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SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS:  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
NARRATIVE AND CONTEXT**

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CSSR Working Paper No. 119



Published by the Centre for Social Science Research  
University of Cape Town  
2005

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Price in Southern Africa (incl. VAT and postage): R 5.00

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ISBN 1-77011-051-8

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Social Surveys Unit

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June 2005

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# Relationships between Adolescents and Adults: the Significance of Narrative and Context

## Abstract

*A substantial body of research links the developmental outcomes of young people to the relationships they have with adults. However, very little research provides insight into the mechanisms whereby relationships achieve their outcomes or the specific qualities of those relationships. This paper explores the construction of relationships between young people and adults in three different socio-cultural settings in Cape Town. Four young people in each setting, namely Ocean View, Fish Hoek and Masiphumelele were interviewed about their relationships with the most important adults in their lives. Where possible, the adults they identified were interviewed also. Interviews were unstructured and analysed thematically. Fundamentally, constructions of the relationships in all three settings were found to be similar. All adults encouraged young people to succeed and sought to protect them against risk. However, the nature of the opportunities and risks, and of the material context in general, differ between the three different study sites and have considerable import for the narratives of the relationships from each. The paper argues that the differences between the three sites indicate the responsiveness and adaptation of ideals and discourses to environmental demands, rather than fundamental ideological discrepancies.*

## Introduction

The availability of adults to whom young people can turn is identified in much of the literature on development as a key source of social support, integral to the process of healthy development (Morrow and Styles, 1995; Barron-McKeagney, Woody, & D'Souza, 2001; Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; DuBois & Neville, 1997; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002).

Much research has documented the effects of relationships between young people and adults on developmental outcomes. The majority of these studies focus primarily on the effects of these relationships on adolescents' educational outcomes (Maharaj, Kaufman and Richter, 2000; Anderson and Lam, 2003). These authors argue that educational outcomes are dependent not only on children's behaviour, such as performance in school, and the learning environment, but also on decisions, for example about which children should receive how much education. These decisions, they argue further, are frequently the result of family and household structures and processes, for example those concerning the social and financial support children receive from the adults with whom they live. These studies have found, for example, that South African children who live with both genetic parents are more likely to be enrolled in school than those living in any other circumstances. Similarly, those children living with neither genetic parent tend to have completed fewer grades of school than children in all other circumstances (Anderson & Lam, 2003).

Other studies have found similar trends, for example that children living with both parents consistently fare better than those in a variety of other co-residential arrangements, in terms of school enrolment, highest completed grade and years delayed in school. Those who live with neither parent have been found to be consistently worse off in these terms. Between these two extremes are those who live with mothers only, or with mothers and stepfathers, found to be better off than those living with fathers only, who fare better still than those living with fathers and stepmothers (Anderson, Case & Lam, 2001).

Significant criticism has been levelled at this body of work, however, pointing in particular to its assumptions about the universality of the nuclear family form. Throughout both the international and South African literature on adolescents' relationships with adults, associations are drawn between family structures and processes that deviate from those of the ideal nuclear family, and negative developmental outcomes. For example, divorce, single parenting and habitual parental absence have been linked, irrespective of the cultural backgrounds within which they occur, with conduct disorder and poor social functioning (Weitoft, Hjern, Halund & Mans, 2003). As Russell (2002) argues, however, rules governing how relationships are identified and conceptualised, who should live with whom, and so on, emerge in any stable society. Family and household systems therefore need to be interpreted in terms of the rules and norms of the relevant group, rather than in terms of those of any other group.

Locally, a number of authors have explored the family and social networks that exist in African cultural settings, arguing that when these are viewed in terms of

Western cultural expectations, adaptive responses to social pressures tend to be interpreted in terms of a 'disintegration', rather than as valid and creative responses within the relevant system. Far from disintegrating, however, the traditional African kinship system, redefined for use in the contemporary world, can be seen as a resource for coping with poverty (Spiegel & Mehlwana, 1997). An example is the decision of many migrant parents to leave their children in rural homes in the care of grandparents. These decisions cannot be interpreted simply as a surrender to the pressures imposed by discriminatory legislation, and hence as evidence of the disintegration of traditional and more desirable arrangements. Instead, they are often taken to protect children from the disruptive influences of migration to the cities, such as violence in schools, and enabled through the flexibility of child-care options inherent in the kinship system (Russell, 2002). In fact, according to Russell, a model in terms of which the mother is necessarily the care-giver is inappropriate for most of sub-Saharan Africa, where other kin have rights and responsibilities for children to an extent that she describes as "almost unimaginable" to people from other cultural systems.

Spiegel and Mehlwana (1997), in a study of households in Khayelitsha, show how people use the 'culture of kinship' to give salience to reciprocal and other relationships that they establish in their struggle to survive in difficult conditions. One of the key assumptions informing the definitions and categories predominantly used in the literature linking relationships with developmental outcomes is that kinship is based on biology. These authors show, however, that within this context kinship is not about biology, but rather about defining relationships with neighbours and those who help them. In fact, these relationships frequently are attributed far greater importance than genealogically traceable ones. Kinship in this context is based not on biology, but on reciprocity, materiality and contingency.

While the above authors, amongst others, have explored the outcomes associated with relationships between young people and adults (Anderson, Case & Lam, 2001; Anderson and Lam, 2003; Maharaj, Kaufman and Richter, 2000), and the social networks and systems within which they occur (Russell, 1995 & 2002; Spiegel and Mehlwana, 1997), relatively few studies have investigated the mechanisms whereby they lead to the outcomes of interest, or the qualities of relationships engendered by the relevant social systems. Amongst those that have, the overwhelming majority focus on parent-child relationships, for example whether or not they are characterised by 'storm and stress', on parenting styles, for example permissive as opposed to warm but authoritative parenting (Steinberg, 2001; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, Fraleigh, 1987), and on levels of parental investment (Anderson, 2003; Anderson, Kaplan,

Lam & Lancaster,1999), basing their interpretations on typically Western values and ideals, and identifying relationships and their characteristics that deviate from this unmarked norm as less likely to lead to positive outcomes.

Anderson (2003), for example, examined the links between family structure and educational outcomes in South Africa, suggesting that investment in education is a key factor in mediating the relationship between family structure and children's educational outcomes. He found that investment decisions are strongly influenced by household composition, with biological parents being the highest investors. The effects of these investment decisions on schooling outcomes tend to be cumulative as decisions are repeated year after year. Anderson, Kaplan, Lam and Lancaster (1999) describe the relationships between Xhosa-speaking adolescents living in Guguletu, Cape Town, and their fathers in terms of the time and money fathers invest in their children, as well as their histories in terms of living together. This study found distinct patterns of time investment and expenditure on adolescents according to whether fathers were biological fathers of their children or not, as well as according to whether or not they had lived with their children. Biological fathers who lived with their children tended to invest the most, followed by stepfathers who lived with their children and biological fathers who no longer lived with their children, but had done so previously.

Again, only a minority of researchers have studied the qualities of relationships in terms of the norms and values that prevail within the relevant cultural settings. Van der Waal (1996) discusses the relationship networks that surround fostered children, and the qualities of relationships experienced by African children in the Northern Province of South Africa. This study found that, due to resource shortages and parents' consequent inability to care for their children, parents frequently accustomed children to fluid, non-exclusive family relationships. For many children living in Cape Town, moving temporarily and intermittently between various households is an integral part of their existence (Spiegel, Watson & Wilkinson, 1996). The experience of family has been described for these children as an "almost seamless continuity ... between the various households within which they are housed" (Spiegel and Mehlwana, 1997: 30). Bonds between parents and their children in this context are thus very different from those established within nuclear families in affluent societies, even if the composition of households sometimes resembles the nuclear form. Not only are children's parents not permanently available, but the relationships that children develop are not exclusively or even mainly with family members. Nor are they centred around any one individual. Interestingly, important relatives among the group Van der Waal studied were often referred

to in the plural, rather than in the singular, for example *vamhani*, meaning ‘mothers’.

This paper aims to address the gap in knowledge of the qualities of relationships between young people and adults, and the mechanisms through which they achieve their outcomes. It explores, in particular, the construction of relationships and the significance attributed to them. It further attempts to elucidate the interplay between these constructions and the material and social environments within which the relationships are located, providing insight into the interaction between meaning and context.

## Relationships and Culture

It is no longer necessary to argue for the relevance of culture for relationships. As noted by Swartz (1998), acceptance of multicultural realities and of their consequences has become commonplace. Helman (quoted in Swartz, 1998: 6) defines culture as a “set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) which individuals inherit as members of a particular society, and which tells them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, and how to *behave* in it in relation to other people.” As Russell (1995) points out, even when apparently similar relationships are considered important within two or more different cultures, their meaning and significance, and the expectations people have of one another within them, cannot be assumed to be the same. In most Western societies, for example, Russell observes that parent-child relationships are constructed such that parents are obligated toward their children, owing them time, resources and emotional care. Children, on the other hand, owe their parents very little, but are expected to become emotionally and materially independent of their parents once they become adult. Russell argues, however, that the key dimension in parental relationships amongst the group of African people she investigated in the Western Cape is material rather than emotional, and that these relationships are conceptualised in reciprocal terms, rather than in the unidirectional terms of parental relationships in much of the West.

In addition, while developmental outcomes are almost universally accepted as influenced by the relationships within which children and young people grow up, understandings of positive outcomes, and of the practices and behaviours that promote them and constitute their markers, are dependent on conventional wisdom regarding what constitutes danger or success and for whom (Adam, Beck & von Loon, 2000). While the attributes of autonomy and self-sufficiency,

for example, may represent logical goals within the context of an individualist culture, in terms of which they are seen as highly valuable assets and as desired outcomes for every adult, they may make very little sense as aims when viewed from other perspectives. Within a culture in which, for example, the good of the community is given precedence over that of the individual, or in which recognition of interdependency is seen as necessary for the accomplishment of communal goals, the characteristics of self-sufficiency and autonomy may even be viewed as counterproductive.

## **The Present Study**

This paper reports on a study of the meaning systems within which the relationships between young people and adults are embedded. The research was conducted in three different socio-cultural contexts in Cape Town – Ocean View, Fish Hoek and Masiphumelele. It should be noted, however, at the outset of this argument, that culture, considered in the past as a static, geographically bounded phenomenon, is in fact fluid, changing and diffuse (Swartz, 1998). The pictures that this paper presents, of the different meaning systems underlying the relationships that form in the three locations should not be understood as separated by impermeable boundaries. Furthermore, not only difference, but substantial similarity is evident in the narratives from the different locations, as is difference between narratives given by people within the same geographical places.

