

The Bogeyman Cometh: A Strategic Approach for Difficult  
Adolescents<sup>1</sup>

JOHN J. O'CONNOR, PH.D.  
AARON NOAH HOORWITZ, PH.D.

*Unpredictable, alarming events can sometimes revise one's view of reality. The revised perception may in turn result in altered forms of behavior and interaction with others. Deliberate efforts to facilitate this change in perception is sometimes attempted by invoking mythical forces such as the Bogeyman, Death, Satan, a shaman, or a sorcerer. Anthropological observations of shamanic magic suggest a number of components that appear to be responsible for these reality-altering experiences. These can be employed to create such experiences in the treatment of difficult adolescents for whom usual solutions have been ineffective. The experience results in systemic changes in the relationships that the adolescent has with others that render the adolescent accessible to more usual forms of treatment and more functional interactions with adults. The crafting of this kind of experience is illustrated in a case example. Parallels with other therapeutic practices as well as ethical considerations are discussed.*

"The bogeyman will get you."

Although this can be an innocent tease by one child to another, some parents use it with the intent to threaten a mysterious, immense punishment. It invites the child to look beyond the habitual sequences of interaction in a conflict between parent and child. If the threat is believed, the child's view of reality is revised. The revised view of reality then dictates the child's behavior and subsequent interactions with others. For want of a better term, we will refer to this type of sudden and profound change in the perception of the world as a "bogeyman experience."

This kind of experience can occur not only in children but in adolescents and adults as well. It can also be created with conscious deliberation, as in religious and shamanic practices of some cultures. In this article, we will identify the ingredients necessary to produce a bogeyman experience. We will also illustrate the manner in which these can be applied to the purpose of altering the reality and the interactional patterns of difficult adolescents for whom usual solutions are ineffective.

### **Bogeyman Figures in Story, Myth, and Natural Settings**

The word "bogeyman" will be used here as a general term to refer to any of the many threatening or mystifying figures in our cultural heritage that have the potential for altering our perception of reality. In Charles Dickens' well-known *Christmas Carol*, the image of his own death helped Scrooge to change his view of the world and of himself.

<sup>1</sup> This is an early draft of a paper that was later published as an article in *The Family Process*, 23(2):237-249, 1984. (Copyright 1999 Family Process)

## The Bogeyman Cometh: A Strategic Approach for Difficult Adolescents

1 JOHN J. O'CONNOR, PH.D. AARON NOAH HOORWITZ, PH.D.

*Unpredictable, alarming events can sometimes revise one's view of reality. The revised perception may in turn result in altered forms of behavior and interaction with others. Deliberate efforts to facilitate this change in perception is sometimes attempted by invoking mythical forces such as the Bogeyman, Death, Satan, a shaman, or a sorcerer. Anthropological observations of shamanic magic suggest a number of components that appear to be responsible for these reality-altering experiences. These can be employed to create such experiences in the treatment of difficult adolescents for whom usual solutions have been ineffective. The experience results in systemic changes in the relationships that the adolescent has with others that render the adolescent accessible to more usual forms of treatment and more functional interactions with adults. The crafting of this kind of experience is illustrated in a case example. Parallels with other therapeutic practices as well as ethical considerations are discussed.*

"The bogeyman will get you."

Although this can be an innocent tease by one child to another, some parents use it with the intent to threaten a mysterious, immense punishment. It invites the child to look beyond the habitual sequences of interaction in a conflict between parent and child. If the threat is believed, the child's view of reality is revised. The revised view of reality then dictates the child's behavior and subsequent interactions with others. For want of a better term, we will refer to this type of sudden and profound change in the perception of the world as a "bogeyman experience."

This kind of experience can occur not only in children but in adolescents and adults as well. It can also be created with conscious deliberation, as in religious and shamanic practices of some cultures. In this article, we will identify the ingredients necessary to produce a bogeyman experience. We will also illustrate the manner in which these can be applied to the purpose of altering the reality and the interactional patterns of difficult adolescents for whom usual solutions are ineffective.

### **Bogeyman Figures in Story, Myth, and Natural Settings**

The word "bogeyman" will be used here as a general term to refer to any of the many threatening or mystifying figures in our cultural heritage that have the potential for altering our perception of reality. In Charles Dickens' well-known Christmas Carol, the image of his own death helped Scrooge to change his view of the world and of himself.

1 This is an early draft of a paper that was later published as an article in *The Family Process*, 23(2):237-249, 1984. (Copyright 1999 Family Process)

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. *Family Process*, 23:237-249, 1984



With this altered view, he behaved like a different man, generous and empathic, rather than miserly and self-centered.

The figure of Death, in hooded robe and axe in hand, stalking the earth to claim his victims, has been a chilling bogeyman character in folktales, literature, and even in movies.

The figure of Satan has also figured prominently in this kind of role.

In addition, real persons have been mythologized into bogeyman figures. For example, in the late 1800s, parents in Texas threatened their disobedient youngsters with a visit from the outlaw John Wesley Hardin.

Our folklore, mythology, and literature abound with similar figures. We do not mean to imply that the threat of a powerful bogeyman is the only means by which an abrupt and profound shift in the perception of reality occurs. There are numerous life events and changes that can bring about this kind of shift, such as divorce, death of a parent, wartime experience, and so on. For example, the child who has lost a parent experiences the loss of the illusion that parental protectiveness is permanent. As a result, the child's behavior and interactions with others may also be altered.

These profound shifts seem to happen when one's beliefs about reality have been dependent on those events that have changed. The same kind of shift can occur when one comes to believe in the "reality" of Death, God, a shaman's power, or the bogeyman. Although some of these concepts are fictitious, their power to influence is derived from the belief system of the individual, the social consensus of family and community members, and the behavioral rituals that result from and further modify those beliefs (10).

Adults often make deliberate attempts to create bogeyman experiences for children in natural settings. Their application of the concept is, for the most part, successful enough to prevent the development of extremely difficult behavior. For example, a mother might invoke a bogeyman figure with the phrase, "Wait until your father gets home." A teacher might threaten to send a child to the principal's office or a probation officer might threaten to bring a child to court to face the judge. For some children, the threat has the intended effect.

