The psychological impact of sending children away to Boarding Schools in Britain: Is there cause for concern?

1 | Introduction

The British boarding school is a national institution woven into the consciousness of English society (Lambert, 1968) and a bastion of exclusivity and elitism (Erichsen and Waldow, 2020; Wakeford, 1969; Lambert, 1968). Serving the upper and upwardly mobile classes (Reeves et al., 2017), public boarding schools have been largely ignored by the psychological community (Lauryn, 2012; Schaverien, 2004). In spite of increasing biographical evidence detailing the separation anxiety endured by boarding school attendees (see Duffell, 2000; Schaverien, 2015; Monbiot, 1998), the historical and current cases of sexual abuse in boarding establishments (Ward and Rodger, 2018; Symonds, 2019; Poynting and Donaldson, 2016; Rhodes, 2015), as well as evidence showing that students of independent schools are statistically less likely to achieve a higher class university degree than their state-funded counterparts (Smith and Naylor, 2005), boarding schools are still considered by many as a sought-after educational path, and a symbol of aspiration and social standing (Faulkner, 2020).

The aim of this paper is to consolidate existing literature on the psychological impact of sending children away to boarding schools in Britain and to ascertain whether wider research is needed to fully, and specifically, understand the psychological repercussions of this English tradition.

This paper will take the form of a scoping review which is described as presenting a broad overview of existing literature. Scoping reviews are tasked with identifying key concepts in a body of literature and reporting or discussing them, while also potentially recognising gaps in the existing research (Munn et al., 2018; Tricco et al., 2016).

Literature which attends specifically to the psychology of boarding students is scarce. Shaw (1995) posits that a psychoanalytical view of education has been more commonly used in the field of special education, and that there is a subsequent

reluctance for mainstream schools to associate with the psychological issues inherent in special needs schools. A desire to protect the social standing of these schools (Hodges et al., 2013), an emphasis on the financial and social benefits to the country and a dismissive view of any psychological impact on children (Faulkner, 2020) could also possibly have limited academic inquiry in the past.

In the last twenty years, however, there has been a shift in awareness following *The Making of Them* documentary (Luke, 1994) and several journalistic articles and books written by ex-boarding school students (see Rhodes, 2015; Renton, 2017; Simpson, 2018). There are two authors who appear to be spearheading discussions on this subject, academically or otherwise. Duffel's first book on the subject, *The Making of Them,* is cited in most studies alongside Schaverien's 2015 book, *Boarding School Syndrome: The trauma of the privileged child* (Schaverien, 2015). Although some of these sources may consciously or unconsciously contain bias, they collectively corroborate independent research findings relevant to this review, lending further credence to the academic validity of their observations or phenomenological experiences.

This paper is specifically aimed at British boarding schools, but studies from schools outside of the UK are included in recognition of the fact that the boarding institution was exported to what are now former British colonial states (Schaverien, 2004; Chief Moon-Riley et al., 2019; Morrell, 1994). These international schools were modelled on British independent boarding schools down to the architecture, ethos, education and discipline (Rich, 1989; Morrell, 2001; Mander et al., 2015). The next section (section 2) sets out the five key themes found in the literature: cultural context; separation; adaptive behaviours; peer victimisation in the context of total institutions; and prolonged abuse and trauma in captivity. Section three offers evidence in support of boarding schools and section four begins with a statement on the author's reflexivity during the research process followed by a critical reflection of the literature and suggestions for future research; Section five offers a brief summary of the findings and Section six suggests how these findings could be useful in counselling practice.

2 | Analysis of the literature

Five key themes were identified in the literature as cause-and-effect elements of psychological ruptures recognised by researchers and practitioners in working with ex-boarding school students.

Firstly, the *cultural context* in which boarding schools exist is important to understand. Boarding schools are interweaved with the social class system of Britain (Reeves et al., 2017) and unique pressures exist around the privilege of attending these schools which can result in repression of emotion and an inability to ask for help (Duffell and Bassett, 2016; Schaverien, 2015).

Second, *separation* from parental figures is central to several of the included studies. Specifically, attachment separation (Bowlby, 1999) and identity development (Erikson, 1965) are explored in this review.

