

# Boarding school: the trauma of the 'privileged' child

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*Abstract:* Sending young children to boarding school may be considered a particularly British form of child abuse and social control. The trauma of the rupture with home may be followed by other ordeals such as emotional deprivation and, in extreme cases, physical and sexual abuse. The taboo on expressing emotion, which is common in such institutions, may lead to an encapsulation of the self. Consequently, the needs of the distressed child/self remain active, but unconscious, within the adult. This may be disguised by an armoured, and very often socially successful, persona. The psychological interplay, between these two facets of the personality, may be detrimental to intimate relationships. In clinical practice the emotional conflict between a desire for intimacy and anticipated exile comes to the fore. Three examples demonstrate how within the transference this may lead to a dependent and erotic atmosphere, which abruptly changes to sever all connection. Changes in the frame, breaks in analysis, and confessions of emotional need are all points at which vigilance is required if such disturbance in analysis is not to end in its abrupt termination.

*Key words:* boarding school, child/self, contrasexuality, erotic transference, exile, intimacy, premature endings, transference.

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## Introduction

A Dutch colleague, who had been a hidden child in The Netherlands during the Second World War, worked with child survivors of the Japanese prison camps. These experiences led her to the observation that the British Establishment was a group of traumatized people as a result of the practice of sending young children away from home to be placed in the care of strangers. She was amazed that this was not because of some dire political situation but for the purposes of education. This, alongside the experiences of my patients, led me to consider the British boarding school system to be a particularly British form of child abuse.

The 'basic assumption' (Bion 1968) on which this practice is based is a common, socially condoned, and usually unquestioned premise that sending children to boarding school is good for them. A common phrase used to justify

this practice is that boarding school will be 'the making of them'. This is the title of a BBC television film, made by Colin Luke in 1994, in which little boys were filmed during their first term in prep school. The psychotherapist Nick Duffell (2000) used the same title for a book based on workshops he has conducted over ten years with adults who attended boarding schools as children. He has identified many lasting psychological patterns common in those he calls 'Boarding school survivors'. I have observed similar patterns in my analytic practice and this article is developed from my exploration of the psychological impact of boarding school in this Journal (Schaverien 1999) and *The Dying Patient in Psychotherapy* (Schaverien 2002).

Very little research has been conducted into the psychological effects of the experience and so there is little evidence with which to substantiate observations from clinical practice. An exception is Lambert who conducted sociological research in the 1960's. Alongside this he published the views of children themselves that were obtained by sending researchers to live in boarding schools for at least a week and sometimes for several weeks. These researchers elicited written diaries from the children, which give a moving and sometimes shocking account of day to day living in boarding schools of that time, (Lambert 1968). This remains one of the few serious pieces of sociological research with regard to boarding school experience from the viewpoints of children and staff. It is relevant today because although the system may have changed a little, much of it has not. Moreover many of the adult patients that we see today were the children of that time.

Although there is little published research apart from this, there are numerous biographical and fictional accounts of the institutional abuse conducted in some boarding schools. These books, television programmes<sup>1</sup> and films give plenty of anecdotal evidence of the trauma of the experience. From *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (Hughes 1855), to Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929) this system has been exposed to retrospective scrutiny. Graves' experiences at Charterhouse prior to 1914 are surprisingly similar to those of Frederic Raphael (2003). Moreover Raphael adds another element when he describes the anti-Semitism he encountered at the same school in the 1940's. There have been general release films about fictional boarding schools, most notably *If*, made in 1968, by Lindsay Anderson. The *Dead Poets Society* (1989), an American film, is a reminder that the British exported this system all over the world. Consequently boarding schools, very often with a Christian ethos, exist today in South Africa, Canada, New Zealand<sup>2</sup> and other countries

<sup>1</sup> As early as 1974 James Astor made a film for BBC *Man Alive* programme on this topic with Anthony Storr as a contributor to the discussion. (This film is no longer available.)

<sup>2</sup> Recent scandals have revealed serious abuse of Maori children in Christian boarding schools in New Zealand. Sources of information: report for One News from TVNZ April 4<sup>th</sup> 2001, Nga Korero Business May 2000 Education section report from Dover Samuels the Maori Affairs Minister. Nga Korero Business March 1997 Education section report.

throughout the world. Although boarding schools are rumoured to have improved in the present day, it is sad to report that some of the same problems, including in some cases bullying and sexual abuse, continue and in the so called 'best of schools'.<sup>3</sup>

There is the argument that not all who attended boarding school were damaged by the experience; many consider that the advantages of the high standard of education they unquestionably received in these schools has indeed been a privilege. There are people for whom school offered respite from an intolerable home situation. For these, and others too, boarding school was not the prime cause of their problems. For some it resonated with an earlier sense of abandonment or neglect. There are people for whom their school experience was mainly good and who experienced neither overt bullying nor abuse. Even so I would argue that for any small child being left in the care of total strangers is a frightening experience. However, in a reversal of the hierarchy that the schools themselves foster, it is often asserted that those who did not have the advantage of attending boarding school have problems more worthy of attention.

This is the very double bind in which the boarding school child—now adult—is trapped. Boarding school is deemed a privilege. The child knows it is expensive for his parents and that he is expected to be appreciative. The child is inculcated with the parents' preferred view—that the school is good—'The Making of Them' as Luke's (1994) film makes abundantly clear. However, as Duffell (2000) points out, if the child is unhappy this ultimately leads to the sad conclusion that, 'if school is good and I do not like it, therefore I must be bad'. Thus the child has to do violence to his own perception and he learns to view the situation, not as he experiences it, but as he is told it is. This leads to unease and a vague sense that something unspecific is wrong and this may continue into adult life.

The tragedy is that some parents make immense sacrifices to send their children to these expensive schools. This is why, even as an adult, it is difficult for the child—now analytic patient—to complain. He is often successful in his career and sometimes wealthy, but profoundly troubled: still caught in the same double bind in which he was trapped as a child. Moreover this is a socially taboo topic where it is deemed unseemly to complain, especially when, as a result of their education a prominent place in society has been achieved. However soul pain is no respecter of social position and, like it or not, the badge of privilege is also the badge of suffering for many.