Yet, there are a number of reasons why the threat of a bogeyman experience is recognized as a bluff. Such usually are poorly planned and crafted because adults simply have an incomplete understanding of the ingredients necessary to effect such an experience. Also, some acting-out adolescents who do not share the social beliefs about the power of available bogeyman figures are so provocative that they consistently engage all adults in intensely symmetrical relationships.

Attempts by adults in these relationships to alter the adolescent's behavior often result only in first-order change (11). For example, a father may respond to his grounded

With this altered view, he behaved like a different man, generous and empathic, rather than miserly and self-centered.

The figure of Death, in hooded robe and axe in hand, stalking the earth to claim his victims, has been a chilling bogeyman character in folktales, literature, and even in movies.

The figure of Satan has also figured prominently in this kind of role.

In addition, real persons have been mythologized into bogeyman figures. For example, in the late 1800s, parents in Texas threatened their disobedient youngsters with a visit from the outlaw John Wesley Hardin.

Our folklore, mythology, and literature abound with similar figures. We do not mean to imply that the threat of a powerful bogeyman is the only means by which an abrupt and profound shift in the perception of reality occurs. There are numerous life events and changes that can bring about this kind of shift, such as divorce, death of a parent, war-time experience, and so on. For example, the child who has lost a parent experiences the loss of the illusion that parental protectiveness is permanent. As a result, the child's behavior and interactions with others may also be altered.

These profound shifts seem to happen when one's beliefs about reality have been dependent on those events that have changed. The same kind of shift can occur when one comes to believe in the "reality" of Death, God, a shaman's power, or the bogeyman. Although some of these concepts are fictitious, their power to influence is derived from the belief system of the individual, the social consensus of family and community members, and the behavioral rituals that result from and further modify those beliefs (10).

Adults often make deliberate attempts to create bogeyman experiences for children in natural settings. Their application of the concept is, for the most part, successful enough to prevent the development of extremely difficult behavior. For example, a mother might invoke a bogeyman figure with the phrase, "Wait until your father gets home." A teacher might threaten to send a child to the principal's office or a probation officer might threaten to bring a child to court to face the judge. For some children, the threat has the intended effect.

Yet, there are a number of reasons why the threat of a bogeyman experience is recognized as a bluff. Such usually are poorly planned and crafted because adults simply have an incomplete understanding of the ingredients necessary to effect such an experience. Also, some acting-out adolescents who do not share the social beliefs about the power of available bogeyman figures are so provocative that they consistently engage all adults in intensely symmetrical relationships.

Attempts by adults in these relationships to alter the adolescent's behavior often result only in first-order change (11). For example, a father may respond to his grounded

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. *Family Process*, 23:237-249, 1984

daughter's sneaking out of the house by increasing the length of her grounding. More of the same solution only intensifies the problem.

Some adults tend to wait until they are hopelessly frustrated before attempting to administer a potent consequence. By this time, the opportunity has often passed for those consequences to help the adolescent to regulate behavior and to alter his or her view of self in relation to others. The adolescent may also have become inured to the potency of the consequences. These are adolescents whose experience has never been touched by an effective bogeyman or who have learned that the threat is a bluff.

We have begun to craft bogeyman experiences for some of these adolescents at an earlier, more optimal point in time in order to interrupt a sluggish progression of increasingly restrictive consequences in the juvenile justice system that would ultimately result in residential placement of the adolescent. In order to craft such experiences, it was useful to identify the effective ingredients in prototypes of bogeyman experiences.

### **An Effective Bogeyman Experience**

A prescription for a bogeyman experience with a difficult child was given by Yaqui Indian sorcerer Don Juan, described by anthropologist Carlos Castaneda (4, p. x). Castaneda had told Don Juan about a friend's dilemma with his son. The child was a "misfit" in school; lacked concentration; and engaged in tantrums, disruptive behavior, and running away from home. Nothing the father did was effective in modifying the child's behavior.

When asked what Castaneda's friend should do, Don Juan indicated that the worst thing the father could do was to continue in his attempts to force the child to agree with him. Therefore, the child should not be spanked or scared by his father. Being a masterful strategist, Don Juan could see that the father was caught in a battle he could not win by means of the solutions at his disposal. Don Juan believed that in order to change people's views and behaviors, one must "be outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure" (4, p. xi).

Don Juan suggested that the father go to "Skid Row" and hire an ugly-looking derelict. Then the boy and his father were to take a walk. In response to a prearranged cue from the father after any misbehavior by the boy, the derelict "was supposed to leap from a hiding place, pick the child up, and spank the living daylights out of him" (4, p. xii). Afterward, the father was to soothe the boy and help him to regain his confidence in any way he could. If the father followed this procedure three or four times, Don Juan assured Castaneda that the child would "feel differently towards everything. He will change his idea of the world" (4, p. xii).

After the boy was more contained, Don Juan suggested one last task. The father must take his son to a morgue and have the boy touch the corpse of a child of the same age but prevent the child from touching the corpse in a certain area. "After the boy does that, he will be renewed. The world will never be the same for him" (4, p. xii). When asked

daughter's sneaking out of the house by increasing the length of her grounding. More of the same solution only intensifies the problem.

Some adults tend to wait until they are hopelessly frustrated before attempting to administer a potent consequence. By this time, the opportunity has often passed for those consequences to help the adolescent to regulate behavior and to alter his or her view of self in relation to others. The adolescent may also have become inured to the potency of the consequences. These are adolescents whose experience has never been touched by an effective bogeyman or who have learned that the threat is a bluff.

We have begun to craft bogeyman experiences for some of these adolescents at an earlier, more optimal point in time in order to interrupt a sluggish progression of increasingly restrictive consequences in the juvenile justice system that would ultimately result in residential placement of the adolescent. In order to craft such experiences, it was useful to identify the effective ingredients in prototypes of bogeyman experiences.