Third, *adaptive* behaviours in the face of threat or identity trauma are discussed. These behaviours are developed and used as a survival strategy in an environment that feels unsafe (Herman, 1992). Though not exclusive to boarding school students, they are seen prolifically in this context (Duffell, 2000; Duffell and Bassett, 2016).

Fourth, *peer victimisation in the context of total institutions* is investigated. Carlisle and Rofes (2007) and Harris (2020) note that there are no studies that address peer victimisation or bullying in the context of boarding schools in Britain and the author has found this still to be the case in 2021. Very little research exists that specifically attends to the effects of bullying in any boarding school (O'Brien, 2014) so it was necessary to look at comparable environments to either differentiate or substantiate the impact of bullying in boarding schools in the UK.

Finally, *prolonged abuse and trauma in captivity* is explored. Communal living in close quarters makes children especially susceptible to bullying and abuse (Lester and Mander, 2020), and respite from this environment is not forthcoming (Monbiot, 1998). The effects of persecution is intensified in communal settings by the fact that the victim cannot walk away from it (Kirke, 2007) and the emotional scars are far reaching (Schaverien, 2015).

Cultural context

While British public schools have their roots as far back as the early 1st century (Gathorne-Hardy, 1978) they have evolved over time to serve the changing needs of the nation (Duffell, 2000). Children of parents serving the Crown outside of Britain were sent back to attend these schools necessitating not just education but accommodation as well. Fees evolved to cover both of these services, which created an economic barrier to the lower and middle classes and, as a consequence, public school education became the privilege of the wealthy and influential (Schaverien, 2015).

The schools of the late 19th and early 20th centuries mirrored a patriarchal society where women's education was considered less vital than that of a man (Bruley, 1999) whose future endeavours were likely to involve service to the burgeoning Empire (Rich, 1989; Duffell, 2000). It is perhaps for this reason that boys still account for the majority of boarders in the UK (ISC, 1980-2020). In spite of the significant numbers of girls attending boarding schools (ISC, 1980-2020), there is still an emphasis on boys' boarding schools and boarding school experiences in the research that was found. This can perhaps be attributed to the aforementioned patriarchal nature of education, or to the high profile of some of Britain's elite boarding schools that have, and still do, produce many of the country's influential leaders, most of whom are male (Creasy, 1850; Reeves et al., 2017; Daddow and Hertner, 2019). It is important to note that while boys' boarding schools are written about more often, girls did suffer psychologically by attending these schools (Stack, 2008; Schaverien, 2011). In the context of academic inquiry, the research found for this review did, on occasion, mention this gender imbalance, but nothing was found that specifically redressed it.

Separation

Research shows that the family unit is the primary force for social and emotional development and that, for example, a parent's inability to respond appropriately to the emotional needs of an adolescent with the necessary quality of care is associated with "poor self-esteem, self-efficacy, anxiety and depression" (Hodges et al., 2015, p. 1046). Family units grow and flex in response to the child's normal development

(Schaverien, 2011), but fixed policies and procedures are needed in institutional settings to legally safeguard the collective (Hodges et al., 2013). Legislation that safeguards children in Britain, specifically extends protection to children in boarding schools (Children Act, 1989) and requires a level of inflexibility not seen in family units. Bound by this inflexibility it is arguably unrealistic to expect these institutions to provide an effective parental role for a developing child (Hodges et al., 2013).

Teaching staff may lack the appropriate level of training, experience and/or time to successfully attend to the emotional needs of their charges (Lynam et al., 2019; Hodges et al., 2015) potentially resulting in the aforementioned mental health issues. The significant trauma of rejection that is experienced by some boarding school students (Faulkner, 2020) when separated from their families can, for example, be likened to “disenfranchised grief” (Mitchell, 2017, p. 4); a term used to describe the non-death loss experiences of some foster children. Mitchell (2017) argues that these experiences of separation are not sufficiently acknowledged as loss; that the grieving process can be seen as socially unacceptable and is consequently invalidated. School staff may respond appropriately if a child suffers a bereavement but if they are not adequately trained they may not understand that a small child experiences separation in much the same way as an adult experiences bereavement (Faulkner, 2020). That said, students may benefit from staff who have the opportunity to develop their skills and understanding of the emotional needs of children over time, while parents may be relatively inexperienced at each stage of their child’s development (Martin et al., 2014).

