

In search of the boarding school self:
A heuristic inquiry

Guy Cousins

A dissertation submitted to Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Psychotherapy

Supervisor: Professor Keith Tudor

2023

Abstract

Navigating the long-term effects of boarding school can pose challenges for psychotherapists. The complexity stems from the defensive coping mechanism, the strategic survival personality, developed in the first critical moments at boarding school. Although the topic has garnered increased attention in the psychotherapy community, novel approaches are required to navigate the defensive barriers of adults who have attended boarding school. Using heuristic research methods, this dissertation is an intimate exploration of an adult's emotional landscape. My subjective exploration seeks to uncover the various facets of the "boarding school self" by examining old essays and letters from boarding school, analysing dreams and poetry, and observing relational behaviours in adulthood. This study contributes to the ongoing conversation by offering further insight into the emotional intricacies of the adult experience of having attended boarding school and potential pathways for clinicians to explore.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Keith Tudor. His encouragement, validation, and unwavering support were invaluable throughout this journey.

I also want to extend my deep appreciation to Olli, whose holding and containing presence provided me with the stability and guidance I needed at the outset of this endeavour.

Emma, your infectious energy and generosity have been a constant source of inspiration and motivation for me.

I am grateful to Gina for her kind support, creative energy, help with dreamwork, and willingness to delve deep alongside me.

Lastly, I want to thank my family. To my wife and best friend, Sally, I appreciate your understanding, patience, and the kind encouragement you provided. I could not have accomplished this without you by my side.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Attestation of Authorship	6
Prologue: The Invitation	7
Chapter One: Introduction.....	8
Initial Engagement	8
Creeping Into Consciousness	9
A Brief View of the Literature on Boarding Schools	10
My Question.....	13
Some Caveats	14
Chapter Two – Methodology	15
Heuristic Research	15
Exploring the Paradigm.....	16
Alignment with My Worldview	16
Concepts in Heuristic Research	17
Tacit Knowledge	18
Indwelling	18
Method	20
The Six Stages of Heuristic Inquiry	20
Critique of the Heuristic Methodology	23

Chapter Three: Findings.....	25
Sinister Unease.....	25
Nostalgia and Institutional Longing.....	26
Cutting Away.....	27
Falling Away.....	29
Disruptions in Going On Being.....	32
Sinister Contracts.....	33
Sexuality and Unformulated Experience.....	35
Return of the Boarding School Self.....	36
Chapter Four: Implications.....	38
Underestimated Impact.....	39
Unmasking Hidden Trauma.....	39
Intellect's Grip.....	41
The Unseen Cultural Wall.....	41
The Power of Creativity.....	42
Implications of this Research.....	43
Limitations.....	43
Final Thoughts.....	44
References.....	46

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed _____ Date _____

Guy Cousins

21 October 2023

Prologue: The Invitation

I dream of being in an old country manor house at night, looking for the entrance to a secret passageway leading from one wing to the other. I am drawn to this hidden, private place. I descend into a dark, dusty attic room where old, latticed beams crisscross the floor. I edge deeper into the space, balancing cautiously on the wooden rafters. I sense something ahead, ominous and hellish. The room becomes narrower, and below me is a dark abyss. Above and ahead, I see a door bathed in light, the only escape. I must ascend a treacherous wooden scaffold to reach this exit, its rungs spaced too far apart. Overwhelmed by fear, I find myself paralysed, unable to move, gripped by the terror of plunging into the unknown depths below. The terror becomes unbearable, and I wrench myself awake.

I re-orientate to the space around me, trying to decompress. I stare at the ceiling above in the dark and sense my wife asleep beside me. Unable to return to sleep, I replay the scenes from the dream. It is a place I have visited many times in my life. It resurfaces with greater frequency as I get older. My thoughts drift to my two daughters in the room next door. At ages ten and twelve, they are both older than I was when I went to boarding school. Their age and physical size evoke memories of myself at the same period. My protective love for them makes the idea of sending them away unimaginable. It also permits me to find compassion for the nine-year-old boy inside me.

Chapter One: Introduction

Midway along the journey of our life I woke to find myself in a dark wood, for I had wandered off from the straight path.

(Dante Alighieri, 1314/2003).

Boarding school has been a constant backdrop. It has been there for decades, buried, dormant. I have spent most of my life trying to ignore it, but now I feel compelled to retrace my steps. In this dissertation, I embark on a journey of reconnecting with memories of boarding school through a heuristic methodology.

In the first chapter, I detail my initial engagement with the topic of boarding schools and explore relevant literature. The second chapter outlines the chosen heuristic methodology, while the third chapter delves into the findings. Finally, the fourth chapter summarises the study's insights and implications for the discipline of psychotherapy.

Initial Engagement

Before examining the topic, I must offer a disclaimer: recounting my initial interest in the subject matter has proved challenging due to my tendency to manipulate the sequence of events to enhance the story's appeal or showcase my intellectual abilities. I may avoid confronting emotional truths by presenting a polished interpretation of events. This relates to my experiences at boarding school. I learned to downplay my emotions and always offer a composed exterior there. The crux of this story lies in its emotional authenticity, which I will endeavour to preserve as much as possible. Like a sailor steering a ship, I must adjust the sails to catch the wind while remaining vigilant not to be deceived by it. So, to begin, I will retrace the first signs of intrigue in the subject matter, described in heuristic terms as a "passionate and discerning personal involvement" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 39).

Over the past decade, I have recognised that I felt less alive as if a part of me had been deadened. Despite having the conventional markers of achievement—a moderately successful career, a family, and a home—I sensed that I had buried a part of myself. I had a recurring nightmare where I had hidden a body in a shallow grave, waiting to be discovered. It was not until later when I learned that other former boarders had similar dreams (Schaverien, 2015), that I understood the significance of this disconnection from my true self.

I embarked on psychotherapy training in search of a more meaningful career path. This required me to confront my vulnerabilities and cultivate self-compassion, leading me to delve deeper into my past. The turning point came when I became a parent to school-aged children, bringing back vivid memories of my time at boarding school.

As a trainee psychotherapist, I faced the daunting task of investigating the past and exploring the hidden corners of the unconscious. In my first year of the programme, I came face-to-face with a recurring theme in my family's history: self-reliance. I examined this intergenerational pattern in an essay, looking at the reasons behind the decision to send children away to boarding school at a young age. While I acknowledged the potential for trauma associated with this experience, I also justified my parents' choice – a response that is all too common among former boarding school students.

As I probed further into the impact of boarding school, I began to realise its true significance. What had started as a casual interest was now an intense and passionate concern; Sela-Smith (2002) describes this personal engagement in terms of a pull to reach inward, which resonates with my experience, driving me to uncover the psychological issues that underlie this unique form of education.

Creeping Into Consciousness

In a synchronistic turn of events, my mother gave me a folder with old papers: the weekly letters I had written home while at boarding school. It struck me as an

opportunity to connect with the child within, bypassing adult cognition and diving straight into the heart of the matter. I only glanced at the first letter, surprised to find I seemed quite happy. I wondered if this meant that there was no problem to solve. Nevertheless, as I sat there with the letter in my hand, a strange feeling began to wash over me - a sickening sensation in my stomach that told me there was more to the story.

My curiosity about my boarding school past began to seep into my daily life. I became drawn to buildings that reminded me of my old school, and I started to attract a specific type of client: guarded, unemotional men who struggled to access their feelings. Even within my own family, I noticed a tendency towards emotional avoidance, with conversation quickly redirected to lighter topics whenever anything too heavy came up. It was becoming increasingly clear that the impact of my time at boarding school was far-reaching and profound.

I realised that my past was a source of self-consciousness for me. I felt embarrassed and even ashamed of my privileged upbringing. This shame was different during my school years. Thanks to my father's profession in the armed forces, I had access to subsidised boarding fees. Consequently, I often felt we were less well-off than other students. This feeling led me to routinely hide parts of my identity. This habit of concealing might have also served as a coping mechanism in an environment where privacy was non-existent.

A Brief View of the Literature on Boarding Schools

As I dug deeper into the topic of boarding schools, I realised that research in this field is still in its infancy. Despite its longstanding presence in popular culture, the psychological and psychotherapeutic literature on boarding schools only emerged in the 1990s (e.g., Duffell, 1995). In my review of the literature on boarding schools, I have noticed that much of the existing research predominantly comprises personal narratives, anecdotal and autobiographical accounts, and client case studies based on observations. As a result, there is a need for more published empirical research on the subject, and the limited existing studies primarily

employ quantitative research methods. Consequently, it became evident that there was an opportunity to contribute to an under-researched domain. Focusing on an area still in its early stages, I am inspired to offer an additional viewpoint and establish the foundation for further exploration.

