A negative boarding school experience through the lens of therapists

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Contents

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own, except where due acknowledgement has been made. No part of this thesis has, to my knowledge, been submitted for examination by any other institution.

I agree that Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

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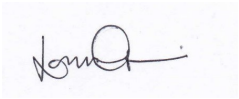

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List of Tables and Figures

Abstract

Background: Over the past 15 years the psychological impact of attending boarding school has become an area for discussion and research within the UK therapeutic community. Individuals' experience of boarding school can vary enormously. Questions of academic motivation, engagement and psychological wellbeing (Martin et al., 2014), adult attachment and resilience (Kucerova, 2016), attachment and trauma (Duffell, 2000; Duffell & Basset 2016; Schaverien, 2011) and the experiences of gay ex-boarders (Gottlieb, 2005) have all been addressed in the research literature. However, there appears to be a paucity of empirical data on individuals' experience of struggling at boarding school, particularly when the question is considered from the therapist's perspective.

Objective: The objective of this study is to investigate therapists' perceptions of clients who have had a negative boarding school experience. It aims to offer insight and understanding from experienced practitioners with knowledge of this area and contribute to the growing empirical literature on the boarding school experience.

Method: A qualitative design was used within this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine UK-based psychotherapists who had worked with clients who had struggled with a negative boarding school experience. Data from the interviews was then assessed using thematic analysis.

Analysis: Four themes and 12 corresponding sub-themes emerged from the data. These were: (1) "There is complexity to their experience"; (2) Being kept at an arm's length; (3) Difficult-to-reach clients; (4) "Privileged but emotionally starved": A group of clients who warrant attention.

Conclusion: The research captured therapists' perspectives on clients who had had a negative boarding school experience. It adds a therapeutic perspective to the growing wealth of empirical data on the subject. The results suggested that the complexity of a negative boarding school experience requires a level of specialist knowledge to resolve. Analysis also suggested that individuals experiencing distress might struggle to seek out therapy and that they might require multifaceted support. Perceptions of privilege within society appeared to put up further barriers to individuals accessing support. Arguably, the numbers of those seeking support will continue to grow despite the modernisations of these educational institutions. In summary, the findings suggest further awareness of the negative boarding school experience is needed within both the therapeutic community and wider public.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter will establish the context for my research. It will first provide a background on boarding schools in the United Kingdom (UK), touching on some of the current research about the boarding school experience. It will then give a brief outline of the aims and anticipated contributions of the research before sketching an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background: Setting the Scene

In the UK, boarding schools are a well-established institution embedded into British society, as well as a system that has been exported to many other countries including India, Australia, Canada, Africa, Pakistan and beyond. According to the Independent Schools Council (ISC, 2022) in 2022 there were approximately 441 privately run boarding schools in the UK. The boarding school is a semi-permanent institution providing students with education, accommodation, and food for up to nine months each year. Boarders can attend junior or preparatory school between the ages of seven and thirteen, and senior boarding or public school from eleven to eighteen-years-old. Boarders can board 'full-term', going home at the end of the academic year; 'termly board', going home at the end of the academic term; 'weekly board', going home at weekends; or 'flexibly board', boarding for one or two days per week and spending the remainder of the week at home. The number of children attending boarding school has remained constant over time; 69,525 children attended boarding school in 2000 compared to 69,347 in 2022 (ISC, 2000, 2022). While most students are full-term boarders, the number of termly and flexi boarders has trended upwards. Boarding appears to be more popular at sixth-form than at junior level with a reported 85% of sixth form boarders being full-term, 10% weekly and 5% flexi boarders. By contrast, more than half of junior school pupils flexi-board (ISC, 2022). The number of non-British boarders with parents living overseas is 25,079 (ISC, 2022).

Catering for around 7% of the British student population, boarding schools offer small class sizes, high-end facilities, extracurricular activities and a social network with other 'privileged' fellow students (Turner, 2015). According to Bronfenbrenner (1970), social contexts such as family, school and community provide opportunities for development and achieving goals. Boarding schools arguably offer something unique from day schools, including special facilities, socialising opportunities and cultural and continuing educational courses (BSA, 2016).

The psychological impact of boarding school, particularly early boarding, has become an area of increasing discussion and research within the UK therapeutic community. Individuals' experience of boarding school can vary enormously. Certain areas such as academic motivation, engagement and psychological wellbeing (Martin et al., 2014), positive quality of life effects (Steel et al., 2015), adult attachment and resilience (Kucerova, 2016), attachment and trauma (Duffell, 2000; Duffell & Basset 2016; Schaverien, 2011; Laughton et al., 2021; Simpson, 2018) and the experiences of gay ex-boarders (Gottlieb, 2005) have been addressed in the literature and research. Literature on negative boarding school experiences is becoming more mainstream and there has been recent research into the experiences of those seeking therapeutic support (Emerson-Smith, 2021). One publication offers guidance and insights for working therapeutically with individuals who have been impacted negatively by boarding school (Duffell & Basset, 2016).

There is contentious debate about boarding schools and how the institutions support or contribute to divisions in society by entrenching power, privilege, and elitism (Green & Kynaston, 2019; Turner, 2015; Verkaik, 2018). This is beyond the scope of the present thesis; I took an apolitical stance even though I am aware of this controversy. As a counselling psychologist in training, I am interested in psychological and relational questions. There are obviously different ways of exploring these, including through the client's perspective; however, there already appears to be a wealth of recent publications and research taking this focus. What seems to be missing is any research into the growing number of therapists working with clients who have struggled at boarding school. Therapists who work with this population have the potential to use their psychological and therapeutic lens to make sense of a client's experience and can thus offer a wealth of information to the field.

1.3 Purpose of the Study and Anticipated Contributions to the Literature

The objective of this study was to investigate therapists' perceptions of clients who had a negative boarding school experience. To caveat, this is not making the claim that all boarders experience distress. Instead, it acknowledges that there is a group of individuals who have struggled and who have sought therapeutic support either directly or indirectly, via their partners for example.

This study sought to understand how therapists conceptualised their clients' experience, the psychological processes they felt were at play in the therapeutic relationship, and what they found was challenging or beneficial when working with this client group. As a counselling psychologist in training, I hope the research will facilitate the transfer of insight and understanding from experienced practitioners with knowledge of the boarding school

experience to therapists and professionals in other settings. I also hope it will contribute to the growing body of empirical research on the boarding school experience and be a source of information those seeking support for themselves.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The following chapter outlines the relevant literature, including research into the boarding school experience and a discussion of attachment theory that I felt was pertinent to this study. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research methodology. It defines and justifies the critical realist ontology and phenomenological epistemology I adopted. It will then discuss my rationale for choosing thematic analysis as a research methodology before outlining the research design and data collection methods. I will then discuss ethical considerations and describe the process of data collection. The chapter will conclude with a description of the steps I took to ensure quality and trustworthiness in the research.

Chapter Four explains my findings. This includes the four key themes and the thirteen sub-themes. The identified key themes were: “There is complexity to their experience”; Being kept at an arm’s length; Difficult to reach clients; and “Privileged but emotionally starved”: A group of clients who warrant attention. Chapter Five discusses the findings alongside the existing research and literature. I will describe the strengths and limitations of the study as well as its implications for practice and recommendations for future research. Finally, I will present my reflections and conclusion.

1.5 A Note on the Definition of Terms

When referring to parents I always keep in mind that the child might be in the care of a guardian. I also refer to parents in the plural but am aware there might be one parent or caregiver involved in the upbringing of a child.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter will begin by discussing non-psychological literature on the boarding school experience, specifically sociological and historical research. I will then survey students' experience of boarding school, which appears to fall into three main camps: those who had a good experience, those with mixed feelings and those who struggled. The chapter will then discuss attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which feels relevant to consider alongside this study. Finally, I will outline the research question and objectives and explore my reflexivity.

2.2 Literature on the Boarding School Experience

The literature review aimed to offer a broad overview of literature on the independent boarding school experience. While not giving a comprehensive representation owing to word limit, it included what appeared to be the most cited publications. The search included both psychological and non-psychological literature. Various strategies were used including adopting a snowballing technique of checking reference lists in key publications. Various theses and dissertations in the area were acquired via contacts and others gained through ResearchGate or researching library catalogues. Different search terms were inputted into databases including PsycINFO, the Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection and the EBSCo eClassics Collection. The search words included 'boarding school', 'boarding school experience' and 'boarding school support'. The search for the words 'boarding school' alone yielded over 22,000 results. Many of the results were filtered out because they did not feel relevant for this study, as I discuss below. The search quickly filtered down to 800 and fewer when more specific search terms were applied such as 'independent boarding schools' and 'negative Independent boarding school experience'.

During the search process, I became aware of some considerations that should be noted when reviewing the data. Firstly, it seemed important to consider the reasons for sending a child to boarding school and how these differed between countries and communities.

Historically, some communities have been forced or coerced into sending children to boarding school. For example, indigenous children in Canada were sent away to be Christianised and re-socialised (Elias et al., 2012). Similar assimilation programmes were carried out in Alaska where Federal initiatives required rural Alaskan children to be socialised in state-run boarding schools (Hirshberg, 2008). Many of the results generated from my literature search related to research into this area. Whilst I acknowledge the importance of this data in reporting on diverse boarding school experiences, owing to the complex history of colonisation and the context of these indigenous groups, this data was

beyond the scope of this study and was thus not included in the literature review. My review also omitted UK special needs or state-run boarding schools. Instead, it focused on literature and research into independent boarding schools in the UK and similar international establishments perceived as 'privileged'.

In the UK, children are sent to independent boarding school for quite different reasons from those outlined above. Individuals are sent to access a 'top' education, extracurricular activities, and stability, especially prized by parents working overseas, in the military for example. Some individuals board because their parents themselves went to boarding school and they feel they want to offer their child the same educational opportunity (Duffell, 2000; Hodges et al., 2013; Schaverien, 2004). Others board due to geographical isolation, the provision of specialist courses or changes in family circumstances (for instance, divorce) (Hodges et al., 2013).

Notably, given the long history of boarding schools such as the King's School, Canterbury, which was founded in the year 598 (Gathorne-Hardy, 1977), there is limited literature and even less research carried out in this area. When reviewing data on independent boarding schools, it felt important to keep in mind the age a child is when they begin boarding school. Younger children are much more reliant on adults, so much so that we can see the detrimental effects on emotional development in those who attend preparatory school from ages six to eleven or thirteen when compared with those children who start boarding at secondary school age (Schaverien, 2011). Boarders who boarded from an early age might reflect very differently on their experience than those who boarded in their later adolescent years when independence is encouraged as part of a healthy identity development (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). Another consideration is that the research appears to capture data at varying stages in a person's life from pre-adolescence to adulthood. One could argue that older ex-boarders might have had more life experience and time to reflect on how their boarding school experience might have impacted on them.

Before exploring the more recent and predominantly psychological research, I will outline some of the historical and sociological literature on the boarding school experience. Gathorne-Hardy's (1997) publication charts the history of the boarding school from the fifteenth century to the 1970s. The book documents boarding school life from the early ages through to the public-school reform. As well as recounting history, it acknowledges issues around class, sexuality, social justice, and the ascent of female public schools. Chandos' (1984) publication chronicles boarding schools from the second half of the nineteenth century. Using various sources, he reports anecdotes on boarding school education, culture and life and asks what motivates parents to send their sons to boarding school. Looking

internationally, Brendon (2005) documented the narratives of British children living in India in the 19th and 20th centuries who were sent back to Britain to attend boarding school. The book touches on the personal stories of children who often had to stay for long periods in boarding school, owing to the distance from home. A later book by Brendon (2009) documented pupils' experience of boarding at prep school through letters, dairies, memoirs, poetry, and interviews. It offers testimonials from children as young as six on the challenges of living away from home in difficult and sometimes violent conditions in order to achieve a privileged education.

Turning to the sociological research, Lambert & Millman's (1968) study examined boarding school life through the writings of boarders and staff. The analysis offered a rich insight into boarding school life through the eyes of the resident children. Whilst not current, it does touch on relevant contemporary issues such as being separated from home, living in a single-sex environment, and living to a scheduled timetable 24/7. It also offers insights into the histories of some of the clients who might come to therapy. Further sociological research offered a descriptive exploration of the psychological impact and socialising function of 100 boys at boarding schools, reporting a less than favourable impression of the institutions (Wakeford, 1969). In later years, Hickson (1995) produced a publication that offered insights from over 100 contributors into their sexual experiences at boarding school, and the attitudes towards sexuality in the institutions. Regarding the female experience, Wober's (1971) social and psychological study investigated the social role of girls' boarding schools and how students experienced their time there. It explored what boarding school offered, who taught at them, the effects of a single-sex environment, and the impact they had on family life. Finally, Okely (1996), a British anthropologist, published a retrospective account of her own boarding school experience. She described the negative impact it had on her family relationships, the constraints of the system and how she felt it differed between genders.

Turning to more current psychological (and, to a lesser extent, sociological) publications on the boarding school experience, the literature appears to fall into three camps: those who see school as being the making of them, those that consider it a mixed experience and those who report it being a struggle. To maintain a broad and balanced overview it feels pertinent to discuss each of these areas.

2.2.1 The Making of Them

For some students, boarding school is the making of them, offering a positive experience, fostering independence, confidence, social skills and nurturing an independence and sense of community (BSA, 2022). Data from research carried out on boarders and ex-boarders

from international boarding schools in America (Steel et al., 2015), Australia (Martin et al., 2014) and Israel (Shulman & Prechter, 1989) will now be discussed.

2.2.1.1 American Boarders vs Non-boarders

One American study used several long-term quality of life estimates to compare boarding school with non-boarding school students as they entered university (Steel et al., 2015). The study found that ex-boarders benefited in both short and long-term quality-of-life positive effects. This was the case even when adjusting for the ex-boarders' apparent advantages in coming from a household with a higher level of education and income. It found that the ex-boarders were more likely to complete university compared to their non-boarding peers, leading to better outcomes in employment, income, health and other aspects of life (Steel et al., 2015). A German study investigated social development and the social relations of boarders compared to non-boarders between the ages of twelve and nineteen. They found the boarders perceived themselves as having more support from teachers and more autonomy from their parents, promoting a sense of independence. This is unsurprising given their physical distance from home (Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2016). Interestingly, even those boarders who perceived themselves as getting more support from their teachers than their parents still viewed having parental support as being more important than having teachers' support. This demonstrates the important role parents are perceived to play when the child is away at boarding school. The data arguably lacks qualitative insight into the boarders' experience. It would have been useful to have the answers to questions such as 'what is the experience of feeling more autonomous from your parents' or, 'what is the vital support a parent can provide compared to a teacher specially trained to work in the boarding school environment?' Additional information such as the attachment status of students to their parents might also be worth considering in light of these results.

2.2.1.2 Australian Boarders vs Non-boarders

One of the largest-scale boarding school quantitative studies to date is an Australian study that assessed boarders against non-boarders in relation to motivation, engagement and psychological wellbeing. They assessed students over a year, controlling for sociodemographic benefits and personality and found equivalent outcomes across both groups (Martin et al., 2014). Boarders scored higher on adaptive motivation, academic buoyancy and lower on absenteeism. With regard to psychological wellbeing, boarders showed higher scores on meaning and purpose, life satisfaction, participation in extracurricular activity and parent relations. One notable finding of the study was the boarders' positive perception of their relationship with their parents compared to day school students. Such findings come as a surprise when considering attachment theory (Bowlby,

1973), which led the authors to consider that perhaps boarders see periods with parents in the holidays, away from the stress of the school and studies as the “good times” (Martin et al., 2014, p.1038). Other commentators, such as Schaverien (2011), might argue that this outcome demonstrates that boarders rarely complain of the relationship with their primary caregivers, for fear of sabotaging their attachment with those far away from them. Whilst the research of Martin et al. (2014) outlines some of the notable benefits of boarding, there are some shortcomings to the data. Firstly, it does not include any in-depth accounts from boarders themselves, which might offer more insight into the boarding school experience. The study also includes students aged thirteen and above who might react very differently to those who started boarding earlier. The study also looked at current-day boarding school status and did not carry out any midterm or post-hoc follow-up research, which might have been useful to see if students’ reports differed over time. Finally, it was also apparent that the study was funded by the Australian Boarding School Association. This raises questions over the stakeholders involved in the process of the investigation and possible conflicts of interest.

Some report boarding schools manifest a certain symbolic ecological context, which bonds the individual to the collective (Chase, 2008). One mixed quantitative and qualitative sociological study looked at Australian boarders’ own perspectives (Cree, 2000). The study reported indoctrination and reinforcement of social status being established when new students arrive at boarding school, and explored how this impacted boarders’ development over their school years. Such findings provide a further rationale for carrying out longitudinal qualitative research: in order to include retrospective accounts of boarders, gain a true understanding of the boarding school experience and see if boarders maintain the same reflections of their time at boarding school after they have some life experience behind them.

Looking at other benefits of boarding school, it is unfortunately apparent that not all children come from a secure home, and for such children the boarding school can provide reprieve from an otherwise toxic and dysfunctional home environment or neighbourhood (Bowlby, 1951; Power 2007). One Israeli study found a greater prevalence of family-related risk factors (e.g., separation or divorce from parents) in boarding school pupils compared to their peers at day school (Shulman & Prechter, 1989). Perhaps boarding school was perceived as offering more security of attachment and continuity for students whose households might be going through periods of instability.

2.2.2 A Mixed Experience

The literature review also found studies that described both positive and negative experiences of attending boarding school.

2.2.2.1 Attachment and Resilience in Ex-boarders

Kucerova' s (2016) mixed methods study explored the impact early boarding has on attachment and resilience. Through a snowball sampling approach, the study interviewed 46 ex-boarders who were aged 35 years and above who had started boarding school before age 13. The results demonstrated a mixed response. Those that reported a negative experience of boarding school (24 participants) spoke of abusive staff, bullying and the impact boarding had on their functioning in close relationships. In contrast, those who felt boarding had been a positive experience (22 participants) perceived it as fun, stimulating and nurturing and as an opportunity to develop friendships and build resilience. The same group had less experience of bullying and did not feel boarding impacted on their functioning within close relationships. Interestingly, some of the positive group spoke of becoming overly self-reliant and unable to express emotions. The author suggested these findings might be impacted by class or the parental reluctance to express emotions (Kucerova, 2016). Some might suggest that this highlights a key characteristic of what Duffell (1995) calls a survival personality, which has been seen to emerge in some boarders seeking to protect themselves from vulnerability. Interestingly, both groups scored higher on attachment anxiety than on avoidance, which contrasts with other attachment research (Duffell, 2000). However, it has been acknowledged that life trauma might also play a role in that (Sroufe, 2005). The study also found surprisingly low resilience scores in the positive group, which goes against the assumption some boarders held that their experience nurtured their resilience (Jacobs, 2015).

The author acknowledged that the study does not explore other areas such as ethos of the school, the level of pastoral care and emotional support from parents, peers and staff that might explain the differences between the groups. Another limitation of the study is its small sample size, which prevents generalisation. However, the study does offer some empirical evidence on how an ex-boarder's developmental trajectory might unravel. It also encompasses retrospective empirical research into the early boarding experience, where there is presently a lack of research.

2.2.2.2 Resilience in ex-boarders vs non-boarders

A mixed methods study by Khaleelee (2018) explored the resilience of senior executives who had boarded and the impact this had on their home lives. The study challenged the notion that boarding encourages resilience. It compared 45 (randomly selected) senior executives who had boarded with 45 senior executives who had not. The defence mechanism test (DMT) was used to assess resilience in the face of stress. The test produces an outline of emotional development and shows which defences an individual uses

to protect themselves. Assessments showed 13% of the ex-boarders could be described as fully resilient. Unfortunately, it did not provide an outcome to this measure for the non-boarders but, nevertheless, 13% seems low. Results also showed that that 33% of the ex-boarders could not stay in touch with their emotional intelligence under pressure, compared to the 50% of the non-boarding executives. Several executives reported how their experience of boarding school had impacted their relationships including with family and friends and at work. Many acknowledged they had received a good education but that it came at a price. On a more positive note, the study found some executives who reported that their boarding school had become a safe space for them to escape from a difficult home environment. A general interpretation from the study was the impact early boarding had on individuals' ability to access their emotional intelligence when perceiving threats, which is interesting given the level of decision-making responsibility these individuals had. The study is also interesting in that it is based on empirical research and offers retrospective accounts of those who boarded. It also investigates a sample of adults who have had career success and might not otherwise investigate certain aptitudes.

2.2.3 Those Who Struggled

In addition to the negative sentiments outlined above, other challenges have been depicted in publications exploring ex-boarders' experience of clinical practice (Duffell & Basset 2016; Duffell, 2000; Schaverien, 2015, 2011, 2004; Simpson, 2018) as well as published personal accounts (Hoare, 2014; Laughton et al., 2021; Mair, 2005; Palmer, 2006; Partridge, 2007, 2013; Simpson, 2018; Stack, 2008) that looked at the experience of boarding from as young as five-years-old. Whilst I acknowledge most of this former data is based on case studies and processed through the commentator's own lens, akin to Freud's early research (McLeod, 2014), these researchers are psychotherapists, some with over 30 years of experience working with ex-boarders. I also acknowledge that psychotherapists, as researchers, have the emotional depth, breadth and reflective capacity to pinpoint and make good sense of the boarding school experience. Furthermore, I hold in mind that these observations and personal accounts might encapsulate the most negative experiences of boarding school and offer insight into some of the underlying presentations of clients who come to therapy.

2.2.3.1 Duffell

Duffel is a psychotherapist who has worked with ex-boarders individually and in groups for over three decades. He has taught at and attended boarding school himself. Duffell (1995) first coined the term 'Boarding School Survivor' in a publication for other therapists. He later published *The Making of Them* (2000), the first book to explore the psychological impact of

boarding school. Duffell reported how individuals who struggle with boarding school quickly learn to dissociate their feelings and construct a defensive organised self, which severely impacts their later life. Duffell (2000) describes how boarders can experience a sense of arrest in their development when they leave their homes to go to boarding school where there is an expectation for them to become "self-reliant pseudo adults" (p.244). He reports that this can have an impact in adulthood as individuals can experience a lack of self-integration as a result of not going through childhood and teenage years naturally. Duffell (2005) also reports boarding school children can be posed with a double bind whereby they are told how privileged they are to be at such an establishment, yet they are unhappy and cannot show these emotions for fear of being abandoned again. This leads them to view the situation not as they experience it, but how it is perceived by others. According to Duffell, the real experience of boarding school surfaces when the child becomes an adult. In some of his writings he describes how this can be disruptive not only for the individuals themselves but also those they lead. This is particularly true of those in positions of authority and government (Duffell, 2000). Duffell's 2014 publication *Wounded Leaders* takes a broader societal perspective on the boarding school system, bringing into question the characters and judgement of those who attended school and are now in government.

2.2.3.2 Schaverien

Schaverien (2011) is a Jungian psychotherapist who, like Duffel, has worked with ex-boarders for over 20 years. Schaverien first conceptualised the term 'Boarding School Syndrome' (2011), which is characterised as a cluster of psychological symptoms observed in adults who had been to boarding school. Boarding School Syndrome is described as impacting on the development of emotional literacy, the ability to understand the emotions of others and intimacy within close relationships. From her clinical experience, Schaverien found that children who began boarding early can experience a "sudden irrevocable loss of their primary attachments" (p.138), which can lead to significant trauma. She reported "bullying and sexual abuse by staff of other children may follow and so new attachment figures may become unsafe" (p.138). To maintain a sense of safety the individual develops a defensive shell around the true self, which can have serious implications in later life, particularly in relationships. Schaverien reports how intimacy issues are at the heart of ex-boarders' struggles.

Schaverien later published a book called *Boarding School Syndrome* (2015). The publication adopted a more rigorous enquiry into the psychological impact of a negative boarding school experience. Her research included case studies, interviews with ex boarders (who were not Schaverien's clients), unsolicited testimonials from adults who boarded and feedback from

colleagues she supervised. The book offers deep insight into boarding school syndrome and an exploration of the female boarding experience, which is lacking in the male-dominated literature. It also advocates the reframing of the boarding school experience from the perspective of the child, acknowledging homesickness as a form of mourning, captivity within an institution, feelings of homelessness, the impact on the body and issues around intimacy. This publication was written for professionals but would be of value to anyone interested in the area as it offers invaluable insight into individuals who struggled with their boarding school experience. However, from an empirical perspective it is not clear how systematic the method was, and there is little methodological information about the number of interviewees, for example. Finally, whilst other professionals supplemented the literature, their voices are not delineated, providing a further rationale for my desire to pursue research into therapists' conceptualisations of working with their clients.

2.2.3.3 Duffell and Basset

Duffell and Basset (2016) produced a publication to raise awareness and build support for psychotherapists, counsellors and other mental health workers working with those who had experienced psychological distress attributed to early boarding. Drawing on case histories, testimonials and clinical experiences over 25 years, the book offers insights and a practical guide with exercises to support clients. It advocates for a procedural framework through a process of recognition, acceptance and change. This seems to parallel trauma-focused interventions including remembering, reconnection and integration (Herman, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2014). It offers rich descriptions of common patterns of behaviour that ex-boarders may have used to adapt to their difficult experiences. The book is informed by theory and acknowledges areas that boarders might have struggled with and how they may be impacted in later life. The book draws on Duffel's own experiences of working with clients as well as material supplied by several contributors to and practitioners in the field. The book offers a rich contribution to a field that is growing in data, however, once again, it is not empirically based, thereby highlighting a gap in the research.

Basset (2018) later published his own personal account of boarding school, describing how his early childhood spirit was quashed by his school demanding he grow up quickly. He described the adaptions he made to support himself through ten years at boarding school and touched on how these have impacted his relationships and work. Drawing on data gained from his book with Duffell (2016), Basset appeals for homesickness to be recognised as a school sickness and for the impact of attending boarding school to be known and integrated within therapeutic training. The article offers a personal perspective but also calls for issues around boarding to become more mainstream within the therapeutic community.

Several therapists have written publications on their personal experiences of attending boarding school. Mair (2005) described his feelings of abandonment at being sent to boarding school, despite consciously understanding the practical implications. He touched on his coping strategies and how his sense of abandonment was exacerbated further in an attempt to avoid shame around his homosexuality. Partridge (2007) wrote a personal account of the experience of leaving for boarding school, his feelings towards his mother for sending him away and how he came to terms with his experience through therapy. Hoare (2014), another psychotherapist, described her challenges with boarding, the difficulty of leaving each term, the felt lack of privacy, experiences of bullying and how she felt ignored by both school and home. Finally, Stack (2008) described her seemingly delayed response to the experience of boarding, noting the impact it has had on herself as a person, with others, particularly her children, and her relationship with the outside world.

2.2.3.4 Personal Accounts

Following these personal publications on the boarding school experience, two books were produced, the first capturing female perspectives of boarding and the latter male accounts.

Simpson (2018) published an anthology of short autobiographical accounts by sixteen female ex-boarders who reported having a negative experience of boarding school. This anthology added to the gap in the literature on the female boarding school experience. Whilst each story offered a unique picture of emotional distress, notable key themes that arose through the text were loss, loneliness and abandonment, 'being sent away', staying safe and family transitions. Whilst there are key parallels with the male experiences – such as issues around intimacy – what was palpable the way shame was used to control female boarders. Whilst Simpson's (2018) work is not a clinical or academic piece, it does offer invaluable insight through witness testimonials of females who struggled with their boarding school experience.

The recent publication *Men's Accounts of Boarding School* (Laughton et al., 2021), is a collection of personal and individual stories written by men, some of whom boarded from as young as five, describing the impact they felt boarding has had on their lives as adults. The book includes men's recollections of being sent to board at an early age; their memories of boarding, and reflections on recovering from their negative experiences. The stories span a period of ten years: from growing up through to adolescence and adulthood and cover both UK and international boarding schools. The stories include themes of leaving home and confusion, sexuality within an all-boys environment, loss of privacy, learning to not need, and bullying and abuse. There is some acknowledgement of the opportunities boarding school offered but the consensus is that these came at a high cost for the authors, including

difficulties with trust, intimacy and the search for the self. The book offers insightful reflections by therapists working with this client group. It adds to the burgeoning body data on the boarding school experience and contributions from what appear to be a growing number of therapists who specialise in working within the field.