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<sup>3</sup> My own observations are confirmed in a personal communication from James Foucar, the secretary of the Association for Boarding School Survivors (ABSS—Boarding concern), who writes: 'We . . . need to challenge the myth of "modern" boarding schools—my recent research shows that little has changed especially in boarding prep schools'. He quotes: *School Life—Pupils views on Boarding*, published by the Department of Health in 1993; *Good Practice in Boarding Schools*, Boarding Schools Association, 2001; *Head to House—How to Run your House Effectively*, John Catt Education Ltd, 2000.

Despite the popular literature on this topic there is little written, from within the analytic world, about the lasting psychological and sociological impact of boarding schools. Moreover, as already stated, there is little published research to be found on the topic<sup>4</sup>. This is surprising, given the high percentage of survivors in our midst. A relatively high percentage of those who present for analysis are survivors of the boarding school system. In private analytic practices this group may be over represented—partly because of their, often successful, social status. People who attended boarding school are frequently high achievers but sometimes with surprisingly little emotional literacy. In professional papers and case discussions it is common to be informed that the person attended boarding school but, although the suffering is worked with, it is rare that the institution is the focus of more than passing attention. This basic assumption has a social basis. It is as if, as analysts, we take this damage for granted as a sort of by-product of a system with which we are all so familiar that it hardly warrants comment. Perhaps this is because many British analysts were themselves products of this system.

In clinical practice we frequently meet those for whom boarding school was an unhappy, if not traumatic, ordeal. Therefore I am proposing that the lasting psychological effects of these experiences merit detailed attention with particular regard to transference and countertransference patterns. The trauma of boarding school is rarely the presenting problem but, as analysis develops, the effects of this early form of banishment may emerge as a more central issue than the person had realized. Moreover the double bind, referred to above, that goes something like: ‘even though you are unhappy you really appreciate how good it is for you’, means that, in analysis, the patient finds it extremely difficult to permit his own point of view to have centre stage.

The psychological impact of boarding school on the developing child affects the core of the personality. As a result of the sudden loss of early attachment figures the vulnerable self needs protection. Therefore a form of acquired and defensive encapsulation may occur. One adult patient described it as feeling as if he were ‘trapped in a bubble’ which isolated him from other people. This type of personality structure, which serves a necessary protective function at the time, is difficult to reverse and leads to problems with intimate relationships in later life.

The rupture in family relationships may permanently affect attitudes to the opposite sex. Growing to maturity in a single sex institution may lead to a fixed perception of gender and gender role. The combination of these factors can leave the person with a perpetual distrust of loving relationships. Consequently in clinical practice the interplay between a desire for intimacy and fear

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<sup>4</sup> A research project by June Thomason (2000) entitled ‘The Boarding school self: Does it exist?’ was conducted at the University of Kent, Faculty of Science, Technology and Medical Studies, as part of a Master’s programme in psychotherapy research. (At the time of writing it has not been available for me to read.)

of exile will be replayed in the transference with particular intensity. Any breach of the frame engenders anxiety and unconscious defences come into play. Thus around the breaks there is always the danger of the analysis breaking down.

### **Women and men—differences in experience**

When I began to write this paper I reviewed my practice and found that there were a high percentage of people who had attended boarding school. There were five men, who had been sent to preparatory school between 6 and 8, and two women, sent at 11. Looking back in my recent files there were several more men from this background and one woman. In my current practice there are also three women whose brothers were sent away whilst they stayed at home; they too were affected.

Women are usually the majority in our analytic practices but the boarding school 'survivors', in my practice anyway, are mostly men. Although there is a tremendous impact on both men and women the psychological repercussions seem to be different. Most boys start preparatory school from 6 to 8 years of age. At this age they are so little and unformed that the sense of loss and adaptation to institutional life may be disruptive to psychological development and, for some, devastating. It is sometimes suggested that those with strong early maternal attachments are better able to cope with boarding school. However my clinical observations have led me to consider that it may be the reverse of this. Those with close maternal bonds seem to be extremely vulnerable and exposed when the sudden rupture occurs. Adaptation to the alien environment may present similar problems for them, as for those who have already suffered maternal deprivation, but possibly intensified. However, whatever their background, few children are prepared for the shock of finding themselves at 6 or 8 years of age in a totally alien and unloving environment

Although some girls are sent to school at 8, many go later—at 11 or 13—as do some boys. It is arguably the case that the child is better able to cope at this age, although I can think of many exceptions. Sometimes the girl who goes later than her brother/s is looking forward to it or has even chosen boarding school over the alternative because it seems exciting. Some of the reading material for girls in particular in the 1950's gave an impression of boarding school as a place of fun and excitement.<sup>5</sup> The reality rarely matches up to the fictional portrayal.

There are other differences between the experiences of girls and boys and these have to do with gender and the development of sexual identity. Most prep schools are single sex and it is only in recent years that some boarding schools for older children have introduced mixed education. Therefore the

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<sup>5</sup> For example Enid Blyton and Angela Brazil

first difference is that, whilst the boy leaves the maternal shelter to live in a male institution, girls' boarding schools are all female environments. Arguably, this may make the transition from the mother a little less violent for girls. Another difference between the experiences of girls and boys is in the area of sexual violation. Sexual abuse, although serious when it occurs, has been less widespread in girls' schools. Similarly, bullying amongst the student group, which of course exists, is less institutionalized in girls' schools. This is because, as far as I know, in girls' schools systems such as fagging have been less common.<sup>6</sup>

There are experiences that are particular to girls. For example, convents are often considered to be amongst the best girls' schools educationally, and this seems to be borne out by many of those who have attended them. However a few convents have been responsible for some of the worst injustices and sadistic practices of which I have heard. It seems that female religious institutions are no protection from cruelty.

Some girls were pioneers when, in the 1970's, it was decided to admit girls to previously single sex boys' boarding schools. At first a few girls were introduced into the sixth forms during the transition to mixed school status. Some of these girls experienced particularly traumatic alienation and, in some cases bullying which included denigration of their sexuality and of their academic abilities. For some this resulted in lasting damage to self-esteem.

The manifestation of unconscious or repressed distress in boarding schools may find concrete expression in different ways for girls and boys; for example eating disorders are very common in girls' schools. This is prevalent in girls and young women throughout Western societies but it is usually very private. However in boarding schools there are times when it reaches epidemic proportions, with girls competing to eat less or be thinner than their peers. We know that this is a manifestation of a sense of powerlessness and much has been written on this topic (Orbach 1986; Chernin 1985). However, as far as I know there is little reference to boarding schools in this regard. Boys are less likely to express their disturbance through a relationship to food and, as in society in general, they are more likely to turn to alcohol and abuse of drugs.

