

STEPPING IN, STEPPING OUT

Process Work Application of Pre-Birth Stories used as Life Myth

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DIPLOMA/MASTER OF ARTS IN PROCESS WORK

from

THE PROCESS WORK INSTITUTE

Portland, Oregon

by

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September 2009

Abstract

Stepping In, Stepping Out: Process Work Application of Pre-Birth Stories Used as Life Myth

This qualitative study explores the pre-birth story as subjectively experienced in order to understand the personal life myth. The research investigates new territory in two ways: it explores the concept of the pre-birth story as a special story removed from everyday surface awareness; and it examines how the pre-birth story relates to the life myth. The study addresses the following research question: How can pre-birth stories be unfolded using Process Work techniques in order to gain greater understanding of the Life Myth?

To answer the question, a sample of five Process Work Diploma students was surveyed. Guided interviews were used to research the pre-birth stories' validity as a therapeutic entrance into unknown experiences and their possible pattern connections to the childhood dream and life myth. The guided interview was structured as an explorative exercise adapted as a tool from Process Work. Data was collected using demographic questionnaires, written pre-birth stories and childhood dreams, video-tapes and transcripts from the guided interview, as well as two sets of drawings from the pre-birth story and childhood dream, and a debrief interview.

The data analysis elucidated six major findings: 1) the content of the pre-birth story tends to include small, insignificant or unplanned happenings, often involving a relationship with a parent (usually the mother) as the teller of the story; 2) the pre-birth story tends to be told *after* the childhood dream occurs, even though the story comes from *before* the child is born; 3) *all* the participants found detached new energies when working with the pre-birth story therapeutically; 4) *all* participants found that the themes

of the drawings from the pre-birth story and the childhood dream mirror each other; 5) pattern connections between the pre-birth story and the childhood dream were found in *repeated words, verbal descriptions* of the drawings, and *similar themes*; and 6) *perceptual changes* from working with the pre-birth story included a deepening of the childhood dream, new perspectives through viewing the pre-birth story as a dream, and dissolving problematic aspects of the childhood dream.

The results indicate that the pre-birth story offers a new concept to Process Work theory and practice. The pre-birth story can be useful as a therapeutic tool when working with the life myth to help build personal knowledge and change perceptions, and is especially powerful when combined with the childhood dream.

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude and deep felt thanks to all the people involved in the different aspects of this project who helped to make it happen:

Caroline Spark, my supervisor, who by her loving, caring inspiration, supported me through the whole process. She was involved in the project from the very first seed of thoughts until the findings started to come out. Without her, this research would never have seen light. I also want to thank the five student colleagues from the Portland Process Work Institute's Diploma Program who, without knowing much about the project, volunteered to participate by sharing their personal stories and childhood dreams. In that way, they made huge contributions by handing me the data for the project. Katje Wagner, not only a dear engaged friend and colleague, but also a big part of the project, did the data collection connected to the exercise. Later on, Katje was again involved in the writing process, editing and shaping up my thoughts and ideas to bring clarity to my points. This research would not be far as interesting and readable without her fantastic help. Midori Hirai, a student colleague from my cohort, in very short notice came forward and helped me out with video equipment. She made the videos into DVD's when I was far away and not able to deal with this detail by myself.

My study committee, Lesli Mones, Julie Diamond and Stephen Schuitevoerder, I want to thank for their support and encouragement throughout my whole study, always directing me in the utmost loving and light-hearted atmosphere, making me see where I was stuck and what to do about it. I also want to thank them for pointing out places in this project where I could be clearer. I am most grateful to the faculty in Portland: by making the new cohort structure possible, I got a chance to go smoother and grow stronger at the

same time, allowing me to believe in my power and to use it with awareness. My Cohort X family supported me to be the best of me, which meant that I was able to focus on this project with a newfound intensity I never thought possible before.

I want to thank my family: my partner, Per Bjorn Olsen, and my two sons, Jens Norgaard Olsen and Anton Norgaard Olsen, who for a long period all gave up seeing me as anything else than a shadow sitting by the computer. Their love and patience allowed me to dig as deep as I needed to in the research in order to make it happen. Thanks to Anton for help with parts of the project related to computer technology. Max Schupbach I want to thank for giving me the idea of ever starting out the program in Portland, trusting that I could make it through, and supporting me in my ideas about possible connections between the pre-birth story and life myth. Arny Mindell, the founder of Process Work, I want to thank from the bottom of my heart for his wonderful ideas and inspiration, which have made my life far more interesting than I would ever have imagined possible before. And, after years of searching for a coherence between the body and mind that made sense to me, I want to thank my luck or the world for so many years ago showing me the ad for the Danish translation of Mindell's *The Dreaming Body*.

I want to dedicate this research to my father, Jens Larsen Norgaard, who taught me about science, nature and art.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As my understanding of Process Work has developed over the past many years, I have started to wonder about the strange mystical things that sometimes appear when people ask specific questions. Long ago, when I was asked about my childhood dream, I had never talked with anybody about that dream. Similarly, when I ask others about their childhood dreams, I often hear them respond, “No, I don’t have a dream, but I just remember that...” And then out it comes!

Long ago, I once had a strange experience when a woman lecturing in art asked me if I was a child conceived out of love or a witch – right out of the blue, in a public setting where I was part of the audience. The experience had a powerful effect on me: it made me begin to wonder about things I have been told as a child. This led me deeper into stories I have been told in childhood, and to a “pre-birth story;” in other words, information about the time when I was in my mother’s womb. Many years later, when I had started my studies in Process Work, I somehow suddenly came across the pre-birth story I was told. These personal connections have inspired my interest in this study: to search for a possible pattern match between childhood dreams and pre-birth stories.

Personal Connections with Process Work

My interest in having a strategy to gain an overview of individual life – finding meaning – has always been very strong and clear to me. I have a childhood memory from when I was around four years old sitting under the dinner table of my family, wanting to grow up and know everything there is to know in this world in order to be truly happy. I

understand now that, even as a young child, I was already searching for a purpose and meaning, like a concrete basement whereupon I could build my life.

I have always been a big thinker. For many years, I leaned toward the linear consensus world where knowledge and science are in focus. But even then, way back when I was studying psychology, I felt that something was missing...all the strange, para-psychological, synchronistic events underlying everything. These were the things missing in the consensual perception of what most consider “the world.” For many years, I thought that the part of the world with strange flickering coincidences was somehow not appropriate or useful. But finding Process Work made me realize the use of these things in life, as captured in just one concept: the dreaming.

Termed by Arnold Mindell (2000a), dreaming refers not only to night-time dreams, but to the sentient reality behind all life experiences. He explains that dreaming is “a basic, usually unconscious form of awareness, which precedes consciousness” (p. 64). Dreaming is the awareness process from which observation arises, and gives form to the unknown sides of life.

Process Work & Life Myth

Mindell’s (1972) early research focused on the connection between a psychological and physical understanding of fairy tales, finding that both interpretations hold the same patterns. He showed that fairy tales not only deal with collective and archetypal patterns, but also with individual personal stories and synchronicities. Fairy tales are first shown as personal strange stories which later develop into mythic tales because “inexplicable outer events seem to unfold quite spontaneously whenever the events avoid causal explanations” (p. 25).

Informed by the work of Jung, Process Work views childhood dreams as personal fairy tales, in that they capture important qualities and patterns of one's life journey (Diamond & Jones, 2004). Through my studies in Process Work, I have also learned about similarities between the childhood dream and chronic body symptoms, which both hold the same quality of one's life myth (Mindell, 1998, 2000b, 2001). The term "life myth" describes a pattern for life long personal development, and brings meaning to otherwise incomprehensible or overwhelming experiences.

Life Myth & Pre-Birth Stories

This study explores the following assumptions: since it is possible to understand or interpret individual personal strange stories like the childhood dream psychologically, then other personal strange stories *like pre-birth stories* might be worth exploring as personal mythical tales. Maybe pre-birth stories also show patterns connected to the life myth? Especially if a story is remembered from way back, it seems that the impression it made is important; even if the story itself is not usually in the front of our awareness. Following this line of reasoning, the pre-birth story may have the potential to bring forth life myth patterns, even though those stories has there beginning before we were born.

Process Work & Pre-Birth Stories

What is the "pre-birth story" I study? Pre-birth stories are short narratives or fragments of situations we have been told during our upbringing that somehow connect with the time when we were conceived or lying in our mother's womb. Pre-birth stories can be relational things, such as something that happened between mother and child or between the parents; or it can be something that happened in the world at that specific time.

Since I have not been able to find literature using the term “pre-birth story,” I have found it necessary to search for related terms, such as birth stories in general. I have also found it useful to dig into factors about what the pre-birth story actually is; for instance, the unborn factor, the told factor, and the remembering factor, to name a few. This has been a helpful way to uncover the pre-birth story concept I am researching.

The idea of the pre-birth story is new territory. To my knowledge, there has been no previous research into either pre-birth stories or the connections between pre-birth stories and life myth, neither in Process Work communities nor in other parts of the academic world. Within the Process Work community, related studies include the following: Kas Robinson’s (2002) study on family and attachment through personal experiences; Susette Payne’s current research about the lost father; Renata Ackermann’s (1994) “Stories of our lives,” in which she explores experiences of life threatening illnesses; and the current research of Kirsten Wassermann (UK program), considering whether to abort a child or not. In addition, Anne Murphy’s (2008) study for the Masters in Conflict Facilitation explores myths for the use of organisational development.

Research Purpose

The study is guided by the following question: How can pre-birth stories be unfolded using Process Work techniques in order to gain greater understanding of the life myth? The study explores the research question via two main lines of inquiry: (1) the validity of using pre-birth stories as a resource for deeper self knowledge and therapeutic use; and (2) the possible connections of pre-birth stories to life myth.

Process Work helps us to step into the Unknown. We gain new perceptions of who we are, and discover new possibilities for how to react, think, relate and behave in

life, by looking into unknown parts of ourselves and the mysterious stories we all hold. The main title of this research, "Stepping In, Stepping Out," comes from the process of stepping deeply into the unknown, looking for new discoveries, to stepping out on the other shore. In this research, "stepping in, stepping out" refers to both the process of exploring pre-birth stories empirically and to the methodological approach of this study.

Method

Because the topic of pre-birth stories presents a new area of research, the study was approached from a qualitative perspective, in which the research question was explored through illustrative cases of the empirical data. I created an explorative guided exercise containing two sets of drawings to give participants the opportunity to express and experience, both verbally and visually, the pre-birth story and life myth (here represented by the childhood dream). Through the process of "unfolding," the participants were asked to express and experience part of pre-birth story through movement.

When using Process Work techniques, unknown strange experiences are unfolded therapeutically. As Amy Mindell explains, "Unfolding is a natural process that flows from a seed or embryo into a plant toward its manifest expression" (2006, p. 134). Unfolding involves amplifying an unknown experience – making it bigger – so that all its details, full message and expression can emerge. Unfolding is an appropriate approach for this study because it emphasizes the "stepping in, stepping out" quality so essential to this research. By unfolding pre-birth stories from way back, we are exploring a time when we were just a seed in the mother's womb, all the way into our present emerged manifestation.

Aims & Contributions

In this descriptive and explorative study, my aim is to contribute to Process Work by introducing a new concept which can be used for self-growth. It is my hope that the study will contribute by bringing therapists and clients a new tool to enter unknown or undiscovered parts of the life myth: to explore and have fun, finding new ways to perceive the myth and gain inspiration for living life in a more creative way.