2.2.3.5 Bullying

Turning to empirical research, there is, as I have outlined, a growing number of publications acknowledging those who struggled at boarding school but there is also a lack of empirical data. Of the empirical data that exists, there appears to be a focus on bullying. Understandably, bullying can take place in day schools, but empirical research demonstrates that boarders are much more likely to be subjected to bullying since they are together in large groups for 24 hours a day, with fewer opportunities to disconnect from their peers. Pfeiffer & Pinquart (2014) carried out the first large-scale quantitative study into the prevalence of bullying amongst 300 adolescents attending nine boarding schools and 406 adolescents attending six-day schools in Germany. They found boarders were more likely to be bullied (through relational, overt bullying, perpetration, and victimisation) than the day school students. The study demonstrated that more time spent with peers can increase the chance of relational victimisation. Another US-based study explored 313 male and female boarders' perceptions of school bullying and emotional and physical safety and support (Fredrick et al., 2021). A strong association was found between perceiving high levels of bullying and feeling unsafe, and that mental health support had a strong impact on feeling safe. Amongst its limitations, the study acknowledged that the lack of diversity in its sample of boarding students meant it only captured a universal concept of bullying.

There is a lack of actual empirical evidence of biased-based bullying (i.e., bullying based on discrimination and prejudice). Instead, I turn to Gottlieb (2005), who carried out workshops with ex-boarders who went to boarding school from as young as seven-years-old, some of whom were at school prior to the era of The Wolfenden Report, or Section 28. Gottlieb (2005) describes how some men spoke of being sent away to all-boys boarding schools by parents who were disappointed in their child's sexuality and wanted to "make men of them", (2005, p.20). The men reported how they experienced boarding school as a profoundly homophobic environment. Whilst the data around bullying and reports might not be generalisable owing to sample sizes, it does illuminate the uniqueness of the boarding school experience and what might contribute towards boarders' difficult experiences.

2.2.3.6 Attachment Styles

Faulkner's (2018) qualitative research used discourse analysis to explore the adult attachment styles of two groups of ex-private boarders (14) and ex-private day school

students (12). The research found the ex-boarders had experienced more trauma than the day school group both before and after being sent to boarding school. The research found that all the ex-boarders who had come forward to take part in the study had a history of receiving psychodynamic therapy. Interestingly, both groups were found to have similar secure attachment strategies, leading Faulkner to speculate that therapy supported the ex-boarders in reorganising their attachment. The research concluded that feelings of abandonment at being sent away to boarding school – particularly before the age of thirteen – had a negative impact on the ex-boarders' mental health. Whilst this sample might not encapsulate the overall boarding school experience, it does give a snapshot of a group of ex-boarders who had experienced negative outcomes that were attributed to their boarding school experience.

2.2.3.7 Trauma on Adult Life

Research by Grundy (2021) explored the impact that trauma from boarding school had on the adult life of four participants who attended school before the introduction of the Children's Act 1989. The study explored how the individuals adapted to their boarding school experience and how these adaptations played out in later life. Key themes included loss, inexperience in relationships, being institutionalised by hierarchy rules and timetables and the perception of the self. Whilst the study is limited in scope, with just four participants, it does add a richness of data around the boarding school experience and further contributes to the academic research in the area.

In a more recent piece of empirical research, Emerson-Smith (2021) investigated the experiences of psychotherapy of 12 participants, all of whom had felt psychological distress related to attending boarding school. The research used semi-structured interviews, analysed using thematic analysis. Whilst the focus is on experiences of psychotherapy, the data offers key insights into those who struggled with boarding school and, interestingly, acknowledges, the term 'Boarding School Syndrome' as a form of psychological distress. From the literature I have read it feels quite progressive to see clinical psychology research using this term, which seems to appear most frequently in psychotherapy texts. This may reflect the growing attention being paid to the boarding school experience within the wider therapeutic community. If this is the case, it arguably provides further justification for more empirical research in this area.

Key relevant themes from Emerson-Smith's (2021) research include the validation of distress by an expert therapist who understands the nature of boarding school, a loss of identity deriving from the boarding school experience, a sense of denial, shame, and privilege as a barrier to therapy, loss of intimacy in relationships, the need for expert and

trauma-based interventions and, finally, the impact of acceptance through online or group interventions. As with Schaverien's (20015) and Duffell and Basset's publication (2016), Emerson-Smith's study validates the use of psychotherapy and offers further insights to help develop therapy in the field of boarding school distress, this time backed by empirical research.

2.3 In the Media

Aside from academia, the boarding school experience has gained attention from the mainstream media. Several television documentaries highlight the impact on students attending boarding school, with two focusing on the early boarding. A documentary called *The Making of Them* (Luke, 1994), followed a group of boys starting at prep school. It interviewed the boys, teachers and parents about their thoughts and experiences of boarding. It also interviewed adult ex-prep boarders, who gave retrospective accounts of their experience of boarding school. There was a sense that, despite the modernisation of boarding schools, young boarders were still very attached to their homes but their parents, some of whom had boarded themselves, felt it was the best opportunity for them. The documentary portrayed how it was apparent that the actual impact of a student's boarding experience surfaced many years after they had attended school.

The documentary *Leaving Home at 8* (Russell, 2010) followed four girls through their first term at preparatory school, capturing some of the challenges of homesickness and settling in. The film showed how the parents, especially the mothers, experienced the transition of their children going away to board and how at various points in time they questioned if they had made the right decision. Both this and the above documentary posed the question of how young is too young to be sent to boarding school.

A later documentary called *A Very English Education* (Berryman, 2013) interviewed men who had finished school 35 years previously about their boarding school experience in a sequel to a previous documentary that showed them as children at boarding school. Once again, the film offered an insight into the impact of what boarding schools seem to pride themselves on: the making of independent individuals who appear contained and, at times, shut off from their vulnerability. Whilst the experience in the documentaries cannot be generalised to the boarding school population at large, they do offer a useful visual snapshot of what boarding school life might have been like for some in previous decades.

2.3.1 Abuse

Finally, a more extreme and darker experience of boarding school was depicted in a documentary called *Chosen* (Woods, 2008). In this film, three men described in depth the

sexual abuse they suffered during their boarding school years in the 1960s and the impact it had on their lives. A news publication later reported Alex Renton's (2014a) personal history of the abuse he experienced at boarding school. Renton wrote a follow-up article documenting the responses he received from individuals who had had similar experiences (2014b).

In summary, there is growing data, particularly from the last fifteen years, looking into negative experiences at boarding school. Before I discuss gaps in the data and the intentions of my study, it feels important to touch on some psychological theories that seems relevant when researching a negative boarding school experience.

2.4 Psychological Theory

I used a relational psychodynamic developmental lens when considering psychological theory within the context of a negative boarding school experience. I considered psychological theories primarily including attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Wallin, 2007), theories of self-psychology (Kohut, 1971), intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996), the concept of multiplicity of self (Bromberg, 2012), infant development research (Stern,1985), affective neuroscience theories and research (Schore, 1994; Siegel 1999). For reasons of brevity, some of these theories will be discussed below and others later in the discussion. These theories not only felt pertinent for the context of exploring the experience of individuals, some as young as eight, being separated from their parents for long periods of time but also sit within the relational psychodynamic lens and my way of working.

2.4.1 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory describes how relationships provide a fundamental context for a secure emotional development across a lifespan. Some describe the theory as potentially the most important developmental construct ever researched (Sroufe et al., 2005) and it has gained much attention and support within the field of affective neuroscience (Schore, 1994; Siegel 1999).

Attachment theory describes an infant's innate motivational system to maintain physical proximity with caregivers who provide safety and support (Bowlby, 1969). Through attachment seeking behaviours such as crying and clinging the infant tries to attract the caregiver to support their biological need for protection. This safety regulating system is a survival need gained through a reciprocal process, bonding the child with their caregiver. The goal is the reassurance of the caregiver's ongoing availability. Through this process the infant develops 'internal working models' (Bowlby, 1969) or relational templates (Schore, 1994), based on their interactions with their caregivers. The internal working models will

influence an individual's future relationships with their self and other. They differ with regards to how the individual perceives and manages intimacy, how they communicate their emotions and needs, how they manage conflict and their expectations of a caregiver.

In optimal conditions, the caregiver demonstrates sensitivity, attunes to the child's affective states through coregulation, acting as a secure base for an infant to go and explore (Schore, 2009; Siegel 1999). The infant gains the security and healthy coping strategies such as independence, social competence, empathy, mentalisation, self-efficacy and resilience to manage adverse circumstances and learns to expect support from others (Bowlby, 1973, 1977, 1997; Schore, 1994; Wallin, 2007). Securely attached adults are comfortable with intimacy and are not worried about rejection or abandonment (Wallin, 2007).

Non-optimal caregiving or negative attachment experiences may force a child to adapt sub-optimally and attach to whatever is available, resulting in them feeling vulnerable (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Children with an anxious/preoccupied attachment might experience intrusive or controlling caregiving, which can make a child feel overstimulated, encouraging attention-seeking behaviours in periods of distress (Ainsworth et al., 1978). As adults they appear anxious and preoccupied in relationships, craving closeness, and approval (Wallin, 2007). Children with an avoidant/dismissive attachment might experience their caregiver as unresponsive to their needs, making them feel anxious and like they must suppress their emotions and distance themselves from others (Ainsworth et al., 1978). As adults they appear uncomfortable with closeness and struggle to trust and depend on others, opting for independence and self-sufficiency (Wallin, 2007). Finally, the disorganised/unresolved attachment child might have experienced a threatening caregiving environment when the caregiver is experienced as frightening. This is often found within an environment of trauma and or abuse (Main & Solomon, 1990). Here the child may demonstrate ambivalent and fearful behaviour such as anger or freezing. Insecure attachments can impact on an individual's feelings of security within their self and their relationships with others. Whilst self-protective patterns may provide support in childhood, problems can arise later in life when relational patterns become rigid, impacting on healthy functioning (Johnson, 1994). They can also impact on an individual's ability to effectively respond to life changes and make them more predisposed to developing mental health problems (Bowlby, 1971; Doyle & Cicchetti, 2017; Fonagy, 2001).

It is pertinent to mention that attachment theory acknowledges that, culturally, there are different ways of providing attuned attachment. Differences in style between secure attachments has been found in the Netherlands and the United States (US) (Van Ijzendoorn, 1986). The study found infants in the Netherlands gained security whilst they remained at a

distance from their caregiver when compared to US infants who were found to be more tactile. In terms of insecure attachment styles, children were more likely to be ambivalent in Japan (Takahashi, 1990) and more avoidant in Germany (Grossmann et al., 1981).

Attachment patterns are thought to remain relatively constant over time but are not necessarily fixed (Bowlby, 1982, 1988). They might change negatively within the context of stressful life events or experiences such as parental loss, or separation, unemployment, poverty and other stressors on the parent which might impact on the parental sensitivity of attachment with the child (Schoenmaker et al., 2015). Equally, attachment patterns might be impacted positively through an earned secure attachment via a positive experience in new relationships such as an alternative support figure (Saunders et al., 2011), a stable romantic partnership (Crowell et al., 2002; Hesse, 1999) or with a therapist whilst attending effective psychotherapy (Brisch, 2012; Saunders et al., 2011; Wallin, 2007).

A longitudinal study on adopted adolescents found the sensitivity of maternal support through early childhood development and adolescence predicted the continuity of secure attachment across the first fourteen years of life (Beijersbergen et al., 2012). These findings concur with the notion that attachment is a human need that remains significant across a lifespan from infancy, through adolescence and into adult maturity (Bowlby, 1980). During early to middle childhood the attachment relationship remains central, with a parent developing from non-verbal behaviours into a goal-directed partnership and co-constructed experiences (Bowlby, 1973). By adolescence the attachment needs begin to be directed away from parents and toward peers and people in school, university, work and romantic partners (Allen, 2008; Steinberg, 2010). Some adolescents may loosen the tie to their parents or stay very attached, unwilling, or unable to seek attachment from others. However, most adolescents fall in between the two poles: parents play a role whilst other peers are also important (Ainsworth, 1979). Despite there being a potential shift away from the parent as attachment figure, the adolescent and adult still rely on that attachment figure to provide care and protection (McConnell & Moss, 2011).

2.4.2 Self Psychology

Self-psychology (Kohut, 1971) describes the importance a present attuned caregiver has in supporting an infant in developing a healthy sense of self. Kohut (1971) outlines what an infant requires from a parent to support the development of the self. These include mirroring, idealising and twinship which all reflect the self-object needs of the infant. In an optimal environment when needs are met, the infant develops a sense of self with an ability to self sooth and self-regulate through life.

2.4.3 Affect Regulation Theory

Schore's (2009) affect regulation theory outlines the importance of affect regulation in healthy human development from infancy through to adulthood including emotional regulation and resilience. Schore (2009) describes how important it is for a securely attached caregiver to sensitively attune and respond to an infant's experience and how this enables the child to integrate an emotional experience which supports the formation of an implicit self. This theory is supported by developmental neuroscience and offers insights into the impact early trauma can have on affect regulation and how this can disrupt the development of the self which might lead to emotional dysregulation and psychopathology.

2.5 My Research Question and Research Aims

In the five years since I began my exploration into this field, there have been some key publications about people who have struggled with their boarding school experiences (Emerson-Smith, 2021; Grundy, 2021; Laughton et al., 2021; Simpson, 2018). In my opinion this suggests that interest in the boarding school experience is gaining momentum both in the therapeutic field and in the mainstream, further supporting the need for more empirical research.

As previously mentioned, most of the publications to date have come via clinical work, case histories and personal testimonials. Whilst rich in information, these are not empirical studies. The literature also seems to have been dominated by key figures in the boarding field, namely Duffell (1995, 2000, 2014) and Schaverien (2004, 2011, 2015). But what of the growing number of therapists who are specialising in the area? What of their voices and the sense they make of their clients' experiences? Granted, some of these voices were heard in Laughton et al. (2021) but there has been no empirical research in this area. Interviewing therapists who specialise in boarding schools using empirically based research has the potential to capture a particular richness in data that could support others looking to work in the field.

As I reflect on the literature, it is apparent to me that a negative boarding school experience had gained more attention in the psychotherapeutic than psychological domain until the most recent clinical psychology research into 'Boarding School Syndrome' by Emerson-Smith (2021). Schaverien's (2011) 'Boarding School Syndrome' was never intended to be a means of pathologising individuals, however, it does offer a cluster of symptoms or a construct for psychology to adopt in research.

Considering the voices of therapists who worked with ex-boarders, I explored therapists' perspectives on clients who had had a negative boarding school experience. As a practicing psychotherapist and trainee counselling psychologist, I hoped the research would contribute to the growing empirical data in the field, supporting those in both the psychotherapeutic and

psychological domains. I also hoped the research would contribute to 'practitioner research' (McLeod, 2014), with the aim of enhancing therapeutic practice.

Therefore, the aim of the study is to investigate therapists' perceptions of clients who had a negative boarding school experience.

The research objectives are to:

1. Understand therapists' perspectives on clients who had had a negative boarding school experience.
2. Explore what psychological processes are at play in the therapeutic relationship.
3. Identify what therapists consider to be positive or beneficial when working with this client group.

2.6 Reflexivity

When I first began to explore and discuss the boarding school experience as a research area, I came across some varied and, at times, quite polarised views from friends, colleagues and tutors, some who had themselves attended boarding school or knew others who had attended. Considering this, I wanted to be aware of the literature on varying experiences, to gain as much understanding of the boarding school experience as possible. I therefore endeavoured to begin with a broad literature review before narrowing down to the nub of where I intended to take the research.

In terms of research, I initially considered interviewing individuals who had struggled with their boarding school experience. I then felt that looking at the question through a therapist's lens might offer a different stance. Furthermore, through my initial enquiries, I became aware of two forthcoming publications on individuals' perspectives on boarding school. Given that two books would give detailed accounts of men and women's experiences of boarding school and considering the existence of research into clients attending therapy as a result of negative boarding school experiences, I felt reassured about my choice to research the area from a therapist's perspective. I hoped it would add value to growing data in the field.

In the process of carrying out my literature review, I became aware of several publications by therapists who had a negative boarding school experience and of the number of therapists who specialised in the field who were themselves ex-boarders. I appreciate ex-boarders have a first-hand experience of boarding school life and understand how that can offer great value to a client. However, I am also aware it may consciously and unconsciously influence the lens through which the therapists look and I kept this in mind with regards to the participants in my study.

A note on some of the content of the literature review: I was quite shocked and incredibly moved by what were, at times, harrowing testimonials by boarders. Particularly those coming from the time when child safeguarding, and protection laws (such as The Children's Act, 1989) were not at the forefront. I was moved as a person and therapist but mostly as a parent of a now thirteen-year-old boy, as I am closely observing the developmental needs of children this age and younger. It also made me reflect on the environment and challenges my husband might have faced as an early boarder, and my brother who boarded later. I wondered to what extent they might have reflected on their experiences and the potential for some difficult experiences to become normalised as being part of regular boarding school life.

With regards to my choice of research objectives, I endeavoured to gain a picture of a negative boarding school experience from the therapist's perspective. Reflecting back on these objectives, I am mindful of their strong focus on the client's vulnerabilities. I am aware that this client group might also demonstrate strengths and resilience as a result of their experience but arguably this was not pursued directly as an objective. For example, adaptive processes such as dissociation can have a survival function in the face of trauma as well as a positive function in the absence of any other coping strategy for stressful situations (Sinason, 2020). I consider adaptive strategies such as dissociation as presenting on a spectrum from helpful such as a temporary escape from a stressful situation to unhelpful when it impacts on an individual's daily functioning and wellbeing.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

3.1 Outline

The aim of this research is to explore therapists' perspectives on clients who have had a negative experience of boarding school. The study aimed to understand 1) therapists' perspectives on their clients' experience 2) the psychological processes at play in the therapeutic relationship, and 3) what therapists consider to be challenging, positive or beneficial when working with their clients. The research aimed to contribute to the growing literature on the adult lived boarding school experience. More specifically, it aimed to create a picture of a sample of therapists experienced in working with ex-boarders who have had a negative experience, thereby offering some insight to the therapeutic community.

Considering the research aim and objectives, the focus of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the process of the research by firstly describing the philosophical stance I adopted. It then outlines the choice of research methodology I deemed most appropriate for my research objectives. Next is a discussion of the research design and data collection. Ethical considerations are then explained before I describe the process of data analysis. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how I aimed to ensure quality and trustworthiness throughout.

3.2 Philosophical Stance

When conducting research, it is essential to outline the researcher's epistemological position (Walsh, 1995). It is important the reader is aware of the type of knowledge the research aims to produce and the assumptions that guide the creation of knowledge. This section will firstly outline my ontological position before discussing my epistemological assumptions.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology addresses the question "what is the form and nature of reality, and what can be known about that reality" (Ponterotto, 2005, p.130). The ontological positioning encapsulates a range of perspectives from 'realist/positivist' at one end of the continuum to 'radical constructionist' at the other (Madill et al., 2000). According to the 'realist/ positivist' stance, an objective reality or absolute truth exists, and a person's word is a direct conduit to that reality of the experience (Willig, 2013). Within realism, a further three categories have been identified, including 'naïve', where the world can be known as it is (outlined above), and the 'scientific' which argues that the scientific method can produce true representations of the world. Finally, 'critical realism' where the perception of truth is impacted by beliefs and expectations thereby acknowledging an inherent subjectivity in the production of the knowledge (Madill et al., 2000).

This research adopts a critical realist approach, postulating that a reality 'exists' around the phenomenon being investigated, namely a negative boarding school experience, but that it is only imperfectly apprehensible, and thus we cannot know it with certainty (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Critical realism came out of the positivist and social constructionist paradigm wars of the 1980s (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Bhasker (1998) introduced a critical realist stance that rejects the positivist idea that 'reality' is limited to what is already known through empirical studies. It similarly rejects a constructionist view that endorses the notion of reality as being solely constructed by human knowledge and discourse. Instead, critical realism acknowledges there are theories in the world but that the world is not determined by theory. It embraces the opportunity for new social and scientific developments through studies that might offer fresh insights into a research area. In doing so, it rejects the positivist notion of an absolute truth, instead supporting the view that several different subjective interpretations of reality exist. Critical realism is the ontological positioning I adhere to as a trainee counselling psychologist and psychotherapist. I believe human experience is complex and multi-layered and constructed by multiple perspectives. At the same time, my work with clients is informed by theories such as attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Wallin, 2007) and affective neuroscience (Schore, 1994; Siegel, 1999).

With regards to this research, it was my belief that through interviews I could access the participants' subjective views on their clients. I acknowledged and respected that the participants were therapists who had been trained to develop their reflective capacities and had knowledge of social and psychological mechanisms that they could draw on to reflect their experience of the reality of working with ex-boarding school clients. However, I also keep in mind the fact that the data is interpreted through the lens of the researcher's (i.e., my own) prior knowledge and assumptions. Consequently, the research intends to acquire data about a reality that exists in the world, but it acknowledges that the information gained is subjective and might not represent a direct mirror of that reality.

3.3 Epistemological Position

Epistemology is an area of philosophy focused on the theory of knowledge and truth and how we attain that knowledge. It considers the relationship between the 'knower' (research participant) and the 'would be knower' (researcher) (Ponteretto, 2005). When carrying out research, the researcher must identify their epistemological stance, as this supports whether the data gained by the researcher will be effective (Willig, 2012). Epistemologically, using the critical realist stance, I attempt to understand and lightly interpret the participants' perspectives on their clients by adopting a phenomenological framework (Willig, 2012). Phenomenology attempts to "capture as closely as possible the way in which a phenomenon is experienced within the context in which the experiences take place" (Giorgi & Giorgi,

2003, p.27). The approach aims to produce knowledge about human subjective experience by describing and making sense of things, as opposed to explaining 'why'. It is concerned with capturing something that exists in the world, in this case the therapists' perceptions of their clients' negative experience of boarding school.

Some differentiate phenomenology into descriptive and hermeneutic or interpretative categories (Finlay, 2009; Willig, 2012). According to Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, to fully make sense of a phenomenon "we must go back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1970, p.252). Husserl advocated meeting a phenomenon in as fresh a way as possible and bracketing off one's own preconceptions. Applying this to the present research, the researcher would be connecting directly and immediately gaining a sense of a phenomenon based entirely on a participant's account of it, instead of thinking about it or applying theories or judgement. This is known as the descriptive approach.

An alternative to the descriptive approach is the interpretative or hermeneutic method, which this research adopted. This approach emerged from the work of philosophers such as Heidegger (1962), Ricouer (1981) and Gadamer (1996) who argued that people are embedded within a world of language and social relations and that this world is integral to making sense of a phenomenon. Heidegger described human existence as a process of 'Dasein', meaning 'being-in-the-world' and viewed this as perspectival, as always being in relation to something. In making this assertion, Heidegger discounted Husserl's notion of bracketing, instead outlining that interpretation was integral to the phenomenological approach. Some contemporary researchers argue that all research is interpretative and guided by the researcher on some level (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Consequently, meanings around a phenomenon are always emerging, historical and contextual and, thus, never fixed. When applied to research, "what influences these meanings and perspectives must be foregrounded as the researcher becomes instrumental to the analysis" (Nowell et al., 2017, p.2.) Therefore, a researcher engaging in interpretive/hermeneutic research needs to be reflective about how their knowledge, experience and assumptions might impact the research (Finlay, 2009). I am aware that much of the literature around a negative boarding school experience adopts a political stance. Whilst I acknowledge this and understand why it does so, I steered away from the political, choosing to stay close to the human experience, hence my adoption of a phenomenological stance. I looked at the question as being about a group of people who were seeking support for emotional difficulties. I felt that adopting this stance would be beneficial to the therapeutic community.

An interpretative phenomenological stance underpins my work as a trainee counselling psychologist and psychotherapist. I work using relational, developmental, and contextual

perspectives. I draw on theories such as intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Stern, 1985; Winnicott, 1965), self-psychology (Kohut, 1971) and, as mentioned earlier, I am informed by affective neuroscience (Schore, 2004; Siegel, 1999). Working within an intersubjective setting I acknowledge the client's social, cultural, political and historical background. Alongside this, I also bring in my roles as a mother, wife, daughter, sibling and aunt, as I seek to make sense of the client's experience at the implicit and explicit level. Whilst I attempted to interpret the data in this research lightly, I was aware that these were the lenses through which I looked at it. Applying reflexivity, I endeavoured to be transparent about my thoughts and influences throughout the process.

The interpretative phenomenological epistemology parallels contextualist epistemology (Tebes, 2005), which retains the view that there is a notion of 'truth' but that it is subjective and that various accounts of reality are possible. It acknowledges knowledge cannot be separated from the knower, or the researcher's values and practices and asserts that the researcher must be reflexive so there can be transparency in the interpretations and meaning making. According to Braun and Clarke (2022) contextualism maps well onto a critical realist ontology situating itself between positivism and constructionism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994) in the same way critical realism positions itself between realism and relativism. In the same vein, I find phenomenology (a framework applied in this research) maps well onto a critical realist stance in that both acknowledge a notion of a 'reality' but agree that it is subjective.

3.4 Choice of Research Methodology

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Given the nature of the research, I felt a qualitative investigation was appropriate in order to gain a comprehensive and in-depth record of the participants' words and actions and what they all had in common (Willig, 2013). Qualitative research aligns well with counselling psychology's philosophical stance and its emphasis on the subjective experience of individuals and caution against one way of knowing (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). According to Camic et al. (2003), qualitative research is also useful when researching an area that has not been previously researched. To the best of my knowledge, no research has been carried out into negative boarding school experiences from therapists' perspectives. Considering that this research looked at therapists' perspectives with the aim of developing themes across the data, thematic analysis (TA) was the chosen research methodology. TA creates knowledge in the form of themes derived from codes that capture meaning and make sense of the phenomenon being researched (Willig, 2013).

Epistemologically, TA offers a “theoretically flexible approach” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78) and can therefore work with a critical realist perspective and phenomenological stance, maintaining the assumption that the participants tell me what is going on in ‘reality’ but I do not take that at face value and instead explore it through my own prior knowledge and assumptions. TA also supports the analysis of individuals’ perspectives, outlining similarities and differences between them, leading to the discovery of unexpected insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004).

The research followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2013, 2022) reflexive TA approach, which conceptualises themes into meaningful patterns in a step-by-step, nonlinear approach. Whilst as a researcher I brought knowledge, my own stance and psychological lens, the research required the use of an inductive approach to coding in which codes and themes come from the data. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

3.4.2 Alternative Research Methodologies

I also considered several alternative methodologies for this research, including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA focuses on the individual' lived subjective experience of a particular phenomenon. At the start of the research, I considered if IPA was an appropriate method for gaining information from therapists. Upon further reflection, I acknowledged that this research would focus on negative boarding school experiences, as seen through the lens of therapists. Therapists make sense of another person’s experience, and the data was not therefore a first-person account. For this reason, IPA did not feel like the right approach. Whilst I employed a phenomenological framework in terms of epistemology towards the data, I was not solely focusing on the subjective responses of the therapists. I was also looking at the context around some of these data (e.g., psychological, and social), as well as evaluating the whole dataset for meaningful patterns, which aligns with the TA method, as opposed to the IPA approach of analysing data individually. IPA is also theoretically bound to a phenomenological epistemology in which the researcher is reporting solely what the participants think about the phenomenon being researched. I liked the theoretical flexibility of thematic analysis that allowed me to approach the research question from my own chosen epistemology and apply theories such as attachment theory (Ainsworth et al.,1978; Bowlby, 1969; Wallin, 2008) without having any single a-priori assumptions about what could be learned from the data (Willig, 2012).

An alternative and popular qualitative methodology to consider might have been grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). Whilst this approach also looks for themes, it seeks to develop an overarching response that might contribute to an explanatory theory (Willig, 2013). I felt that using grounded theory and making any claims of an overall theory

went beyond the capacity of the thematic analysis, which, at this stage, felt more exploratory. However, this might be something that could be considered for future research. Grounded theory also approaches research without a theory and, whilst this study is inductive and content driven, I did keep some developmental theories such as attachment theory (Ainsworth et al.,1978; Bowlby, 1969; Wallin, 2007) and self-psychology (Kohut, 1971) in mind as I approached the research.

3.4.3 Limitations of Thematic Analysis

I understand thematic analysis is not without its limitations, one of them being that it is not a distinctive method. Considering its theoretical flexibility, I as the researcher understood I needed to carry out some conceptual work before the research began (Willig, 2013). This process took me some time to wrestle with, but, upon consideration, I arrived at a critical realist perspective, in which I felt the data would tell me something about negative boarding school experiences but understood that this was subjective (Willig, 2013). Given the subjectivity of the data, both the participants' and my own, I endeavoured to thoroughly question the latter through reflexivity and feedback my thoughts and positioning. Conscious of being rigorous throughout the analytical process, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach. This offered step-by-step phases to conceptualise themes in meaningful patterns. In doing so, I aimed to avoid the pitfall of reporting back a list of themes and paraphrasing comments, a common limitation of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). I also followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis.