### **An Effective Bogeyman Experience**

A prescription for a bogeyman experience with a difficult child was given by Yaqui Indian sorcerer Don Juan, described by anthropologist Carlos Castaneda (4, p. x). Castaneda had told Don Juan about a friend's dilemma with his son. The child was a "misfit" in school; lacked concentration; and engaged in tantrums, disruptive behavior, and running away from home. Nothing the father did was effective in modifying the child's behavior.

When asked what Castaneda's friend should do, Don Juan indicated that the worst thing the father could do was to continue in his attempts to force the child to agree with him. Therefore, the child should not be spanked or scared by his father. Being a masterful strategist, Don Juan could see that the father was caught in a battle he could not win by means of the solutions at his disposal. Don Juan believed that in order to change people's views and behaviors, one must "be outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure" (4, p. xi).

Don Juan suggested that the father go to "Skid Row" and hire an ugly-looking derelict. Then the boy and his father were to take a walk. In response to a prearranged cue from the father after any misbehavior by the boy, the derelict "was supposed to leap from a hiding place, pick the child up, and spank the living daylights out of him" (4, p. xii). Afterward, the father was to soothe the boy and help him to regain his confidence in any way he could. If the father followed this procedure three or four times, Don Juan assured Castaneda that the child would "feel differently towards everything. He will change his idea of the world" (4, p. xii).

After the boy was more contained, Don Juan suggested one last task. The father must take his son to a morgue and have the boy touch the corpse of a child of the same age but prevent the child from touching the corpse in a certain area. "After the boy does that,

he will be renewed. The world will never be the same for him" (4, p. xii). When asked  
O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. Family Process, 23:237-249, 1984

earlier whether fright might injure the boy, Don Juan responded that fright "never injures anyone. What injures the spirit is having someone always on your back, beating you, telling you what to do and what not to do" (4, p. xii).

An analysis of this example and of shamanic practices in other cultures (1, 2, 3, 6, 10) suggests five characteristics or attributes displayed by bogeyman figures that effect changes at the ideational level and thereby alter one's view of reality. In addition, the experience affects the system of interactions in such a way that it interrupts dysfunctional, regenerative loops and allows more functional, complementary interactions among the central players. This experience can be characterized by three shifts in the system of relationships. In the following sections we will explore both the shamanic and the systemic characteristics that are inherent to an effective bogeyman experience. The manner in which these characteristics can be employed to craft a bogeyman experience are discussed and are later illustrated in the case example.

### **Shamanic Characteristics**

First, the bogeyman figure displays an almost supernatural form of omniscience. Batson reported, in his study of the Iatmul Indians of New Guinea (1), that the sorcerer can "see" or "smell" the dark cloud over the house of a man who has committed some outrage. Also, Don Juan's derelict knows just when to strike. These are demonstrations of omniscience, indicating the bogeyman figure knows more than is usually possible for others to know.

A shamanic experience sometimes begins with a historical account that relives, in "luxuriant detail," all of the events preceding an illness (6). This produces the belief that the shaman understands perfectly the context of the problem, thus reinforcing the previously existing social consensus that the shaman knows all and has a "sight" derived from supernatural forces (6). In order effectively to display omniscience to an adolescent, the bogeyman can surreptitiously obtain information that can then be used to demonstrate to the adolescent, in "luxuriant detail," how much more the bogeyman knows than the adolescent believed was possible for someone else to know.

Second, the bogeyman is hierarchically superior to the system that needs help. He is able to press on the system where there is conflict but is invulnerable or unresponsive to the players' attempts to engage him in the kind of symmetrical escalation of conflict at which they may be expert players. As Don Juan indicated, one must be "outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure" (4, p. xi). The bogeyman strategically and temporarily imposes himself on the players' system but only to interrupt the symmetrical interactional patterns.

In the case of an acting-out adolescent who is an expert at initiating first-order types of interaction (11), the bogeyman must remain unresponsive to usual provocations. He must appear to be unconflicted about the adolescent's possible punishments, viewing the adolescent as having chosen his or her own fate. A climate of metachange is created once

earlier whether fright might injure the boy, Don Juan responded that fright "never injures anyone. What injures the spirit is having someone always on your back, beating you, telling you what to do and what not to do" (4, p. xii).

An analysis of this example and of shamanic practices in other cultures (1, 2, 3, 6, 10) suggests five characteristics or attributes displayed by bogeyman figures that effect changes at the ideational level and thereby alter one's view of reality. In addition, the experience affects the system of interactions in such a way that it interrupts dysfunctional, regenerative loops and allows more functional, complementary interactions among the central players. This experience can be characterized by three shifts in the system of relationships. In the following sections we will explore both the shamanic and the systemic characteristics that are inherent to an effective bogeyman experience. The manner in which these characteristics can be employed to craft a bogeyman experience are discussed and are later illustrated in the case example.

### **Shamanic Characteristics**

First, the bogeyman figure displays an almost supernatural form of omniscience. Bateson reported, in his study of the Iatmul Indians of New Guinea (1), that the sorcerer can "see" or "smell" the dark cloud over the house of a man who has committed some outrage. Also, Don Juan's derelict knows just when to strike. These are demonstrations of omniscience, indicating the bogeyman figure knows more than is usually possible for others to know.

A shamanic experience sometimes begins with a historical account that relives, in "luxuriant detail," all of the events preceding an illness (6). This produces the belief that the shaman understands perfectly the context of the problem, thus reinforcing the previously existing social consensus that the shaman knows all and has a "sight" derived from supernatural forces (6). In order effectively to display omniscience to an adolescent, the bogeyman can surreptitiously obtain information that can then be used to demonstrate to the adolescent, in "luxuriant detail," how much more the bogeyman knows than the adolescent believed was possible for someone else to know.

Second, the bogeyman is hierarchically superior to the system that needs help. He is able to press on the system where there is conflict but is invulnerable or unresponsive to the players' attempts to engage him in the kind of symmetrical escalation of conflict at which they may be expert players. As Don Juan indicated, one must be "outside the circle that presses them. That way one can always direct the pressure" (4, p. xi). The bogeyman strategically and temporarily imposes himself on the players' system but only to interrupt the symmetrical interactional patterns.