In recent years there has been a shift towards a more holistic approach to pastoral care alongside anti-bullying measures, and it is asserted that empathic understanding from school staff can help a child recover from the trauma of deprivation (Lauryn, 2012). In Britain, there has been an increased number of programmes implemented to address the mental wellbeing of students in schools, but the effectiveness of these programmes has been varied. Some report significant successes and others cite the inattention to the quality of care provided as being one reason for implementation difficulties (Department of Education, 2011). This acknowledgement of the need for mental health care in schools is very positive. However, due to the independence of most boarding schools it is difficult to establish to what degree pastoral care is

implemented, and no such studies were found. Regardless, where staff and children spend significantly more time together than they do in a day school setting, there is a need for training in mental health first aid and child safeguarding legislation, in order for it be effective (Cruickshank and MacDonald, 2016).

Separation and identity development

Although separation for unwilling participants can be traumatic, separation from parental figures is, in actuality, a natural developmental process for any adolescent. From age ten onwards there is a progressive move to independence as individuals become less in need of parental input (Blau and Blau, 2019). The vast majority of boarding school students have, and still do, attend from the age of eleven or thirteen years (ISC, 1980-2020). At this stage, "identity v. role confusion" (Erikson, 1965, p. 252), the child becomes more attuned to how others see them and, as the child develops, the importance of intimate relationships outside of the family comes to the fore (Erwin and Duck, 1993; Erikson, 1965). The value of friendship in boarding schools is prized above all else (Lambert, 1968) and past students note the strong bonds they have with their peers many years after leaving (Faulkner, 2020). Nevertheless, Lauryn (2012) argues that this move to independence away from parental figures is usually symbolic in nature and not accompanied by physical distancing as experienced by children living in boarding schools. However, in their study of boarding school students in Israel, Blau and Blau (2019) found that these students presented with a higher level of identity development than their day school counterparts in part because of the enforced physical separation from their parents. Furthermore, boarding school students showed a greater sense of autonomy while simultaneously preserving a healthy relationship with their parents (Blau and Blau, 2019). Positive parent relationship for boarders is also noted by Martin et al. (2014), while day school students who experienced greater parental control in their schooling years, experienced more emotional distance from their parents (Blau and Blau, 2019). While these studies do not attest to any specific psychological benefits or detriments, it has been shown elsewhere that a closer relationship with primary attachment figures is of benefit to one's overall mental wellbeing (Hair et al., 2008).

Erikson (1965) warns of a danger at this stage of development of isolation and 'character-problems' if the fear of vulnerability with another person leads to avoidance of relationship (Erikson, 1965, p. 258). Erikson's developmental stages are predicated on the idea that a subsequent stage builds upon the outcomes of the preceding stages (Erikson, 1965; Dunkel and Sefcek, 2009). The ability of a child to resolve the crisis of one stage heavily influences the outcome of all subsequent stages (Erikson, 1965). A significant number of pre-adolescent children attended boarding school each year (ISC, 1980-2020) and at this stage, a child would ideally enjoy the physical presence, support, inclusion and safety of parental figures in their daily lives. In fact, it is deemed an essential constituent of identity formation (Blau and Blau, 2019). Lacking the physical presence and safety of parental figures, children in boarding schools may experience issues with identity and a sense of belonging (Murphy et al., 2020).

Separation and attachment

Attachment theory has been used prolifically in studies to allow us to further understand the effects of separation from parental figures, and has been the focus of several studies specifically about boarding schools (see Lauryn, 2012; Faulkner, 2020). Attachment, as described by Bowlby (1999), is a way of conceptualizing the affectional bonds that human beings naturally form with others. The healthy maintenance of which results in a sense of security, while disturbances such as loss or threat of loss are experienced as grief and anxiety respectively (Bowlby, 1999). Unwilling separation and repeated disruptions to affectional bonds gives rise to "anxiety, anger, depression and emotional detachment" (Bowlby, 1999, p. 127). These same psychological consequences are observed in adult boarding school survivors in a therapeutic environment (Duffell and Bassett, 2016).