Before exploring the literature on boarding schools, it is important to clearly define them. In the United Kingdom, boarding schools are often called public schools. They offer both formal education and lodging and are commonly linked with elitism and the preparation of future leaders. These schools are found in various forms worldwide, notably in former British colonies such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada, South Africa and the USA (Gathorne-Hardy, 2014). However, this dissertation will not focus on this global perspective in depth. According to recent data, there are 88 boarding schools in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2023) and 440 in the UK (Independent Schools Council, 2022).

Given the limited scope of this inquiry, only psychological and psychotherapeutic work will be consulted to present a view of the literature. It is essential to recognise the idealised heritage of boarding schools in popular culture, which is sustained through depictions in works such as the Harry Potter book series (Rowling, 1997) and biographies of notable individuals like Winston Churchill (Churchill & Barnes, 1930) and C.S. Lewis (Hannay, 1976).

The exploration of boarding schools within psychotherapy emerged in the late twentieth century. However, its foundational ideas can be rooted in earlier works, as prominent British psychoanalysts such as Donald Winnicott, John Bowlby, and Wilfred Bion attended boarding schools and their themes of detachment from parental figures, stemming from their personal experiences, are discernible in their writings (Abram & Hinshelwood, 2023; Van der Horst, 2011). I have noticed that subsequent authors have often echoed these themes when exploring the effects of boarding schools.

The British psychotherapist Nick Duffell (2000) describes a "strategic survival personality" (p. 35), which he observed in his work with groups of male ex-boarders, whom he describes as boarding school survivors. He notes that this personality, a trait or adaptation, involves emotional compensation in adulthood. It is related to adaptive behaviour developed by small children who were prematurely separated from their families and had to learn to moderate their behaviour and suppress their emotions quickly. Similarly, Schaverien (2011) identifies "boarding school syndrome" (p. 138) among her ex-boarder clients, characterised by a rupture in parental love, emotional deprivation, bullying, and even sexual abuse.

Whilst memories of boarding school can feel elusive, people can vividly account for arriving on the first day. The literature on boarding schools largely agrees that the initial school moments are pivotal (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Gottlieb, 2005; Palmer, 2006; Partridge, 2007; Power, 2007; Schaverien, 2004). Schaverien (2011) argues that crossing the threshold to boarding school results in a profound change in a child's life, usually characterised by excitement or awe, followed by a realisation of vulnerability in a strange and unfamiliar world.

Dissociation is discussed in the literature: Duffell (2000) suggests that it is a coping mechanism that enables children to disown certain aspects of their emotions. Likewise, Schaverien (2011) notes that the compartmentalisation employed by those who experienced trauma was similar to other trauma responses, for example, prisoners of war. Schaverien (2021) sees that splitting occurs with boarding school children in the face of trauma, with a separation between their "school self" and their "home self" (p. 611).

Authors, including Duffell (2000), Palmer (2006), Partridge (2007, 2013), Schaverien (2011, 2021), Power (2013), Duffell and Basset (2016), and Khaleelee (2018), have employed Winnicott's (1965) concept of the true and false self as a metaphor to understand the experience of boarding school. The false self is a protective shell that assumes a caretaker role to safeguard the more authentic, creative, and vulnerable true self (Winnicott, 1965). The false self may even take

on a "joker" persona as a defence mechanism to deflect bullies and protect vulnerable aspects, as Power (2013) suggests (p. 195). In adulthood, clients may present a sophisticated and confident facade that avoids revealing primitive emotions, as Palmer (2006) notes.

Power (2007), examining boarding from an attachment theory perspective, argues that a child with a dismissing avoidant attachment style may be better equipped to survive in this environment, having already experienced emotional bleakness in their home. Partridge (2007, 2013) similarly suggests that a broader culture of emotional avoidance is perpetuated in Britain, where ex-boarders are overrepresented among the elites. He sees this as a form of complex trauma, which he terms "upper-class/boarding school trauma" (Partridge, 2011, p. 154) experienced by that class of boarding school survivors.

In summary, the psychotherapeutic literature suggests that attending boarding school during childhood leads to an adaptive response, which can be described as a strategic survival personality or a false self (Winnicott, 1965). This response can also be seen in a cluster of symptoms described as boarding school syndrome in adulthood, characterised by emotional avoidance and forms of dissociation similar to those found in complex post-traumatic stress disorder (Herman, 1992).

My Question

As I ponder the implications of my boarding school experience, I realise it remains a complex and elusive subject. While I understand its impact on my life, I still have unanswered questions. Despite the validation offered by the literature, my adult defences hinder my ability to comprehend my childhood memories fully. As a psychotherapist, I must gain clarity on what attending boarding school means for me and its potential implications for my work. This leads me to ask, "What is an adult experience of attending boarding school during childhood?"

Through a reflective and creative approach, this study aims to add to the existing literature by exploring my journey of reconnecting with my "boarding school self"

(Schaverien, 2021, p. 611) and the exploration of early moments at school; the study aims to uncover deeper meanings and navigate the obstacles presented by adult defences.

Some Caveats

It is worth noting that every person's recollection of their boarding school experience will vary, depending on age, social context, school attended, class, family background, ethnicity, gender, and more. As a result, my findings cannot be considered objective or applicable to everyone.

My research focuses on my memories as a man who attended a specific boarding school during a particular period. I am exploring my early days at a boarding school in Great Britain during the late 1980s. While I cannot claim that my findings are universally generalisable, they can offer valuable insights into an essential aspect of the human experience. By delving into my own experiences, I aim to add a nuanced perspective to the existing literature.

Chapter Two – Methodology

In the opening of this dissertation, I recounted a vivid dream that resonated as an invitation – a “call from the soul” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 4). The topic of boarding school emerged organically, drawing my attention and beckoning me to embark on a journey of exploration. This subject held profound meaning for me, and I sought a reflective and creative approach akin to my experiences in psychotherapy. Heuristic methodology met these criteria.

I chose heuristics for this project because other approaches lacked the sense of freedom and creativity that I felt was necessary. I was not interested in quantifying the effects of boarding school or proving anything. Instead, I wanted to dig deep into my inner experience to uncover new understandings. While searching for a qualitative approach that would allow me to delve into personal experiences, I came across Moustakas’ heuristic research (1961, 1990). This discovery liberated me; it permitted me to fully embrace the depths of my subjectivity and venture into uncharted territories of unconscious experiences. It allowed me to descend into my interiority.

Heuristic Research

Heuristic research, introduced by Clark Moustakas (1990), searches for the essence and meaning within significant human experiences. As Moustakas (1990) acknowledges, the term “heuristic” originates from the Greek word “heuriskein” and conveys the idea of discovery. Driven by questions arising from autobiographical history, heuristic research seeks answers and insights, aiming to uncover the essence of phenomena by exploring the “interiority of our experience” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 54). It explores human experiences while focusing on the researcher’s inner feelings toward external circumstances. This approach embodies passionate and committed problem-solving rooted in the personal domain (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Heuristic inquiry is open-ended, guided solely by the initial question (Sela-Smith, 2002), encouraging a conscious

surrender to the emotions present in an experience and unveiling aspects of the self inaccessible through conscious thought (Moustakas, 1990).

Exploring the Paradigm

Heuristic research draws from various philosophical threads, incorporating phenomenology and social constructivism elements. Researchers using heuristic research, like other qualitative approaches, investigate phenomena within their natural context and interpret their meanings using open-ended questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Heuristic research aligns with phenomenology (Sultan, 2019) as it seeks to understand the essence and structure of human experience by directly examining phenomena through lived experiences. While phenomenology aims for objectivity through bracketing (Husserl, 1913/1963), heuristic research diverges from this by encouraging researchers to fully immerse themselves in subjective experiences (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). This recognition acknowledges social constructivist influences and embraces the view of reality's subjective and socially constructed nature (Sultan, 2019). This sets it in diametrical opposition to positivism's emphasis on objective reality (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In summary, heuristic research shares many fundamental aspects with phenomenology but unapologetically incorporates a social constructivist influence.