In the case of an acting-out adolescent who is an expert at initiating first-order types of interaction (11), the bogeyman must remain unresponsive to usual provocations. He

must appear to be unconflicted about the adolescent's possible punishments, viewing the adolescent as having chosen his or her own fate. A climate of metachange is created once

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. *Family Process*, 23:237-249, 1984

the adolescent realizes that the bogeyman can touch the adolescent but the adolescent cannot touch the bogeyman.

Third, the bogeyman's behavior is incomprehensible and unpredictable and violates expectations in ways that induce significant degrees of fright, surprise, confusion, awe, or wonder. In Don Juan's prescription, this was to be accomplished in a number of ways. The sudden appearance of the derelict, the ugliness of the derelict, the father soothing the child rather than scolding him, the unusual trip to the morgue, and the mystifying injunction for the child to touch a corpse only in a special manner, are all events that would be experienced by the boy as incomprehensible.

A puzzling or unpredictable event that violates expectation and cannot be understood serves to exhaust conscious strategies of thinking and nullify an ordinary orientation to reality. Hypnotists refer to this use of puzzling events as depotentialization of conscious sets (5). Once these usual conscious strategies of thought are relinquished, a person is left feeling psychologically paralyzed, uncertain how to respond next, and awaiting suggestions that can restructure an understanding of the experience. This receptivity to suggestion is necessary in shamanic, hypnotic, and other trance kind of experiences. It is characterized by the use of a "trance logic" (8), or reliance on more primitive logical operations, which allows the highly dubious logic of a shamanic or hypnotic ritual to go unchallenged. Probably for these reasons, it also sometimes facilitates the subjective impression of an altered state of consciousness.

To produce these effects with adolescents, the bogeyman utilizes unusual and incomprehensible procedures and rituals. The bogeyman's demeanor, personal presentation, and style of interaction can all contain puzzling properties. The appearances of the bogeyman can also be made at unpredictable times. Since these social behaviors are unlike any others the adolescent has known, the adolescent's usual provocations and style of interaction are quickly rendered impotent and irrelevant.

A fourth attribute of importance is the bogeyman's power to effect change. For example, Don Juan's derelict was supposed to "spank the living daylights" out of the child. Sorcerers and shamans are commonly empowered to heal, to place curses, and to facilitate altered states of consciousness. Even when bogeymen do not instantly effect a cure, a punishment, or other change, they at least have the power to deliver a potent message concerning such a change. For example, in *Christmas Carol*, Scrooge received a message that enabled him to experience vicariously the future consequences of his behavior.

In the case of an acting-out adolescent, the bogeyman must at least be empowered to provide a mystifying message about the future or to threaten the adolescent with punishment. Although the potency of the anticipated consequences may be inflated by the bogeyman to illusory proportions, the bogeyman must have at least a minimal degree of power to follow through on administering consequences or to impinge personally on the adolescent. The adolescent must believe this in order that the bogeyman's predictions not be viewed as empty threats. The predictions must be linked to some consequence in the

the adolescent realizes that the bogeyman can touch the adolescent but the adolescent cannot touch the bogeyman.

Third, the bogeyman's behavior is incomprehensible and unpredictable and violates expectations in ways that induce significant degrees of fright, surprise, confusion, awe, or wonder. In Don Juan's prescription, this was to be accomplished in a number of ways. The sudden appearance of the derelict, the ugliness of the derelict, the father soothing the child rather than scolding him, the unusual trip to the morgue, and the mystifying injunction for the child to touch a corpse only in a special manner, are all events that would be experienced by the boy as incomprehensible.

A puzzling or unpredictable event that violates expectation and cannot be understood serves to exhaust conscious strategies of thinking and nullify an ordinary orientation to reality. Hypnotists refer to this use of puzzling events as depotentiation of conscious sets (5). Once these usual conscious strategies of thought are relinquished, a person is left feeling psychologically paralyzed, uncertain how to respond next, and awaiting suggestions that can restructure an understanding of the experience. This receptivity to suggestion is necessary in shamanic, hypnotic, and other trance kind of experiences. It is characterized by the use of a "trance logic" (8), or reliance on more primitive logical operations, which allows the highly dubious logic of a shamanic or hypnotic ritual to go unchallenged. Probably for these reasons, it also sometimes facilitates the subjective impression of an altered state of consciousness.

To produce these effects with adolescents, the bogeyman utilizes unusual and incomprehensible procedures and rituals. The bogeyman's demeanor, personal presentation, and style of interaction can all contain puzzling properties. The appearances of the bogeyman can also be made at unpredictable times. Since these social behaviors are unlike any others the adolescent has known, the adolescent's usual provocations and style of interaction are quickly rendered impotent and irrelevant.

A fourth attribute of importance is the bogeyman's power to effect change. For example, Don Juan's derelict was supposed to "spank the living daylights" out of the child. Sorcerers and shamans are commonly empowered to heal, to place curses, and to facilitate altered states of consciousness. Even when bogeymen do not instantly effect a cure, a punishment, or other change, they at least have the power to deliver a potent message concerning such a change. For example, in Christmas Carol, Scrooge received a message that enabled him to experience vicariously the future consequences of his behavior.

In the case of an acting-out adolescent, the bogeyman must at least be empowered to provide a mystifying message about the future or to threaten the adolescent with punishment. Although the potency of the anticipated consequences may be inflated by

the bogeyman to illusory proportions, the bogeyman must have at least a minimal degree of power to follow through on administering consequences or to impinge personally on the adolescent. The adolescent must believe this in order that the bogeyman's predictions not be viewed as empty threats. The predictions must be linked to some consequence in the

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. *Family Process*, 23:237-249, 1984

adolescent's reality that cannot be questioned. For example, Scrooge's powerful image of death is linked to his certain knowledge of the inevitability of death, something that he may have known all along but that was never as vivid, imminent, or real to him.