Attention to these differences may enable us to understand the different transference manifestations of this particular trauma with women and men. In treatment terms, the gender division of single sex schools means that the gender of the analyst is likely to make a difference in the initial manifestation of the transference. The analyst will be seen either as 'like me', or as 'other', and this split is significant. For example I have noticed that there is sometimes an assumption of sameness—we are girls together—with some women, who as girls, spent time in boarding school. There is a sisterly feeling, which maybe a

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<sup>6</sup>Fagging is a system in which junior pupils at British public schools perform menial tasks and run errands for a senior pupil. According to James Foucar of the Association of Boarding School Survivors this system died out in the 1990's, as it was incompatible with the Children Act of 1989. (Personal communication.)

result of the substitution of the peer group for the mother. I assume that there is something similar in the initial presentation with men working with male analysts, and particularly around discussions of sexual matters.

It is not insignificant that, in order to understand the different effects on women and men, I am perpetuating the single sex focus. In this article I am writing mainly about working with men and planning another, separate paper, on working with women. Therefore I will leave the specific issues affecting women and turn to the male boarding school survivor in the clinical situation.

### **Working with men**

It has become increasingly evident to me that the male patient receives less attention than the female patient in the psychoanalytic literature. It has been my interest to attempt to redress the balance of this from the perspective of the female analyst (Schaverien 1995, 1996, 1997, 2002). I consider that gender difference does make a difference in the process, if not the outcome, of analysis. In 1997, in a paper entitled 'Men who leave too soon', I identified certain countertransference problems encountered by women working with male patients. I proposed that some male patients terminate their analysis when the erotic transference begins to become conscious. Since writing that paper I have noticed that this is more pronounced with male boarding school survivors. Therefore, in this article, I am continuing that theme. Although some women end their analysis abruptly the type of sudden end to which I refer seems to be more common in men.

Some men who have attended boarding school find it extremely difficult to stay the course of analysis. It seems that the desire for intimacy, which analysis seems to offer, and the simultaneous terror of it leads to an internal conflict that may be acted out. The patient brings about an abrupt end to their analysis leaving the analyst feeling helpless and unable to prevent the ending. This pattern may be precipitated by breaks in analysis, changes in the frame or as a result of a confession, by the patient, of emotional need. All may threaten the survival of analysis because of the vulnerability that this exposes. The patient may have the impulse to leave and be unconscious of the terror of dependency and the anticipated abandonment that this masks.

Of course this is not always the case and some men and indeed women stay the course of analysis just because it offers an opportunity for the experience of a form of metaphorical maternal holding. It may be that those whose early, or pre-school experience, of maternal attachment was secure find analysis more acceptable than those for whom there was a much earlier loss of attachment figures. My consideration of this has been from the position of a female analyst but it has become evident, in discussion with colleagues that similar patterns arise with male analysts. Initially this pairing may evoke a familiar, boarding school dynamic of man-to-man, interaction but similar problems arise when dependency needs and the intimacy of analysis evoke a maternal

transference. This may be combined with homosexual arousal. The male patient may well have an impulse to leave at this point. Therefore I propose that with this group we need to be especially vigilant. I hope that by discussing common factors in the analysis of such men we may identify some transference problems in time to prevent the psychologically violent ending that is sometimes brought about by the patient.

### Clinical vignette

In order to give a sense of the sort of ending I am discussing I will describe how Mr A came to terminate analysis. He had attended for a few months and left when he was considering increasing from one to two sessions a week. This was at the point when the self was breaking through its encapsulation and there was an intermittent, dependent atmosphere generated in the analytic relationship. I understood this to be generated by the dawning consciousness of the neediness of the vulnerable child/self.

Mr A, in his late forties, was the son of a banker who had travelled abroad. His mother had often travelled with the father leaving their son in the care of a nanny from an early age. Mr A had been sent to a boarding school at the age of 7 and in the school holidays his parents were often absent and made arrangements for him and his younger sister to be cared for by a succession of nannies. Now he came to see me reluctantly, on the recommendation of his doctor, who thought that there could be a psychological component to some of the physical symptoms that he was suffering.

At first it was clear that it was immensely uncomfortable for him to be at the centre of another's attention. As a professional academic he was used to giving attention to his students but not receiving it. He thought that a brief series of sessions might help him. Therefore, from the beginning, his ambivalence about engaging in analysis was very clearly present in the material. As he began to talk about his early life, the link with his physical symptoms became apparent, first to me, and then gradually he began to see the connections.

Initially, as he recounted his childhood experiences, he was quite dismissive of their import. However when he talked about his prep school, it became evident that this had affected him profoundly. The feelings associated with it were emotionally present and, as he recounted various incidents related to this time, he became tearful and momentarily the vulnerable child, that he had once been, was present in the room. Each time this happened he would quickly recover and the coping persona would emerge and take charge. Often his vulnerable state showed through in the material he brought, but it was only when I interpreted it that the social veneer would break down, permitting it to emerge more fully. By the next session he was always composed and the whole process began again. There was an evident psychological conflict between two parts of Mr A that was replayed each week within the analytic vessel. The small child, who had felt abandoned from an early age, was seeking expression—to

be known. However at the same time the adult who had spent his life caring for others, thus unconsciously attempting to re-parent himself, could not permit this vulnerability to have space.

As his analyst, observing my own response to him, I noticed that I was deeply touched when he recounted his early experiences. It was as if previously his early emotional life had not been witnessed. Thus despite his professed reluctance to stay in analysis there was a strong sense of connection in response to this previously unmet need. In one session, when this was particularly evident, I suggested to him that part of him seemed to want to engage in analysis and that he might like to consider the benefit of coming more than once a week. It seemed the task was to encourage expression of the early experience but at the same time acknowledge the coping adult. This is exceptionally important with such an embedded defence system; it has served a significant function in the past. Therefore transference regression can be a profoundly frightening experience; relinquishing of the coping persona can be experienced as a devastating loss of self. This is due to the developmental gap between the abandoned child and the armoured personality that the school fostered.