Structure of Project

Following the introduction chapter to the research, the Literature Review discusses aspects of the pre-birth story as seen in other researchers' findings, as well as the concept of life myth as a method for personal growth. In the Methodology chapter, I lay out the theoretical ground for the empirical data. In order to make the methods transparent, I also explain my methodological choices, how I gathered the data, and how the process went. The Findings chapter illustrates the results from the data collected to capture the essence of the participants' experiences. The final chapter discusses my reflections on what I discovered throughout the research process.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Although I have found no previous studies in pre-birth stories, this Literature Review explores key concepts related to the idea of pre-birth stories and their connection to life myth. Pre-birth stories indicate three important points: 1) that the parents already connect with the child before birth; 2) that some episodes or memories are later passed down to the child; and 3) that the child remembers the story as an adult. In this way, the study deals with many relevant aspects of pre-birth stories, which I will take a closer look at here. Concepts related to pre-birth stories include: pre-birth experiences; birth stories; stories we are told; stories we tell; and how we remember. I also focus on the concept of myth and how it is used in therapy to show how it relates to my study. This chapter addresses many different aspects related to the topic of this research and is divided into two foci: factors of the pre-birth story; and myth and the mythical aspects used in self growth.

Early Life Patterns

The idea that the first part of a person's life is important and lays patterns for the rest of his or her life is not new. In the early 1900s, Freud, Adler, and Jung were already focusing on childhood as the part of life where personality and personal patterns are settled. Freud worked with children and youngsters, developing theories based on studies of himself as well as other case studies (McAdams, 1993). Adler worked with children's earliest memories, with the idea that these narratives hold symbolization for a person's overall style of life (McAdams, 1993). Jung developed these ideas further through case

studies working with the childhood dream as containing fundamental patterns for a person's life (to be discussed in greater detail below) (Mindell, 2004). In this study, I explore the possibility that these life patterns exist even before the child is born.

Some Pre-Birth Foci

Beginning in the 1960s, Stanislav Grof (1975) was the first to construct a theoretical framework for prenatal, perinatal and transpersonal psychology. Grof proposes that "birth trauma" exists as a critical psychic experience that can be re-entered through an altered state of mind for the purpose of self-knowledge and healing; a concept which he developed into a therapeutic tool called Holotropic Breathwork. Commenting on the time in womb, Grof (1993) focuses on the psychic condition of the infant/embryo, arguing for its impact on the later psychic condition of the person, in that we bear (often hidden) memories from that time. More recently, Grof's (2000) interests lean into the newest area of brain research, proposing that the experience of birth is stored in the neo-cortex.

Grof's theories contributed to the growth of Prenatal Psychology, a field based on specific psychological and physiological theories that attribute significance to the early relationship between mother and fetus. Prenatal Psychology dates the origins of knowledge about the embryonic condition back to the time of Confucius in China (Blum, 1993). Healthcare providers use these theories as part of prenatal education, teaching pre-parents about the unborn child's ability to sense and perceive changes in the extra-uterine environment, early bonding with the child in the womb, and maternal prenatal care (ie, that it matters what the mother eats and does in her life throughout the pregnancy).

Echoing the premise of my study, these different theories shed light on the time in the womb as special and needing attention. Grof's (2000) work attends to personal memories from the time in the womb and utilizes cognitive brain psychology to state his case. Unlike Grof's interest in prenatal memories and Prenatal Psychology's focus on parental development, my research emphasizes stories that we are told about the time when we are in the mother's womb. Because no studies seem to exist directly related to pre-birth stories, I have explored research on stories told around the time of birth, or "birth stories."

Researching Birth Stories

Birth stories share similarities with pre-birth stories. Whereas birth stories are connected to a special event we have all gone through, pre-birth stories are connected to a special period when we are inside the mother's womb. Even though there seem to be differences, both kinds of stories are from the time when parents start bonding with the coming child. I have found three studies of particular interest: Reese (1996), Soparkar (1998), and Hayden, Singer and Chrisler (2006). All three studies focus on birth stories but in different ways.

Conception of Self in Mother-Child Birth Stories

Reese's (1996) research addresses how the child's growing sense of self is connected to what she calls "family stories." She focuses specifically on birth narratives and the interpersonal aspects of birth; looking into, for instance, how many times a story is told to a child. Reese finds that birth stories are interesting from at least two perspectives: 1) they relate to a highly significant and emotionally charged event for both members of the dyad; and 2) the child has no explicit memory of the event. Reese claims

that, in terms of their effect on self-concept, these reported stories may be no less important than actual memories. Birth stories parallel narratives of remembered experiences to make up autobiographical memories. Reese also focuses on gender differences when telling the story, finding that mothers told more detailed and emotional stories with their daughters than with their sons.

The Telling of the Childbirth Story

Soparkar (1998) focuses on the birth-giver's telling of the childbirth story: what it is like to tell the story and why women tell these stories. Soparkar claims that women are trying to reach the intra-psychic part of the experience which is beyond words. By telling birth stories, the women re-live the actual delivery experience. Soparkar views childbirth as a developmental process which reorganizes and integrates internal and external events. She finds that by creating the childbirth narrative, women ritualize their experience; including the newfound identity as a mother, finding personal meaning through the story, and taking the process as a spiritual awakening.

The Transmission of Birth Stories from Mother to Daughter: Self-Esteem and Mother-Daughter Attachment

Hayden, Singer and Chrisler's (2006) research explores how birth stories impact the daughter's self-esteem and mother-daughter attachment. They conclude that the transmission of birth stories from mother to daughter has a significant relationship to daughters' sense of themselves and their feelings about their mothers. Hayden et al. view attachment security in the mother-child relationship as a critical factor for socialization and the development of children's life stories, in that mothers who report a more secure attachment bond are more elaborative when reminiscing with their children. Through

their research findings, Hayden et al. argue for the potential role birth stories play in young women's narrative construction of their emerging identities, as well as how birth stories might impact the daughter's self-esteem and mother-daughter attachment.

These three studies each have different perspectives and look at different aspects of birth stories. Even though they all differ from the topic and focus of my study, I find it interesting that birth stories share similar characteristics: they are reported; highly significant; emotionally charged when told; reminiscing and bonding narratives; and play a role in individuals' autobiographical memories. Whereas birth story research is concerned with social and relational circumstances in the story, my study focuses on how the content of the pre-birth story can be used as a narrative strategy for self-growth. Still, I see links between birth and pre-birth stories because they bear the same qualities of being significant, reported stories, with an inherent relational factor.

Storytelling & Why We Tell Stories

People tell stories in all human cultures. McAdams explains that "the very concept of a story is inherently social in that stories exist to be told in a social context" (2003, p. 200). Storytelling is a way of connecting to others and a way to build a sense of belonging. The stories of a culture – for instance, fairy tales – shape how its members perceive the world (Campbell, 1972; Siegel & Hartzel, 2003). We can say that people both create stories and are shaped by stories. Stories are central for both individual and collective human experiences. Scientists even claim that adults can help children understand and make sense of their experiences by telling them stories about their experiences, assisting them to integrate both the emotional content and the event (Siegel & Hartzel, 2003). In this way, children build experiential tools to become reflective,

insightful adults later in life. The child's own re-telling of a story shows the ability to make sense of the world and regulate emotional states.

With age, people usually start to wonder about who they are (Værum, 1992). In trying to answer that question, we start telling stories about our lives. Certain stories are selected out from all the stories of one's life, not necessarily accurately remembered, yet they influence one's self-perception and have special personal meaning. As adults, the way we tell stories from our life reveals the way we have come to understand the events of our lives. Siegel and Hartzel frame the significance of storytelling as "our mind's attempt to make sense of our own and others' rich inner worlds" (2003, p. 42).

This process of making sense of our own inner world as adults by getting to know who we are through personal stories also links to my research. Coming to understand the events of our lives as part of who we are is important because it frames the way we perceive ourselves. This study focuses on one specific story from the past – the pre-birth story – in order to explore the underlying patterns in that story as possibly useful for self-growth. Pre-birth stories may reflect our mind's attempt to make sense of our inner world, yet pre-birth stories tend to have a hidden character: they may not immediately look like they make sense, instead just a strange coincidence or episode from way back that we were once told.

Autobiographical Memory & How to Remember Stories from Life

Since the 1980s, psychologists have referred to the part of our memory in which we store personal experiences as our "autobiographical memory" (Draaisma, 2006). When we are asked questions about our life, both early memories as well as recent episodes are stored here. In the 1980s a field of different researchers started concentrating

on a “new” sub-discipline of personality psychology, interweaving clinical, developmental and cognitive psychology, as well as social psychology and its relation to social sciences and anthropology (Singer, 2004). They were all interested in different aspects of stories from life, memory, how to remember and sense of self.

Linde (1993) states that life stories are oral units containing “landmark events” through which one expresses one’s sense of self. Snow (1990) discusses how the interpersonal interactions of stories told by significant others (such as parents) constitute children’s sense of self; showing how the process of telling the biography turns into autobiography. Reese’s (2002) findings show that children’s autobiographical memory is caused in part by social interaction and through reminiscing in particular. Nelson and Fivush (2004) focus on autobiographical memory as central to children’s early development, with implications for social, cultural, and cognitive growth. McAdams (Singer, 2004) places the narrative identity at the centre of personality and focuses on how individuals employ narratives to develop and sustain a sense of personal unity and purpose from diverse experiences across the lifespan.

McAdams (2001) finds that some remembered episodes are more privileged for self-definition than others, making a distinction between autobiographical memories and self-narrative. He states that autobiographical memories bear information not directly involved in self-concepts, whether as self-narrative deals with a set of temporally and thematically organized salient experiences and concerns that constitute one’s identity. Abelson, Frey and Gregg (2004) state that retrieved memories are often biased by the state of mind people are in at the moment. They argue that individuals reconstruct the past in terms of the present rather than simply remembering the past in its original form.

Of particular interest and relevance to this study include the following points: the focus on the relational aspects of told stories; personal narratives becoming autobiographical memory; stories as candidates in identity making; and that, when reconstructing personal narrative, our recollection of the past might depend on one's present state. This research into pre-birth stories focuses on certain events or reflections from parents that somehow link to their child in the womb, are made into a special story which the child (through the relation with the parent or other caregivers) comes to know as part of their autobiographical memories, turning into a self-narrative. Pre-birth stories do not fall under McAdams' (2001) concept of the narrative identity because pre-birth stories are stored parts of personal history that are usually not part of identity nor usually focused on or talked about.

Myth & Mythical Aspects Used in Self Understanding & Growth

Armstrong (2005) points out that we today live in a society where myths play a more minor role than ever before. In the pre-modern world, myths were indispensable; a kind of pre-psychology that helped people find meaning in life, yet also served the purpose of revealing regions of the human mind that otherwise remained inaccessible. Since long ago, myths and fairy tales have been used as a way to tell central beliefs from a culture, a tool for making people behave, and also offered people a sense of identity. All myths and fairy tales have a moral tone or a certain aspect that shows a solution to a problem to help when people felt stuck.

As Murphy (2008) states, the term myth can be rather confusing because it is often used rather loosely, so it can be helpful to divide the concept into different parts; for instance, traditional myths, personal myths, and myth as it is referred to in Process Work.

At the traditional level, myth refers to cultural narratives which play a role in expressing shared common human feelings, and often, in arbitrary ways, gives solutions to problems. The idea of the personal myth reflects the modern search for meaning in life, and offers creative ways to shape our quest (Campbell, 1993). In Process Work, myth has relevance for both present and past as a framework to illuminate past experiences with meaning and perhaps even discover significance in experiences that might otherwise make little sense (Diamond & Jones, 2004; Murphy, 2008).

Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell (1993), a professor who worked with comparative mythology, claims that modern persons are searching for meaning and explores myth as an application for personal transformation. Campbell uses myths and the metaphor of “the hero’s journey” to facilitate psychological change in the universal struggle for identity. Looking at the symbolic language lying in myths, Campbell expresses that we all bear mythical aspects that can be identified. These aspects are found as “mythic patterns” in the stories we tell about our life (Bruner, 1990). Ancient myths are not dead, because they live on in the stories people tell about their own lives.

Campbell sees that most world myths are tales of psychological transformation. By reading those myths psychologically, they show parables of growth and development possibilities coming through significant inner struggle, shedding light on therapeutic transformation possibilities. Campbell is important because he was the first to shape people’s understanding of myth in modern psychology, thereby bringing psychology to ordinary people striving to understand themselves without needing to have “psychological problems.”

McAdams' Research

Through major qualitative and quantitative research into personality psychology, the narrative psychologist McAdams (1988) discovered key aspects from ancient myths within people's stories about themselves, which resonate with and make sense of life: "the mythic character at the heart of a person's life story" (Golemann, 1988, p. 2). These mythical characters can change during a lifetime as a person changes identity. According to McAdams' (2001) concept of self-narrative, he claims that we compose a heroic narrative of the self that illustrates essential truths about ourselves. We create, so to speak, a heroic story – a kind of myth or narrative identity. McAdams claims that the reason for creating and talking about such stories is to bring coherence and meaning in our lives.

The use of personal myth for self-growth or identity-making, central for both Campbell and McAdams, is important to notice here because they introduce the use of myth to a broader public, shedding light on topics like personal myths, self growth and narrative identity. Campbell uses myth for transformation purposes by letting myth show the way for possible changes in a consensual cognitive way, whereas McAdams uses myth as narrative identity, a strategy to understand ourselves through telling the world who we are. My topic of interest is personal myth and self-knowledge as well. However, rather than using ancient myth or narrative identity, I am instead digging deeper into the personal myths within pre-birth stories.

Jung's Work with Life Myth

To really understand the life myth concept I am using in this research, it is necessary to start at the origin of the term, which Jung created through his extended study

of the archetypes. According to Jung, “The archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas” (1998, p. 70). The archetype is the central dynamic of the psyche, a special personal structure that determines psychological probabilities (von Franz, 2002). Von Franz explains that “not only are the archetypes, apparently, impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences, but, at the same time, they behave empirically like agents that tend towards the repetition of these same experiences” (p.16). Archetypes are not conscious, but seem to be like underlying ground themes upon which conscious manifestations are sets of variations.

When used in a therapeutic context, archetypes are explored through dreams, as well as ancient myths and fairy tales, in order to understand the dream and reach the unconscious. Clues to myths that have special meaning for the client’s problem are shown through the motif and images of certain aspects of a client’s dream (Golemann, 1988). The aim is to find a person’s archetype in order to shed light on the general patterns and specific problems of a client’s life.

Freud worked with myth by using “the Oedipus Complex” to explain his ideas about the first part of human experiences (McAdams, 1988). Working with the second part of the human lifespan, Jung had yet another focus, especially interested in the time when individuation begins and adults become interested in their psychological growth (McAdams, 1988). For Jung, myth represents general universal patterns which show up in people according to their struggle in life around different bigger problems. You can say that these myths have a collective as well as personal aspect, that they are like universal models found in everyone and expressed everywhere in mythology, literature and the arts (Mindell, 2001). Jung views myth as “the primordial language natural

to...psychic processes, and no intellectual formulation comes anywhere near the richness and expressiveness of mythical images” (McAdams, 1988, p. 274). He states that it is common for all to have a myth-producing level of mind (Jung, 1998).

Jung reflects that our inward vision can only be expressed by ways of myth because myth is more individual and expresses life more precisely than does science. In myth it is possible to contain and do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life (Jung, 1995). Jung used the term “life myth” to describe a patterning for life-long personal development, and found that childhood dreams, which often stayed in a person’s memory into adulthood, revealed an archetypal or mythical pattern for a person’s life. The childhood dream is not a predetermined path, but a picture of tendencies, represented symbolically (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

Jung saw the childhood dream as a seed. Comparing that thinking with Chinese philosophy, von Franz (2002) explains that if you know the very deepest patterns, you will know the patterns for the future. You see the seed in the child’s earliest dreams, but do not know how it will grow up; just that a certain pattern is underlying that seed as possibilities. The childhood dream, which is a repeating and often scary night time dream from childhood, has psychological patterns that appear to be inherited, or at least passed down (Mindell, 2004). Childhood dreams can be seen as containing a personal life myth and can be worked with therapeutically in many different ways; using two polarities or diverging energies found in the dream or through a single part which seems interesting (Mindell, 1995).

Process Work with Life Myth

The personal myth in Process Work is seen in the generalization of a childhood dream, which becomes an organizing factor in the creation of lifestyles, chronic symptoms and issues, and may also organize the last experiences in life (Mindell, 1989). The chronic body symptom and chronic relationship problems capture the same energy or pattern that can be found in the childhood dream; all seen as life myths holding the same patterns (Mindell, 1972, 1998, 2000b, 2001). The expressions of underlying patterns or archetypes found in life myths, Mindell calls “dream-genes” (2004, p. 150). Childhood dreams show typically a combination of genes from both parents, often a conflict of some sort, as well as psychological and genetic components (2000a).

Mindell extends Jung’s work with life myth by proposing that patterning for a person’s life can also be seen in recurrent and long-term experiences, such as chronic symptoms, illness, addictions, and relationship patterns (Diamond & Jones, 2004). A life myth is a form of “psychological inheritance” which includes tendencies related to parents, cultural context, and historical background. Working with a life myth consciously and creatively can help prevent being unconsciously propelled by it. The energies from the polarities or themes seen in the childhood dream seem to appear again and again during a life in different disguises.

Process Work sees myths not as bad or good, but rather that they are endured with a revelatory potential, providing illumination to patterns, paths, and directions, all of which can become more conscious and intentional, making our existence more purposeful. In the life myth a meta-life pattern emerges, describing the familiar patterns that shape our lives. Working repeatedly with the myth reveals that the childhood dream

contains many patterns to be discovered and explored. As Diamond and Jones explain, “Viewing experience as part of a mythical pattern can relieve feelings of stuckness or failure that often accompany chronic problems. It can also bring reminders of life’s meaning and purpose” (2004, p. 149). Working with challenges through the myth brings potential for personal growth, revealing wider perspectives and new meaning.

Myth is fused into Process Work and typically elicited through stories and dreams (Mindell, 2002). Stories describing the start of a relationship, for instance, can reveal a mythic seed of what each party is looking for in the other. Each couple has its own stories and all these stories can be seen as dreams with inherent mythical patterns. When working with the life myth as stories (such as the childhood dream) it is done through polarities or themes. Kalsched (1996) points out, that most archaic images are not single images but structured in tandems, pairs, dyads, couplings, polarities. In Process Work the polarities in the myth are seen as equal. Usually one polarity is experienced as problematic, which just indicates that it might be more unknown than the other.

Life Myth & Pre-Birth Story in the Project

Using the concept of life myth from Process Work in connection to the pre-birth story, I study if the pre-birth story shows a capacity to be treated as a new strategy or way to discover or work with life myth. For the sake of limiting the study, I have chosen to use the childhood dream (or the first memory – hereafter just named as childhood dream) as a parameter for the life myth to be compared with the pre-birth story.

In this study, I treat the pre-birth story as a special (mythical) story from our lives; as able to reveal new meaning and wider perspectives through discovering significance in a story that beforehand might make little sense. Although the pre-birth story seems to be

less meaningful and usually not talked about, this study digs deeper, beyond viewing them as merely part of our consensual life stories. This research proposes that patterns of the life myth (as revealed through the childhood dream) can be seen in the pre-birth story. Through the data of this study, I will try to show that the concept of pre-birth stories contributes another doorway into understanding life myth.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss my choice of qualitative inquiry to explore my research question: How can pre-birth stories be unfolded using Process Work techniques in order to gain greater understanding of the life myth? Drawing up the research design, I had two goals: to satisfy the rigorous demands of mainstream academic research, while at the same time preserving the characteristic creativity and phenomenological approach of Process Work.

The Philosophical Framework

The philosophical foundation of this study is relativistic, which assumes that there is no one objective “truth” that can be ascertained about social and experiential realities. Relativistic philosophy focuses on the search for meaning, with the underlying belief that no truth or “true meaning” about any aspect of existence is possible, at least not in any absolute sense; it can only be constructed (Patton, 2002). Knowledge is a co-construction between the researcher and the researched, inevitably shaped by context. In the relativistic framework, I am also influenced by heuristic research, which emphasizes “examining and understanding how who we are can shape what we see, hear, know and learn during fieldwork and subsequent analysis” (p. 27).

Qualitative research complements the philosophical framework of relativism, in that qualitative research refers to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things (Berg, 2001). Qualitative research views reality as dynamic. It is a subjective approach to research, which searches for meaning based on small sample sizes, includes the researcher as an instrument, uses inductive

analysis, and attempts to understand something in depth (Merriam, 2002). In this study, I used a naturalistic approach to inquiry, which incorporates an emergent design, draws on qualitative data and analysis to explore pre-birth stories, and looks at the patterns of similarities to childhood dreams. Qualitative inquiry is particularly useful for exploring a topic area in which there has been little or no previous research conducted, as is the case with pre-birth stories.

The Research Strategy

In this descriptive study I chose case studies as the research strategy to capture the pre-birth story. The “case” that I investigate is the pre-birth story as a social phenomenon. Case study research strategy is suitable because I gather comprehensive, systematic, and in depth information from a small sample size (Patton, 2002). In case study, the key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspective (Merriam, 1998). Further, it is important to determine the relevant data to be collected and decide what should be done with the data once it is collected (Yin, 2003).

I used interviews as the method for gathering data in this case study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For the sake of limiting the data, I adopted the strategy of the tool of a Process Work exercise, which offers a specific standardized interview – a “guided interview” – to study the topic of interest. In the guided interview, a guide with predetermined questions or topics is developed beforehand. This is done to ensure that relevant aspects of the theme are defined; additionally, predefined complex themes are easily controlled through this specific model. The guide also serves to make the results of various individual interviews easily comparable (Weyermann, 2006).

My interest in the psychotherapeutic use of the pre-birth story falls within the type of research called discovery-oriented psychotherapy research. Discovery-oriented psychotherapy research provides a close, in-depth, “discovery oriented look” at psychotherapy phenomena (Vassiliou, 2005). I used guided interviews (the exercise) with a narrative strategy to look at the psychotherapeutic phenomena of interest. Using stories as gateways to deeper psychological awareness about personal human experiences and self-knowledge is not a new idea. Various depth psychologies value and use people’s stories as openings into personality dynamics and dispositions: Freud uses stories in dreams as cues for free association; Adler views narrative accounts of earliest memories as symbolizations of a person’s overall style of life; Murray uses imaginative stories told in response to picture cues; and Jung does the same when using childhood dream stories as a method to get to personal archetypes and life myths (McAdams, 2001).