## **Research Questions**

Through an analysis of young people's and adults' narratives of their relationships, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of relationships that form within the different cultural contexts?
- What is the basic content of relationships? What is the nature of the young people's and adults' interactions, and what are the meanings attributed to these?
- Which aspects of relationships are attributed significance within the different contexts? What is the significance attributed to these relationship elements?

- What are the key processes in the relationships: for instance negotiating roles?
- What relationship practices are associated with positive relationships?
- What are the adults' goals with regard to the relationships and the young people themselves?
- Do the relationship partners' constructions of their relationships interact with relationship qualities? For instance, what is the relationship between these constructions and the nature and extent of communication and empathy between partners?

## Method

The phenomenological standpoint assumed within qualitative research orients its practice towards elucidating people's interpretations of their life worlds and behaviour, enabling the generation of 'insider perspectives' (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Qualitative research methods are sensitive to context, and thus to the unique, contextually-based meaning-systems within which youth make sense of their lives and relationships. This sensitivity to context and contextually-specific meaning, along with the inductive orientation of qualitative research, whereby theories and interpretations are developed from the data as they emerge (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), render qualitative methods particularly pertinent to the generation of unanticipated information, and thus to new 'insider' understandings of the problems faced by youth.

Narrative analysis is based on the idea that people live in and through the stories they tell about their lives (Howard, 1991). Based on the phenomenological assumption that entities acquire meaning through our engagement with them, narratives transform otherwise unrelated events into meaningful sequences. Thus, the narratives through which relationships are recounted provide a source of insight into participants' experiences of their relationships and the meanings made of them. Narratives further provide insight into broader social meaning systems, as they are inevitably co-authored – either directly through interruption, challenge, questions and so on from listeners (Ochs & Capps, 2001), or indirectly, through, for example, imagined or remembered dialogue with others (De la Rey, 1999). They are therefore inseparable from the social contexts within which they are produced.

Thus, the analysis of narratives represents a most suitable means of gaining access to and understanding social meaning systems. By crediting narrative

elements with the power to construct and transform reality, as well as to describe it, the analysis of narratives goes beyond universalist assumptions about a single reality that may go by various names. This is a point often missed in analyses attempting to compare different cultural groups: namely, that not only do the norms and rules in terms of which people conduct their lives differ, but the realities and experiences that they thereby create differ in the meaning and consequences that they have for them. Analysis of narratives enables the exploration of difference in a manner that acknowledges the import of diverse cultural ways of enacting and conceptualising life, and therefore avoids the dangers associated with assuming that beneath the varying modes of expression there lies a single, and objectively knowable, reality.

The participants for the project were selected from the sample for the Cape Area Panel Study, which this research was designed to complement (see Lam & Seekings, 2005). Young people were chosen according to their co-residential histories, so as to include both those who had spent all or the majority of their lives living with their biological parents and those who had not, and thereby, hopefully, to diversify the range of relationships deemed important by the young people in the sample. Young people in the study ranged between the ages of 15 and 22, and were composed of two boys and two girls from each of the three geographical locations, totalling 12 in all. Adults were identified by the young people themselves, as those who fulfilled the most important role in their lives. Again, there were four adults from each geographical location, except for Ocean View, from where there were only three, as one of the young people identified her grandmother, who had died prior to the study, as having been most important.

Participants were contacted via telephone or through the schools they attended. Interviews were conducted in places mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participants. Unstructured interviews were conducted with all participants, in order to create the opportunity for elements of the relationships held to be important by the participants themselves to emerge and be explored, and for participants to be allowed to name their own experience (Scheurich, 1997). Thus the interviews were conducted primarily as conversations, and the form of questions was determined by the unique particulars of each interview (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Participants were encouraged to speak about their relationships “as they saw them”, and additional lines of inquiry were developed in light of their responses. Wherever possible, questions were phrased to be as open as possible, so as to limit further the extent to which answers would be prescribed by the researcher, and to encourage participants to disclose also that which was unexpected. In addition, stories about actual events and recounted conversations were requested, as it was felt that these were most likely to elicit

rich information and provide insight into the underlying values and constructions in terms of which the participants' experiences of their relationships were composed (PANOS, 1999).

### *Project Participants*

<i>Young person</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Adult interviewed</i>	<i>Other adult referred to in text</i>
<i>Ocean View</i>			
Crystal	18	Step-father	Grandmother
Samantha	19	Aunt	
Darrell	17	Mother	
Ricardo	21		Grandmother
<i>Fish Hoek</i>			
Deryn	22	Mother	
Juliette	18	Mother	
Christoph	20	Mother	
Jonathan	21	Father	
<i>Masiphumele</i>			
Thandiwe	21	Mother	
Phumla	21	Mother	
Andile	19	Mother	
Mpho	15	Mother	

Interviews were analysed according to the techniques and theories of narrative analysis, and arranged according to themes. A theme is a statement of meaning that runs through most of the pertinent data or that carries heavy emotional or factual impact. Thematic analysis thus allows for flexibility and the use of multiple interpretive techniques, while at the same time creating a structure that will render the knowledge produced readily useable, in line with the aims of this paper.

# Results and Discussion

## Relationships in Ocean View

The narratives of relationships in Ocean View are permeated throughout by stories of material hardship, violence, alcohol and drug abuse and death. Two of the four young people interviewed reported that the most important adult in their lives had died, one of whom had been murdered. A third was living with her aunt, who had become the most important adult in her life, since her mother's death. The fourth lived alone, his mother having left due to her inability to tolerate his brother's violence within the household. Not only are these factors present in the environments within which these relationships take place, impacting on them from the outside as it were. They are an integral part of the relationships and their contexts, both of which are fundamentally changed, created and destroyed as a result of, and in response to these factors. While the manner in which individuals respond to these events is indeterminate, they are noteworthy in that they constitute major and traumatic life events that frequently occupy a central position in the formation, maintenance and termination of interpersonal relationships. An eighteen-year-old girl describes the change in herself, and in her relationship with her mother after her grandmother's death:

“From the time that my granny died, so I was a different person, so my mommy did, so she did give more attention to me and stuff like that, and we understand each other now, and we love each other now. And, I think if I'm going to lose her then I'm really going to be different person, because I did already lose my dad and I did already lose my grandpa and my grandma – not my mommy now, no, not my mommy.” (1)

As is evident in the above extract, not only relationships but the individuals within them change in response to these events. In this example, the death of Crystal's grandmother ended one relationship, while strengthening that with her mother. In addition, Crystal's identity has also shifted – “From the time that my granny died, so I was a different person” – and her experience of those relationships that remain are permeated by her sense of the possibility of further loss – “not my mommy now, no, not my mommy.”

Within these narratives, young people identify three primary qualities as those according to which they evaluate the relationships they discuss as the most important in their lives. Firstly there is the adults' ability to protect the young people against risk. Secondly there is the existence of empathy between them, and the young person's sense that the adult knows his / her 'true self'. And thirdly there is consistency of the adults' availability. It emerges within the narratives, however, that the former two qualities are not always compatible, and that even a degree of conflict may sometimes exist between them.

## Risk and Relationships

Not surprisingly, relationships are structured around, and intended to protect young people from the risks of hardship, violence, abuse and death. Crystal describes the role and importance of a mother:

“If (you) call (your) mom a mother then ... she will tell you, she will tell you what to do and what not to do because if your mom nie styf (strict) is and that, and then there's no future for you because you're gonna leave school you're gonna go to drugs, you're gonna do anything ... you'll work yourself into the graveyard ... so you must, you'll need strength, adult strength, strength of adults.” (2)

What is notable about the dangers to which these narratives refer is that they more often than not involve the active participation of those who fall victim to them – “*you're gonna* leave school, *you're gonna* go to drugs...*you'll work* yourself into the graveyard.” Thus, parental protection involves, rather than merely warding off external dangers, demanding that young people adhere to a code of behaviour that avoids engagement in risky activities. Their attempts to control the behaviour and activities of young people therefore become an integral aspect and key purpose of their relations – “If (you) call (your) mom a mother then ... she will tell you ... what to do and what not to do.”

In fact, many of the narratives begin by locating the relationships within a context of risk:

I: So...is there one particular adult who is most important?

Crystal: Ek sal se daar is n' klomp mense ... Die plek is, is baie gevaarlik. Die kinders roep, hulle roep drugs, en, en, there's n' klomp

straatmeisies there now. So he's (her father) very important. Yes, very, very important. Hy's baie strict. We've got a time to come in and stuff like that. He won't let me talk to some of the children there now in our place ... (3)<sup>1</sup>

Thus, these relationships are narrated as emerging within a risky environment, and assuming a form that is responsive to this environment. As illustrated in the extract below, many of the stories that the parents from Ocean View tell begin with descriptions of their children's transgressions. For instance, Janet, expressing her concerns about her daughter's impending departure from the family home, begins,

“And her, her grandmother told me that she, Samantha's got friends that she didn't like...because they are using alcohol and she's staying out late at night, ja, she's going to the taverns, things like that, you know.” (4)

These kinds of concerns thus form a central focus of the narratives, often representing the point from which sub-stories embark, implying that subsequent relationship events are perceived as responsive to, or intended to resolve, these concerns, which form a key organising structure of the relationship accounts.

## **Risk and the Goals of Development**

The risks of the socio-economic environment within which these relationships are located appear to have an interesting consequence within these narratives, in terms of which they exert their influence on the ways in which the goals of development, and the means of attaining these, are constructed. There is an underlying implication in these narratives that the ultimate goal toward which the relationships are directed is the eventual independence and autonomy of the young people (as it is overtly in Fish Hoek, a point which will be discussed later), both materially, as well as on emotional, cognitive and motivational levels. However, far more audible in the Ocean View accounts are the attempts of adults to direct and control young people, and of young people to comply

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<sup>1</sup> I would say there are a number of people ... This place is very dangerous. The children take drugs, and there are a number of prostitutes there now. So he's (her father) very important. Yes, very, very important. He's very strict. We've got a time to come in and stuff like that. He won't let me talk to some of the other children there now in our place ...

with their directions and accept their control. The goals of self-sufficiency and direction, at least in the short term, are subordinated within these narratives to those of obedience and control. Janet, a mother, refers to her nineteen-year-old daughter's possible decision to go and stay with another family, expressing her disagreement with the autonomy legally attributed to young people over the age of 18: "That's her choice, it's her choice, ja, according to the law. According to the law, she was only in my custody until the age of 18." (5)

Janet qualifies her statement that the decision is rightfully her daughter's with a clause identifying the source of this opinion as the law, thereby dissociating it from her own belief. Not only are such views expressed by the adults in this study, but examples in which individual choice and self-defined morality are overtly rejected are abundant in the accounts of three of the four young people interviewed in Ocean View. (Interestingly, the exception is to be found in the account of Darrell, who does not conform to accepted codes of behaviour, a point which will be taken up later.) Crystal, below, clearly identifies her step-father as the only one capable of making accurate interpretations and appropriate decisions about the life experiences and choices with which she is presented:

"Sometimes when I meet, I meet a boy, but maybe I don't know him right. And so I'll go to my Dad and ask him, 'Daddy, look – like that and like this. Is it alright? And he would say, um, 'If he smokes dagga and he drinks wine then it's not right for you. Because the reason why is- because when he's drunk they do stuff that they mustn't supposed to do.'" (6)

In this example, not only does Crystal identify her step-father as the proper decision-maker in her life, even with regard to her choice of a boyfriend, but also as the origin of 'correct' knowledge of the world. She entirely subordinates her own perspective to that of her father, both in terms of its likely outcomes and correctness – "maybe I don't know him right, so I'll go to my dad and ask him." Thus, not only is individual choice subordinated to the more capable decision-making of older people, but personal point of view is subordinated to the 'correct' vision of these adults also. A similar example illustrates a boy's decision to leave a gang:

"And so my dad came to me, and so he did talk to me and, ag, I must come to church on Sunday, man...And so I did go on Sunday, I go to church, and after the church I go to my friends and I tell them, 'No man, I don't want to be in this gang.'" (7)

While Ricardo in this example takes ownership of his decision to leave the gang – “*I don’t want to be in this gang*” – he provides no indication of his personal or active involvement in the decision-making process. Instead, he relates only the actions of his father in this regard – “*my dad came to me, and...he did talk to me.*” His own actions occur only in consequence of those of his father – “*And so I did*” – and are subsequent to the decision, effecting it rather than playing a part in its making. Thus, within these narratives, adults’ definitions of ‘good’ behaviour, and their instructions for its enactment, are prioritised almost without argument over those of young people, who either concur or are assumed to be wrong.

The proposed interpretation of this is twofold. On the one hand it should be noted that the researcher’s age and social status as an adult may have rendered the young people more likely to assent with their parents’ opinions within the interview context as a result of their own presumptions about the researcher’s expectations. However, even if this were the case, their inclination to depict themselves in this light implies their perception of its desirability, and therefore the strength of its presence as a discourse within the meaning context. It is further suggested, therefore, that within this context of extreme risk the goals of autonomy are temporarily subordinated and postponed until such time as the individual is deemed competent to manage the dangers of the environment. Thus, while embedded within an overarching discourse in terms of which autonomy remains the ultimate goal, the form this discourse assumes is modified to suit the demands of its location. Within a context in which the risks to young people are notoriously great, self-direction and determination may constitute substantial dangers to these young people, many of whom may not yet have mastered the skills required to navigate such conditions. It may be, therefore, that the reason for which autonomy does not emerge in these narratives as an important theme, but remains rather an implied aim, is not so much because the goal is different, but is rather because the young people in the sample have not yet reached the age at which autonomy is held to be desirable.

This suggestion is supported by Darrell’s case, an example in which his independence was necessitated by his mother’s absence. Darrell attempts to cope with this situation by evaluating it positively, stating that if one’s mother is always available, “How can I say, you won’t get the chance to look after yourself, you see. You’ll always think, ‘Well, my mom is gonna- but my mom will do that for me, you see, that’s a bad thing, you see. Now you must, you must look after yourself, you see.’” (8)

While this level of independence has evidently been forced upon Darrell, the availability of this discourse as a means of accepting and coping with his situation further implies its existence within the social context. That the ideal of independence and autonomy does indeed exist within this context is further supported by Janet, who explains her attempts to direct her daughter's behaviour with reference to the ability she will hopefully derive to direct her own behaviour when Janet is no longer available to look after her:

“I want her to – it's like for me, it's like telling people I can make my own decisions, you know. Ja, I want her to show me that she can make her own choices and her own decisions and not falling in with everything, you know. Because so that she, when she's not with me anymore, that she will be able to cope on her own, and that's what I'm trying to do.” (9)

Thus, while independence and autonomy are subordinated in these narratives to parental control, it seems that this subordination is temporary, and employed only in the interests of their responsible achievement in the longer term. In this regard there is an interesting point to be made concerning the apparent discrepancy between dominant norms and the demands of living in a high-risk environment. The example above (extract 5), in which a mother declares her powerlessness over her 18 year old daughter's decisions, “according to the law”, illustrates this idea. While the law assumes a person to be fully responsible by the age of eighteen, it should be noted that an evaluation of responsibility is always relative to a particular set of circumstances and behavioural alternatives, and that the need that this parent experiences to continue to make decisions on behalf of her daughter beyond the age of eighteen should be understood in this light.

## **Polarising Decision-making in Terms of ‘Right’ and ‘Wrong’**

Another feature of these narratives concerns the construction of risk in moral terms. Again, it appears that this may be a strategy for protecting young people, in terms of which they are presented with an already defined code of behaviour. The likelihood of an error of judgement, with potentially tragic consequences, may therefore be reduced through the application of a predefined code, reducing the need for ‘on the spot’ decision-making. Choices and behaviour within these narratives are constructed as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’, leaving a single correct option, which is predefined in any given situation. In the words of one young

person: “I won’t drink, I won’t do dagga and stuff like that. Because no, that’s not right, man. That’s not right.” (10)

A mother evaluates her daughter’s behaviour in the same way: “When I ask Samantha if she’s done something (smoked cigarettes), even if it’s wrong, she will say yes.” (11)

In terms of this moral codification of risky behaviour, the individual’s need for a complex evaluation of a choice concerning participation in some risky activity is reduced. Risky behaviours are simply categorised ‘wrong’, as defined by social norms and popular consensus. It should be emphasised at this point that this mode of evaluating behavioural options cannot be assumed to extend to other choices and situations also, but rather pertains specifically to the navigation of risk. Again it seems probable that this mode of construction serves to reduce the likelihood of a judgement error. While the future consequences of an action, for example, are necessarily uncertain, and therefore require more complex decision-making, the classification of behaviour in terms of a pre-given system requires little decision-making other than to abide by already established rules.

Darrell’s narrative, displaying not only evidence of individual decision-making, but also of non-conformity to accepted codes of ‘right’ behaviour, and engagement in activities involving a very high level of risk, supports the argument:

“I never did drink wine before, but I did smoke, I smoked weed, you see. You see, all my friends, they drink every day. Say every weekend they drink, you see, but I don’t drink...for me it’s like drink is for old people...Because my grandma drinks, you see, why must I drink? I’d rather smoke weed or something else, but not drink wine.” (12)

Later, the same seventeen-year-old boy explains his reasoning behind his involvement in selling ‘tik’ (crystal meth) while declining to take it himself:

“For me, like, this is now, how can I say, it’s like this is my shop, you see. I must sell this to get money, you see. It’s my only job, you see...You see, it’s like, why must I do it, it’s stupid people who do that, you see. And I’m just helping them out to be more stupid. But I won’t take drugs. If I take drugs there must be something wrong with me.” (13)

Thus Darrell clearly establishes his own decision-making system in contrast to those of other people – his friends and grandmother, who drink wine, conventional shop owners, as well as drug-takers, whom he considers to be ‘stupid’. His reasoning system goes far beyond the binary concepts of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, apparently employing a whole range of other criteria according to which an action is judged: most notably, in this extract, its practical consequences – the production of money, and hence success, or the exacerbation of stupidity, and presumably failure. While Darrell showed throughout his interviews considerable ability for independent thought and decision-making, it is noteworthy that his engagement in this regard has apparently led him to criminal activity. The complexity of the decisions with which he is faced are easy to imagine, when one considers that he has lived alone since the age of thirteen, that he has strong feelings of protectiveness toward his mother, who has always supported him alone, and whom he now does not want to burden, that he is strongly committed to completing his schooling, and that his employment alternatives are severely limited.

## **Risk and the Role of Grandparents**

While the central role of parents is thus portrayed in these narratives as the protection of young people from the risks associated with involvement in drugs, gangsterism, consumption of alcohol, and so on, grandparents appear in these narratives in roles that protect children and young people from their own parents. Thus, while parents are depicted as having the responsibility of protecting their children from the dangers of the outside world, grandparents protect them from the dangers that exist within the home. The following quotes from these young people’s narratives relate that their grandmothers provided food, love and security when it was unavailable from their parents:

“We didn’t have, like for instance, in the night we didn’t have food at home, and so she (grandmother) was struggling, or she will go out and look for something for us, something to eat.” (14)

“So my mother went to jail...And my granny will always lie to us – my mother was in hospital or something, but she was in jail at that time.” (15)

“Daar was tye wat soos, soos, ek en my ma en my broertjie nie so baie oor die weg gekom het nie. So was daar altyd- my Ma, my Ma sal

altyd vir ons na my ouma gestuur het, miskien of iets te gaan kyk daar om te eet of so.” (16)<sup>2</sup>

“So he (father) hit my mommy, and then I will just come, but I don’t know mos what’s going on. Ja, he hit me also...and I’d run away from home and I’m going to my gran. Ja, she took me to stay with her.” (17)

Thus, when these mothers are in jail, are themselves the victims or perpetrators of violence, or are unable to provide food or love for any other reason, these young people turn to their grandmothers to meet these needs. A story from Crystal’s narrative is illustrative:

“There was a time um, when we, when a few of my friends, they, they were, they went to this house. Um, so they, so the girl of the house, she’d invited them in, to come in, because they wanna hit her so she just wanna make friends with them and stuff. So they just stole in the house, and the next day they went again to the girl and they did stole again...so her mommy went to the police...And in the night the cops were there at our house, so they sommer blamed me for a key, a key, the house key. I don’t know where was the house key. Um, so they said, so they told my mom that we were in the people’s house and we were stealing and stuff like that. So I said, “No, it wasn’t me,” and stuff like that. So the cops...said... ‘No, you did,’ so I said, ‘No, I never, I was in the yard,’ and stuff like that. So they said we must come down to the police station...So my mommy said they must give us a hiding. So, so my mommy them must sign to let the cops hit us. So they were, ja, so they were hitting us...And so next time I went up to my granny, I never talked to my mommy so I went up to my granny, so I told her. Ja, and she came down, and she’s very sick, but she came down and she just yelled at them, and she just talk to my mommy and that.” (18)

In this story, Crystal’s mother plays a dual role – both that of protector and that of agent of the danger itself. While she attempts to protect her daughter from the dangers associated with living in a high-risk environment (by inviting the police

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<sup>2</sup> There were times when, like, my mother and my brother and I weren’t getting along so well. So there was always- my mother would always send us to my grandmother, maybe to see if there was something there to eat.

to punish the children for an alleged burglary), in so doing she herself becomes a source of risk to Crystal, both physical and emotional. It is at this point that Crystal calls on her grandmother for intervention – “So...I went up to my granny...and she just yelled at them.” These grandparents can thus be seen as playing a fundamental role in protecting young people from risk, and thereby promoting resilience.