The conflict between the two parts of the self intensified when, in association with a memory of a motor accident that he had suffered as a child, Mr A appeared to regress. Injured, he was carried from the scene of the accident by an ambulance crew. Now he recalled enjoying the sensation of being carried and rocked. As he recounted this it was as if the young child that he had been at that time, was emotionally present in the room. For a while Mr A was overwhelmed by his feelings. The way this was conveyed, the tone of voice and the tears, seemed to indicate that the memory of these feelings was evoked by the transference. The containment of the analytic situation enabled him to feel held and perhaps carried.

In response a sense of connectedness was evoked in me, a countertransference to the vulnerability of the child he had been. Offering an interpretation based on this understanding, I suggested that the emotion he was experiencing seemed to indicate that the incident reminded him of being carried by his mother when he was very young. He was overcome and it seemed that this was indeed the case. Thus it was that the vulnerable child, who had been protected and encapsulated within the coping exterior for most of his life, emerged live in the consulting room.

At the beginning of the next session the coping persona was in place again, however as the session progressed the emotional child/self again emerged. A pattern was becoming evident so that, when he opened up, an intimate atmosphere made it possible for me to care for him. This might indicate that the regression was to a maternal bond that had once existed. However at the end of each session he appeared to abandon the child/self, regaining the defensive, protective ego position, and I would feel abandoned too. Judging this to be countertransference I sensed that *he* was unconsciously experiencing the end

of the sessions as abandonment. It seemed that this replayed his sense of abandonment when his mother had left him—first with a nanny—and later at school. His reluctance to give his vulnerability space, for fear of abandonment, was in conflict with his tremendous desire for nurturing. Aware of this, I reminded him that we had discussed the possibility of more frequent sessions. I explained that the suggestion was based on the apparent needs of the child part of himself, which had been so evident in the previous session. I wondered if he might like to consider this again now. This time Mr A readily agreed. The first break in analysis was in two weeks' time and so we agreed to start twice weekly sessions after that.

However, after the break, Mr A returned but in order to tell me that he would not continue. He reminded me that he had initially wanted just a few sessions and already this had been longer than he had anticipated. At the same time he revealed some very unhappy circumstances of his present life that he had not previously disclosed. Thus, at the same time as cutting off, he was also investing in analysis. I interpreted this, pointing out his conflicted feelings. The compulsion to leave seemed to be generated by an unconscious impulse to repeat the abandonment that he had experienced as a child, whilst raising new material seemed to indicate his desire to stay. Nonetheless he had decided and withdrawn his agreement to work with this material. He had cut off in a very decisive way and so I had to accept his decision.

The question is whether the 'right' interpretation might have saved the analysis. However Mr A had always said that he wanted just a few sessions and sometimes people do mean what they say. The analyst may have other ideas but can do no more than point out the choice that is being made. The suggestion that Mr A might come twice a week, made so close to the break, may well have been countertransference. Perhaps unconsciously, I was embodying the mother who was anxious about his departure to school and so offering the promise of something better on his return. However Mr A had sampled what was on offer and, although he had clearly been touched emotionally, it was probably too painful for him to continue. Sometimes people make a conscious choice that they do not want to explore the meaning of the pain they experience, preferring to leave it in the past, and, as analysts, we have to accept that. For Mr A, the break in analysis was all too familiar; packing and getting ready to leave is a familiar pattern for the boarding school educated person. Perhaps this, combined with the anticipated commitment to coming twice a week, had added to his concerns about dependency. Unconscious anger about the break might also have had an influence. The thinking might be something like—if I can manage without you for three weeks I can do without the upset of analysis altogether. In this way control of the power imbalance and particularly the timing of separation is reinstated.

It seemed that the transference repetition evoked regression to losses experienced at two different developmental stages. The first, when he was left at boarding school as a very young child, was more accessible to conscious

memory than the second. The deeper, bodily memory brought much earlier, probably infantile feelings to the fore. For Mr A, this was probably overwhelming and he left rather than confront the dependency needs that were aroused by the prospect of long-term analytic work. It seemed that, unconsciously, he repeated the emotional violence that he had experienced in childhood, by cutting himself off. This induced in me some of the helplessness that he had experienced as a child—being left when I considered that there was so much more work to do.

Chasseguet-Smirgel (1984) discusses particular transference issues for the male patient, when working with a female analyst, the fear of engulfment and being sucked back into the womb to lose all separateness and to become absorbed into the female body. Wrye and Welles (1994) take up this theme, mainly in working with women, and they discuss what they term erotic horror and terror of the desired woman therapist's body. In Jungian terms it could be understood as an archetypal fear of being sucked in by the Great Mother and losing all sense of separate identity. Whatever theoretical language we use to discuss this, the abandoned child that emerges in the transference brings with it the infantile desire to be one with the mother. If this is not understood, it evokes terror in the adult who unconsciously reverts to the well-learned pattern of 'defences of the self' (Fordham 1985, p. 152). It is not so different with the male analyst because in this case the desire for understanding would be tempered by the same maternal transference material but compounded by the fear of homosexual arousal.

The problem for the defended patient is the emergence of intimacy in relation to another human being. This evokes fear of the loss of self. The familiar persona is relinquished revealing an underlying vulnerability or even at its most extreme fear of madness. What is needed is time for this to be mediated gradually, as insight emerges. However this can only happen if the patient is prepared to stay in analysis. Breaks in analysis expose the patient with boarding school trauma to unbearable transference repetition. With each break it is as if they are again being sent away from home. This means that the therapeutic alliance is more essential for this group of patients than for many others. It is only if there is an agreement to stay with the process and observe the transference that this can very gradually be mediated. Conscious understanding only emerges slowly but the patient may leave before this can be integrated, thus repeating the familiar pattern. However ultimately it is important to respect the patient's choice to leave, to trust the person to know what is right for them. In this regard I have noticed that some people who have left in a similar way have returned, after a break in analysis of a year or more, more ready to engage in analysis.

### **The feminine in society and those left behind**

Boarding school is a repudiation of the feminine in society. It is a training ground where the feminine is devalued and denied. Mothers are hurt by the departure of their young sons—or daughters—to institutional life. Some lose a

sense of purpose and turn to alcohol for support whilst others throw themselves into voluntary or paid work. Fathers who have attended boarding school themselves may consider it necessary to perpetuate the tradition and there is often family pressure to do so. It is a common tradition for parents in the military, with postings abroad, to send their children 'home' to attend school. Sometimes divorced or single parents consider that the advantages, for the child, of being in a large sibling group will be preferable to staying at home. There are some parents who are pleased to be relieved of the responsibility of looking after their children but there are also those who steadfastly refuse to send their children away irrespective of pressures to do so. The intentions of the parents are nearly always well meaning; but whatever the intentions, intimacy, that familial feeling, is absent from the life of the child and he loses touch with his home and the significant women in his life.

