for a dynamic fusion of ideas that make for a rather eclectic ensemble of participants' points of view. It is an authentic account of our data that allows a shaping and reshaping of itself, as we follow the 'logic in practice' (Neuman 1997:330) that is synonymous with qualitative research. Examples of this shaping and reshaping of meaning is clear in all the discussions since participants are free to challenge each other's viewpoints and thereby clarify what they mean on complex issues such as self-perceptions. This kind of dynamism and richly textured meaning might have been lost in the context of individual interviews with the participants.

The discussions in all of the groups take on an ebullient nature and participants are generally forthcoming with their reflections. Among the challenges I experience is a certain 'playfulness' among some of the younger participants of the group during the discussions. In these instances I find myself walking a fine line of allowing spontaneity and lateral responses to the questions but at the same time making sure that the jokes are not distracting. It seems to be a kind of defense mechanism by some who find it difficult to speak as freely as others do. I take the opportunity to probe some responses, especially when opaque statements are made, so it helps draw the attention of the group in the sense that they feel they are being listened to. The strategy of giving each focus group a specific theme proves to be extremely helpful because as we begin they are eager to dart and dive in all directions, bubbling over with comments to make about various experiences. Here I manage to straddle this energy by focusing them on one theme at a time. I find that it gives more much more depth to the discussion.

As a self-critique of my arrangement of groups and the subsequent dynamics, I found that the familiarity shared among the participants of the younger groups began to pose problems. In our first discussion, some participants remained quiet or simply made comments in agreement with other more vocal

youth in the group. They also developed a tendency to talk directly to me, rather than to one another, compromising the interactive nature of focus groups (Barbour & Kitzinger 1999:4). I therefore felt inclined to interject more often than I planned to, encouraging certain participants to express views in their own words. I also prodded in the initial stages of these discussions, asking if they agreed with what was being said and I encouraged them to ask questions to each other about issues that I found them simply nodding their heads about. The approach seemed to work since by the second and third discussions, they talked freely to each other almost as though I was not present. In this case, I had to gently intervene when I found the discussion swaying too far from the focus.

The outline for each focus group discussion, documented as Appendix 3, follows the questioning route technique as opposed to the topic guide. It uses the sequence of questions to help maintain a sharper focus within such a heterogeneously constructed group as in the case of our participants. Whereas such questions are ordinarily determined by a set of theory questions, in turn produced from the central research question, the technique employed in this study is appropriated to the use of a stimulus, in the form of a fantasy, to generate the questions. However it still allows for an inductive process where the emerging data informs and gives meaning to the initial purpose of inquiry (Morgan & Krueger 1998:10). In this case the discussion questions are therefore teased out from the three major aspects of the fantasy imagination: scenario, characters and treasure. These themes are in turn drawn from the central research question that looks for the social construction of meaning, determining how participants build an understanding of what is most valuable to them. As a moderator, my intention was to use these questions to merely spark an uninhibited discussion among the youth. I therefore tried to create a safe space for them to feely express themselves. This was achieved through the lively debates, questions and witty humor shared within each group.

As night falls on the last evening of the camp, participants go about gathering firewood for the traditional campfire. There is a certain lightness of character

among all the groups during this stage of the experience, having already had ample opportunity to delve into their inner world and give voice to these hidden realities. A sense of relief and ease is often a telling sign that reliable material has been gauged from the unconscious (Johnson 1986:26). The mood augurs well for the final discussion that is set aside for the last day, in which the treasures are finally revealed, as discussed in the following chapters. In the mean time there is reason enough to celebrate the journey thus far. Around the warmth of a campfire animated stories recall the adventurous episodes of the afternoon hike and foo-foo slide as we enjoy deliciously roasted, often burnt, marshmallows.

### **Containing the Symbols**

A sacred silence descends on the valley once again as we begin the ritual of incarnating symbolic treasures. Participants are invited to each take a block of clay prepared for this session and then go off to a space on their own where they will mould the formless block into an expression of what their fantasy treasures mean to them. The work of creating physical incarnations of the fantasy or abstract treasures is considered a necessary ritual involved in the work of active imagination. Such an incarnation serves to prevent the fantasy from being translated into a literal acting out of it in everyday life, thus creating conflict since this is symbolic material. The idea is that the essence of one's imagination is incarnated through a physical ritual that contains this symbolic energy (Johnson 1986:197). This is in keeping with one of the central tenets of my theoretical framework that observes the lack of adequate containers for unconscious archetypes (Edinger 1972:65). In an ordinary psychoanalytical session between therapist and patient, such an exercise would be used to bring closure to an emerging issue of concern. Seeing that this study is confined to purely research purposes, we are unable to draw any conclusions regarding the extent to which any of the participants have experienced a sense of healing. However having used the theory of dialoguing with the unconscious, we hold the responsibility of dealing respectfully with unconscious material. These are indeed treasures that cannot be simply abandoned once they have revealed their worth.

The experience of working with clay is similar to the more popular Jungian technique of sandplay since it offers a further opportunity, in addition to the role-play, for participants to physically represent their own inner space: 'We can imagine it as a sort of container holding the innermost meaning and making sense of it' (Castellana & Donfrancesco 2005:375). Along with these clay incarnations, participants also write a short description of what they have expressed. This material is used to complement the role-play and discussion data in building firmly substantive descriptions of their symbolic world.

Playfulness becomes an immediate and natural response to the clay, given its supple nature. Many participants begin by kneading, rolling or throwing it against hard surfaces to get a feel of the kind of possibilities they could enjoy from what they intend to do with the as yet formless mass of earth. Some experiment by adding water to make it more pliable, others by using makeshift utensils like sticks and stones to cut up the clay and then roll it back together again. It is clearly a child-like experience that ignores the adult concerns of soiled clothing, gritty fingernails, smeared hair and faces. After all, these would become sufficient excuses for another swim in the river.

Gradually the lumps of clay begin to take shape and form expressions of what is most valuable in each experience. As gathered from the photographic presentation in Appendix 4, some forms can be more easily associated with the role-plays. These include examples such as the CD and microphone that contain the symbols of performing arts aspirations. Others such as birds, pots, flowers are not as explicit but rather suggestive of associations that might be drawn from them. Religious and other spiritual symbols such as a cross and the sun are also formed as expressions of the transcendental nature of the treasures that have been unearthed.

There is much excitement and enthusiasm, as well as some playful teasing about the works of art that each participant puts out on display. Many are curious to know what each other's sculptures represent and there is a sense of pride and value that emerges from the interest stimulated about what each

participant has created. There is no particular instruction given about what they should do with their symbols but it becomes apparent that they need to be left behind. These are merely expressions of a deeper understanding of self that they may have discovered, an understanding that will build the capacity of this research to construct a more authentic appreciation of their potential. As the participants pack their bags and start their ascension out of the valley, it is with a sense of accomplishment that they look back on their work of journeying into the depths.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **UNEARTHING THE SYMBOLS: A SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS OF THREE PIVOTAL CASES**

Looking for treasure is an experience characterized by suspense and anxiety, largely because one is never certain of what constitutes the treasure or the path to be followed in finding it. It is with this sense of anticipation that the role-plays unfolded, creating an eagerness to know what participants came to discover. This chapter studies the symbols that surfaced in three role-plays, one from each group of participants, with the intention of creating a concentrate that draws together the abundance of symbols. The criteria for selection hinges firstly on the depth of associations made at focus group discussions. Those participants who made the most lucid associations with their symbols afford the opportunity for a reliable and taut analysis. Secondly, the selection is governed by the generic nature of the following symbols, inasmuch as they encapsulate the key ideas and patterns of each group.

Each case is analyzed according to Jungian principals of working with the unconscious material of active imagination. This includes background narratives of family life, living environment and behavior patterns that I have observed from my ongoing affiliation with these youth. The clay symbols and accompanying write-ups for each participant are also used as a reference, as pictured at the end of each case study. I shall begin by exploring the fantasy world of each role-play, followed by a meeting of the characters that tell the story and finally an exposition of the treasure.

## Case Study 1: Alice in the Castle of a Wicked Queen

Tumbling down a hole in search of her treasure, the protagonist of this story finds herself bewildered and disorientated when she realizes that she has fallen into a strange land. She meets a good angel and a bad angel who both compete for her attention. The good angel stands on her right, pleading with her to listen to him so that she could go to heaven. However, the girl states emphatically that she's looking for a treasure, not heaven. The bad angel, standing on her left, sees this as his opportunity to step in and convinces the girl to follow him as they start to explore the strange land that she has entered. All three of them wander around what is actually a huge castle belonging to a wicked queen. The girl anxiously tiptoes around the castle, looking around in amazement at the vastness of the space. She suddenly stops dead in her tracks as she realizes that she has stepped into the presence of a commanding figure.

The wicked queen sits on her throne, with attendants on either side of her. She lunges forward on seeing the girl and scowls at her. She is scolded for being on the queen's property with no permission and is asked to immediately declare her intentions for being there. The bad angel considers this an insult to the girl and encourages her to go up and slap the queen, while the good angel reminds her that this is not what God would want her to do. The girl steadies herself and simply declares that she is looking for her treasure. The queen laughs mockingly at her and calls her to first bow down to kiss her feet in order that the girl may gain access to the treasure. The good angel persuades her not to give in to the queen and to rather follow her own instincts, so she turns away from the queen to go off looking for the treasure herself.

The girl wanders around the castle once again and comes across two strange looking items of interest. Taking a closer look, she identifies them as a book and a mask. Believing these to be her treasure, she excitedly holds them up and tries to figure out how she is supposed to use them. The queen, who has been holding a steady gaze on the girl's movements, simply laughs in a

dismissing attitude towards her find. She calls for the girl's attention and tries to convince her that what she has found is meaningless. Holding up a golden ring, she entices the girl to accept it as the treasure that she is really looking for. In this way she dissuades her from taking the book and mask. The good angel encourages the girl not to give in to the queen while the bad angel tries to convince her otherwise. Giving in to the promptings of the bad angel this time, the girl kisses the feet of the queen and accepts the ring. Suddenly she finds herself turning into an evil monster, realizing that the ring is not what she is looking for since her real treasure is supposed to improve her life. She then follows her good angel once again and takes up the mask which has the power to make her disappear, releasing her from all her troubles. She is unable to open the book but takes it, along with the mask, back into her world of origin.

Given the usual quirky nature of this participant, her active imagination is reminiscent of the popular television series *Alice in Wonderland* (IMDb 1991), based on the novel by Lewis Carroll. In this series Alice is a rather eccentric character who constantly escapes the real world and loses herself in fantasy, much to the consternation of her mother who often has to wake Alice back into reality. Likewise this participant has a dramatic personality, often dressed in brightly colored knee-high socks, shirts fastened with oversized pins and her hair tied up in a collection of animated butterfly shaped grips. She arrives late at rehearsals simply because she gets sidetracked talking to a stray dog on the road and helping the dog find its home. She misses her cues on stage as well, admitting to losing track of time backstage while daydreaming. So as she pushes the stone aside and tumbles down into the castle of a wicked queen, she becomes the epitome of the much-loved television character who herself disappears down a hole into her wonderland. For the purpose of this analysis I shall therefore refer to the participant as Alice.

## **The Castle**

As we begin talking about the fantasy worlds that each participant brought to life through their active imagination, the castle is associated with ideas of

escaping. Alice chooses to describe her world as 'hiding away,' admitting that it was far-fetched and 'not reality.' Commenting on what it felt like to step into this world, she describes her sense of attachment and satisfaction: 'I wanted to stay there.' These ideas of escape and comfort are reminiscent of Alice's real life tendency to find refuge in her private room at home. She is known to spend countless hours a day locked away in her room and not even emerging to join her family for any meals. In this time, she listens to music or sings to herself in the company of her three pet dogs. She asks for no one to interrupt her and refuses to answer anyone who might come knocking on the door. This is where Alice admits to feeling secure and protected. These needs point to deficiencies and areas of darkness within her psyche, which call for an attentive consideration.

The protection that Alice seeks seems to play out against the rough neighborhood that she lives in her real life. It is most common for violent brawls to take place on the streets or in the sports ground where teenagers gather to recreate. Many youth live under the conviction that arguments or misunderstandings can only be settled through a fight, often drawing blood and sometimes leading to fatal consequences. Alice herself has been in many such fights with other girls and at times even with men much senior to her, some of whom have been her friends. The cause of these fights range from seemingly trivial disagreements and jealousies to more grave instances related to drug dealing. Alice is known to be associated with a notorious syndicate that operates in her neighborhood, managing the sale of illegal drugs in schools. The relationship she shares with this group, whom she calls her friends, is certainly volatile and on numerous occasions she has borne the scars of being at odds with some of them.

There are other alternatives of considering Alice's association with escaping, considering the difficult relationship she shares with her family. She often speaks of them as misunderstanding her and constraining her capacity, so the syndicate that she is involved in could also be considered as a safe haven from the constraining influence of her family. There she speaks of experiencing a sense of liberation. However, we also gather that her escape

into the castle is especially to seek refuge from such instances where she has been let down and disappointed by her friends, apart from the physical dangers she has been vulnerable to. These ambiguities may gain clarity upon a deeper probing of the symbol and its relatedness to other emerging images.

The protective symbolism of Alice's fantasy castle is especially significant in the shape that we gather from her body language as she explores the space. Her gaze follows circular patterns around what we assume to be the walls of the castle. She also swings around in circular movements to take in all of the imaginary sights that unfold around her, further emphasizing a widely enveloping contour. It expresses the idea of being complete and not in need of anything that is beyond its circumference. However, that is the very point at which such a world becomes self-destructive. It remains only a protection against our paranoid tendencies and cuts off our connection with our unconscious: 'strengthening by packing with fillers the holes in our natures, which are ways we keep in touch with the underworld' (Hillman 1979:160). The castle might well be a protective hideout but it also stifles unconscious needs that are embedded in these threatening experiences. What Alice sees as being protective is only palliative of the symptoms that point to a deeper malaise.

A further understanding of Alice's need for protection begins to emerge as the discussion deepens its focus on the actual worlds that the participants live in. What we see is the picture of a hostile world; one in which she does not feel safe against influences that seem to threaten her. Alice shares her experience of being backstabbed and let down by people whom she once considered friends, leaving her with a sense of self-reliance: 'Personally I don't rely on no one. I rather rely on myself... I see for myself because when I see you see me then I'll see you.' Here she expresses her need to stand alone and always consider people from the suspicion of causing her harm. It becomes her defense as she fends for herself in a world that leaves her vulnerable to attack from people who she has made the mistake of trusting. Her castle is therefore a haven of safety but also a destructive escape unless

she digs up the roots of her vulnerability. We turn now to the symbolic figures of Alice's fantasy to unearth these clues.

### **The Wicked Queen and the Bad Angel**

The second focus group discussion centers on the characters that brought each story to life. When Alice starts to draw associations with the major characters of her story, she is emphatic that 'they need to be poked... because why they causing flops for me?' It is firstly a reference to the wicked queen who tricks Alice into accepting the ring that turns her into a monster and thereby leads her further away from her treasure: 'my treasure is supposed to make my life better. Not this ring. It brings out a monster in me.'

If we consider the symbolism of the wicked queen along the same understanding as that of a witch we appreciate these symbols as projections of dark impulses; images that carry transferences of innate evil intentions (Stevens 1982: 238). These evil intentions may be understood as finding their origin in the fiery relationship that Alice seems to share with her mother. In speaking about the character of the queen, she makes associations that portray her mother as a controlling influence in her life: '... she doesn't understand this: the more you try and push me to do what you wanna do, the more I'm gonna revolt and do the complete opposite.' It therefore becomes apparent that the wicked queen fits into the Jungian understanding of personifying the terrible mother (Stevens 1982:90). The symbolism of the mother in Alice's unconscious reflects a control over her actions even to the extent of stifling the satisfaction of her own legitimate needs.

Alice is an only child to both her parents and has grown up under her mother's expectation that she will be a ballet dancer, as her mother hoped she would become herself. Alice's mother was not able to pursue her promising dance career due to the fact that she had to take care of her husband's failing health. However she always lived under the belief that Alice would take up this highly disciplined and demanding lifestyle. This has not turned out to be the case since Alice has a more eclectic interest in the performing arts, ranging from

singing to acting and modern dancing. She belongs to a dance group that straddles various techniques of hip-hop and rap, much to the disapproval of her mother who refuses to acknowledge her daughter's unique interests and talent. Alice finds it hard to live up to her mother's highly rigorous religious routine, which at one stage used to include standing on street corners and preaching excerpts of the Bible. Her relationship with Alice has also taken on the tone of preaching and speaking down to her. It is for such reasons that Alice resents anything to do with religion. We are therefore not surprised when she conveniently turns down the good angel's invitation to find heaven.

The idea of control is further strengthened by the symbolism of the ring, offered to Alice by the queen, under the guise of being the treasure she is looking for. It also serves to strengthen our already established understanding of the confining features of circular objects. Rings are widely accepted as expressing links and bonding among people but it also carries a dialectic undertone of a master and slave relationship. The collar ring that braces the neck of a prisoner or a slave is the most fitting imagery to describe this kind of relationship (Hillman 1979:161). In Alice's family life too, the rings exchanged in marriage between her mother and father have tragically come to express such a relationship. Alice's mother has given up her treasured dream in order to serve the needs of her chronically ill husband. This sacrifice, however, is only met with verbal and emotional abuse. While many other women in their community have taken legal action against such instances in their own families, Alice's mother has tolerated this abuse for as long as she can remember. Despite words of advice and caution from concerned friends, their family life has continued to allow this trauma to persist unabated. Alice's mother will not separate from her husband out of a stoic religious stance that this unfortunate situation is her lot in life, thereby portraying to Alice the image of a slave.