However, the importance and potential effectiveness of the role of grandparents is balanced in these accounts, in particular in the parents’ narratives, by references to their ineffectiveness in controlling young people and, therefore, protecting them from danger. The following mother expresses her concerns about her daughter’s departure to stay with a grandmother: “(It) is very worrying really. Like I said, she’s like kind of, she’s free. There’s no rules...Her grandmother is very old, ja, she’s very old. So there’s no control over her.” (19)

Thus, while grandparents may provide these young adults with a particular form of support, they are perceived as ineffective in other ways, specifically with reference to controlling young people’s behaviour.

## **Social Positioning and Empathy**

Aside from protecting children from the overt risks presented by the physical and emotional abuse that takes place in their homes, grandmothers in these narratives are also credited with knowing and understanding their grandchildren’s ‘real’ selves, and with listening to and hearing their versions of events, crediting their personal perspectives with validity. In Crystal’s account,

Crystal: She was always there for me, um, ja, she was always there...I never did wrong in her eyes...When my, I was sitting with my friends around the corner, ne, so they were sniffing glue and I was just sitting there, so there was a lady coming by, so she thought I was doing the same things – but you can mos smell I didn’t do it. And so, um, she mos tell my mommy and that, so my mommy wanna hit me...So I told my mommy she can smell, it smells like that. So she said I mustn’t come and talk shit and all stuff like that. So I was mos scared to go home, because I knew I had never just done that, so I runned away...We to to Kommetjie...They found us there. Ja, so they- my uncle, the one I was telling you about, he was (wanting to hit us. So my granny stopped them) because she knew I never did it...She won’t

like accuse me of stuff, she will first ask me, ‘Did you do it, or didn’t you do it? Why you’ve done it?’ and stuff like that.”

I: And, um, how did she know you hadn’t been?

Crystal: Because I was living, at that time I was living with them, there by her, so she knew what kind of person I am, she really knew me from the inside and out. And she was always the one that always knew what, if I don’t feel right or something like that. Because she was the one that’s most- She was the one that, how can I say now, she was always there for me and- (20)

This example not only reveals the importance to this young person of being given a fair chance to have her perspective heard – “she won’t accuse me of stuff, she will first ask me” – but also of being trusted – “she knew what kind of person I am, she knew me from the inside and out.” It may be that this role, of which trust and empathetic understanding are the key constituents, is much more easily fulfilled by grandmothers than it is by parents, in terms of the positions that they occupy relative to the young people, with their associated duties and obligations. As a possible generalisation, it may be that for someone who is responsible for another’s protection against the kinds of risks that involve the purposeful action of those at risk, the issues of trust and empathy may be more fraught than they might for others in a less directly responsible role.

This possibility is supported by the manner in which this grandmother, at least, establishes the empathy she has with her granddaughter. Crystal relates a story of a time when, as punishment, her parents sent her to her room and withheld her meals. Her grandmother, in response, joined Crystal by refusing food: “So they brought her food in, so she didn’t, she didn’t want it, and so we didn’t eat the night or the next day.” (21)

It is clear from this example that the means through which this grandmother established her solidarity and empathetic alignment with her granddaughter were not available to the parents, who were implementing her punishment. It might thus be argued that the opposing positions available to young people and their parents in such situations render empathy and trust between them more difficult to attain than they are within relationships in which these struggles are not required.

A similar barrier to empathic understanding on the part of parents is discernible in both parents' and young people's constructions of the relative truth status of their perspectives, and hence parents' ability to make decisions on behalf of young people. The extract quoted above (extract 6), in which Crystal explains that she asked her step-father's opinion of a boy in whom she was interested, in case she did not "know him right", provides an example. Her step-father's opinion is assumed to be the correct one, rendering her own experience invalid, and precluding the possibility for her to feel that her perspective is empathetically understood and valued within this relationship. It is interesting that this apparent lack of empathy, and the construction of adults' perspectives as correct, relative to those of young people, who are portrayed as naïve and even foolish, does not appear to result in resistance on the part of the young people to adults' guidance, or to inhibit their ability to approach these adults for help. Instead, the extreme dangers of the environment appear to be acknowledged by both sides, resulting in (at least a theoretical) acceptance of adults' authority by both parties.

## **Empathy and Relationship Goals and Directionality**

A noteworthy feature of those relationships in which a high degree of empathy appears to have been achieved is that they involve engagement in mutually shared activities for their own sake, rather than purely out of necessity or in the interests of some other goal, such as education or safety. For example, Ricardo reports that he used to accompany his grandmother daily on walks through the mountains and on outings to the beach, many of which were for the sole purpose of picking flowers to give to friends and other family members. He describes his conversations with his grandmother in similar terms – conducted for their own sake, rather than, for example, for the purpose of warning him against the dangers of drugs, and so on:

I: And did you used to chat while you were walking?

Ricardo: Yes, talking about how she was when she was young and stuff like that...she used to um tell us how did she grow up, and like the history, her history. When she, she and her mother were also walking in the mountains and go fetch water and stuff like that...And she did know stuff about the birds and the flowers, and like animals and stuff like that, she used to like that. (22)

In this example, the only justification that is given for the chosen topics of conversation is that "she used to like that." It is of further interest that, in

contrast to the opposing positions assumed by young people and their parents within those interactions specifically designed to promote healthy development, Ricardo's grandmother occupies a position similar to that of her grandson. Through reference to her own childhood, and the parallel walks she used to take with her mother, this story highlights their similarity rather than their difference, further increasing the potential for empathy and mutual understanding.

That the establishment of empathy does not preclude the occurrence of conversations directly aimed at offering the young people guidance, however, is evident within this narrative: "She was always telling me and my brother, 'Don't go that road, man.' And, like, 'Go on that road.' And, 'Don't become like your uncles and your aunts and be in jail and stuff like that.'" (23) Thus, rather than implying a requirement that adults put aside their responsibilities in this regard in the establishment of empathy, these narratives suggest the importance of the presence of both.

The importance of such flexibility in the navigation of these relationships is further suggested by the more fluid allocation of positions to the relationship partners within their interactions. For example, within these relationships the positions of 'protector' and 'protected', 'provider' and 'provided-for', 'knower' and 'known' are less rigidly available to only one or the other member, and young people and adults assume both positions at different times:

"You know, there was a time when my daddy's granny also lived here, and, and my other granny lived there, so when my granny came to fetch me they always had something to say about her, and I didn't like it, and I didn't want to tell my granny because how would she feel." (24)

"En like soos se maar daar was nie nou kos in die huis nie, dan sal my ouma altyd iets gaan soek het om vir ons kos te kry of so, om te eet, nou in die aande. En soos of ek en my broertjie sal gegaan het, dan sal ons miskien op ander mense se deur geklop het en miskien gevra het om, of daar nie n stukkie brood is of so iets nie. En so sal ek en my broertjie alles wat ons kry van die mense af, dan sal ons dit huistoe geneem het, dan sit ons voor die tafel, en ons eet almal sommer saam." <sup>3</sup> (25)

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<sup>3</sup> And like, say there was no food in the house, then my grandmother would always go and look for food for us to eat in the evening. And like if my brother and I went then we would

“And she (grandmother) used to send us, we used to, we used to, when the first bus in the morning, ne, rides past us, that’s half past five in the morning, then we used to stand up and go fetch like cigarettes, man. Like ask people in the morning at the bus stop for cigarettes and that. And so then we took it to her and they smoke.” (26)

In the above extracts, young people assume positions traditionally reserved for the adults in the relationships – Crystal protects her grandmother from other family members’ slander, and Ricardo provides food and cigarettes for his grandmother. While adults may primarily assume the role of provider, protector, and so on, these roles are not rigidly adhered to in these relationships. This ability to alternate between the positions assumed within the relationships can be read as allowing for similarity and alignment between the partners, and exists in contrast to the relative unlikelihood of such an experience within relationships narrated in terms of binary opposites. Ricardo states quite clearly the connection between his grandmother’s accessibility to him, in this instance his ability to take his troubles to her, and her alignment with him ‘on the same road’: “Like, my mother was never there for me. She was, she was on her own road, you see. She wasn’t there for us, for me and for my brother. That’s why we will always go to my gran.” (27)

By implication, Ricardo positions his grandmother as “on the same road” as he is, a representation locating her in the same geographical space, and therefore rendering her accessible. The argument here is that the responsibility involved in taking on the charge of a young person’s development, while a very important survival strategy within a high-risk context, has the potential to inhibit the development of empathetic communication and mutual understanding, through the barrier it creates in the form of adults’ need to control young people, and young people’s potentially conflicting need to either impress or deceive the relevant adults.

## **Consistency**

Within all the narratives from young people in Ocean View, the ‘ever-present’ quality of what their most important adults offer them constitutes a key feature of the accounts, and a reason for the identification of particular relationships as

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maybe knock on other people’s doors, and maybe ask if there wasn’t a little piece of bread or something. And so my brother and I would take everything we got home, then we would all sit around the table and eat together.

the most important ones. Ricardo's account contains constant repetition of words such as 'always' and 'every' in reference to what his grandmother did for him. In answer, for example, to my question of how she showed her pride in him, he replies that, "She watched every game, *every* game." His description of their trips to the beach similarly emphasises their consistency:

Ricardo: Every, every day in the week, like from Monday to Friday, she will take us to the beach to go fetch mossels and stuff like that...Ja, every day, every day. (28)

And Crystal reports:

I: So what was it about your gran that made her so important in your life?

C.R: She was always there fore me, um- she was always there. (29)

It seems further that this consistent support is particularly valued for being pervasive, rather than confined to a particular area of life, such as school or material or emotional difficulties. In the words of one of these young people speaking of his grandmother: "It's like she gave her, she gave everything for me, man. Like her whole heart." (30)

## **Aloneness**

Unfortunately, while all four of these young people could identify an adult who was most important in their lives, three of the four found themselves in some way alone at the time of the interview – either due to the death of the important adult, as in the case of Crystal and Ricardo, or as a result of the fact, as in Darrell's case, that while that adult may have been more important than any other, the relationship was nevertheless not a strong one. While Crystal remains with her mother and stepfather, her grandmother, now dead, was the only other person by whom she felt understood.