Alignment with My Worldview

When deciding on my research approach, I did not just choose a methodology that would suit the research question. Butler-Kisber (2010) points out that your personal beliefs must align with the selected methodology. However, it can be challenging to express this alignment clearly due to the constantly evolving nature of perspectives. I experienced this myself, as my evolving beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge is acquired (epistemology) influenced my choices.

My experience in the corporate world and transition to psychotherapy has shaped my beliefs about research. At first, I preferred a balanced approach that combined quantitative and qualitative methods for data-driven insights. However, as I delved deeper into human experiences, I realised the limitations of relying on quantitative techniques. To truly understand the complexities of human behaviour, I have come to embrace intuition and qualitative research. This has led me to reject the idea of absolute objectivity and recognise the importance of intuitive understanding in research.

I adopted a more subjective and relational approach as I progressed through my psychotherapy training. I let go of rigid patterns of thinking and started to embrace ambiguity.

Concepts in Heuristic Research

Heuristic research offers a plethora of valuable concepts and processes, but when faced with time constraints, it may be necessary to be selective in their application. Moustakas drew inspiration from Polanyi (1966), Maslow (1966), Gendlin (1978) and Rogers (1980) to develop processes and concepts that resonate with the field of psychotherapy. In his work, Moustakas (1990) outlines foundational concepts in the heuristic approach, including identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and the internal frame of reference. Referencing Bronowski (1965, 1978), Sela-Smith (2001, 2002) adds four additional concepts: resistance, intentionality, self-transformation and interiority. While all the concepts discussed are important, I will concentrate on two specific ones: tacit knowledge and indwelling. These hold relevance to this research and are closely intertwined, aligning with deeply embedded understanding and the experience of dwelling in a boarding school setting.

Tacit Knowledge

Moustakas considers tacit knowledge to be a fundamental concept in heuristic research. This is based on Polanyi's (1966) idea that our understanding of the world encompasses "things that cannot be put into words" (p. 4). This "inarticulate intelligence" (Polanyi, 1958, p. 71) is found in animals and the implicit preverbal knowledge of human infants (Stern, 1985; Stern et al., 1998). It exists mainly below the level of consciousness and is the essential foundation for other forms of knowledge (Polanyi, 1966).

When reflecting on the research question, tacit knowledge plays an important role. My understanding of boarding school goes beyond words due to the absence of a containing parental presence (Bion, 1962) to help me process emotional memories. The education provided by the school not only imparted knowledge but also shaped my worldview, embedding tacit knowledge within me. The all-encompassing nature of the institution I lived in profoundly influenced every aspect of my life.

While uncovering unspoken knowledge is essential for exploring new ideas, it challenges the researcher, given that it cannot be articulated (Tudor, 2010). Tacit knowing is portrayed in mysterious terms as a hidden entity that generates intuitive hunches (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Sela-Smith (2002) suggests that accessing the "I-who-feels" is crucial for accessing nonverbal tacit knowledge (p. 57). Douglass and Moustakas (1985) recommend using Gendlin's (1978) focusing technique to connect with the unspoken dimension, while Tudor (2010) proposes creative methods, such as using poetry, to achieve the same goal. Perhaps the challenge in exploring tacit knowing is that it cannot be considered in isolation; we also need to consider indwelling.

Indwelling

Tacit knowing is accessed through the "act of knowing based on indwelling" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 24). Indwelling is the act of introspection. By turning our gaze inward and focusing with soft eyes (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985), we can dwell

on things that have become internalised. This concept recognises how we internalise knowledge. For instance, when we master a tool or language, it becomes a part of us. We merge with it and assimilate it into our being (Polanyi, 1958). This idea challenges the certainty and objectivity of scientific thinking and is based on our understanding of how we gain knowledge.

Indwelling takes on a deeper meaning in this research study, as it echoes and emphasises the immersive and all-encompassing nature of my boarding school experience, which involved dwelling in the school environment for seven years. I became profoundly integrated into its culture, values, and daily routines. Indwelling suggests that boarding school life became deeply embedded in my identity, shaping my attitudes, behaviours, social norms, interactions, and knowledge acquisition. It highlights the boarding school environment's pervasive influence on overall development and sense of self.

For me, the idea of indwelling has additional meanings. It reminds me of the therapeutic relationship, where the therapist tries to understand the patient's experiences and behaviours to help them see things differently. Indwelling helps build empathy with others (Polanyi & Prosch, 1975). Winnicott (1960) uses the term differently: the indwelling of the psyche within the soma, referring to how our personalities are formed as they develop within our bodies. Indwelling makes me think of the importance of gentle care as it touches on the core of our being. It can even have spiritual significance, representing the presence of a higher power within our bodies. It implies a sense of surrender: we must release our grasping mind, as the work of McGilchrist (2009) suggests.

Based on my experience, accessing the tacit dimension through indwelling proves challenging, which is why intermediaries such as metaphors are invaluable. This mysterious domain resists explicit explanations, yet it can be delved into through expressive mediums, revealing unvoiced dimensions and concealed depths. I can connect with the implicit through poetry, metaphor, and dreaming and undergo a deeply personal encounter.

Examining these concepts offers valuable insights into the philosophical foundations of heuristic methodology, its relevance to psychotherapy, and its potential for deepening our understanding of human experiences. Although time and word constraints limit my exploration of numerous concepts, I have focused on tacit knowledge and indwelling in this research. These concepts serve as pathways to uncover hidden dimensions of experience and embrace the intricate complexities of ourselves and the world we inhabit.

Method

The Six Stages of Heuristic Inquiry

Moustakas (1990) outlines six phases that a researcher encounters to answer a passionate concern, using the self as an internal frame of reference: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. The researcher needs to navigate each phase organically, relinquishing control and remaining open to whatever emerges in each stage (Sela-Smith, 2002). In the subsequent section, I will elucidate each step and share personal reflections on my journey within this process.

Initial Engagement

The initial engagement phase, as identified by Moustakas (1990), is characterised by a strong personal concern that originates from within. In the first chapter of my dissertation, I detailed how this process unfolded in my journey. It began with a growing fascination with the topic during my university studies, which continued to deepen as I approached the stage of drafting my dissertation. The experience became even more profound when I had a mysterious dream, which I interpreted as an invitation to address unresolved matters. This persistent calling emanated from the psyche or soul (Romanyshyn, 2013). This aligns with Sela-Smith's (2002) depiction of an experience requiring completion and exploration.

Immersion

In immersion, the researcher embodies the research question through focusing, indwelling, and introspection (Moustakas, 1990). Contrary to my initial thoughts, where I imagined myself driving the process, I felt more like a passenger. It seemed to move through me, and I learned to surrender to the process.

This immersion encompassed three processes: remembering, dreaming, and observing. I maintained a journal detailing my boarding school memories and highlighting my emotions and sensations. To deepen my recollections, I revisited letters I had sent home. From these, I extracted the essence and translated it into poetry. Poetry became my bridge, leading from the rational to the emotional (Schore, 2019) and connecting the psyche with the soma (Winnicott, 1954). My unconscious took the lead, revealing itself in dreams, which I habitually noted immediately upon waking to capture their essence. Dream exploration became one of the main parts of the research, allowing me to unearth previously dissociated parts of the psyche (Bromberg, 1998).

In the waking world, I noticed how my current behaviours were tied to my boarding school experiences, especially under stress. The boarding school self manifested, impacting my interactions with family. Through this immersion stage, I indwelled in the research question, making it a central focus of my life.

Incubation

During the incubation phase, the researcher intentionally takes a step back from intense concentration on the subject, allowing it to recede into the background and allowing room for the mind's inner workings to unfold (Moustakas, 1990). The issue takes root in the tacit dimension, enabling the unconscious mind to contribute to the development of ideas. There is a surrender to wisdom that lies beyond our conscious control. As someone who has worked in a creative profession, in advertising, I found this process quite familiar. It resembles how our minds process information when engaged in other activities, such as

showering or experiencing a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) during exercise, when undertaking mundane tasks, or even when sleeping.

Illumination

After allowing the question to reside in the tacit dimension, the researcher becomes receptive to the spontaneous emergence of thoughts in their consciousness. This occurs naturally through intuition and enables the researcher to discern emerging patterns and themes. The process is profoundly fertile and creative, evoking a sense of mysticism as if a higher power or the Self (Jung, 1965) brings forth precious moments of illumination. This process also reminds me of the mindset in psychotherapy, where one remains open to unconscious communications from a client, taking the form of a waking dream, or what Bion (1962) described as a reverie (Ogden, 2007). I noticed that moments of illumination were scattered throughout the process rather than occurring discretely within a stage. Moreover, these illuminating moments often arose during self-dialogue, journaling, and reading rather than while working directly on the manuscript.