The more empowered a bogeyman is by social consensus, the more certain the adolescent will be that predicted consequences will occur. Therefore, in those cases in which the bogeyman's power is derived primarily from the social myth of the role, the bogeyman can afford to be flexible and can respond gently, which can further confuse and dislodge the adolescent's conscious grasp on reality. In modern cultures, in which bogeyman figures are usually less empowered by the social context, it is more necessary deliberately to create the illusion of power. The power should be one of mythic proportions in the mind of the adolescent. The notion must impact on the ideational system of the adolescent that there is no escape from this nemesis. The adolescent must believe that his or her power as a misbehaving person has met more than its match and that further symmetrical escalation is fruitless.

The illusion of this power can be created not only by bluffs of strength but also by a presentation that is ritualistic, mystifying, confusing, and charismatic. As long as the adolescent believes that the bogeyman has power to effect certain changes, aspects of the bogeyman's behavior are viewed as potent rituals that will cause those changes. Magic ritual, such as incantations and ritualistic trance inductions, can bring about change because of the individual's belief that it can do so, not because of the ritual itself (10).

A fifth and final attribute, one upon which the other attributes depend, is the bogeyman's capability temporarily to distort perceptions of, and beliefs about, reality. The power, the omniscience, the hierarchical superiority of the bogeyman, and the potency of ritual, all depend to a large extent on the bogeyman's ability to foster unusual beliefs and to create illusions.

The art of creating illusion is central to the practice of most magicians and shamans. In Don Juan's intervention, the father was to hire a derelict to play a particular role that would create an illusion for the boy. Even the devastating stratagems of Geronimo, who was a war shaman, usually depended on the use of illusion, so much so that this dependence dictated a preference for staging attacks at twilight when the light was optimal for visual distortion (3).

Illusion can be created in a multitude of ways that depend upon the skills available to the bogeyman and the resources available in a given situation. A bogeyman experience crafted for an adolescent requires seeding the adolescent's social environment with certain forms of information that will foster or manipulate certain beliefs. It also requires the recruitment of confederates whose roles and behavior have to be choreographed with care.

### **Systemic Change**

adolescent's reality that cannot be questioned. For example, Scrooge's powerful image of death is linked to his certain knowledge of the inevitability of death, something that he may have known all along but that was never as vivid, imminent, or real to him.

The more empowered a bogeyman is by social consensus, the more certain the adolescent will be that predicted consequences will occur. Therefore, in those cases in which the bogeyman's power is derived primarily from the social myth of the role, the bogeyman can afford to be flexible and can respond gently, which can further confuse and dislodge the adolescent's conscious grasp on reality. In modern cultures, in which bogeyman figures are usually less empowered by the social context, it is more necessary deliberately to create the illusion of power. The power should be one of mythic proportions in the mind of the adolescent. The notion must impact on the ideational system of the adolescent that there is no escape from this nemesis. The adolescent must believe that his or her power as a misbehaving person has met more than its match and that further symmetrical escalation is fruitless.

The illusion of this power can be created not only by bluffs of strength but also by a presentation that is ritualistic, mystifying, confusing, and charismatic. As long as the adolescent believes that the bogeyman has power to effect certain changes, aspects of the bogeyman's behavior are viewed as potent rituals that will cause those changes. Magic ritual, such as incantations and ritualistic trance inductions, can bring about change because of the individual's belief that it can do so, not because of the ritual itself (10).

A fifth and final attribute, one upon which the other attributes depend, is the bogeyman's capability temporarily to distort perceptions of, and beliefs about, reality. The power, the omniscience, the hierarchical superiority of the bogeyman, and the potency of ritual, all depend to a large extent on the bogeyman's ability to foster unusual beliefs and to create illusions.

The art of creating illusion is central to the practice of most magicians and shamans. In Don Juan's intervention, the father was to hire a derelict to play a particular role that would create an illusion for the boy. Even the devastating strategems of Geronimo, who was a war shaman, usually depended on the use of illusion, so much so that this dependence dictated a preference for staging attacks at twilight when the light was optimal for visual distortion (3).

Illusion can be created in a multitude of ways that depend upon the skills available to the bogeyman and the resources available in a given situation. A bogeyman experience crafted for an adolescent requires seeding the adolescent's social environment with certain forms of information that will foster or manipulate certain beliefs. It also requires the recruitment of confederates whose roles and behavior have to be choreographed

with care.

## **Systemic Change**

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. Family Process, 23:237-249, 1984

Although systemic issues have been considered in the previous section, several of them require further explication. In general, a bogeyman experience effects systemic changes in the relationships between the adolescent and other adults. Specifically, it transforms a highly symmetrical relationship characterized by escalating conflict to a more complementary type of relationship in which the players behave more in accordance with their respective role assignments. This effect was intended in Don Juan's prescription and in some of the shamanic practices previously mentioned. The systemic change can be accounted for by three shifts in relationship that are effected by the bogeyman's impact, shifts that were identified by Bateson almost fifty years ago in his study of the Iatmul Indians of New Guinea (1).

First, a bogeyman experience signals or punctuates the fact that a cultural upper limit has been reached that will not be exceeded. This message reframes the adolescent's misdeeds as far more serious than the adolescent had believed to be the case. The bogeyman does not accuse the adolescent of misdeeds but convicts the adolescent by the accuracy of a litany of misdeeds. This conviction pushes one side of the symmetrical system beyond its usual point of equilibrium. The effect of such a punctuation is a reduction in the strain of what Bateson described as a "schismogenesis" (2), or an increasing polarization.

Second, when the bogeyman remains unresponsive and unconflicted in the face of the adolescent's provocations, the usual symmetrical escalation between the adolescent and adult is avoided. Since solutions for first-order change are not attempted by the bogeyman and since the adolescent's provocations prove ineffective, the adolescent is now poised for second-order change.