Ricardo states that,

"Now I'm on my own. I don't say to my mommy. I will give my mommy love, ja, but not, I will not chat to her." (31)

Darrell:

“I don’t have a, how can I say, strongly a relationship with my mom, you see. It’s like I’m just, I’m just here on my own and just checking out, go to see, to do stuff with my own.” (32)

The difficulty this boy has experienced in living alone for the last four years, since the age of 13, is well expressed when he says,

“Like especially when I go to sleep, you see, I don’t make much, I don’t make food, you see. So sometimes...when I don’t like feeling to make me something here, just laying there, and then I think I’m going to make me something tomorrow, I’m going to sleep now. You see, but if my mom was here she could have done it for me, you see.” (33)

The extent to which this boy’s mother is unavailable to him, and to which he has had to learn to cope alone is illustrated in his explanation that,

“For me it’s like, man, I’d even, I was even, even when I was small and I did maybe pick a fight on the street, I wouldn’t run home and go tell my mom. I would just sitting. And later I go home like nothing happened – ‘What are you talking about? I never saw him. I’d never fight with him!’ (chuckles) You see.” (34)

The reciprocity of this arrangement, in terms of which he neither takes his troubles to his mother nor does she invite him to do so, is made explicit in the following extract, in which Darrell explains how he keeps secrets from his mother:

Darrell: Actually, I don’t lie to her. I don’t lie to her, you see...I don’t tell her, you see. But she don’t ask me, you see. (35)

However, as Darrell points out, sometimes being alone may be the best available option:

“For me it was very fine for me alone, you see, because I did do my thing and *my* time and *my* way. Now that he’s there (his elder brother) everything is like upside down. He do this, I do that then. You see, nothing is right... You see, I live with, how can I say? I live with *such* trouble, you see, it’s nothing for me just to go, but where, where am I going to when I want to go? You see, like just to get away from them, or-” (36)

## The role of the School

Darrell’s case, although the only one like it in this study, is interesting in that it provides some insight into the alternatives available to children whose needs are not met at home. In explanation of his mother’s departure, without him, to Masiphumelele:

I: So how come you didn’t go stay with her there?

Darrell: You see, um, I mos go to school here, man. You see. Then I was, ‘How can I change?’ How can I say, um, but um, when we lived here, we- I was in primary school, you see. So after primary school I came to high school. And I did check, ‘What?’ All my friends and everybody are here. If I have to go and live in Site 5 then I must make new friends and new pupils, you see. I’m not going to live there. Ja, and I want to stay here. It’s better for me here. (37)

Darrell thus appears to derive his sense of stability from his social environment at school. His questions, “How can I change?” and “What?” are expressive of the sudden disruption he imagines that he would experience should he have to relocate to a new place, when “All my friends and everybody are here.” Thus, in Darrell’s account his friends assume a more important role than does his mother. What seems unfortunate in this story is not that he should derive security from his friends but that it should be exclusively so. In addition to the absence of his parents, or of any guardian, notable is his silence on the matter of adult members of the school community. He refers only to friends and pupils, and makes no reference to teachers or other adults at the school. The reasons for this are not clear, and whether this situation is a result of his own avoidance of adults or their unavailability remains a question. However, as such circumstances can be presumed to be plentiful in number, and on the increase with the acceleration of AIDS deaths, it may be a valuable avenue for further research.

## Relationships in Fish Hoek

At first glance, the overt statements made within the narratives of relationships from Fish Hoek appear substantially different from those from Ocean View. Most prominent are their differences in terms of the relationship aims, the ideals of development, and the manner in which the participants pursue these. It will be argued, however, that on closer inspection of the ideologies underlying these accounts, they emerge as more similar than different, and that, rather than on the level of ideological and cultural meaning systems, these narratives differ primarily in terms of how the participants respond to the practical opportunities and challenges of the particular environments in which they live. Thus, while fundamentally similar meaning systems may be at play in both contexts, the vastly different demands of the material and social environments within which these are lived and experienced, and to which participants must respond, call for substantially different strategies and tactics in the ways in which these systems are utilised and enacted.

In stark contrast with Ocean View, Fish Hoek is predominantly a white, middle-class community, with a reputation for conservative thinking. The opportunities and challenges faced by the participants in these relationships are therefore substantially different from those in Ocean View. Completion of schooling, for example, is almost a given in Fish Hoek society, and the aims of development are positioned on the other end of the continuum. Rather than on a range between “drugs and the grave” and completing school and finding a job, the outcomes in Fish Hoek are more likely to range from finding a job to becoming “a big nob.” Within this context, the risks are also different. While alcohol, drugs and mental illness do feature in these accounts, firstly, they do not do so on the same scale, and secondly, they do not carry the same awareness of the threat of violence and death so prominent in the narratives from Ocean View.

Within the narratives of relationships from Fish Hoek, three primary and highly interrelated themes emerge as predominant. Firstly, the relationships are constructed as instrumental to the achievement of desired developmental outcomes, and the narration of the events within them is structured to a very great extent around these aims. Secondly, the conceptualisation of people as autonomous selves forms a key architectural structure in the narratives, and creates a conflict within these accounts. On the one hand autonomy constitutes the most desired goal of development, and on the other a barrier to emotional closeness, which relationship partners seek perpetually to transcend. The third major theme in these narratives emerges as the partners attempt to overcome their isolation from each other, through the search for a “connection” between

pair members' 'inner selves'. This connection in turn constitutes an integral piece in the causal chain, in terms of which relationships are intended to bring about positive developmental outcomes, creating a paradoxical tension between the pursuit of autonomy and connectedness.

## **Relationship Narratives and the Goals of Development**

Almost all the features of these narratives are in some way related, if not directed, toward the attainment of desired developmental outcomes. The overwhelming majority of outcomes these relationships are intended to achieve can be classified under the broad heading of autonomy. Most of these can further be categorised as indicators of personal success, and include self-motivation, emotional independence, social competence, material and academic achievement, and so on. A father comments on his "sense of duty" and "responsibility" toward his son:

Dennis: Well, I'm gonna guide him to become a proper citizen...Give him the right ideals, the right idea about life, the goals, where, where are we going? What do you want to do, what do you want to become? Do you want to be a cricket coach or do you want to become a general manager of Nedcor, or-? Something like that, do you want to be a big nob? Wanna become Investec Bank, hhhm?...So where do you want to go? (38)

In this extract, the father explicitly states his focus on his son's progress toward becoming "a big nob," defined in terms of personal, material power and success – "Wanna become Investec Bank, hhhm?" What is notable about all the outcomes of development to which the participants refer is that they have in common the ability to facilitate coping "on (one's) own" in the world. A son asserts his growing independence from his father:

But I'm, I mean, I'm actually like quite, how can I say this? Like independent, I'm- Ja, I'm just, ja...Ja well I can make a plan myself, ja. (39)

And a father describes his partial satisfaction with his son's progress:

“But I, so he’s becoming more independent, although- But the ball’s started-

Almost every, almost every three months, I see a – a change...He’s accepting slight responsibilities...Slight. He will do things for himself, slowly.” (40)

In addition to overt statements of aspirations to autonomy – “I’m actually like quite...Like independent,” words and phrases such as “by yourself”, “(on) his own” and “for himself” permeate these narratives, indicating a marked emphasis on separate existence and independent functioning in all spheres. The emphasis placed in the narratives on the achievement of these goals is evident not only in their overall structure, but also in the narration of almost all those events accorded significance within the narratives. A mother’s account of her husband’s attempts to improve her son’s social competence is revealing:

“Francois (her husband) just said to him, he just smiled, he said, ‘You know what will happen, you just have to get this marks up and you’ll have a car and then you can go by yourself’, you know, but I think by the time, if he has his own wheels and he can started organising his own life, he’ll get more sho- sociable, you see?” (41)

Thus, this parent’s attempts to encourage his son’s social life are intricately bound up with his attempts to facilitate his development as an autonomous and successful being – “You just have to get this marks up...and then you can go by yourself”...and...“he’ll get more sociable, you see” – illustrating the extent to which participants’ constructions of almost all aspects of their relationships, even the encouragement of interaction with others, are infused with individualist ideals.

## **The Mechanisms of Development**

### **The Psychologisation of Development and the Observance of Age-graded Norms**

As in the narratives from Ocean View, there is a close adherence within these accounts to consensually defined norms for development and evidence of anxiety when either parents or young people fail to conform to them. Unlike in Ocean view, however, norms and the ways in which young people are

encouraged to conform to them, are constructed in the narratives from Fish Hoek in psychological, rather than in religious or moral terms, and assume the form of age-graded norms. The following extract from a mother's account of her relationship with her son illustrates:

“So sometimes I put a little bit- sometimes I put a-...I put a little bit of pressure on him ...You know, at his age a nineteen-year-old goes um out a lot and- ...I think also, you know, we live in Fish Hoek and all his friends, the few that he's got...don't live close...Um and then, you know, it started bothering us, you know, it's not normal. You've got to have a balanced life, you know.” (42)

Another mother expresses the anxiety she feels about her daughter's continued financial dependence:

“It's a big source of concern, because by the time I was Deryn's age, I'd already been working for many years. I had a pension fund, I had a medical aid...She's got nothing, she's got absolutely nothing.” (43)

The above extracts illustrate the participants' concern with consensually defined norms of development marked in these narratives through references to the generic young person – “a nineteen-year-old goes um out a lot” – and by frequent allusions to the commonly known status of these ‘facts’ – “*You know, it's not normal – you've got to have a balanced life, you know.*”

The ‘psychological code’ in terms of which these relationships are narrated is further evident in the manner in which both adults and young people attempt to regulate behaviour and achieve conformity with these norms. It appears, therefore, to fulfil in the narratives from Fish Hoek a similar function to that performed by the religious / moral code predominant in the narratives from Ocean View. Instead of taking their difficulties to God and the Church, as do those participants from Ocean View, these adults and young people employ the expertise of psychologists, both in constructing ideals and in attempting to manage behaviour accordingly. The different responses of an Ocean View and a Fish Hoek parent to their children's engagement in risky activities illustrates the point:

A young person from Ocean View tells how his father persuaded him to go to church in response to discovering his involvement in gang activities and drinking:

“And so my dad came to me, and so he did talk to me and, ag, I must come to Church on Sunday, man, and see how’s it to live, to live in that, that dinges, like in that life. To have God in your life and stuff like that.” (44)

A Fish Hoek mother tells of her attempts to curb her daughter’s “rebellious behaviour”, and to understand its cause:

“By now Deryn and I had been going to a psychologist for a while and the psychologist said to me that Deryn was suffering from father rejection.” (45)

And another of her attempts to direct her son toward a suitable career:

“So by then I went to have him tested. That’s why I said to him, “I think you should actually do this and this”, but they never listen to their parents. Have him tested and I heard it from somebody else’s mouth that this and this and this is how- and his eyes were like- ‘You actually know who I am’, you know, like, ‘Whoah, okay,’ like, ‘fine’...And then, ‘This is what you should study,’ and, ‘Do you want to study?’ whatever. So we said to him, ‘You can go study,’ I didn’t say, ‘You have to go and study, you have to go study this,’ – ‘Do whatever you wanna do.’ (46)

In extract 44 this father attempts to modify his son’s behaviour, defined as morally ‘wrong’, by steering him toward God and religion. In the next extract (45), a mother attempts to modify comparable behaviour, understood in psychological terms as the result of ‘father rejection’, through consultation with a psychologist. While different in their approaches, all three parents attempt to curb very similar behaviours. In addition, both attempts involve an appeal to a system of meaning-making that extends beyond the immediate problematic event and calls upon the spiritual dimension, in the first instance, and the psychical, in the second, of the young people in an attempt to modify their behaviour. Extract 46 shows how another mother attempts to direct her son’s behaviour via a claim to knowledge of his ‘real inner self’, based on the expert

opinion of a psychologist. This illustrates yet another parental attempt to regulate behaviour, which in this case involves convincing a young person that his mother's directions as to what he should study are correct. The analysis of this extract will be elaborated later.