When Alice first gives in to accepting the ring, she obediently kisses the foot of the queen and so hands over her power. It is with this sense of being disempowered that she turns into the monster she does not want to be, much to the delight of the queen. A paradox therefore emerges: Alice is repelled by

the slave image of her mother, yet that is exactly who she is in the esteem of the drug syndicate leaders that she associates with. She works only according to their rules and suffers the abuse of their own violent tendencies. In unraveling this apparently discordant pattern, we need to consider the way in which Alice deals with similar figures belonging to her fantasy world.

In Lewis Carroll's creation of *Alice in Wonderland*, the Queen of Hearts is also encountered as an evil and fearful character who insouciantly orders beheadings. However, the influence that she holds over Alice is dramatically reversed in a transformed giant-sized Alice who dismisses the queen as just a playing card. In standing up to the queen, she expresses her own personal integrity (Dougherty & West 2007:158). Likewise, Alice's role-play sees a dismissal of the queen's power over her when she decides to give back the ring and claim her independence. In doing so she destroys the wicked queen, as she plays no further role in the fantasy. The once powerful queen is usurped by Alice's new realization of self.

It is important to note that Alice's fantasy does not see the queen or the bad angel as unnecessary influences. In her focus group discussion she speaks of their significance: 'I don't think they should disappear... because if they weren't there then we wouldn't be the people who we are.' In this sense she speaks of them as necessary even though they present themselves as having a negative influence. Edinger reminds us of the symbolism of the devil that takes us back to the mythical story of the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This theme of the disobedience of humankind signals the awakening of new conscious insights in the sense that an old way of life is being left behind as a new realization of the Self starts to emerge. When such images are encountered in dreams or fantasy they are never pleasant but they nevertheless open a new door to understanding one's potential (Edinger 1972:21). As Alice gives in to the temptation of her bad angel, she experiences the unpleasant realization that what she has become is not the person she really wants to be. However it is only through the awakening of this monster that she realizes her need for independence and through the guidance of her good angel, goes off to find her own treasure.

## The Good Angel

The association that Alice makes with the good angel is in talking about 'people that have soft hearts.' She sees such people as always being helpful to others even to the point of being treated like a slave or being taken advantage of. When in the company of friends she always ends up being the one having to make coffee for everyone and on stage production tours she is the last person that she sees to, after first helping everyone else with their costumes and make-up. At camps Alice is often willing to step in and help with chores that she has not been assigned to, to animate campfire entertainment and also to smuggle in the prohibited alcohol and cigarettes for her group. However she is always overlooked and taken for granted by these peers. The helpful angel in Alice's fantasy is also soft-hearted and undermined, being ignored even though he points to what she is ultimately looking for.

Jung identifies angels as among those symbols indicative of psychic wholeness, commonly associated with the idea of God (1956:115). This speaks of the movement away from conflict and alienation towards a state of integration (Edinger 1972:43). The good angel is therefore a representation of her pure intentions that serve to develop her own self and not merely to slavishly serve the needs of others. Alice's imaginative story shows what Edinger would describe as a state of alienation where the ego has become discordant with the self, leading to emptiness and despair (1972:43). When Alice silences her good angel for offering her the chance to find heaven, she realizes that a more enticing opportunity lies in the promise of the wicked queen. Alice then offers herself in servitude, even though she was initially angered by the queen's remonstrance of her presence in the castle. As she bows down to kiss the queen's feet and then places the ring on her finger, a monster is released from within Alice. This monster brings her great despair and emptiness; a point at which she realizes she is not the person she wants to be.

In our focus group discussion Alice speaks lucidly of her sense of dissatisfaction with the present quality of her life: 'I want a re-lap all the way to when God was putting me in my mother's womb and then when he calls for me I'll run around all over heaven and I won't come to earth.' It is a clear refusal to accept any authority, including that of God, because the authority figures in her life have stifled her and given her a sense of not being respected. The association traces back to the experience of her mother whom Alice describes as a 'law enforcer'. She is someone who follows a strictly dogmatic observance of religion with the kind of expectations that make all that is good and of God unacceptable to Alice. This negative maternal influence has turned her good angel into a slave, thereby bringing about a need to run away and to hide.

### **The Mask and the Book of Knowledge**

Among the treasures that Alice finds, from following the guidance of her good angel, is a mask. It serves the magical purpose of making one invisible during times of danger or difficulty: 'when you just wanna run and hide and you just can't seem to run far enough so that mask was like an escape route to get away from everything.' Masks are known to be widely used in theatrical productions and even ceremonial rituals. Its symbolic function is that of submerging the individual human expression (Jung 1964:263). One's personal identity is therefore disguised to such an extent that the actual person is no longer recognizable. It is a pattern that Alice identifies in her own life and it relates very closely to the symbolism of the castle in which she finds the mask. She speaks of her tendency to be judged by the way of life she lives, often being called a gangster and a hooligan since she engages in behavior that is offensive such as smoking, drinking alcohol and even physically violent altercations. However she sees this behavior merely as walls or barriers that she puts up to defend the inner, more gentle self: 'When you eventually break down all those walls and really get to the heart of me... I'm not like that type of person.'

The significance of the power of invisibility, contained in the mask, is appreciated in Jung's analysis of the symbol being one of transformation. He makes an association with the idea of death, not in a terminal sense but rather within the understanding of a rite of passage as commonly observed among initiates and neophytes (Jung 1956:345). The association is quite apt in the case of Alice since we have already identified an awakening of conscious insights through the symbolic destruction of the evil queen. Alice therefore emerges not merely as a rough and tough gangster or a 'skaapie cherrie.' We also see her as a softhearted person who is naturally inclined towards a compassionate bearing, as expressed in the affectionate care she shows towards her three dogs as well as to stray animals. Unfortunately the value of this character trait has been severely damaged by the example that she has witnessed in her mother. Inasmuch as Alice would like to show this face of compassion to the world, she is afraid to do so since it has thus far turned her into a soft target for the malevolent relationships that she has fostered with members of the local drug syndicate. She therefore chooses the mask to hide and suppress an essential feature of her personality, leading to her being misunderstood and needing to defend herself against what she calls false accusations. When she is called a gangster or a delinquent, it causes her great consternation since it does not connect with her internal image.

Alice's internal image is further articulated through the clay symbol that she moulds in the shape of a heart, pierced with an arrow (Figure 4.17). She speaks of this symbol as her 'broken and still healing heart,' and thereby expresses her sense of vulnerability. The harm that she has experienced, from being overlooked and having her generosity abused, is depicted by random streaks that give the sculpture a rough texture. It tells of the scars she has experienced, as well as the 'rough and ready' front that she puts up to the world around her.

This sense of being disconnected and alienated is a pattern observed among many popular artists. An example taken from among Alice's source of admiration is the controversial British pop star Amy Winehouse. Widely recognized by her exaggerated vintage beehive hairstyles as well as her

dramatic make up, she takes on a larger than life appearance. It is a masked front that she shows to the public. Besides this physical mask, she also indulges in the kind of behavior that turns her into a modern day gangster figure: drug and alcohol abuse, as well as violent confrontations in pubs and nightclubs (BBC News 2008). Conversely, though, her music reveals a far more sensitive and vulnerable personality behind the mask. In one of her tracks that express a relationship in turmoil, she sings: 'for you I was a flame, love is a losing game.' It tells of the way she gave passion and commitment to a relationship that only caused her harm and unhappiness. This sense of disillusionment with life is mirrored in Alice's own sentiments of also being caught up in a losing game as she sums up her discussion comments: 'life sucks.'

What we begin to identify is a clear holding back in taking responsibility over the relationships that she shares. These are the kind of lessons that she unfortunately did not learn from the examples she grew up with, namely her parents. It is for this reason that she operates from a sense of what she has observed at home and what she has also come to understand as the only means of survival on the tough streets of her neighborhood. In the second treasure of the book of knowledge however, she alludes to these difficulties and her realization of the need to find a resolution to her personal turmoil.

Her acknowledgement of the kind of person she really is, associates with the symbolism of the book of knowledge that Alice finds along with the mask. She describes it as a book that holds the answers to questions that she often asks about herself; questions that no-one has been able to help her answer. It takes us back once again to the mythic Garden of Eden and the eating of the fruit of knowledge in the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve. Knowledge, inasmuch as it brings the awareness of opposites, highlights the specific feature of consciousness (Edinger 1972:18). These polarities emerge clearly through Alice's imaginative journey: the good angel and bad angel, servitude and independence, the softhearted interior and the tough exterior.

Alice's book however, remains locked and she explains that she is not yet ready to open it and to know what the contents holds. It portrays the idea of holding back her responsibility for her new consciousness that needs to be lived out with great caution and wisdom (Edinger 1972:27). One would find this escape from responsibility quite natural for a sixteen year old like Alice but her escape is not merely contained in the common understanding of teenage rebelliousness. It is far more damaging since the defense that she puts up is the mask of a warrior whose behavior becomes destructive of both self and others.

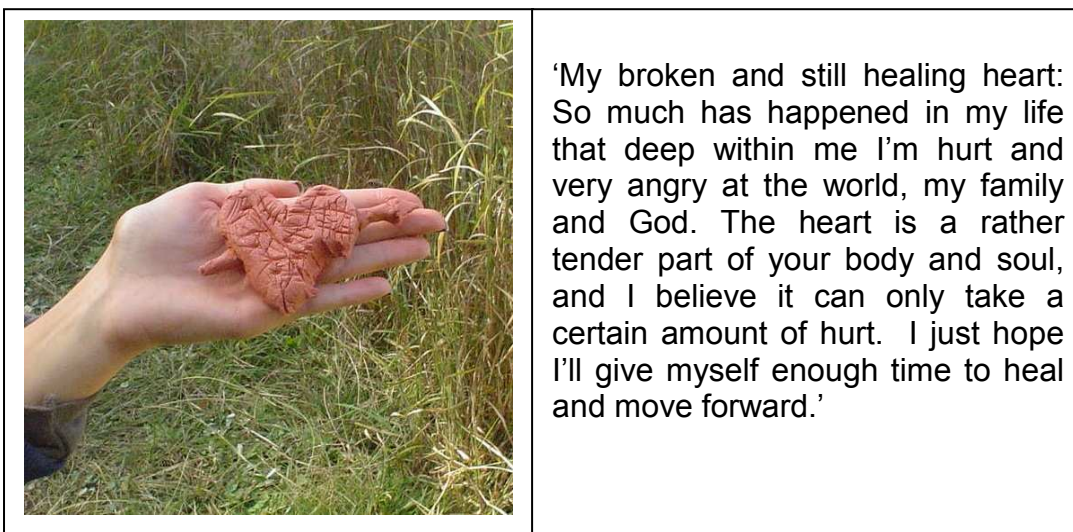


Figure 4.17

## Case Study 2: The Emancipation of Shrek

An epic journey of adventure awaits the protagonist of this story. We identify him as a boy who considers himself quite ordinary until he finds himself in the extraordinary world of his fantasy. On entering this enchanted world, he is initially bewildered as to why he is here and what he is supposed to do. A messenger, who has been anxiously awaiting his arrival, announces that the boy is the long-awaited chosen one. Before he has any time to enquire further, the messenger and a mysteriously silent scar-faced woman whisk him away as they set out to meet Bellerophon, the wizard of that land. As they hurry along, the boy makes several attempts to find answers about the world he is in, why the woman is scarred and why they are going to see a wizard. However, he is constantly told: 'Stop wasting time... hurry up... this is your world, your imagination.'

Bellerophon, the wizard, is a serious looking and sagacious old man who has also been anxiously awaiting the boy's arrival. He speaks about the wicked witch who has besieged their land in her attempt to destroy everything that inhabits it, including the people themselves. The boy is their only hope of destroying the witch since he has been especially chosen and set apart for this audacious mission. His reaction is one of surprise and disbelief. He never thought that he could be so valued but the wizard assures him that he is the only one who has the weapon to defeat the witch: 'It is from looking deep within yourself.' In accepting to take on this challenge, the boy is told that he will also be rewarded with a treasure that is to be revealed when he fulfills his mission.

Accompanied by the messenger and the scar-faced woman, they set out to encounter the greatly feared witch. When the boy first sees her, he underestimates her weak appearance, calling her a weasel. However he soon discovers that her apparent feebleness is deceiving as she blows him away with the force of a mighty wind. After several attempts to tackle the witch, the messenger encourages the flagging young fighter not to give up

and to keep looking deep within himself. He then suddenly realizes that he has fire in his hands, which he throws at the witch and thereby kills her.

Returning to Bellerophon, the boy stands in eager anticipation of his prize, which he expects to be a pot of gold or money. The wizard, however, smiles and says to him that his treasure lies within himself. The boy is pleasantly surprised and feels a sense of being liberated from his poor self-image. He is eager to essay his newfound power as he turns to the scar-faced woman and touches her face, thereby removing her scars that had been caused by the evil influence of the wicked witch. Realizing that he has found some release from his fear and disbelief in himself, he prepares to return to his real world. It is with a new understanding of the power of his inner strength, that he makes this return.

Following the participant's discussion around his role-play, allegorical features begin to emerge from the popular computer animated film *Shrek*. Among the subplots of the larger story we meet the lonesome ogre as tasked with saving the swamp he inhabits, as well as the land of his fairytale friends, from the clutches of the evil King Farquaad. Shrek has always considered himself as a detestable ogre whom people often judge merely by his appearance. It only takes the ingenuous wisdom of his companion: a donkey known as the 'noble steed', who encourages Shrek to look deeper within himself to find his real self-worth (IMDb 2001). The protagonist of our role-play speaks of the messenger as his 'noble steed' and also finds his liberation from a negative self-image, thereby himself making a close association with the much loved cartoon ogre. In this analysis I shall therefore refer to the protagonist as Shrek.

### **Inhabiting a Besieged Land**

As Shrek leads us into his fantasy world, we immediately experience an ominous sense of fear and anxiety. The messenger or 'noble steed' presents himself as a precipitate character, having no time to offer any pleasantries of welcome or orientation to the new world. This mysteriousness is further

heightened by the presence of a silent scar-faced woman, naturally creating questions about how she came to be so scarred and why she does not speak. The anxiety over these unanswered questions is all but assuaged by the wizard, Bellerophon, who creates further cause for fear in speaking of the besieged state of the land. It has tragically fallen under the evil clutches of the wicked witch of the east. It is a land in chaos and has come to be associated with only hunger, starvation and death.

Shrek is surprisingly sanguine in his impression of the fantasy world he created. Despite the apparent misery of what we immediately encounter, his focus group discussion input says nothing of the kind of distress that one would naturally associate with being besieged. On the contrary, he speaks of experiencing a sense of liberation, of finally being in control of what happens in his life. He relishes the 'kind of cool and awesome' feeling of being able to experience life differently and to simply be someone else. Considering Shrek's response, it would seem that his liberation might be understood within the metaphor of a prisoner finding release from being confined to a cell. Such an existence speaks of the lack of control over one's life and the dominance of authoritarian powers that leave one helpless and hopeless, as in the case of the enchanted land under the spell of the wicked witch. Just as hunger, starvation and death characterize their unfortunate state of affairs, so too does imprisonment deprive a person of certain rights and liberties under which ordinary citizens thrive. We would now need to test this understanding with some associations from Shrek's real life experience.

One of the greatest deprivations that Shrek often speaks of is his experience of being disowned by his father. Since the separation of his parents, he has lived with his mother and stepbrother, while his father lives alone and has emphatically declared that he wants nothing to do with Shrek. He has since not seen or spoken with his father even despite several initiatives on his part to at least maintain some kind of communication through a telephone call or an occasional visit. His father has rather chosen to sever all ties with his ex-wife and son even if it means not recognizing their existence. It has caused a great deal of hurt and emptiness for Shrek who admits his longing for at least

some recognition and affirmation from his father. This becomes an association with the hunger and starvation of his fantasy world where a significant lifeline has been severed.

Shrek lives in a perennial state of inconstancy, oscillating from one interest to the next and has never quite settled into the choices he has made. For instance he has been struggling through two different programs of study, neither of which he admitted any interest towards. For the past two years he has been in and out of campus, having to repeat several courses and is now considering joining the navy. Furthermore he has had numerous girlfriends, none of whom have lasted for any significant amount of time. His capricious personality therefore finds an association with the chaos that we see in his fantasy world.

On numerous occasions, Shrek has spoken of his tendency to indulge in illegal drugs. He has admitted to bingeing on cocaine and marijuana, as well as excessive alcohol consumption in what he describes as 'wild and wicked' parties. Inasmuch as he finds this a release from pent up frustrations, he is always consumed with a sense of guilt and shame about what he has done. 'I've been doing some bad things,' he would say, 'some very bad things.' He detests his tendency to 'let myself down' and sets himself to put things right by faithfully going to church, helping out with community service projects, taking up leadership in youth programs. He speaks of a desire to live an ascetic life and never turning back on his 'bad habits'. To this extent, Shrek is looking for more than just a release. Our understanding of his fantasy world as a prison therefore calls for a deeper probing.

Jung reminds us that any delving into the unconscious, albeit through dreams or fantasy, is a stepping into the underworld. It carries along with it the primordial images of darkness and being devoid of life (Jung 1956:409). Shrek's descent into the underworld is perhaps most starkly reminiscent of these images, as compared to the other role-play fantasies. It is made all the more appropriate when one considers that the world is being besieged, or devoured by a wicked witch. This need to be freed or rescued from a deadly

embrace is found in various other mythical stories including Jonah and the whale. They not only convey the idea of death and suffering but are also antecedents of redemption and rebirth (Jacobi 1959:156).