Bowlby (1999) posits that attachment's most likely biological function is that of protection from predators, and so abandonment by an attachment figure can arguably be perceived by the child as an existential threat. Certainly, the threat or actual separation of an attachment figure can be damaging to an individual's development and can include a diminished capacity to form affectional bonds (Bowlby, 2015). Difficulties with intimate relationships and trust in adulthood has also been noted by both Schaverien (2011) and Duffell (2014; 2016) in their work with boarding school

survivors. It is also an area of research identified by Faulkner (2020) as needing further attention.

Though the effects of infant attachment are felt throughout a person's life, in the adolescent years this attachment can be supplemented, and even supplanted, by another (Bowlby, 2015). Boarding school teachers and housemasters spend many hours beyond the normal school day with their students giving rise to the potentiality for a child to consider a teacher to be an attachment figure with whom they feel a sense of safety and security (Spina et al., 2019). Faulkner's (2020) findings, however, run counter to this and show that all of her study's participants experienced a repeated loss of their main attachment figure with each return to school, but only one was able to replace that figure with another from the school. Schaverien (2015) puts it quite plainly: "A boarding school may provide a caring environment but it cannot provide individual attachment figures to foster the reciprocity of emotional intimacy" (Schaverien, 2015, pp. 156-157).

A study of adults who were separated from their parents during the evacuation in World War 2 shows that separation from parents leads to insecure attachment styles in both girls and boys and tends later to develop into dependent styles in girls and independent styles in boys (Rusby and Tasker, 2008). In her study of adolescent attachment in a boarding school, Lauryn (2012) notes boarders before the age of eleven presenting signs of insecure attachment styles. She later concludes that separation as a result of boarding school attendance results in an avoidant attachment style. Ein-Dor et al. (2012) suggest that these individuals find it difficult to trust in the goodness of others, minimise their own distress and tend to attempt to cope alone without seeking any support. These, and other adaptive behaviours are discussed in more detail in the next section. Vermeire (2020), though, makes an important point; the perception of attachment style can be obfuscated by the influence of social context, and what can be seen as an attachment style may more accurately be described as an adaptive strategy deployed in an unsafe environment or situation.

Adaptive behaviours

For children who attend boarding school, emotional displays may be unwelcome or unable to be held by teachers, housemasters and fellow students. Crying over separation may be deemed inappropriate for their age and so children are left with little choice but to stifle their feelings (Bowlby, 1999). Morrell (1994) suggests that this elimination of emotional expression gives rise to frustration and provides the conditions in which violence is formed. In an environment where difference is not tolerated, violence between boys is common (Poynting and Donaldson, 2016; Morrell, 2001; Duffell, 2000; Lambert, 1968). The subsequent sense of isolation can give rise to a form of masculinity that is borne not out of genuine confidence and strength, but out of fear of being targeted (Lauryn, 2012; Duffell, 2000).

This newly created personality is part of what Duffell (2000) refers to as the "strategic survival personality" (Duffell, 2000, p. 222). He posits that one of two mechanisms are activated for psychological survival in an environment which appears unsafe: 'protection' and 'control' (ibid, p. 230). Where protection fails in keeping the outside at arm's length, control is exerted on the inner self. Vulnerability and the consequent fear of being targeted in and of itself becomes an existential threat to the child and the response is to create a personality which will be more socially capable and acceptable (Duffell, 2000). In extreme cases one might build two defences; one to protect from the outside and one to protect from the overwhelming feelings coming from within, shielding the person from danger but also disconnecting them from the possibility of intimacy (Duffell, 2000). While Duffell's (2000) model of the Strategic Survival Personality favours one in which the individual adapts to become more acceptable, Hopper (1991) suggests that a threat of identity annihilation may trigger an "encapsulation" response whereby an individual will attempt to seal off access to all sensations associated with the threat (Hopper, 1991, p. 607). Similarly, an individual faced with the disruption of caregiving may seek order in whichever form they can achieve it. One such mechanism is that of dissociation, or splitting (Holmes, 2001) in which a child learns to maintain the appearance of normality by presenting a false self (Herman, 1992). Whichever mechanism a child uses, one can argue that it is an

adaptive behaviour triggered by fear and an overwhelming sense of helplessness, loss and break in attachment relationships (Hopper, 1991).