3.5 Reflexivity on My Positioning as the Researcher

I acknowledge that "a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of the investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (Malterud, 2001, p.483). In this case, the fact that I acknowledge a negative boarding school experience 'exists' as a phenomenon to be investigated demonstrates that I believe there is a 'reality' but one that it is not totally objective, thus I am adopting a critical realist positioning.

I am aware that subjectivity influenced my interest in this research area and I was therefore mindful from the outset of the need to question my experiences, assumptions and beliefs and consider the way they shaped how I connected to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). My lived experience of being an individual with close contacts to people who had had positive, negative, and mixed experiences of boarding school, as well as a therapist who has worked with ex-boarders who struggled with boarding school, could not be completely divorced from

the project. I did not board but given that I know many who did, including my husband who boarded from age eight, and brother from thirteen, I find the notion of boarding of interest to me. I have a memory of dropping my brother back to school on a Sunday evening and seeing a ripped teddy tied to an outside window. I recall finding this somewhat alarming. This coupled with the odd report of other pupils having their heads flushed down the toilet by an older prefect seemed very strange and frightening. Equally, I recall hearing of many fun events that took place between my brother and his friends particularly 'after hours'. I acknowledge my brother made some long-lasting friendships from his boarding school days. I wondered to what extent having lived with friends away from home, form the age of 13 to16 years, might have shaped the quality and depth of his friendships.

My husband boarded from 8 to 17 years of age. I note how prior to us having children I was struck by his ambivalent attitude towards boarding so early and his overall experience. I wondered to what extent the environment shaped him and his indifferent 'get on with it' attitude. Whilst arguably this perhaps spoke to a level of resilience, I wondered if there were some unprocessed experiences. I noticed he reflected more when our son turned eight and how he found himself curious to know why he boarded so young. From 14 years onwards, my husband speaks fondly of his boarding experience and how he enjoyed the independence, sport opportunities and living with close friends. Overall, there is a sense that developmentally 14 years onwards was a better age for my husband to board. However, I make no judgements and remain conscious of my thoughts around this and made of point of holding it lightly and in my awareness throughout the research process.

Reflecting on the lens that I adopt; I acknowledge that as a result of my training I have a particular interest in relational developmental theory and have integrated this into my work. Watching my two children grow up whilst I have been training has helped me concretise my understanding of child development. Over the years I have been researching the boarding school experience, I have observed my children, of an age at which they could have gone to boarding school, with a sense of curiosity about how they might have managed separation and a new environment. I also note my time spent as a therapist hearing the history of two clients who both struggled with their boarding school experience. Working with these clients further spurred me on to explore my line of enquiry with greater depth and plan my own empirical research.

In terms of preconceptions, I confess that I personally feel that sending a child to boarding school at the age of eight is wrong and I am aware of the developmental theory to support this. However, I am not judging other parents for doing so because I think there are many factors involved in making the decision. I am also aware of an early preconception, that

those who attended boarding school have access to high end facilities, extra curriculum opportunities which are not available to many other non-boarding school students and thus acknowledge an assumption of privilege. I think this has been tainted since I have delved into the literature around boarding school and worked with two ex-boarders who struggled with their experience.

Whilst saying I take an apolitical stance, with my hermeneutic approach, it arguably cannot be completely separated from this topic area and I therefore endeavour to offer some clarification to my positioning. I acknowledge the association boarding schools have with privilege and power, and how they might encourage social hierarchies. I am aware of the disproportionate number of boarding school alumni who have run the country and many large institutions, how boarding schools might have shaped their style of leadership, and how this might have perpetuated further inequalities. However, I feel that by maintaining an apolitical stance I keep doors open so that the human experience is heard. This rationale was partly bore out of conversations with tutors early on in my research process who spoke about how contentious the area was and to consider what I was aiming for. Furthermore, having read responses from boarding school literature, there is a sense that some people are judged for having a political and anti-boarding school stance which I feel precludes some from seeing what is being said about the challenging experiences of those who attend and hereby closing doors. I also think, if there are individuals negatively impacted by boarding schools occupying positions of power, is there a not perhaps a social responsibility to be aware of the impact boarding school can have on an individual level.

Given that I saw myself as embedded in the research process, I made a point of being reflective and staying close to my preconceptions and experiences from the outset of my research through ongoing discussion with my supervisor, research peers and journalling. Journaling helped me to acknowledge my own subjectivity by documenting my thoughts in a reflective journal (Finlay & Gough, 2008). The journal supported me to have an awareness of my own responses prior and during interviews and strive to be impartial to the participants and enable their voices to be heard and accurately described during the analysis stage.

In summary, I have considered how the above factors, alongside the boarding school literature I have read, might have coloured my beliefs and assumptions, the way in which I have engaged in the research process and interpreted the data. I hope that with this awareness, grounded in my training as a therapist, would support me to be aware of any transference I might have throughout the research process.

3.6 Design and Data Collection

3.6.1 Participant Sampling and Recruitment

The study included nine therapists, all of whom were integrative psychotherapists. Nine participants felt the optimum number to enable a large enough dataset while also offering sufficient opportunity to look deeply into and analyse the data and explore any meaningful patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) suggest 6-15 participants for a masters or professional doctorate.

The sampling criteria for this study included counselling psychologists or integrative psychotherapists (BPS/UKCP/BACP/ accredited), who were two or more years post-qualification, with current or previous experience of working with two or more ex-boarders. Participants were sought through purposeful sampling method, a non-probability way of sampling in which I sought participants who met the research criteria and expressed a willingness to participate in my research. In doing so, the study aimed to recruit a defined homogenous group for whom the research question had relevance, acknowledging the importance of quality of data over quantity. I contacted counselling psychologists and integrative psychotherapists (Appendix B) independently and through word of mouth. I attended a continuous professional development (CPD) day for therapists working with clients who had been to boarding school. The organisers gave me permission at the end of the day to present my research to the attendees and explain I was looking for participants to take part and answer any questions. Following the CPD day, I was contacted by one attendee who expressed an interest. I was also given the names of therapists who specialised in the area of boarding schools and who I then contacted. During the research process I discovered an online charity that provided support for ex-boarders who had struggled with boarding school. They passed on my details to therapists who were on their members list.

3.6.2 Reflexivity

In terms of sampling, I was aware that I was going to find out about a very specific area and soon realised it made sense to target those who specialised in the field. My rationale was it would be much richer to talk to people with a particular interest and understanding of the area.

When informing therapists who enquired about the research, I noted their slight guardedness around how the information would be used. I was mindful of being transparent with them about the process and ensuring anonymity for them and their clients. The majority of those who came forward expressing an interest in the study asked for all information and for their

data to be anonymised. Considering this alongside what felt like a small community of therapists supporting ex boarders, it did not feel appropriate to ask for any demographic information, which could have divulged their identities.

3.6.3 Initial Contact

Prior to the interviews, participants were sent a participant information sheet (see Appendix C) about the study and a consent form (see Appendix D). I confirmed therapists satisfied the inclusion criteria and offered them the opportunity to ask any questions about the research or the documentation they had been sent.

3.6.4 Interviews

I carried out an initial pilot interview with a colleague who had had some experience of working with ex-boarders. This allowed me to practise the interview process and review the interview schedule and any prompts that might facilitate conversation. I chose not to include the interview in the research as it did not provide such richness of data compared to other participants and felt I had gained enough material for an in-depth analysis without it. The interviewee was made aware that their data might not be used in the main study. The reviewed interview schedule (see Appendix A) was then carried forward and used with participants in the study.

All interviews took place online over Zoom using the interview schedule and were recorded. The interviews lasted from 45-90 minutes. The interviews were carried out online as opposed to in-person owing to the COVID-19 isolation guidelines in place at the time of the data gathering. Interviews followed a semi-structured format to facilitate space for therapists to reflect and develop their ideas (Smith, 1996) and provide the flexibility to explore different themes that came into the conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I hoped the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews would encourage a richness in data collection and avoid a typical pitfall in thematic analysis research in which interviews lack sufficient depth for meaningful analysis (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). Just before the interview began, participants were read the information sheet and consent form and were given the opportunity to ask any questions. Participants were made aware of the semi-structured nature of the interview and given the broad questions that they would be asked. Participants were encouraged to talk and elaborate on the discussion through prompts.

When the interviews ended, participants were given the opportunity to feedback about the interview process and ask any questions. Two participants flagged that they did not want some of the stories they had told to be included in the research as it would give away their clients' identities. I made a note of the data they were concerned about and reassured the

participants it would not be included. I then thanked the participants and sent them a debrief form (Appendix E) with details of who to contact if they had any further questions and reminding them of their right to withdraw. After each interview, I noted down any thoughts, feelings and impressions that came to mind.

All the recordings and transcripts were stored in a password-protected computer and folder with participants being identified using pseudonyms. Participants' consent forms were kept in a locked filing cabinet separate from the transcripts.

3.6.5 Reflecting on the Interview Process

Despite having carried out a pilot interview, I was a little nervous interviewing my first participant and was mindful how this might impact the clarity of my questioning. With practice, I found the interviews got easier as they progressed. I was conscious of getting as rich a dataset as possible and not going too off course from the research question. Some participants initially appeared suspicious, asking for more information about the research. It felt, understandably, as though they were looking for more reassurance around confidentiality and how the data was going to be used. I fully respected that participants wanted to protect their clients' anonymity. Their sense of suspicion also made me reflect on the notion that the topic of boarding schools is contentious for some people both politically and socially, as demonstrated in the literature. I did my best to reassure the participants and put them at ease. At times I felt I might have overshared some of my experience of the area, although I also think this might have helped build trust and facilitate the research process. I acknowledged the need to be aware of my feelings around the topic area and how they might impact on the process. With trust established, I felt I developed a good rapport with the participants, who readily shared their thoughts and conceptualisations on their clients.

I noted how promptly participants responded to my recruitment call-out and how keen they were to arrange interviews soon while they had a sudden availability during the first COVID-19 lockdown. This meant the interviews were carried out over the period of two weeks. Having the interviews take place close together meant I had information fresh in mind from the previous interview. Whilst I found this usefully informed me with prompts and helped me tap into common themes, I also think it might have made my questioning a little more leading and meant that, at times, I was not seeing some of the interviews in complete isolation. That said, I was always tentative in my questioning and kept in mind that therapists could disagree with me. Overall, I think having one interview quite soon after the next enhanced an organic process to the data gathering and might, arguably, have supported me in gaining richer data. For example, I was able to reflect on my performance or material from prior interviews to support me in the next interview.

Around the time of the interviews, Zoom was in its infancy. Having not interviewed people via Zoom previously, I was mindful of how much it might impact the data gathering process. Given that the participants were therapists who were professionally trained to access thoughts, feeling and emotions, Overall, on reflection I thought the video interview set-up offered me a convenient option of gathering data and did not feel I would have gained any more if had I interviewed participants in person. I noted on a few occasions how deeply touched I was by the stories therapists were sharing. The material moved me as an empathic researcher but also on a personal level as I reflected on the ex-boarders I know who had struggled with their boarding school experience and perhaps not found the words to express it. I reflected on this in my own clinical supervision and personal therapy.

Reflecting on my interview prompts, I appreciate in some cases there was a bias towards a more psychodynamic perspective. For example, a prompt for my first interview question invites the participant to reflect on the therapeutic relationship, and other prompts refer to repression and denial. I appreciate this may have directed participants towards a relational psychodynamic reflection they might have otherwise not brought up if they had not been asked. I recognised here I had fallen into modality jargon with some of my prompts. However, the reality was I rarely used them and, for the above reason, made a point of reviewing and not including data that may have been perceived to be biased through such prompts. All participants were asked follow-up questions, with the final question asking them about a take home message. It felt this brought a lightness to the end of the interviews before thanking the participants for their contributions.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Consent was gained from the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee (Appendix G). I followed the ethics protocol for academic and practitioner psychologists, as outlined by The British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018) and the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014). These codes outline the need for adherence to the following principles: respect, responsibility, competence, integrity, scientific integrity, social responsibility and maximising benefit and minimising harm. I understand ethical research is more than just following these rules and that the process of ethical research begins with the research idea and does not end until the research is no longer being disseminated (Finlay, 2009). Ethical issues will therefore be considered throughout the research process.

i) Consent

Informed (verbal and written) consent was sought from for each participant. Each participant received an information sheet at the recruitment stage (Appendix C). Participants read this

sheet at their leisure and were invited to ask any questions or seek clarification before they agreed to participate. The information sheet included the title of the study, an overview of its purposes, what was required of the participants, how the data from the study might be disseminated with anonymity protected, confirmation of data protection and the contact details of myself and my research supervisor. Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked if they had read the information sheet and were invited to ask any questions. Prior to the interview commencing online the consent form was read out and verbal consent was recorded. Participants were reminded they had the right to withdraw at any point up to one month after the interview.

ii) Confidentiality

Participants were reminded throughout the study that their data would be kept anonymous. Interviews took place over Zoom in the privacy of the researcher and participants' own homes. I reassured participants that I would take special care to disguise identifying information. As mentioned above, two participants highlighted potential identifying data about their clients they wanted omitted. In both cases, I reassured the participants I would omit the data, making a written and audio note at the interview. Participants were allocated a pseudonym and any identifying details within the transcripts were either deleted or altered if the deletion of the data were to change the meaning of the text. All interview audio recordings were transferred immediately after the interview onto an encrypted computer that was stored securely. The audio recordings will be destroyed once the doctoral thesis has been passed and any necessary amendments made. The consent forms, which included the participants' names were stored separately in a locked filling cabinet.

iii) Debriefing and management of stress

Given that the participants were therapists, I considered but did not assume that they would be able to provide a level of self-care post interview. Prior to the start of the interview, participants were reminded that they had the right to not answer a question if it felt uncomfortable, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage up until one month post-interview. Post-interview, participants were given a debrief and an opportunity to ask any questions and report how they felt the interview process went. An email was sent out after the interview thanking the participants for their participation and reminding them of my contact details should they have any further questions.

3.8 Data Analysis

I approached the data inductively, working 'bottom up' to develop codes and then themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Whilst I appreciated that existing literature covers some concepts and theories that might be applicable to this research, I did not want to assume labels from

the outset, hence I chose a data-led inductive method of coding over a deductive method. That said, I acknowledged that themes gained from the interviews were actively constructed by myself as the researcher, and thereby informed by the literature I have read, my beliefs, and assumptions (Banister et al., 2011). The analysis incorporated semantic coding, capturing the explicit descriptive meaning of the data, as well as latent coding to look at the implicit interpretative meaning as I immersed myself further into the data. Using latent coding, I tried to engage fully with the interviews to avoid simply reporting the data. I positioned myself as an empathic researcher trying my best to understand the meaning of the data, focusing on what was there as opposed to taking a suspicious stance that focuses more on what might be hidden (Willig, 2013). In doing so, I was trying to make sense not just of what the participants said but also why they said it.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide details of a useful six-step analytic process. Despite it being outlined as a linear process, it is acknowledged that the researcher moves back and forth between the different stages.

The process of analysis was carried out as follows:

i) Step 1: Familiarisation

This phase included immersing myself in and connecting with the data, listening, and rereading each transcript several times. This phase involved being thoughtful and curious whilst making notes (as opposed to labels) on any observations about individual items, as well as across the dataset. I chose not to use an electronic system to support me (e.g., NVivo) as I felt going through the data independently would enable me to stay close to it.

ii) Step 2: Generate Initial Codes

This phase involved further immersion and a more rigorous, systematic engagement with the data. Here data was organised and collated into chunks of text with similar meanings. Initial codes were assigned to the data and written on the transcripts (see Appendices H & I). I systematically worked my way through each dataset several times to ensure rigour (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I collated each participant with their codes (semantic and latent) and supporting data onto an Excel spreadsheet (see Appendix J). Each participant was assigned a colour to support organisation in the next step of the process. I then discussed my codes with my research supervisor.

iii) Step 3: Search for Themes and Sub-themes

Next, sub-themes and later themes were identified from the coding and given meaning, taking into consideration the data, my experience and subjectivity, and

the questions I asked the participants. This stage was flexible and prototypes were tried and tested to see if they offered the best insight into the data in response to the question being asked (see Appendix K). Using Excel supported me in arranging and reviewing the subthemes and themes.

iv) Step 4: Review Themes

This phase involved checking the theme was connected to a meaningful pattern in the data and was relevant to the research question. With support from my research supervisor, themes were reviewed to check they made sense, were not too light, and did not overlap with other themes conceptually, as these, if kept in, might impact on the richness of the data. Some themes were discarded when I closely scrutinised them against the research question or when there was not enough data to support them. Several themes were collapsed into other themes when there appeared to be some crossover. There were various phases of to the theme development (see Appendix L & N).

v) Step 5: Define and Name Themes

Having identified the themes, this phase involved clear comprehensive definitions of each theme, explicitly outlining the theme's boundaries and central organising idea. When possible, I chose to use quotes from the data when naming the sub-themes. At the end of this stage four dominant themes were identified:

1. "There is complexity to their experience".
2. Being kept at an arm's length
3. Difficult-to-reach-clients.
4. "Privileged but emotionally starved": A group of clients who warrant attention.

Step six of Braun and Clarke's analytic process is the write up stage.

3.9 Reflexivity

I found the process of reading though the data quite exciting, but, equally, I was a little overwhelmed by how much there was to get through. Similarly, I found generating codes a little daunting as a novice researcher and noticed my strong urge to 'get it right'. Reminding myself of my epistemological stance and the subjectivity I adhered to enabled me to remain grounded. I stayed close to any personal pre-judgements and prior thoughts and feelings through my journaling, and I felt this supported transparency with my own process and what was unfolding in the data. I also noted it had been a long time since I had immersed myself in the boarding school literature, which meant I was perhaps less influenced by the boarding school research prior to the interviews, thereby supporting a more open exploration.

Noting my slight procrastination to begin the coding, I soon realised that despite having read several papers and a textbook by Braun and Clarke (2022), it was only in the act of doing it that I would really understand the process. I also acknowledged that my learning style is learning through activity. This is when I felt my confidence and creativity around the data developed, and I began enjoying the process more. I was creating a window into the world of a negative boarding school experience and was aware that others looking at the same data might have a slightly different take on it.

The process of searching for sub-themes reminded me of the overwhelm of being presented with a huge puzzle and trying to work out the best way to start it. The process felt messy, but on reflection I realised this enabled me to play flexibly with the different directions in which I could take the sub-themes. The identified sub-themes and then themes that developed evolved over several phases, during which I reflected with my research supervisor and a fellow research colleague. This supported me to listen back and consolidate my thoughts, find my own language, and develop more succinct themes. My research supervisor encouraged me to have the confidence to look deeper into the research to see what the data was telling me and delineate what was and what was not so relevant with regards to my research question. When labelling the themes and sub-themes, I felt using relevant participants' quotes stayed close to the data and brought the message I was trying to convey to life. At times I noted my need to be tentative around the language I used when creating themes, keeping in mind the subjective nature of the data.

3.10 Quality and Trustworthiness

Qualitative research should be carried out methodically and rigorously to produce meaningful and useful data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In qualitative research, trustworthiness concerns the authenticity, quality, and truthfulness of findings, and is one way of ensuring the findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba,1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refine trustworthiness into four key criteria namely credibility, transferability, dependability and conformity, paralleling the criteria of validity and reliability found in quantitative assessment. To ensure trustworthiness, I utilised Nowell et al.'s (2017) framework, which adopts the above criteria to ensure trustworthiness at the different phases of TA.

3.10.1 Credibility

Credibility is achieved when the outcomes reported in research are recognised and acknowledged by other readers confronted with the same data (Guba & Lincoln 1989). Whilst the data is lightly interpreted though my lens, I endeavoured to achieve the best fit

between my representation and the participants' reporting (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In doing so, I adopted several techniques recommended by Guba & Lincoln (1989), including prolonged engagement with the data, consistent observation and peer-debriefing with my supervisor and a fellow research colleague discussing my coding and themes against the raw data. I kept a reflective journal of thoughts, assumptions, and observations I made throughout the process and was mindful of how they might bias my interpretation. I was also transparent and shared my approach to mapping out themes onto Excel with my supervisor, which demonstrated the phases I went through to arrive at my final themes, sub-themes, and the supportive data I gathered.

3.10.2 Transferability

Transferability concerns whether the research study's findings can be generalised to other similar situations, populations or phenomena. To achieve transferability, I adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) advice and provided a rich description of the study and themes.

3.10.3 Dependability

Dependability is the extent to which a study can be replicated by other researchers. To gain dependability, the research process needs to be traceable, logical and clearly documented (Tobin & Beagley, 2004). Keeping this in mind, I provided a detailed account of the study by giving a full description of the methodology, detailed examples of the analysis, from coding to themes, with extract examples as supporting evidence of my decision making. I kept a journal which documented my thoughts and choices through the research process. In keeping with Koch's (1994) suggestion, I felt the journal acted as a form or audit evidencing the research process.

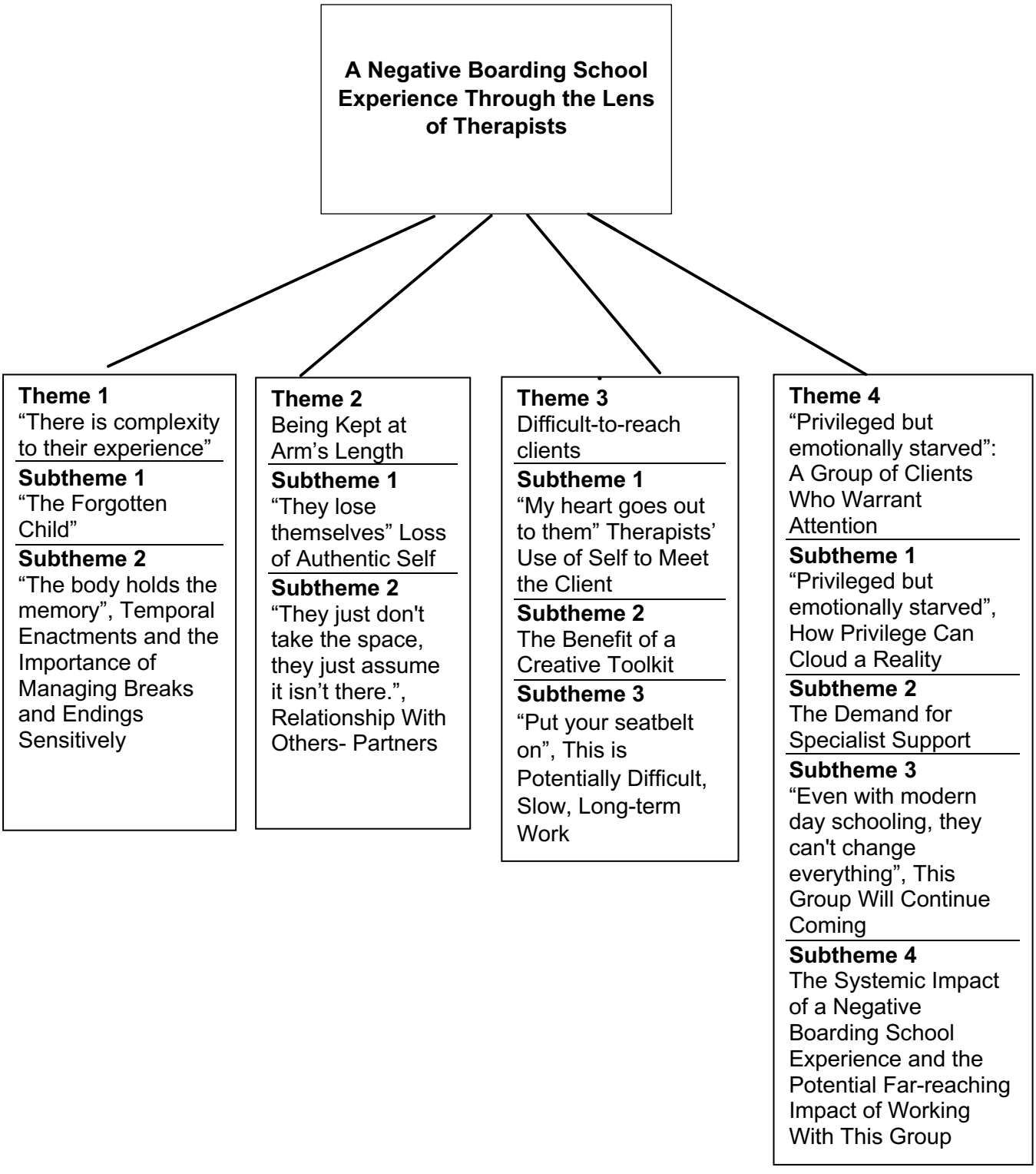
3.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the extent to which the researcher's interpretations are based on participants' responses. The researcher must explain how they arrived at their interpretations and conclusions (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Striving to achieve confirmability, I outlined my process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. I provided detailed rationale for my codes and themes, scrutinising how closely they reflected the participants' responses. Throughout the process I have reflected on and journaled my own thoughts and things that arose from the data, endeavouring to be transparent in my positioning at different points of the writing.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

Figure 1

Main themes and subthemes



4.1 Outline

All the participants offered a wealth of insights into working with clients who had had negative experiences of boarding school. This chapter presents an outline of the four main themes and corresponding sub-themes constructed from the interview transcripts in response to my research title: A Negative Boarding School Experience Through the Lens of Therapists. Each main theme and subsequent sub-theme will be discussed alongside excerpts from the data to provide transparency. Each quote will be presented with the participant's pseudonym (prior to or after the quote). I have consciously chosen to keep connections with theory to a minimum in this chapter, reserving that for the discussion chapter.

Whilst demographic information was not reported and pseudonyms were used to support participant anonymity, it felt pertinent to outline which of the participants did and did not attend boarding school themselves. Those that attended boarding school were Ruth, Elisabeth, James, Peter and Sam. The remaining four participants, Marie, Tamara, Juliet and John, did not attend boarding school.

4.2 Main Themes

The main themes were identified from all the participants' interviews and the sub-themes came from the majority but not all of the participants' interviews. Table 1 presents the main themes and description, their constituent sub-themes, and the frequency with which they came up in the data. I have presented and described the main themes that came up in the data below.

1. "There is complexity to their experience" outlines what the participants felt took place for clients at boarding school and the impact they felt it had on their clients.
2. Being kept at arm's length discusses what the impact of boarding might mean for some clients today.
3. Difficult-to-reach clients explores the impact of attending boarding school means for therapists working with this client group.
4. 'Privileged but emotionally starved' considers that this is a group of clients who warrant attention.

Table 1

Main Themes, Description, Subthemes, and Frequency

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency
1: “There is complexity to their experience” *What the participants felt took place for clients at boarding school and the impact they felt it had on their clients.*	“The Forgotten Child”	9
	“The body holds the memory”, Temporal Enactments and the Importance of Managing Breaks and Endings Sensitively	8
2: Being Kept at Arm’s Length *What the impact of boarding might mean for some clients today*	“They lose themselves”, Loss of Authentic Self	5
	“They just don't take the space, they just assume it isn’t there.”, Relationship With Others- Partners	9
3: Difficult-to-reach clients *The impact of attending boarding school means for therapists working with this client group*	“My heart goes out to them”, Therapists’ Use of Self to Meet the Client	7
	The Benefit of a Creative Toolkit	7
	“Put your seatbelt on”, This is Potentially Difficult, Slow, Long-term Work	9
4: “Privileged but emotionally starved”: A Group of Clients Who Warrant Attention *Why this group warrants attention*	“Privileged but emotionally starved”, How Privilege Can Cloud a Reality	7
	The Demand for Specialist Support	9
	“Even with modern day schooling, they can't change everything”, This Group Will Continue Coming	5
	The Systemic Impact of a Negative Boarding School Experience and the Potential Far-reaching Impact of Working With This Group	8

4.3 Theme One: “There is complexity to their experience”

The first theme attempted to encapsulate therapists’ conceptualisations of the impact a negative boarding school experience had on their clients. All the participants expressed to some degree a level of “complexity” in what they felt their clients’ experiences were in terms of what happened and the lasting impact it had on them. Within this main theme, two sub-themes were identified: “The forgotten child” and “The body holds the memory”: Temporal enactments and the importance of managing breaks and endings sensitively.