### **The Wicked Witch**

During the course of the role-play, the action was occasionally paused to afford each protagonist an opportunity to step into the role of other characters. Shrek's response to swapping roles with the witch reveals that it was a frightening realization of 'how like the witch I really am.' It reminds him of times when evil and hateful thoughts crop up in his head, like dropping bombs and killing innocent people for no particular reason. Further on in the discussion, this topic picks up its thread once again and weaves itself into a more textured understanding of such an apparently macabre thought. '... you know when you are empty, you tend to go and do bad stuff... 'cause you trying to fill that empty space... you do all these bad things you don't understand yourself.' Here we see an indication of what lies beneath the kind of evil thoughts that Shrek so vividly describes. As already established through the symbolism of his chaotic fantasy world, he experiences severe deprivation that leave empty spaces: hunger and starvation.

Emptiness is recognized as one of the typical effects of being symbolically bewitched. The figure of the witch in fantasy and dreams is an archetypal image that shows itself through emotions hostile to the ego (Jacoby *et al* 1992: 200). The hatred and evil thoughts that Shrek experiences therefore originate from this archetypal energy that overwhelms and overpowers the ego or conscious self, resulting in feelings of being constrained, emptied out or alienated from self (1992:200). Shrek's very identity as an ogre indicates this alienation from self, as dramatized in the film that helps draw out our association for his character analysis. When we meet the cartoon character, he presents himself as one who is alienated not only from other creatures but also from his own real personality. He describes himself only in terms of what others think of him: 'a big stupid ogre... grab your torch and pitchforks' (IMDb 2001).

The association of the wicked witch, which arouses feelings of emptiness and alienation, must therefore find itself in an influence that Shrek feels to be overwhelming or constraining in his everyday life. This trend is what Jung would identify as the negative anima. The anima is the personification of feminine psychological tendencies in every male psyche and it expresses itself as destructive if the experience of his mother has been negative (Jung 1964:190). Considering Shrek's relationship with his mother, we find that her great influence is expressed in the way she marks out his life for him. She grants him the kind of pleasures that are beyond the standards of his friends: keys to her car, designer clothing, expensive gadgets and accessories. However, being a policewoman, she runs her household rigorously and maintains high expectations for Shrek to follow her lead. She decided that it would be best for him to follow the line of study that he has engaged in despite his unhappiness. She relies on him to baby sit his stepbrother as well as to run errands for her and do the chores due to her erratic work shifts. It is her notion that he is to effectively take the place of his father in running the household, sacrificing time that he might wish to spend recreating with his own friends. Shrek often speaks of his mother's obsessive need to prove to his father they can be self-sufficient in his absence. He admits to feeling obliged to make his mother happy out of gratitude 'for doing her best for me'. At the same time he is also exhausted from the rule of law to which she expects strict adherence.

The idea of being constrained and struggling to take control over one's life, is keenly expressed in Shrek's clay symbol (Figure 4.14). It is rather ambiguous in the sense that it looks like a flower but it could take on several other meanings such as a cup or a container. As he writes, 'it can be what ever you want it to be.' In this sense we appreciate Shrek as someone who has struggled to claim control over his life, feeling a need to fit into the expectations imposed on him. Through his fantasy, he reveals a desire to configure the set of rules according to which he would like to live his life and relate to his social world.

The symbol of the wicked witch helps us understand how an overpowering feminine principle is responsible for constraining and subsuming Shrek into destructive thoughts. It has dominated him and forestalled his independence. Like the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, it has enticed him to relish in the delightful confectionery of having all his physical needs provided for but it is also the very influence that devours one's urge for autonomy (Jacoby *et al* 1992:200). This idea finds a fitting association with Shrek's gratification over the power he is finally able to wield in his fantasy world: '... the fact that I had powers as well in my world was awesome... being the ruler of your own world, knowing that you control it. No-one else does.'

### **The Wizard Bellerophon**

The presence of a wizard in Shrek's fantasy world gives an initial impression of magic and spells, usually associated with these figures. Such expectation seems to find fulfillment in Shrek's confrontation with the witch, when the fire he acquires to defeat her almost magically appears in his hands. We could therefore consider it a spell from the wizard but a much more incisive probing seems to be called for. For instance, even the magical pot of gold that Shrek expects as a reward turns out to be a far more natural self-realization to which he is awakened. Consequently, the association with a wizard finds a greater significance as a wisdom figure than merely a magical sorcerer.

The naming of the wizard also reveals some clues to finding closer associations with the fantasy figure. Shrek speaks of being in great admiration of the hero of Greek mythology, Bellerophon, widely known for his skill in slaying monsters. In particular he is most celebrated for defeating Chimera, a female monster that terrorized his neighboring countryside (Butler 1952:42). Although tradition does not consider Bellerophon as a wisdom figure, Shrek nevertheless gives his character this description, referring to him in the role-play as 'O Wise One.' Here we find further grounds to build an understanding of the wizard as a sagacious presence in Shrek's unconscious, relying on his good counsel to fulfill a similar task against the wicked witch.

The battle that Shrek prepares to take on in his fantasy world is one that he cannot realize in his everyday life. His fantasy gives him the opportunity to find what he ordinarily longs for: the wisdom of a role-model who helps him unlock his autonomous power. Johnson identifies this as a significant feature of active imagination, one in which hidden archetypal themes such as heroic quests are lived out (1986:153). The hero symbol is particularly clear in Shrek's association with Bellerophon since the fantasy figure grants him the approval and recognition of being the chosen one. It is the kind of approval he has not received from his father, so when Bellerophon addresses Shrek in this manner he symbolically unlocks his hidden and silenced potential.

Jung's appreciation of wisdom figures is that they appear in situations where insight and determination are needed but cannot be gathered on one's own strength (1959:94). We have already established this sense of deficiency as being rooted in an overwhelming negative mother complex, through the devouring presence of the wicked witch. This pattern of the overpowering mother is understood as eclipsing the powerful archetype of the wise old man (:150), clearly expressed in Shrek's fantasy as the witch takes control of the land that is meant to be ruled by Bellerophon. The nature of Shrek's liberation from this besieged state may be found in examining the roles played by his supporting characters.

### **The Noble Steed and the Scar-Faced Woman**

As Shrek's companions on the treacherous mission to defeat the wicked witch, his noble steed and the scar-faced woman help to draw out the symbolism of combat and conquest. Displaying contrasting natures, the scar-faced woman is a silent presence who stirs up a sense of mystery and fear. Her scars serve as a warning of the injurious potential of the witch's power. The noble steed, however, is far more loquacious and enthusiastic about the challenge, also providing comic relief with his candid responses to some challenging calls. For instance, when they finally encounter the witch he bravely announces to Shrek: 'Here she is, the wicked witch... you go first!'

Shrek's association with the noble steed stems primarily from the film in which the character is a hilarious donkey who helps the hero overcome his negative self image of being an ogre. In one of the pivotal dialogues of the film, the hero asks Donkey to take a good look at him and tell him what he is. Donkey merely responds: 'Um... really tall' (IMDb 2001). In doing so, Donkey diffuses the hero's pre-occupation with his perceived unappealing appearance. So too, in Shrek's fantasy, his noble steed encourages him to keep looking deep within himself to find his strength to defeat the witch. The symbolism is also characteristic of the steeds of mythology. In this case they were horses that contained great significance such as the properties of clairvoyance and prophesy. That explains why they were the noble helpers of mythic heroes (Jung 1956:277). So the encouragement that Shrek finds in his noble steed is also a prescience of conquest even in the face of great danger and flagging spirits.

In the focus group discussion, Shrek makes associations with such people in the real world as those who have a selfless nature. He speaks of such people as difficult to find since there is a greater tendency for people to be selfish, 'in a sense that I'm gonna do my own thing, you do your own thing, catch you on the flip side.' Selflessness is appreciated as a great virtue but not easy to achieve: 'to be selfless is a great barrier that one needs to overcome and if you overcome it early in life, then that is just amazing.' We are therefore prone to ask what Shrek's barrier might be to finding a sense of being selfless. What is it that holds him back from embracing this virtue? The mysterious presence of the scar-faced woman calls for some careful consideration in realizing a denouement to as yet unresolved reservations of Shrek's fantasy world.

Shrek identifies the mysterious woman as one who has been hurt by the witch and is shocked into silence. He goes on to describe the scars as associated with the emotional wounds that we all carry and choose to rather bury, as if they never existed. This inner wounding is often indicative of a negative self-image whereby children grow up believing that they are not important and so they are scarred by feelings of 'absolute and utter worthlessness' (Oldfield

1996:162). Shrek's sense of self worth has been severely damaged by the refusal of his father to acknowledge him and so he has grown up receiving the unconscious message of not being valuable. The heavily conditioned relationship that he shares with his mother further exacerbates this emptiness since he is bound by strict adherence to her expectations for him, lured by the comfort of being lavishly provided for. This lies at the expense of relinquishing the autonomous power he longs for, as expressed in his heroic fantasy actions.

The scar-faced woman therefore stands as a symbol of Shrek's wounded self and in so doing, she reveals the barrier that Shrek speaks of when describing his admiration of the virtue of selflessness. In his selfless attempts to reach out to his father and express his feelings of attachment to him, he has been wounded by rejection. In going beyond himself to take care of his mother's happiness he has again been wounded by the loss of his autonomy. What we gather is that Shrek sees in himself the potential to be selfless and heroic but like the heroic figures of Greek mythology, he has experienced mutilation in the course of battle (Jung 1956:239). Shrek is incapacitated through the power of the archetypal forces that influence his thoughts and actions. In overcoming the barriers that these forces impose he accepts the challenge to enter into combat through his active imagination. He is cautioned of danger by the presence of the scar-faced woman but also encouraged in the belief of conquest by the loyalty of his noble steed.

### **Refining Fire**

At the much-anticipated scene of combat Shrek initially underestimates the power of the witch, whom he dismisses as a 'weasel'. That impression is literally blown away by the witch herself, who lets forth a mighty gust of wind that topples Shrek and his companions. Here the wind is understood as a destructive force, as contrasted against more common associations with the life-giving spirit of God (Jung 1956:422). Its destruction is characteristic of the chaos that we have already identified in Shrek's fantasy, thereby highlighting the enervating instability that the anima brings about within his psyche. The

battle that he faces is therefore not as straightforward as it initially appears to be. It is not to be gauged from mere external impressions.

Shrek discusses his tendency of generally paying attention to the way he presents himself to the world; the importance he attaches to dressing up and making sure his hair always looks good. It is a pattern that runs along the same trajectory of putting up the front that he and his mother are self-sustainable even with Shrek's father having abandoned them. The exterior might look secure but inside there is much hurt and fragility that remains silent, as personified by the scar-faced woman.

The noble steed draws Shrek's attention to the fact that he needs to look much deeper than what he sees on the outside. He needs to look within himself to find the appropriate weapon. This delving into the depths ignites the balls of fire in his hands. He throws them at the witch and destroys her. In doing so, we see a symbolic destruction of the force that has held Shrek captive. Edinger acknowledges this destruction as representing 'a break-up of the conscious *status quo* by an influx of fiery energy from the unconscious' (1972:80). The idea is further developed through an analogy with the mythic figure Prometheus who steals fire from the gods. Inasmuch as it is a willful act against authority it represents the grasping for consciousness in the same way that Adam and Eve steal the forbidden fruit (:25). Shrek expresses his feeling of liberation from this experience as he shares: '... it's almost as if you get to be God for that moment. You get to make all the decisions.' His fantasy therefore speaks of his desire to be victorious over the constraining influence of the witch and to assume his autonomy.

In an anticlimax to this epic adventure, Shrek does not receive the pot of gold that he expects. Bellerophon merely tells him to keep searching deep within himself to find what he is looking for. Considering the symbolism of fire and purification, however, we may understand the gold as a treasure that is yet to be achieved according to the mythical principles of alchemy. As gold is tested and refined through fire, the goal of human development is to find redemption through conscious realization of the opaque self' (Edinger 1972:103).

When Shrek touches the woman's face, removing her scars, he removes the spell of her silence and thereby releases a hidden self. The gesture serves to indicate the kind of treasure that he sets himself out to still achieve, as seen in the relationship between the two most significant images of his fantasy. The constant influence of the wicked witch over the wise Bellerophon is what creates the besieged state from which he seeks liberation. However, the emancipation of Shrek is not merely a release from confinement. It is the redemptive realization of a new sense of self: the autonomous wielding of his own power.

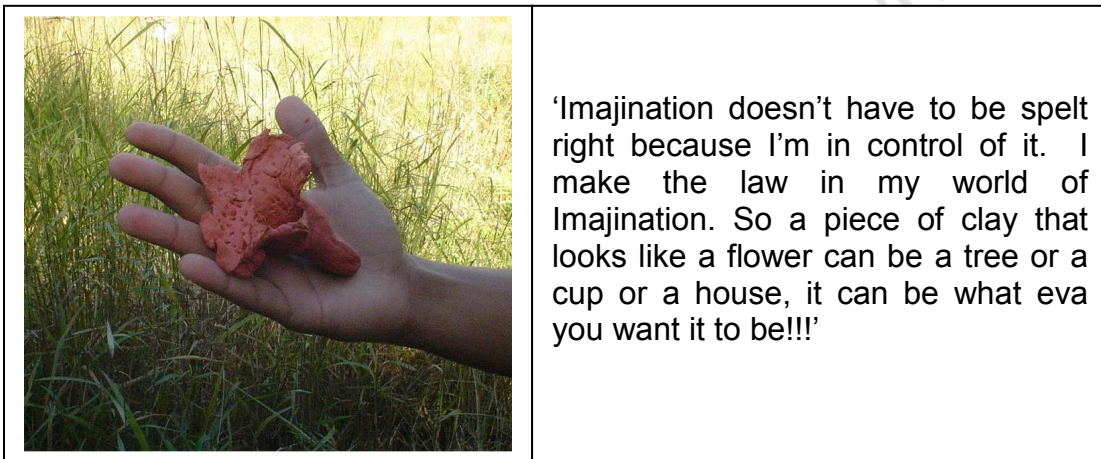


Figure 4.14

### **Case Study 3: Honey's New World of Opportunities**

The world of this protagonist is imagined according to the actual setting of the streets of her real life neighborhood. She is a young girl working in earnest on a set of dance moves that she is trying to perfect. As she goes through each routine, she stops to ask herself if that was the best she could do. She identifies her faults and refuses to give in to her feelings of being tired. Persevering through her practice routine, she meticulously corrects her weak points and also attempts other techniques that might give the dance a more distinctive character. With each attempt she improves and displays her delight at the creative routines she has been able to choreograph.

She is approached by several other youth in the course of her intensive practice session, all of whom appear to be well acquainted with her. In the first instance the girl is asked how she is doing and she responds by expressing her excitement about the chance she has to appear in the next big Missy Elliot music video. By the time her next friend turns up, he has already heard about the good news and comes over to express sentiments of excitement and praise. He is then followed by a group of friends who are on their way to 'just a pedicure and manicure and to go see our men.' The girl is invited to come along with them and to join in the thrilling afternoon of fun that they have lined up for themselves. She politely turns down the offer, as exciting as it may seem, due to the fact that she is busy practicing some new dance moves. It will still be a while before she gets through a few more routines, according to her practice schedule.

A young man, who has not seen the girl for a long while, stops by to see how she has been doing. He is surprised at her recent absence from usual places of recreation like the corner shop and the sports grounds. He tells her about a few of the youth who have been arrested for breaking into the shop over the weekend. He is glad that they have been caught but he is also certain that they will be back on the streets very soon. The girl responds by saying that she has been out of touch with the most recent happenings since her dance practice has been taking up all of her time. She talks about going solo with

her dance career if she gets a chance to dance in Missy Elliot's music video. The much- anticipated audition is about to take place in half an hour.

The scene changes to the studio where the young girl is expected to present herself. Before knocking on the door, she straightens out her attire, runs her fingers through her hair and takes a deep breath to compose herself. As she knocks, an attendant answers the door and speaks to her in a firm manner. He reminds her not to 'get too cute' because she is after all not knocking at any door; it is the door of a celebrity. She is introduced to Missy Elliot as 'that dancing kid who wants to show you her moves.' Missy Elliot appears quite indifferent and nonchalantly gives the girl a nod to indicate that she could begin. After a few routines, the girl declares that this is all she has for now but she could do a bit more once she gets the contract. Missy Elliot sits up attentively and appears bewildered by what she has seen. With a sharp snap of her fingers, she orders her attendant to sign up the girl for her next music video, herself getting carried away with the unique choreography. The girl is thrilled upon receiving the contract, jumping around and hugging Missy Elliot who simply admits: 'this girl is hot.'

The fantasy of the young girl is almost a re-enactment of the film *Honey*, which tells a similar story of a young dance choreographer and her difficult journey to find her own space in the competitive dance industry (IMDb 2003). The protagonist speaks about this film as having a profound influence on her decision to keep persevering through the setbacks and disappointments she has experienced in her real life. For the purpose of this analysis I shall therefore refer to her as Honey.

### **The Street Corner**

The street that Honey lives on is the main road of her neighborhood. It is a bustling space of motor vehicle, bus and taxi traffic, apart from the scores of pedestrians who use this route to access public facilities that are centrally located on the main road. Among these pedestrians are youth in particular who make their way to and from school or even just hang around at a corner

of the street, outside a small shop. This particular spot has come to be known as 'the corner' and has developed a notorious reputation for being a place where drugs are peddled. The house that Honey lives in is only a few doors away from the corner and is therefore among those houses that are always visible to people of the neighborhood who pass by everyday. Her fantasy world is located in the open space outside her home, almost on the pavement of the road; a very public space to be engaging in a dance routine that is as intensive and urgent as her fantasy reveals. One expects that she would rather prefer privacy and fewer disturbances than what she encounters by the many people who stop to talk with her.