The differences and similarities evident here support the argument suggested above that, rather than espousing an entirely different set of values, the narratives from Fish Hoek and Ocean View represent different ways of understanding similar situations, and only somewhat different strategies for achieving similar ends.

## **Ideals of Autonomy and the exertion of Parental Control**

An interesting conflict exists in these narratives between participants' overt statements of the value of autonomy and their attempts to achieve it. While adults and young people alike state overtly that they strive for independence and self-determination of the young people, close inspection of the ways in which they narrate their attempts uncovers evidence that contradicts and potentially even refutes their aims. The father quoted above (extract 38) describes his aims as a parent in terms of the goals and ideals of autonomy and personal success. However, analysis of the ways in which he narrates his aims reveals that, in direct contrast to the content of his words, he constructs himself as the agent of his son's acquisition of the very "goals" and "ideals" that will procure and establish his autonomy – "*I'm gonna guide* him to become a proper citizen...*Give* him the right ideals." Another constructs the distribution of agency similarly in his comment on his daughter's confidence in him that she had had sex for the first time the previous night:

"Somewhere I've done something right...I've, I've actually done something right somewhere with this daughter of mine, somewhere along the line when I had decided all those years ago before Pat and I even had children that I was never going to smack them and I was never going to rule by fear...that maybe this was paying, pay-off, okay, for, not for me, but for her." (47)

Again, the father is the ultimate agent of his daughter's honesty, contending that "somewhere *I've done* something right...I've, *I've actually done* something right...somewhere along the line." The narration of this event shows how the stories of relationships become codified in these terms. Almost any action on the

part of the young people in these narratives is constructed somehow as the achievement or failure of their parents, even if this involves connecting them to events in bygone years – “before Pat and I even had children.”

Thus, while the participants from Fish Hoek overtly aspire to autonomy and personal achievement, the attribution of both causal and moral responsibility, as well as ultimate agency, to the parents for their children’s actions within a linear causal sequence, positions children only as secondary agents, *reactive* to their parents’ actions.

## **Making Causal Connections**

The participants’ attempts at managing this conflict are evident in the means they employ to achieve their stated aims. The individualist ideology in terms of which these relationships are narrated displays, amongst its repertoire, a dichotomous construction of selfhood, in terms of which the self is comprised of an interior and an exterior element. The interior in these narratives is prioritised over the exterior as ultimately important, and is conceptualised in terms of an emotional ‘real’ self. The exterior is presumably some defensive façade, which must be transcended in order to establish a “connection” between parent and child. It is through this “connection” that adults are depicted as able to exert their influence on young people’s developmental outcomes.

As in the case of the necessity for young people’s active engagement and therefore active aversion of many of the risks to which young people in Ocean View are exposed, Fish Hoek parents’ attempts to influence their children in the achievement of desired outcomes involve influencing their choice and personal agency. Thus, adults aim to gain access to the ‘real’ inner selves of their children, in order to affect their motivations, conceived of as stemming from within. Parents’ knowledge of their children’s interiors therefore becomes a highly valued asset, and structures the narration of many relationship events. One mother sums up the difference between her son’s relationship with his father and that with herself in these terms:

“I know, I know exactly when something’s troubling him. I just know his body language very well and I can see- you know, my, my, my husband...can’t- my ss, my son’s like a closed book to him and it, it, it’s difficult for him to get through, that’s why they don’t rea-, they’re not really, they, they’re a lot together and they do a lot of things

together, but there's no connection - not real, not real connection...not very close, like Chris and I, because I think I understand him...I know, you know, what he's going through." (48)

This extract concerns the centrality to their relationship of the "real connection" between mother and son, which she contrasts with the "closed book" with which her husband is met – "they're a lot together and they do a lot of things together, but there's no connection - not real, not real connection." The key in these narratives to the establishment of this connection lies in the parents' assumed knowledge of their children's interior selves – "because I think I understand him...I know, you know, what he's going through." The overt dimensions of relationships, such as doing things together, are thus accorded secondary importance in these narratives, which attribute primary importance to the more subtle dimensions of interaction – "I just know his body language very well and I can see." Interestingly, very little emphasis is placed on children's similar knowledge of their parents, resulting in a markedly unidirectional structure to these narratives. In fact, parents' confidences to their children are portrayed as parenting errors: "I would probably confide in her a little bit more than I should, with regards to what I feel about her Mom...You shouldn't burden your children with like, the, the adult shit, okay?" (49)

Two primary means by which parents attempt to access this private inner self emerge in these accounts. On the one hand are those that rely on an intuitive form of knowledge, and on the other are those that involve 'reading' the young person's inner emotional state from what are construed as its 'outward' expressions:

Valerie: And I always think like, I wonder what Christoph thinks, 'Ja, Conrad's getting everything', you know, 'What have I-', you know, 'what did I get?', you know, type of thing, but he doesn't tell me. But I know he thinks about it. I know.

I: You just know?

Valerie: I *know*.

I: You just-

Valerie: I *know*. (50)

This mother asserts her knowledge of her son's thoughts without his having stated them, a knowledge that requires no evidential support or justification – "I *know*." Most interestingly, her son confirms the accuracy of her observations:

I: How does she know when something's bothering you, if you don't tell her?

Christoph: I don't know, she's seen the- you got body language, your facial expressions, whatever...just uh, if you've got a, in a bad mood today, or-...Um she usually asked me if I've got a, if I got a problem or something and I usually say, "No, I don't."

I: And then what does she say? {Laugh}

Christoph: No, she's just fine then...Ja she um she knows when I want to be left alone and I don't want to speak to anybody...we talk very little, actually...It's more like, more body language. Eye contact, everything like that...I don't know um, probably just because we know each other pretty well, know what you thinking, um, I don't know how to explain it now. (51)

In this extract, Christoph both confirms his mother's interpretations, concurring with her suggestion that these are arrived at by intuitive means – “probably just because we know each other pretty well, know what you thinking, um, I don't know how to explain it now” – and identifies observation of ‘external’ cues, such as body language, as an additional means by which his mother knows his unspoken thoughts and feelings. Christoph, in this extract, further alludes to the value of such non-verbal communication, through which he feels understood without having been forced into making a confession – “She's just fine then...she um she knows when I want to be left alone.”

Extracts 45 and 46, in which two mothers discuss having taken their children to psychologists, reveal their purpose in gaining knowledge of their children's inner selves, namely to direct them away from risk and toward desired developmental outcomes. While one mother employs a psychologist to help her understand the cause of her daughter's rebellion, identified as ‘father rejection’, the other makes use of psychological testing to validate her intuitive knowledge of the most suitable career path for her son to pursue. Of particular importance here is the use to which she puts the validity her instructions have acquired. No longer is she confined, in directing her son's behaviour, to giving orders - “I didn't say you have to go and study.” Instead she is able to couch her instructions in terms of her knowledge of his true self, and thereby to persuade him to make the desired choices himself – “do whatever you wanna do.” Thus, not only is this mother able to control her son's actions, but she is able to do so without compromising her statements regarding the value of his independence. Similarly, her son is able to accept her orders without throwing doubt on his own autonomy – “‘You actually know who I am’, you know, like, ‘Whoah, okay,’ like, ‘Fine.’”

## **Making Connections and Relationship Content**

The importance of adults' ability to establish a connection with the young people's 'real' inner selves not only structures the accounts of these relationships but determines also, to a very large degree, the content of relationship activities described.

The narratives display a propensity in these relationships for a focus on emotions in general, and in particular young adults' emotional difficulties. As one father puts it,

“I think that’s the type of relationship we’ve got now...she can talk to me about anything that would be on her mind, or that would hassle her.” (52)

In the words of a mother,

“I mean if she is having problems she ‘phones, I can tell in her voice, ‘What you doing tonight?’ and I say, ‘Nothing much. Do you want to meet me after work for coffee?’ ‘Ja, I need to talk.’” (53)

These relationships tend, therefore, to be focused on adults gaining a knowledge of, and helping their children iron out their emotional difficulties. This focus entails an emphasis in the pairs' interactions on discussions or otherwise acquired understandings of young adults' emotional troubles.

## **Emotion, Responsibility and Empathy**

As in the narratives from Ocean View, however, there seems in these accounts to be a relationship between adults' constructions of their responsibilities toward their children and the empathy they are able to achieve. A daughter's evaluation of her relationship with her mother as compared with her father illustrates:

“I might have a stronger relationship with my Dad, but my Mom's like – I know I can fall back on my Mom. My Dad, I wouldn't be, I wouldn't like, in a crisis or very, I could talk to my Dad about it, but

he couldn't really do anything about it, whereas my Mom would. But you know then, then I'd say it's far much more easier to speak to my Dad. You know, he doesn't judge, he's very open-minded. Ja and I don't know, my, my Dad gives more of like a "don't worry" kind of, he talks through the things like options you could, if you had a problem you could like talk through it and, um, you know, give me my options of what I could do. My Mom's very much like, 'Well, I think you should do this. You could do this and stuff it up, or you could go this way and it would be right.'" (54)

Even though Juliette acknowledges that her father would be unable to do anything concrete to help her in a crisis, this daughter evaluates her relationship with her father as the "stronger" one, in contrast to that with her mother whom she knows she can "fall back on." She thus relegates the value of the directive support she derives from her mother – "You could do this and stuff it up, or you could go this way and it would be right" – to that of a last resort, as compared with that provided by her father, who is admittedly less able in this regard, but who is "far much more easier to talk to." This same father describes the differences between his and Juliette's mother's approaches to Juliette's confidence in them about her sexual encounter:

"And I said, 'Juliette, it's something that's personal, it's something that, that you have experienced. It's your body, it's your choices...you do have choices, you've reached that stage where you can make choices, whether they're right or wrong.' She, however, did tell her Mom that night. The Mom's reaction was- Pat I think took it personally, well I know she did, okay, in that it was a personal affront, this is not what she had planned for Juliette... it's like, 'I planned it, my daughter, you know, she would get married and she would like –' I don't know.'" (55)

While Juliette's father emphasises the importance of Juliette's own agency in her sexual choices, her mother, in his description, experiences frustration when her daughter exercises her own choice, instead of affecting her mother's plans. In conjunction with the similar experiences of the other parents and young adults, it might be argued, therefore, that adults who construct their responsibilities toward their children in terms of controlling their behaviour run the risk of engendering resistance on the part of young people to confiding in them. In addition, the frustration they experience, when their attempts at control are unsuccessful, may further impair their ability to establish empathy with their

children, as illustrated by Juliette's frequent references to her mother's inability to understand her:

"I can...tell him most things and he'll just, he'll either keep quiet or- and I will know he's listening, whereas if I talk to my Mom, my Mom will keep quiet, but she's already programming in her head what to say back to me...That's why my- I could say that my Mom listens, but she doesn't actually hear." (56)

Empathy, therefore, and parents' ability to guide their children may, paradoxically, be most easily attained when their intentions as such take a back seat to the adoption of a non-judgemental and non-authoritative position relative to their children. Again, the importance of context may be paramount here. While the non-controlling intervention of grandparents within the narratives from Ocean View was positively evaluated by the participants, in terms of the empathic understandings it achieved, it was simultaneously negatively evaluated by parents in terms of its failure to protect young people from exposure to extreme risk. Thus, again it appears difficult to argue for substantially different ideological systems between the two contexts, as apparent differences may be explainable in terms of differing environmental demands, rather than in terms of differences in the ideological structure of narratives.