Explication

During the explication phase, there is a purposeful examination of the insights and themes discovered during the illumination stage. This phase is the explicit counterpart to the unconscious work done during incubation. To engage with these insights fully, Moustakas (1990) suggests using heuristic approaches like focusing and indwelling. In my experience, after gathering a rich tapestry of insights, reflections, and thoughts from my inner world, my task was to sift through them and focus on the most valuable ones. I delved further into their significance. Although time constraints were present, I conducted an explication process by processing and documentation of the insights. The findings that I present and explicate in the third chapter of this dissertation emerged from this process.

Creative Synthesis

After fully immersing themselves in the preceding phases, the researcher relies on intuition to allow a coherent narrative of the findings to unfold. This final phase often involves working in solitude or meditative states, seeking truth and developing the core narrative. The researcher can generate a new understanding of reality (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985).

The process of creative synthesis blurs the boundaries between other phases, such as immersion and incubation, and incorporates similar processes. Whenever a theme subtly entered my consciousness, I would step back and give it the necessary space – a form of indwelling. As Moustakas (1990) pointed out, allowing something to unfold naturally allows the tacit dimension to work its magic. Sometimes, while meditating or engrossed in everyday activities like showering, a thought suddenly becomes illuminated. Meanwhile, as I engaged with other materials, thoughts percolated, interconnected, and gradually coalesced into something that resonated emotionally. The most effective way to synthesise these ideas was through writing lines of poetry, where the meaning would arise. This process aligns with Green et al.'s (2021) description of “poetic inquiry at work” (p. 7); this distillation encompassed the integration of other phases in the creative journey.

The synthesis of insights is shared in the concluding chapter of the dissertation. However, I experienced it less as a distinct phase and more as an ongoing process intertwined with the other phases. There was a constant sense of attempting to distil and synthesise, particularly while balancing the need to immerse deeply within the research process and work within time constraints.

Critique of the Heuristic Methodology

Heuristic research departs from the conventional empirical path of theory examination, experimentation, and hypothesis testing. Instead, it explores truth within the human realm (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). However, its

autobiographical nature makes it susceptible to criticism for being excessively self-focused, potentially leading to the perception of “navel-gazing”. This critique aligns with broader criticisms of qualitative research, which argue that it is subjective, lacks rigour and trustworthiness, faces generalisability challenges, and encounters verification difficulties (Madill et al., 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest that these criticisms often stem from the historical dominance of quantitative research, which monopolises rigour.

Nevertheless, ensuring trustworthiness and credibility in heuristic research requires implementing strategies that enhance rigour (Sultan, 2019). These strategies may involve meticulous documentation of the research process and the inclusion of multiple data sources or perspectives. Moreover, emphasis is placed on triangulating findings through seeking consultation with supervisors, peers, and other well-informed individuals (Sultan, 2019). Moustakas (1990) emphasises that the validation of heuristic research comes from the meaningful depiction of the essence of the researcher’s experience through detailed inquiry. The ultimate validation is achieved if the researcher successfully conveys something essential about the experience, with the potential to contribute to people's understanding of the phenomenon.

Chapter Three: Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of my research inquiry. I unearthed eight themes while reviewing the material documenting my reveries, dreams, and reflections. Beyond presenting these discoveries, I aim to depict the context from which they originated. This is a prelude to the final chapter, where the findings will be condensed and amalgamated.

Throughout the journey, I focused on the guiding question that illuminated my path: "What is the adult experience of attending boarding school during childhood?". Over time, the ideas metamorphosed, slipping through my fingers like sand and settling onto the ground. The sand formed intricate shapes and small hills, hinting at the emergence of subtle themes. I learned to allow the process to unfold naturally, trying to put any sense of haste to one side.

After uncovering the findings, I tried to create a structure for communicating them. After some frustration and inaction, I grasped the significance of the fragmentation I felt in my thinking. Perhaps I was experiencing dissociation as the ideas emerged from various moments or self-states (Bromberg, 1998). I concluded that full integration at this point was yet to be possible.

Sinister Unease

As the immersion started, I felt a dreadful sensation in the pit of my stomach. I would pause and give myself time to notice what I was feeling. I experienced a deep, dark ache that seemed metallic in texture. Eventually, the words "unease" and "sinister" came to mind. My nightmares accentuated this gloomy feeling. I understood these nightmares as a sign from my psyche, a warning that I might be losing touch with the gravity of the subject. For example, when I was disconnected from the topic and treating it lightly, I dreamed of my stomach brutally tearing open and disembowelling like a gutted fish. I interpreted this as my unconscious mind demanding my attention, revealing the violence I inflicted upon myself by neglecting the importance of the subject. This detachment from

my emotions, as I distanced myself cognitively, juxtaposed with the profound, palpable sense of trauma experienced at a soul level, represents the lasting impact of my time in boarding school.

Nostalgia and Institutional Longing

While there was a sinister undertone to my inquiry, this did not capture the whole picture: it was coupled with a strange longing for the past—a nostalgia for my old school days.

I feel drawn to something; I see faint outlines etched in my memory; It echoes around me. It's an old misty place that beckons me.

Journal Entry 15th March, 2023

I was bewildered by the allure of something mysterious from the past, which carried a tinge of melancholy and sorrow. As I turned it over in my mind, I found a parallel to the feeling of loss that had consumed me during my early days in boarding school.

When my world shifted, I was left there. My parents died in a sense, and I had to connect with the place, the institution. The sadness of this attachment makes it something I long for, yet it is not a kind, safe parent; it is more of a distant, austere figure.

Journal Entry 23rd March, 2023

My strange nostalgia for my old school and its architecture evokes the concept of the 'brick mother' (Rey & Magagna, 1994). This inanimate institution offers stability and continuity despite being cold and unresponsive. This sentiment also brings to mind the wire monkey from a behavioural study, as illustrated in Figure 1 (Harlow, 1959). In that experiment, a newborn monkey separated from its biological mother sought nurture from an artificial surrogate.

Figure 1*Wire Monkey*

Note. From “Love in infant monkeys”, H. F. Harlow, H. F., 1959, *Scientific American*, 200(6), p. 69. (<https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican0659-68>). In the public domain.

Cutting Away

Like many former boarders, my first moments at school are deeply etched in my memory. Although these memories have an emotional tint, they are overshadowed by the more commonplace and mundane recollections of events. Reflecting on my own experience, I offer a brief excerpt from my journal, where I transported myself back to the threshold moment that left a deep imprint on my memory.

Crossing the Threshold

I was excited the days before starting my new school. A large silver trunk had been placed in my bedroom, bearing stickers that spelt out my name. We visited a department store and bought lots of clothes. I loved the smell of these new things: long socks with name badges, rugby shirts, smart blazers that looked like the ones my father wore. All these items were methodically ticked on a school list and carefully packed in the trunk.

We had taken my older sister to her new school one week earlier. She was eleven, two years older than me. I remember her tear-streaked face as we drove away in our Volvo estate.

The day arrived. I remember the journey from West London to the Oxford countryside. I recall feeling sick on the journey. I remember my first sight of the old school building. Inside, it smelled of disinfectant. Confident, jolly men cracked jokes with my parents, reassuring them that I was in good hands.

I remember seeing other tweedy little boys being dropped off by their parents—lots of jolly, happy-sounding adults with quiet, bewildered children. I may have started speaking to another boy, trying to establish an ally.

As my parents drove away, down the gravelled drive, I thought of my sister and was determined not to cry. I bravely soldiered on, not looking back. I was here, and that was that.

Journal Entry 8th January, 2023

The experience of crossing a threshold re-emerged for me as a series of scenes that possessed a dream-like quality. Despite the traumatic and transformative nature of the experience, there is a jarring contrast between the mundane, everyday actions of people going about their business. As I recount the memory in a matter-of-fact tone, I am struck by the disturbing normalisation of an event that can have a profound impact on the developing mind of a young person. Within my recollection, I notice the distinctions I made based on gender: how, even at a young age, I believed that tears were acceptable for girls, while boys were expected not to cry.