What emerges from Honey's discussion of her fantasy world is that she had found a sense of recognition: '... you know that feeling when someone recognizes you for what you good at, you start screaming and going crazy because you so happy.' To this extent we cannot consider the people visiting her as disturbances inasmuch as they recognized her and valued what she was working towards. As Johnson reminds us, active imagination is an opportunity to live out parts of ourselves that cannot be realized in everyday life (1986:152). The frequency of visits and the importance that Honey attaches to being noticed by other people is therefore an indication of the recognition that she craves. The cause of this deficiency might be gauged from considering the nature of her family life and immediate surroundings.

Honey's family is a large and well-known network of people in the community. They are respected for being community leaders: teachers, nurses and active members of the local church. Honey often speaks of the way in which she feels pressured to maintain the family reputation of having a good name in the community, even to the extent of being repressed by her aunts and uncles: 'in my life everybody just wants to live my life for me... it's either their way or the highway.' Since her mother died only a year ago her family has rallied around her in an effort to 'protect' her even from seeing her own father. Although Honey is very fond of her father and would prefer to live with him, her family objects to any contact since his reputation for being a drug addict is unacceptable to them.

The circumstances surrounding the death of Honey's mother are also unfortunate. It is believed that she died of an AIDS related illness but the family has denied this and firmly instructed Honey not to speak about her mother's illness to anyone. These are the constraining influences that caused her to quietly accept what was expected of her but she has also come to realize its hazards: '... I bottled up everything until the end of last year. I was a mad case... I don't wanna keep it in me because I'm really gonna do something stupid.'

Honey's defiance of her family expectations has resulted in her tendency to spend as much time as possible out of the house. Her grandmother often complains that Honey is never at home, even playing truant at school to hang around with the boys at the corner shop. In so doing Honey has taken to smoking marijuana and imbibing alcohol, developing a reputation for causing scandal to the family especially because her aberrant activities with the 'corner boys' take place on the public space of the main road. Whenever her family reprimands her about this behavior Honey flies off into fits of rage, shouting insults and abuse at her family whom she accuses of ruining her life. These incidents of outrage have at times been so severe that her grandmother has expressed fears of her being possessed by evil spirits. Honey, however, insists that she is fine and that the problem is with her family, not with herself. Her intense anger and outrage appear to be indications of a deeper conflict that she gives vent to through the kind of notorious bearing she exhibits on a public sphere. This calls for an exploration of the fantasy symbolism expressive of her behavior.

### **A Dancer at Work**

Honey's fantasy world makes a stark departure from her real life experience on the street corner where she often hangs around. While she ordinarily creates a stir from the socially unacceptable behavior she engages in, her fantasy sees her engaging in the kind of behavior that far exceeds mere social acceptance. It is admirable and deserving of much praise, as she experiences from those who stop by to express their acknowledgement of her

efforts. One of the values of active imagination is that it recognizes powerful personalities within us that might be in conflict with our conscious behavior (Johnson 1986:25). The conflict is also heightened by Honey's disinterested response to reports of her friends who were arrested for theft, revealing her disassociation from such tendencies.

The symbolism of dance in Honey's fantasy is a powerful expression of an as yet unrecognized facet of her personality. It carries the themes of disciplined work and dedication that one does not usually expect from a teenager who plays truant at school and smokes marijuana. This apparently discordant pattern, however, is only reconciled through the understanding of dance as 'an instinct to heal a split ... or deadness within.' The act of dancing therefore takes on a meaning that expresses an unconscious effort at healing (Blackmer 1989:35). The discipline, movement and rhythm of the body becomes a vessel for purification and cleansing in much the same way as metals are purified according to the ancient practice of alchemy (Blackmer 1989:105). Edinger reminds us that the ultimate aim of this transmutation process was to 'release and redeem a supreme value from its bondage' (1972:102).

The bondage that we trace in Honey's real life stems firstly from the constraints under which she lives at home, being besieged by the expectations of her family to hold up a reputable image. Honey's defiance of these servile expectations has led her to the equally detrimental grasp of 'the corner boys' whose image as street gangsters has cast a shadow on Honey's sense of integrity by the rest of the community. Many parents have warned their children to disassociate from her, labeling her as a dangerous influence to young girls in the community. The intensive work schedule that she applies herself to in her fantasy world therefore becomes an act of purification or cleansing. This healing process takes place in anticipation of the release of a personality trait that has thus far been hidden. In order to probe this association we must follow Honey deeper into her fantasy world.

## The Studio of Recognition and Fame

Before Honey leaves behind the street on which she has been so ardently preparing herself, she encounters a door into the next world. As she anxiously knocks on the door, she introduces herself and her intentions before stepping through into the dance studio. The door therefore becomes a point of separation from images of self-denial and asceticism, or purification. It opens up to her 'a world of opportunities,' as she describes in her focus group discussion. This is in stark contrast to the world of bondage that she describes on the street. There she has been tied down to the constraining expectations that her family forces her to live up to and the criticism that her community has dismissed her with. The door therefore takes on the image of a threshold and becomes a rite of passage from one world to the next (Hillman 1979:181), exemplified by the ritual that the doorkeeper asks Honey to observe: the decorum and mannerisms of being in the presence of a celebrity.

Honey's response to stepping into the dance studio is one of being amazed and bewildered by what she sees. She stares wide-eyed at her surroundings, taking careful and deliberate steps into the space as though she were a child walking into a freshly polished room. Inasmuch as this world stimulates a sense of wonder and awe, it starts to take on heavenly qualities, representing the realization of a goal or a yearning that has long been nurtured. We may also consider this world to be a place of fruitfulness or even fertility to the extent that it only comes about through the intensive efforts or preparation that Honey has already displayed. These appear to be womb-like or maternal images, implying the need for protection (Jung 1959:15).

The space of a dance studio easily lends itself to such images, given the firm buffering of its infrastructure against disturbances of physical intrusions and noise. Honey does not speak easily about the death of her mother, due to the firm directives of her family to refrain from such discussions with others, but the image of the dance studio alludes to the kind of needs that she might be silently harboring. This is especially significant considering that this is the

world in which she discovers the recognition that she has been struggling to achieve; a place where she will achieve fame rather than notoriety.

### **The Audience of Admiring Fans**

In retracing our steps back to street corner where Honey draws the attention of those who pass by, we find that these onlookers are representative of her network of friends. As we have already suggested, their presence in Honey's fantasy world does not give us the impression of her privacy being intruded since she chooses to practice in a public space. She is quite aware of the attention that she will receive and her location therefore seems quite suited to the purpose of being noticed and recognized for what she has been doing. The activity of such rigorous routine turns out to be a source of admiration that Honey finds among some of the local dancers in her real life experience. She sometimes compares herself to them and considers herself in very low esteem: 'I'll never get into the shows like them. I can't break. I can't pop. I can't do what they do.'

Dance shows are an extremely popular feature in the community that Honey lives. Dance groups often compete in impressive displays of original techniques and routines that have crowds of teenagers in awe of what they see happening on stage. As a result, these dancers take on a celebrity status among the youth and are greatly admired not only for their dance skill but also for their general appeal. Many of the other youth tend to follow their fashion trends and mimic their latest dance moves. Honey is quite aware of the status that these dancers enjoy in the community since she often takes a front row seat at the dance shows, being an enthusiastic fan of these dancers.

In her fantasy we come to hear that she has been dancing for a local dance group that enjoys the most success at regional competitions. It speaks of her fascination with the world of dance and more especially, with the promise of recognition that it offers. As she pays diligent attention to perfecting her dance moves, like the dancers she herself admires, this same admiration is

what she experiences for herself through the attentive audience that she creates in her own fantasy.

Honey's great preoccupation with approval in her fantasy world clearly stems from her experience of not being valued by her family and her community. Neither of these socializing agencies has given her the message that she is of any worth to them. Instead she has been silenced and ostracized, set aside as a person who should be avoided by others. Edinger speaks of this occurrence as the damaged ego-Self axis, where the conscious element of the psyche becomes alienated from the Self and so the true potential of the person becomes stifled or hidden. The only healing that can repair this damage is an experience of acceptance, approval and affirmation of one's self-worth (1972:40). It therefore supports our understanding of the symbolism of dance in Honey's fantasy, as a yearning for a sense of healing and the emergence of a valued self from beneath her rejection.

### **The Divine Wisdom**

The biographical story of Missy Elliot bears a resemblance to the real life experience of Honey. Having lived through the traumatic childhood of physical abuse, Missy Elliot dealt with this rejection through escaping into a fantasy world. Here she speaks of finding a compensation for her lack of acceptance and approval. In the private space of her room, she would pretend that she is a superstar performer with her doll babies as an audience. Having rotating arms, she would lift them up and imagine that they were applauding her (Notable Biographies 2009:2). The success that Missy Elliot has made out of her unfortunate life circumstances is a source of great admiration for Honey. She speaks about this being the kind of dream that she aspires to: 'It's what I want to be in the future, what I want to happen to me.'

In considering the role that Missy Elliot plays in Honey's fantasy, she emerges not only as a role model but also as a figure of wisdom because she stands as the much-anticipated adjudicator of Honey's potential. Being someone who understands first-hand the nature of her plight, Missy Elliot gives Honey

the kind of opportunity that she has missed from the people whom she lives with. Seeing that the encounter takes place in a dance studio, which we have already suggested as having heavenly qualities, the character of Missy Elliot conjures up a divine image. Honey's meeting with her has been much anticipated and difficult to accomplish. She also holds the ability to unlock Honey's realization of a deep-seated desire. It is an understanding of the divine spirit that has been imprisoned in matter and concealed deep within the darkness of the mind, thereby representing the Self that is hidden in identification with the ego (Edinger 1972:102).

An association with the divine would be quite appropriate in the case of Honey since she is among those youth who find much meaning from attending church regularly. In the focus group discussion she argues the point that going to church is not about trying to put up a front and making one's parents happy. Honey speaks about the fact that every time we go to church, a special message awaits us and we should simply go to church every Sunday to receive that special message. We should not concern ourselves with who we see at church or how well we are dressed. It has to do with going beyond the mere conscious observation of the ritual into a deeper realm of need.

In talking about the obstacles that we often encounter on our life journey, Honey immediately mentions the value of being faithful in her religious observance. It is what she believes will take away the obstacles that prevent her from achieving her dream. Honey's disciplined and regular church attendance takes us back once again to the alchemical association of purification that anticipates the emergence of a dormant energy. It is also strengthened by the identification of Sophia as divine Wisdom in finding release for her hidden treasure.

### **Finding Approval of Hidden Potential**

When Honey finally gets her opportunity to audition before Missy Elliot, there is not much doubt or even any question about Honey's obvious talent. Honey is therefore an instant success and we notice that there is no deliberation over

any terms and conditions that we often find associated with a contract. Missy Elliot simply declares: 'this girl is hot.... sign her on.' The contract therefore does not portray any meaning of being bound or confined to any limited notion of work. It actually comes to signify quite the opposite especially if one considers Honey's demeanor on hearing the good news. She immediately throws her hands up in the air and looks up into the sky, shouting 'alleluia.' The image is therefore one of victory and it conveys the clear message that she has finally found what she has worked so hard to achieve: the recognition of her sense of value. This approval is symbolic of a transformative process synonymous with the victories achieved by mythical heroes, where a once vilified victim emerges as one who has vanquished the dark forces of repression (Jacobi 1959:117).

Honey draws a clear association between her fantasy story and that of the film *Honey*. It is the story of a tenacious dancer living in an impoverished neighborhood, teaching dance to the teenagers of that community. Her opportunity for a big break in her career eventually comes to pass but with a malevolent twist. The video director who casts her in a music video does so only in expectation of the dancer's servile fulfillment of his sexual desires. Her decision to back down from the contract results in her dance school being sabotaged but her tenacity wins through when she works tirelessly to establish a dance benefit and continue her admirable work. (IMDb 2003).

A sense of tenacity emerges from Honey's fantasy world, as depicted in her clay symbol (Figure 4.1). The CD is a solid image and it is the energy behind her dance, just as the unconscious is the energy behind all our conscious activity. It expresses the strength of her intentions, the strong perseverance against all odds such that there is no need to give up on finding treasures that might be difficult to achieve. It is also a further expression of the values that youth such as Honey possess: hard work and determination.

The treasure that Honey finds in her fantasy is not only the approval that has been hidden away in her real world. It is also an indication of her potential to emerge as a person of influence in her community, as represented in the

heroic image of the film lead role. Her task, however, is to find release from the servile fulfillment of her family's constraining expectations and being shunned by her neighbors. It is this refining process that holds the promise of releasing the potency of a superstar.

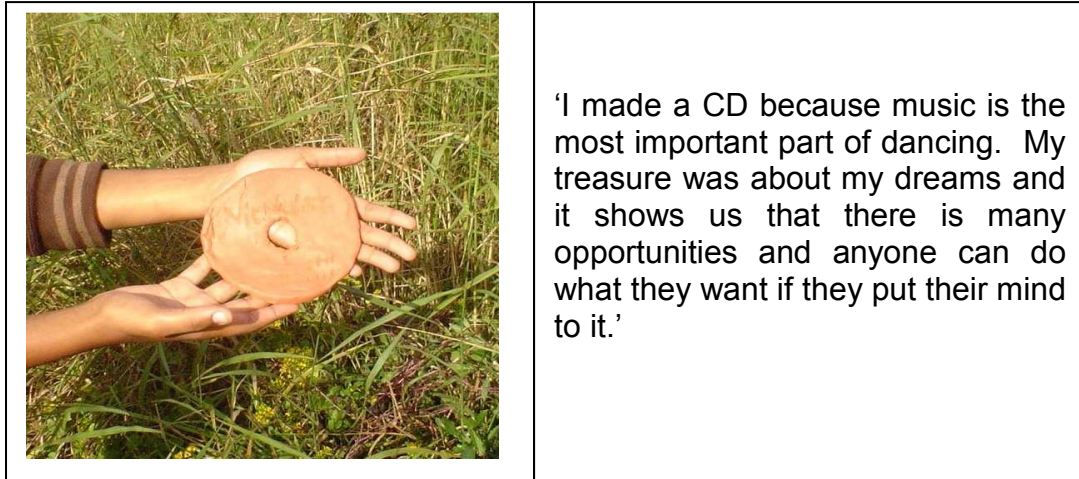


Figure 4.1

University of Cape

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE: IDENTIFYING CORE VALUES AND NEEDS**

Now that I have unearthed the buried treasure of unconscious symbolic expressions, we are in a favorable position to appreciate the value that they hold in the real life experience of our participants. Drawing on the case study analyses and focus group discussion material, I shall set out to establish what these youth hold as most valuable to them. The treasures discovered by Alice, Shrek and Honey have opened up important themes that will now be discussed in confluence with streams of thought that have emerged from the remaining participants.

The purpose of this chapter is to firstly trace a pattern of recurring values that lie within the unconscious psyche of these youth. Although they find expression through different symbols, their associations with real life experiences reveal common themes. These themes form the basis of our evaluation; an appreciation of the energy that influences their behavior patterns. We shall then consider the factors that have led to the stifling of these values and what needs emerge from this muted potential. In so doing, we journey to the centre of their personal worlds and locate the circumstances around which their social behavior revolves.

#### **Evaluating the Treasure**

The values associated with most treasures take on a particularly lucid nature through the focus groups discussions. Here participants found a liberating space in which they were not constrained, as they often experience in their ordinary circumstances of home and school. In this context they speak of feeling a need to live up to expectations and fit into a mould that they constantly rebel against. The sincerity with which they applied themselves to the discussions is expressed in various closing comments: 'can we have two more questions? This is interesting stuff.' Besides the actual value of the treasures uncovered through animated discussion, participants also realized the value of being given the space to be heard: 'Thank you for listening.'

These spontaneous responses serve to strengthen the notion that the space created for discussion was safe enough to explore relevant issues with great depth. It therefore allows for reliable data to build an authentic understanding.

### **Autonomous Identity**

The emancipation that Shrek realizes, expressed through the refining symbolism of fire, is an awakening of his innate power. He therefore enables a new facet of his personality to emerge, one that he considers a treasure that he will use in future battles. This awakening of consciousness is just as prevalent in Alice's treasure of the book of knowledge. Even though she is unable to open it at the moment of its discovery, it remains a symbol of her own new voice. It is one that she has had to refine through the discordance of her bad angel and the evil queen against her good angel. Likewise, Honey's hard-earned accolade of the dance contract allows her to emerge in a new light both to herself and to those who vilified her as a bad influence in her community.

What each of the participants identify as treasure has always been present but hidden or repressed. What we thereby recognize as a new sense of self is actually a hidden or repressed identity. In order to understand this state of repression it would be instructive to firstly consider the Jungian perspective of ego and Self. According to this understanding, all human development is marked by the separation of the ego from Self, although not a complete disconnection. As the human psyche grows to understand the need to facilitate independent living as free from infantile dependencies, it claims its autonomy. It is essential for the ego or individual personality to still nurture a connectedness to the Self since the ego continues to actuate the identity of the Self. It is the energy that guides and directs all conscious activity. This healthy relationship between ego and Self is what Edinger describes as the ego-Self axis (1972:6). In the case of our participants however, the ego-Self axis has been damaged since the ego has become alienated from the Self (:12). The autonomous power contained within the Self has not been recognized but rather repressed and the ego has therefore associated itself

with such repressive forces. This identification is expressed in various alter ego characters like the evil queen who turns Alice into a violent monster, causing her much despair since this is not the person she really wants to be.