## **Relationships in Masiphumelele**

Masiphumelele is a poor black township. The relationship narratives, like those from Ocean View, are infused with stories of poverty, violence, alcohol abuse, disease and death. As in Ocean View, these factors are intricately bound up with relationships, in terms of their establishment, maintenance and termination. Relationships are not only damaged and terminated by violence and death, but others are established and strengthened.

Again, a few broad features of the relationships between young people and the most important adults in their lives can be identified as key in the narratives from Masiphumelele. Emotional support and pragmatic guidance, provided by adults, are the primary benefits both they and young people identify as resulting from these relationships, and are perceived as integral to the formation of young people's identities. The forms that relationships assume, and that structure the

events within them, are, in addition, tightly bound up with broader cultural values, on which an overt emphasis is placed in these accounts.

The emotional support described in the accounts of these relationships is one of the most interesting features of these narratives. Many of the narratives of these relationships, like those in Fish Hoek, begin with reference to some emotionally troubling event. This not only signals the beginning of a story, but also represents the reason young people give for identifying the relationships they do as most important, as well as affording adults the opportunity to comfort them, a primary goal attributed to the relationships in adults' accounts. For example, a 21 year old girl begins,

“I don't know how to put it. I can say on my mother's side our relationship is very tight, you see. If I have a problem that worries me I can talk about it to her.” (57)

The beginning points of stories are particularly interesting, in that they provide insight into cultural ideals and expectations by indicating the kinds of events that conflict with these, and thus make for a story. The tendency in these narratives, as in those from Fish Hoek, to begin with reference to “a problem that worries me” indicates the role these relationships play in resolving young people's troubles. They provide a space within which confidences can be made, and difficulties discussed, thereby meeting young people's needs for emotional support.

## Hope

A primary theme that can be identified in the quality of the emotional support these adults provide is that of hope. Another young person describes the emotional support she has received from her mother since revealing her HIV status as positive:

“In 2001 I heard I was HIV positive, and when I heard that I was scared to tell my mother...But when she heard I was HIV positive, she...said, ‘No, my child, I was not going to do anything,’ and she supported me about things, telling me I am not going to die soon, you see. Even now when I'm sad she supports me a lot...By the time she was consoling me she said what is going to happen, like for instance,

because I have HIV I can say I'm going to die soon, you see. Maybe even before I die she would suffer from asthma and die before me whereas I have HIV. And she said that the person with HIV is not sick, you not sick when you have HIV, you not getting sick easily, it takes time for you to become sick, you see...I felt so relieved by the time she console me. I also gave myself hope, because she said, 'Don't think because you are HIV you won't get work, you still going to get a job and work, and you can even buy a car when you are working.' ' I had no hope. I thought maybe is the end of my life. She also told me that I'm still going to live a long life.' (58)

A nineteen year old boy tells a similar story about his failure at school:

“When I was failing, on that day when I was failing to be at Matric, but (s)he didn't get angry for that...(s)he's just keeping encouraging...I just, I just burn my report so that she can never even see it...So (s)he was going to school and at school (s)he got another report and (s)he come to me and try to talk with me....She said to me, 'No, Andile, this is not the end of the, of the world. You are still young...you can continue your studies.' (59)

The primary benefit these young people report that they derive from the support their mothers offer them is the restoration of hope, when dealing with an event that somehow threatens future opportunities – “You still going to get a job and work, and you can even buy a car when you are working...and live a long life” and, “This is not the end...of the world. You are still young...you can continue your studies.” In both cases also, hope is restored not only by pointing directly to positive possibilities for the future, such as buying a car or continuing studies, but also by placing the problematic event in perspective. The first young person's mother refers to the possibility of her own death resulting from an asthma attack, locating the threat posed by her daughter's HIV status within a context of other risks from which no one is free. Andile's mother achieves the same objective, locating the event of his failure at school within the broader context of his whole life – “You are still young” – and thereby reducing its apparent enormity.

## Unconditional Acceptance

Another benefit these young people derive from their mothers' reactions to the difficulties with which they present them is the realisation of unconditional acceptance, and the sense of security they derive from this knowledge. In both these extracts, these young people's mothers discover a problem their children have been afraid to confess and have attempted to conceal. Both stories, at the beginning, are characterised by the young people's fear of their mothers' reactions to discovering their failure to live up to expectations – "I was scared to tell my mother," and, "I just burn my report so that she can never even see it." In both instances, these young people's mothers prove their fears to have been groundless – "No, my child, I was not going to do anything," and "but (s)he didn't get angry for that...(s)he's just keeping encouraging." The fear of rejection these young people experience when they fail to live up to adults' expectations, and the sense of relief and security when they discover their fears unfounded is clearly evident in the story a girl tells of her mother's reaction when she fell pregnant at the age of 15:

Phumla: She was very supportive...She bought me some toiletries after I gave birth.

I: So, um, what did, what did that mean to you?

Phumla: Like, while she did that, I thought when she was shouting at me it didn't mean that she was throwing me away, you see, or she was chasing me out of her house. She was doing what every parent can do to her child, I told myself that. (60)

## The Symbolic Significance of Material Support

A number of authors, in particular Russell (1995), have argued that material provision is held to be more important to relationships within many African cultures than is emotional provision. Especially interesting in the narratives from Masiphumelele, however, is what appears to be the symbolic emotional content of both the material and practical support young people receive from the adults in their lives, casting a somewhat different light on these claims. It is interesting to note that, without exception, references to the provision of material support in these narratives are combined with references to the sacrifice involved in parents' attempts to meet their children's material needs. For example, "I did get clothes...and she bought me a bike...but my mom was the only one working, you see, and we had three people." (61)

This combination of references to material provision and sacrifice can be seen to imply a significance of material provision that extends beyond merely meeting young people's material needs, and provides, in addition, evidence of the extent to which these adults care for them, as indicated by their willingness to place their children's needs before their own. The importance of this aspect of material giving is evident in a boy's description of the inadequacy of his father's contributions in this regard: "And my father, my father...It's just like, how can I say? It's just like, he don't care, man. He, he's just like, 'I have this child and I must give him my share' and he just give and he go on with his things. He don't like really care for me, you see." (62)

The provision of material requirements is often explicitly described as meeting other needs such as, as in the following example, enhancing self-esteem. A boy describes the difference having a school uniform has made to him. "Since I started school, I wasn't, I wasn't wearing a uniform, but at least now I'm trying to, to be- look like someone here..." (63)

Rather than simply fulfilling a material function, this boy's school uniform enables him to "look like someone here," thus both clothing his body and enhancing his self-esteem. It seems further that adults are aware of the emotional needs they meet when they provide for their children materially, and that material gifts are frequently intended overtly to meet these emotional needs. For example, a boy explains his mother's attempts to "get (him) what (he) want(s)": "(S)he tries, (s)he tries to get what we want...(s)he tried everything we ask her, (s)he tried to give to, to give us...Because she want to, she want me not to be worried." (64)

Thus, this young person understands his mother's attempts to satisfy his material desires not so much in terms of the direct function of the material things she provides, but rather in terms of the emotional impact of having "what (he) want(s)" – "she want me not to be worried." A mother similarly describes her attempts to buy her fifteen-year-old son's clothing from Ackerman's rather than from Pep Stores, the latter being a less expensive option, explaining that the quality is better at Ackerman's, and therefore his friends at school do not laugh at him as they might if he wore clothes bought from Pep.

Not only material support, but other forms of practical support also seem to derive much of the value with which young people attribute them from their emotional connotations. Thandiwe, for example, lays great emphasis on the

information with which her mother has provided her since discovering her HIV status:

I: In what way does she support you?

Thandiwe: She normally tells me that now that I'm HIV positive, I must never stop using a condom just because I'm married...because the more I'm not using a condom, the more HIV increases in my body...Like another thing she said I must use concerning my health, she said I must use to eat vegetables, things like garlic, spinach, cabbage, fruit, oranges, etc. (65)

While ostensibly this mother is providing her daughter with a practical form of support in the form of information regarding health practices, the story apparently has more to it than at first meets the eye. Thandiwe admits later in her account that by the time her mother provides her with this kind of information, she has in fact already received the very same information at the clinic she attends. Rather than spontaneously mentioning the clinic as the source of the information she receives, Thandiwe only makes reference to this fact in response to pointed questioning, emphasising instead her mother's role in the provision of this information. Not only is Thandiwe's mother only one source of this information, she is in fact the second source. It seems strange, then, that Thandiwe should place so much emphasis on her mother's provision of this information, unless it carries meaning beyond the simple transference of information. It seems that, rather than merely providing information, the act of this provision itself meets some other, presumably emotional, need, creating, for example, a feeling of being cared for.

## **Consistency**

The consistency with which these adults can be relied upon forms another key feature of these stories. Young people's references to the support they receive from the relevant adults are strewn with emphases on the constant, ever-present and multidimensional nature of this support – “There are so many things she help me with,” “I'm with her all the time,” and “She do everything for me.”