This devalues the feminine in both society and the psyche. The boy is sent away from home where he has been nurtured by his mother, or paid carers, usually women. Children who come from less privileged backgrounds suffer because they feel the lack of money and social advantages that they witness in the children around them. For those from an economically affluent home, lack of money and status is rarely a problem but love may be. For some of these children the strongest attachments may be to servants who, in the emotional absence of parents, provided stability and positive mirroring. It is important not to assume that all children who were sent to boarding school longed for home. For some children boarding school is a relief from an intolerable situation at home and there are those who look forward to returning to school to escape neglect, instability, bullying or abuse that takes place in the home. As one patient put it, 'at least at school the punishments were predictable'.

The tradition is that the sons of the moneyed classes were sent away to perpetuate the establishment and its values through careers in the army, the law, medicine, the church and the making of money. These social conventions demand compliance and create leaders. The rugby field is the training ground; rugby is a team sport, in which the fittest and strongest excel whilst the weakest flounder and are denigrated. It is not very different in the present day. The academic education, which is usually excellent, fosters independent thinking, clear logic and intellectual achievement. However there are casualties; those who are so damaged by the experience that instead of going on to university and then taking their place in the establishment, through one of the careers they were destined for, they turn away from the whole enterprise. An anti-authoritarian attitude pervades with a conscious or unconscious refusal to take part (see Duffell [2000] for discussion of this and Schaverien [2002] for a full length case study).

### Siblings

In addition to the primary rupture with the mother and father, there is a secondary rupture that damages sibling relationships. For the young child sent

to prep school at 6 or 8 years of age, attachments to siblings are disrupted and family is replaced by many, same sex strangers; everything is changed overnight. The familiar position and role in the family, for example, as eldest or youngest, or only child—is substituted by a new role as the smallest person in a huge hierarchical institution. Brothers or sisters sent to the same school often lose touch with each other in the vast institutional dynamics.

When the boy is sent to school and his sister or sisters remain at home the unspoken message that the girl receives is that her brother is valued more than she. Inevitably this produces envy and idealization, splitting the sibling group along gendered lines. As well as personal psychological damage, this contributes to maintaining a social gender division that has implications far beyond the school. This is a significant aspect of the effects of this particular trauma. However gender is at least a reason, if not a convincing one, for the difference in treatment. It is sometimes the case that siblings of the same sex are treated differently with one staying at home and another going away to school. Then the lack of comprehension of the reason for the difference in treatment may cause jealousy and a lifelong rift may result. The child at home may see boarding as a privilege of which he is deprived; whilst the one sent away feels rejected in favour of the sibling who stays at home.

### **Sexual development**

The social, cultural and political context in which our patients have grown up is threaded through analysis. The influence of boarding school on the psychosexual development of the individual is a product of just such a context, the lifelong implications of which become increasingly evident as analysis progresses. This subtle form of social conditioning leaves its traces on all intimate relationships and therefore it is likely to be unconsciously played out within marriage and replayed within analysis. As already stated there is very little research on this topic and so the material cannot yet be substantiated by reference to current research. However the stories of our patients constitute a valid form of research in the field of psychoanalysis. Therefore the following is based on common themes that emerge in the material of patients in analysis with me who have attended boarding schools. For reasons of confidentiality the points are generalized rather than given as specific clinical examples.

The losses described above are enough to cause psychological damage but this is exacerbated when a competitive and bullying atmosphere dominates the institution. Loneliness may be expressed through addictive masturbation, in a vain attempt at self-soothing; this, if noticed by other boys, can bring more censure and loneliness. Warmth may be sought with the available other, as a new form of sibling group emerges. Sexual experiments may offer solace but may also lead to abuse. They may lead to confusion in development of sexual identity and some boys become uncertain of their primary sexual orientation. Whilst initiating the child into the pleasures of homosexuality the institution

proclaims its dangers. This may set a person on a path of covert homosexuality or of proclaimed heterosexuality and emphatic disavowal of homosexuality. In extreme cases rape and sexual torture may be the result of boys left to regress to archaic states fostered by the prefect system. The tacit acceptance by staff, who themselves have been subjected to a similar system, may mean that they turn a 'blind eye' to the abuses of power that are perpetrated in the name of law and social order. The normal developmental confusion about sexuality is compounded by the implicit message that male is good, strong and desirable: female is other, to be distrusted, denigrated and exploited (sexually and commercially). This is a patriarchal precedent that runs like a fault line through British society. Thus the natural path of individuation is distorted and, in analysis, one of the primary tasks is the unravelling of the person's sexuality whatever form it may take.

### **Contrasexuality and the psychological feminine**

The psychological split that this engenders is the reason that I consider Jungian theory helpful. Feminists who would ignore the developmental issues that face men may unwittingly collude with a situation that perpetuates the oppression of women but also of men. Attitudes to sexuality and sexual difference harbour the seeds of social change. The theory of contrasexuality leads to a way of understanding opposites in the psyche but also in the outer world. In the past boarding schools were single sex, and very often still are, at least until senior school. This means that the boarding school child lives in a world that is split along gender lines. This contributes to one-sided development where the opposite sex is viewed as 'other'. The result is a psychological split that runs throughout the personality. The person may be a high achiever with no language for emotions; an intelligent person with little emotional intelligence; a loving person who dare not love; a masculine identified man with early homosexual experiences. Psychological problems that result are often masked until the middle years of life. An armoured and very often socially successful personality may disguise the distressed child within the adult. Within the armour is encapsulated the unconscious emotional life of the person; these might include the love, hate, sadness, and erotic sexuality, elements that were rejected as belonging to the feminine in society.

Duffell quotes a former pupil of a major public school who said: 'Boarding schools don't "build character" or "make the man", they break the child, and replace it with a coat of armour filled with fear, loneliness and alienation' (Duffell 2000, p. 31).