Violence and despair are commonly attributed to a state of alienation. It is a most undesirable state since the Self is meant to give foundation, structure and security to the ego as well as providing meaning and purpose. When the connection is broken, the result is emptiness (Edinger 1972:43). Here we find a strong theme recurring throughout the focus group discussions where the connection between a sense of emptiness and violence is clearly articulated:

‘... and you know when you are empty, it’s like err, you tend to go and do bad stuff. ‘Cause you trying to fill that empty space, ‘cause you living your life in regret. You never did what you wanted to do... you do all these things you don’t understand yourself. It’s not you doing it, like you end up being nasty to people, fighting all the time, arguments but it’s not you. You just trying to fill that space.’

These ‘things’ that the participants speak of failing to understand would refer to the deviant behavior patterns that have come to be identified with them. Even though they too have associated themselves with this apparent identity of social deviants, they also admit that it is not descriptive of their true identity. The alter egos of the witch, the evil queen and other villains in the fantasy role-plays only express the despair that these youth experience from the destructive influences associated with them. The theme of doing battle with forces of darkness is a defining feature of the struggle for self-identity. Dragons and witches, as we have already encountered in the role-plays, are typically guardians of gold and hidden treasure, representing hidden values or ‘golden seeds’ (Jacobi 1959:156). It is therefore only in the eventual defiance or defeat of these constraining forces that the treasure is released: the treasure of autonomous power contained in the Self.

### **Courage and Self-Reliance**

The kind of energy contained and constrained within the Self of these youth, is glimpsed at through the value they attribute to being courageous. This idea is built on the image of battle that emerges in the ubiquitous scenes of combat

acted out in the role-plays. A seminal example would be the stand-off between Shrek and the wicked witch. Despite the potential danger imposed by the task, he realizes that he has to face the challenge alone. In finding his symbolic fire, which brings him victory, Shrek awakens to a consciousness of courage within his self-identity. The idea is echoed by other participants in the focus group who talk about the challenge of 'stepping up to the plate.' Here we appreciate what the participants describe as the need for courage: 'It's really got to do with courage... when you got a solution and you just too afraid to say it and then when the problem happens you like: 'ey, if I said something things would have changed but I don't have the courage to do it.'

The value attributed to being courageous is associated with hero figures that the participants further discuss. They speak of their admiration for people who stand up for what they believe in and thereby make a difference for the better even at the expense of being ostracized and standing apart from what they describe as 'the mob.' A key example would be the case of one participant who struggled to find acceptance in her adoptive family, until her foster brother stood up against his own sisters to defend and look out for the young girl. In so doing he boldly faced the difficulty of being ostracized by some of his own family as well. Jung speaks of this notion of courage or boldness as being associated with the hero archetype that is clearly present among the participants. Accordingly, there is a risk involved and this risk must be taken if the meaning of life is not to be violated; a violation that leads to a state of hopelessness or emptiness (Jung 1956:354).

The theme of emptiness therefore plays itself out once again in the pattern of being constrained as opposed to tapping the productive energy of their archetypal heroes. Although much discussion centers around an inability to show courage in real life, the active imagination role-plays abound in this unconscious energy. Honey's rigorous dance routine, for example, sees her standing alone and apart from her friends who even try to distract her disciplined focus. The image of doing battle is also evident in this case since dance is a highly competitive activity for most youth in Honey's neighborhood. Dance competitions are often called 'battles,' where competitors are expected

to battle each other out until there is one winner who claims victory. When signing up as a competitor, dancers therefore accept the risk of defeat and failure in the esteem of a menacing audience. Although Honey has never 'done battle' on the dance floor, her fantasy victory is an expression of the value she attributes to bearing such courage in standing up amidst the crowd and being recognized.

The contrast between fantasy and real life is not as vast as it appears to be since the content of participants' imaginative worlds also find traces in their conscious activity. Johnson reminds us that both worlds are reliable and genuine self-expressions but we often have a tendency to dismiss fantasy as figments of our imagination and therefore misleading or false (1986:19). This tendency is present within the domestic relationships that most participants share, in which they voice their frustration of not being listened to: 'They make us angry because they don't wanna listen to what we have to say. They think we are crazy or too big for our boots.' However when they are given an opportunity to speak, as in the focus groups, traces of their core values emerge in an indirect manner. For instance, much of the discussion around obstacles to finding treasure in real life centers around a strong sense of self-reliance. What they are alluding to is a belief that if they are to find their imaginary treasures in real life, they will only look to themselves to succeed in this mission.

The attributes of courage, as identified by the participants themselves, find an indirect but nevertheless sincere expression in their natural tendency to be self-reliant. These include the stance of standing alone, being steadfast in what you believe and a sense of confidence in being successful. However, what we observe is that their self-reliance turns itself into a strong feeling of mistrust towards other people. They speak of being able to make their own decisions and not trusting anyone besides just themselves: 'To tell you the truth, me I don't trust no-one. I'll get to my treasure myself. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.' Here we trace the picture of a hostile world in which these youth feel threatened, alone and surrounded by more enemies

than friends. The value they treasure in being courageous is therefore lived out through the disguised attitude of being self-reliant.

What therefore emerges is that the response to feelings of emptiness or dissatisfaction with their home environment does not only lead to violence. Many of these youth also retreat into quiet spaces where they feel safe from what seems to be the hostile influences of authority figures such as parents. They will not speak to anyone at home but silently bear the strain of carrying issues that they prefer to deal with on their own and according to the directives that they set for themselves. It is a tortuous path to follow and sometimes parents would speak of their concern over a child who 'never says a word to anyone about what's on his mind... how can I help him if he says nothing to me?'

This pattern also continues at school, where teachers would speak of learners who sit quietly at the back of the class and not contribute to any discussion or even produce homework assignments. Still, they are intelligent young people and by no means lazy or idle. They could hold down a cogent argument on world issues with the few people whom they associate or compose volumes of poetry that they would rather keep to themselves. They choose to configure their own rules and defy the expectations of their family and school teachers. These same youth would engage in multi-partner relationships, smoke marijuana or skip school to stroll on the beach all by themselves. These are the kind of activities in which they find meaning, instead of what they would call the 'boring 'ol routine' of mainstream society.

### **Hard Work and Responsibility**

When Alice finds her book of knowledge locked, we associate the symbol with a tendency of holding back in accepting responsibility for her new found autonomous self. Although she expresses this reservation about her treasure, she still ascribes much value to it since she doesn't discard it like the ring but takes it along into her world of origin. The notion of responsibility is further developed in Honey's fantasy of diligent preparation for her hard-won

recognition. She thereby points out to us her appreciation of the fact that autonomy implies taking responsibility for oneself. In order to win over the confidence of her fantasy role-model, she engages in a refining process of transformation which involves hard work. She is well aware of the sacrifices she needs to make on her behalf in order to claim her autonomy. Both girls have similar real-life experiences in terms of their associations with gangs and developing a notorious reputation but their core values betray these aberrant behavior patterns. When Alice gives back the ring to the wicked queen and Honey refuses the distractive influence of her friends, they express an inherent impulse of desiring to be responsible for their own choices.

Accepting the consequences of one's choices is also a recurring theme throughout the focus group discussions and it encapsulates the participants' understanding of responsibility. In talking about the possibility they see of finding their treasure in real life, there is a strong sense of the need to 'work for it... work hard for it. You think about it and you aim for it and you strive towards it.' The understanding is compatible with archetypal heroic journeys, where struggle, determination and sacrifice are considered most necessary for winning over hidden or protected treasure that is characteristically hard to attain (Jung 1956:331). The struggle that these youth maintain is their inability to complete this metaphoric heroes journey since they go off looking for treasure but do not return. They cannot find their re-integration with the community but remain on the outskirts. It does not mean that they are incompetent or that they have failed their task. It is rather that they do not find the kind of mentoring that any mythic hero finds through the wise old man, the sagacious woman or the sorcerer. They are on their own and they struggle to clearly identify what is valuable to them. That is why they make choices that seem irresponsible and callous, however responsibility is a value they still possess.

In expressing the value of responsibility, participants identify the heroic element of sacrifice since they speak of the need to distance themselves from friends who show signs of apathy. Such examples of apathy include being expelled from school through disruptive behavior and wasting one's life

smoking marijuana. Their conscious rejection of such behavior speaks of a belief in the value of working hard to achieve autonomy from the infantile dependencies that constrain them, needing to accept responsibility for the choices they make. The clarity of their thought process is arresting in the way that it follows quite logically and seems quite easy to do even though they have difficulty accepting it in practice: 'You done the crime, so do the time.' Here they speak of the consequences that one needs to accept from engaging in deviant activity such as robbing a shop or getting caught in possession of drugs. Punishment is viewed as a necessary means of learning from one's mistakes and never repeating the offence. In this sense punishment is considered as a means of justice, as expressed in some of the role-plays that depicted unruly school learners being locked up in a prison cell. The protagonists in these cases are the school principals or policemen who execute the punishment. It is interesting that participants, who are themselves guilty of perpetrating violence against others and also disregarding of authority, would see themselves as the same authority figures in their imagination. However in speaking about their role in such fantasies, they express the importance of helping the perpetrator and they consider them as victims in the sense of needing help to 'find their way in life.' These reflections are telling of the needs they have to find the appropriate help in putting right what has gone wrong in their own lives.

Inasmuch as the participants present very cogent and credible arguments for living out the value of hard work and responsibility, the unfortunate reality is that they struggle to follow through with such ideals in their real life experience. Although none of them have yet been arrested or convicted, they are certainly among those whom they themselves criticize for dropping out of school and smoking marijuana. Many have experienced the penalties of school disciplinary hearings and expulsion, but they too have not learnt from their mistakes and have become repeat offenders of violent and disruptive behavior. Be that as it may, the value they ascribe to responsibility maintains a dormant presence until they come to face challenging circumstances. The wilderness camps that they regularly attend are opportunities for such challenge, when the usual secure comforts of home are abandoned. These

are instances when those among the participants of this research would stand out as taking responsibility when others are injured or lagging behind on a hike, when a search party needs to be sent out for a lost group, or when the rain keeps everyone at camp and the group is wanting of spontaneous activity. At such times these youth, who are often labeled as lazy, irresponsible and incompetent, emerge as responsible and hard working leaders. We come to find that the values they ascribe to are eclipsed by overriding circumstances that shadow their potential; a trajectory that we are now about to explore.

### **Seasons of Emptiness**

The hidden values of autonomy, courage and responsibility are the treasures that help us understand what gives these youth their sense of meaning and purpose. This is the energy of their self-identity that, as we have come to understand, is restrained in their everyday lives. An illustration of this state of disconnection or disengagement is seen in instances where youth who start out at drama workshops, in preparation for a stage production, are initially reserved. The improvisation sessions invite youth to step up to the stage and perform a short sequence, causing much anxiety but also offering the thrill of adulation from the rest of the cast who become the audience. Those youth who accept the challenge are delighted at the power they are able to wield from their audience whereas those who shy away from the opportunity do so with a sense of regret, knowing that they could have achieved the same fulfillment of their potential. These are the same youth who find it difficult to participate in other socializing environments such as school. Teachers speak of them as bright students but 'too lazy to study.' However, what we have come to see as an inability, rather than laziness, is the actual cause of feeling the sense of emptiness that we have already identified. Their potential to work hard, to be responsible and courageous is not realized and so they slip into a state of feeling unfulfilled, being regretful and therefore angry about what they want to achieve but cannot.

For others, it is more a feeling of being inadequate and therefore lacking in the kind of confidence needed to take responsibility for a particular action. Such youth would simply feel that they are not good enough, that they don't belong to a group that puts forward expectations that they see as being far beyond them. An illustration of this holding back can be traced in the example of a participant who backed down from an audition for a lead role in a musical being staged by a professional company. She speaks of going to the audition but turning back on seeing the large crowd of candidates who 'looked so prepared with their music scores and bottled water and there I was... this scruffy township girl.' Yet, on seeing the show, she admits that she could have pulled off that role quite easily especially considering the more intricate vocal ranges she has carried off in other 'amateur' shows. She often speaks about her deep sense of regret and emptiness for not being able to step forward when she had the opportunity to do so. These extensive feelings are well expressed in some of the clay symbols that resemble hollow containers, a blank sheet or a picture-less frame: Figures 4.7, 4.20, 4.18.

In such seasons of emptiness, these youth are prone to behave in a way that even they identify as not being expressive of who they really are. These are times of reckless behavior where often the most respectful and sanguine youth literally turn into unrecognizable villains. They would steal away to remote or abandoned parts of their neighborhood such as the sports ground or a dilapidated street known as 'the gully'. Here they find refuge in the company of other youth who sit around smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol the whole night. Often these evenings start out on a very leisurely and jovial tone but as the indulging consumption of intoxicating substances intensifies, so do the dark feelings of emptiness and anger. They find tragic release in some of the most horrific brawls that are never ended until blood has been drawn.

Episodes of intoxication and violence often continue for days, with parents claiming to be dumbfounded and helpless at the sight of their disheveled and sometimes bloodied children staggering into the house late on a Sunday evening. They appear disorientated and when reprimanded about where they

have been over the weekend, they react in fits of violent rage. These include physical abuse against their parents or anyone else at home who attempts to reprimand them for behavior that is considered unacceptable. The tension that such episodes bring about leads these youth to be kicked out of their homes. They then go out to find refuge at the home of a sympathetic relative or even come knocking at the youth centre asking for help. This help comes in the form of a listening ear to assuage the emotional pain of being ostracized, which they would attest to being misunderstood. At the outset, it seems almost ludicrous for a drunken teenager to stagger into his home, shout insults at his parents for being reprimanded and then claim to be misunderstood. However, it remains their emphatic plea that this is not a true reflection of who they really are '... you go back feeling sad because it's not you, it's not your nature.'

The difficulty that our participants express in presenting a sincere reflection of their values, is an ongoing struggle that seems to exacerbate itself at every instance of feeling regret and emptiness. After their violent tempers have subsided and the enervating effects of the drugs have worn off, they find their way back home again. They try to evade the memory of their violent episode by retreating into quiet spaces at home, almost becoming invisible. However they are constantly plagued by their inability to 'step up to the plate' and take responsibility for what they want to achieve, leading them back into a cyclic pattern of violent and aberrant behavior: '... you feeling empty everyday and everybody thinks you're an arse. In the end you just believe that... ey look: this is who I am so maybe I should keep doing it. Everybody hates me.'

Outrage and violence are not the only expressions of this inability to recognize their potential, or the pain of their emptiness. Deviant behavior also manifests itself through retreating into self-indulgent actions that may seem comforting or immediately consoling to the urgency of filling empty spaces. Some youth would engage in smoking marijuana either by themselves but more often in closed groups of friends. They could spend up to an entire week absenting themselves from school while staying at the home of a friend whose single mother might be away on a work project. With the house to themselves they

would indulge in 'smoking that green (marijuana) just to take the edge off, you know... just forget all that negative stuff.' In this kind of escape, they also speak of 'taking it to the extremes' by smoking much more than a regular teenager might want to just experiment with. They have therefore clearly surpassed the realm of trying out the habit from sheer curiosity. They know very well the kind of inebriating effects of the drug and they willingly give way to the hold that it has over them. It is such that they are only assuaged from smoking as many 'sloops' as it may take for them to pass out for several hours. Although most of the participants have openly admitted to smoking marijuana as the only drug they indulge in, others have also spoken of using harder substances such as cocaine.

The desperate search for comfort also expresses itself through exclusive relationships in which youth are drawn into spending large portions of their time with partners whom they have chosen and made commitments to. But these relationships are not merely fleeting episodes of teenage infatuation. Boys especially speak of the incessant need to partner up with a girl who gives him a sense of affirmation, who 'makes me feel good about myself again.' They make open declarations of their attraction towards each other, buy each rings and commit as much time together as possible, sometimes even skipping school to spend the day at one of their homes while parents are away at work. The commitments that they make to each other include the promise of sexual relations such that a boy would not partner up with a girl if she refuses to sleep with him. However, the regular intensity of such commitments leave these youth feeling 'bored with each other' or 'trapped' and after a few weeks they go looking for another partner who will satisfy this same need. They are well aware of the risks involved in such indiscriminate affairs but the needs they seem to experience go far beyond the logic of conventional reasoning in such instances. The desperation to alleviate the fear and pain of their emptiness is echoed in the reflections of Magadien, a convicted gangster whose story is documented in *The Number*. As he recalls his childhood experience of losing someone who served as a father figure he speaks of his constant emptiness of being ostracized by other male figures who entered into relationships with his mother: 'I was very sore. I was worried

about where love was going to come from' (Steinberg 2004:85). It is therefore a severe and intense need that youth grapple with. The recurring seasons of emptiness occlude even their own belief in the values that constitute their self-identity. Every such season seems to bury their treasure ever deeper and lead them astray in their elusive search to find it.

### **Inadequate Symbol Containers**

When looking for the autonomous power they grapple to find in socially acceptable agencies like school and family, the youth in question turn to places of social aberrance. Places such as the deserted sports ground or the derelict 'gully' seem inappropriate containers of treasures such as the autonomy of courage, self-reliance, hard work and responsibility. It might seem more appropriate to say that such places take away these values since they become slavishly addicted to the sense of power that they find from the drugs and alcohol: 'when you drink, like everything seems just perfect.' As discordant as the association may appear, it is necessary to pursue its significance since their instinctual attraction to such places of discord speaks of the value they project in this regard. On a literal plane we could easily say that they are looking for what they really want in the wrong places but unless we delve into a more symbolic understanding, we too might misunderstand these youth.