To ensure focus and simplify analysis, as well as the opportunity to follow whatever came up within the frame of the exercise structure, I chose to employ a purposeful sampling model using homogeneous and emergent sampling. In the study, five participants were found on the basis of the following criteria:

- Familiarity with Process Work; to ensure that participants have prior experience being led through an exercise
- Willingness to work in a therapeutic setting on an exercise led by a facilitator
- Ability to recall one pre-birth story
- Ability to recall a childhood dream
- Consent to possible limitations on anonymity in the written report

The Process Work Exercise

Process Work has a phenomenological approach to human experiences and offers a way to deepen these experiences in a creative and supportive way, such that new insight might be revealed. The exercise is a guided method to focus on a specific topic of interest in order to enter into significant and often unknown sides of consciousness. It is a tool for accessing deep personal processes with help from an outside facilitator. The facilitator has a central helping role, following closely what happens with open awareness, looking for feedback and stuckness, and supports the participant to go as far as possible in the experiences, assisted by the questions in the exercise.

In the exercise, the participant is led through a guided therapeutic session, which starts out with a topic and, through guided questions, aims to facilitate new insight about oneself. While the process is very structured in terms of a predetermined topic and questions, what the participant experiences during the exercise session is individual, subjective, and unknown beforehand. The process the participant goes through is very similar to the one that occurs in a therapeutic setting, in which the willingness to enter into the unknown is central. The difference here is that the initial topic and direction are more structured in an exercise.

Jung stated that looking at the therapeutic process of working with your life myth could be compared with the alchemical process in symbolic form (Mindell, 1987). In the transformation process, the participant goes from a more known experience through the alchemical process, where everything is dissolved into something new or something that was previously hidden in the original known position or form. The process is carefully followed and prompted by the therapist, or facilitator in this case (Dworkin, 1984;

Mindell, 1987). The alchemists chose elements in terms of opposites, because they thought that the attraction of opposites led to their eventual conjunction and ultimately to the production of new substance, arising, but different, from the original substance. This alchemical principle of using opposites can be seen when working with polarities or themes; as Jung and Process Work do when working with life myths.

The Structure of an Exercise

Working within a Process Work framework, the first step of an exercise aims to get an overview of the process structure. The primary process refers to all perceptive content concurrent with people's identity, usually associated with the person's momentary identity. The secondary process people usually experience as being foreign and distant; something not part of themselves, yet somehow already present in some minimal way in the moment. Also referred to as "dreamdoors," often the secondary process is revealed through verbal and nonverbal signals in an individual's expression with which the individual does not identify (Mindell, 1987). Secondary processes can also appear through external disturbances or attractions (such as a disturbing or attractive relationship), through things happening to us in the outer world, or through body symptoms (Diamond & Jones, 2004).

Usually experiences and perceptions that fit the primary identity become the central focus of awareness, while all others that challenge or interrupt the sense of status quo lying in the primary process are marginalized. The primary and secondary processes are separated by an edge. The edge is like a bridge between the primary, known identity and the more unfamiliar, new identity in the secondary process. To protect the familiar primary identity by preventing perception of and learning about unknown experiences,

the edge consists of belief systems and fundamentals from education and culture, and can be experienced as a figure (Weyermann, 2006).

In the exercise for this research, the primary process is addressed at the beginning of the exercise when the participants are asked for a re-current or chronic problem. Through that question, we become familiar not only with the primary process, but also with long-term edge patterns (as seen in the chronic state often related to life myth). The dreamdoor, or secondary process used in this exercise, is found in the different themes or polarities within the pre-birth story. Some themes or polarities are experienced as more familiar than others, indicating that the most foreign ones contain the most secondary processes furthest away from awareness, whereas the most familiar ones are more known.

Channels are the different modes of communication or ways we pick up information. They are of specific interest when working with the secondary process because the channel in the dreamdoor shows the way to dig into the process to start the alchemical process. Diamond and Jones (2004) explain that

channels are signal vehicles, which convey intended and unintended communication. A channel may be 'occupied' or 'unoccupied'. An occupied channel is one that is characterized by conscious intent. It is used to transmit a message from the primary process. An unoccupied channel carries information that is marginalized by the primary process. (p. 64)

Process Work differentiates between four irreducible channels (proprioceptive, visual, movement and auditory) and two composite channels (relationship and world).

During the alchemical process, referred to as the unfolding of the (secondary) process, it is important to notice, pay attention to, and follow changes in the participant's

channels in order to deepen the process and ensure that the experience the participant is going through is grounded and deep. Because the exercise is a specific structured tool, the facilitator guides the participant through some previously chosen channels to start the unfolding process. In a usual (not structured) therapeutic setting, the therapist closely follows the client's start point and switches in channels to ensure the most fluid following of the unfolding process. In the exercise, the unfolding start point is chosen, but otherwise the facilitator pays attention to and follows channel switches as needed. The exercise used in this research uses the visual and movement channels to start the unfolding process because these channels for many people are unoccupied modes of perceiving, thus support the secondary process to come to the front of awareness.

The exercise for this research is structured in two parts, which crystallize the focus and goals of the project as a whole. The first part focuses on using the pre-birth story as a narrative strategy. The second part focuses on possible pattern connections between the pre-birth story and the childhood dream; as my interest was to show if the pre-birth story has therapeutic use as, and if there are links to, the life myth, here represented by the childhood dream.

Data Collection & Analysis

A combination of different subject-oriented methods were used in the data collecting process:

- A demographic data sheet was answered before the exercise session
- The pre-birth story (or stories) and childhood dream were written up by the participants beforehand as well

- Participation in one facilitated session, which included:
 - An experiential exercise session exploring the pre-birth story and patterns in the childhood dream
 - A debriefing interview following the exercise to capture the participant's experiences

The core of the data collection included the exercise session, which was videotaped (mainly for references to non-verbal signals) and transcribed. Video study of therapeutic sessions is one of the methods used in qualitative research to explore aspects of the psychotherapeutic process (Vassiliou, 2005). Video recording the exercise sessions is appropriate when researching and exploring the pre-birth story because it provides a holistic view on the creative process lying in the method of the exercise, capturing in detail the interaction of the facilitator and the participant, as well as non-verbal communication, such as body postures, gestures, body contact and movement.

In the exercise, I used drawings or sketches as a method twice for dual purposes: at first to make the participant change into another perceptual channel (visual) after talking about their pre-birth story; and secondly, later in the exercise, to see if there are pattern connections between the energy sketches in the pre-birth story and the childhood dream (Appendix C). I used integrated approaches combining verbal or oral and graphic methods because they enable the exploration of the multiplicity and complexity of human experience. Through the process of drawing, the draw-er is constructing knowledge about the drawing (Weyermann, 2006). The participants come to understand their pre-birth story at that particular place and time on a deeper level. Using the drawing to access other perceptual modes, the participant gets to know something new about him- or herself.

In my aim to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest – the pre-birth story – I used an overall inductive analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the data, particularly as they relate to the unfolding of the pre-birth story and childhood dream. I had several goals throughout the data analysis: looking into the world of the participants; determining the focus areas in the data; making sure that the analysis was done correctly to ensure academic quality; and keeping the topic of the study on track. Following Jones' (2005) process of analyzing qualitative data, I first reviewed each transcript in its entirety to get an overall sense of the participant's main ideas. Next, I slowly read through the transcript again, this time noting key words and phrases, creating a kind of coding system. Then I explored how the key ideas were related and what concepts they might represent. Finally, I created a visual chart of the data, identifying key themes and sub-themes related to each idea.

Role of Researcher

I played a significant role throughout this study, in that I was involved in the overall structure, preparation and data analysis. My attempt to keep myself out of the research process has been very limited, so in that way I am very biased. I am also biased in being a Process Work student for more than 10 years and having felt how useful this approach is. I am aware of the fact that I have a tendency to perceive the world and the phenomenon through the mindset of Process Work awareness. I have chosen to step out of the data collection exercise and debriefing interview, and have in that respect a limited connection to the participants. Communication with participants has been through email when requesting specific information, including the participant and consent form, the

demographic data sheet, and the written pre-birth story and childhood dream. The exercise and debriefing interview were done by another colleague facilitator.

I engaged in reflexivity when considering how my expectations affect what I focus on and what I discover (Jones, 2005). Reflexivity is a process of ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it – an attempt to identify my biases, assumptions and expectations, and observe how they affect what is studied and shape what is discovered. To address these biases, I have tried to be aware of, focus on, and openly use my subjectivity, as well as create an audit trail.

Evaluative Criteria & Ethics

I am using a set of lenses to capture the pre-birth stories in order to ensure academic rigor and the reliability of my research. Methodologically, I used triangulation as well as transparency in the data collection process. The strategy of transparency was done through two sources. First, in the audit trail below, I made a description of my process as researcher: I show in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived in the data analysis, and how decisions were made throughout the data gathering to ensure validity, such that nothing is hidden from the reader. Transparency in the data collecting part was also used by asking a colleague to facilitate the exercise and debriefing parts of the data collection. This was done to prevent me from impacting such a significant part of the project's data collection.

Various data gathering techniques were used in the interest of data triangulation. In sum, these included: a demographic data sheet; pre-written pre-birth story and childhood dream; exercise session; and finally, the debrief interview. Triangulation is used to capture the phenomenon of interest in many different ways, so as to increase the

validity of the findings. It is done to secure the variation of the data and to search for patterns in all the various material, both used singly and all together. Finding meaning of an observation is one thing, but additional observations give ground for revising the interpretations that I had from the start (Stake, 1995).

The ethical part of the project has been dealt with by making an information and consent form. Here the limitations of anonymity and confidentiality were mentioned, as well as the freedom to withdraw from the project at any stage before the report was published (Appendix B). Data, such as video tapes, notes and transcripts, were stored and used only by me and my research adviser, Caroline Spark, and were destroyed after the project was finished.

How It Went: Method Details & Audit Trail

Since I started with my very first interest in the topic in the springtime of 2007, a lot of people have immediately said “yes” that they can see pattern connections between their pre-birth story and their childhood dream. I have become even more curious about the topic because of that. It was also very encouraging when I once asked my cohort if they had a pre-birth story and 12 out of 14 immediately said “yes.” Smaller informal research attempts, like asking people personally if they have a pre-birth story, has sometimes resulted in them answering “no,” followed by “I just know that...” and then the story comes. It seems like the pre-birth story has the same hidden quality as the childhood dream; people rarely talk about pre-birth stories or childhood dreams before they are asked due to some special occasion.

Because I didn't want to have any influence on participants' experiences during data collection, I chose to let a colleague help me out with that part of the project. I asked

a colleague and friend, Katje Wagner, to do the facilitating. After I made the exercise, together we tested it out on each other in middle of December 2008. I discovered that we each emphasized a different part of the exercise: when drawings of the two polarities or themes in the pre-birth story were made, one of us chose to unfold and move like the most energetic one of the themes; the other found it more exciting to work with the two polarities or themes at the same time. Here it became apparent for me that I needed to stay open and let the participant, together with the facilitator, choose to go with the part that seems to have most energy – and that choice could be either one part of the themes in the drawing or both.

Diploma cohort students who showed interest in the project were given a participant form before deciding to join (Appendix A). If they chose to participate, they signed a consent form (Appendix B). The sample consisted of five students: three were found by asking my own cohort; and two were found by word of mouth. The video data were collected in the period from January 11th to February 20th 2009 in Portland at the Process Work Institute. The videos were transformed into DVDs, and transcripts of the videos were made. DVDs, drawings and transcripts were sent to me. The time used for data collection with each participant varied from one hour to one and a half hours. Because the lighting on the videos was poor, I was not able to see facial expressions, smaller movements, or smaller details in the relation between the participant and the facilitator. When using the videos, I therefore focused on the linguistic, paralinguistic and non-verbal signals, such as pauses and tone of voice, which were captured and useable on the videos.