## **The Role of Community Values in Relationships between Parents and Children**

As religious values and psychologically-defined norms play important roles in defining the expectations parents have of their children and vice versa, in Ocean

View and in Fish Hoek, respectively, so explicit references to community values play an important role in the narratives of relationships from Masiphumelele. The story of one mother's relationship with her son, for example, is entirely focused around the difficulty she experienced in leaving her abusive husband, and the damaging effects of this relationship on her son. Due to the values and expectations of her neighbours and relatives, in terms of whose beliefs her position as her husband's wife was immutable, as he had paid lobola for her, she felt unable to leave the marriage. Only after her husband actually tried to kill her, by stabbing her, did it become socially acceptable for her to leave him. In the meantime he had, in her own words, "turned me into a lion" toward her children.

More direct constraints on the relationship between a girl and her mother are evident in another young person's explanation of why her mother no longer visits her at home: "As we are Xhosas, in our culture our mothers are not supposed to go to where we are staying with our boyfriends, so is the way of respecting each other." (66)

Similarly, the expectations young people have of their parents are, to a very great extent, structured in these terms:

"Like, for instance, as my mother divorced with my father, she is in love with someone else. So if her boyfriend hurts her or they quarrelled, I go to her and give her support...I try to support her, saying, 'Mother, even if your boyfriend is breaking up with you, please don't look outside because you are old enough now not to have someone else.'...And I even tell her that she will be disgracing me, not her...people of the community will say, 'Zande's mother is a one woman many man.'" (67)

Thus, one of the primary values in terms of which the accounts of these relationships are structured involves adherence to community norms and expectations.

## **Community Values and Parental Authority**

An element of the narratives, in which the importance of community values is particularly evident, concerns both parents' and young people's acceptance of

adults' authority, even when it involves physical punishment in its implementation. Parents tell openly of their use of physical punishment, and young people of its appropriateness. In the words of a mother, "So I came home, and he didn't sweep the floor – ten lashes! And he was screaming very loud, so I said to him, 'No, my child, next time you know you must sweep when I tell you.'" (68)

A daughter justifies her mother's having told her teacher to beat her for being truant from school:

"What she would do was to take me back to school and at school she won't take my side. She would tell the teacher that, 'Teacher, beat her while I'm here.' I felt so angry. Like when I arrived at home I became angry at her because she told the teacher to beat me. She would say, 'I was not doing anything wrong, my child, I wanted you to be a good child.'...I, I ended up agreed with her...She was right. I can say she was right because at some point I ended up clever at school in so many things...The reason why she was so strict, she wanted me to study and pass." (69)

Thus, the use of physical punishment is justified in these narratives as an effective means of regulating behaviour – "she wanted me to study and pass" – and even as a means of modifying identity – "I was not doing anything wrong, my child, I wanted you to be a good child."

As are the most significant relationship events recounted in the narratives from Ocean View and Fish Hoek, the displays of authority reported in those from Masiphumelele are generally constructed as means to ensuring that young people achieve the desired developmental outcomes. As in Ocean View, these are constructed almost exclusively in terms of completing school, as illustrated above, and avoiding risk:

"I can be at least a good person because the other things that my family saying, saying me not to do it, or to be guide me to be not do it...Things like to do with drugs, or to be not sleep at home, or to be not good...It's the one who keep saying the words that, 'Andile, you must keep, not, don't doing this thing – do this.'" (70)

While not as prominent in the narratives from Masiphumelele as in those from Ocean View, the guidance young people report receiving from their parents tends, similarly, to be in the form of instructions, in which the adults' authority in making decisions on behalf of young people is unquestioned – “don't doing this thing – do this.” Again, the acceptance of adults' right to control young people's actions, as opposed to the attempts illustrated in the narratives from Fish Hoek to disguise adults' directions as aspirations that emanate from the young people themselves, may be a response to the very high level of risk operative in Masiphumelele, necessitating the postponement of adult decision-making responsibilities. That the assumption of adults' rights and responsibilities is indeed reserved for later years is supported by one young person's statement that,

“It's also good in school...children mustn't, you mustn't, you mustn't to keep on to form relationships with girls...But according to our culture it's when we reach 21, 21 years we can do all those things...And then you can, you can be included in a relationship then.” (71)

Again the suggestion is that, while ultimate values and goals in terms of which these relationships are structured may be more similar than different, the differing contexts within which the relationships are located call for substantially different means of constructing and enacting them.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has illuminated key elements of the narratives in terms of which relationships between young people and the most important adults in their lives are constructed in three different socio-cultural settings in Cape Town. While fundamental similarities emerged between the narrative forms in terms of which the relationships are constructed within the three different contexts, it was equally apparent within the narratives that the environmental factors particular to each context have a profound impact on construction, enactment and even presence of the relationships formed.

The relationships in all three settings are conceptualised as instrumental in promoting young people's healthy development. While the specific attributes and achievements in terms of which positive developmental outcomes are

constructed vary between contexts, they can be broadly categorised, in the narratives from all three places, under the heading of autonomy. In all three contexts too, parents actively pursue the attainment of these outcomes via two primary means – encouragement of individual success and avoidance of risk.

It is at this point that substantive differences between the narratives from the different locations become pertinent. While all relationships are constructed in terms of the same broadly defined aims, the specifics of these, the discourses in terms of which they are understood and experienced, and the strategies employed to achieve them are finely tuned to the contexts in which they are located. Many of these differences appear to arise from differences in the material contexts within which the relationships occur, placing different demands on the people who inhabit them.

The specific personal achievements toward which relationships are oriented, for example, are clearly formulated relative to the opportunities and constraints presented by the different material environments. Whereas adults and young people in Fish Hoek aim at achieving the status of “big nob”, those in Ocean View and Masiphumelele aspire to finishing school and finding a job. While some of the risks these relationships are designed to help young people avoid are similar, for example involvement with drugs, their severity and the dangers with which they are associated within the narratives from the different locations are clearly situated at different points along the continuum. For example, the participants from Ocean View and Masiphumelele expressed concerns about young people’s involvement in crime and gangsterism, and the resultant possibility of incarceration or death. Participants from Fish Hoek, on the other hand, were more concerned with “rebellious” or unsociable behaviour, which, while they did express concerns about physical safety, in particular with reference to daughters, they were more likely to perceive as potentially hazardous to material and personal success. These differences can be attributed to the differing availability of opportunities for young people within the three different contexts, and to the differing levels of risk to which they are exposed, rather than to fundamental ideological differences.

Differences in the ways in which desired goals and the potential threats to these are constructed within the narratives from the different locations, however, reveal the interplay between discourse and the material environment. Young people’s engagement in behaviour that is directed toward the attainment of desired outcomes, or that poses a threat to these, is constructed within the narratives from Fish Hoek in psychological terms as either in keeping with or deviating from age-graded norms. In the narratives from Ocean View, the same

behaviours are constructed in moral terms as right or wrong, and in those from Masiphumelele as complying or failing to comply with community values.

While these variations certainly reflect differences in the discursive contexts within which the relationships are located, their utility in dealing with the material contexts should not be overlooked. For example, the construction of risky behaviour in psychological terms seems to leave more room for individual decision-making about acceptable levels of risk and so on than does its binary construction as morally right or wrong, or as compliant or non-compliant with community values. What is especially noteworthy here is that the former psychological construction of behaviour takes place within a context characterised by relatively low levels of risk within which individual trial and error is likely to lead to less drastic consequences than it might in either of the other two locations. In Ocean View and Masiphumelele the greater level of risk may well account for its construction in terms that more explicitly define the courses of action for young people to follow.

The same argument can be applied to the different strategies parents utilise in their attempts to bring about the desired goals, and to the different life stages at which these goals, in particular that of autonomy, are held to become desirable. For example, while all relationships are constructed as spaces within which young people can obtain emotional support, other means adults use in their attempts to guide young people toward the desired goals differ substantially between locations. In the narratives from Fish Hoek parents attempt to regulate their children's behaviour through demonstrating a knowledge of their 'inner selves', in Ocean View by appealing to religious doctrine and in Masiphumelele through the use of physical punishment. Again, the latter two, while different in method, both appeal to a more overt form of authority, suggesting the adaptive interplay between discourse and a risky material environment.

This argument for the fundamental similarity of the values and ideals in terms of which the relationships in the three different contexts are narrated does not negate the importance of a nuanced understanding of contextually specific meaning systems. Nor does it imply that the ways in which relationships are lived and experienced are the same. As evident in the narratives, the details of the ways in which relationships are constructed influences the form they assume on a moment-to-moment basis, the level of responsibility attributed to adults for young people's actions, for example, influencing the topics of the conversations that occur between them, the processes of negotiation that take place within the relationships and the level of empathy the relationship partners are able to achieve.

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The CSSR is an umbrella organisation comprising five units:

The **AIDS and Society Research Unit** (ASRU) supports innovative research into the social dimensions of AIDS in South Africa. Special emphasis is placed on exploring the interface between qualitative and quantitative research. By forging creative links between academic research and outreach activities, we hope to improve our understanding of the relationship between AIDS and society and to make a difference to those living with AIDS. Focus areas include: AIDS-stigma, sexual relationships in the age of AIDS, the social and economic factors influencing disclosure (of HIV-status to others), the interface between traditional medicine and biomedicine, and the impact of providing antiretroviral treatment on individuals and households.

The **Data First Resource Unit** ('Data First') provides training and resources for research. Its main functions are: 1) to provide access to digital data resources and specialised published material; 2) to facilitate the collection, exchange and use of data sets on a collaborative basis; 3) to provide basic and advanced training in data analysis; 4) the ongoing development of a web site to disseminate data and research output.

The **Democracy in Africa Research Unit** (DARU) supports students and scholars who conduct systematic research in the following three areas: 1) public opinion and political culture in Africa and its role in democratisation and consolidation; 2) elections and voting in Africa; and 3) the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on democratisation in Southern Africa. DARU has developed close working relationships with projects such as the Afrobarometer (a cross national survey of public opinion in fifteen African countries), the Comparative National Elections Project, and the Health Economics and AIDS Research Unit at the University of Natal.

The **Social Surveys Unit** (SSU) promotes critical analysis of the methodology, ethics and results of South African social science research. Our core activities include the overlapping Cape Area Study and Cape Area Panel Study. The Cape Area Study comprises a series of surveys of social, economic and political aspects of life in Cape Town. The Cape Area Panel Study is an ongoing study of 4800 young adults in Cape Town as they move from school into the worlds of work, unemployment, adulthood and parenthood.

The **Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit** (SALDRU) was established in 1975 as part of the School of Economics and joined the CSSR in 2002. In line with its historical contribution, SALDRU's researchers continue to conduct research detailing changing patterns of well-being in South Africa and assessing the impact of government policy on the poor. Current research work falls into the following research themes: post-apartheid poverty; employment and migration dynamics; family support structures in an era of rapid social change; the financial strategies of the poor; public works and public infrastructure programmes; common property resources and the poor.

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