When Edinger presents his theory of alienation or the loss of meaning and purpose, he speaks of the psychic energy of the Self being unable to find expression due to the breakdown of social structures that are meant to contain these archetypal symbols. Out of the several possible consequences that he presents, his argument for psychic reprojectio is most appropriate to our understanding of the behavior observed among the research participants. Accordingly, energy that is restrained or unable to find expression through established and socially acceptable agencies such as the family will reproject itself into secular movements. These movements might not be universally accepted and therefore the way in which they interpret a system of values may bring about social conflict. To this extent they are never adequate

containers for archetypal symbols inasmuch as they lead to conflict rather than cohesion (Edinger 1972:68).

The conflict that Edinger talks about is what our participants often refer to as the misunderstanding they experience from their parents and other authoritative figures such as their school teachers. However it is also indicative of their internal conflict as evidenced in the way that they speak of their violent tendencies: 'this is not me.' It takes us back to what we have already established as the damaged ego-Self axis. Seeing that the ego is restrained from association with the positive and nurturing energy of the Self, it has reprojected itself onto the repressive forces that have come to contain these symbols. These, being inadequate containers, have brought about the consequential effects of conflict and antinomy in the behavior patterns of these youth.

The case of Alice's relationship with her mother is a telling example of the way this theory actualizes itself among the narratives of most of our participants. The value that Alice unconsciously attaches to taking autonomous responsibility over the relationships she shares is simply not contained in the social construct of her family. Instead, she is exposed to the repressive forces of servitude from her maternal influence. This is the breakdown of social structures that result in such youth being led astray in their search for meaning. So as Alice finds what she considers to be an appropriate association with the drug syndicate that she has become enmeshed with, it is only due to her misdirected efforts to follow the promptings of her self-identity. She has been unconsciously taught, by the example of her mother, to submit to others and abandon one's self interests but this can only lead to disastrous effects as expressed in the symbolism of the ring that turns her into a monster.

What is true of Alice's struggle for meaning through inadequate containers, sounds itself out along with the youth who find recourse to marginal communities such as the gully. Here they project their values of autonomous courage albeit in an inappropriate manner. The behavior that they indulge in

takes much courage since it is risky and death-defying, almost like the impending danger of fighting off a dragon or wicked witch as they do in their fantasies. They are aware of the dangers of being arrested, of being injured in a fight, of overdosing on the toxic substances they imbibe or contracting HIV from illicit sexual behavior. Those who participate in these activities take on the status of a hero within this sub-culture. They brandish their achievement of smoking the most 'sloops' and being able to throw the most fatal blow in a fight. It almost mimics the accolades that these youth are capable of achieving under the more acceptable circumstances such as a school awards function. However their inability to participate in these agencies, or rather their reprojected values into inadequate containers, holds them at the margins of their community as social deviants, unable to access socially acceptable accolades.

### **Damaged Parental Identities**

The influence of parental identities in the social construction of meaning among our participants now emerges as an important theme. The cases of Alice and Shrek particularly demonstrate how these influences hold a restraining power in the example of dominating mothers and abusive or absent fathers. While Honey also experiences the dominating influence of her extended family, she further points to the needs that arise from absent parents both in the story of the death of her mother and also being barred from contact with her father. What Edinger identifies as the pivotal role of symbol containers in social structures, is further developed by Harding's understanding of the parental image as a container of life (Harding 1965:144).

### **The Great Mother**

In considering the parental image as a container of archetypal energy, we begin with the principal of the Great Mother archetype that we all bear in our unconscious. This is considered the deepest and most poignant relationship in the course of human development since it contains the caring, protective and nurturing energy that serve as primal elements of our welfare (Harding

1965:11). In order to appreciate this principal within the trajectories of our participants, we need only consider the maternal symbols that feature so prominently in their fantasy role-play. Alice and Honey, for instance express images of being encapsulated in a womb-like world through their imagining of the circular, contoured castle and the buffered recording studio. Similar structures such as caves, tunnels and canyons also featured prominently in other role-play scenarios. Furthermore it is important to consider the globular shapes that characterize the clay symbols created by the participants as unconscious expressions of their internal worlds: Figures 4.7, 4.19, 4.28. These recurring patterns are telling of the extent to which the Great Mother archetype constitutes a vital presence among the symbols of meaning that are constructed.

The vital role of the maternal archetype finds fulfillment through the primal relationship of a child's natural mother or the person substituting for her. To this extent, she is the person who contains, nourishes, protects and warms the child who is affectively bound to her. The provision of these primal needs affords the developing child security and thereby removes any threat to his or her existence. This gives her the quality of being transpersonal or archetypal in the sense that what she represents for this child is the source of intrinsic well-being. Her influence on the child is therefore pivotal to the extent that the loss of the mother is infinitely more than the loss of a source of food. Her presence or her absence is felt less in the bodily than in the psychic sphere (Neumann 1973:21). A child could therefore receive sufficient physical nourishment in order to survive but in the absence of maternal affection the child is left wanting. They are disconnected from the maternal energy of the self that is meant to nourish their ego or personality development.

In the primacy of the relationship between mother and child, her unconscious behavior is what enables the child to associate and connect with their own innate mother energy. Her role is therefore vital to the development of that child into adolescence and adulthood. Instances of too much or too little attention are both equally negative and gives rise to a damaged parental identity. Considering the family histories of our participants, either of these

extremes can be traced in all of their narratives. In most cases, the patterns of a dominant and overbearing mother are clearly manifest. These instances are also largely characterized by the phenomenon of single parent households of absent fathers. The mother image is therefore the only parental image that these youth are associated with since fathers have either abandoned their responsibility or been restricted from contact with their children due to abusive tendencies. Among those cases of absent mothers, this loss is largely attributed to death from HIV related illnesses thereby making foster care the substituting maternal presence. However these have also become instances of deprivation that have consequently had damaging effects on the Great Mother archetype. Among these participants foster care has been an experience of feeling ostracized and even at times abused by substitutive mother images, leaving the young person with a sense of longing that is difficult to assuage:

‘I always like sit and I think, you know... what I lack is a mother’s love, that warmth... the fact that I don’t know who she is. She died when I was a baby. My foster mother did more damage than ever... so ya, like nobody can really fill that space.’

Here we see traces of the longing that many of these youth grapple with, setting them apart from regular developmental patterns that assume the place of a nurturing mother figure who ignites this same energy within her child, so that they look after their own needs independently. The way in which our participants respond to this deficiency in their own development is to go looking for it through the kind of activity that will give immediate satisfaction for such comfort: the high of inebriation, the physical intimacy of sexual contact, the affirmation of belonging to a gang-like sub culture, the containment and protection of withdrawing into quiet spaces and disengaging from society.

### **Overindulgent Maternal Influences**

The attachment that a child naturally experiences towards a mother is a regular response to the nurturing role that she fulfills, thereby activating the child’s own innate sense of being protected and secure enough to venture out on one’s own. The expectation therefore is that a young person finds release

from this mother-world by a new birth. If, however, this attraction is felt too strongly then the development of one's freedom is jeopardized and the new birth into autonomy is restrained. Such patterns emerge when mothers take on the role of being overindulgent with their children, to the extent that the child comes to a complete identification with the mother. Harding notes that this phenomenon is especially prevalent in young men, with the result that they become unable to make a life of their own (1965:9). It evokes a state of helplessness and despair, as seen in the case of Shrek's strife torn world that is overwhelmed by the destructive influence of the wicked witch.

The participants engage in an animated discussion about similar patterns in their own lives, while on the subject of obstacles to their treasures. They speak of mothers who seem too afraid to give them their own space, who lay down rules that are unrealistic and paranoid: 'They wanna live their life through us... they are mad. Some guys can't even stand outside with their bras (friends).' One of the young men, who is often a reserved presence in the group, expresses this experience of living a muted existence in his role-play that unfolds as follows: A boy takes his pet dog and cat to the veterinarian for emergency treatment. Just as the surgeon is about to cut open the animals, the boy receives a message informing him that the animals can speak; an ability he has never recognized before. He then affords them this opportunity to have their say and they joyfully declare that they are actually not sick but just craving a bowl of lasagna, which happens to be their favorite meal. In this context he speaks of his feeling blocked, sad and miserable due to the overwhelming protection he receives from his mother.

This unnatural protection stifles their search for autonomy and takes away their treasured independence that is part of a natural process of development within the transitional stage of child to adult (Kiepenheuer 1990:3). It is for this reason that teenagers are often described as rebellious and to a large extent this is expected since it is within their nature to challenge convention on their way to creating an independent frame of thought for themselves. In a healthy and regular parent to child relationship, this space is respectfully created with authority figures guiding the young person towards a responsible

living out of their independence or autonomy. In the case of deviant youth, however, they are denied this space and guidance. They feel imprisoned within their homes, not being able to configure the process of independent decision-making and therefore respond to this external influence by breaking out of the confine. They do so through violent outrage, silent defiance, bringing scandal to their family through behavior that they know to be against the rules of their society. It is their legitimate need to identify themselves within their own personality but achieved through illegitimate means of aberrant behavior. The depth of this need is expressed in such fantasy symbols as a canyon, where one of the participants places his story. He is alone here and he feels peaceful, uninterrupted and free to discover his own space. Such sentiments are also portrayed in clay symbols that give the idea of surpassing boundaries, as birds fly freely across vast territories: Figures 4.9, 4.19, 4.21.

The debilitating influence of overindulgent mothers is also evident in the way that values such as hard work and responsibility are taken away from their children. They are often left in a situation where they are so accustomed to being literally bailed out by their mothers, that the consequences of their actions cannot influence their decisions to rather not engage in behavior that is harmful to them. Some mothers would even throw themselves into a fight to save their children from being beaten up, instead of allowing the child to accept the harsh but realistic consequences of their decision. It is also not uncommon for such mothers to give up their entire salaries to release their children from the debt of owing to drug dealers, even while having numerous household bills to pay. Among those participants for whom this pattern rings true, Alice stands out very clearly through the symbol of her book of knowledge that remains locked; an indication of her difficulty to deal with the responsibility that constitutes her choices.

### **Hostile and Absent Parental Influences**

Inasmuch as the overindulgent mother pattern results in a damaged innate maternal image, so does the experience of a child who grows up with one

who has not been a loving or fostering parent. The parental image therefore takes on a negative and destructive nature since the primal relationship here between parent and child is hostile rather than friendly, cruel instead of kind. The unfortunate result of such experiences is that the child's development is dwarfed or distorted. Apart from the instance of a hostile mother, the same effects are also experienced by the absent parent, which in most cases happens to be the father. In those cases where the father may be present, experiences of hostility may also result from abusive behavior. Collectively, these influences result in a young people growing up with the message that they are not loved, accepted or valued in their own individual personalities (Harding 1965:11).

One of the most striking examples of both a hostile and absent father is articulated by Shrek who often speaks longingly of being in contact with his father, even despite the unkindly manner in which his father has denied him. In other examples, participants speak of fathers who visit their children only to steal whatever they can make money of to support their own drug habits. Those who have had to live under the circumstances of foster families, following the death of their mother, speak also of the difficulty they have experienced in finding acceptance: 'Once my mother passed away I used to stay with my brother... and I didn't feel like I was accepted in this house. The thing is I never used to love myself.' These are the kind of experiences that play themselves out whenever such youth face the challenge of actualizing their potential. They back down because they have never been nurtured into respecting their sense of value and worth.

The tragic effects of damaged parental identities are most clearly seen in a young person's despair and hostility to people around them. As they struggle with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, they grow in the belief that they are inevitably unacceptable to mainstream society. They therefore retreat into marginal spaces of their communities, where they are almost doomed to be outsiders. 'Whatever they do will be wrong, whatever they desire will be forbidden' (Harding 1965:15). Here we find resonance with the kind of lifestyle lived out by our participants who likewise find refuge in marginal

spaces such as the 'gully.' It is under such circumstances that these youth can indiscriminately engage in self-destructive behavior, being deprived and unaware of their autonomous value. This is based on the premise that it becomes more permissible to destroy what one does not value, as opposed to what is consciously treasured.

### **The Necessity of Transformation**

In each of the fantasy role-plays, one of the strongest trajectories is that of change. The protagonist undertakes a journey in which the character that emerges from the imaginary world is substantially different from the one who first entered the secret tunnel. The most dramatic example of this change is evident in the journey of Honey who starts out as an ordinary girl-next-door, only to emerge from the dance studio as an international star. This is the hero energy that is characteristically traced in the development of youth, as played out in other role-plays through the victorious struggle over witches and evil queens. What these symbols express is the crossroads that a young person has reached, between the dependency of childhood and the independence of adulthood (Kiepenheuer 1990:3). It is therefore a natural progression in the development of any youth; a necessary time of transformation.

In the case of our participants, this necessity and the natural process of their development has been hampered by their damaged ego-Self axis, or what we have also come to see as a damaged parental identity. They have been alienated from the parental archetype contained within their self-identity, allowing them no viable projection of this energy since the examples of parenthood they experience are oppressive and destructive of their innate value. The treasure of autonomous identity is therefore constantly elusive. Their means to find it has been hidden away by parent figures who have overpowered and debilitated them. It is as though their development has been stalled such that they remain fixed in the world of their childhood. Perhaps the most telling example of this fixation is found in the participant Shrek, who makes his own identification with this child-like cartoon world. He therefore expresses a difficulty in finding a more appropriate, adult image for

this developing self. In the absence of adequate containers for this symbolic energy, they go looking in places that identify them with deviant behavior that involves great risk and danger.

Pinnock identifies this time of transformation as being a critical process of becoming. Inasmuch as it is a time filled with enormous potential for growth, it is also a time filled with danger when youth display a great desire to test their mettle and their need to be accepted as heroes is paramount (Pinnock 1997:10). Among our youth in question, these tendencies are manifested in behavior such as the deliberate defiance of a school dress code. Boys would, for instance, wear earrings or style their hair with spikes and girls would wear their skirts above the recommended length or display excessive costume jewelry. The penalty for such defiance involves barring them from entering the school or singling them out at the morning assembly. However, this attention causes them to emerge as heroes in the esteem of their colleagues who admire their bravery. Such bravery also has more tragic consequences when they try to outdo each other over the amount of marijuana they can smoke, the number of sexual partners they can 'conquer' or the most blood that they can draw in a brawl. It becomes a desperate attempt to transform themselves from the childish dependencies that they feel a need to now outgrow. There is a single goal behind this behavior: adult respect (:12). It is therefore not merely their behavior that calls for attention but rather the more urgent need to experience their own essential transformation.

### **Perceiving Needs Within Opaque Symbols**

The startling and at times shocking behavior patterns of our participants finds resonance with studies of gang culture such as those pioneered by Don Pinnock among street gangs in the Cape Flats during the 1980's. In understanding the inadequacy of symbolic containers, which gives rise to deviant behavior, we find that youth will seek out means to discover their treasure or claim their autonomy. They will do so through unconventional means that are not contained within the norms of society and often opposed to them, in keeping with the nature of teenagers as myth-makers. It means

that they recreate situations and worlds of significance that seem opaque to the pragmatic adult world. Here Pinnock quotes David Matza's incisive appreciation of deviance as making 'little human sense without understanding the philosophical inner life of the subject as he bestows meaning upon the events and materials that beset him' (Pinnock 1997:6). Having delved into the depth of meaning contained in the unconscious worlds of our participants we can now bring this understanding into the realm of their exterior world of deviant behavior, as we perceive their needs.

The value of this perception stems from the understanding that deviant behavior, within the context of groups resembling gangs, mimics ancient rituals that nurtured adolescent transformation (Pinnock 1997:29). In the absence of these moral and social codes of conduct, youth create gangs that provide for their archetypal or universal needs. The rituals of gangs and the patterns of behavior that they prescribe therefore hold treasures of meaning beneath their offensive appearance.

### **The Need for Separation**

One of the most telling signs of a gang is a state of differentiation from their community; a construction of the mentality of 'us' and 'them.' We therefore find groups of youth huddled together on street corners, for instance, or in other clearly defined areas such as the sports ground or the notorious 'gully' in the case of our participants. The young person's association with the group is what sparks off the process of separation. Honey's experience of being associated with the 'corner boys' is especially significant since she speaks of being shunned by her family and the rest of the community because of this association. Such a response is both desired by the young person and at the same time startling. It is desired because such a separation takes care of the natural need for severance from the protective environment of parent figures which indicate childhood and dependency (Sanyika 1996:117). However it is startling because this separation lacks the assuring quality that such a transition is afforded in formal ceremonies of traditional societies (Pinnock

1997:32). This is indicative of the lack of affirmation that many participants long for in the absence of an encouraging parental image:

‘We all just need somebody to tell us that we’re great... then how much more easier would life be... how much more confidence would everyone have... how easy it would be for everyone in the world to find their own treasure.’

A feature in each of the fantasy role-plays is the presence of a character who distracts the protagonist’s attention from their treasure, offering apparently lucrative alternatives. In these instances, the protagonist demonstrates a struggle to overcome this alluring power that effects a debilitating influence. Alice gives an apt example in her initial acceptance of the ring but similar patterns also emerge in the case of a protagonist who recovers from blindness after making the right choice, as well as the already quoted example of a pet dog and cat who discover their ability to speak after being silenced. In discussing these associations one particular story stands out as an illustration of the need for separation from restraining parental influences. It tells of the experience of a youth who got involved in an altercation with three other boys at the sports ground one Friday evening. The argument revolved around an accusation that he was flirting with the girlfriend of one of the boys who approached him. As the stand off intensified between the three boys and the youth in question, his mother soon got news of the incident and ran to the grounds in a panic. By the time she reached her son, he was already thrown to the floor with the other boys kicking him around. Without saying a word to anyone, she lunged forward and threw herself over her son in an attempt to protect him. However this over-bearing gesture only resulted in debilitating the youth’s attempts to defend himself since it did not stop the brawl. The boys kept kicking, causing him further harm and subsequent injury to his mother as well.