Third, the experience interrupts the negative interactional loops involving the adolescent and parent by uniting them in opposition, confusion, or deference to the bogeyman. In this way, the union between parent and child reduces the symmetrical strain between them. Although the resulting relationship between bogeyman and family may be schismogenic, the bogeyman retains control over the degree of polarization and can regulate it if it becomes too severe. A contemporary therapeutic application of this principle is the use of a split perspective when conducting therapy with a consultant team situated behind a one-way mirror; therapist and team present contradictory messages to the client so that the client is forced into the position of forming an alliance with one of the opposing positions (9).

### **Crafting of a Bogeyman Experience**

It is possible to utilize these characteristics in the planful crafting of bogeyman experiences for difficult adolescents. An intervention of this kind is not intended as a final solution. It results in temporary idiosyncratic and systemic changes that render the adolescent accessible and responsive to usual solutions and positive exchanges.

The adolescents we identified as appropriate for the use of this intervention are those for whom family therapy is often ineffective for one or more of several reasons. One reason

Although systemic issues have been considered in the previous section, several of them require further explication. In general, a bogeyman experience effects systemic changes in the relationships between the adolescent and other adults. Specifically, it transforms a highly symmetrical relationship characterized by escalating conflict to a more complementary type of relationship in which the players behave more in accordance with their respective role assignments. This effect was intended in Don Juan's prescription and in some of the shamanic practices previously mentioned. The systemic change can be accounted for by three shifts in relationship that are effected by the bogeyman's impact, shifts that were identified by Bateson almost fifty years ago in his study of the Iatmul Indians of New Guinea (1).

First, a bogeyman experience signals or punctuates the fact that a cultural upper limit has been reached that will not be exceeded. This message reframes the adolescent's misdeeds as far more serious than the adolescent had believed to be the case. The bogeyman does not accuse the adolescent of misdeeds but convicts the adolescent by the accuracy of a litany of misdeeds. This conviction pushes one side of the symmetrical system beyond its usual point of equilibrium. The effect of such a punctuation is a reduction in the strain of what Bateson described as a "schismogenesis" (2), or an increasing polarization.

Second, when the bogeyman remains unresponsive and unconflicted in the face of the adolescent's provocations, the usual symmetrical escalation between the adolescent and adult is avoided. Since solutions for first-order change are not attempted by the bogeyman and since the adolescent's provocations prove ineffective, the adolescent is now poised for second-order change.

Third, the experience interrupts the negative interactional loops involving the adolescent and parent by uniting them in opposition, confusion, or deference to the bogeyman. In this way, the union between parent and child reduces the symmetrical strain between them. Although the resulting relationship between bogeyman and family may be schismogenic, the bogeyman retains control over the degree of polarization and can regulate it if it becomes too severe. A contemporary therapeutic application of this principle is the use of a split perspective when conducting therapy with a consultant team situated behind a one-way mirror; therapist and team present contradictory messages to the client so that the client is forced into the position of forming an alliance with one of the opposing positions (9).

### **Crafting of a Bogeyman Experience**

It is possible to utilize these characteristics in the playful crafting of bogeyman experiences for difficult adolescents. An intervention of this kind is not intended as a final solution. It results in temporary ideational and systemic changes that render the

adolescent accessible and responsive to usual solutions and positive exchanges.

The adolescents we identified as appropriate for the use of this intervention are those for whom family therapy is often ineffective for one or more of several reasons. One reason

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. Family Process, 23:237-249, 1984

is that attempts by parents to take a firm, unified stance with the adolescent repeatedly dissolve, often in association with serious marital disagreements and other crises.

A second reason is that the severity and frequency of some adolescents' stealing, running away, assaults, drug use, and truancy sometimes escalates so quickly that episodes of misbehavior vastly outnumber available consequences. In this context, efforts to organize the family system and to marshal its forces are fruitless. Third, the identified adolescents are interpersonally provocative, belligerent, and able quickly to stimulate symmetrical and cyclical exchanges with parents and other helpers that lead the players to believe that change is impossible. In general, these are adolescents whose misbehavior cannot be altered by solutions usually employed by family, school, therapist, residential facility, or other usual agents of change.

In the following section, a case example is presented of an adolescent boy living in a therapeutic group home who continued to present the same problems displayed in the family and who engendered the same types of relationships with staff as with family members. Since the relationships between the adolescent and the caretaking adults were the same as those at home, a bogeyman experience would be equally applicable in either context. The case illustrates the way in which a bogeyman experience was crafted, utilizing the characteristics discussed above.

### **Case Illustration**

At 14 years of age, David L. had been involved in intense conflict with both of his parents for several years. David's mother often gave in to David's demands, and it was with Mrs. L. that the conflict was most intense. Mr. L. could sometimes enforce compliant behavior, but the periods of compliance were shortlived because of interference from Mrs. L. Although family therapy had helped Mr. and Mrs. L. to take a more unified and firm stance with David, this stance would repeatedly dissolve when there was conflict between the parents.

For the last year, David's problems had escalated despite family therapy. His academic performance had declined, and his conduct in school had become increasingly disruptive. He was belligerent, assaultive, and destructive of property both at home and at school. He defied any authority and frequently ran away from home. As a result, he was placed in a group home for troubled adolescents. Family therapy was continued, with the goal of returning David to his home as soon as the parents could more effectively manage his behavior.

At the group home, David continued to engage in threatening behavior, regularly disobeyed the group home staff, assaulted staff and other youths, and ran away repeatedly. The staff handled these behaviors as they usually did with other clients, by attempting to have him found when he ran away, withdrawing privileges, and so on. Yet, despite the numerous consequences that he consistently suffered for his misbehaviors, his misbehaviors greatly outnumbered the consequences that were available to administer.

is that attempts by parents to take a firm, unified stance with the adolescent repeatedly dissolve, often in association with serious marital disagreements and other crises.