These memories include my journey to school, apparent carsickness, and being told to “look out of the window”. I recall being transfixed by a motorway cutting, a channel cut through a hillside where the motorway passed. In my journal, I reflect that the idea of cutting felt meaningful. There was something surgical about my experience. It reminded me of the times I have had an operation under anaesthetic. The cutting is unconscious, but the body keeps the score (Van der Kolk, 1994, 2014). In a sense, I felt the memory of an old, anaesthetised cutting—the dismemberment like an anaesthetised cutting of the soul.

Falling Away

In my quest for an authentic experience, I actively tried to reach back in time to the thoughts and words of my younger self at boarding school. The letters were addressed to 'Mum and Dad,' but in a strange sense, they seemed directed at me—a parallel-universe version of myself as an older, middle-aged man. When I read the letter from my first week at school, I came across as brave and competent, writing, “Some people are homesick, but I am not.” Reading these words, I felt surprised and remembered feeling physically sick. The discrepancy felt incongruous.

As I sifted through a pile of letters, I stumbled upon an old essay I had written. The essay chronicled my encounter with a "space monkey" that was launched into orbit by "big bullying apes" and needed my help to survive. What struck me was how much this tale mirrored my inner world then. It depicted an interaction between two distinct parts of my personality: one that was responsible, guarded, and self-conscious, and another that felt alien and chaotic. This internal conflict is similar to what van der Hart et al. (2006, p. 5) refer to as the "apparently normal personality" encountering an emotional part that I perceived as "not me" (Sullivan, 1953, p. 161).

To capture the essence of this insight, I present a poem below from my journal. It compares the more formal and restrained aspect of my personality as reflected in the letters and the creative, perhaps more authentic version of myself unveiled in

the essay. Striving to stay close to the experience of my younger self, I had deliberately confined myself solely to the expressions found within the original material.

Space Monkey

I like it here
 Yet I miss you a lot.
 Some people are homesick,
 But. I. Am. Not.

But there are queasy moments:
 Cocooned under duvet;
 Or unseen in the bog;
 When silly tears come uninvited.

In class, I write a story
 About a space monkey;
 Packed away, sent floating into space.
 A bit like me - I suppose.

They told parents not to call,
 “Best to let them settle.”
 Home is like a fading dream,
 Lost forever in my soul.

So, I write home weekly,
 And I don’t make a fuss.
 I won’t say I am homesick.
 That’s Just. Not. Us.

As I try to remember what took place in the early days of boarding school, I realise that trying to capture it ideally is futile. As I return to the question that is the focus of this dissertation, this comes close to the essence of it. The word “queasy” in the second stanza is significant. This is the nauseous feeling I feel as I re-read the poem. It brings me back to the early moments of school. The horrible car sickness I felt on the drive back to school. The institutional smells of the forbidding school building, the smell of old wood, the musty dorms and furniture polish.

The deliberate use of full stops in “But. I. Am. Not.” creates a rhythmic effect emphasising my assertion of not feeling homesick: the stubborn brevity conveys determination and self-reliance. Similarly, in the final stanza, the same punctuated abruptness reinforces my identity and separation from those who may experience homesickness. This recalls Duffell’s (2014) explanation of the dissociation of boarding school children, described as the “I am not the Vulnerable One” imperative (p. 79): by rejecting homesickness, it became compartmentalised, as in “I am not the one who feels this way.” “That’s. Just. Not. Us.” conveys the idea of a division between those who are self-reliant and those who are not. This value was reinforced by the institution, other children and my family. In the simplest terms, without the ‘little soldier’ protecting me, I would not have been able to survive.

Under the boarding school child's jolly facade is a profound terror of annihilation. Whilst it is impossible to experience this sense of abstraction fully, it can be visualised in the image of the monkey floating in space. This recalls a passage by Thomas Ogden (2014) in his exploration of Winnicott’s (1974) description of the primitive agony of falling forever:

I imagine that the agony of falling forever is an experience like that depicted in Stanley Kubrick’s film 2001: A Space Odyssey, in which an astronaut floats alone into endless, silent, empty space after the umbilical cord to the spacecraft is severed (Ogden, 2014, p. 211).

While Winnicott (1974) and Ogden (2014) explore the realm of early infancy, I see a striking parallel in the poem: an unsettling, disjointed element reminiscent of the boarding school encounter that is sensed somehow by a part of my younger self.

While working on the manuscript for this dissertation, I encountered a disturbing sensation of being drawn deeply into a parallel universe. While immersed in it, this alternative reality does not feel inherently traumatic; however, a sense of physical discomfort, often manifesting as queasiness, often accompanies the

experience. When I pause my writing, I am engulfed by a profound emptiness. I find myself unable to connect with my family, overcome by loneliness, severed from the world around me, as though everything has “fallen away”. This unsettling experience echoes the haunting remnants of my time in boarding school—a strange replication of the sensation of plunging into the boundless depths of space. This narrative captures the adult experience of the lasting impact of boarding school, where an undercurrent of a parallel world seeps in, eroding the sense of connection to the surrounding reality.

Disruptions in Going On Being

Some of the experience felt like falling, but this does not capture the entire story: there was also a sensation of something being violently torn away. This abrupt severance from the comforting realm of home created a profound fault line in my psyche, affecting my relationship with time, continuity, and my overarching sense of aliveness.

"When I left home, I lost not only my parents and familiar surroundings but also my sense of continuity."

Journal Entry 23rd April, 2023

"The feeling of space and being unhurried moments was forcefully ripped from us. They would literally rip away our duvets in the morning, leaving us shivering in the freezing cold dormitory."

Journal Entry 23rd April, 2023

This experience of disruption, as I reflect upon it, carries an archetypal resonance reminiscent of our earliest infancy stages. In the first moments of life, time eludes our understanding. Before the attempt of parents to regulate our sleep, we existed in a natural state, unburdened and liberated, embracing a sense of boundless freedom. During this stage, continuity of sensations was maintained between the child and the maternal organism (Burrow, 1958). Winnicott (1963) characterised this state as "going on being." (p. 183). However, the emergence of an intrusive force named "time" marked the beginning of a manufactured and artificial entity,

encroaching on the once sacred and tranquil space and unsettling the inner calm. Once again, in the transition to boarding school, home life's spaciousness and timeless existence were disrupted. My personal experience is that this sense of time being taken away becomes an enduring aspect of adulthood, leading to an unconscious longing for something that was forcibly torn away.

The disruption caused a rupture in my ongoing sense of aliveness. A dissociation from various parts of the psyche, culminating in a deadening of the inner emotional landscape (Bromberg, 1991).

Last night I dreamt that I was asleep in a large dorm room. I hear P [my eldest daughter]; she is terrified and screams: "Dad's dead. He's frozen". I try to comfort her.

Journal Entry 13th June, 2023

The emergence of a false self, or strategic survival personality (Duffell, 2000), constitutes psychic death. In contrast, my dreams reveal an unconscious longing for integration. They depict a dialogue, or an intermediation, between different parts of the psyche. The state of 'frozenness' suggests possibilities for thawing and rejuvenation, evoking a benign sense of something caring and comforting as part of me attempts to console a scared, yet alive, younger self. According to Winnicott (1945), remembering and sharing our dreams can also be a thawing process. This can help dissolve dissociation barriers, bridging the gap between our sleeping and waking states and taking a small step towards a more integrated and alive psyche.

Sinister Contracts

As I journeyed further into the research process, I noticed a more significant recurrence of school-related dreams, as if they held a profound message for me. It felt like I were transcending time, revisiting the familiar school environment, but now through my daughters' eyes, who symbolically represented facets of my youthful self.

I dream that my oldest daughter starts at my old school. She has my uniform. Oddly, I need to return to school as an adult, possibly to catch up. My first school day is as an adult in a child's uniform. I feel embarrassed and out of place. I'm trying to decide whether to hang around with teachers or kids.

Meanwhile, in a classroom, my daughter seems embarrassed by me. What should I do? I consider sleeping in a dorm room. I enter the chapel, where there are adults, teachers and "old boys," but they wear school uniforms with black ties. I see a tapestry on the wall during a ceremony depicting the scene. Clumsy and awkward, I trip on a projector cable, cutting off the screen's projection. The teacher makes a sarcastic remark.

Journal Entry 5th June, 2023

The dream seems to portray the anxiety I experienced during the initial days of starting school. It resurfaces the theme of disconnection, evoking the feeling of being forcibly torn away from a familiar connection, like a chord ripped from its socket.