As we have already established, the result of such restraining influences is such that youth are prevented from taking responsibility for their actions or accepting the consequences of their decisions. It juxtaposes the value that they attach to exercising their responsibility, creating an internal conflict in which they feel drawn to stand up to the forces that threaten them and yet at

the same time they feel inadequate, falling back into the safety of childish dependencies. Separation from these tendencies, and in turn from overbearing parental images, is therefore essential in the process of reaching adulthood. Without this transition youth are bound to the parent archetype and its overwhelming unconscious influence, creating an inescapable effect that constantly holds them back from following what they may consciously be determined to do (Harding 1965:13). This is why participants speak of their difficulty to 'step up to the plate,' as well as the consequential emptiness and regret that they are haunted with.

### **The Need for Ordeal**

The graphic imagery of doing battle is common to the lifestyle of gang members who fight off rivalry for their territory and their market. Pinnock rightfully identifies the battlefield as a pivotal space in gang life since outsiders are treated with severe hostility and any threat to their prosperity sounds the call for an outright war. Youth who associate themselves with such territorial groups display a fearless demeanor and a warlike capacity, such that they always put on the appearance of looking tough or invincible. What they hope to achieve by building such a reputation is that they will be talked about by both friends and foes, and that they will come to receive recognition by the community albeit for notoriety (Pinnock 1997:45). The allure of this recognition is expressed by some participants who speak of their tendency to associate with groups that hold notorious reputations: 'If they can do it then I can do it and then maybe they'll like me better and then you just become a person that you not.' So the value that they attach to hard work and the tenacity for ordeal therefore becomes thwarted in its inadequate containment of a gang.

The more appropriate and therefore adequate projection of such value is appreciated within the context of the trials and tribulations of initiation into adult life. In cultures that still observe such rituals, the novice or adolescent is put through a series of ordeals that are meant to test their character. It is therefore a training and conditioning that prepares youth for the kind of

sacrifices that characterize adult life, as opposed to a life of infantile protection and dependency. Recognition only follows the successful completion of tasks that include challenges of hunger, thirst, fatigue, fear and pain (Sanyika 1996:118). The tough exterior image that many of the participants speak of is therefore part of their need to display their resilience in the face of ordeal. Kiepenheuer recognizes this pattern as a desire to prove their endurance: 'The ordeals must create fear in order to confer immunity' (1990:11). Dangerous tests of courage such as unlicensed driving, illegal drag racing and trafficking drugs are only some examples of the extreme lengths many participants will go to in grappling with this unrequited need.

Although the projection of their need for ordeal is often met within the disapproving circumstances of gang-associated behavior, our participants also show glimpses of such resilience under the more acceptable circumstances of the stage productions they are involved in. When workshopping dance sequences, for instance, they would attempt the most challenging moves they have seen in the media. Such moves are not only intricate but also potentially dangerous to a novice dancer. However they bravely tackle the challenge and are never satisfied until they at least conjure a recognizable image of their dance hero. The recognition that they yearn for is then realized in the enthusiastic applause of their audience.

These glimpses of bravery, courage and endurance are however short lived and far removed from their ordinary everyday experience of growing up. In this experience they lack the affirmative influence of an elder who traditionally serves as a mentor that guides the young person through the dangers of battle. Traces of this need are easily located in the wisdom figures of wizards, angels and even apparitions of deceased parents who feature prominently in their fantasy role-plays. The absence of guiding principles in their real life experience therefore creates a vacuum in which they remain oblivious to limits and warnings of danger, in order to gain status and respect. However we once again see the conflict of expectation since their boundless and deviant behavior only increases their reputation within the gang but decreases their standing in the wider community; a position they desire to hold (Pinnock

1997:50). The consequential penalties of violent, criminal behavior therefore do not influence their desperate attempts to assuage their yearning for ordeal: '... when you do it you wanna do it right now... You can't tell me: think what you do. I'll never stop... its do first and then you think later.'

### **The Need for Death and Rebirth**

In the risky as well as daring feats of ordeal, youth display an analogous oscillation between death and life. Kiepenheuer identifies these as arbitrarily interchangeable thoughts that leave them in great danger on one hand while touching on the eternal and infinite on the other (1990:8). While our participants display great risk in placing themselves in the danger zone of violent brawls, substance abuse and multiple partner relationships they are also stretching the limits of their potential as they try to satisfy their yearning to be invincible or immortal. However defiant these actions may appear to be, they nonetheless speak of primordial or archetypal needs. What they long to experience is a symbolic death: drawing an end to their dependence on the familiar nest of parental providence. This need is often reflected in a tendency to be alone, withdrawing into safe and contained places of solitude. Here they seek to gather together their energy for the next stage of the maturation process (:10).

The behavior pattern related to this particular need finds its most clear illustration in what we have already observed in the case of Alice. As she speaks of her fantasy world castle being a place of 'hiding away' she also refers to her real life tendency to spend much of her time locked away in the private space of her bedroom. Furthermore, the notion of death is inferred from her discovery of the treasured mask that gives her the power of being invisible. This symbolic notion of death is reminiscent of traditional rites of initiation that celebrate the end of a child's dependency and irresponsibility such that they may now embark on preparing for the more demanding challenges of adulthood. However, in order for the new adult to emerge the old child must be annihilated (Sanyika 1996:118).

These ritual patterns of death and annihilation also feature prominently in the role-plays of other participants, such as the case of Honey. Her rigorous dance practice schedule becomes a symbolic defeat of her child-like tendencies to live an irresponsible life of pure pleasure, as played out in the later egos of her friends who try to tempt her away from her disciplined routine. As she passes through the door of the dance studio, we see a passage of transformation into the new person that she had been preparing herself to become. The ritual passage from death to life is a natural process of development that is appropriately facilitated through the initiation rituals that traditional societies still observe. In the ordinary experience of our participants and indeed in most modern societies, such containers of social meaning are severely lacking. In this regard, there are no adequate guides and wisdom figures to journey with youth through the underworld of death and lead them back again (Kiepenheuer 1990:9).

In the dark underworld of gang culture, echoes of death clearly resonate in the chilling callousness of violent behavior. It is a violence that seems to know no limits as seen in the ease with which youth will pull out knives and inflict multiple stab wounds on their victims or even gouge out the eye of an enemy with a broken beer bottle. These gruesome acts of violence, which would ordinarily incur harsh penalties, are held up as necessary victories in order to achieve the status of recognition within a gang. Now they are no longer considered with the ignominy of a mere fledgling but are afforded the status of being a full member with all the accompanying rights and privileges. It serves to mimic the entitlements of adulthood that characterize the ordinary socialization of young people into their community (Pinnock 1997:29). However this socialization into their community never happens within the rules of a gang that this same community rejects. Their death therefore ceases to be symbolic since it is not followed by rebirth or recognition by the community they long to be part of. For this reason they remain caught in a state of alienation and disillusionment, as Alice shares despairingly: 'I don't really reach out to anyone outside. I think I rather just handle it by myself. Maybe I won't, maybe I will. It's just one of those things. Life sucks.'

## The Need for Ritual

In observing the harmful influence and the despair that young people experience through association with gang-related activities, we are prone to ask why youth would voluntarily give themselves over to such a destructive lifestyle. Pinnock brings us to the realization that gangs actually serve a purpose that extends far beyond the self-seeking needs of syndicate bosses who ply their trade of illegal drugs. This purpose extends to the primordial human needs for the ritual of initiation; a ritual which is not provided for in most modern cities. Where such ritual is absent it is created in the form of local gangs and syndicates (Pinnock 1997:1). Although our participants would not admit to naming their social associations as a gang, the friendship circles that many of them associate with clearly model themselves on the notorious gang culture: youth operating through highly organized but socially unacceptable activity such as drug trafficking and territorial violence.

Whereas traditional rites of passage or initiation have the goal of the re-incorporation of youth into their community as adults, gangs and syndicates tend to hold youth in an 'eternal liminality: passing through a realm that is undefined' (Pinnock 1997:15). As we have already observed, the archetypal needs that all youth seek to satisfy only succeed in bringing about an internal conflict through their immersion in such undefined realms. It brings about a sense of emptiness and despair that they cannot reconcile. The reintegration into their community is an increasingly remote possibility since gangs do not possess the ritual social safety of traditional rites. It therefore brings about dispersion and blinds the path to social cohesion.

The dispersion that Pinnock identifies is reminiscent of the conflict that Edinger recognizes in the reprojection of archetypal energy into secular movements (Edinger 1972:68). The ultimate recognition that youth seek is from their community but since this community lacks the measures to facilitate this primal need for recognition, it is reprojected into pseudo-communities of local gangs. Within these secular movements, the rituals that meet the archetypal needs for separation, ordeal, death and rebirth only bring about

recognition that is respected within the gang but abhorred by the larger community. Conflict is therefore created between the individual and their community such that they are marginalized and rejected. To this extent their behavior cannot be regarded as substantial inasmuch as it is largely symbolic. We could say that they do not intend the harm and damage they cause to themselves as well as to their community. These actions stem from deeper needs that can only be adequately expressed through rituals that reunite them with the truth of their collective humanity (Sanyika 1996:123). What these youth are really asking for is a passage towards their adulthood; the mentorship and guidance necessary to find their treasured autonomy.

### **Responding to Opaque Potential**

Given that the treasures sought after by our participants lay deeply buried away, their associated values are just as far away from their conscious realization. The misunderstanding and alienation that they therefore speak about is rooted in these unfortunate circumstances of deprivation. Cut off from the vital energy of their unconscious self, they are unable to identify and communicate what they hold as most valuable. The consequential despair and discord become the symptomatic expression of what is interiorly wrong but these symptoms cannot be taken as conclusive enough to prescribe remedial responses. Deviant behavior patterns are what Everatt describes as 'opaque codes' (2000:25). They point to a deeper sense of meaning that we must first delve into before being prescriptive of appropriate responses. Unfortunately, these codes have not always been adequately perceived by the socializing agencies that our youth have been exposed to.

### **The Institutional Mould of Family and School**

Following the focus group discussions on family dynamics, participants' comments reveal the extent to which they are subjected to a restraining sense of control. In short, pithy statements they express this prevailing attitude of conformity: 'a child must be seen and not heard... parents teach us two years to walk and talk but the next sixteen years they teach us to sit down and keep

quiet... it's their way or the highway.' These tight boundaries therefore leave hardly any room for discovery and indeed finding treasure. Their autonomy is occluded and their values are hidden away under the mould that is imposed on them by their parents and other figures of authority in their families. But apart from the stark messages of dominance that they receive, many of the youth in question are also exposed to harsh, abusive attitudes that leave them feeling further alienated from their families: 'If I had a chance to speak to my parents, I'd do it in terms my father would understand... with swearing. I'd tell them how they make me feel when they talk to me...angry, sad, miserable. I don't wanna be in the house.'

The households that many of our participants grow up in are either single headed, run by their mothers, or headed by both parents where the father is often emotionally detached and sometimes abusive. With single mothers working extra hours to support four to five children and fathers who spend their leisure time out with friends, there is hardly an opportunity for quality family time. Parents have a tendency to set the rules and expect their children to follow them diligently, while they get on with the task of making a living. As a result, the parental identity is further damaged and youth grow up with the restrictive notion of having to conform to a set of rules rather than enjoying the freedom to discover and explore their way through the transition of adolescence:

'Parents gotta realize just because they give you food and water and buy you clothes, that's not all they need to do. They also gotta realize that a person can't be alone in the world. Everyone needs someone to talk to... that's why we hit the streets because we got freedom over there.'

The impact of family life therefore emerges as stifling rather than conducive to growth and development. Youth are clearly looking for more than the provision of material sustenance. They are also looking for guides as opposed to rules, an understanding of the world rather than the imposition of a mould that they have to fill.

The loneliness that restraining families create among our youth is further exacerbated by the system of schooling that they are associated with. Most

participants attend schools in which they are one of at least forty other learners in a class. Teachers who complain of being overworked and exhausted barely spend enough time to explain work assignments, so youth are neglected and have to fend for themselves in their struggle to cope at school. Many are disillusioned or frustrated with the poor conditions they are subjected to and this frustration is expressed in behavior that is considered unacceptable. Arguing with teachers, arriving late for school, smuggling alcohol and drugs are all causes for severe punishment that often ends up in expulsion. The tragedy is that this behavior, as we have come to discover, is largely symbolic and therefore deceptive of the youth's actual value system. One of our participants in particular has been twice expelled from two different schools for being in a state of intoxication in class. On being told that he was expelled from the second school he broke out into a violent fit of rage, hurling abuse at his principal. Still, he speaks of his greatest fear being the possibility that he might never matriculate, expressing his deeply buried value for an education.

The influences of socializing agencies such as family and school emerge as restrictive of youths' need to express their individuality or their autonomy. They are alone and silenced; seen but not heard. Under such restraint they cannot connect with their values of courage, self-reliance, responsibility and hard work because they are forced to channel this energy into an institutional mould. Here they must conform or they are excluded. The destructive influence of such a wielding of power finds articulation in the work of social scientists such as Michel Foucault. In describing the quarantine and purification measures taken against the seventeenth century plague and leprosy, he points to control mechanisms of modern society. Out of such needs for surveillance developed the idea of the panopticon: a tower at the centre of prison buildings used to monitor every cell. Its structure is such that every prisoner sees the tower but does not know from where he is being watched. Power is therefore visible but unverifiable (Foucault 1977:201). This notion of oppressive control is expressed by the participants who speak of their frustration with the rules they are subjected to: 'How can you give us rules when you don't even want us to ask why you giving us these rules?'

Foucault's development of the theory of panopticism goes on to demonstrate how this ideology is used to control and subject citizens of modern society towards the development of a society's economy and public morality: a disciplined society and an enclosed institution (1977:209). All are placed under surveillance of authoritarian power and what is abnormal to this pattern is to be feared and placed under quarantine, just as the threat of the plague. The youth in question are clearly considered 'the plague' of their community. They are considered a threat to the well being of other youth and so they are expelled from school or sent away from their family to live with a relative in a remote and quiet neighborhood. They are considered aberrant, deviant, or abnormal to the economic and moral development of their society

### **The Necessary Crime**

The participants of this study often speak of expectations from teachers and parents to follow a disciplined and controlled lifestyle; that they will adhere to principals of authority as long as their basic needs are provided for. When youth do not respond to these initiatives and turn rather to the streets, they evolve into anti-social and disruptive elements that seem to oppose the very people who are desperately trying to work towards their development: family, school teachers and other figures of authority. This kind of behavior is not altogether as offensive as it may seem because what they are expressing is a natural inclination and need that young people must experience.

In following the mythological hero, Prometheus, we find an understanding rooted in the depth of unconscious, archetypal human needs. In his crime of stealing fire from the gods, Prometheus represents the awakening of consciousness or the establishment of the human person as an autonomous entity. It is a willful act of disobedience against the reigning authority but it is a necessary crime since it leads to the vitally important separation from the infantile state of dependency that limits one's independence. If we are to place any real value on the development of consciousness or the initiation of youth into adulthood, then we must consider the separation a necessary crime (Edinger 1972:25). The realization of one's full potential cannot be achieved

until the individual faces up to the unconscious out of which it came, meaning that youth must be empowered to hold their own over and above the authority of their parents in order to advance into mature adulthood. If this crime of separation does not take place, then they are held back in guilt-filled responsibility to their parents and the responsibility to their own individual development is never realized (:26).

Evidence for such arrested development in the case of our participants is clear enough from the controlling influence that they experience at home. Most participants have grown up in families where their needs are adequately provided for, with some cases in which they experience a more abundant providence of luxuries. However they are aware of the struggle that their parents, most often single mothers, put themselves through in order to maintain such standards. But such standards also hold these youth within the notion that they cannot provide for themselves. Within such a smothering influence they grow up to believe that they are nothing without it, incapable of fending for themselves and so they are constantly drawn back in dependency. However, as we have traced the pattern of emptiness that results from such dependency, we realize that their consequential anger and violence is an expression both of the frustration of their being debilitated as well as of the independence or autonomy that they desperately seek. If they cannot find this empowerment at home, they create it in cultures that defy their parents and authority figures who take on the images of monsters, witches and evil queens. The mythological and symbolic battle for autonomy is therefore played out in their actual everyday lives with tragic consequences.

In addressing the tragedy of gangs and high-risk behavior among deviant youth, Pinnock provides some insightful reflections into the deeper issues that often evade macro policies. The impetus of social development should be rooted in the context of micro-communities who take responsibility for the socialization of youth. This means creating a safe environment to discover and experiment with their potential, where elders become mentors or wisdom figures. Accordingly they look out for and caution young people on the limits of their new-found power; of the implications of committing an act

unacceptable to those whom the young person grows to respect. The success of such approaches is noted in low crime societies such as rural areas, where 'people do not mind their own business, where tolerance of deviance has necessary limits' (Pinnock 1997:67). So the necessary crime of claiming one's autonomy does not escape into the dark recesses of opaque cultures where limitless freedom leads to the eventual destruction of that autonomy through violent behavior. The young person is helped to find meaning in this apparently discordant transition. They are given the opportunity to express their courage, bravery and responsibility towards the community they long to be recognized in, rather than in conflict with it.