A second reason is that the severity and frequency of some adolescents' stealing, running away, assaults, drug use, and truancy sometimes escalates so quickly that episodes of misbehavior vastly outnumber available consequences. In this context, efforts to organize the family system and to marshal its forces are fruitless. Third, the identified adolescents are interpersonally provocative, belligerent, and able quickly to stimulate symmetrical and cyclical exchanges with parents and other helpers that lead the players to believe that change is impossible. In general, these are adolescents whose misbehavior cannot be altered by solutions usually employed by family, school, therapist, residential facility, or other usual agents of change.

In the following section, a case example is presented of an adolescent boy living in a therapeutic group home who continued to present the same problems displayed in the family and who engendered the same types of relationships with staff as with family members. Since the relationships between the adolescent and the caretaking adults were the same as those at home, a bogeyman experience would be equally applicable in either context. The case illustrates the way in which a bogeyman experience was crafted, utilizing the characteristics discussed above.

### **Case Illustration**

At 14 years of age, David L. had been involved in intense conflict with both of his parents for several years. David's mother often gave in to David's demands, and it was with Mrs. L. that the conflict was most intense. Mr. L. could sometimes enforce compliant behavior, but the periods of compliance were shortlived because of interference from Mrs. L. Although family therapy had helped Mr. and Mrs. L. to take a more unified and firm stance with David, this stance would repeatedly dissolve when there was conflict between the parents.

For the last year, David's problems had escalated despite family therapy. His academic performance had declined, and his conduct in school had become increasingly disruptive. He was belligerent, assaultive, and destructive of property both at home and at school. He defied any authority and frequently ran away from home. As a result, he was placed in a group home for troubled adolescents. Family therapy was continued, with the goal of returning David to his home as soon as the parents could more effectively manage his behavior.

At the group home, David continued to engage in threatening behavior, regularly disobeyed the group home staff, assaulted staff and other youths, and ran away repeatedly. The staff handled these behaviors as they usually did with other clients, by attempting to have him found when he ran away, withdrawing privileges, and so on. Yet,

despite the numerous consequences that he consistently suffered for his misbehaviors, his misbehaviors greatly outnumbered the consequences that were available to administer.

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. Family Process, 23:237-249, 1984

In addition, any time the staff confronted David on a minor act of disobedience or rudeness, David reacted with defiance and accusation, quickly engaging the staff in an escalating conflict. The only means to contain his behavior would have been constant physical restraint, which required more staff than could be employed in this facility. At this point, David had recapitulated in the group home the symmetrical and polarized interactional system in his own family.

Feeling frustrated and discouraged, the staff correctly perceived that David was getting away with more misbehavior than any other client and that it would be impossible to keep him in such a nonrestrictive facility if his misbehaviors remained at their current frequency and intensity. Yet all the professionals concurred that this group home, which had a strong clinical component, was the best possible placement to deal with his social and emotional problems.

At that point, the staff and the family therapist consulted with Dr. H., one of the authors, who suggested a plan that was intended to achieve a bogeyman experience. First, one of the staff members who had been assaulted was to file a juvenile delinquency petition, which would eventually bring David back to court once again. David was also told that Dr. H. would be the one to provide a recommendation to the court and was reminded that he had been the one originally to facilitate his placement at the group home. An appointment was made for David to meet with Dr. H. in the courthouse where he had an office. David's impression of this impending meeting was that he was "going to court." The only official function, however, was to warn him that his placement was in jeopardy.

Prior to the appointment, Dr. H. had a meeting with all the group home staff, in which he documented every runaway, assault, and threat, as well as every minor act of disobedience and rudeness. The staff was instructed to commiserate with David about having to go to court and to worry with him about the possibility that he might have to leave the group home and go to a "lock-up."

On the day of his appointment, a group home staff person brought David to the waiting room of Family Court, where he was kept waiting over a half hour to simulate usual waits for Family Court appearances. This wait was also intended to build anticipation, discomfort, and anxiety. The meeting with Dr. H. was held in a large and official-looking room where Dr. H. had assembled several probation and court personnel who were willing to assist and who had been recruited on the basis of their physical sizes and stern countenances. These confederates were instructed to sit and stand in particular positions in the room, to say very little, and to look solemn and official.

One of them, large and unsmiling, went to the waiting room and brusquely escorted David to a holding room, where he kept him for about ten minutes, on the pretext that he needed close supervision. There he overheard this man say to the group home staff person that David "wasn't going to get away with it anymore." At this point he began biting his fingernails. After a phone call by Dr. H. to the holding room, David was escorted to the conference. As he walked into the room, Dr. H. shuffled his papers, not looking up, while someone firmly told David to sit down across from Dr. H. at a long

In addition, any time the staff confronted David on a minor act of disobedience or rudeness, David reacted with defiance and accusation, quickly engaging the staff in an escalating conflict. The only means to contain his behavior would have been constant physical restraint, which required more staff than could be employed in this facility. At this point, David had recapitulated in the group home the symmetrical and polarized interactional system in his own family.

Feeling frustrated and discouraged, the staff correctly perceived that David was getting away with more misbehavior than any other client and that it would be impossible to keep him in such a nonrestrictive facility if his misbehaviors remained at their current frequency and intensity. Yet all the professionals concurred that this group home, which had a strong clinical component, was the best possible placement to deal with his social and emotional problems.

At that point, the staff and the family therapist consulted with Dr. H., one of the authors, who suggested a plan that was intended to achieve a bogeyman experience. First, one of the staff members who had been assaulted was to file a juvenile delinquency petition, which would eventually bring David back to court once again. David was also told that Dr. H. would be the one to provide a recommendation to the court and was reminded that he had been the one originally to facilitate his placement at the group home. An appointment was made for David to meet with Dr. H. in the courthouse where he had an office. David's impression of this impending meeting was that he was "going to court." The only official function, however, was to warn him that his placement was in jeopardy.

Prior to the appointment, Dr. H. had a meeting with all the group home staff, in which he documented every runaway, assault, and threat, as well as every minor act of disobedience and rudeness. The staff was instructed to commiserate with David about having to go to court and to worry with him about the possibility that he might have to leave the group home and go to a "lock-up."