In terms of data, the biggest contribution to the project has been the videos and transcripts, in which the participant experiences are vibrant and living. It is here possible to follow the therapeutic process of exploring, unfolding and unravelling unknown experiences into something new. The written pre-birth story and childhood dream have contributed to the research by shaping the participants' focus on what the topic of the study and the exercise was about. The write-ups also played a role in the analysis, where I focused on specific words and themes used by participants when telling their stories. The drawings have contributed by giving me another insight in the participants' way of describing their inner sensations, feelings and energies.

To capture the analysis process, I made three different forms, each containing a separate step of the analysis:

- The first form contains all of the different pieces of data from each participant on a single sheet of paper. The form was divided into five squares and held notes for: demographic data, pre-written pre-birth story and childhood dream, video-notes, transcripts and drawing comparison.
 - I tried here to get the essence or key lines, phrases or specific repeated words for each participant, as well as other information that I found important.
- The second form was a very big piece of paper, again containing all the pieces of information from each participant; also dividing the sheet into different subheadings, but this time related to the different parts of the exercise (pre-birth story, re-telling, themes, drawings, childhood dream, themes, drawings, comparing the drawings, and debrief).

- I first read through all the data again using a pen to mark specific words, which I later wrote down on the big sheet to notice the participants' own repeated words. The emphasis was on getting an overview of each participant's process, focusing on distinct parts of the exercise to really discover new and noteworthy things and to have a tool to easily capture the whole session.
- The third form was an open piece of paper for each participant.
 - Here I used the two foregoing analysis instruments: capturing essence themes and interpretations for each participant; and finding correlating things happening in between the data of the participants.

Finally, I let myself go back to the research question using the iterative process and from there constructed some questions to use as guidelines to frame and capture the findings. In the process of analyzing, I was freed from preconceptions I had on the pre-birth story. Just like someone in the alchemical process, I let myself flow with the data collected in the unknown – like stepping in the soup to let myself step out again on another shore with new discovery. In this process of flow, I contacted the facilitator for the data collection to ensure that my experience and interpretations corresponded to what actually occurred in the exercises and interviews.

Chapter 4

Findings

The main findings in this research concentrate on three lines of inquiry: 1) outer findings about the pre-birth story; 2) the therapeutic value of pre-birth story as narrative strategy; and 3) possible pattern connections to the childhood dream as life myth. Since the findings from the data are not linear or causal, it is not always possible to clearly differentiate between these three lines of inquiry. Because of these overlaps, some aspects of the data are repeated for different discoveries and purposes.

My focus for this research project is on the pre-birth story itself. I therefore chose to refer to the participants by number: I use P1 for participant number one, P2 for participant number two, and so on. In the presentation of the findings, I use the terms PBS for aspects connected with or exploring the pre-birth story and CD for aspects connected with the childhood dream. To help the reader grasp the findings and follow the themes addressed in the analysis, I will first introduce the five pre-birth stories.

The Five Pre-Birth Stories

The following section introduces the five pre-birth stories as described by the participants in their PBS write-ups; the phase of data collection which occurred before doing the exercise. In the spirit of qualitative research, I will initially let the PBS speak for itself in the participant's own voice, then draw attention to the thematic patterns and my interpretations in the analysis that follows.

The Dancing Pregnant Fly

P1PBS: “My mother danced on stage dressed in a huge fly costume when she was heavily pregnant with me. I don’t know what month, but my impression was it was really late. She had a big belly. It was modern dance, and through the performance she took off layers of the costume until she emerged in just her leotard with her pregnant belly.”

The Not-Shooting Markswoman

P2PBS: “My mother was a competition markswoman (she travelled around shooting guns at targets and she won often), and suddenly when she was pregnant with me (and didn't even know she was pregnant yet) she couldn't stand the sound of guns being fired. The sound made her very upset. She tried to ignore it but couldn't, and had to stop in the middle of a shooting match and couldn't go back to shooting for many years after that because of being bothered by the sound of the guns.”

The Reflecting Mom

P3PBS: “When my mother was 18 years old she worked as a secretary. She met my biological father, who worked at a bank and they began to date. All she knew about him was that he was Roman Catholic, played the piano, and had graduated from Notre Dame University and had not been drafted into WW2 because he had a severe astigmatism and myopia. She fell in love with him and they had only dated a few months when I was conceived. He had told my mother that his parents were very religious Roman Catholics, so when mom told him she was pregnant he panicked and was afraid that mom's parents and his parents would force him to marry her. He offered to pay for an abortion for her. Mom said she realized he did not love her and so decided to move without telling him anything. My mother did not tell her mother and father about her

pregnancy, because she wanted to protect her father from the shame of a second illegitimate child. From her parent's home, Mom secretly gathered baby clothes and a trunk, and moved in with her sister, until she found her own place and a job as a secretary. Her OB doctor put pressure on her to put me up for adoption, as he felt she would not be able to support me and there was another doctor there who wanted to adopt a baby. Mother vacillated about an abortion, and decided to pray to the Virgin Mary about whether or not to give birth to me. She also thought of giving me up for adoption because of fear of not being able to support me and herself, but decided to keep me after watching a movie of a mother who had given her child away and then regretted it.”

The Silver Thaw

P4PBS: “The story is very minimal. It was only a brief description of the unusual weather pattern on the days before and on my birth. As my mother stated it, it was the coldest March in memory, in the part of Oregon we lived in, with a phenomenon called a ‘silver thaw’. This is when it rains and immediately freeze causing everything to be coated with thick ice – the whole environment looks crystalline silver.”

The Wanted & Celebrated Child

P5PBS: “Mom’s version: My mom was living on a biodynamic farm. She wanted to have a baby but was not together with anyone, so she made a baby with a friend on the farm. At the time he was married and had two kids but was separated from his wife. After my mom became pregnant she fell in love with another farmer at the farm who she married and who adopted me. My biological father graciously gave up his parental rights and allowed the other man, who he respected, to adopt me. Biological father’s version: Same as my mom's version, but he said that there wasn't an intention of making a baby

but instead they were just making love and celebrating life and if a baby came of it, then hooray! When my mom did become pregnant, he really wanted to be with my mom and be the father, but was able to give up his parental rights and allow the family to go on without him.”

Characteristics of the Pre-Birth Story

In analyzing the data, several key characteristics of pre-birth stories became apparent related to age, content, and links to parents:

Age

Demographic information revealed that the pre-birth story was told to participants when they were between 7 to 50 years of age: three participants heard when they were children (6-7 years old); one when she got pregnant; and another when the participant’s father died. In contrast, all of the participants had their childhood dreams between three to six years old. Therefore, according to this data analysis, the pre-birth story was passed along *after* the childhood dream appeared.

Content

The analysis of participants’ write-ups showed that pre-birth stories involved *occurrences* for three participants (P1, P2 and P4) and *experiences related to the parents’ relationship* for two (P3, P5). For all participants, the pre-birth story seems to consist of smaller, insignificant or unplanned happenings they once were told. Given that “depth psychology bases its theory of the psyche upon the study of the meaning in so-called accidental phenomena,” pre-birth stories seem to fulfil such criteria (Mindell, 1972, p. 52).

Links to Parents

Looking further into the content of the pre-birth stories, a significant recurring phenomenon showed that (in all but one PBS) one or both parents were present. More specifically, the mother was mentioned in the beginning in four of the stories. In the one story without parents, a parental relationship shows up during the unfolding of the PBS in a related story with similar themes: “I just had a memory...it’s a thing that happened privately with my mother and me around freezing and thawing” (P4, PBS). Parents may have appeared in so many of the pre-birth stories because information that is passed along has an inherent relational quality, connecting parents – and it seems especially the mothers – with their child. Although the pre-birth story seemingly involves simple information about something that happened but is usually not talked about, all the while the pre-birth story seems to encompass a known fact about one’s identity – “who you are” – related to one’s parents and/or the world and environment.

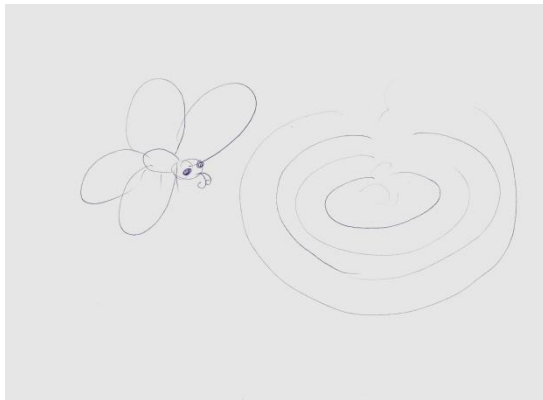
Therapeutic Value of the Unfolded Pre-Birth Story

A significant finding in the data showed that all participants discovered something useful once the theme from the pre-birth story was unfolded as a dreamdoor into the unknown. Because Process Work claims that all experiences hold something useful, in some ways it is not that remarkable that all the participants found use through unfolding the pre-birth story. However, digging deeper, it became interesting to note *what* was of personal use for the participants. Here, it is noticeable that all the participants were able to find two main themes in the pre-birth story. This is important to notice because it allows the pre-birth story to be unfolded similarly to working with mythical patterns in the life myth. Since Jung refers to polarities as the “underlying the dynamic of the

psyche,” working with the pre-birth story using themes or polarities serves as an attempt to directly connect with these mythical patterns (1995, p. 383).

To make it easier for the reader to follow the unfolding process of the PBS described in this section, I first show the drawing of the PBS themes. Then, following the steps of the exercise, I identify the initial chronic problem, the two main PBS themes, what was unfolded, what was discovered, and how that discovery related to the original problem.

Unfolding the Dancing Pregnant Fly



a fly / the layers coming off

P1 focused on a chronic body symptom in the beginning of the exercise. The two identified themes from the PBS were “a fly” and “layers coming off;” the one chosen to unfold was “layers coming off.” Through the unfolding, the participant explored in movement the “layers coming off,” then turned into the fly taking off layers; meaning, both themes were integrated through the unfolding process. The newfound energy was experienced as “clean, fast...not any bigger than it has to be...very authentic” with “no drama” in the way of dealing with the world. When asked to give advice about the chronic problem from this newfound perspective, the participant said, “Well, so what,

just get on with it...maybe it will be solved, maybe not...just get on with everything...it's just life...you just have to keep on going.”

Unfolding the Not-Shooting Markswoman



trance / sound of bullets coming from everywhere

P2 started out by mentioning a chronic body symptom when asked to name a problem. The two identified themes from the PBS were “trance” and “sound of bullets from everywhere;” P2 chose to unfold “sound of bullets from everywhere.” By unfolding in movement, the participant experienced that an energy emerge that was “not negotiable, very intolerant, compassion but detached,” with a “very clear vision.” The participant noticed a match between the starting chronic body problem mentioned at the beginning and the energy in the unfolded theme in pre-birth story. Coming up with advice related to the chronic problem, this new energy said: “Just allow for it to be what it is...there’s ripples...there’s a reaction...just part of nature...part of the flow...I’m not the only ripple.”