The importance of taking adequate consideration of the micro issues of youth development is that it respects the depth and complexity of discordant social patterns. It is based on the principals of traditional initiation rites that serve the purpose of helping young people find within themselves a primordial voice; one that resonates with the universal principals of their social world, rather than shouting discordantly against it. Such an approach may prove successful in making the necessary link between the provisions of social policy and the capacity of young people to participate in them. It is an understanding that serves as complementary to the macro issues that often overlook and misunderstand symbolic behavior such as youth deviance. If we are truly engaged in the journey towards social cohesion then we cannot overstep delving into the depths of social deviants to rescue those who long to be part of the society that they are alienated from.

### **Bringing Back our Heroes**

The imaginative journeys that each participant brings to life is an expression of the primordial need that every young person must meet on their way to adulthood. It is expressed through mythic heroes who also encounter the likes of dragons, witches and monsters: frightening and treacherous creatures who challenge them beyond the comfortable state of childhood dependencies that have thus far defined them. It is no wonder that so many young people are fascinated by heroic stories such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*,

which they follow with religious devotion since it resonates a sacred and treasured need that they naturally identify with. It is also fashionable for young men, and now even young women, to wear exaggerated Mohawk hairstyles that unconsciously impersonate these popularized tribal figures ready to engage in battle and fight for their land against invaders. The trend is not only characteristic of present day youth cultures but also reminiscent of the graphic punk traditions of the 1980's. The energy that these expressions exude, speaks clearly of the significance that youth attach to embarking on the hero's journey in claiming their independence. For the most part these youth would complete such a journey and reintegrate into society. They will trim their Mohawks, cut off their dreadlocks, discard their exaggerated make-up and costume jewelry as they internalize these outward expressions of their individuality. They see no more need to do battle with a world in which they find meaning once again: not as children but as independent adults.

The participants of this study, and many others like them in every society, have not completed this hero's journey. They have lost their way in the treacherous darkness of a strange wilderness and are still raging fierce battles with the witches, dragons and other such monsters of this underworld. What separates these youth from others who have successfully completed the hero's journey is that they have responded to their obstacles according to rules that they have had to configure for themselves: rules which their society rejects and therefore they cannot find their way again even though they long to do so. They are therefore confined to the margins of their society as social deviants.

What sets these youth apart is not only the fact that they have lost their way home, but also that they have chosen to walk a different path. Their acts of defiance against authority and social norms set them apart only because they have found these to be the most legitimate means of grabbing hold of their treasured autonomous power. However the true value of this treasure cannot be appreciated since it is only fully manifested in the larger society that respects its universal worth, not in the inadequate containers of sub-cultures that are in conflict with this same society. Still, these youth need not be

considered lost in the realm of the underworld. The necessary crime of breaking across the threshold into adulthood does not have to take on the damaging characteristics of violence, destruction and defiance if young people are given adequate accompaniment as they delve into the depths of their unconscious archetypes.

In arguing for the cause of youth as a force for social change, Mamphela Ramphele makes the point that deviant youth need not be merely considered from the perspective of social misfits whose behavior needs to be regulated, ensuring social cohesion. Attention should rather be given to igniting the potential that such youth hold to bring about creative change in any society. It is a matter of granting young people the platform to debate and discuss a future different from their present circumstances in order for their creative energies to be unleashed rather than restrained. Marginalized youth who think deeply and differently about society must therefore be engaged and not rejected as outcasts simply because they engage in behavior that does not abide by the rules. If they are adequately mentored then they can find their way back again or else South Africa will continue to pay the price through the horrific and escalating crime rates: 'indicators of the frustration young people feel' (Ramphele 2006:29).

Within this frame of thought, we also recognize the glimpses of such potential among the youth who have participated in this study. What sets them apart from other youth is not only their defiance of social rules. They also display the capacity to surpass these rules and boundaries through the depth with which they reflect on the world around them. The level of maturity that they express regarding world issues and the sensitivity with which they consider social challenges, such as pandemics and suffering, point to the kind of empathy that a consumerist and production driven society is failing to cope with. When they defiantly walk out of their homes, angry with parents who are consumed by their work, and rather spend time with HIV positive babies and lonely senior citizens, they point to the different circumstances they choose to live under: the values that their society undermines. When they defiantly hold back from handing in their homework assignments and rather spend

countless hours composing volumes of poetry about new world orders, they speak of their ability to think independently. They may not spend time memorizing all the facts of their textbooks and doing exactly what their teachers tell them but they know full well how to respond to unexpected situations, how to solve original problems and how to think critically for themselves (*The Times* 2010:9).

Deviant youth respond to their social world in ways that turn them into villains, yet they are merely asking to be engaged rather than rejected. Within the margins that they are confined to they cling to illusions that are contrary to reality. They conjure up unrealistic images of how to respond to the world because they do not have the kind of guidance that shows them how to understand boundaries before they step beyond. They therefore nurture exaggerated expectations and an underestimation of the hazards involved in their self-destructive behavior, through misconceived notions of invincibility. So they continue wreaking havoc and terror, refusing to accept responsibility for their actions (Jung 1969:760). As evidenced by the signs of engagement that results from the endeavors of this study to delve into the depths of their symbolic world, deviant youth are willing to respond in the language of their symbols. They are in need of those responsible for their socialization to delve into the depths with them, to wage through the darkness and help them find their way back home again.

## CONCLUSION

At the close of a reconciliation workshop that I often conduct with youth, one of the young men comes up to chat with me. He has always been a withdrawn individual, reserved at school and with his family. He finds it hard to cope in class and dropped out for a few years before going back to try completing his matric. He admits to smoking drugs and hanging around with notorious groups, sometimes prone to violent outbursts but often just quietly disengaged. As he prepares to leave, he slips one of his poems into my hand:

I may not be an artist but I can still see beauty  
I may not be the best person but I am the best at being me,  
my own person  
I may not know how to love you but I know that no matter what  
I will love  
I know that I don't know how to hate  
Have the courage to say no. Have the courage to do what is right,  
merely because it is right.  
Love because you want to love.  
The opposite of courage in our society isn't being a coward...  
It is conformity.

The courage demonstrated by participants of this research, to delve into the depths of their symbolic world, finds resonance with this poetic expression of their values and needs. They may not be well equipped in bearing the strain of conformity, they may not be convinced of the rules that govern their social world but they nevertheless discern its values in a deeply perceptive manner. Their need, however, is to communicate these values to a society that expects them to co-operate with the rules of convention. That is where the problem lies. Deviant youth are angry with what has become of conventional patterns in society; the breakdown of social symbols such as family and school have left them with a sense of emptiness that they struggle to reconcile. In this struggle, they are given to aberrant behavior that breaks the rules of convention only because they hold no meaning for them.

The findings of this study have unearthed the tragic extent to which youth are restrained and debilitated within their own transition to adulthood. Their

struggles to connect with the world they find themselves in stems from a damaged identification of universal values or archetypal images. In the absence of this vital link, their codes have become opaque. They have retreated within themselves where any influence from authoritarian and universally accepted norms are treated with suspicion and rejected through an alienation of these universal images from their unconscious. If youth are not empowered with the language and culture of their exterior world, if the values of ritual initiation into adulthood are constantly overridden by macro concerns and policies, then the trend of marginalized and deviant youth will persist into future generations. And yet, these same youth who are discarded as threats to economic and moral development contain the values of hard work, responsibility, courage and self-reliance: the hallmarks of a stable moral convention and a viable economy.

The question that emerges from this realization is whether society might be equipped with the capacity to recognize this hidden potential and nurture it into effectuation: 'Does modern society offer the appropriate shelter and freedom to contain the transition from childhood to adulthood and make use of the energies that are released?' (Kiepenheuer 1990:14). This kind of capacity goes beyond the rolling out of policies that take care of the macro elements influencing the socialization of our youth. It is important to take note that marginal youth cultures, such as those found among street gangs, are not necessarily the products of poverty, social dislocation and unemployment. These factors merely harden and aggravate a much deeper malaise that constantly evades the attention of social policies (Pinnock 1984:106). These macro initiatives gain value from being informed by micro perspectives that consider the worlds in which the youth in question have constructed a sense of meaning. In the closing focus group discussions that probed the question of overcoming obstacles, an overwhelming optimism among the participants gives the assurance that the potential for responsible leadership and a resolution of social deviance can be realized through engaging such youth according to their primordial needs: 'We just need some help, some courage from older people. They need to say, like... you doing the right thing... to

motivate you. That's what they are there for and then that gives you the strength to go forward.'

The youth of concern to this study have clearly pointed to the lack of adequate parental figures and mentorship from the community at large as key deficits in their process of socialization. The conventional rules of obedience to authority can take no root in their construction of meaning since these youth have pointed to the way these figures of authority have enslaved them. These damaging influences are poignantly expressed through the imaginative images portrayed through their active imagination: witches who bring famine and destruction, evil queens who turn innocent girls into monsters and a menacing veterinarian ready to slit open animals who can actually speak for themselves and reveal that nothing is wrong with them.

Essentially there is nothing wrong with these youth. They are not psychotic in any way and they do not need any clinical remedies. The problem is rather that they refuse to participate in any conventions that compromise what they hold as valuable: autonomy, hard work, courage, self-reliance and responsibility. Their inability to find these values in the mainstream containers of their social world has pushed them to the margins where these values are further desecrated by the inadequate containers of sub-cultures. The reason why talented youth therefore engage in deviant behavior is because they are highly perceptive of the inconsistencies of their socializing agencies and refuse to play by these rules.

In the 'afterword' of Albert Camus' *The Outsider*, he draws a distinctive character analysis of his protagonist who displays a similar pattern of behavior as our youth in question: 'Meursault doesn't play the game... he refuses to lie... he says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings and society immediately feels threatened' (Camus 1982:118). It is hoped that by engaging deviant youth instead of ostracizing them, the threat that they seem to impose may be understood for what it is: a symbol of their need to explore the powerful energy of their hidden autonomy. It therefore depends on the responsibility that society is willing to take for its potential heroes, through

community elders, schools, families, religious leaders, local government and other socializing agencies that influence their development. The further away from the centre that these youth are allowed to transgress, the further they move from recognizing the values that they treasure. If they are not engaged on the level of their symbolic world, from which they construct their social meaning, the further away they slip into their darkness: abandoned by the world they long to embrace.

University of Cape Town

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 Briefing Session Notes

The aim of the project is to understand how young people like yourselves make sense of the world. What is valuable to you? What is important to you? It is a research project that will hopefully help us to better understand the problems that you and other youth like yourselves grapple with.

There is no guarantee that we will find all the answers. We are trying to understand. You will be given a chance to speak your truth, to tell your story in a way that you want to and that will be respected.

The main objective is merely UNDERSTANDING.

How do we do this? We delve into the depths. Beneath all the behavior that the outside world sees, is another side to the story. Beneath all this is a truth about you that's waiting to be uncovered. So we go into the depths. That is why we are taking you away. It is like the journey of Frodo (The Lord of the Rings) or The Prodigal Son, etc.

We begin with some role-playing. You will be given a scenario to build in your fantasy and then, with the help of others in the group, each person will act out their fantasy in a spontaneous manner. We will then talk about what emerged in the role-playing through three focus groups. A focus group is like the support groups you are used to, except that I will lead the group with a series of questions (based on the role-playing) and we will create a discussion around these points of focus.

There will be ample time to have good, clean fun. Camps are always exciting.

Since this is a research project that you voluntarily participate in, you are under no obligation. You are merely invited to make a contribution to understanding why young people behave in the way that they do. It is an opportunity to tell your story and to be heard. However, if at any time during the camp you start to have second thoughts about the discussions or the project itself, you are free to step down.

The sessions will be recorded by video camera and voice recorder so that they can be analyzed. However the project is very confidential. No identities are revealed.

You are also entitled to know what is being written about you after the material is analyzed. You will have access to the write-up. If you disagree with any particular point you may raise your objections and I am obliged to change or erase accordingly.

Just remember that you have been chosen to participate because I feel that you have a valuable contribution to make to this study.

### Dates for the camps

Camp 1: 1 – 3 May

Camp 2: 8 – 10 May

Camp 3: 15 – 17 May

You choose which weekend you'd like to attend.

We aim to leave at 14:00 on Friday and return by 15:00 on Sunday.

### What are the conditions on the camp?

Umgeni Valley: Rough and ready experience. Only mere basic necessities are provided. There is no electricity, cell-phone signal, hot water.

Don't bring any clothing that you value a lot, it might get ruined beyond repair.

### What to bring

Bedding (Sleeping bag, pillow, extra blanket)

Towel

Personal clothing (Remember that it does get cold in the valley)

Sandals and Takkies

Swimming shorts

Toiletries

Torch

Cutlery and crockery (Plastic or metal)

Plate, Bowl, Mug, spoon, knife and fork

Dish Towel

Plastic bag (for wet clothing)

Umbrella / Rain coat

Insect repellent

Sunscreen lotion

Wide-brimmed hat / cap

Water bottle

Medication (if necessary)

... *And don't forget to bring along your **imagination***

**Appendix 2  
Indemnity and Consent Form**

I accept full responsibility in committing myself / my child / ward

\_\_\_\_\_

to the care of the adults in charge of the youth camp taking place at Umgeni Valley on one of the following dates:

- 1 – 3 May 2009
- 8 – 10 May 2009
- 15 – 17 May 2009

I understand that the purpose of this camp is to conduct scientific research in ascertaining an understanding of the social world of young people. I (My child / ward) undertake(s) to participate on a voluntary basis and acknowledge(s) that I (my child / ward) is under no obligation to complete the program should I (he/she) feel a need to discontinue.

I delegate the organizing team full authority to take such action at any time during the camp, as they may deem necessary for my (my child's / ward's) and the group's discipline, well-being and safety.

I shall not hold any member of the organizing team liable in any way, whatsoever.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant / Parent / Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness

Contact telephone numbers:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 3**

### **Focus Group Interview Questions**

#### **Focus Group I: The Fantasy World**

1. If you had to give this place a name, what would you call it?
2. How did it feel when you entered this fantasy world that you created?
3. What does this world mean to you?
4. During the role-play, I asked you to swap roles with some of the props. How did that feel?
5. In a real life setting, what reminds you of this place?

#### **Focus Group II: The Characters**

This discussion is divided into two separate themes. The first focuses on the lead characters while the second focuses on the supporting roles.

- 1.1 Who would you describe as the main characters in your story?
- 1.2 Can you identify some people in your everyday life who remind you of such characters?
- 1.3 I also asked you to swap roles with these characters. How did that feel?
- 1.4 Why do these characters occupy a lead role in your story?
- 1.5 How do you feel about people like this in our society?
  
- 2.1. Who would you describe as the supporting roles or smaller characters?
- 2.2. Can you identify some people in our world who remind you of such people?
- 2.3. How did you feel about swapping roles with these characters?
- 2.4. Why did you give these characters smaller roles to play in your story?
- 2.5. How do you feel about people like this in our society?
- 2.6. Are there any characters that we left out our discussion? Would you like to say something about them?

#### **Focus Group III: The Treasures**

Each participant begins by mentioning their treasure.

1. What was it like for you to fantasize about your treasure?
2. What makes this valuable for you, above everything else?
3. What possibility is there that you will find this treasure in real life?
4. What is it that stands in your way of finding such a treasure in real life?
5. What do you think might help you overcome the obstacle?
7. Is there anything else about your fantasy that you would like to talk about?

## Appendix 4 Clay Symbols



Image 4.1



4.2



4.3



4.4



4.5



4.6



4.7



4.8



4.9



4.10



4.11



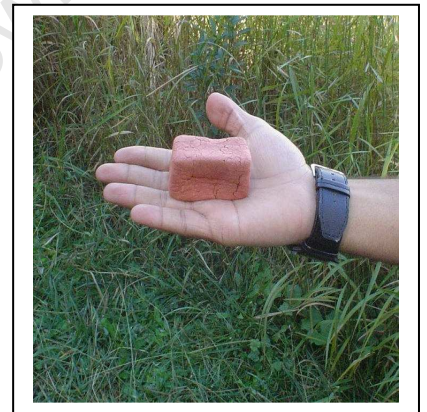
4.12



4.13



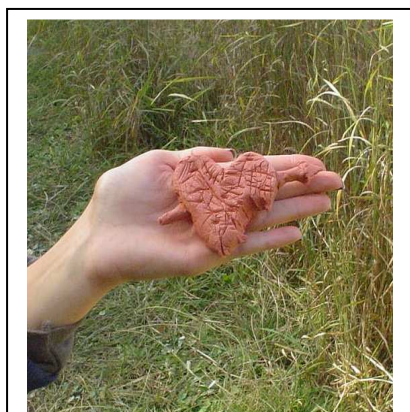
4.14



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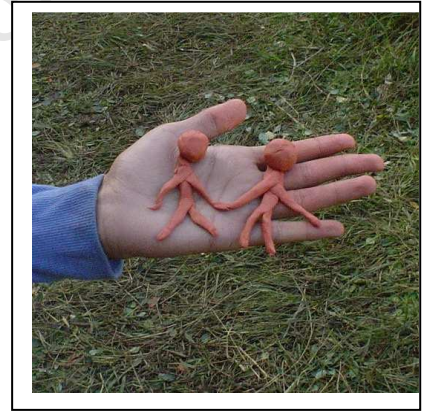
4.21



4.22



4.23



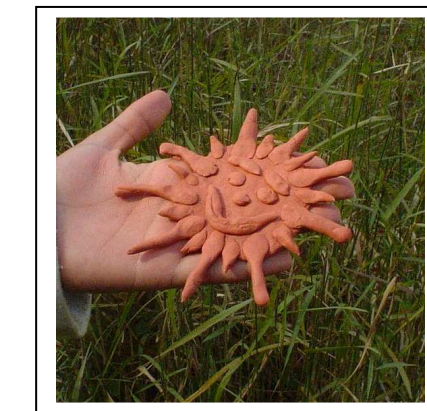
4.24



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