I have also returned to school but should not be there as an adult. I am acutely aware of the other adults. They seem to operate as part of a religious sect, exerting power over the children, delivered through mockery and sarcasm. I perceive a more sinister aspect beneath the surface. The adults are barred from witnessing what transpires here. A secretive pact exists between the staff and pupils, where what unfolds within these walls remains confined. This tradition is depicted in ancient murals.

The dream points to an interesting aspect of this research. As I delve deeper into the adult perspective of having been a boarding school child, I find myself assuming the role of an observer within an institution that does not welcome my presence. I witnessed an unspoken agreement between teachers and students: a pact that whatever transpires within these walls shall remain confined to these premises, never to be disclosed. This unspoken pact of secrecy could be why

boarding school survivors avoid looking deeper into the institution or themselves and their erased histories.

Reflecting on this sensitive knowledge, I am drawn to the unsettling subject of sexuality and abuse. I must tread lightly for self-care. When involving prepubescent children, sexuality becomes delicate due to their vulnerability. Schaverien (2021) notes that both adults and other children can initiate sexual acts, be they consensual or predatory. Authors like Partridge (2011, 2013) and Renton (2014, 2017) discuss the alarming risk of entrusting kids to certain adults who might abuse them instead of providing care. In boarding situations, close contact with same-sex peers during sexual maturation can lead to limited privacy, exposing youngsters to sexuality early on. This can cause deep shame, intimacy fears, and potential homophobia shaped by societal norms (Schaverien, 2021).

Sexuality and Unformulated Experience

When I force myself to stay grounded, even as my instincts push me away, I am met with discomfort and fragmented images. Forming a straightforward narrative from these fragments is challenging. Stern (1983) labels such vague memories as unformulated experiences, nebulous and unclear, often disassociated to bypass distress. This aligns with Bion's (1962) concept of beta elements: unprocessed data that has not formed into memories. For both Stern and Bion, these experiences require a guiding figure, like a parent or analyst, for processing. Given the lack of such figures in boarding schools and the topic's distressing nature, it's no surprise this remains a challenging and murky theme.

While my story began in ambiguity, it detailed uncomfortable experiences in a world of overt male sexuality in dorms and a sense of predatory behaviour from some adults. As girls were introduced to the co-ed setting, a newfound appreciation arose for the gentleness and solace of femininity that was missing earlier. In retrospect, the presence of girls might have filled the emotional and physical gap left by a missing maternal figure, highlighting a deep longing for emotional closeness and support.

Return of the Boarding School Self

The final theme I address is one that I find particularly challenging to share, as it delves into the repetitive patterns that unfold across generations. One instance that caught me off guard was when I found myself frustrated with my daughter, and I could hear an echo of my parents in my inner dialogue:

I feel disappointed that she did not give it a go and wondered about a lack of resilience. I noticed the voice of the boarding school self that seemed to be saying, 'If I could be sent away at age nine and get through it, you can put up with it for a day.' I can see that I wanted to toughen her up, and I felt angry, disappointed, and punitive.

Journal Entry: 11/03/23

Fortunately, I could intercept this thought and refrain from acting on it. It also made me realise a connection between feeling triggered upon hearing crying at bedtime:

At this moment, I sensed two parts: the caring parent who wanted to help and an uglier version stressed and recoiled from the sound. I realised that it may have reminded me of the sounds of crying in the dormitory.

Journal Entry: 11/03/23

This discovery sheds light on what initially seemed like an allergic reaction. In the dormitory, we were forbidden to cry because it served as a constant reminder of the homesickness we were determined to conceal. This example illustrates how dissociated or repressed affective states can be activated (Chu, 1991). When combined with cultural and familial influences, this phenomenon perpetuates a cycle wherein a boarding school self is enacted, affecting subsequent generations in a similar manner. Palmer (2006), quoting D.H. Lawrence (1964), underscores the importance of self-reflection to break free from the "endless repetition of the mistake | which mankind has chosen to sanctify" (p. 35). If left unexamined, the

boarding school self has the potential to return when reactivated in the relational dynamics of later life.

Chapter Four: Implications

In the preceding chapter, my findings were laid out in the sequence they unfolded. As I explored my inner world, I had the impression that I was being guided there unconsciously. In this final chapter, I will attempt to draw some threads together. I will then reflect and evaluate the significance of this study to the field of psychotherapy, emphasising working with boarding school survivors.

While exploring memories of boarding school, I immersed myself in dreams, recollections, metaphors, and poetry, all while observing adult behaviours. This journey felt like unearthing hidden facets of myself. I felt a pull, a longing for something nostalgic yet sorrowful. Although the recollections appeared distant and anaesthetised, I encountered unsettling, violent unconscious imagery that warned me against downplaying the traumatic effects of boarding school. The experience of conducting the research was a long journey with a cast of younger parts of myself: some distressed, others vigilant and protective. At times, it was like a veil had been lifted, revealing another side of me. I could bypass defences creatively and became aware of a protective "little soldier"; another part lost in space, falling forever.

While conducting my research, my identity from boarding school dominated my thoughts, causing me to feel disconnected from the people who mattered most to me. The disconnection between different parts of myself, particularly between intellectual and feeling aspects, became more conspicuous. Some of my dreams and waking reveries were difficult to understand, process, and manage. My nightmares featured ominous characters who seemed to prevent me from looking into my past. However, acquiescing carried a heavy risk of repeated intergenerational trauma, as the boarding school self gets triggered and reanimated through my children.

In analysing these findings, I identified five key areas of influence: the impact of boarding school, trauma, intellectualisation, cultural factors, and creativity. I will explore how each relates to psychotherapy with boarding school survivors.

Underestimated Impact

Going into my research, I knew I needed to look into my boarding school experience, and I now see that it impacted my life much more than I had previously thought. This has clinical implications because it implies that ex-boarder clients may be oblivious to the effects of boarding school. The boarding school self is hardwired to protect itself from unhelpful emotional unravelling. To survive, the child, as demonstrated in this study, cannot allow themselves to feel genuinely defenceless. This is consistent with research on boarding school survivors who, as adults, maintain a strategic front; the protective carapace is always looking for flaws in the armour (Duffell & Basset, 2016). Within the self-assurance lies a child who does not want to be known as the “pathetic one” (Duffell, 2014, p. 77). The therapist’s responsibility is to be on the lookout for this type of avoidance, observing the boarding school self’s desire to minimise the effects of boarding and avoid self-pity or criticism of their parents. This is consistent with research on how ex-boarders avoid emotion through dissociation and repression (Duffell, 2000; Duffell & Basset, 2016; Partridge, 2013; Schaverien, 2004, 2011, 2021). According to Schaverien (2021), there is a risk that the problem will go unnoticed in therapy or that the former boarder client will leave before the real work begins.

Unmasking Hidden Trauma

The study suggests that, in my case, mundane memories were more traumatic than I previously believed. This was illustrated by the discrepancy between describing the threshold moment of arriving at school and experiencing the disturbing symbolism in dreams. This aligns with the literature’s descriptions of the traumatic impact of boarding school and the defence of dissociation as an adaptive response to intolerable emotion (Schaverien, 2015).

The study refrains from making generalisations about the prevalence of trauma, recognising the uniqueness of each boarder’s experience. It is important to note that more severe psychological disorders frequently correlate with early trauma

(van der Kolk et al., 1991) instead of latency age trauma. Nevertheless, Schaverien (2021) claims that boarding school trauma is often underestimated, especially when abandonment, bereavement, captivity, and sexual victimisation are considered. Taking place over a long period, boarding could be described as complex post-traumatic stress disorder (Herman, 1992), which Partridge (2011) believes is caused by a lack of close relationships. This study does not address this phenomenon, but the description seems appropriate.

The study suggests psychic severance as if part of my psyche was removed and desensitised without my knowledge. While briefly mentioned in the literature (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Schaverien, 2011), this reminds me of Kalsched's (1996) description of trauma's inner world. According to Kalsched (1996), trauma is primarily a wound in one's capacity to feel. He quotes Kohut and Wolf's (1978) theory that "unshared emotionality" can cause relational trauma (p. 418). Dissociation protects vulnerable parts from unbearable feelings in this contact, leaving them adrift in the inner world. These descriptions seem relevant to the study's findings and warrant further investigation.