Unfolding the Reflecting Mom



Abraham with knife / acceptance of fate

P3 started out in the exercise identifying a chronic relationship problem of “saying no, without guilt.” The two themes identified in the PBS were “Abraham with knife” and “acceptance of fate.” The participant chose to unfold both energies, using “Abraham with knife” *and* “acceptance of fate,” plus the question of whether to save the child. Through the unfolding process, P3 got in touch with a sense of “justice...dipping into both realities...somebody’s choosing;” which evolved further into “The Egyptian Myth of The Mother Justice Scale,” who was able to hold the opposites. When asked to give advice about the chronic relationship problem mentioned in the start of the exercise, the participant said, “There’s always a yes and a no at the same time...this place doesn’t feel guilty...saying no, because it’s a yes to something else.”

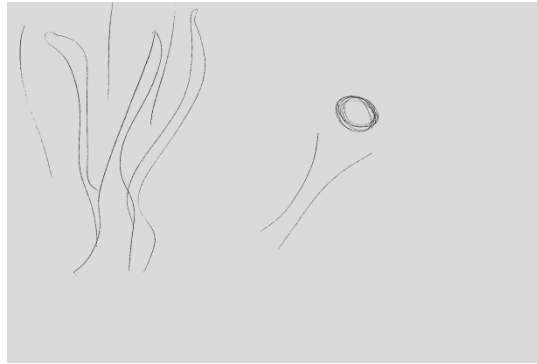
Unfolding the Silver Thaw



everyday life / something awesome

P4 here identified a chronic relationship problem of not being able to “be direct in relationship.” The two identified PBS themes were “everyday life” and “something awesome.” The participant chose to unfold “something awesome” through movement, and came through the process to a free energy without limits like a “bird of the universe;” realizing that “being directive on this planet earth is such a narrowing down of this energy.” When considering how this new energy related to the starting problem from the beginning of the exercise, the participant found “the joy in relating, letting it all come through in sparkling,” which was a “very unique discovery...like a 45 year process of...reclaiming that” way of relating again.

Unfolding the Wanted & Celebrated Child



biological father's version / mom's version

P5 starts out with mentioning a chronic relationship issue of “feeling stuck in relationship.” The two main themes were identified as “biological father’s version” and “mom’s version” of the pre-birth story, and the choice was to work with “biological father’s version.” Through the unfolding process, a “leader” energy popped up that said, “People are all behind me...I’m kind of being other worldly.” When considering the relationship problem at the beginning of the exercise, this new energy told the part that feels “stuck in relationship” that it was “too worldly...wipe that aside,” also asking the stuck part “who are you?”

Additional noteworthy findings from the unfolded pre-birth stories include the following:

- For P1, the body was perceived as having another quality or feeling even *before* relating to the problem stated at the beginning of the exercise: I feel “energetically at home in a really simple light kind of way...it’s more comfortable just to be home in my body...I’m being myself unencumbered.”
- P2 found that the unfolded PBS expressed the same energy as the chronic body symptom: It “feels the same...not negotiable, very intolerant” energy.

- P4 reconnected with a lost way of relating through the pre-birth story: “A 45 year process of reclaiming” the ability to relate with joy, bringing it all out.

It is interesting to notice that all participants discovered something useful when they connected the newfound PBS energy to the original chronic problem. In all cases the participants unravelled energies which were experienced as detached and spiritual. This makes sense, considering that chronic body symptoms and chronic relationship problems produce a feeling of stuckness, which can often be relieved when approached as part of a mythic pattern (Diamond & Jones, 2004). It can be particularly helpful to work with long term problems from a more detached spiritual dimension. Based on these findings, it appears that unfolded PBS themes produced such profitable outcomes.

The Five Childhood Dreams

To be able to follow the analysis in the next part of the study, I will start out by presenting the five childhood dreams. As before when presenting the pre-birth stories, I will let the participant’s own voice speak, using the written childhood dreams that were sent to me before participating in the exercise.

The Falling Awareness

P1CD: “I was falling through the floor in our family house. I had no body, just awareness falling. About a foot below there is another floor, and below that another and it keeps going forever. A few levels below the CR [consensus reality] floor, there are figures like red chess pawns. I fall past them, but I know as I pass them that they have power over the people in the CR level of the house (meaning my family). As I fall, there is a sense of endless dark space.”

The Mafia Chasing

P2CD: “Many men with guns were chasing me; it was the Mafia. They chased me up the stairs to a tall brick building and I ran from them and ended up on the roof of the building. They came at me with guns pointing at me to shoot and I knew my only escape was to jump off the top of the building (and die) or fly. I flew by doing the breast-stroke (swimming in the air) and barely got out of range of the bullets as the Mafia all fired their guns at me. It was peaceful and beautiful up in the sky, I was out of range of the bullets and could not hear them any longer – but soon my arms became tired of flying (it was even more work than swimming), so I figured I had lost the Mafia and I would land in another part of the city. But when I landed on the top of another building, they were already on their way up the stairs to get me. They had all tracked me through the streets below (they could see me flying and followed me) and so I only had time for a few quick breaths before I had to fly again. This story-line repeated as I flew, rested a moment, and had to fly again.”

The Alligator Servant

P3CD: “I am around six years old and standing in my living room looking out a large glass window, watching my parents get out of their black Studebaker car and beginning to walk to the front door. I am crying and begin to walk toward the steps to our attic because I will not be able to say good-bye to them. I was going to go live in the attic and serve or care for an alligator that was living in the attic and had captured baby animals which were caring for the alligator. I was exchanging myself for the baby animals, so they could be free. As I walk up the attic, the baby animals begin to come down the steps to freedom.”

The Un-Noticed Child

P4CD: “I was standing alone in the archway between the hallway and the living room observing a verbal fight between my mother and father. They are both sitting on the couch next to each other. They don't notice me, acknowledge me or speak to me. My father is throwing our children's books at the window blinds one at a time with deliberation and angry intent. They make a crashing sound as they hit the blinds (they were the old fashioned Venetian blinds – the sound is a metallic like shrill crash). I have a sense of being frozen in place – my younger brother comes out from our bedroom and I feel him holding my hand. Then I see my mother get up from the couch and run into the bathroom right by me (again not acknowledging me). I follow her to the bathroom doorway, standing in that archway observing her – she is sitting on the toilet with the lid down, with her head resting on her arms on the plumbing back of the toilet. She is crying. I have a big empathetic emotion come over me and I want to help her. Again no noticing, acknowledging or speaking to me.”

The Night-time Spiders

P5CD: “My earliest childhood dream that persisted over several years was that there were lots of spiders all over my bedroom as I slept, and they were crawling under my bed. If I got up to go to the bathroom they would crawl to my feet and try to bite me. I remember huddling in my bed afraid to go to my parent's bed but afraid to stay where I was as well. The spiders themselves were small and large and had hairy legs and were malicious – they were trying to get me and just taking over the whole floor of my room and scurrying very fast.”

In addition to the information gathered from the written childhood dreams, there were two additional significant discoveries made by participants when verbally telling their CDs during the exercise:

- After unfolding the PBS, right in the middle of telling *Mafia Chasing*, P2 discovers: “oh my god, I’ve worked on the dream so much and I’ve never really...well I’ve never connected the dream to the bullet actually like that”; working with the sound of the bullets in the PBS made a change in the perception of the bullets in the CD.
- P4 started to use similar words when telling *Un-Noticed Child*: the participant refers to the child as “frozen” upon seeing the parents’ fight, then noticed and was surprised by the change of words, saying “I’ve never correlated to that silver thaw before. I never even thought about them being connected.”

Pattern Connections to the Childhood Dream

So where does the pre-birth story parallel the childhood dream? What did participants experience when asked to compare the drawings? Did the participants discover anything else when exploring the drawings? This section discusses what the participants discovered during the last part of the exercise, in order to show different possibilities for exploring the pre-birth story and its connection to the childhood dream.

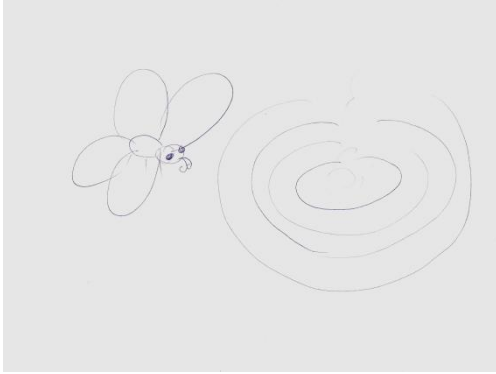
Comparing the Drawings: Mirroring

A major finding in the data was that all participants were able to see connections between the drawing of the energies in the pre-birth story and the energies in the childhood dream. The participants found comparing interesting as they looked for connections in the drawings of the pre-birth story and childhood dream, and all came up

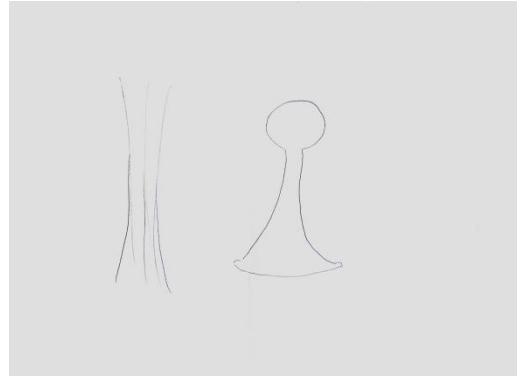
with exclamations like: “This reminds me of this somehow” (P2); “similar qualities somehow...this is going straight up, this is going straight down” (P1); “they both have elements of both” (P2); “as similar to these”(P5); “when I said it, you know started talking about it, I was like oh my gosh, it’s so connected” (P4); and P1 immediately said “definitely” when asked about connections.

When watching the video or reading the transcripts, it was difficult to understand what the participants were actually talking about in the above statements. Therefore, the following section looks into the themes in the PBS and CD drawings further by instead exploring what the participants *experienced*. Since none of the words describing the PBS and CD drawings were repeated, it was not immediately clear that the themes were comparable. Nevertheless, mirroring was evident throughout the drawings.

In all cases, the same energies were discovered in both drawings of the themes from the pre-birth story and childhood dream, indicating that they have similar tendencies and are possibly part of the same life myth. I include the participants’ drawings below to show the mirroring of PBS and CD themes:



a fly / the layers coming off

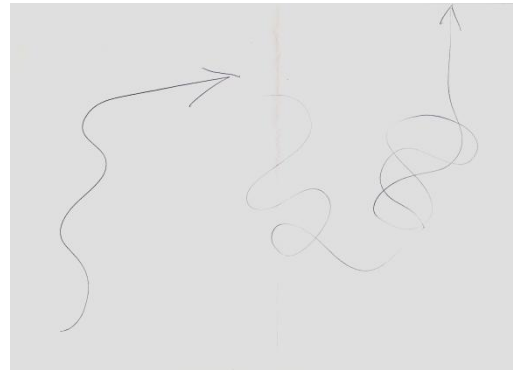


falling through floors / chess pawns

- P1 described both the energy in the “fly” and the energy in the “chess pawns” as “unknown.” Additionally, “layers coming off” was compared with “falling through floors” as “straight up” and “straight down” energies.



trance / the bullets coming from everywhere



mafia gunmen after me / me being chased

- P2: The energy in the “trance” was compared with the energy in “being chased;” and the energy in the “sound of bullets coming from everywhere” was comparable to the “Mafia gunmen.”