On the day of his appointment, a group home staff person brought David to the waiting room of Family Court, where he was kept waiting over a half hour to simulate usual waits for Family Court appearances. This wait was also intended to build anticipation, discomfort, and anxiety. The meeting with Dr. H. was held in a large and official-looking room where Dr. H. had assembled several probation and court personnel who were willing to assist and who had been recruited on the basis of their physical sizes and stern countenances. These confederates were instructed to sit and stand in particular positions in the room, to say very little, and to look solemn and official.

One of them, large and unsmiling, went to the waiting room and brusquely escorted David to a holding room, where he kept him for about ten minutes, on the pretext that he needed close supervision. There he overheard this man say to the group home staff

person that David "wasn't going to get away with it anymore." At this point he began biting his fingernails. After a phone call by Dr. H. to the holding room, David was escorted to the conference. As he walked into the room, Dr. H. shuffled his papers, not looking up, while someone firmly told David to sit down across from Dr. H. at a long

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. Family Process, 23:237-249, 1984

table. After several quiet moments, Dr. H. slowly looked up and announced to David that he was here for very serious business.

He vaguely introduced each of the other people in the room and then went on to tell David that he understood he was getting himself into very serious trouble, that because of that trouble he would be appearing in court within the next two weeks, and that the judge would be asking Dr. H. what to do with David. He then said he was afraid he was going to have to recommend another placement, one that David would not enjoy, if his misbehavior continued.

When David attempted to engage Dr. H. in a symmetrical and conflictual interaction by minimizing and denying his misbehaviors, Dr. H. calmly and coldly interrupted him. Whenever he did so, he slowly but sternly recited descriptions of David's long list of misdeeds, even pinpointing minor acts of impoliteness. He gave dates, times, and circumstances, holding David accountable for each deed. He informed David that although he had thought he was getting away with a great deal, he was, in fact, getting away with nothing because Dr. H. was going to do something about it.

Instead of getting angry with David whenever he began to engage Dr. H. by defiance, Dr. H. was quick to laugh at him and to point out that this defiance was the very kind of thing that was going to cause Dr. H. to make a harsh recommendation to the judge. Dr. H. commented that David had better stop to think about whether he wanted to speak to Dr. H. in that way. Dr. H. quickly added that it was David's choice whether he wanted to behave in this way or not; he pointed out that he did not care, because David was the one who would suffer from the recommendation, not Dr. H. This served to quiet him effectively, marking the first time that David accepted stern criticism without displays of defiance.

Throughout the long litany of misdeeds, Dr. H. interspersed many remarks about how David did not seem able or willing to control himself, although he pointed out that some people felt there was a side to David that seemed to be trying to control himself. He said he was afraid that the side of David that wanted to be in control of himself was not very strong, and Dr. H. was afraid that David could not control himself well enough to prevent a more restrictive placement. Only if there were a marked change in his behavior could Dr. H. even consider altering his recommendation. Then Dr. H. listed the various types of misbehaviors for which David would be accountable if he continued them.

At the end of the list, Dr. H. once again doubted that David could control himself enough to change Dr. H.'s mind. David then said that he could control himself if he wanted. Dr. H. said he doubted it, but he acknowledged that it might be possible. He informed David that he would be checking on him every day to see if it were so. He also advised that if David were wise he would turn to his parents, to his therapist, and to the group home staff for help in controlling himself. Then he was curtly dismissed.

In the next two weeks, the staff was instructed to avoid confronting David on any act of disobedience. Instead, they were instructed simply to inform him that a consequence

table. After several quiet moments, Dr. H. slowly looked up and announced to David that he was here for very serious business.

He vaguely introduced each of the other people in the room and then went on to tell David that he understood he was getting himself into very serious trouble, that because of that trouble he would be appearing in court within the next two weeks, and that the judge would be asking Dr. H. what to do with David. He then said he was afraid he was going to have to recommend another placement, one that David would not enjoy, if his misbehavior continued.

When David attempted to engage Dr. H. in a symmetrical and conflictual interaction by minimizing and denying his misbehaviors, Dr. H. calmly and coldly interrupted him. Whenever he did so, he slowly but sternly recited descriptions of David's long list of misdeeds, even pinpointing minor acts of impoliteness. He gave dates, times, and circumstances, holding David accountable for each deed. He informed David that although he had thought he was getting away with a great deal, he was, in fact, getting away with nothing because Dr. H. was going to do something about it.

Instead of getting angry with David whenever he began to engage Dr. H. by defiance, Dr. H. was quick to laugh at him and to point out that this defiance was the very kind of thing that was going to cause Dr. H. to make a harsh recommendation to the judge. Dr. H. commented that David had better stop to think about whether he wanted to speak to Dr. H. in that way. Dr. H. quickly added that it was David's choice whether he wanted to behave in this way or not; he pointed out that he did not care, because David was the one who would suffer from the recommendation, not Dr. H. This served to quiet him effectively, marking the first time that David accepted stern criticism without displays of defiance.

Throughout the long litany of misdeeds, Dr. H. interspersed many remarks about how David did not seem able or willing to control himself, although he pointed out that some people felt there was a side to David that seemed to be trying to control himself. He said he was afraid that the side of David that wanted to be in control of himself was not very strong, and Dr. H. was afraid that David could not control himself well enough to prevent a more restrictive placement. Only if there were a marked change in his behavior could Dr. H. even consider altering his recommendation. Then Dr. H. listed the various types of misbehaviors for which David would be accountable if he continued them.

At the end of the list, Dr. H. once again doubted that David could control himself enough to change Dr. H.'s mind. David then said that he could control himself if he wanted. Dr. H. said he doubted it, but he acknowledged that it might be possible. He informed David that he would be checking on him every day to see if it were so. He also advised that if David were wise he would turn to his parents, to his therapist, and to the group home

staff for help in controlling himself. Then he was curtly dismissed.

In the next two weeks, the staff was instructed to avoid confronting David on any act of disobedience. Instead, they were instructed simply to inform him that a consequence

O'Connor, J. & Hoorwitz, A. Family Process, 23:237-249, 1984