4.3.1 Sub-theme One: “The forgotten child”

This subtheme describes how participants thought their clients had experienced “abandonment” and felt “forgotten” by their parents, with one likening their client’s experience to “complex trauma”. Some voiced what they felt were clients’ feelings of “confusion” around their experience of abandonment. The “forgotten child” appeared to be strong in the transference too, with some participants reporting how they often forgot their boarding school clients.

As Ruth articulated, “the abandonment and the rejection and the overlooking are always very significant with boarding school people, dare I say, because they feel abandoned by parents, rejected by parents and overlooked”.

Others, such as Juliet readily reported that “abandonment is definitely, uh, an issue”.

There appeared to be clear agreement across all participants with the conceptualisation that their clients had feelings of “abandonment” by their parents when they went to boarding school.

There was an acknowledgement amongst the participants that their clients appeared to have missed out on the nuanced attention and contact parents might provide for a child at home and they wondered how this could possibly be replicated by the pastoral care offered at boarding schools. The consensus was this lack of attention contributed to the notion that clients, as children, had not been fully seen or supported emotionally, and in the worst case “forgotten”. As Marie articulated:

> When children live at home, parents pick up on stuff, I think. You know? You tend to know if your child is distressed or worried or a bit more grumpy than usual or has hurt themself or something as a parent. But those boarders don't get any of that.

Within the frame of feeling abandoned and forgotten, participants reported a sense of agony around attachment and loss as they gave emotive reports of their clients being sent to boarding school. Participants reported how detrimental they felt this was, particularly for

those who boarded from a young age, as James alluded to “the very early boarders; there's a thing about the despair that gets well and truly buried”.

In some cases, the participants felt their clients experienced confusion around why they were “sent away” or “abandoned”, keeping them in what appeared to be a state of flux. I felt this was illustrated in the following two quotes:

> I was the apple of my mother’s eye, she absolutely loved me, in fact she preferred me over my brother, I couldn’t do wrong, she thought I was great, she told me she loved me, and she sent me away… so why did she send me away and I can’t forgive her, can’t forgive her, can’t work it out. (Elizabeth)

> How could she send me away if she loved me? So otherwise, there is something wrong with my mother's love, or she was pretending to love me, and she doesn't love me. So how come she doesn't love me? (Peter)

Participants described how they felt their clients’ abandonment was confounded by the fact that they had to say goodbye to parents at the start of each term or half-term, causing the repeated distress of abandonment. Tamara conceptualised some of her clients’ experiences of this as “complex trauma” and a form of “child abuse”. She gave an analogy of her clients’ repeated distress of going to and returning from boarding school, which, for some, was a repeated rupture in attachment; “retraumatization... You know, it's like rolling the rock up the… the hill... you roll it back down again and it's just constantly this is to say it, is repeated.”

According to participants, the notion of being forgotten appeared to come to life in the therapy room. One participant described how they often forgot to take their boarding school clients to supervision in what appeared to be a parallel process where they forgot their clients in the same way they felt their clients had been forgotten as children. In the same vein, Sara described an enactment whereby she often forgot she was seeing her boarding school clients in the much the same way she felt they had been forgotten as children; “I have forgotten that I'm actually seeing them today... Noticing little things like that. Um, because often these children... these, yeah these clients will have been forgotten.”

When I considered the language used here, I thought it was interesting how Sara referred to “these children” before correcting herself and saying “clients”. I wondered if this slip might have represented an unconscious conceptualisation of her boarding school clients as her children, a possible maternal transference hinting at a potential relationship between the participant and client. If that was the case, then I thought it was interesting how in one sense

there was either a closeness between the participant and client or that the client was completely forgotten.

I also contemplated on James' use of the word "buried" and how powerful it sounded, as though it might never be discovered, as well as the possible unconscious connotation with death. Considering the participants' portrayals, I sensed the children appear confused about why they were being sent to boarding school. I sensed an introjection on the self by Peter's client when he questioned whether he was the problem and was being punished by being sent away to board. I was also struck by the impact the clients' depictions had on the therapists as they spoke about their clients. I wondered if there had been some projective identification from the client onto the therapist, leading them to act out a distress that the clients might have struggled to have communicated. Finally, I noticed how moved I was on hearing the participants' reports of what felt like visceral stories of childhood desperation, which made me think about the impact of their clients' experiences.

In summary, there appeared to be a consensus among the participants that their clients had experienced abandonment, and how this appeared to be replicated each term as boarders left for school. One participant likened this to complex trauma. Some offered what felt like compelling examples of their clients' apparent distress and confusion trying to make sense of why they were "abandoned" at boarding school. Interestingly, the forgotten child was experienced in therapists' transference too. I felt that participants' equating of going to boarding school to leaving home raised some interesting questions around the potential long-term impact, particularly for the early boarders. This will be explored in the next sub-theme.

4.3.2 Sub-theme two: "The body holds the memory", Temporal Enactments and the Importance of Managing Breaks and Endings Sensitively

All but one of the participants described how they felt breaks in therapy impacted this client group and potentially offered useful information about the client's past and process. Participants speculated that clients presented with an unconscious body memory from their school years and how this became part of the work. Given the potential impact of breaks and endings, participants reported how important it was to discuss these with clients and manage them sensitively.

Peter reflected on his clients coming back to therapy in September after a summer break and the symbolism it had; "I think the body holds the memory, doesn't it? Time of year, you know, the weather change and the dark nights come in. It's that kind of back to school, isn't it?"

Elizabeth sensed an unconscious temporal memory was often acted out in therapy by her clients by way of attendance:

> … they come for a few sessions and then disappear with no word at all and they might come back again and then they disappear, it's almost like they are doing half-term slots and if you say that to them, if you show the pattern to them it sort of makes sense to them but they don't know they are doing it.

There was consensus that breaks offered useful information about clients out of their awareness. Participants also felt breaks had the propensity to help clients connect with their vulnerability. They reported how clients appeared to struggle to say they might miss their therapist as a way of protecting themselves in the same way they might have done as children saying goodbye to their parents at boarding school.

Juliet spoke of using breaks as useful information about the clients' process and a way of supporting them to express their more vulnerable selves:

> … breaks are useful things because also you can kind of, you know, you can notice what... how a client is in a break over time. And that maybe with time, you know, their need of you, they might be able to acknowledge that they might have missed you.

Participants described enactments they felt took place in the therapy room as clients appeared to struggle with feelings of rejection and abandonment when their therapist took a break. Peter reported what he felt was his clients' unconscious process of rejection, anger, and punishment when he took breaks:

> … you messed me up so I'm going to mess you up. So you get the clients you go and have a week off and then they don't turn up or they forget. So there's an unconscious strategic punishing going on.

Given the emotive impact of breaks, participants spoke of the need to manage time off sensitively as this client group might experience it as another rejection or abandonment and trigger their defences. Clients were often described as dismissive of an upcoming break. John described the protective shell he felt his client retreated into after a break, seeming to re-enact the early defences of his boarding experience:

> … he in particular was very keen to tell me how he didn't miss me, how he didn't miss therapy, everything's fine, but he needed to tell me that. It struck me that the… that is what he would have said when he went back to school in September.

Ruth spoke of using psychoeducation to support her clients by naming the emotions they might experience during breaks or when she might have had to cancel a session, foreseeing

the distress that might be caused; “If I have to cancel because I'm not well, and this happens sometimes, you might get a sense of rejection, and we need to talk about that now. So, I did pre-empt quite a few things with him.”

Victor described what he felt was his clients’ self-protection strategy after a break, and how this created a sense of moving three steps back and a challenge to the therapeutic relationship:

> … much more than I've noticed with any other – any other clients in general... it's generalising obviously, a client might go back into a – a sense of uh, you know, back – back into self-protection, resilient, this so-called resilience of, actually, I don't need nobody, I'm functioning fine. And when you then go to reconnect, you get the – you get... you're back at the – back at the beginning… Everything's fine.

Participants appeared to be more flexible with boundaries around communication between sessions with this client group than they might otherwise have been. Juliet spoke of the greater degree of contact she received from her ex-boarding school clients between sessions and the sensitivity she felt was called upon to manage what often appeared to be a young child communicating in adult shoes.

> … this client group I get a lot more communications between sessions... Um, and I... my... I always tend to see them as a letter home.. I'm very careful about how I respond to them. With an awareness that actually... you know, often clients will have, you know, begged their children ... begged – begged their parents to – to take them home.

Ruth spoke of offering one of her clients the opportunity to keep in contact between sessions to promote a sense of security during a long break in therapy, and how she felt it reassured him; “I would actually say to him, you might feel abandoned when I go away, um, and if you want to send me an email, you are very welcome. And he said, it’s so good to know that.”

Marie described how she felt endings were an opportunity to model and support the client in a way that they might not have experienced themselves; “being able to do that ending in that nuanced way to really... for, you know, both parties to really listen to what the client needs... in the ending, in that separation.”

Peter also spoke of how he used endings as part of his work with clients, supporting them to make contact with their possible disavowed emotions:

> So, you get the conversation going around you know, abandonment, rejection and anger, and oh no oh no I'm not angry with you [the client]... well I will be angry if I

was in your position so how come you're not angry with me because I feel angry, I feel angry with myself about letting you go.

I considered how the impact of breaks and endings is perhaps not surprising given boarders' repeated experience of packing and going off each term, and the impact this might have on those who struggled with being at boarding school. Given the emotive impact, I thought it was also not surprising that participants spoke of managing endings with extra sensitivity. I reflected on the idea of loosening boundaries for this client group and whether participants felt pulled in to rescue their clients and if there was a possible parental transference being acted out, which might suggest how impactful working with this client group was. I also considered if the ex-boarding school participants might also be calling on their own boarding school history and responding to a yearning that they did not have answered as children. I noticed how, as I reflected on the participants' take on their boundaries with their clients, I was thinking of the participants' boundaries in parallel. Finally, I thought about how breaks and endings appeared on one level to symbolise something very final, like a death, which I felt connected to "the despair that gets truly buried" outlined in "the forgotten child" sub-theme above.

In summary, according to the participants' reports, breaks and endings in therapy appeared to enact strong emotions from this client group. Participants spoke of relaxing boundaries with their boarding school clients, mindful of the young self-states they felt they were working with and the clients' potential experience of abandonment. Time spent at boarding school and the complexity of that experience may have an impact on the developing relationship with self and self with other. This will be explored in the next theme.

4.3.4 Reflexivity

I found the data particularly emotive as I compiled this theme and sub-themes. I was moved as a mother of two children, albeit I do not think you have to be a mother to be moved by this material. I reflected on how young children managed the goodbye. It made me think of how alone and fearful the boarders like my husband might have felt. The palpable sense of loneliness also made me reflect on the not-too-distant memory of the COVID-19 pandemic and the experience and impact on wellbeing by the enforced disconnection en-masse. But that unique experience was due to a pandemic, for this client group it is a result of a privileged schooling. I found myself reflecting on the data through my trauma lens and remained vigilant as to how this might colour my making sense of the data.

4.4 Theme Two: Being Kept at Arm's Length

This theme reflects participants' understanding of how they felt a negative boarding school experience impacted on their clients' connections with themselves and others. All participants reported how they felt their clients' experiences had impacted on intimacy with the self and other. This theme included the two sub-themes: "They lose themselves": Loss of authentic self and "They don't take the space, they just assume it isn't there": Relationship with others- partners.

4.4.1 Sub-theme One: "They lose themselves", Loss of Authentic Self

Over half of the participants described how they felt many of their clients had lost their "authentic selves" as a result of the expectation on them to succeed at boarding school. Participants spoke of how they felt this contributed to feelings of shame, impacting negatively on their relationship with their self. The majority of participants also spoke of clients losing their self by adopting a "survivor personality" with defences to manage their negative boarding experience and how this impacted on them as adults. There was discussion around how the boarding school environment might have actively encouraged this strategy and how this could have impacted on a boarders emotional development.

Elizabeth, alongside the other participants, described her clients bowing to the pressure of parents' and schools' expectations to do well academically and in sport, with some acknowledging an awareness of when they fragmented from their self.

> … they lose themselves, and some will say, you know I can actually picture the moment when I lost myself. They don't have their authentic self... They become somebody that somebody expects them to be, either the masters or the school expect it or the parents expect it, and they don't know any different so they just do it…

Participants described how they felt shame was a "major issue" for many clients who felt they had not met the mark. Marie summed up what many participants reported, a conceptualisation that the clients experienced themselves as the problem, "there can be a lot of shame in boarders that they feel dysfunctional." Victor meanwhile spoke of clients blaming themselves for not coping at boarding school "I didn't do it very well. I was bullied. I was... you know... I could have done it a lot better. So, so really distancing from that, um, from any love towards that, their young self."

The turning in on oneself appeared to start early for some clients as they tried to make sense of why their parents chose to send them to boarding school. Peter described his

clients as children appearing to question their self-worth; “Maybe I'm unlovable, so I’d better try really hard to be lovable or maybe I'm so unlovable, I better give up and dissociate?”

This sense of self-blame tied into the reports by participants of clients seeming to cut off from their vulnerable younger selves and showing little self-compassion. Some participants’ reported how clients appeared to retroflect their pain through self-destructive behaviours. Peter spoke of how some of his clients managing their emotional distress through drugs and alcohol; “.. alcoholism and drug addiction or other ways of comforting and protecting the self because the ability to touch that part of the failed self is too shameful.” Ruth meanwhile alluded to this when conceptualising her client’s experience using Cognitive Analytic Theory (CAT); “a child that's been abandoned will be either abandoning of self or abandoning of others. A child that's felt rejected will then either be rejecting of self in different ways or rejecting of others.”

Some participants coined the term “mobile personality” or “survival personality” which they felt their clients adopted as children as a form of armour to protect themselves from their negative boarding school experience. The majority of participants, such as Tamara, felt this “survival personality” was very much alive today in their clients, “You're meeting them in survival personality… But I think, you know, underneath that, there's a very frightened child perhaps is so grateful to have, have got some support and they have enough trust to keep coming.”

Victor touched on how very present and entrenched this protective self-state was for clients when they came to therapy.

> Look how lucky I am, kind of everything's fine... that attachment to that survival strategy, um, has uh, been really difficult to kind of, to… they don't want to show any cracks in that. No, I'm absolutely fine. And, of course I am. You know that… that's the thing that kept them safe. That's the mobile personality, is what kept them alive…

Several participants spoke more explicitly of the survival personality in the form “defences” they felt their clients used in the therapy room supporting them to maintain a distance from their vulnerable self. Peter described how he felt his clients, having historically hidden or dissociated their childhood distress, struggled to show vulnerability; despite knowing they needed support.

> … even if they’re aware they've got a problem, there is going to be resistance, you know, looking at it through the model that I do, the inner child inside has been trapped many years is often traumatised… So to come out into vulnerability is going

> to be quite a sensitive area so there's a lot of fear there, so it's going to be a lot of denial, a lot of dissociation…

Juliet spoke of how she felt clients protected themselves through dissociation, “I haven't talked about dissociation which is also a massive issue... it could be quite hard for a client to be present at... or even to be aware that they're dissociating.”

John described how, in the transference, he felt the weight of the clients’ dissociated emotions as they explored their early boarding school experiences and how he felt they unconsciously projected their detached or unexpressed pain onto him, “when they're explaining being dropped off at school and waving goodbye to Mum and Dad... they're not feeling that, but I am. So, there's an incongruence between the two of us at those moments.”

Based on reports, it seemed the challenge of therapy was to acknowledge and support the client who might have adopted this strategy that might be impacting their functioning. However, according to the participants, in some cases, the adaptive way of coping could be so strong it stopped therapy from progressing. Tamara reflected on this in her clinical experience; “it became quite apparent that he, he was very much in his survival personality, and he wasn't ready to do the work at all. Um, and he didn't stay all that long actually.”

Elizabeth provided a window into what may have contributed towards the survival personality. She alluded to how the early masquerading of distress and vulnerability of some young boarders; “There's this veneer of the beautiful boarding school grounds and these smart children with their happy, smiling faces. And then hidden is all the distress and the very – sometimes very -toxic things that are happening underneath or behind that.”

Elizabeth spoke of how she felt boarding school encouraged students to have only a positive outlook on things. She felt this benefited them in the world of work but was to the detriment of their emotional development.

> … boarders are brought up to say everything is fine, lovely, I enjoyed it, lovely time, played sport, and they don’t look at the emotional side at all and they do become leaders and managers and senior people, they do very well in life because that’s where they put their energies, they’ve been trained to do that… Yes well I think the emotional side has to go…

I reflected on the reports of clients appearing to split off from themselves by dissociating from difficult experiences and emotions. I wondered if this indicated the level of distress some of them might have experienced at boarding school. I thought reports of clients struggling to show any negative emotion was perhaps unsurprising given the way Elizabeth and others perceived the boarding school environment as being unsuccessful at fostering

emotional development. I contemplated on how boarding schools appeared to have a bias towards encouraging a left-brain development, with right-brain emotional development appearing to fall behind. I also noted how clients were reported as presenting as guarded and struggling to make contact, arguably akin to clients in the general population who come to therapy.

Given the impact shame has on the self, it felt important to include it under this subheading. I acknowledged how this sense of self-blame tied into the reports by participants of clients seeming to cut off from their vulnerable younger selves and showing little self-compassion. I considered how this potentially encouraged a splitting or disintegration of the self, leading to mental health distress in later life.

In summary, according to participants, many clients appeared split off and disintegrated within their selves and showing little self-compassion which has implications for therapy. One participant's take on boarding schools offered food for thought into how certain behaviours might have been purposefully enhanced by schools trying to develop resilience in their pupils, without perhaps being aware of the potential long-term impact. This apparent disconnection with the individual's self brings into question how some of these clients managed intimacy, and the relationship between self and other. This is the context of the next sub-theme.

4.4.2 Sub-theme Two: "They just don't take the space, they just assume it isn't there.", Relationship With Others- Partners

This sub-theme dealt with how participants felt their clients' negative boarding school experience impacted on their relationship with others. Relationship issues were reported to be one of the main catalysts for individuals in this client group to seek therapy. It was felt that clients appeared to avoid intimacy.

Elizabeth described how she felt clients who had experienced abandonment had abandoned themselves emotionally and struggled to connect with others, keeping their partners at arm's length, in particular. Ruth described how she felt some clients struggled with genuine intimacy and being fully present in relationship, appearing distant, shut off and oblivious to how they were coming across; "Intimacy and relationships can be really tricky because you are a withdrawn person potentially or you're not really yourself, you're a mask but you don't know that."

Peter trained as a relationship therapist and felt advertising this alongside his experience of boarding school attracted many of his boarding school clients. He described both his clients

and himself (as an ex-boarder) as being almost perplexed when their partners spoke of feeling ‘shut out’ by them.

> … they don't understand, they don’t understand that their wife or husband is saying, you know, you don't listen to me or, you know you're not hearing me. And I get with my wife, she’s said you know, you’re not hearing me.

Participants perceived many of their clients as struggling to feel like they mattered in a relationship. I sensed a distinct feeling of loneliness when Elizabeth spoke of a client who appeared bewildered as to why he might share with his partner.

> … it never occurred to me, never occurred to me to share it! Because he has grown up with the idea that no one will be interested, so I think that is a theme, no one would be interested, who would want to hear about it.

Participants felt that many clients, whilst appearing successful to the outside world in their professions, presented as cold, distant, and withdrawn from their partners. Elizabeth reflected on how she felt her clients’ negative boarding experience impacted their ability to trust and love in relationship, and then, years later, they suddenly, retrospectively, recognise the missed opportunities of intimacy.

> … if you’re a girl and you had a bad experience you may be very dubious towards anyone trying to attach to you, or love you, and you don’t know how to do love and they reach 60 and you say, oh I could have been so much more open, I could have had a different relationship, could have enjoyed it and I always felt on edge.

Participants also spoke of boarders’ partners being on the receiving end and looking for specialist support, having speculated the boarding school experience was impacting their relationship. Victor spoke of partners coming to him appearing to desperately want to help their partner’s (the ex-boarder) low mood but feeling defeated in the battle to make a connection.

> I know that he's depressed. And I… I don't know how to support, he won't let me. He won't let me help him, you know? And I... and so, this is kind of their end of... the end of the line for them as, uh, living with someone that won't allow them to… to support.

Issues around being in relationship is by no means unique to this client group, however, it was a key theme for these clients, and I therefore felt it constituted a sub-theme. There was a sense the younger child had not learnt to feel or validate their emotional needs, nor experience the emotional attunement they needed to feel like they mattered. This might explain why some participants felt their clients, as adults, could take up no space in a

relationship and had to avoid coming across as needy for fear of being re-abandoned. I also considered how given the level of defence and dissociation the participants felt their clients presented with, it is perhaps not surprising that some ex-boarders might shut off from themselves primarily around difficult emotions and levels of intimacy, which then has an impact on the partner too.

I was struck by Peter's use of his self in reporting how he felt his clients' partners were shut out. There was a sense of merger or twinship with his clients' experience, possibly calling on his own wounded healer, which might suggest something about the impact of the clients' experiences. It also made me consider how Peter's experience of boarding school might colour the lens through which he conceptualised his clients. Reflecting on Elizabeth's report on lost opportunities, I sensed that her client had potentially become aware of something that was lost or forgotten and out of conscious awareness of how things could have been.

In summary, the participants reported that their clients appeared to have issues around relating to others. Their portrayals gave a sense that clients presented as distant and possibly struggled to share and have their needs met in relationship. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were reports of partners of ex-boarders also seeking therapeutic support, seemingly aware of how their partner's boarding experience may have impacted on their relationship. Findings from such reports has implications for therapy in which clients struggle with forming a working alliance. Individuals might also find it difficult to identify and allow themselves a space for their needs to be heard and met within an intersubjective setting; something that might appear on one level as foreign but on another as desperately needed.

4.4.3 Reflexivity

This theme made me reflect on my positioning as a wife to an ex-boarder. I was not able to identify greatly with the material on a personal level from a partner's perspective. The data however did very much resonate with the experience of a previous client who when we first met, appeared very shut down from his emotions and was having difficulties in his relationship with his wife. The client had been a termly boarder and therefore had gone home during the holidays as opposed to weekends. Through our work together he became aware of how he had shut off early from his needs when he went to boarding school aged eight years. On his first night of boarding, he reported how he instantly stopped sucking his thumb for fear of being bullied. He came to realise that what he identified as self-sufficiency was also challenging his ability to be in touch with his vulnerability and this was impacting on his relationship with his partner.

4.5 Theme 3: Difficult-to-reach clients

Considering participants' reports that many within this client group appeared to struggle with the self and other and with connecting with their needs raises the question of how they arrived at therapy. This main theme addresses the question of how best to make contact with what can be a challenging group to reach. The theme included three sub-themes: "My heart goes out to them": the therapist's use of self to meet the client, the benefit of a creative tool kit and "Put your seatbelt on" this is potentially difficult, slow, long-term work.

4.5.1 Sub-theme One: "My heart goes out to them", Therapists' Use of Self to Meet the Client

This sub-theme concerns how participants found working with this client group particularly emotive. "My heart goes out to them" denotes what appeared to be the therapists' countertransference, evoking a seeming maternal yearning to nurture their clients. Participants described how they used their own somatic response to support the client to make contact with their emotions.

Elizabeth expressed quite a visceral response to what she felt her client experienced at boarding school, enacting a possible maternal transference, in which she wanted to defend and protect the young self-state she was sitting with.

> It's very cold, it's very unloving, it's very unforgiving, it's very, a lot of uns, and I suppose my heart goes out to them… I feel if I have a very young person in the room, they might be ten or twelve and I think that's particularly difficult to sit with because they're very damaged and I feel pretty irritated and annoyed that they've had that experience landed on their plate.

John also expressed how deeply moved and shocked he was by what he felt his clients experienced at such as young, vulnerable age, potentially, also evoking a paternal transference towards his client:

> I could cry when some of the things that they describe in terms of being tiny, tiny, tiny children and sitting on a train on their own, you know. Uh, a big box full of… I mean, I just, actually can't imagine how that's even possible.

Juliet also appeared to be deeply moved by her clients' testimonials and made a point of sharing her own somatic response with them, maybe seeing it as an essential therapeutic intervention to support the client to make contact with their emotions.

> I can feel very um… distressed actually. I mean, you know, really very distressed. Um… when, especially when a client really touches... yeah, just um, yeah, what it

> might have been like on that first night in... I've have heard some really horrific stories... And it's important that they see I'm distressed.

Peter also articulated what felt like the emotive weight and complexity of working with his ex-boarding school clients. There was a sense he might be calling on his own wounded healer to help the clients make contact with their distress. He reported:

> … this is not counselling, this is not at times even psychotherapy. You know, this is soul work, you know you're dealing with very deep meaningful things in the wholesomeness of this person, it's all pervasive, you know, there's no aspect of a person's life that isn't affected by the boarding, particularly the young boarders because it is their life you don't know anything else except for that, so this is why it becomes so terrifyingly normalized as it did in my world.

In describing how emotive he found the work, Victor appeared aware of his own wounded healer in the room and how, when working with this client group, he had to remain mindful of his own self-care.

> I think for me, maybe because of, you know, because of my history, um, um, it's… it's a lot to take on, so and they occupy a lot of space for me. So, um, so I'm quite careful to… to balance my… my caseload with uh, at any one time.

Participants also reported that despite being 'emotive' work, it was also very rewarding, which might be why some of the therapists chose to specialise in working with this client group. Juliet reflected on the admiration she had for the strength and bravery she felt her clients demonstrated in confronting their experience and its context.

> I'm also very fond of my boarding school clients... Like yeah, I think um... I, I really recognise their courage. I think it's incredibly difficult work. I think, you know, the having... yeah, the having to… to really confront a whole system and, societal values around their experiences. It's enormous.

Peter too described how he felt deeply touched by clients and how fulfilling and meaningful the work was; "I would say some clients I've loved, not in a personal loving relationship, but loved them in loving the experience of them recognising that they're lovable and having that affection from somebody."

I reflected on how strong feelings elicited in the participants suggested how clients might be so dissociated from their emotions as to call on the therapist to use their own somatic response to support them. Such an idea would be congruent with participants' reports, as outlined in the theme above, that this client group can appear disconnected from their

selves. The participants' somatic response might have illuminated the level of distress and trauma their clients may have experienced and the possible support they were calling upon. This gave me a sense that a level of developmental trauma might be in the frame.

Whilst acknowledging that listening to participants' portrayals of their clients' experiences was itself emotive, I also noted how, for the participants who were themselves ex-boarders, the presence of their own boarding school experience and possible wounded healer might be in the therapy room. I noted how this might add a possible layer of complexity, and maybe advantage, for therapists who had boarded themselves. I reflected on whether there was potential overidentification in the room for Peter with his clients as he brought himself into the frame. I considered how he was potentially literally sitting alongside his client as the ex-boarder but also one step ahead as the therapist. I contemplated how much his wounded healer might have supported – but, equally, impacted – his conceptualisation of his clients' experiences.

In summary, participants' use of their somatic response appeared to play a key role in contacting these difficult to reach clients. The challenge in making contact lends me to question what methods or interventions therapists found useful in supporting their clients. This will be discussed in the next sub-theme.

4.5.2 Sub-theme Two: The Benefit of a Creative Toolkit

Thus far, participants have described this client group's strong sense of disconnection and the presence of defence and dissociation in the therapy room. All the participants spoke of the benefits of adopting an integrative approach drawing on an array of modalities and interventions to make contact with their clients.

Peter described how working with his ex-boarding school clients was complex and how he felt it necessitated a multimodal approach.

> … the advantage in terms of an integrative approach because if you come purely as a psychoanalyst or purely as Gestalt or purely as a person or psychodynamic, you're going to miss some of this stuff, and… Rogerian Counselling doesn't work, using just empathy doesn't work because challenge is really important, I'm not saying you can't be challenging in that modality but it's the interventionist.

Many participants described a sense of fragmentation in their clients and consequently felt they were carrying out parts or "dualistic work" with the "functioning adult" and the "disturbed child". Through experience Juliet anticipated her clients' inner child to be stuck at a certain age; "always remember what age they went. Because that's the age of the... just think that's the age of the child that you're going to be with."

Several participants spoke of the benefits they found from using Gestalt chair work and/or inviting clients to write a letter to their younger self at boarding school in order to make contact and encourage dialogue between their adult and child self-states. Juliet felt her work with this client group called on a developmentally needed relationship. This was compatible with other participants' reports of working with young self or ego states and it being developmental orientated work. Others, such as Victor, appeared to use phonological enquiry to help the client to reflect and unpack any preconceived narratives of their boarding school experience that might be there to protect them, when he referred to, "*loosening* that kind of idealised version of that um… maybe a bit, enough to be able to question it more."