It is hardly surprising that boarding schools produce armoured personalities. At the same time as losing everything, the eight year old child is attempting to do the 'right thing', to adapt to an alien system. Breaking the rules brings punishment—but the rules are not spelled out—very often it is only when they are broken that it becomes clear what they are. One of the unspoken rules, clearly

conveyed, through the ranks of this system, is that boys don't cry; it is cissies and girls that cry. Thus the small child soon learns to hide his feelings. The taboo on expressing emotion results in both an inner world problem and, at a later stage, a social one. The first split is between thought and deed, between feeling and action, between inner world and outer world. This damages the inner world relationship to those attributes deemed feminine in the male psyche.

I will give a brief vignette from the analysis of a man, Mr B, who had attended boarding school from the age of eight to eighteen. When he left home at the age of eight he had been separated from his family of female siblings and his mother. I have written in depth about his analysis elsewhere (Schaverien 1999, 2002). My purpose here is to recount part of a dream that reveals the beginning of a relationship with the feminine in his psyche. It was six months into the work and there was a strongly erotic transference that had dominated the analysis from the beginning. Its origins in very early experiences—prior to the boarding school trauma—were beginning to become conscious when he dreamed:

I was in a fortress and this woman—who was not known to me—came to me for help. She was being pursued and I took her with me to safety. We climbed down some steps into the bowels of the earth . . .

(Schaverien 2002, p. 64)

Among other aspects of this analysis, which I will not go into here, I consider that this dream was about the unconscious relationship to the split off feminine in the psyche. On the one hand, the woman could be seen as the analyst—his partner in this psychological venture—with whom there was an erotic connection. However this woman 'comes to him for help' and so it is likely that, as a result of the work that had already taken place, this female figure was an aspect of his own psyche. The 'going deep into the bowels of the earth' could be understood as a regression to the archetypal, elemental mother: 'mother earth'. This resonated with the depth of emotion experienced in the transference at that time. However when I asked him who was pursuing the woman in his dream his answer was immediate and revealed the effects of his boarding school history. He responded:

Men with spears, a macho image of men. I hate that but I feel I was sent away to school to become like that. When I was at school I read a story of a page boy who was sent away to become a knight. I identified with him then. But I know I should never have been sent away—I am not a knight.

(Schaverien 2002, p. 64)

This was a profoundly moving dawning realization of his vulnerability. Within the therapeutic relationship he had removed his psychological armour and as a result he was now able to admit to himself, and so to me, this simple realization.

He was a sensitive soul and he should not have been sent away. This was a vital moment in acceptance of his own suffering and therefore the beginning of integrating the split off feminine aspect in his psyche. The contrasexual elements were beginning to come into relation with each other.

This split between male and female had occurred the moment he was sent away. It was then that he had lost all his attachment figures and his home. It was significant that he had had such attachments but he had been unable to speak of his suffering and so he had had to find a psychological suit of armour in which to shield the vulnerable child part of himself. The immense cost of living like this had been the sacrifice of intimate relationships.

### Primary attachments and the Self

The reasons that the boarding school survivor may have difficulty in making and maintaining intimate personal relationships are multi-faceted. For some people problems began before they were sent away. However there are common factors that can be traced back to the rupture of the early, primary attachments. Intimate relationships with parents, siblings and pets are lost and substituted by many anonymous strangers. This is acknowledged with the simple term 'homesickness', which is commonly referred to in the vernacular but which, in this context, has a particularly poignant meaning. The child is literally sick because he misses home. In the light of what we know about the emotional needs of the child, it is possible to understand that, as a consequence, developmental processes will be arrested or distorted. The child learns to adapt and use his thinking rather than intuitive or feeling functions. The intimacy of the mother-child bond can never be recaptured but the yearning for it, which begins with homesickness at school, may unconsciously dominate later life. This combination of need and anticipation of rejection makes for, on the one hand dependency, and on the other a lack of investment in relationships. Many of those who come to our consulting rooms, as adults, are either troubled within a marriage or long term relationship or else they come at a point when it has broken down. Often the problem relates to an unconscious idealization of women on the one hand and denigration of them on the other. The life partner, of whatever sex, may be unconsciously punished for what was experienced at the time as a betrayal by the mother. This may be replayed in the transference especially with a female analyst.

Bachelard links the house to the mother image (Bachelard 1964, p. 45). The house is a kind of template returned to in memory at times of need. 'A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability. We are constantly re-imagining its reality...' (ibid., p. 17); this is relevant to our discussion because the young child, exiled from home, may carry in mind an image of an idealized house. This is a memory of a real place in the world but it may also be symbolic of the body of the mother of early childhood. There may be a strong attraction to this image; it draws the person towards

intimacy and a sense of a self before exile and it is in stark contrast to the cold image of boarding school. Of course not all mothers were warm and so this is an idealization coloured by a yearning for home (for a more detailed discussion of this see Schaverien 2002, p. 32).

Thus it is that boarding school can affect the core of the personality. In terms of developmental processes we might turn to Fordham's (1985, p. 50) theory of integration and de-integration. If this is a process that continues from infancy into latency we might understand that the rupture that is perpetrated by school distorts this growth. The little boy or girl abandoned, at an early age, in a strange institution, where the rules are unknown, is tense, on guard, and so has little opportunity for genuine reverie. There is a lack of privacy; very often lavatories have no doors and showers are taken communally; eating and sleeping take place en masse and at times that suit the institution. At night lights are put out irrespective of what the child is doing. In the past the system of fagging meant that junior boys had to be available as glorified servants for the older boys and this condoned bullying as a privilege of age. There is no space for integration; and de-integration is to an institution rather than a person. On the one hand independent and intellectual thought is encouraged but at an emotional level autonomy is not fostered.

### **Transference and countertransference breaks in analysis**

In clinical practice the admission of dependency needs is very often a significant moment in the transference. This heralds the emergence of the self from its encapsulated state. As the person relinquishes their armour, or emerges from the bubble, they are in a state of extreme vulnerability. The defencelessness of this state may not become evident until something, such as a holiday break, disrupts the flow of analysis. For some people, who have experienced the constant separations of boarding school, the breaks in analysis may seem to have little effect. Then something dramatic happens, revealing that this apparent lack of significance masks the underlying trauma. This was the case with Mr C.

### **Clinical vignette**

Mr C, a married man in his late thirties, had been in analysis for a year. The presenting problem was that he suffered from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. A successful solicitor, he was thinking of leaving his wife. The way he spoke of his wife was as if he was addressing me 'man to man', discussing 'women' as other. This was compounded when he described a previous therapist as easy to talk to because she was very like a man. The implication was that there was an unspoken understanding between them—little emotion had been permitted. It seemed that he dealt with the problem of being with a woman by denying difference. This is not uncommon; a boarding school boy device for denigrating women and denying any need for them.