Abraham with knife / acceptance of fate

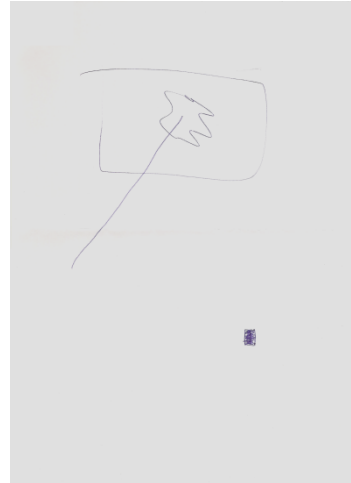


sad, depressed, scared / powerful, instinctual, grabs

- P3: In the energy of “Abraham with knife,” connections were found to the “powerful instinctual alligator;” also “acceptance of fate” correlated with the energy in “sad, depressed and scared” from the childhood dream.



Everyday life / something awesome



dad, throwing with power / me, frozen

- P4: Here the pre-birth drawings consisted of energies drawn on each other. The “everyday life” energy was comparable to “me frozen;” and the “something awesome” energy was like the “dad throwing with power.”



Biological father's version / Mom's version



Spiders / me, scared in bed

- P5: The energy of the “biological father’s version” was also seen in “spiders” as “outward;” and the energy in “mother’s version” was connected to the “me, scared in bed” as both having “roundness.”

More Discoveries of Parallels to Childhood Dream

Several pattern connections besides the major finding in the drawings emerged between the pre-birth story and the childhood dream when explored further, including the following: 1) repeated words; 2) verbal descriptions of the drawings; and 3) same theme present in PBS and CD. All participants found pattern connections in one or more of the above listed ways, as illustrated by the following examples:

Repeated Words. Two cases used repeated words in describing the PBS and CD:

- P2 used words like “guns” and “shooting” throughout both the PBS and CD. The unfolding of the PBS included descriptions like “steam of air” and “parts it;” then similarly, here CD consisted of words like “parting the air.”
- Likewise, P4 repeated the word “frozen” in many inflections in both PBS and CD.

Verbal Descriptions of the Drawings. In two cases energy pattern connections were seen in the verbal description of the drawings:

- P1 stated that the energy in the PBS was “straight up;” in CD, “straight down.”
- P5 said that in both drawings an “outward” energy can be seen, as well as a “round” energy.

Same Theme Present. In two cases the same theme was present in the pre-birth story and the childhood dream:

- P3 had a “live and die” as well as a “choosing” theme present in both pre-birth story and childhood dream; in the PBS, the decision of whether the child will be born; in the CD, the child’s decision to leave and die in order for other to live.
- P1 used “layers” in the PBS which connected to “falling through the floors” in CD; where “taking off layers” is active in the PBS, “falling through” in the CD is something that just happens.

Perceptual Change

Looking at the process of the exercise and debriefing interview, it seemed like an organic creature of its own in which the participant was given the possibility and frame to explore something new: the pre-birth story and its potential connections to childhood dream. Each participant used the exercise and debriefing in unique ways – stopping up at different parts, dwelling and noticing something interesting – and was transformed, as if the process gave birth to new perceptions of each participant’s history, identity or myth. Like “stepping in” to the unknown of the exercise, then “stepping out” again with a new discovery! In this next section, I repeat some of the findings in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the study.

Through the statements from the participants and the analysis of the data, it became clear that the participants found the process in the pre-birth exercise meaningful

in several ways. The pre-birth exercise deepened the childhood dream, providing a missing piece of the childhood story that made it possible to perceive a problematic part of the childhood dream's energy in another way. In addition, entering into the pre-birth story as a dream or fairy tale allowed the participants the freedom to explore the PBS in new ways, making it possible to perceive problematic relationships or aspects of the PBS through a more detached filter. Finally, once unfolded, the pre-birth story seemed to contain the potential to change a problematic aspect or scary theme in the childhood dream; dissolving part of the childhood dream.

Deepening the Childhood Story. In four cases the childhood dream was deepened through the exercise:

- P1 found in the debriefing part that “I have a different take on my childhood dream now. It’s a shift in focus....another way of looking at the dream,” without really clearly stating what the shift was about.
- P2 stated in the middle of telling the childhood story, “Oh my god, I’ve worked on the dream so much and I’ve never really, well I’ve never connected the dream to the bullet actually like that.”
- P3 noticed something new when looking at the childhood dream drawing: “the little innocent baby animals are freed.” During the comparison of the drawings this participant again made a new discovery: “I’m *choosing* to go up the steps...It’s a *choice*...isn’t that interesting. I hadn’t made that association before.”
- P4 found right after telling the childhood dream: “I’ve never correlated to that silver thaw before. I never even thought about them being connected.”

Entering the Pre-Birth Story as a Dream. In two cases the participants were able to change perception because entering and exploring the pre-birth story was done as a dream:

- P1 mentioned: “I usually start analyzing my family story, but it’s really refreshing just to look at it as a story and ignore the personalities. That was really interesting. Mythology isn’t necessarily attached to the difficult history.”
- P5 found in the debriefing part that “it’s the first time I’ve worked on it in a process-oriented way. It’s really special to be able to do that, and also have the childhood dream in there too. It’s amazing to try to put some meaning on all. It’s just really helpful. I’m buzzing with the possibility of exploring the story...it’s really great. I’ll have to remember that.”

Dissolving Part of the Childhood Dream. In three cases the unfolded energy from the pre-birth story became useful in the childhood dream:

- P2 stated that a big discovery was the change of the perception of the bullet; scared of it in CD, then perceiving it in PBS as “just a wake” (ie, ripple in water).
- P3 noticed that the “weigh-er” in the PBS changed the perception of the child in CD, realizing that the child *decides* its path. P3 also discovered that the baby animals in the CD were free to live, because the child chose to be traded.
- P4 found the awesome beautiful frozen state in PBS useful when looking at the frozen child in the CD, because unfolded it was a sparkling-joy in relationship that can change the child’s view, stating that “this is like a missing piece adding to my CD.”

Summarizing the Findings about the Pre-Birth Story

The pre-birth story seems to be able to transform deep mythical experiences, especially when connected with the childhood dream. Noteworthy here is that the meaning and useful parts for the participants popped up at different places in the exercise, and for some participants even more than once. The data reveals the following about the pre-birth story:

- **Characteristics** of PBS included: the age when the pre-birth story was initially told came *after* the childhood dream appeared; the content in pre-birth stories appeared as smaller, insignificant or unplanned occurrences; and links to parents were seen in all cases, where especially mother was mentioned.
- The PBS contains potential **therapeutic value**, in that *all participants were able to unfold the PBS and found detached energies useful in dealing with the starting problem.*
- In all cases, **comparisons between PBS and CD drawings** showed that energies tend to mirror each other.
- More **PBS and CD connections** were found in: repeated words; verbal descriptions of the drawings; and the presence of similar themes.
- **Perceptual changes** were seen through the PBS exercise which: deepened the PBS; deepened the CD; occurred by entering the PBS as a dream; and helped to dissolve part of the CD.

Through the data it becomes apparent that the pre-birth story is a useful tool when working with the life myth, helping to build more knowledge of the life myth, changing

perceptions in aspects of the life myth, and is especially powerful when combined with the childhood dream.

Chapter 5

Discussion

For a long time now, I have found it useful to have tools to explore things about who I am so that I do not feel thrown around in the world, unable to comprehend what and why something is happening. This wish motivates my interest in the topic of this study: The Pre-Birth Story.

The goal of this research has been to look for possible connections between the pre-birth story and life myth (Mindell, 1989, 1998, 2000b, 2001, 2004). With that aim in mind, I have studied the pre-birth story as life myth from various approaches.

I have explored the pre-birth stories as individual personal stories in order to deepen the understanding of these specific tales. By focusing on prenatal and newborn experiences (Blum, 1993; Grof, 1993), I found that the pre-birth story shares patterns with the birth story, in that both are reported stories, highly significant, emotionally charged, and serve as reminiscing and bonding narratives (Hayden, Singer & Christler, 2006; Reese, 1996; Soparkar, 1998). The pre-birth story also reflects the interpersonal quality of birth narratives (Reese, 1996). In addition, I explored why we seem to remember narratives and found the following: they offer value by expressing something about one's sense of self; are remembered usually from way back; are part of our self-narrative; and are usually not talked about because they do not really seem to express anything about who we are (Linde, 1993; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Reese, 2002; Snow, 1990).

I discovered that pre-birth stories reveal stories from the past in a *present* form (Abelson, Frey & Gregg, 2004). This indicates that we can work with these mythical patterns over and over again, yet still discover something new and useful each time. But why do we remember these special narratives such as childhood dream stories and pre-birth stories from long ago in childhood? Maybe they are remembered because they are stories *for* us, with messages meant uniquely for us. Unfolding pre-birth stories helps us to get inside and harvest their messages so that they become useful, like tools for navigating life.

I explored the concept of myth in order to grasp how the life myth (when viewed psychologically) can be used in self growth (Armstrong, 2005; Campbell, 1993; Jung, 1993; McAdams, 1988; Murphy, 2008). When working with myth from a Process Work perspective, I found that it is important to identify polarities or themes because they seem to structure and present an inherent life-long dynamic of the psyche (Diamond & Jones, 2004; Mindell, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2002). According to Process Work, the personal myth is usually found through the childhood dream, chronic body symptoms or chronic relationship problems.

In this study, I use the childhood dream as a sign of the life myth in order to make comparisons with the pre-birth story. While pre-birth stories and childhoods dreams reflect similar patterns, I also want to mention where they are different; Pre-birth stories differ from childhood dreams in that they are *told by someone else* (rather than solely internally remembered), revealing *relationship connections*, stories shared with parents, and possibly a relational aspect of identity. In order for the pre-birth story to become visible in the world, parents must both *remember* some strange happening while the child

is in the womb and *pass* it along to the child in later life. Because of this inherent relational aspect, it may be that the pre-birth story reflects more of one's identity, relationship with others or the world, whereas the childhood dream reveals the earliest glimpse at the life myth, less mediated by others' perceptions, and stems more from internal experience.

The Findings

Studying the pre-birth story as a narrative strategy for personal growth, I have been led by the following research question: How can pre-birth stories be unfolded using Process Work techniques in order to gain greater understanding of the life myth? This qualitative study has addressed two main concerns: the therapeutic validity of pre-birth stories; and the possible connection of the pre-birth story to the life myth. In order to explore these concerns, I created an explorative exercise as a Process Work tool, which structured the data and provided greater transparency to my role as a researcher. In addition, I asked a colleague to be the facilitator of the exercise with the five participants, all process work diploma students from different cohorts at the Process Work Institute in Portland.

The data analysis revealed four main findings related to: (1) characteristics of the pre-birth story as a concept; (2) the therapeutic value of the pre-birth story; (3) the connections of the pre-birth story to the childhood dream; and (4) pre-birth story as life myth material.

First of all, through the data I discovered that pre-birth stories share several key characteristics: the pre-birth story was told to the child *after* the childhood dream appears; the content in pre-birth stories appear as smaller occurrences, insignificances or

unexpected happenings; and links to parents (especially mothers) are observed in all cases. The mythical aspects of pre-birth stories relate to several components inherent in the pre-birth story: it is observed by the parents *before* the child is born; noticed by the child and remembered (for many participants) for many years; and usually shared with others in special circumstances or when specifically asked.

Is it possible that the life-long mythic pattern was there before the child was born? Or is it just that the pre-birth story is a reflection of the childhood dream which makes the child remember that specific strange story? Future research is needed to answer that question. It may be that the childhood dream is the main road and first place the personal life myth appears as a specific pattern; whereas the pre-birth story (like the chronic body symptom and chronic relationship problem) shows the same patterns seen in the childhood dream, yet appears later in life.