As previously discussed, all the participants found the use of their own somatic response supported clients to try and reach their dissociated emotions. It was reported that, despite clients' high functioning capacities, they all required a level of psychoeducation. Elizabeth spoke of the benefit of naming emotions to support clients with an emotional vocabulary to make sense of their feelings.

> I think a lot of people don't know they've got those feelings, they don't have a vocabulary for feelings, but if you say… oh it sounds if you're feeling A, B or C… Oh that's exactly what I feel! But they couldn't get there themselves.

Most participants described their work as being trauma informed, prioritising the need to build safety, to help process and integrate memories and make sense of what the trauma means for the client today. Others spoke of the importance of naming the client's trauma experience and said how historically, and to some extent still today, it goes unnoticed in the therapy room. Peter found that psychoeducation through neuroscience supported his clients to understand their experience.

> I do a lot of information or informing through neuroscience, or neuroscience articles, you know, read this, this is developmental trauma. You have lived a normal life, you've been successful, but you are a traumatised individual, and that's quite a shock sometimes, but if they can get that, that they've managed a part of their trauma.

Juliet spoke of supporting her clients using Nick Duffell's (Duffell & Basset, 2016) model, which set out to help individuals who were looking for support following a negative boarding school experience. She described, "recognition, acceptance, change, which is the kind of stages approach. I can talk to a client and I think that's often really helpful at the beginning."

Whilst cognitive approaches were found to be useful in the therapy room, all the participants reported how their clients often appeared to intellectualise and keep out of their bodies. For

this reason, participants also advocated incorporating bottom-up, non-cognitive interventions alongside the cognitive approaches outlined above.

Among other participants, James spoke of the benefits of using visualisation and body work to help his client to try and connect with their potentially split-off parts.

> I would encourage him to put a hand on his tummy and maybe even close his eyes, I might even do a tiny bit of visualisation with him you know... 'Where is that boy?' In fact this particular boy, he's normally sat on the edge of his bed in a dormitory… So we would go there and we'd spend five, ten minutes with him and the feeling in his tummy.

Several participants found the use of photos from when their clients first started boarding helped them to reach split-off emotions. Animals and Russian dolls were also reported to support clients to circumvent their cognitive defences. Peter, amongst other participants, felt drawing was a useful tool to reach a client's potentially dissociated experience and was particularly helpful for those who had shut down verbally. Peter asked his clients:

> … so how does it feel? How did it feel at home, doing quick drawing of how you remember home, and do a… very colourful picture of home and a very black or white or some clients do a just a big hole or block of blackness. You know, so those contrasts bring out the unconscious process, gently and getting the person to realise how horrifying and terrifying the experience is.

I reflected on reports of clients struggling to make contact with their emotions and their tendency to intellectualise. I felt this observation aligns with the idea that their survivor shield was so strong that subconsciously they chose to remain in their more developed, and potentially safer, left-brain space. I wondered, based on participants' reports, whether some evidence-based science would be welcomed by these apparent high functioning clients with a reported left-brain dominance. Scientific data might support participants to help their clients understand that they may have experienced trauma and, in doing so, validate their narrative and emotions. Reflecting on the methods reported to be useful to this client group, I acknowledged they are of course not unique to them as they would benefit many other clients.

As discussed in the earlier sub-themes there was a sense from the participants' reports that an awareness of the impact of a negative boarding school experience was important when working with this client group. It would also appear that a comprehensive set of interventions was invaluable to access these reportedly hard-to-reach clients. Whilst more cognitive approaches seemed to have their value, non-cognitive approaches also appeared to enable

participants' clients to connect their disowned or disavowed parts. This data has implications for healthcare providers whose first line of support for a client seeking help might be a cognitive behavioural therapy route.

4.5.3 Sub-theme Three: "Put your seatbelt on", This is Potentially Difficult, Slow, Long-term Work

This sub-theme encompasses the notion that working with this client group was potentially difficult, slow and long-term work.

Elizabeth, described working with this client group as both stimulating and challenging, owing to the developmental nature of the work.

> … it is fascinating work but it is not comfortable work because I suppose I think I feel I have a seven-year-old in the room, I mean you have that with other people but the seven-year-old is much more poignant because they're helpless.

James spoke of being prepared for a challenge when working with this client group who he described as being likely to present with young self-states, defensive systems and the tendency towards intellectualising instead of feeling:

> One thing I would say is put your seatbelt on, engage, there's going to be lots of different stuff, there is going to be a lovely child, there's going to be quite a strong mind, quite cognitive, find your way in there and roll your sleeves, and get busy with the survival personality.

Several participants, including Tamara, reported how they often felt they were 'getting nowhere' with clients, contributing to the notion that this is challenging and long-term work. Despite the resistance, Tamara's portrayal suggested her clients wanted to feel held, in that they kept coming to therapy.

> … there's a theme of, of, um, I would say for me, in terms of countertransference that I've noticed of feeling like you're not really doing anything. Feel, feeling like you're not, um, kind of getting anywhere, but they're still coming.

There was a sense that these clients needed time in therapy to work through their experience. Participants reported how they felt their clients had not had the space to be heard and how important offering that was. Elizabeth advocated "spill before the skill", when giving the client time and space to tell their story, "I mean I wouldn't give ideas but even point out patterns or address anything, they may just need to tell it over and over again, it's a bit like trauma."

Participants articulated the importance of titrating interventions with their clients, mindful that they might be experienced as 'another authority figure' and potentially ignite feelings of shame which this client group were reported to have a propensity for. Tamara described how she worked in this way:

> … we're always working with that fine balance of… of one foot on the accelerator and one on the brake...You know, at what point can we, is it safe to start to maybe talk about the transference since it's happening, you know, and, and that break is always around not wanting to sha- you know, to shame. That fear of shame in our clients is so, is so strong.

I reflected on how Elizabeth appeared to differentiate the suffering of her ex-boarding school clients from her other clients, particularly those who might have experienced developmental trauma. It suggested how emotive it is working with this client group and how it might trigger a rescuing or maternal transference. I also wondered if there was something about Elizabeth's boarding school experience that may have contributed towards her conceptualisation of her clients, within the intersubjective setting.

I reflected on how Tamara was possibly picking up on her clients' vulnerability in the countertransference and their resistance, owing to the fear of being re-abandoned. I wondered if this perhaps illuminated something about the "stuckness" participants' clients might have felt as children at boarding school, and now, again, as adults having been offered a platform inviting them to express their emotions.

Finally, I considered how perhaps it was unsurprising that working with this client group might involve long term, slow work, given the reported fear of abandonment and sense of resistance discussed in previous sub-themes. Whilst this sub-theme relates to the previous two, this is emotive work, and all the participants spoke about it being "long-haul" so I felt it justified its own sub-theme.

In summary, according to participants, working with this client group appeared to lend itself to challenging and long-term work. This is not dissimilar to working with clients in general, particularly those who have experienced trauma, where it takes time to build the therapeutic relationship, and support the client as they make contact with their more vulnerable parts.

4.5.4 Reflexivity

Compiling these sub-themes made me reflect on the therapeutic work I did with a client who openly shared the challenges they experienced as a result of boarding from the age of eight. I recalled my maternal transference, particularly as he relayed the vivid memory of his first school day. The client had initially come for bereavement therapy, and, reflecting on our

work, I sensed that his bereavement was making him think of the other losses in his life. Peter's use of the word "pervasive" really stayed with me as I considered how a negative boarding school experience, which for some people can last for up to ten years, has the potential to permeate so many areas of an individual's life.

4.6 Theme Four: "Privileged but emotionally starved": A Group of Clients Who Warrant Attention

Thus far the themes have encapsulated what participants felt took place for their clients, the impact they sensed it had on their clients as adults in terms of intimacy with self and other, and what it might be like when working with this client group. This final theme captures the rationale for researching and creating more awareness around this client group. The core theme included four sub-themes: "Privileged but emotionally starved": how social privilege can cloud a reality, The demand for specialist support, "Even with modern day schooling, they can't change everything" and the systemic impact of a negative boarding school experience and the potential far reaching impact that can be achieved by working with this group.

4.6.1 Sub-theme One: "Privileged but emotionally starved" How Privilege Can Cloud a Reality

Most participants spoke of the pressure they felt their clients were under, not only to achieve but to be grateful for the opportunity to go to boarding school. Participants conceptualised a tension and 'double bind' on their clients who, on the one hand recognised the privilege of having attended boarding school but who were still unhappy, perhaps feeling like they had no right to complain or even acknowledge that they had had a difficult time. Juliet described how she felt this might manifest from a young age.

> … if as a child you've been told that this is a good experience, and that it's a privileged experience, um, and you know, your parents are making sacrifices for you to get this experience. I think it's understandable, really understandable that psychologically, they're unable to kind of make… just like recognize the difficulty of that experience.

Juliet's portrayal of her clients' double bind appeared to describe another level of 'stuckness' that an ex-boarder might have found themselves in as a child and adult, and how this might have further pressured them to disavow their actual experience. To further add to the mix, James spoke of the pressure he sensed his clients felt due to the financial sacrifices their parents had made to send them to boarding school, once again impacting on their ability to stay attuned to their true experience. According to James, "it's quite particular with boarders

because of the complication around ‘Mum and Dad spent a huge amount of cash on me’ and that creates a particular estrangement to their inner feelings.”

Ruth referred to what she felt was a pressure her client experienced at being hoisted onto a pedestal of family privilege seemingly devoid of any emotional warmth. Ruth described, “they were told it was a privilege and, I think for him, he was the last one. He was following a family tradition, he felt privileged, but emotionally starved.”

Participants spoke of the pressure individuals felt from society at large. Clients were viewed as privileged for being able to attend boarding school and benefit from the potential connections it offered. John felt this pressure and turmoil potentially contributed towards a client’s experience of trauma.

> I'm being told I should enjoy this, but my experience of this is not one of enjoyment. I do not feel privileged. This does not feel like a good thing, but everybody in society, I think, does do that with boarders, is telling me that this is a privilege and I... so therefore, it's a good thing, right? And that inner conflict is, is a hallmark... I think, in trauma.

Elizabeth felt that even in the therapeutic community there was a possible prejudice against privilege, and that some people might not listen if you explained a boarder’s experience in adverse terms.

> If you were sent to a children’s home, people sort of get that… you know immediately something will come into the person’s mind, therapist’s mind… you are sent to a boarding school, something quite different comes into most people’s minds, including therapists.

In summary, participants described the pressure an arguably false privilege can have on an individual, potentially damaging their ability to be in touch with their inner reality. What felt important and potentially daunting to note was that this pressure was not only apparent at the family or societal level but also within the therapeutic community. It feels pertinent to make people aware of the potential impact the boarding school experience can have, and somehow separate out potential assumptions and judgments that might put up barriers to those seeking support.

4.6.2 Reflexivity

Elizabeth’s above comment made me reflect on some of the responses I received from individuals both within and outside my own therapeutic community when I explained my area of research. I too noticed an inner curiosity as to why this area might warrant research or

attention. I wondered if some individuals queried the idea of investing in an area that many deem privileged and I now wish had explored the process further with them.

4.6.3 Sub-theme Two: The Demand for Specialist Support

All the participants felt that working with this client group required a level of specialist knowledge. This was expressed first in terms of therapists feeling the need to actively resource themselves in boarding school knowledge through continuing professional development (CPD) training, but also via clients seeking out specialist support themselves. The consensus was that there was something unique and nuanced about this client group and without the level of insight, things could be missed. Six out of the nine participants had carried out some form of boarding school CPD training. The remaining three had read extensively around the area, one had close links to a boarding school support community and the other worked with an experienced supervisor with specific knowledge of the boarding school experience.

Ruth had been seeing ex-boarding school clients for years prior to attending any CPD workshops regarding the boarding school experience. She reported how her recent CPD training had enriched her practice and she felt that it gave her more to offer her clients, including a current one; “I think I wish I'd had the study day of working with privileged abandonment before I'd worked, especially with the chap.”

Peter had carried out his own boarding school support CPD workshops. In his opinion, even the most experienced of therapists with knowledge of attachment disorders and abandonment needed more support to understand the often missed ‘internalised hidden shame’ he felt was quite unique to boarders. Peter had a sense that without the right support therapists might struggle to be able to fully support their clients; “it’s difficult for therapists who haven't done the specialist training or haven't worked through some of that more specialist work.”

Marie and Juliet both articulated how their specialist training was ‘invaluable’, particularly given that they were not ex-boarders. As Peter did, they both felt that having the knowledge and understanding was essential when working with this client group. Marie alluded to how difficult it might be to effectively reach ex-boarding school clients without the right specialist knowledge; “boarders come, they're pretty strategic. They're pretty... some powerful stuff going on, and if you don't know what that is, you don't recognise the patterns, I think you just won't get anywhere, really, near anything.”

Victor, an ex-boarder himself, advised other therapists to access the right information and support before working with this client group. Despite having attended boarding school

himself, he still felt his specialist training was essential. He reported, “I wouldn't be comfortable working with boarding school clients without the training.”

All the participants described how clients also actively sought out therapists who specified that they had knowledge of the boarding school experience. They felt narratives around negative boarding school experiences were becoming more ‘mainstream’. Clients had reportedly approached participants informed by literature they had read that resonated with their experiences.

Marie felt her boarding school clients were unique in that they often came informed, with an awareness of their distress and how it might be linked to their boarding school experience, hence their desire to seek specialist support.

> … when they have come to me for boarding school therapy, that's where the focus is, so, it's a starting point, if you'd like. It's the explanation somehow that's underpinning how they feel about themselves and where I start with them. So, that's, perhaps, the big difference. They've read something about boarding trauma and recognised themselves.

Elizabeth reported how clients actively sought her out because she had written about the boarding school experience. She described how, without specialist training and knowledge in the area, the client might feel missed.

> I think that somebody is helped if they feel understood and you’re not going to feel understood unless someone has done quite extensive work on the boarder, and what that experience might have been, I don’t think you can really get it.

In the pursuit of specialist support, there was a sense that clients appeared to put therapists in an expert role. Marie described the degree of power she was given and the level of expectation she felt from her boarding as opposed to her non-boarding school clients; “I do have a sense of, being a sort of an expert and an authority figure with these clients particularly.”

I reflected on the palpable sense that working in this field required a level of specific training even for those who had attended boarding school. I noted how things might go unnoticed which could arguably replicate a scenario in which the distressed child feels unheard. I considered how supportive and potentially validating the boarding school literature might have been for ex-boarders who might have been struggling alone and silently with their distress. Given the data discussed in the previous themes, I wondered to what extent a therapist might unconsciously pick up on the client’s vulnerability and ‘stuckness’ in the countertransference. Such feelings could potentially have left therapists feeling vulnerable

and deskilled, thus requiring a need for further training in the area. Finally, I reflected on how the all-knowing expert therapist came to mind when Peter described how clients actively asked about his experience and expressed reassurance when they learnt he was an ex-boarder himself. Whilst understandably clients wanted to feel fully understood and sought out a mutual understanding, I did consider if, on an unconscious level, there might also be a narcissistic wound for some, which led to a need to feel a sense of specialness in their support from their therapist.

In summary, it appeared that there was something quite unique about working with this client group that required some specific training. This applies to both therapists working with those who have had a negative boarding school experience and ex-boarders seeking support. There was a sense from both client and the therapist that, without the right training, things might be missed or overlooked in the therapy room. Such data has important implications for those looking to work in the area or seeking support related to this experience.

4.6.4 Sub-theme Three: "Even with modern day schooling, they can't change everything", This Group Will Continue Coming

This sub-theme encompassed the notion that, despite the modernisation of boarding schools, and greater awareness of mental health concerns in the media, some things have not, indeed maybe even cannot be changed, meaning this client group might potentially keep coming to therapists for support. This sub-theme was raised by just over half of the participants.

All the participants felt that a principal issue that would never change, is that of the absent parent and what that meant for a child who was struggling. Peter felt that, despite a more comfortable and homely environment at boarding schools, the absence of a primary attachment/s was a key problem.

> So very recent in terms of the changes in the boarding environment. You know where you got carpets on the floor, warm showers, Facetime, you know, but the principal issue is still there, that they don't have parents or parental support.

Marie described how, despite boarding schools' best efforts to offer more comfortable living conditions, boarders were not protected from what might go on behind closed doors with children alone in their dormitories, away from the protection of housemasters; "..it doesn't matter how many duvets and carpets you've got. When children are on their own in dorms and have a code of honour and are supposed to have a stiff upper lip and all this."

Some participants discussed the amount of pastoral support that was realistically available for the boarder. Ruth described how the limited number of housemasters relative to the

number of boarders was going to impact on the emotional attunement available to children; “you know, to have to share a house master, you were talking about, house masters being present, with what? How many in the house? 40? I don't know... You're not going to get your emotional needs met, are you?”

From participants reports’ there was a sense that there is no-one-size-fits-all solution and that boarding schools will never suit all students, some of whom might struggle with their experience there and with being away from home. Elizabeth felt that whilst mental health might be more on the agenda at boarding school, boarders still felt a pressure to not show their distress. Elizabeth described, “younger boys now it’s probably more acceptable that you might be homesick but you still hide it and all those feelings disappear off behind a cupboard or a chest.”

In spite of the modernisation taking place within boarding schools today and a greater awareness around supporting mental health, there was a strong consensus amongst participants that “they cannot change everything”. Despite the best endeavours, it was felt that the system would still not suit everyone and particularly given the amount of time spent there, would continue to impact on an individual’s wellbeing. This might suggest why, according to participants’ reports, that this client group were continuing to seek support.

4.6.5 Sub-theme Four: The Systemic Impact of a Negative Boarding School Experience and the Potential Far-reaching Impact of Working With This Group

This sub-theme considered the impact that a negative boarding school experience could have beyond the individual who attended the school. The impact of boarding school was reported to be far-reaching, including siblings, mothers across multiple generations.

As well as partners, Peter briefly spoke about the impact a negative boarding experience could have on siblings, and the lack of information he found when he reported it to necessitate a “whole other area for research”.

He touched on stories of siblings, particularly brothers, who had gone to boarding school whilst the remaining siblings, often in his experience female, had stayed at home attending day school. He described the emotional impact this could have on those ‘left behind’ and how it impacted family structure and dynamics. This suggests that the impact of boarding might also come up for siblings seeking therapy.

4.6.6 Reflexivity

This made me reflect on my own experience of when my brother went to boarding school whilst my sister and I remained at home, and how overnight the family structure and dynamic changed. I recall feeling a sense of loss at no longer having my brother around.

Tamara meanwhile spoke of the “traumatic impact on mothers” whose daughters had been sent to boarding school and, like Peter, referred to siblings as ‘a whole other field’ that warranted attention; “cause they are often absolutely distraught because they have had to shut that away.”

A key area that came up for many participants was the intergenerational impact of boarding. Children were reportedly following a family tradition in attending boarding school, overriding any questions of individual differences and whether a certain school might not be the best fit. Participants reported how some clients’ parents appeared to have been impacted by their own boarding school experiences and yet still allowed their own children to proceed through the very system that caused them emotional distress. There was a sense that some parents adopted an ‘it never did me any harm’ outlook, not questioning how their experience might have impacted on their own emotional development. Juliet conceptualised that, for some, this was repeated intergenerational trauma; “often, this is a generational... Yes, this intergenerational trauma, because the parents... their parents could have been to boarding school… inevitably that is going to have an impact.”

Marie described how parents who boarded sometimes struggled to know how to parent teenagers; “also the parent, particularly if they've been a boarder or they, you know, it's been the family culture, they don't have the sense of how to parent an adolescent”.

John also spoke of the impact an unprocessed negative boarding school experience could have on parenting; “I think that, um, being a child of a boarder is really difficult. As… assuming that the parents haven't done any work on, on their own abandonment.”

Victor and Elizabeth described how clients presented with issues around parenting and distant attachments. Many of these ex-boarders had been raised by nannies prior to boarding school, and the boarding school itself thus illuminated an issue that was already present in the family system.

> Yeah. I think that certainly the… the boarders that I've seen, um, maybe the ones that are coming for therapy are um, have potentially struggled in early relationship anyway. So, this is- this is exactly that, I think this is the compounding of something that's already going on, in their… in their family situation. (Victor)

Keeping in mind the potential systemic impact that a negative boarding experience can have on individuals besides the boarder themselves hints at the potentially far-reaching impact that working with this client group could have beyond the therapy room. Juliet specifically articulated how she felt her work impacted on both the clients and their wider context, including their partners and children.

> I think that's the other thing is that very often um, these clients will have children, a lot of problems with parenting and all that kind of stuff. So, actually, it's not even just, you know, the… the work that you're doing with someone is gonna... can impact not just only them in their lives but their partners, their children.

I was struck by reports of clients being sent to board by parents who themselves had been impacted by their experience at boarding school. In such cases, I considered if this might encourage a cycle of intergenerational distress which, if it was not questioned, could persist through generations. I reflected on how this might be compounded by reported expectation and pressure boarders were perceived to have felt to meet up to family expectations outlined in Theme Two, Sub-theme One, “They lose themselves” Loss of authentic self.

On the subject of parenting, I reflected on the idea that ex-boarders have potentially missed out on the experience of having parenting modelled to them. I also wondered, if an ex-boarder had missed out on opportunities to learn how to relate to their vulnerable self, outlined in Theme Two, Sub-theme One “They lose themselves” Loss of authentic self, it raises the question of how this might impact on them being able to parent another.

I reflected on Victor’s report that distant attachments were sometimes already in place between the child and parent prior to boarding. I contemplated if this population, with distant or insecure attachment, was a result of intergenerational boarding in which parents follow the tradition of having childcare because they themselves were not parented and therefore struggled to parent, thus perpetuating the cycle by following tradition. Either way, it raises the notion that boarding school might present as the key issue for some, but it may not necessarily be the origins of every individual’s distress and further enquiry into family dynamics is therefore warranted within therapy.

In summary, most participants described the impact that a negative boarding school experience had for others beyond the ex-boarder and how this highlighted populations such as siblings and mothers, who needed further research and understanding. The potential rippling impact of boarding on others in this theme related to the earlier subtheme concerning the impact on partners. The intergenerational impact of boarding and the impact it had on parenting was a key feature for participants. Whilst weak attachments within families cannot be attributed solely to a negative boarding school experience, it does have a

role to play, and a greater awareness and knowledge of this area and client group could therefore be of immense value.

4.7 Reflexivity

When choosing a research area, I recall a tutor saying I needed to apply the 'so what' question to identify how the research will be of value to field of counselling psychology. I reflected on this whilst compiling this final theme and sub-themes, which to me built an argument as to why this research was necessary. It is apparent there are a growing number of individuals looking for specialist support and, despite the modernisation of boarding schools, they are likely to still need this help. Whilst I have steered away from a political focus, I cannot neglect to think of the context of these individuals and the current positioning of white privilege. I wonder how this might impact on those seeking therapy and I hope my focus on the human experience might help others see past the supposed privilege and instead simply see a group of individuals who are seeking support.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

5.1 Outline

This chapter presents a discussion of my findings. First, I will summarise the findings in view of the research aim and objectives. Secondly, I will discuss the findings within the context of the existing literature and psychological theory. I will then outline the clinical implications as well as the strengths and limitations of the study and suggested future directions for research. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an account of my personal reflexivity.

5.2 Summary of Findings

I will provide a reminder of the research aim and objectives before summarising the findings. The study aimed to explore therapists' perspectives on clients who had had a negative boarding school experience. The objectives were to understand 1) therapists' perspectives and conceptualisations on their clients' experience, 2) the psychological processes at play in the therapeutic relationship and 3) what therapists considered to be positive or beneficial when working with their clients.

Firstly, the participants described the complexity of their clients' negative boarding school experience with particular regard to what took place, how they adapted to the environment and the impact the experience had on them as they entered adulthood. Within this, sub-themes included a sense of being abandoned and forgotten and how the repetitive nature of the experience was likened to complex trauma. The second described the potentially enduring impact of a negative boarding school experience, specifically the sense of an unconscious temporal memory around breaks and endings being held in the body.

Participants described the impact they felt negative boarding school experiences had on their clients' relationship with themselves and others, how clients shied away from intimacy and left their partners feeling held at a distance. Sub-themes here include clients' loss of an authentic self and the way clients adapted to protect themselves from the distress of their boarding school experience. Another theme was challenge and particular avoidance faced by clients around intimacy with others, especially in relationships, as well as their struggle to share their needs.

Given some ex-boarders' apparent difficulty in communicating their needs to others, participants discussed what they found helpful in supporting this apparently difficult-to-reach group. The first sub-theme concerned participants' feelings around how emotive it felt working with this client group and how they used their own somatic responses to support their clients to access their emotions. The second sub-theme included the benefits of drawing on various modalities and interventions to work effectively with these clients. The

last sub-theme described how potentially challenging and lengthy working with this group could be.

Finally, participants discussed the importance of encouraging an awareness of those individuals in this client group who might be struggling as a result of being seen as socially privileged. The first sub-theme included discussion around the nature of privilege and how it had the propensity to cloud a reality. Therapists described individuals as appearing to be stuck in a double bind where they felt they should be happy for the opportunities they had been afforded but even though they were unhappy, they felt they could not express their distress. A second sub-theme concerned the need for specialist training and support when working with this client group and how doing so lessened the risk of things being missed in the therapy room. Discussion also took place around how this client group will keep coming for support despite boarding schools' attempts at modernisation. Finally, a sub-theme emerged around the impact that a negative boarding school experience can have beyond the individual, and the way it can impact relationships with siblings, parents and generations within families.

Having summarised the findings of this study, I will now offer a more detailed discussion of each theme and sub-theme alongside the existing literature and psychological theory. While providing some new insights, many of the findings in this data also correspond with data testimonials found in existing literature on boarding schools. I will keep in mind that this study was the first empirical research to look at the boarding school experience through the lens of therapists and it therefore offers a level of clinically rigorous validation to the existing data.

5.3 Theme One: "There is complexity to their experience"

The study found that, according to therapists, a negative boarding school experience was complex in terms of what they felt boarders had experienced, how they adapted and the enduring impact it had on them. One of the ways this last aspect manifested was in how clients managed breaks in therapy.

5.3.1 "The forgotten child"

A key finding from the study was the conceptualisation that ex-boarders who came to therapy had experienced abandonment and rejection and missed out on the emotional attunement they might have received had they stayed in their home environment. Such findings are also echoed in the boarding school literature (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Faulkner, 2021; Schaverien, 2015, 2011) and the testimonials of ex-boarders such as Mair (2005) who summarised, "central to my own experience of being sent to boarding school was a sense of

abandonment" (p.7). Hoare (2014), meanwhile, recalls the start of each term at boarding school thus "my family had given me up to an institution" (p.43). Perhaps unsurprisingly, such experiences are thought to be compounded for boarders who come from abroad and stayed with relatives during the school holidays rather than going home (Schaverien, 2015).

Participants felt boarding particularly impacted clients who boarded from a young age, with one describing how they felt the young boarders' despair got "well and truly buried". Similarly, in the literature, Schaverien (2011), describes how, owing to a break in their attachment to parents, home, pets and familiarity, younger boarders are often lost for words to describe their feeling state, leading to a "psychological freezing" (p.141). Such an experience is articulated by the psychotherapist Bion (1986) who, like many other known analysts who attended boarding school, reported feeling 'numbed and stupefied' (p.33) when he first arrived at school aged eight. In psychological terms, this "speechless terror" (Van der Kolk, 2004, p.11) is induced when the right hemisphere of the brain is not able to send sensory information to the language centre in the left part of the brain. From an evolutionary stance, the child adapts to survive by automatically going into a dorsal vagal shut down, a dissociated freeze mode, disconnecting from self and others (Porges, 2009).

The research findings touched on the distress boarders experienced when they said goodbye to their parents for the first time to enter boarding school. This parallels the sentiments depicted in testimonials of ex-boarders around their experience of leaving their parents for the first time, with some referring to it as "trauma at the threshold" (Partridge, 2007, p.310) or "an amputation" (Mair, 2005, p.8), both seeming to denote a somewhat violent, abrupt end to something special, possibly childhood. Schaverien (2015) refers to her clients' experience as "the primary wound" (p.108), suggesting a deep hurt that gets well and truly buried. Participants' reports of their clients' distress at being left at boarding school by their parents for the first time also appears to parallel depictions in trauma literature where a child is left stuck in state of helplessness and terror with a felt sense of betrayal at those they thought cared for them (Herman, 2015; van De Kolk, 2014). Case in point, Gottlieb (2021), in the boarding school literature, cites Frey's notion of "betrayal trauma" (p.62) to depict a similar experience of betrayal by a loved one. This resonates with the state of flux participants felt some clients were thrown into from a young age, and how, perhaps, like a primary wound it presented as a deep, enduring, unresolved trauma.