At the beginning it was hard to break through the social veneer of his 'hail fellow well met' presentation. He would enter my room with a booming voice commenting on the weather, the journey or some general aspect of the outer world. For most of the sessions he would report on the daily aspects of his life, particularly his difficulties with his wife. I learned that he had been born with a serious condition that needed surgery. Therefore he had been in hospital early in his second year and he had an abiding memory of being left. He was so young he had not yet learned to speak and yet he remembered that he desperately wanted to tell his parents not to go, not to leave him, but he did not have the words. This was the first memory of being left. The second was school. He went to prep school at 8 and to a major public school at thirteen. Thus it would have been possible to predict that breaks in analysis would present a problem for him.

At first this did not become manifest. When I gave him the dates of my breaks he would accept them, in a rather off-hand manner. Any comment I made about the way that the break might affect him was dismissed; he would say that it gave him time to reflect. This I came to understand as replaying, in the transference, the coping persona that had made him appear to himself and others not to mind the sudden and abrupt comings and goings of his childhood. It was the spring break a year into the work when problems forcefully emerged. Over the previous few weeks there had been a definite settling into analysis and he had talked with emotional connection about his childhood homes and his prep school. Things had improved in his marriage and he was therefore considering staying with his wife. The presenting problem had improved too and he had recently admitted that he felt that the analysis was helping him. Thus it seemed he was considering staying with analysis.

In the penultimate session before this break he talked, in more detail and in an emotionally present way, about arriving at prep school. He was told that he would enjoy it and was taken there by both his parents. He recalled unpacking the car and going up the steps with his case. Then the shock of turning round and realizing that the wheels of the car were turning and that it was moving off down the drive with his parents in it. That first week he cried a lot and so did the other boys but the general attitude was 'they'll get over it'. He reflects that 'it was probably Ok if you had siblings (he was an only child) but there I was suddenly thrown into this situation where there were 100 siblings'. He wrote a letter to his parents: 'Dear Mum and Dad, I am very sad'. The letters were censored, read by the teachers, and he was made to rewrite it with a more positive message. Thus the sadness was merely tolerated but, in a situation without love or emotional understanding, he soon learned not to reveal it. It was evident that he was now beginning to permit that sadness to come to the fore.

When Mr C left after this session I noted that he was really progressing. The obsessional behaviour was lessening, the booming voice had given way to a more moderated tone and he actually said that analysis was helping. It seemed

that he was moving into analysis and I was able to feel more like a person—even a female person—in his presence. Therefore I was shocked by the next session, which was the last one before the break.

Mr C arrived 20 minutes late and hurried into the room. He said, 'I am not staying—I am too stirred up'. He stood by the door with his coat on, hesitating whether to come further into the room or go away. I invited him to come in for a moment and returned to my seat. He remained standing by the door in a tremendously anxious state. He said that he could not stay; his obsessions had become much worse and that was why he was late. This was the worst since it all began years ago.

I decided that some containing interpretation was needed. Considering this behaviour so soon after a session that had felt so meaningful I suggested that this was caused by the imminent break. Analysis had become important to him and so he was feeling worried about how he would manage without it. He was still standing but his demeanour relaxed. He looked sad and then compared analysis to a porridge pot saying: 'You have stirred it up and now I need to leave it to settle without stirring it any more'.

Reflecting on the material of the previous session, I made a link to his being left, when he was a baby in hospital, and on the steps of his prep school. In both cases he was powerless and without the words to negotiate and so he had felt abandoned. It was similar with the break in analysis; he knew that I would go away and there was no way he could negotiate and persuade me not to go. (It was likely that the obsessional problems had re-emerged because he unconsciously felt as if he had done something to cause the abandonment.) Referring back to the last session, and the sadness he had expressed when he wrote the letter to his parents, I reminded him that, in the past, when he was left he had learned not to feel anything. Now it was likely that the break made him feel sad. Again he was quiet and sadly reflective. Then he said that he would stay but needed to go out again to lock his car. As he was gone rather a long time I went to the door and saw him standing between the door and his car hesitating. He came back in and I again returned to my seat. Standing by the door Mr C said: 'This has been good but I can't go on with it today—I must go'. I realized that he had to go and he left.

This is typical of the pattern with the boarding school survivor. The tremendous pressure of the ambivalence meant that, like Mr A, Mr C wanted to stay but had to leave. However unlike Mr A, he had engaged in analysis for more than a year. This was not a conscious decision. It seemed that he was acting out of an unconscious state that had taken possession of him. I sensed that he was terrified of what he was feeling and totally confused by it. One ex-boarding school patient used to associate his emotional cutting off with the character in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Choderlos de Laclous 1985). The character in the story finished the relationship with the woman he loved, ruthlessly, and not because it was what he wanted but because this is the way it had to be. The shutter came down (Schaverien 2002, p. 159); so it was with Mr C.

This break came at a time when awareness of the significance of his emotional life was dawning. The previously armoured or encapsulated self was breaking through to consciousness and he was beginning to trust the therapeutic relationship. This was therefore a danger point. It is possible that he was experiencing loving feelings towards me, evoked by the previous session in which he had felt understood. Eros and intimacy were both present, causing the break to feel like a familiar abandonment and so he did what he had always done and cut himself off. This indicates how vulnerable the survivor of the boarding school system is when involved in intimate relationships. He is likely to attract women to him and then hurt them, and himself, by suddenly cutting off his feelings. This will be interpreted as rejection but it is terror of intimacy and erotic attraction in all its guises.

My own feelings at this time could be understood to be multi-faceted. Firstly there was genuine concern for his welfare and survival. This was a response to a real threat to the survival of the analysis as well as his physical survival. However it was also countertransference induced by on the one hand his fear of surviving without the support of analysis, and on the other his fear of his need for it. If we remember that he had suffered the traumatic separation, first from his parents in his infancy, and then later when he was a small child it is likely that this was replaying what had felt like disasters to him in the past. He induced in me the same helplessness that he had experienced at these times. In this way the analyst begins to understand the depth of the emotional trauma. If the patient has left there is not much use in understanding it; but Mr C did not leave.