Secondly, through the analysis it became apparent that the pre-birth story offers therapeutic value. The pre-birth story seems to be able to produce polarities or themes, because *all* the participants were able to find polarities or themes in the story. In addition, the unfolded pre-birth story has the ability to transform the chosen theme in the story into something useful when dealing with chronic problems, such as body symptoms and relationship problems (which happen to be life myth patterns as well) (Mindell, 1998, 2000b, 2001).

Given that every discovery can be of use when unfolding something secondary, and that many stories/dreams contain polarities and themes, why is it that the pre-birth story seems to reflect *mythic* patterns in particular? The data illustrates that, through unfolding the pre-birth story, *all* of the participants were able to find and work with

detached energies in relation to their original problems. Detachment often indicates contact with basic energies or *sentience*; a deep level of awareness beyond polarization, possibly marking a connection to the life myth (Diamond & Jones, 2004). Especially when working with bigger life patterns or experiences, the only way to get beyond problems and find meaning is to track them to the sentient realm. Because life myths show enduring personal patterns that can be worked with repeatedly, they hold an inherent dynamic of potential growth which requires going deep into sentience to find possible solutions.

Another main finding points toward the connection between pre-birth stories and childhood dreams. When analyzing the drawings, I discovered that every participant was able to compare the sets of drawings. Even though immediate connections were not obvious because each of the drawings were individually named, participants noticed that energies in the drawings mirrored each other. In addition, connections between the pre-birth story and the childhood dream appeared in many cases through repeated words, verbal descriptions, and similar themes. Could it be just an interpretation? It seems unlikely that so many connections between the pre-birth story and the childhood dream would exist without some indication of validity.

Finally, the pre-birth story enabled participants to make various perceptual changes related to the life myth via the childhood dream. Exploring the pre-birth story deepened the childhood dream by helping participants to recognize aspects of the childhood dream in different ways. Entering the pre-birth story as a dream instigated a change for some participants; for example, difficult relationships seemed to vanish when seen as figures as opposed to personal/family relationships. Once unfolded, in several

cases the pre-birth story helped to dissolve a problematic part of the childhood dream by bringing insight to a new part of the childhood dream or changing a special meaning of a word.

The findings indicate that the pre-birth story provides a useful tool to show life myth patterns, helps to build more knowledge of the life myth, and is especially powerful when combined with the childhood dream.

Limitations

In order to enhance the validity of this study's findings, three areas of limitation need to be discussed. For several reasons, it is actually not strange or unusual that participants found connections between the pre-birth story and childhood dream. In fact, all participants agreed to be involved in the study knowing the research was about pattern connections between the pre-birth story and childhood dream. This underlying pre-knowledge may have biased participants' perceptions. Some might even have chosen to participate because they could already see connections. On the other hand, connections between the pre-birth story and childhood dream were observed in multiple ways throughout the data, both in verbal descriptions and visual aspects of the exercise. These findings indicate that pattern connections do indeed exist.

Another limitation of this study relates to the framework itself. I approached the research using Process Work concepts to explore the life myth and to describe the therapeutic value of the pre-birth story. I even assumed in the exercise that participants would be able to find polarities or themes in the pre-birth story. When studying any phenomenon, this is exactly the problem within qualitative research: it is impossible to grasp something in its entirety when approached from a particular viewpoint. Given this

inherent bias, I have included an audit trail for transparency, such that others can follow each step of the research process (see Methodology).

Lastly, the study was limited by the small number of participants, as well as the criteria that all participants needed to have experience working with life myth. While it is a problem to use such a small and narrow sample, it is the only way to begin exploring new territory. Because of the small sample size, this research indicates possible leads which require further research (possibly through quantitative research).

Contributions

This research contributes a new concept to the exploration of life myth: the pre-birth story. Other psychological approaches also deal with narrative strategies in psychotherapy. My point is that the pre-birth story – strange coincidences or seemingly insignificant incidences rarely talked about and yet still remembered – make up the construction ground for interesting tales to explore as myths. Pre-birth stories have the ability to actually *be and act* like life myths.

The research seems to show that the pre-birth story offers a “forth leg” to the life myth, in addition to childhood dreams, chronic body symptoms and chronic relationships. It provides another layer of psychology for working with life myth, showing how narratives become parts of identity. By opening another doorway to life myth, the pre-birth story contributes a tool for working with life purpose and direction in life. It helps people connect with who they are. My hope is that the pre-birth story will serve as a tool for therapists to help clients learn more about themselves.

Future Research

The concept of pre-birth stories and their use as life myth is far from being thoroughly researched by this thesis. Much is left to be explored and unravelled in order to gain more knowledge about the pre-birth story's ability to reflect the life myth. This study is just the first cornerstone for exploring the pre-birth story concept and ideas, unveiling them to the world for further investigation.

Pre-birth stories are interesting when working with who we are. Especially since they seem to contain flickering ideas or not immediately understandable episodes from our life stories, pre-birth stories provide a rich path of exploration which can lead to the core of who we are. They seem to be part of the Dreaming, having the inherent ability to show how we can live a more creative and fun life.

There are many possibilities for future research into the concept of the pre-birth story – many ideas and holes to be explored. For example, stemming from Sopakar's (1998) study of the birth story, perhaps the pre-birth story applies to situations of adoption as well, reflecting tales from the time period when parents await the arrival of their adopted child? Another potential direction for further research relates to theoretical questions, such as exploring the pre-birth story in terms of quantum physics, or using synchronicities to try to perceive pre-birth story patterns. Or how might pre-birth stories be reflected in neuroscience? Perhaps the pre-birth story can be seen as flirts of a deeper organizing force of our consciousness?

My ultimate hope is that therapists, clients, and people interested in personal growth in general become aware of the possibility for exploring life myth through pre-birth stories. As flickering vaguely remembered small moments from way back, pre-birth

stories are a powerful tool for gaining deeper knowledge about who we are. Opening a doorway to deep life-long patterns, pre-birth stories not only reveal creative ways to know more about ourselves but also bring solutions to problematic aspects of everyday life and personal development.

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Appendix A: Participant Form

Participant Information Sheet

Research Title: Stepping In, Stepping Out.

Researcher: Lone Norgaard.

Supervisor: Caroline Spark.

Institution: Process Work Institute, Portland.

About this research project:

The research project is about searching for possible patterns between stories you have been told during your childhood, which somehow connects to you around the time you were conceived and/or lying in your mother womb.

If you agree to take part in this research you will be asked to use maximum two hours in a row together with a facilitator. The first part of the time will be used to work with an exercise, and the last part in a small interview around how it was for you to participate and what you think about what showed up. The session and interview will be videoed in order for me to look at it afterwards, and also together with the supervisor.

You will be given possibility to get at copy of what the facilitator wrote down during the exercise for your own use.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the research at any stage, please contact me by phone +45 7575 3545, email: lone.ng@get2net.dk or in person. If you have any inquiries about the conduct of this research, please contact supervisor Caroline Spark, email: carolinesparks@earthlink.net or The Ethics Committee, telephone number: 503-223-8188.

All of the information collected in the course of this study, including video, transcripts of session and interview notes, will be treated with the utmost confidentiality so that video and transcripts and notes just will be seen of me and the supervisor before being destroyed. In written reports of the research, anonymity will be protected by changing names and omitting other identifying information as much as possible.

If the research is published at a later date, the same care will be taken to respect confidentiality and preserve anonymity.

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary, and you are free to not answer questions, end your participation, or withdraw from the research at any time. If you do, this will not affect how you are treated in any way. In any event, your interest and involvement is respected and very much appreciated. Thank you!

Lone Norgaard.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Consent form

Research Title: Stepping In, Stepping Out.

This research project is being conducted as part of final project, supervised by Caroline Spark at Process work Institute in Portland, OR.

The research project is about searching for possible patterns between stories you have been told during your childhood, which somehow connects to you around the time you were conceived and/or lying in your mother's womb.

Participation in this research involves using maximum three hours, and falls in two parts: First part at home you have to answer some demographic questions and write up your pre-birth story. Second part is together with a facilitator where a part of the time will be used to work with an exercise, and the last part in a small interview around how it was for you to participate and what you think about what showed up. The exercise and interview will be videoed in order for me to look at it afterwards, and also together with the supervisor.

You will be given possibility to get at copy of what the facilitator wrote down during the exercise for your own use.

All of the information collected in the course of this study, including video, transcripts of session and interview notes, will be treated with the utmost confidentiality so that video, transcripts and notes just will be seen of me and the supervisor before being destroyed. In written reports of the research, anonymity will be protected by changing names and omitting other identifying information as much as possible.

If the research is published at a later date, the same care will be taken to respect confidentiality and preserve anonymity.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to not answer questions, end your participation, or withdraw from the research at any time. Your refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect how you are treated in any way.

If you would like to discuss this research further, please contact Lone Norgaard, telephone +45 7575 3545, or email: lone.ng@get2net.dk, or supervisor Caroline Spark, telephone 503-281-8323. If you have any inquiries regarding the conduct of this research please contact The Ethics Committee, telephone number: 503-223-8188.

Research Title: Stepping In, Stepping Out

I ,, consent to participate in the research conducted by Lone Norgaard, as it has been described to me in the information sheet.

I understand that the data collected will be used for research purposes as outlined in the information sheet, and I consent for the data to be used in that manner.

I understand that the exercise used in this study is not to be general use before the completion of this study.

Signed Date

Appendix C: Exercise: Pre-Birth Story & Childhood Dream

Exercise/Stepping In, Stepping Out!

Name of researcher: Lone Norgaard.

Facilitator: Katje Wagner.

- **First part of exercise:**
- Think about a re-current or chronic problem you have. It could be a body symptom problem, relationship problem or whatever comes into your mind, big or small.
- Now lay that aside, and try to recall a story that you have been told during your upbringing about the time where you were in your mother's womb. It could be about something connected to you directly, or something about what went on in your family at that time -----> tell the story quickly to facilitator -----> (the facilitator should note the atmosphere during the telling of the story, specific words if used a lot, unexpected or strange things mentioned, movements made when telling, etc.)
- Tell the story again slowly and with details, and this time find two central themes/polarities that pull in your attention in the story -----> (the facilitator helps if needed.)
- Make a quick drawing of the themes/polarities -----> look for the movement in the drawings -----> move like the movement suggested in the drawing -----> unfold with help from facilitator and move until you get to know some new energy ----> what figure is that? -----> embody and play that figure -----> how does that figure relate to the world?
- Go back to your starting problem and look at it through the eyes of the new found energy/state of mind-----> imagine that this is you and always was you ----> how can you celebrate this part of you more in your life -----> give yourself advice about the problem you mentioned at the beginning.
- **Second part of exercise:**
- Tell your childhood dream -----> describe two central themes/polarities that you experience in the childhood dream -----> make a quick drawing of these two parts/polarities in the childhood dream -----> compare the drawing with the drawing you made in the first part of the exercise -----> are there pattern connections?

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Appendix D: Demographic Information Questions

Stepping In, Stepping Out!

Research in Process work/final project.

Researcher: Lone Norgaard.

Demographic data:

Name:

Gender:

Age:

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Family composition

Age/s of sibling/s when you were born

Who lived in the home while your mother was pregnant with you?

Your mother's age and place of birth?

Where did she grow up?

Your father's age and place of birth:

Where did he grow up?

Your approximate age when you were first told your pre-birth story:

Your approximate age when you had your childhood dream or first memory:

Is there anything interesting or unusual that you want to say about your birth family:

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you!