Participants conceptualised their clients as having experienced chronic distress owing to the repeated rupture in attachment when they had to say goodbye to their parents each term. In the psychological literature, trauma can involve a single episode or cumulative repetitive trauma (Heman, 2015). The repetitive distress some boarders experience appears to parallel

the chronic distress associated with developmental, relational trauma (Schore, 2002) or cumulative trauma (Khan, 1997) in the shape of recurring experiences of fear, helplessness, and abandonment by attachment figures. References to developmental trauma are also found in the boarding school literature when describing their repetitive abandonment by the caregiver and, in some cases, abuse at school (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Laughton et al., 2021; Schaverien, 2015). Basset (2018) cites an anonymous school counsellor who likened the repeated challenge of separation between the parents and child to the desperate circumstances of children being "placed in care" (p.77). I recall a similar experience articulated by one ex-boarder on a CPD day I attended who said, "I was left 132 times in my childhood and that's been the most punishing, the repetition of abandonment" (BSS, 2022). Laughton (2018) also recalls "leaving home 48 times to go back to school were dreadfully traumatic experiences" (p.115). Whilst through one lens attending boarding school appears to be a completely normalised and privileged experience, through another lens, in essence what is happening is that a developing child (sometimes as young as eight) is being separated from their parents' multiple times.

Perhaps the reports above are not surprising given the research around attachment (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Robertson, 1953), which demonstrates the distress and devastation a child can experience around separation and abandonment. A parent's emotional attunement to their child is considered essential for the child's social-emotional and cognitive development throughout early childhood and adolescence (Mesman et al., 2012). Bowlby described an intimate attachment to other human beings as pivotal to how a person's life evolves from an infant, adolescent, and adult all the way into old age. Whilst boarding was reported to be particularly difficult for younger boarders, research outlines how adolescence is also a turbulent period where major transitions are taking place physically, cognitively and socially (Chen & Faruggia, 2002). This is perhaps what Duffel (Duffell & Basset, 2016) had in mind when he said that, whilst teenagers might be pulling away from their parents, they still need parenting.

Participants' references to the "forgotten child" resonates with Johnson's (1994) constellation of the 'abandoned child'. Like the boarder, 'the abandoned child' experiences an erratic nurturing environment (however in the latter case this is within their early home environment), which contributes to the experience of repeated emotional abandonment. Of course, it might be the case that a boarder may have experienced an unpredictable attachment environment prior to boarding and that the school itself may thus facilitate an earned secure attachment (Brisch, 2012; Wallin, 2007), particularly for those who had experienced a toxic home environment such as one involving abuse or alcoholism (Bowlby,

1951; Power, 2007; Schaverien, 2015). Simpson (2018), for example, reports how some house mistresses and teachers were kind and supportive at attempting to provide what some might call a safe holding environment (Winnicott, 1988). However, in this current study, the onus of abandonment appeared to be experienced when the boarder entered the institution, which itself also appeared to fail in providing much-needed support. This is perhaps not surprising given the client group who were being discussed in this study.

5.3.2 "The body holds the memory": Temporal Enactments and the Importance of Managing Breaks and Endings Sensitively

A key finding of the study was how breaks and endings in therapy appeared to evoke enactments by clients. According to the psychodynamic theory, the implicit communication of enactments reflects the areas of the client's self-experience where trauma has impacted on their capacity to regulate affect (Bromberg, 2012), and what Ginot (2009) refers to as hidden critical developmental information. Schore (2009) posits that enactments are essentially a conversation between two limbic systems. Given the level of dissociation participants felt their clients adopted to manage the distress of their boarding school, it makes sense to consider this context alongside this theory.

Reflecting on the trauma literature, trauma is remembered in the body and not remembered in our left-brain narrative memory (Fisher, 2017; Van der Kolk, 2014). Traumatic memories remain dormant until triggered by a non-threatening cue that is associated with the trauma such as times of the year, weather, particular places, aloneness, voice, smells or sounds. When triggered, the memory is experienced as being relived and the body replicates the experience of the trauma, often through the fight/flight/freeze response of the sympathetic nervous system and is not experienced or recalled as a memory (Siegel, 1999; Fisher, 2017; Van der Kolk, 2014). According to participants' reports, it might be the case that for some boarders, the level of trauma or distress of saying goodbye repeatedly was dissociated from and encoded somatically as a body memory and was potentially triggered by breaks or cancellations in therapy by the therapist. Breaks and endings might unconsciously appear very final, like a death or ending, the very opposite of Stern's (1985) notion of the vitality effects a child needs to grow. Clients were described as appearing to fall into young self-states (Bromberg, 2012), unconsciously employing their survival fight or flight response without any conscious understanding why (Porges, 2009).

Schaverien (2011) refers to breaks in therapy as being particularly difficult for ex-boarders because they can evoke an unconscious memory of ruptured attachments. Clients have been found to end therapy abruptly at such moments owing to the implicit fear of becoming dependent or because it brings up an implicit rage or grievance around abandonment by the

parent in the transference relationship that the client fears to show (Schaverien, 2015). It is perhaps worth considering Bowlby's statement "there is no experience to which a young child can be subjected that is more prone to elicit intense and violent hatred for the mother than that of separation" (1960, p.24). Perhaps the outcome of this is the primary wound noted earlier. Via an enactment, a client might unconsciously act out this distress by suddenly ending therapy or miss sessions, a process Casement (2013) referred to as "communication through impact" (p.89).

The impact of breaks in therapy alongside the theory has clinical implications. Therapists might want to be aware of the potential for such enactments with this client group and perhaps, as Ruth suggested, consider using psychoeducation to support clients to foresee such potential challenges. There was consensus between participants and the literature that therapists should be vigilant around breaks in therapy with their ex-boarding school clients (Schaverien, 1997, 2004, 2011, 2015). Careful attunement and the rupture and repair (Safran & Muran, 1996) of enactments within the security of the therapeutic relationship provides an ideal opportunity for clients to re-experience breaks and integrate them in their narrative memory alongside the emotions that may have been disavowed for a long time (Siegel, 1999; Fisher, 2017).

5.4 Theme 2: Being kept at an arm's length

5.4.1 "They lose themselves": Loss of Authentic Self

The study found that a negative boarding school experience had the propensity to impact on a boarder's relationship with their self. Participants reported how their clients presented as what some might describe as disintegrated and fragmented (Fisher, 2017), with a lack of self-cohesion (Kohut, 1971) or, in attachment terms, as a disembodied dismissing client (Wallin, 2007).

Considering where some boarders are developmentally, Schaverien (2011) notes a child, particularly one between the ages of seven and eleven, relies so much on an adult that there can be detrimental effects on psychological development if they are sent to boarding school. In the psychological literature, relationships are said to develop our sense of self, security and wellbeing (DeYoung, 2015, Schore, 1994; Siegel, 1999). Whilst early relationships are key in self-development, it is also apparent that relationships of all sorts have a great impact and a shaping role throughout life (Wachtel, 2008). Attachment is thought to foster a sense of security, whilst intersubjectivity (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996) promotes a sense of psychic intimacy and belonging. According to Stern (1985), this is achieved through the affect attunement of the primary caregiver who sensitively attunes to the child's non-verbal states. Ideally, the intersubjective field provides the child the with opportunity to learn that

subjectivity can be shared and met with empathy, supporting self-development with a sense of being experienced that leads to a self-experience (Stern, 1985). Within this setting an individual can gain emotional awareness and, according to Kohut (1984), the self-object transferences of mirroring, twinship and idealising required to support the developing self throughout life.

Taking into account the above developmental theory alongside the reported insufficient emotional support at boarding school suggests that boarders might struggle to have all their experiences met and learn about themselves in the eyes of the other. This might stifle their opportunities for self-exploration and development and, at worst, lead to fragmentation (Kohut & Wolfe, 2001). The data from this research and literature alludes to this, particularly for those who struggled at boarding school. As Schaverien (2011) notes, the self begins to get lost when early boarders find themselves in a new and unknown environment, in the care of strangers and missing out on contact or love.

Participants in the study reported how they felt their clients, as young boarders, “lost themselves”, learning early on to become someone that others wanted them to be. This process of disowning part of their self could impact self-development and might mean the child loses touch with their needs, wants and desires. This idea resonates with the Cognitive Analytic Theory (CAT) one participant drew on to describe how an abandoned child is also at risk of abandoning themselves. It also parallels Johnson’s (1994) ‘abandoned child’ who had a tendency towards poor self-care. In the boarding school literature, one ex-boarder reflected on the legacy of the boarding experience thus: “deep down this boy knew he could not be accepted for who he was” (Dickens, 2021, p.65).

Given the reported perceptions of self-abandonment, it was perhaps no surprise to hear participants describe what they felt was their client’s shame at struggling to successfully adapt to boarding school and failing to live up to the expectations imparted on them by their school and parents. Participants described what they felt was an ex-boarder’s tendency to retroflect ‘their failings’ onto their selves, leaving them with a sense of deficit and dysfunction. Shame can induce a rupture in attachment, an empathic failure, and an overall loss of connection (Mollon, 1984). Based on the participants’ perceptions it seems the ex-boarder is shaming and possibly disowning the younger part of their self and in doing do potentially promoting this sense of fragmentation.

Clients were also perceived as adapting to protect themselves from the distress of attending boarding school. Participants described the creation of a survivor personality that paralleled the idea of the false self (Winnicott, 1960) or defensive self-state (Bromberg, 2012) and the protective shield described in the boarding school literature (Duffell, 2014; Laughton et al.,

2021; Palmer, 2006; Schaverien, 2011; Simpson, 2018). Duffell (2005, 2016) himself refers to ‘strategic survivor personality’ protecting the young boarders vulnerable self from showing any weakness or emotion for fear of standing out. In a similar vein, Schaverien (2011) describes the process of unconscious splitting, which takes place for boarders where the ‘true’ identity of the self remains hidden from further distress behind armour. A television documentary (Channel 4, 2010) offers visual footage of a young boy who appears to split off from his vulnerable self when he chooses not to go home at half term to avoid the upset of having to say goodbye to his family. Whilst protecting himself by avoiding the very thing that could provide security, there is the question of how his more vulnerable self was supported. In the trauma literature, Fisher (2017) might describe this as a self-alienation of internal states or parts to survive the distress of a situation, leading to a disconnection of emotion.

According to participants, the process of adaption starts early and may go unnoticed to an uninformed onlooker. Elizabeth’s description of the “veneer of the beautiful boarding school” resonates with Simpson’s (2018) portrayal of boarders masking their distress to onlookers. Perhaps this masking goes some way to explaining why research has found that boarding school students might be more at risk of internalising problems through anxiety and depression (Leonard et al., 2015; Lester & Mander, 2015).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study found that the survivor personality was perceived to remain with ex-boarders into adulthood. Participants described their clients as presenting with a confident façade, masking any feelings of distress, whilst maintaining a level of vigilance as they look for threats (Duffell, 2005; Schaverien, 2011; Simpson, 2018). Considering this from an evolutionary standpoint, in the frame of polyvagal theory (Porges, 2009), the ex-boarder is still trying to stay safe. Their neuroception for danger, acquired from a young age, keeps them in a sympathetic state of fight or flight mobilisation, which promotes a sense of competition and judgement, and impacts their ability to regulate, connect and engage (Dana, 2018). This aligns with participants’ reports of their clients arriving in therapy as if they are encased in a defensive suit of armour and struggling to make contact with their distress. It also parallels the description of a dismissing attachment style in which one is reluctant to feel emotions that might lead them to connect on a deeper level with others (Wallin, 2007). The enduring nature of the survivor personality is echoed in Mair’s (2005) testimonial when he recounted his inability to switch off the “hyper-vigilance and emotional paralysis” (p.8) he developed at the start of his five years at boarding school.

In accordance with the boarding school literature (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Schaverien, 2015), participants in this study described their clients as high achievers with a surprising lack of emotional literacy, defaulting to intellectualising over feeling. Research in affective

neuroscience reports how the left side of the brain processes language, analysis and conscious thought, whilst the right side of the brain manages emotions, nonverbal communication and the unconscious (Schore, 2009). According to Schore (2009) and Siegel (1999), right brain emotional development, emotional regulation and reflexive capabilities are nurtured through a secure attachment environment offering affect attunement (Stern, 1985) and mutual affect regulation opportunities (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002; Schore, 2004). Considering the findings in this research alongside the literature, it could be said that boarding schools successfully foster a "manliness and independence" (Schaverien, 2015, p.27) resulting in a honing of the right-side brain development. Meanwhile, owing to the absence of one-to-one attuned support, they potentially fail to offer opportunities for left brain development nurturing boarders' emotional literacy and development.

Thinking more broadly, Basset (2021) writes about the pressure and expectation society places on boys and men to suppress their emotions and mature quickly and how boarding school 'hot houses' this. The historical literature informs us of the role boarding school had for raising children to rule the British Empire (Gathorne-Hardy, 1997). The literature also reports that in battle, ex-boarder army offices were noticeably more successful than their non-ex-boarder comrades in suppressing their emotions and shell shock (Rivers, 2018). Whilst the ethos of boarding school has, arguably, succeeded in its aim of fostering such individuals, it is worth asking at what cost to the self this comes and whether it is so helpful in today's world. As Den Hollander (2018) remarks, 'being able to cut off from my emotions has been very useful for me in my life. I was able to move from house and lovers frequently without much apparent upheaval. But I now realise that the price paid was high because every time I cut off my feelings, I cut off part of myself' (pp.12-13).

Reflecting on affect regulation, the study reported dissociation as a survival function was a key psychological process thought to be adopted by ex-boarding school clients and was a characteristic of the survivor personality. According to Bromberg (2012), dissociation can be a response to the autonomic sympathetic hyperarousal associated with trauma, which appears to fit with what some ex-boarders might have experienced particularly at moments such as the 'trauma at the threshold'. As a defensive process (DeYoung, 2015), or survival solution, dissociation serves as a mechanism to avoid a sense of self-annihilation to preserve the inner world or self from the destabilizing existence of the outside (Bromberg, 2012). This leads to the non-integration of the trauma into a self-experience, particularly if the childhood trauma and resultant emotions are not processed with an adult (Van der Kolk, 2014). Hence, whilst dissociation may have protected the participants' clients as children at boarding school, it might also protect them as adults by keeping their distress within their

implicit memory ‘well and truly buried’ at a cost to the individual and possibly those around them.

I note how dissociation can also have a positive function in the absence of any other coping strategy to manage a stressful situation (Sinason, 2020). Whilst it did not appear to come from the data, I wonder how for some ex-boarders, the suit of armour might serve as a valuable asset to them. In such circumstances, dissociation serves as a temporary option as opposed it being a fixed adaption impacting on healthy functioning. Krok-Paszkowski (2022) reports on his difficult experience of boarding and explored it through the prism of post traumatic growth. He recognised what whilst he had experienced a challenging time, he had developed a level mental toughness in resilience but lacked in emotional resilience demonstrating a tendency to suppress emotions.

5.4.2 “They don't take the space, they just assume it isn’t there”: Relationship With Others

Another key finding from the research was the conceptualisation that a negative boarding school experience had the potential to impact on an ex-boarder’s ability to be in an intimate relationship and this was often the catalyst for them seeking therapeutic support.

Participants’ conceptualisations of their clients paralleled that of Duffell and Basset (2016) in how they felt the defence systems some ex-boarders adopted had become engrained and were impacting on their capacity for intimacy as adults. This was echoed in Burr’s (2021) testimonial that the shutting down of expression and deep emotion might work for a child but not for an adult looking for depth of intimacy. According to Schaverien (2011), challenges with intimacy underlie many of the learned behaviours and emotional states encompassed in what she refers to as Boarding School Syndrome.

Reports from the participants suggested that the distress they felt their clients experienced from repeatedly saying goodbye to parents impacted the ex-boarder’s ability to trust another. This seems in keeping with Hoare’s (2014) experience “I gradually learnt that it is not safe to rely on others” (p.43). Gottlieb (2021) also reports “the rupture of attachments was managed by developing a mistrust of love often presented in adult years” (p.61). Reflecting on other research findings, Khaleelee’s (2018) study reported the ex-boarder’s inability to rely on others in relationship including partners, parents, and siblings.

The research findings suggested that participants’ clients struggled with the notion that others might have them in mind and care what they think. Perhaps the experience of repeated abandonment induced a sense of aloneness and coming into an intimate relationship might resultantly feel completely foreign. As Elizabeth said, “he has grown up

with the idea that no one will be interested". According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), this core belief might well have formed a strong internal working model influencing how he and other ex-boarders interact in relationship.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study found it was often the partner of the ex-boarder who sought therapeutic support for their relationship. Duffell (2014) also reports many accounts of partners struggling to be in relationship with the ex-boarder and the challenges they faced around intimacy and communicating emotion. It feels pertinent to consider the well-established predictive role of attachment style and personal relating (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). According to the participants, there is a sense that some ex-boarders appeared to display an insecure dismissing attachment style (Main et al., 1985), which is perhaps no surprise given the numerous ruptures in attachments they may have experienced. In keeping with this presentation, participants described clients as uncomfortable with intimacy, deferring to autonomy and independence (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988) and struggling to commit to relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The conceptualisation of ex-boarders' dismissive attachment style also resonates with the interpersonal relating outlined in Johnson's (1994) abandoned child, as previously mentioned. Owing to their earlier needs not being met, the individual fears abandonment in loving relationships. They tend to choose depression over expression, which parallels the participants' depictions of partners' despair at the ex-boarder being "emotionally cut off" and "depressed" (Johnson, 1994).

A final note on relationships. In the study, the participant Ruth applied CAT theory to describe how children who, having felt like they have been abandoned, might abandon their self but also choose to abandon others. The seemingly intertwined impact of a lack of love for self and consequential impact on intimacy with others that the participants perceived in their clients is also conveyed in Simpson's (2018) testimonial of life after boarding school "I vowed to love and then betrayed my partner all amidst the backdrop of a destructive relationship with myself, one in which I berated and abused myself for somehow not being good enough, for not deserving love, for not being lovable" (p.34).

5.5 Theme 3: Difficult-to-reach Clients

Another key finding from this research is the perception that this client group are potentially difficult to reach in the therapy room. This has also been acknowledged in the boarding school literature (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Emerson-Smith, 2021; Schaverien, 2015). Given the level of adaption clients were perceived to have adopted and the potential level of distress that was 'buried' from a young age, this theme examined what there is to know and draw upon to support these clients therapeutically.

5.5.1 “My heart goes out to them”: Therapists’ Use of Self to Meet the Client

The study found that this client group evoked strong emotions in the participants, suggesting the clients’ reluctance to feel and, once again, indicating a dismissive attachment presentation. Participants’ reports suggested clients called on a maternal or paternal response in the transference, which suggests how developmentally oriented it is to work with this client group. From the intersubjective standpoint (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996) on transference, there is a sense that participants’ clients were implicitly looking for development enhancing experiences they may have missed out on in their earlier years, what Kohut (1984) refers to as self-object transferences.

Participants appeared to be working within the implicit, relational setting with clients with a history of dissociation and attachment disruption and drawing on their own somatic response to support the client to make contact with their own disavowed distress. Participants were possibly attempting to develop an attachment, or what Rappoport (2012) refers to as an “umbilical cord” (p.375), by linking the felt states of the client and themselves to support the client to make contact with dissociated feelings and experiences. Through somatic tracking within the intersubjective setting, the participants appeared to be lending the client their own nervous system and, through evenly hovering attention, tracking the client’s nonverbal bodily communications in an attempt to develop co-regulation (Siegel, 1999). The coexistence of two intersubjectivities and the interactive regulation has the potential to integrate affect states and promote healing (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996). Such an approach seemed pertinent for a group of clients who, according to reports, had been deprived of such contact throughout their developing years. Whilst such an intervention is of course useful for many client presentations, the findings suggest it was feature for many of those working with this client group, who they perceived as struggling to make contact with their emotions.

As well as drawing on strong parental transferences, a seemingly novel finding from the data was the presence of the wounded healer (Nouwen, 1994) called upon by some of the therapists who had themselves boarded. This once again indicated how emotive this work was and what the clients might implicitly be calling on for support. Clinically it has also highlighted the need for a level of caution when working with this client group. One participant reported how his wounded healer presented in the room when working with his clients and how he made a point of closely monitoring it for his own self-care. Another participant appeared to express a sense of “we-ness” with his clients’ experiences, denoting a twinship transference (Kohut, 1984) or potential overidentification with some clients. This prompted me to reflect on the intersubjective context (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996) and the

reciprocal influence of both the client's and participant's subjectivities. Whilst the wounded healer might offer additional support for clients through the implicit relational knowing or explicit realms, it felt important for therapists working in the field to stay close to their own process, particularly if they have their own negative boarding school history. Duffell and Basset (2016) raise the notion of therapists working through their own boarding school issues. As with all therapeutic training this would support future therapists in maintaining some distance from the client and reduce the risk of losing some of the 'as if' quality in the relationship, which, on certain occasions, I interpreted in the data. It would also help therapists to monitor their own wellbeing in the work which, given the reported level of perceived trauma, could be at risk of burnout (Baker & Gabriel, 2021).

5.5.2 The Benefit of a Creative Toolkit

This study found that working with this client group called for an integrative approach with different interventions needed to make contact with what the participants perceived to be a difficult-to-reach group. This client group were perceived as defensive, in a dorsal vagal shutdown (Porges, 2009) and all manner of approaches had to be called upon to reach them. In the boarding school literature, Duffell and Basset (2016) also advocate using a variety of disciplines to work with this client group through a structured, staged approach of recognition, acceptance, and change. In the current research there was a particularly strong calling for an integrative approach and strong sense that a therapist would not otherwise reach the client. Unlike Duffell and Basset (2016), there was less emphasis on working through linear stages and more on therapists thinking creatively and on their feet at both a cognitive and non-cognitive level.

Given the conceptualisations of trauma in the study, it was not surprising to hear reports that the participants thought therapists working with this client group would benefit from being trauma informed. Other research looking at ex-boarders' feedback on their own psychotherapy also reported how they found specialist trauma intervention was particularly helpful as part of the therapeutic process (Emerson-Smith, 2021). Participants called on other non-cognitive approaches to reach the implicit disavowed memories. That said, the top-down approach also had its benefits. Given that clients in this group were often reported as being predisposed to left-brain thinking, the study found psychoeducation supported participants to help their clients understand and validate their experience. In the trauma literature, Fisher (2017) notes how psychoeducation has a vital role informing clients about their symptoms, and how to address and regulate them.

Arguably a multimodal approach rests on a strong, trusting therapeutic relationship, acknowledged in research as a key vehicle that brings about change in therapy (Norcross &

Wampold, 2019). Findings from the study also alluded to the developmental nature of working with these clients, calling on what some refer to as a reparative relationship (Clarkson, 1989). For some time, the NHS has positioned CBT as the dominant available therapy, particularly for depression and anxiety disorders (Mark, 2012), and it is thought to be the only viable solution to meet the scale and nature of demand for mental health care (Clarke, 2023). This positioning begs the question of how this client group, who are perceived as being withdrawn from their distress, will get the right support if they try to access it through NHS provision. Might a short-term course possibly deter a client from seeking future help for their distress, causing their disavowed parts to be buried deeper?

5.5.3 "Put on your seatbelt": This is Potentially Slow, Long-term Work

The findings from this study indicate that those considering working with this client group should consider it 'long-haul' work. This is unsurprising given the potential developmental nature of the work and that trauma might be in the frame for those boarders who have a propensity to shut down and intellectualise. Clients were perceived as presenting at therapy with young self-states (Bromberg, 2012) and with little parental ego to attune to and meet their needs. The findings suggest a developmentally needed or reparative relationship (Clarkson, 1989) is necessary and will take time to foster.

The study found that therapists working in this area should be aware of the level of "stuckness" they might experience when working with clients who, according to the findings, appeared committed to therapy (aside from the triggering moments of breaks and endings). This corresponds to other descriptions of how difficult it can be working with clients looking for intimacy yet fearing abandonment and with a tendency to terminate therapy early when challenges occur in the transference (Schaverien, 2015; Power, 2007)

The data supported the importance of titrating interventions with this client group, keeping in mind how a therapist might represent another authority figure in the transference. From an intersubjective stance this appears to parallel the repetitive dimension in which clients fear a repetition of the past (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996). Whilst this process might offer grist to the mill if not sensitively managed, it might cause a rupture beyond repair. Whilst the careful attunement of applications applies when working with any client, it is particularly pertinent when working with those with dismissive attachment presentations, who fear connecting deeply with others (Wallin, 2007).

All the participants reiterated that working with this client group was challenging yet fascinating and rewarding work, a sentiment shared by Duffell and Basset (2016) in the concluding chapter of their work. There was a sense that there was something quite special about working with ex-boarders. I considered to what extent the significance of this work was

influenced by those therapists who had attended boarding school themselves and who were possibly bringing their own wounded healer to the research. On reflection however, I noted how all the participants, including both those who had and those who had not boarded, spoke passionately about how much they valued working in this area.

5.6 Theme Four: "Privileged but emotionally starved": A Group of Clients Who Warrant Attention

5.6.1 The Guise of Privilege

Participants spoke of the 'double bind' they felt their clients had experienced as children. Their clients were told by both their parents and society how privileged they were to be sent to boarding school, yet they felt unhappy and could not express these emotions because of their 'privilege' and fears of being abandoned again. This finding confirms the concept of a double bind that appeared from my literature search (Duffell, 2005; Duffell & Basset, 2016; Partridge, 2013). My findings throw particular light on the juxtaposition that the participants felt their clients were in due to this double bind. One participant poignantly echoed the general consensus when they described the client group as 'privileged but emotionally starved' and how the perception of privilege can cloud a reality. This has implications for individuals from this client group seeking mental health support.

Social class and socio-economic status can have a significant impact on mental health (Liu et al., 2004; Smith, 2005), providing resources that ease the challenges of everyday life and support mental health (Vogel & Entringer, 2023) and access to effective psychological interventions (Barnett et al., 2022). Whilst this client group might have the privilege of getting help, owing to this double bind, they might not feel able to ask for it, as Emerson-Smith's (2021) qualitative study demonstrated. According to Duffell and Basset (2016), the ex-boarder has little sympathy from society. It raises the notion of a possible hierarchy of deservedness in mental health and an unspoken narrative that someone is not allowed to get attention for feeling the way they do because they are privileged. What is novel in this study is the timelessness of the current climate. Diversity is high on the agenda and the privileged white male is the focus of much of society's anger. This might make coming to therapy and taking up space complex for this client group. If you attended boarding school, you are seen as privileged, high functioning, socially able and often occupying a position of power and authority (Duffell, 2014; Schaverien, 2004). Yet there appears to be a nuance that, in the emotional sense, you are not privileged; and my findings suggest some people do not understand that.

The field of counselling psychology aims to consider social justice for those underrepresented and not in positions of power (Cutts, 2013; Goodman et al., 2004; Winter & Hanley, 2015). This poses the question of how to address this client group, given that ex-boarders are perceived by many as being 'on top'. Data from the study reported apparent prejudice from therapists around privilege, which has been also acknowledged in wider research (Kaiser & Prieto, 2018). As part of her research into ex-boarders, Emerson-Smith (2021) also reflects on an awareness of a blind tendency towards classism and a focus on the fight for social justice for the working class. Barclay (2011) notes how her own therapist's assumption of privilege around her boarding school experience was a barrier to her expressing her distress. One participant, Elizabeth, felt that if a client's experience was seen in adverse terms (such as being in a children's home, which is different from a boarding school, although there are some similarities) it would be viewed differently by a therapist. It could be said that boarding schools and children's homes both generate attachment challenges and have a potentially negative developmental impact on the child, yet one key difference is that boarding schools are seen as privilege and part of a social system.

Foster (2018) also raised this notion and argues how not acknowledging a link between privilege and distress leads to a further abandonment of self. Perhaps it is a reminder that as a therapeutic community we need to be aware that individuals across society experience distress because of their early contexts, whether or not these were socially privileged. Furthermore, we as therapists might want to bring awareness to our own assumptions and possible prejudices around privilege that could erect barriers to individuals getting support.