The clinical implications of this research suggest that when working with ex-boarders, it is essential to consider trauma- and dissociation-informed psychotherapy (Howell, 2020). Clinically, addressing dissociated self-states (Bromberg, 1998) and trauma stored in the body can assist clients in healing through assimilation (Howell, 2020). Future research could explore various modalities that encourage active dialogue between different self-states. In my experience, Internal Family Systems Therapy (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2019) is a practical framework for understanding and harmonising these internal parts. For instance, a clinician may prompt a dominant boarding school part (e.g., the "little soldier") to step back, allowing the therapist to engage in compassionate dialogue with a distressed, exiled part. Investigating the efficacy of different therapeutic models for boarding school survivors would be worthwhile.

Intellect's Grip

This study revealed the tenacity of the defence of intellectualisation. Throughout the process, it has consistently performed its function of drawing me away from feelings. As a form of isolation of affect, it can be functional but can also feel emotionally dishonest if it prevents genuine emotion (McWilliams, 2011). I have had to maintain vigilance in the face of something addictive, and I am reminded of an Alcoholics Anonymous description of this as: “cunning, baffling, and powerful” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001, p. 58). The finding corresponds to reports of boarding school survivors found in the literature. Schaverien (2011), in particular, emphasises how intellectualisation can be a barrier in therapy, noting that the therapist should be wary of being swayed by competent, self-assured ex-boarders. The ex-boarder may appear to participate in treatment and alliance with the therapist actively. This is similar to Winnicott's (1960) description, in which the false self may collaborate with the therapist to analyse defences, giving the impression of active participation in therapy. Therapists must be aware of these defences to avoid being misled by false perceptions of engagement. There is a real danger of being seduced by the ex-boarder's charm and consumed by intellectualisation. This subject would benefit from additional research into the broad spectrum of intellectualisation and its potential pitfalls for practitioners.

The Unseen Cultural Wall

This study illuminated a sinister and forbidding cultural barrier that had previously discouraged me from researching boarding schools. This internal barrier manifested in my dreams, including schoolmasters and old boys. This observation builds on existing literature about the institution's insular nature and role in the broader culture. Partridge's (2013) descriptions emphasise a sense of allegiance to a club or school. Duffell (2000), on the other hand, discusses the difficulties of overcoming normalised emotional avoidance and repression. While these arguments emphasise external barriers, my findings highlight internal ones. This research suggests an inner survival ecosystem in which some components are protective, others are distressed, and others manifest symbolically through

dreams. This is consistent with Kalsched's (1996) concept of a self-care system, wherein internal figures in dreams serve as archetypal defences. These internal protectors offer a form of imaginary self-parenting as a compensatory mechanism to fill the relational void. Exploring a *boarding school self-care system* from the perspective of former students could be both interesting and useful for clinical work.

The Power of Creativity

A critical discovery in this research is the power of dreams and poetry in allowing access to dissociated parts of the psyche. The dream descriptions of former boarders, as described by Jungian analyst Joy Schaverien (2015), were the first to bring this to light in the introductory chapter. While much of my involvement with the topic had been intellectual, reading her work made me feel something visceral – something in my body responded on an emotional level, and I continued to use creative methods after being inspired by this approach.

Exploring dreams allowed me access to feelings. Dreams opened a door to my inner world, inviting entry into something deeper, something mysterious. They also seemed to get past a cultural boundary, allowing me to be more self-compassionate. Dream exploration will enable the therapist to get around defences in clinical work with boarding school survivors. It can be viewed as a form of play that provides access to one's true self (Winnicott, 1971). While boarders may find play too childish for their adult sensibilities, dreamwork may feel more permissible, given the depth it appears to provide. Dreamwork also provides a way to work with dissociated self-states: as Bromberg (1998) notes, dreams are a medium through which disparate, dissociated self-states intersect and come into conflict. Delving into this idea could offer intriguing insights into how it influences the approach to addressing boarding school-related self-states.

Like dream exploration, poetry has granted me access to powerful emotional experiences that have felt re-integrative. The application of poetic inquiry in the context of boarding schools has yet to be explored in depth. According to

McGilchrist (2009), poetry, much like music, originates from the brain's right hemisphere, which predates prose in human communication. This hemisphere allows us to tap into how we feel in our bodies (Schoore, 2019) and is also the dwelling place of our true selves and emotional core (Schoore, 2019; Winnicott, 1965). Parts of the self that have been dissociated find refuge in the right hemisphere (Platt, 2007). Therefore, poetry bypasses analytical thought and provides a means to experience these dissociated emotional facets of the self directly. This study demonstrates that such an experience can be significant for boarding school survivors and warrants further research.

Implications of this Research

I hope that my thoughts on this introspective journey are clear and provide a sense of what it feels like to delve into one's innermost realms and rediscover parts that had been forgotten or unconsciously set aside. For practitioners, this could offer insights into working with those who have survived boarding school experiences. For those with a boarding school background, this narrative might echo their experiences and aid understanding and integration of this multifaceted phenomenon. By building upon existing literature, I aim to shed light on the emotional layers inherent in such experiences. The phenomenological exploration of mental fragmentation as a survival strategy in this study could enhance our understanding of this subject. It could also equip therapists with a richer perspective on the varied internal landscapes of their clients. Rather than identifying a single 'boarding school self,' I found myself amidst numerous 'boarding school selves'—evoking the idea of a rich ecosystem of diverse self-states. I hope future research will continue to delve into these ideas.

Limitations

The methodology chapter mentioned that heuristic research has a notable drawback: exploring subjective experiences makes it challenging to prevent the researcher's bias from affecting the results. However, since this research focused on examining my personal experience and did not intend to make any broad

claims, this limitation did not affect the study. I am satisfied with my decision to adopt a research approach that was both synergistic and applicable to psychotherapy (Sultan, 2019), as it ultimately resulted in a personally enriching and transformative experience. It is essential to recognise that the researcher's perspective may be limited by their socio-demographic background. Specifically, the study was conducted by a white, middle-aged, middle-class man from the United Kingdom, and it does not aim to represent a more diverse cultural experience. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of groupthink when reviewing literature from a similar demographic cohort and geographic region. Although this work was written from my adopted home in Aotearoa New Zealand, it did not examine the local experience of boarding schools. Boarding schools have a significant presence in former British colonies, including Aotearoa, New Zealand, and have played a problematic role in cultural assimilation, such as attempting to convert indigenous children into English-speaking Christians. Although this study does not focus specifically on Aotearoa, New Zealand, or local schools, I hope it will inspire further research into the impact of boarding schools in this country.

Final Thoughts

The dream that inspired this dissertation tells the story of a child thrust unexpectedly into adulthood, threatened by the intimidating gaps between the rungs of the ladder. While my boarding school self took steps to adapt and survive in this world, the cost was higher than I had anticipated. This journey has allowed me to delve into the depths of my interiority and reflect on my experiences. This

process has allowed me to connect with something deeply satisfying and reintegrative. Because of my children, I understand the importance of embracing the often-ignored spontaneous, creative, and emotional dimensions in the unexplored recesses of our inner world.

References

- Abram, J., & Hinshelwood, R. D. (2023). *The clinical paradigms of Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion: Comparisons and dialogues*. Routledge.
- Alcoholics Anonymous. (2001). *The big book: The basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous* (4th ed.). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services.
- Alighieri, D. (2003). *The divine comedy: Volume 1: Inferno* (Original work published 1314). Penguin Classics.
- Bion, W. R. (1962). *Learning from experience*. Routledge.
- Bromberg, P. M. (1991). On knowing one's patient inside out: The aesthetics of unconscious communication. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 1(4), 399-422, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10481889109538911>.
- Bromberg, P. M. (1998). *Standing in the spaces: Essays on clinical process, trauma, and dissociation*. Psychology Press.
- Bronowski, J. (1965). *Science and human values*. Harper & Row.
- Bronowski, J. (1978). *The origins of knowledge and imagination*. Yale University Press.
- Burrow, T. (1958). *A search for man's sanity: The selected letters of Trigant Burrow, with biographical notes* (W. E. Galt, Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Butler-Kisber, L. (2010). *Qualitative inquiry: Thematic, narrative and arts-based perspectives*. Sage.
- Chu, J. A. (1991). The repetition compulsion revisited: Reliving dissociated trauma. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 28 (2), 327–332, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-3204.28.2.327>.
- Churchill, W., & Barnes, M. T. (1930). *My early life*. Eland.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper Collins.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