Although he missed the first session Mr C left a message apologizing and he did return the second week after the break. Thus it is possible that my interpretations regarding his feelings of abandonment and sadness had had a containing effect during the break. On his return he was able to begin to work with the material evoked in this last session. The analytic breaks continued to raise problems each time but we were both more conscious and so vigilant at these times.

## Conclusion

When I wrote the paper on 'men who leave too soon' (Schaverien 1997) I had not realized the specific implications for men who attended boarding school. Now it seems to me that this client group is particularly vulnerable in this regard. I have attempted to draw attention to the seriousness of the damage perpetrated by institutions that we take for granted. My hope is that this might generate discussion and take us further forward in transforming the potential breakdown of analysis into a situation where negotiation can take place.

I would make it clear that I do not consider that the breakdown of analysis is inevitable with people who attended boarding school—far from it. The

majority of boarding school survivors in my practice have not left prematurely but stayed the course of analysis. However for many of them the breaks present particular challenges that may be specific to this particular group of people. As already noted above, I have noticed that sometimes someone who has left suddenly will return some months or even years later. In these cases it seems that the analysis has continued as an internal dialogue. When they return they do so on their own terms with more conscious awareness of the meaning of the impulse to leave.

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#### TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

La tradition qui consiste à envoyer de jeunes enfants en pension peut être vue comme une forme anglaise particulière d'abus d'enfant et de contrôle social. Le traumatisme de la rupture avec la maison est parfois suivi d'autres supplices tels qu'une privation émotionnelle et, dans les cas extrêmes, des abus physiques et sexuels. Le tabou mis sur l'expression d'émotions, très fréquent dans ces établissements peut aboutir à ce que le soi se trouve encapsulé. La conséquence en est que, les besoins de l'enfant/soi restent actifs, mais inconscients dans l'adulte. Ceci peut être masqué par une persona carapacée, donnant très souvent ses bases à une réussite sociale. Dans la clinique le conflit émotionnel entre un désir d'intimité et l'anticipation du risque de l'exil est central. A l'aide de trois exemples est montré combien ceci peut, dans le transfert, amener un mouvement de balancier entre des moments où règne une atmosphère d'érotisme et de dépendance, et de brusques coupures de toute connection. Il faut être particulièrement attentif dans ces cas là aux moments de changements dans le cadre, de vacances, et aux moments où une expression de besoins émotionnels a eu lieu, afin de ne pas risquer que ces perturbations aboutissent à une terminaison brutale de l'analyse.

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Kleine Kinder ins Internat zu schicken kann als eine speziell britische Art von Kindesmissbrauch und sozialer Kontrolle angesehen werden. Zur Verletzung durch die Trennung vom Elternhaus kommen oft noch andere Qualen wie emotionale Entbehrungen und, in extremen Fällen, körperlicher und sexueller Missbrauch. Das Tabu, Gefühle zum Ausdruck zu bringen, das in diesen Einrichtungen üblich ist, kann zu einer Einkapselung des Selbst führen. In der Folge bleiben die Bedürfnisse des gequälten Kindes/Selbst aktiv, aber unbewusst bis ins Erwachsenenalter erhalten. Dieses kann verdeckt werden durch eine gepanzerte, und sehr oft sozial erfolgreiche Persona. Das psychologische Zusammenspiel zwischen diesen beiden Facetten der Persönlichkeit kann innerhalb vertrauter und intimer Beziehungen schädlich sein. In der klinischen Praxis kommt der emotionale Konflikt zwischen der Sehnsucht nach Vertrautheit und der erwarteten Verbannung zum Vorschein. Drei Beispiele zeigen, wie dieses in der Übertragungsbeziehung zu einer abhängigen und erotischen Atmosphäre führen kann, die plötzlich umschlägt und die ganze Verbindung durchtrennt. Änderungen des analytischen Rahmens, Unterbrechungen der Analyse, und das Aussprechen emotionaler Bedürfnisse sind Punkte, an denen besondere Aufmerksamkeit nötig ist, damit solche

Störungen während der analytischen Arbeit nicht im plötzlichen Abbruch der Behandlung enden.

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Mandare bambini in collegio può essere considerata una forma di abuso infantile e di controllo sociale tipicamente britannica. Il trauma dello strappo da casa può essere seguito da altre sofferenze come la deprivazione emotiva e, in casi estremi, abusi fisici e sessuali. Il tabù dell'esprimere emozioni, comune in tali istituzioni, può condurre ad un incapsulamento del sé. Di conseguenza il sé/bambino depresso resta attivo, ma inconscio, all'interno dell'adulto. Può essere mascherato da una 'persona' corazzata e molto spesso socialmente di successo. L'interazione tra questi due aspetti della personalità può essere una pregiudiziale alla costruzione di relazioni intime. Nella pratica clinica emerge chiaramente il conflitto emotivo tra un desiderio di intimità e l'anteriore isolamento. Tre esempi dimostrano come all'interno del transfert ciò possa produrre un'atmosfera di dipendenza e di erotismo che repentinamente muta in una interruzione della relazione. Perché tale elemento di disturbo non conduca a una brusca interruzione dell'analisi stessa, è necessario porre la massima attenzione ai mutamenti nella struttura, alle interruzioni dell'analisi e alle confessioni di bisogni emotivi.

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Enviar a niños pequeños a las escuelas de internado puede ser considerado como una forma particularmente Británica de abuso infantil y control social. El trauma de la ruptura con el hogar puede ser seguido por otros desarrollos tales como la deprivación emocional y, en casos extremos, por maltrato físico y sexual. El tabú de expresar emociones, que es frecuente en tales instituciones, puede conducir a una encapsulación del Self. Consecuentemente, las necesidades del conflictuado niño/self se mantienen activas, pero inconscientes, dentro del adulto. Estas pueden estar disfrazadas con una armadura, y con frecuencia socialmente exitosa, de persona. La interacción psicológica, entre estas dos facetas de la personalidad, pueden provocar un detrimento de las relaciones íntimas. En la práctica clínica los conflictos emocionales entre el deseo de intimidad y la anticipada posibilidad de pérdida toman preponderancia. Con tres ejemplos ilustramos como dentro de la transferencia esto puede conducir a una atmósfera erótica y de dependencia, la cual cambia bruscamente para evitar cualquier conexión. Cambios en el marco, rupturas en análisis, y confesiones sobre necesidad emocional son puntos sobre los cuales se debe estar vigilante para que estas perturbaciones no sirvan para la terminación abrupta del análisis.

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## Films

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