5.6.2 The Demand for Specialist Support

This research found there was something unique about this client group that calls for specialist training. Participant reports confirmed the assertion made in the existing boarding school literature that without the right support therapists might miss out on the nuance of the boarding school experience and its lasting impact, which is often masked behind a confident presentation (Duffell, 2000; Duffell & Basset, 2016; Schaverien, 2011). What was interesting and surprising was that this was felt by participants who had themselves boarded, suggesting that all therapists working in this area might benefit from specialist training. According to the literature, distress around the boarding school experience can go unnoticed in the therapy room, often because the therapist had boarded themselves and the experience and possible distress was therefore normalised (Duffell, 2000; Partridge, 2007; Schaverien, 2011). Whilst this was not directly mentioned by participants who were ex-boarders, they may have indirectly alluded to it when they reported the impact their CPD training had on what they felt they could offer their clients. What seems apparent is the need

to continue raising awareness around the negative boarding school experience within the therapeutic community through empirical research such as this project.

As well as therapists looking for specialist training, the data demonstrated that this client group were often seeking specialist support. This adds to Emerson-Smith's (2021) research in which boarding school clients conveyed how helpful it was to receive support from a therapist with specialist knowledge on board (Emerson-Smith, 2021). Looking at the literature, there appears to be a shift in how this client group has presented over the last ten years. Previously, boarding school issues rarely surfaced as the presenting issue at therapy. Ex-boarders were instead seeking support for depression, relationship breakdowns and work-related problems (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Schaverien, 2007). According to Schaverien (2022), clients are now coming to therapy citing boarding school distress. Perhaps recent mainstream publications (Duffell & Basset, 2016; Laughton et al., 2021 Simpson, 2018; Stibbe, 2016) reporting on the negative impact of boarding school are informing and bringing more awareness to these clients and encouraging them to seek appropriate support. If that is the case, then this once again provides a rationale for empirical research in this area and for creating an awareness around the potential impact of an experience that is perceived to be socially privileged and that might otherwise remain buried or tied up with shame.

5.6.3 This Group Will Continue Coming

Findings from this study suggest that, despite the modernisation of boarding schools, this client group will keep coming to therapy. Supporting the research of Martin et al. (2014), participants in the present study agreed that the boarding school sector was modernising, with increasing attention paid to both academic and pastoral care, and better communication with home facilitated through mobile phones. However, the data from the present study differed in that participants strongly felt that, despite modernisation, some things had not and could not change and could continue to cause distress for boarders. The principal issue was around attachment, namely the absent parent and subsequent feelings around abandonment and rejection. Secondly, it was also acknowledged that, despite better pastoral care, the emotional needs that foster a sense of comfort and security could not practically be met owing to the staff-student ratio. Foster (2018) frames this with reference to love when she reports "however well-meaning adults in such institutions may be, they do not love the child, so the child must learn to live without love, adapt to the new environment" (p.130).

The study found that despite the modernisation of boarding schools, boarders were perceived as unprotected against certain traditions and codes of practice enacted by other boarders that might cause distress and impact on their sense of safety. This finding adds to

Schaverien's (2015) report that, despite the banning of traditional practices such as fagging, where young boys act as personal slaves to older boys, they still continue unofficially today, which again dissuades a sense of safety. Given that boarders spend so much time at school, it is vital that they perceive it as a safe and supportive place (Martin et al., 2016; Fredrick et al., 2021). Other research demonstrates that boarding school students are more at risk for bullying victimisation than students in day schools (Lester & Mander, 2015; Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2014). The data suggests a need to promote awareness of what should be closely monitored at boarding school and for therapists to be aware of those unofficial practices that might take place at boarding schools and that could potentially become normalised and go unmentioned in the therapy room.

Notably, there has been disagreement in the literature about whether the modernisation of boarding schools means the experience of attending is no longer as impactful as it historically was (Duffell, 2012; Standish, 2011). This once again demonstrates a need to promote awareness within the therapeutic community and to ensure data such as that presented in this study is available for therapists to draw on.

5.6.4 The Systemic Impact

A negative boarding school experience was found to have a far-reaching impact on partners and family members as well as on the individual boarder. There was reference to the complexity of feeling that siblings experienced as they processed their parents' decision to send one child to boarding school and keep one at home. These findings correspond with Schaverien's (2011, 2018) reports on the profound disruption boarding can have on the parents and siblings left behind. They also align with feedback from some of the ex-boarding school executives in Khaleelee's (2018) study, who described a distance in their relationships with parents and siblings due to attending boarding school. Giddens (2018) also offers a first-hand experience of this, recalling "My family was ripped apart and I have never regained that original relationship with my brothers" (p.25).

Mothers were reported to be particularly impacted by their child going to boarding school. Tamara's reference to the 'traumatic impact on mothers' resonated with the visual distress that can be observed in the mothers depicted in the documentary *Leaving Home at Eight* (Channel 4, 2010) as they said goodbye to their daughters going off to boarding school and faced the challenge of coming home to an empty nest.

The study featured a conceptualisation of the intergenerational impact of boarding and the perpetuation of the distress and trauma caused by families prioritising family tradition over their children's wellbeing by sending their children to boarding school. What might be playing into this is, as Hirsh (2019) describes, parents having a strong attachment to the socially

constructed notion of success, so much so they lose sight of the uniqueness and needs of the individual and, possibly, their own history of distress too. Participants felt that owing to the intergenerational cycle, some of their clients struggled as parents to give their children what they had not been given in the way of positive parenting. Den Hollander (2018) offers a first-hand experience of this “my eldest child has had to carry the burden of teaching me about the boarder’s own parenthood… my children had to pay the price for my boarding school trauma” (p.15).

As well as attachment issues attributed to boarding, the findings acknowledged the prospect of an insecure attachment pre-existing in the families. This prompts reflection on the notion of whether intergenerational boarding and the potential resultant emotional paucity fosters an intergenerational avoidant attachment (Van Ijzendoorn, 1995) within families. Within the family there might also be a notion of Suttie’s (1999) ‘tenderness taboo’ where parents discourage warmth and closeness with their child, perhaps continuing what has been modelled and was normalized in their family and in anticipation of the introduction of nannies and boarding school. Clinically it feels important to consider how therapy for some ex-boarders might be a catalyst for processing early developmental trauma (Wolstenholme 2021).

Considering the systemic impact of boarding school, it feels important to consider the impact boarding might have on the system at large. Whilst taking an apolitical stance with this study, it is difficult to completely divorce politics from this discussion. I note of the 55 prime ministers Britain has had, 20 attended Eton College boarding school (Self, 2021). Given the data around the environment and ethos boarding school offers and what they supposedly try to foster in their students brings into question how boarding schools might have shaped prime ministers’ style of leadership, and how this impacts on society at large. I cannot account for whether Britain’s prime ministers had a good experience at boarding school, but what is apparent is that there are a number of ex-boarders who as adults are perceived as avoidant and cut off from their emotions. Whilst historically this may have been deemed useful for running an empire, how useful is it when leaders need to think perhaps more sensitively for the wellbeing for all members of society. According to Khaleelee (2016), the unexpected leave result of the EU Referendum and leading turmoil was partly a result of a style of leadership which lacked the emotional intelligence to properly engage with judgements of the public. Khaleelee (2016) postulated this lack of emotional intelligence derived from the impact of early boarding. Whilst this is one person’s view, considering it alongside the data from this study, it possibly promotes enquiry into the impact boarding might have systemically on society as a whole.

The systemic impact of boarding works the other way too. Aligning with Field's theory of interconnectedness (Lewin, 1951), participants considered the wider impact that therapy can have beyond the individual, particularly on the boarder's children and partners. Clinically this suggests the far-reaching impact that specialist training can have in supporting the wellbeing of others beyond the individual ex-boarder themselves, including the potential to arrest an intergenerational pattern.

Having discussed the study's findings alongside the boarding school data and theory, I will now discuss the implications and recommendations emerging from my research.

5.7 Implications and Recommendations

5.7.1 Clinical Implications

The findings from this study raises awareness for other counselling psychologists, mental health practitioners and those working in the education system. A key finding was that this was an area calling on specific knowledge and training. Data suggested there was a depth of complexity to a negative boarding school experience that might go unnoticed without prior knowledge of the experience of boarding, the enduring impact it can have into adulthood – particularly on relationships – and how it might be masked or enacted in the therapy room. Without the right support, some ex-boarding school clients might not reach the therapeutic support they need.

The findings suggested that therapists would benefit from being trauma-informed and understanding the repetitive attachment disruption clients might have experienced. Therapists should also be aware of how clients might mask their distress in the therapy room, such as through breaks in therapy. The fact that boarders, sometimes from as young as eight-years-old, are away from the security of their home for up to ten years of their early life, highlights the developmental nature of this therapeutic work. Therapists would benefit from considering a developmental approach, supporting the client to explore their younger parts as well as modelling to them how to be in relationship with the self and other. Clinically, the study informs other therapists of the benefit of using a variety of interventions to reach what were conceptualised as 'difficult-to-reach' clients and to anticipate that working with this group may involve long-term work. The findings highlighted the emotive nature of the work and how therapists who had themselves boarded would benefit from reflecting on their own experience prior to working in this field.

An example of working with such a client might look like the following. Time would be given to establish trust and security within the therapeutic relationship. The therapist would explore what emotional support strategies the client might have to support themselves as they enter

the therapeutic process. Once a level of stabilization and safety was felt established, the therapist would support the client as they explore their boarding school experience, noticing any defences that might impact on them accessing difficult material. If necessary, should the client struggle to find words for their feelings, the therapist might offer bottom-up strategies in the way of drawing or use of animals. Psychoeducation might be offered to explain the role of the client's nervous system and what might be happening if they are dissociating. If necessary, grounding techniques might be offered to help the client to support themselves. The therapist might introduce to idea of working with parts, and in doing so, support the client to make contact with their younger more vulnerable parts, as well as the parts that may have supported them at school and in adulthood. Through exploration, the therapist would be mindful of managing breaks and endings sensitively. They might inform clients of the possible difficulties around such times. Therapy would hopefully support the client to develop their own adult part who can support and reparent their more vulnerable split off part/s. With greater self-awareness, the client hopefully fosters a greater sense of connection and empowerment enabling them to engage more positively with themselves and those around them.

The impact of a negative boarding school experience appeared to be far reaching, thus highlighting the systemic impact that might go under the radar without the right support. Findings suggested that knowledge and understanding of a negative boarding school experience was also valid to support partners and family members who might seek therapeutic help. Given the apparently intergenerational nature of boarding, awareness through specialist therapeutic support might provide opportunities to intervene, facilitate and break potential cycles of trauma and distress that might be present in families. For example, supporting a client to experience an intimacy they missed out on, might in turn lead to positive changes in the way they parent their child at home, modelling a positive change for future generations.

The study found that the societal view of seeing boarding school as a privilege potentially put-up barriers to those seeking support. Data suggested that those negatively impacted by boarding school had potentially faced attachment disruption, trauma, abandonment, and shame owing to the societal perception of seeing their experience as a privilege. Findings suggested therapists might want to be aware of their own feelings around privilege and consider any blind spots they might have around this that might hinder them from seeing the potential distress attributed to clients' experience of boarding school.

Following on from this, in terms of training, the data suggested that counselling psychology and other therapeutic courses could bring more awareness to the issue of boarding school

and the notion of the double bind when addressing issues of class in diversity training. Courses might want to invite clinicians to reflect on any preconceptions or biases around class and privilege they might hold that could impact on working with clients in this area. It appears that knowledge about the impact of a negative boarding school experience has historically been more prevalent within the psychotherapeutic community, but it is increasing its profile within other psychological communities (Emerson-Smith, 2021; Grundy, 2021). Data supports the importance of promoting more awareness of a negative boarding school experience to therapists of all disciplines.

Considering the functioning of boarding schools within the concept of 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1961) suggests that the data may have links with other clinical populations. According to Goffman (1961), a 'total institution' is a place where residents share similar social situations, participate in daily shared activities altogether, are controlled by staff who oversee schedules and are distanced from the wider society for prolonged periods of time. As well as boarding schools, institutions can include military institutions, prisons and orphanages. These institutions share characteristics such as the physical boundary or living in a single enclosure, hierarchical imposed structures, uniformity of routines, loss of privacy and imposed schedules and control. In the clinical setting, boarders and prisoners have been found to share feelings around rejection, abandonment and fear of being loved (Faulkner, 2020). This data could therefore be of value for therapists working within client groups including prisoners, children in care, migrants and refugees.

5.7.2 Educational Implications

The study also offers insights for those working in boarding schools, offering pastoral care and mental health support and social, communication and wellbeing support programmes. Whilst previous research had outlined the greater investment and attention that has been dedicated to pastoral care and support for pupils at boarding school, the findings from this study suggest this may not be a sufficient or correct level of support (Martin et al., 2014). The present study found that despite the modernisation of boarding schools, there is still a group of individuals who are seeking help for the distress caused by their boarding school experience. It found that certain practices or "codes of conduct" that still take place at boarding school can compromise boarders' sense of safety. Elsewhere, research has demonstrated the importance of feeling safe to children's wellbeing at school and this is particularly acute for boarders, given how much time they spend away from home (Fredrick, 2021). This should prompt boarding schools to understand more about the importance of feeling safe (Porges, 2009) and consider how they might want to consider how strong their holding environments need to be in order for their pupils to thrive.

The developmental data from this study also suggests that schools should consider wider learning programmes that support emotional literacy and awareness, encouraging empathy and support through team building workshops. They may also want to look at offering more one-to-one support check-ins with trained mental health workers or therapists who have an understanding of the negative impact that attending boarding school can have. The aim of this would be to support pupils to foster wellbeing awareness and anticipate any issues that might arise whilst they are away from home. It is understood that boarding schools will continue to exist, but studies such as this might provide some awareness of how they might want to develop progressively. Granted, schools cannot resolve the issue of disrupted attachments, but with training and more resources they could support students by providing new attachments and a greater sense of safety, whilst encouraging positive communication links with the home.

5.8 Further Research

This study explored a negative boarding school experience through the lens of a group of therapists. The study provided insights into what therapists felt took place for their clients at boarding school and the enduring impact it had. It also discussed what was challenging and what beneficial when working with the client group and highlighted the importance of specialist training and of raising awareness of a client group who may keep coming for therapy.

Conducting the research through the lens of therapists unearthed useful insight from those who work specifically with ex-boarders. Over the course of the data gathering some keys areas came up that could usefully be explored in future research. One was the impact the boarding school experience had on ex-boarders' partners, many of whom were themselves reportedly seeking support in their relationship with an ex-boarder or directly seeking support for their partner's distress, which they felt could be attributed to boarding school. Another area that featured in the research was the impact boarding can have on siblings, particularly those who were left behind and did not attend boarding school. The study also highlighted the potential for research into what some referred to as the trauma that mothers experience at sending their child to boarding school, in some cases following a family tradition, in others due to work commitments, which meant boarding school provided a greater sense of stability for the child. Another area that briefly came up in the data was the experience of sexuality and boarding school and how being away from home during the adolescent years, often in a same-sex environment, impacted on boarders' sense sexual identity, exploration, and maturity. Given the developmental importance of the years boarders are away from home, I was surprised this did not appear more often in the data but, on reflection, despite my asking open-ended questions, the participants may have felt steered in other directions.

Alternatively, participants may have actively avoided discussing this with me, which might reflect a defence against thinking about the difficult, often lonely, aspects of the ex-boarder's experience. Another area which the study did not really touch on was race and how boarders experienced being from an ethnic minority and living away from home. Given boarding schools are predominantly white, upper-class institutions begs the question of how different levels of intersectionality, for example being a black, homosexual male, might influence a boarder's experience.

5.9 Strengths and limitations of the study

5.9.1 Strengths

The study explored the negative boarding school experience through the lens of therapists. In doing so it drew on the testimony of nine therapists who had received specific training, or specific supervision on the boarding school experience. By virtue of this, the group brought a richness of knowledge and a thematic depth around what they felt ex-boarders experienced, the impact that had, what might be challenging or beneficial when working with this client group and why they might need specialist support.

Whilst there is literature exploring the negative boarding school experience, much of this is reported testimonials and observational case-study research, with some recent empirical research specifically into ex-boarders. The present research was the first empirically based study to interview therapists working in this area. The research proposal was first passed by a university project approval panel, before going through an in-depth research process, adhering to scientific rigour through the use of structured thematic analysis with a strong philosophical underpinning, a systematic literature review and a reflective researcher account, all following university ethical procedure. Above all, the study gives empirical backing to some of the findings in the boarding school literature while also offering some new additions and insights.

5.9.2 Limitations

The sample of participants might incorporate a larger number of individual negative experiences and, while it surfaces some key themes, the data was interpreted through a therapist's lens which, arguably, is context sensitive and whilst informative, cannot be generalised to all therapists working in this area. I note by adopting a developmental psychodynamic lens might offer one perspective on the data. I also note my objectives have a leaning towards looking at the vulnerabilities of the client. I might have asked a question around any strengths participants felt their clients might have gained from their boarding school experience. I have noted how the prompts that were occasionally used in interviews

were biased towards the psychodynamic perspective. I made a point of not including data that might have been influenced by them; however, I raise this as a limitation of the research design.

The sample of participants was achieved through snowball sampling, which may have limited how diverse the sample could be, given that participants might have approached other therapists with similar characteristics to themselves. Six of the participants had attended Nick Duffell's boarding school CPD training, which might have made the group too homogeneous, especially if they filtered their clients' experiences through the same lens. That said, whilst Duffell is a specialist in the area and offers invaluable insights, the participants appeared to draw on a range of information including their own professional knowledge, and in some cases, their prior experience of boarding as they discussed their clients, which I felt added to the overall richness and diversity of their responses.

5.10 Final Reflections

I began researching this area with some understanding of the boarding school experience as I have close relationships with ex-boarders and have worked with clients who attended boarding school. I appreciated the area was therefore not completely unknown to me. I acknowledged that I myself had not attended boarding school and I felt that this provided me with a level of distance to be able hold an objective stance. Whilst I agree with this statement to some extent, I feel further reflection made me consider more how implicit I am in this research.

I was conscious that having worked with two ex-boarding school clients who had had a negative experience, I wanted to find out more about the boarding school experience from other therapists' perspectives. Whilst this holds true, reflecting more in therapy and with a critical friend, I think an implicit reason for researching this area was perhaps to better understand my husband's boarding school experience and him in particular because he boarded so young, was a termly boarder as opposed to my brother who boarded later, was a weekly boarder and boarded for a briefer time. Whilst my husband has reflected more on his experience of boarding since becoming a father, he acknowledged he had a mixed experience and recalls little of his early years. Even when I discussed my research and the literature with him, he did not identify with it in any way. In some ways he appeared quite shut down to it. I wondered if there possibly is something in the field conditions that my husband is not holding and I was picking up. I wondered if a part of me is not abandoning younger parts of my husband, like a dissociation that has counter transferred onto me and has implicitly supported my pursuit in this research.

Whilst carrying out this research, I think it was important to have an awareness that I too was a partner and sister to an ex-boarder. I think having some understanding and a curiosity has added value to the research process whilst I remained conscious and able to separate out what was mine and what was coming from the data. I am mindful of the preconceptions that I have, mainly that I think sending a child to boarding school at eight is wrong. However, I drew on my researcher and therapeutic skills to hold this lightly and within my awareness as I went through the research process.

I note my slight reservation to share this information around my husband. I recall one tutor querying the ethics around sharing some of my husband's history and respecting his privacy. When I chose to omit the information, I recall another tutor later encouraging me to be more transparent around how I was implicated in the research and include the part about my husband. This process made me reflect further on another process I experienced earlier on in my research, namely the comments of caution I received from tutors at the start, with some inferring to tread carefully around how I approached the topic. I noted a contentiousness or stigma around researching this area and I found this interesting. It is only now that I fully embrace the tensions around what boarding school means to different people. I also recognised how swayed I felt at the outset, when working out what the 'best approach' was. Whilst the messages have appeared mixed, they have made me question my own positioning more and encouraged me in my confidence to be surer footed as a researcher going forward. I should add, I have limited the content around my husband's experience and have his permission to share what I have.

As well as a partner and sister, I note as a mother I am also implicated in this research. I first began my research when my son was eight; he is now fourteen. Researching this topic whilst watching him grow through what feels like his transitional years into something of an active teenager has made me regularly reflect on how a child might manage being away from home and what level of support and distance they are calling on from a parent, particularly during the push-pull teenage years. I was struck by how impacted I was by the stories I read whilst doing my literature review and those shared in the interviews particularly around abandonment which I reflected on earlier in the theme. I recognised how moved I felt as a mother, but I assert again, I do not think you have to be a mother to find stories of childhood separation and distress emotive.

The research further prompted me to reflect on my own biases around privilege and how, as one of my subtheme states, it can cloud a reality. Whilst I had a preconception that boarders were privileged in having access to excellent grounds, facilities, social networks, I never saw being away from home as something to aspire to. This research has further prompted me to

consider how for some it can come at a very high cost. Considering things on societal level, I recognise that children are being put into care at the extreme ends of society. A child taken away from its family and put into a children's home is going to go though some of the same things as a child who is sent away to a boarding school with lots of lovely facilities and yet for some this might go unnoticed.

Finally, I was struck by how nuanced working in this area appeared to be. Having trained as a therapist with a relational developmental stance, I intuitively thought such training would be able to support this client group, but I have since realised this may not be the case. I wondered now how much more I could have offered the ex-boarders I had seen if had been more informed.

5.11 Conclusion

The study explored negative boarding school experiences through the lens of therapists, using thematic analysis. The data forms an original contribution to the existing literature through its empirical rigour and, uniquely, its focus on the therapist's stance. Overall, the participants described how there was a level of complexity to a negative boarding school experience in terms of the nature of the experience, how boarders adapted to cope, and the enduring impact it had on them. One key impact was on the boarder's developing relationship with the self and other, thus pointing towards the developmental nature of working with this client group. Participants described this as a difficult-to-reach group of clients, which called for a variety of modalities and interventions, observing that the work was emotive and likely to be long-term. The participants also discussed how privilege can cloud a reality, and how, as a result, distress around abandonment and rejection can be missed both in and out of the therapy room. A key finding from the research was that this is a specialist area that calls on prior knowledge and training and how, despite the modernisation of boarding school practices, this group will continue coming for support. Participants also spoke of the systemic nature of the negative boarding school experience, which suggested the wider impact that working with an ex-boarder could have for their partners, children and intergenerationally.

Whilst some people have a good time at boarding school, this is not the case for everyone. For those who struggle it is important to keep in mind the psychological research into the negative impact of separation beyond infancy (Bowlby, 1980). We now have an attachment-based view that parents and caregivers need to be present, but there is a population of people who appear to have missed out on a level of attachment parenting. This study raises awareness of and offers in-depth insights into a negative boarding school experience. A key clinical implication for therapists looking to work in this area is to seek out specialist

information and training. The findings show that therapists should have an awareness of the developmental nature of the work, be trauma informed and be mindful of the enduring impact of the boarding school experience. Clinically, therapists might want to consider how challenging and emotive this work can be and call on different interventions to reach clients. Increasing awareness of boarding school distress, the notion of privilege and the double bind ex-boarders face might go some way to supporting a group of clients who might feel they have to further hide their distress. In the words of Miguel Hernandez (1936) “There is no expanse bigger than my wound, the wound that nobody sees” (3). The study also had educational implications, offering insights for those working within boarding school into how they can build safety and support the social and emotional development of their pupils as they develop through their transitional years.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Q Can you tell me of the experience you have had when working with clients who are ex-boarders?

Prompts- the therapeutic relationship, any themes that may have arisen in the room, any challenges

Can you describe, in your own words, your client's way of being?

What did you notice about them and how they related?

Q Can you explain any psychological processes that have been a play when working with this client group?

Prompts: Transference, countertransference, Issues of attachment, managing breaks in therapy, repression, denial

Q Can you tell me what has been positive or beneficial when working with this client group?

Prompts: what intervention, aspects of the therapy are/were beneficial,

Q How did you feel in the room with your clients from boarding school?

How did these client's impact on you?

What feelings were you left with from this work?

Closing questions

Q Are there any further aspects of working with ex-boarding school clients which you would like to talk about?

Q Is there anything you might have anticipated me asking?

Q If there was a take home message for other therapists working with ex-boarders what would it be?

APPENDIX B: Advertising the Study

Do you work with clients who have been to boarding school?

Are you a UKCP/BACP Registered Psychotherapist (integrative) or BPS Chartered Counselling Psychologist with at least 2 years' experience working with clients post qualification?

Have you worked with 2 or more ex-boarding school clients?

Would you like to take part as a research participant in a study exploring therapists' experiences of clients who have been to boarding school?

What's involved? A 60-minute interview online via Zoom.

Please email louise.champion@metanoia.ac.uk

The study is part of a Metanoia Institute Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy Doctoral programme supervised by Dr Michelle Ruger.

Thank you

APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet

METANOIA INSTITUTE/MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Study Title

A thematic analysis of therapists' experience of working with clients who have been to boarding school

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of integrative therapists who work with clients who have been to boarding school.

There appears to be growing a consensus that adult life can be significantly psychologically impacted by childhood boarding school experience. Whilst the growing body of literature looks at the lived adult experience of going to boarding school and how ex-boarders might present as clients, there appears to be a gap in the research of qualitative data on therapists' perspectives on working with clients who have been to boarding school.

The study is likely to be completed within 18 months.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a BPS/BACP/UKCP therapist, two years or more post qualification and have worked or are working with 2 or more clients who have been to boarding school.

A total of 10 participants who meet these criteria will be taking part in the study.

Do I have to take part?

Participating in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw up to one month after the interview without giving a reason. In this case any information you have given will not be used for the study and all data (including transcripts and interview recordings) will be destroyed.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Your participant in this study will involve an initial confidential interview of 60 minutes with a researcher at a time and location that is convenient to you. The researcher will invite you to reflect on your experience of working with clients who have been to boarding school. Examples of lines of enquiry in the interview include a reflection on what has informed your work when working with ex-boarding school clients.

What do I have to do?

To participate in the study, you are required to be able to talk openly for 60 minutes with a researcher about your experience of working with clients who have been to boarding school. The study requires that you give verbal and written consent to take part.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not anticipate there to be any known disadvantages or risks in participating in this project. Time will be allocated post interview to discuss any difficult thoughts or feelings and support options will be outlined if required. You will be able to contact the researcher at any stage during or post the research period. Contact details are to follow.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope that participating in this study, exploring your thoughts and experiences will be of interest and possibly helpful to you. However, this cannot be guaranteed.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is used will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. All information will be stored, analysed and reported in compliance with the UK Data Protection legislation and General Data Protection Regulation.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this study will be published in a doctoral thesis. It is possible the research might be used in other published articles in practitioner and academic journals, or a book. The researcher will explain where you can obtain a copy of the published results.

You will not be identified in any report/publication.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed by the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

Contact for further information

Researcher contact details:

Louise Champion

Email: louise.champion@metanoia.ac.uk

Metanoia Institute, 13 North Common Road, London, W5 2QB. Tel: 020 8579 2505

Research supervisor:

Dr Michelle Ruger

Email: Michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk

Metanoia Institute, 13 North Common Road, London, W5 2QB. Tel: 020 8579 2505

Thank you for taking part in this study

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep

APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Form

Number:02

Participant Identification

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

A thematic analysis of integrative therapists' perspectives on working with clients who have been to boarding school

Name of Researcher: Louise Champion

		Please initial box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated .....……for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw one-month post interview, without giving any reason. If I choose to withdraw, I can decide what happens to any data I have provided.	☐
3.	I understand that my interview will be taped and subsequently transcribed	☐
4.	I agree to take part in the above study.	☐
.	I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor	☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

APPENDIX E: Debrief to Participants

METANOIA INSTITUTE/MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF FORM

Study Title: A thematic analysis on integrative therapists' perspectives on working with clients who have been to boarding school

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in this research project, I hope the experience has been of value to you.

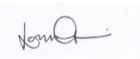
The purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of therapists' who work with clients who have been to boarding school. Your participation has been really appreciated.

Should you have any questions following the interview please contact me using the details below.

Should you wish to gain any further support or information please find information below.