- Douglass, B. G., & Moustakas, C. (1985). Heuristic inquiry: The internal search to know. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 25(3), 39-55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167885253004>.
- Duffell, N. (1995). Boarding school survivors. *Self & Society*, 23(3), 20-23.
- Duffell, N. (2000). *The making of them: The British attitude to children and the boarding school system*. Lone Arrow Press.
- Duffell, N. (2014). *Wounded leaders: The psychohistory of British elitism and the entitlement illusion*. Lone Arrow Press.
- Duffell, N., & Basset, T. (2016). *Trauma, abandonment, and privilege: A guide to therapeutic work with boarding school survivors*. Taylor & Francis.
- Gathorne-Hardy, J. (2014). *The public school phenomenon: 1597–1977*. Faber & Faber.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1978). *Focusing*. Random House.
- Gottlieb, M. (2005). Working with gay boarding school survivors. *Self and Society*, 33(3), 16-23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03060497.2005.11083883>.
- Green, E., Solomon, M., & Spence, D. (2021). Poem as/and palimpsest: Hermeneutic phenomenology and/as poetic inquiry. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, <https://doi.org/16094069211053094>.
- Hannay, M. (1976). "Surprised by joy": C.S. Lewis' changing attitudes toward women. *Mythlore*, 4(1), 15-20.
- Harlow, H. F. (1959). Love in infant monkeys. *Scientific American*, 200(6), 68-75, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican0659-68>.
- Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence - from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Howell, E. (2020). *Trauma and dissociation informed psychotherapy: Relational healing and the therapeutic connection*. WW Norton & Company.
- Husserl, E. (1913). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (W. R. Boyce Gibson, Trans. [1963]). George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Independent Schools Council (2022). *ISC census and annual report 2022* [Report]. ISC Research and Intelligence Team, Kent.
- Jung, C. G. (1965). *Dreams, memories and reflections*. Vintage.
- Kalsched, D. (1996). *The inner world of trauma: Archetypal defenses of the personal spirit*. Routledge.

- Khaleelee, O. (2018). Boarding School and Resilience. *Attachment*, 12(1), 61-70.
- Kohut, H., & Wolf, E. S. (1978). The disorders of the self and their treatment: An outline. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 59(4), 413-425, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429483110-10>.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1964). Healing. In V. De Sola Pinto & W. Roberts (Eds.), *The complete poems of D. H. Lawrence (Vol. 2)*. Heinemann.
- Madill, A., Jordan, A., & Shirley, C. (2000). Objectivity and reliability in qualitative analysis: Realist, contextualist and radical constructionist epistemologies. *British Journal of Psychology*, 91(1), 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1348/000712600161646>.
- Maslow, A. H. (1966). *The psychology of science*. Harper & Row.
- McGilchrist, I. (2009). *The Master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world*. Yale University Press.
- McWilliams, N. (2011). *Psychoanalytic diagnosis: Understanding personality structure in the clinical process*. Guilford Press.
- Ministry of Education, personal communication, March, 01, 2023.
- Moustakas, C. (1961). *Loneliness*. Prentice-Hall.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Sage Publications.
- Ogden, T. H. (2007). *This art of psychoanalysis: Dreaming undreamt dreams and interrupted cries*. Routledge.
- Ogden, T. H. (2014). Fear of breakdown and the un-lived life. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 95(2), 205-223, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12171_3.
- Palmer, J. (2006). Boarding school: A place of privilege or sanctioned persecution? *Self and Society*, 33(5), 27-36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03060497.2006.11086268>.
- Partridge, S. (2007). Trauma at the threshold: An eight-year-old goes to boarding school. *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, 3, 310-312.
- Partridge, S. (2011). British upper-class complex trauma syndrome: The case of Charles Rycroft, psychoanalyst and psychotherapist. *Attachment: New*

- Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, 5(2), 154-163.
- Partridge, S. (2013). Boarding school syndrome: Disguised attachment-deficit and dissociation reinforced by institutional neglect and abuse. *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, 7(2), 202-213.
- Platt, C. B. (2007). Presence, poetry and the collaborative right hemisphere. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 14(3), 36-53.
- Polanyi, M. (1958). *Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy*. Routledge.
- Polanyi, M. (1966). *The tacit dimension*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Polanyi, M., & Prosch, H. (1975). *Meaning*. University of Chicago Press.
- Power, A. (2007). Discussion of trauma at the threshold: The impact of boarding school on attachment in young children. *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, 1(3), 313-320.
- Power, A. (2013). Early boarding: Rich children in care, their adaptation to loss of attachment. *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*, 7(2), 186-201.
- Renton, A. (2014, May 14). The damage boarding schools do. *The Observer*, p. 20.
- Renton, A. (2017). *Stiff upper lip: Secrets, crimes and the schooling of a ruling class*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Rey, H., & Magagna, J. E. (1994). *Universals of psychoanalysis in the treatment of psychotic and borderline states: Factors of space-time and language*. Free Association Books.
- Romanyshyn, R. D. (2013). *The wounded researcher: Research with soul in mind*. Spring Journal Books.
- Rogers, C. R. (1980). *A way of being*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Schaverien, J. (2004). *Boarding school: The trauma of the 'privileged' child*. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 49(5), 683-705, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-8774.2004.00495.x>

- Schaverien, J. (2011). Boarding school syndrome: Broken attachments a hidden trauma. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 27(2), 138-155, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1752-0118.2011.01229.x>.
- Schaverien, J. (2015). *Boarding school syndrome: The psychological trauma of the 'privileged' child*. Routledge.
- Schaverien, J. (2021). Revisiting boarding school syndrome: The anatomy of psychological traumas and sexual abuse. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 37(4), 606-622, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjp.12677>.
- Schore, A. N. (2019). *Right brain psychotherapy*. WW Norton & Company.
- Schwartz, R. C., & Sweezy, M. (2019). *Internal family systems therapy*. Guilford Publications.
- Sela-Smith, S. (2001). *Heuristic self-search inquiry: Clarification of Moustakas' heuristic research*. Saybrook University.
- Sela-Smith, S. (2002). Heuristic research: A review and critique of Moustakas's method. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(3), 53-88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00267802042003004>.
- Stern, D. B. (1983). Unformulated experience: From familiar chaos to creative disorder. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 19(1), 71-99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.1983.10746593>.
- Stern, D. N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant*. Basic Books.
- Stern, D. N., Bruschiweiler-Stern, N., Harrison, A. M., Lyons-Ruth, K., Morgan, A. C., Nahum, J. P., Sander, L., & Tronick, E. Z. (1998). The process of therapeutic change involving implicit knowledge: Some implications of developmental observations for adult psychotherapy. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 19(3), 300–308. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(sici\)1097-0355\(199823\)19:3<300::aid-imhj5>3.0.co;2-p](https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1097-0355(199823)19:3<300::aid-imhj5>3.0.co;2-p).
- Sullivan, H. S. (1953). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. Norton.
- Sultan, N. (2019). *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically*. Sage Publications.
- Tudor, K. (2010). The fight for health: A heuristic enquiry into psychological well-being. *Unpublished context statement for PhD in Mental Health Promotion by Public (Published) Works, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University, London, UK*.

- van der Hart, O., Nijenhuis, E. R. S., & Steele, K. (2006). *The haunted self: Chronic traumatization and the theory of structural dissociation of the personality*. Norton.
- van der Horst, F. C. (2011). *John Bowlby - From psychoanalysis to ethology: Unravelling the roots of attachment theory*. John Wiley & Sons.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (1994). The body keeps the score: Memory and the evolving psychobiology of posttraumatic stress. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 1(5), 253-265, <https://doi.org/10.3109/10673229409017088>.
- van der Kolk, B. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
- van der Kolk, B. A., Perry, J. C., & Herman, J. L. (1991). Childhood origins of self-destructive behavior. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 148(12), 1665-1671, <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.148.12.1665>.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1945). Primitive emotional development. In *Through paediatrics to psycho-analysis* (pp. 145-156). Basic Books, 1975, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315831282>.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1954). Mind and its relation to the psyche-soma. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 27(4), 201-209, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8341.1954.tb00864.x>.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1960). The theory of the parent-infant relationship. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 41, 585-595.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1963). Communicating and not communicating leading to a study of certain opposites. In *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment* (pp. 179–192). International Universities Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429482410-17>.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1965). Ego distortion in terms of true or false self. In *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. (pp. 140-52), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429482410>.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. Psychology Press.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1974). Fear of breakdown. In C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, & M. Davis (Eds.), *Psychoanalytic explorations* (pp. 87-95). Harvard University Press, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429478932-19>.