Should you no longer wish to be part of this study you have the right to withdraw up to one month as of today.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Champion

Researcher contact details:

Louise Champion

Email: louise.champion@metanoia.ac.uk

Metanoia Institute, 13 North Common Road, London, W5 2QB. Tel: 020 8579 2505

Further support groups and charities:

Boarding School Concern https://www.boardingconcern.org.uk/

Boarding School Recovery http://www.boardingrecovery.com/

Mind https://www.mind.org.uk/

APPENDIX F: Ethical Approval Letter

METANOIA INSTITUTE

13 Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing, London W5 3XD
Telephone: 020 8579 2505
Facsimile: 020 8832 3070
www.metanoia.ac.uk

Louise Champion
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DCPsych)
Metanoia Institute

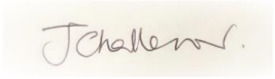
6th January 2020
Ref: 05/19-20

Dear Louise,

Re: A thematic analysis on integrative therapists' perspectives on working with clients who have been to boarding school

I am pleased to let you know that the above project has been granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, please inform me as research ethics representative for the DCPsych programme.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Julianna Challenor
Director of Studies DCPsych
Faculty of Post-Qualification and Professional Doctorates

On behalf of Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX G: Ethical Approval Letter (minor amendment)

METANOIA INSTITUTE

13 Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing, London W5 3XD
Telephone: 020 8579 2505
Facsimile: 020 8832 3070
www.metanoia.ac.uk

Louise Champion
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DCPsych)
Metanoia Institute

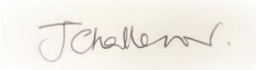
1st April 2020
Ref: 05/19-20/version2

Dear Louise,

Re: A thematic analysis on integrative therapists' perspectives on working with clients who have been to boarding school

I am pleased to let you know that the above revised project has been granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, please inform me as research ethics representative for the DCPsych programme.

Yours sincerely,



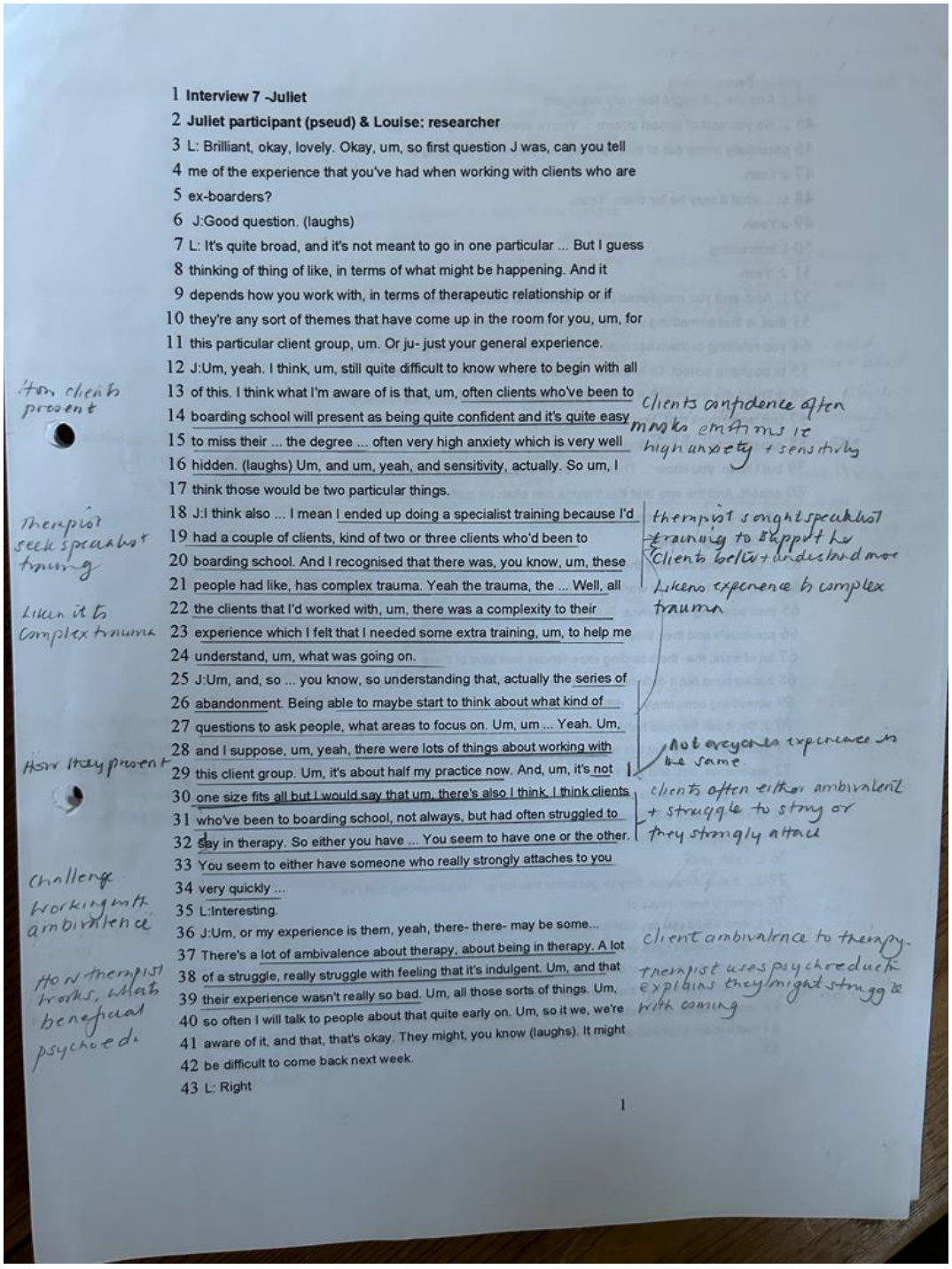
Dr Julianna Challenor
Director of Studies DCPsych
Faculty of Post-Qualification and Professional Doctorates

On behalf of Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

Registered in England at the above address No. 2918520

Registered Charity No. 1050175

APPENDIX H: Generating Codes on Transcript Example 1



1 **Interview 7 -Juliet**
2 **Juliet participant (pseud) & Louise: researcher**
3 L: Brilliant, okay, lovely. Okay, um, so first question J was, can you tell
4 me of the experience that you've had when working with clients who are
5 ex-boarders?
6 J:Good question. (laughs)
7 L: It's quite broad, and it's not meant to go in one particular ... But I guess
8 thinking of thing of like, in terms of what might be happening. And it
9 depends how you work with, in terms of therapeutic relationship or if
10 they're any sort of themes that have come up in the room for you, um, for
11 this particular client group, um. Or ju- just your general experience.
12 J:Um, yeah. I think, um, still quite difficult to know where to begin with all
13 of this. I think what I'm aware of is that, um, often clients who've been to
14 boarding school will present as being quite confident and it's quite easy
15 to miss their ... the degree ... often very high anxiety which is very well
16 hidden. (laughs) Um, and um, yeah, and sensitivity, actually. So um, I
17 think those would be two particular things.
18 J:I think also ... I mean I ended up doing a specialist training because I'd
19 had a couple of clients, kind of two or three clients who'd been to
20 boarding school. And I recognised that there was, you know, um, these
21 people had like, has complex trauma. Yeah the trauma, the ... Well, all
22 the clients that I'd worked with, um, there was a complexity to their
23 experience which I felt that I needed some extra training, um, to help me
24 understand, um, what was going on.
25 J:Um, and, so ... you know, so understanding that, actually the series of
26 abandonment. Being able to maybe start to think about what kind of
27 questions to ask people, what areas to focus on. Um, um ... Yeah. Um,
28 and I suppose, um, yeah, there were lots of things about working with
29 this client group. Um, it's about half my practice now. And, um, it's not
30 one size fits all but I would say that um, there's also I think, I think clients
31 who've been to boarding school, not always, but had often struggled to
32 stay in therapy. So either you have ... You seem to have one or the other.
33 You seem to either have someone who really strongly attaches to you
34 very quickly ...
35 L:Interesting.
36 J:Um, or my experience is them, yeah, there- there- may be some...
37 There's a lot of ambivalence about therapy, about being in therapy. A lot
38 of a struggle, really struggle with feeling that it's indulgent. Um, and that
39 their experience wasn't really so bad. Um, all those sorts of things. Um,
40 so often I will talk to people about that quite early on. Um, so it we, we're
41 aware of it, and that, that's okay. They might, you know (laughs). It might
42 be difficult to come back next week.
43 L: Right

1

How clients present

clients confidence often masks emotions ie high anxiety + sensitivity

Therapist seek specialist training

therapist sought specialist training to support he clients better understand more

Likens it to complex trauma

Likens experience to complex trauma

How they present

Not everyones experience is the same

clients often either ambivalent + struggle to stay or they strongly attach

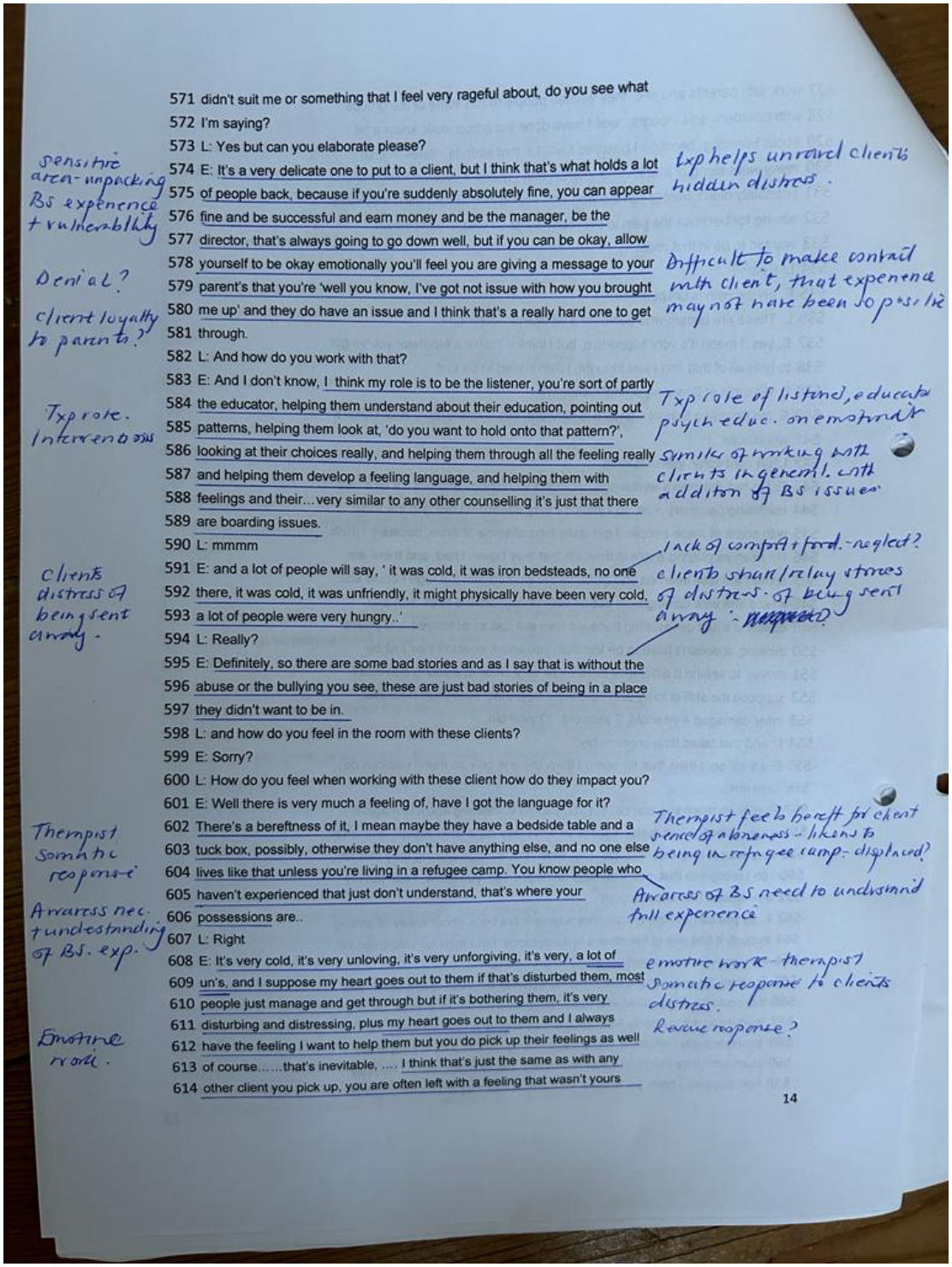
Challenge working with ambivalence

client ambivalence to therapy.

How therapist works, what beneficial psychoed.

therapist uses psychoeduc explains they might struggle with coming

APPENDIX I: Generating Codes on Transcript Example 2



571 didn't suit me or something that I feel very rageful about, do you see what
572 I'm saying?
573 L: Yes but can you elaborate please?
574 E: It's a very delicate one to put to a client, but I think that's what holds a lot
575 of people back, because if you're suddenly absolutely fine, you can appear
576 fine and be successful and earn money and be the manager, be the
577 director, that's always going to go down well, but if you can be okay, allow
578 yourself to be okay emotionally you'll feel you are giving a message to your
579 parent's that you're 'well you know, I've got no issue with how you brought
580 me up' and they do have an issue and I think that's a really hard one to get
581 through.
582 L: And how do you work with that?
583 E: And I don't know, I think my role is to be the listener, you're sort of partly
584 the educator, helping them understand about their education, pointing out
585 patterns, helping them look at, 'do you want to hold onto that pattern?',
586 looking at their choices really, and helping them through all the feeling really
587 and helping them develop a feeling language, and helping them with
588 feelings and their... very similar to any other counselling it's just that there
589 are boarding issues.
590 L: mmmm
591 E: and a lot of people will say, ' it was cold, it was iron bedsteads, no one
592 there, it was cold, it was unfriendly, it might physically have been very cold,
593 a lot of people were very hungry..'
594 L: Really?
595 E: Definitely, so there are some bad stories and as I say that is without the
596 abuse or the bullying you see, these are just bad stories of being in a place
597 they didn't want to be in.
598 L: and how do you feel in the room with these clients?
599 E: Sorry?
600 L: How do you feel when working with these client how do they impact you?
601 E: Well there is very much a feeling of, have I got the language for it?
602 There's a bereftness of it, I mean maybe they have a bedside table and a
603 tuck box, possibly, otherwise they don't have anything else, and no one else
604 lives like that unless you're living in a refugee camp. You know people who
605 haven't experienced that just don't understand, that's where your
606 possessions are..
607 L: Right
608 E: It's very cold, it's very unloving, it's very unforgiving, it's very, a lot of
609 un's, and I suppose my heart goes out to them if that's disturbed them, most
610 people just manage and get through but if it's bothering them, it's very
611 disturbing and distressing, plus my heart goes out to them and I always
612 have the feeling I want to help them but you do pick up their feelings as well
613 of course.....that's inevitable, ... I think that's just the same as with any
614 other client you pick up, you are often left with a feeling that wasn't yours

14

APPENDIX J: Generating Initial Codes and Subthemes

PARTICIPANT 7			
SEMANTIC CODE	**(ppt/line) LATENT CODE**	**SUBTHEME**	**QUOTE**
Client's confidence often masks their feelings of high anxiety and sensitivity	7/13 clients confident self/veneer which masks high anxiety- *a mask developed from a young age?*	The survivor personality	**13.** often clients who've been to boarding school will present as being quite confident and it's quite easy to miss their ... the degree ... often very high anxiety which is very well hidden. Um, and um, yeah, and sensitivity
Therapist sought CPD BS training to support her BS clients	7/18 specialist training- felt deskilled	a specialist area	**18.** Well, all the clients that I'd worked with, um, there was a complexity to their experience which I felt that I needed some extra training, to help me understand what was going on.
Therapist likens client experience to complex trauma	7/20 complex trauma work- the truama of repeated abandonment	complex trauma work	**20.** these people had like, has complex trauma. Yeah the trauma, the ... Well, all the clients that I'd worked with, um, there was a complexity to their experience ..... you know, so understanding that, actually the series of abandonment.
Client's won't recongise their own trauma, its masked by their experience of privaledge	7/56 priviledge masks the trauma, double bind	Priviledged but emotionally starved	**56.** There is, I think one of the things is the privileged aspect. And the way that this trauma can often be quite hidden. So very often a client won't recognize the trauma**.**
Bieng told you are priviledged impacts acknnowledging distress	7/70 priviledge masks the trauma, double bind	Priviledged but emotionally starved	**70**. if as a child you've been told that this is a good experience, and that it's a privileged experience, um, and you know, your parents are making sacrifices for you to get this experience. I think it's understandable, really understandable that psychologically, they're unable to kind of make, just like recognize the difficulty of that experience
Clients present with issues of abandonment	7/86 Feeling abandoned by caregiver is key	Attachment and loss	**86.** abandonment is definitely an issue
Difficulities in relationshps and intimacy rooted in early child hood experiences	7/91 impact on intimacy and relationships	Intimacy with self and other	**91.** common themes I suppose, um, um, I'm just trying to think about how to put- put this into a really general sense. Um, I mean it... yeah problems with relationships, problems with intimacy. Um, the roots of which are in these- these childhood experiences.
Therapist trys to tap into the adaptive patterns the child did to survive	7/96 therapist explores childs adaptive patterns to survive	The survivor personality	**96.** we're working with it, is how this child had to survive the experience and what they had to do, in order to do that.
The work with their BS clients is long-term	7/103 its long-term work	Long-term work	**103.** I mean it's always long-term work
Women ex BS experience more subtle bullying, males it is more physical	7/111 males experience bullying differently to females	Gender differences	**111.** women ex boarders, uh, will have experienced much more subt- subtle bullying**....**123.**I** guess with boys, it tends to be much more physical- do you know what I mean**...126.** lot of bullying is more physical and with girls, perhaps, more psychological
Prevelance of bullying	7/112 trauma of various levels	Bullying	**112.** I mean my experience is that the majority of children who've been through boarding school have- will have experienced, it's very rare that they won't have experienced any form of bullying at all.
Therapist see it as long-term work	7/167 time to develop trust in the therapeutic relationship	longterm work	**167.** It's really longterm work **.....** essentially I have to really work to build trust with them because, you know, on some level, I'm another authority figure
Therapist works with the child and adult self in the room	7/185 developmental parts-work	Integrative approach is key	**190.** always remember what age they went." Because that's the age of the ... just think that's the age of the child that you're going to be.
Uses theory of Clarkson to describe how she works	7/199 Offering developmetnally needed relationship	Integrative approach is key	**199.** , in a way, so- so I- I think sometimes a lot of the work is, you're almost doing is- it's a Clarkson kind of developmentally needed relationship.
Supports clients with addresssing various developmental issues	7/225 its developmental work, supporting younger selves where they have been arrested	Developmental	**225.** Because they didn't have someone taking care of them, you know, around that. You know, and maybe around the, you know, um, their sexuality, their ... I mean, all that kind of developmental-

APPENDIX K: Generating Themes

D. 'Priviledged but emotionally starved' -A group of clients who warrant attention			
1. 'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality			
Clients told it is priviledge and a family tradition	1/325 the double bind or am allowed to be unhappy	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	325. they were told it was a privilege and, I think for him, he was the last one. He was following a family tradition, he felt privileged, but emotionally starved."
Prejudice of the priviledge might impact on the therapist seeing the impact BS can have on some	2/650 Prejudice in society and therapy	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	650. If you were sent to a children's home, people sort of get that…you know immediately something will come into the person's mind, therapist's mind, you are sent to a boarding school, something quite different comes into most people's minds including therapists
BS clients present with a double blind- their	3/65 struggle with the double bind of priviledge	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	65. it's quite particular with boarders because of the complication around, 'mum and dad spent a huge amount of cash on me' and that creates a particular estrangement to their inner feelings
Confusion on privilege impacts on them accessing vulnerability	4/182 the double bind of priviledge	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	182. it's seen as a privilege, they feel privileged, and they still, you know, have some denial about the emotional impact on them because of that expectation and aspect of being seen as privileged and that then becomes a real boundary and barrier, sometimes to accessing the feeling of vulnerability
Clients struggle to make contact with their vulnerabity. Their abilitiy to avoid has supported them in their high powered jobs	6/771 The double bind impacts of the client staying in therapy	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	771. because he did have such a high powered job. I think, you know what we said at the beginning about, you know, if that whole boarding school way of life has, has given him his livelihood and his, his whole career has come out of that and his privilege. I think it's very tied up in that
therapy takes time because it tit is so closely tied up in their succes.	6/166 the double bind impacts the time spent in therapy	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	166 So I think it's very hard, but for, for, you know, that can't be dismantled. Um, um, and that they, you know, that, that takes years because it's, you know, when it's so closely tied in with all their successes in life.
Bieng told you are priviledged impacts acknnowledging distress	7/70 priviledge masks the trauma, double bind	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	70. … if as a child you've been told that this is a good experience, and that it's a privileged experience, um, and you know, your parents are making sacrifices for you to get this experience. I think it's understandable, really understandable that psychologically, they're able to kind of make, just like recognize the difficulty of that experience
Therapists conceptualisation of the client through the double bind and trauma	8/38 the pressure from the system/society sees them as priviledged - are they allowed to complain- double bind	'Priviledged but emotionally starved' How priviledge can cloud a reality	38. I'm being told I should enjoy this, but my experience of this is not one of enjoyment. I do not feel privileged. This does not feel like a good thing, but everybody in society, I think, does do that with boarders is telling me that this is a privilege and I … so therefore, it's a good thing, right?" And that inner conflict is, is a hallmark …I think, in trauma.

APPENDIX L: Phases 1-3 of Generating Themes

PHASE 1 **A: Developmental**	PHASE 2 **A: "This is developmental trauma": for those that struggled**	PHASE 3 **A: This could be framed as a complex trauma**
1. Dealing with Love attachment and loss/grief	1. Therapists frame it as developmental/complex trauma	1. 'The forgotten child' a sense of complex trauma in the form neglect
2. Dealing with Developmental Trauma & dissociation	2. 'The forgotten child' rejection and broken attachments/Loneliness	2. 'The mobile personality that kept them alive'-Shame, Defense and dissc
3. It takes a child to heal a child- the catalyst to getting help- making contact with their child through their child	3. 'the sadness is enormous because they have missed a life' Grief/loss- a life missed	3. 'The body holds the memory' -the importance of managing breaks and endings sensitively
4. The age they go impacts	4. Shame: the emotional weight or it and working with it in the room	4. The guise of Priviledge-the double-bind of feeling 'priviledged but emotionally starved'
	5. 'The mobile personality that kept them alive'-Trauma and dissociation and the survival self	
	6. It matters the age they go	
	7. Intimacy- the relationship with self and other	
	8. The challenges of establishing and maintaining the therapeutic relationship	
	9. Gender differences	
B: A uniqueness around this group	**B: Healing the child- this is developmental work**	**B: Being kept at an arms length- trust with self and other**
1. Clients looking for spec support	1. It takes a child to heal a child-	1. Relationship with self and other
2. Therapists feel deskilled- poss CT of client. But also lack of spec knowledge	2. 'Remember what age they went, because that's the age of the age of the child that you're going to be with' T working with trauam and fragmentation	2. Fostering trust in the room-The challenges of establishing and manintaining the therapeutic relationship
3. The wounded healer- those that have gone through it use their insight	3. Getting back in touch with their parts-bypassing the cognitive	3. 'My heart goes out to them' This is emotive work
4. Managing breaks	4. "The body holds the memory, doesn't it?"	
5. integrative approach is key- PC not enough, need psychodynamic, means to bypass unconcious	5. "Put on your seatbelt" this is slow paced, long-term reparenting work.' A very delicate difficult dance	
	6. "My heart goes out to them" This is emotive work: Therapists feelings towards clients	
C: The guise/issue of priviledge	**C: The guise of priviledge: how the sense of priviledge can perilously mask the upset and difficult emotions that lay hidden within.**	**C How to reach these clients**
1. The Double bind-priviledge yet not emotional poor	1. 'Priviledged but emotionally starved'-the Double bind. 'If you were sent to a children's home, people sort of get that'	1. The catalyst to getting support- the key role of partners and young children
2. Therapists blind spots/the elephant in the room		2. The benefit of a creative tool kit- an integrative approach
		3. 'Put on your seatbelt' this is potentially slow, long-term work

The systemic impact of the BS	**D: A uniqueness around this group: Boarding schools are a unique system which warrants it attention**	**D A group of clients who warrant attention**
1. Partners- experience the emotional coldness	1. A unique system- BS is a unique system that requires CPD training to understand the nuances of the experience.	1. The demand for specialist support- both clients and therapists are seeking out specialist knowledge
2. The impact of siblings going or not going to BS	2. 'Feeling as though we're not good enough': Therapists can feel deskilled in the counter transference	2. This group will continue coming- modernisaton cannot resolved the key issue meanwhile the area is being more acknowledged and becoming more mainstream
3. intergenrational impact of BS- impact on family	3. The need to feel seen and understood- Clients look for specialist knowledge	3. The systemic impact of a negative BS experience and the potential far reaching impact by working with this group
4. Trauma for the mothers	4. 'They can bring a level of sanity to it' When not having prior knowledge is a good thin	
	5. Despite modernisation boarding schools cannot resolve the key issue	
	E: The systemic impact of the BS: the wider impact of a negative boarding school experience	
	1. Partners- experience the emotional coldness	
	2. The impact of on other family members	
	3. 'Yes, this intergenerational trauma'- The Intergenerational impact of BS	
REFLECTIONS ON THIS PHASE: It felt as if I was approaching it too much with my developmetal lens and using the word developmental was perhaps not tentative enough. I needed to go deeper into the data to see what it was telling me.	**REFLECTIONS ON THIS PHASE:** Here I felt I had too many subthemes. I was wanting to include all the data in but was mindful I had to make sure I was answering the question and not diluting the richness of the data by keeping it all in. This encouraged me to look further at the data closing reflecting back over the research question and objectives. I decided to take out the following: 6. It matters the age they go: the age they go- this seemed obvious hence I took it out. 9. Gender differences: the issues men and women bring to the therapy room. This again did not feel as relevant as the other sub-themes.	**REFLECTIONS ON THIS PHASE:** Through discussion with supervisor I noticed my language was quite objective when this is subjective data.

APPENDIX M: Phases 4-5 of Generating Themes

PHASE 4 **A: "There is complexity to their experience"**	PHASE 5 **A: "There is complexity to their experience"**
1.“The forgotten child”	1.“The forgotten child”
2. 'The mobile personality that kept them alive' The survivor personality	2. 'The mobile personality that kept them alive' The survivor personality
3. "The body holds the memory" Temperol enactments -the importance of managing breaks and endings sensitively	3. "The body holds the memory" Temperol enactments -the importance of managing breaks and endings sensitively
B: Being kept at an arm’s length	**B: Being kept at an arm’s length**
1. “They lose themselves” Loss of authentic self	1. “They lose themselves” Loss of authentic self
2. "They just don’t take the space, they assume it isn't there' Relationship with others-partners	2. "They just don’t take the space, they assume it isn't there' Relationship with others-partners
C: Difficult to reach clients	**C: Difficult to reach clients**
1. The conduit to getting support	1. "My heart goes out to them" This is emotive work
2. "My heart goes out to them" This is emotive work	2. The benefit of a creative tool kit
3. The benefit of a creative tool kit	3. "Put your seatbelt on" this is potentially difficult, slow, long-term work
4. "Put on your seatbelt" this is potentially slow, long-term work	

D: "Privileged, emotionally starved"- A group of clients who warrant attention	**D: "Privileged but emotionally starved"- A group of clients who warrant attention**
1. "Priviledged but emotionally starved" The guise of Priviledge Or how priviledge can cloud a reality	1. "Priviledged but emotionally starved" The guise of Priviledge Or how priviledge can cloud a reality
2. The demand for specialist support	2. The demand for specialist support
3. "Even with modern day schooling, they can't change everything" This group will continue coming	3. "Even with modern day schooling, they can't change everything" This group will continue coming
4. The systemic impact of a negative BS experience and the potential far reaching impact by working with this group	4. The systemic impact of a negative BS experience and the potential far reaching impact by working with this group
REFLECTIONS ON THIS PHASE: It feels the themes are coming together. The conduit to getting support does not feel it stands alone as a sub-theme, as it crosses over with relationship with others, so I decided to take it out.	**REFLECTIONS ON THIS PHASE:** It feels as though the themes stand alone and I have made best use of the quotes to support theme where I can.

APPENDIX N: Researcher Supervisor Confirmation of Consent

METANOIA INSTITUTE

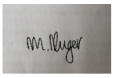
Research Supervisor Confirmation of Consent

Name of student: Louise Champion

Name of research project: A negative boarding school experience through the lens of therapists.

This is to verify that as Research Supervisor for the above research project I have seen proof that appropriate consent has been obtained from the participants used in the project.

Supervisor's name: Dr Michelle Ruger

Signature: 

Date: 02.08.2023