Identity trauma

British boarding schools are steeped in tradition (Lambert, 1968) and function as "total institutions" (Reeves et al., 2017, p. 8) providing not only education, parental support roles and accommodation, but a secondary, hidden curricula of socialisation based on the culture and ethos of the school (Reeves et al., 2017; Morrell, 1994). Wakeford (1969) describes these schools fundamentally as "people changing organisations" (Wakeford, 1969, p. 42). This acculturation ultimately produces what we now refer to as the traits of an English gentleman; a highly prized status (Reeves et al., 2017). It is a covert and slow burning method of supplanting the authentic individual with a sense of identity more in line with the school and staff ethos.

> *"Most staff in public boarding schools perceive it as one of their chief tasks to persuade the boy to adopt their perspective of his behaviour in an attempt to persuade him to internalise the official ideology." (Wakeford, 1969, pp. 174-175)*

This systematic and intentional assimilation of culture and separation from parental figures is, in some ways, similar to the way in which the indigenous population of Canada, Australia and the United States experienced the stripping of identity in colonial residential schools of the 19th and 20th centuries (Chief Moon-Riley et al., 2019). Children were specifically targeted for this practice because of their plasticity so they could be easily indoctrinated into a culture that served a greater purpose to those in power (Smith, 2004). Acculturation, as defined for Native Americans, was the degree of acceptance and adherence to the majority's cultural values (Reynolds et al., 2017); the psychological stress of which led to "depression, anxiety, identity confusion, feelings of marginality, and alienation as well as behavioural and functional difficulties" (Barnes and Josefowitz, 2019, p72).

In reference to the embodied culture of boarding schools, Reeves (2017) notes that "[m]astery of this cultural identity" was seen as a sign of "elite status" (Reeves et al., 2017, p. 8) and, as will shortly be seen, safety can be achieved by adhering to, or

assimilating oneself into, the dominant culture (Lewis, 1956; Duffell, 2000; Kira et al., 2017). C.S Lewis (1956) felt that the best way to remain safe at school was to be like them; to hide one's vulnerability and identify with the ethos of the school. The implication being that one would need to suppress or split from one's original identity in order to take on a more socially acceptable one (Duffell, 2000).

When the elements of identity are forcibly altered or done away with in, for example, a new social context in which acculturation or an unsafe environment elicit adaptive behaviours, the individual experiences this as a threat to identity (Jaspal et al., 2020). How the individual responds is varied and subjective but it is generally accepted that they will respond in such a way as to mitigate the effects of the threat by using a combination of coping strategies which might include:

- Self-isolation – disengaging from social engagement in order to avoid the threat of annihilation;
- Denial – a rejection of one's own identity;
- Changing oneself to fit in – changing one's identity to avoid the threat;
- Pretence - pretending to be someone more acceptable to the collective;
- Reframing and rehearsal – re-evaluation of identity and preparation for threat.

(Jaspal et al., 2020)

All of the above coping strategies involve a level of rejection and potential loss of one's own identity. This loss of authenticity and agency is described by Kira et al. (2017) as an "identity trauma" (Kira et al., 2017, p. 178) and can lead to "general distress, depressive symptoms, anxiety, substance abuse, anger, and psychosis as well as negative associations with happiness" and "life satisfaction" (ibid, p. 177). While this particular study was written in the context of refugees facing sexual, physical abuse and rape, all of which have occurred in British boarding schools (Symonds, 2019; Rhodes, 2015; Renton, 2017), it also emphasises the threat to identity of individuals or groups who are deemed to be inferior in status by dominant others (Kira et al., 2017), the school context for which will now be discussed in the exploration of peer victimisation.

Peer victimisation in the context of total institutions

The definition of peer victimisation or bullying often differs depending upon the context within which it is being used (Kirke, 2007). However, it is generally accepted that it is a behaviour, or cluster of behaviours, that is consolidated under a theme of aggression (Carlisle and Rofes, 2007; O'Brien, 2014). More specifically, it is defined as "the experience in which an individual is exposed repeatedly to discomfort at the expense of another peer's behaviour" (Armitage et al., 2021, p. 2); although repetition is not necessarily a hallmark of bullying, as one-off acts of bullying can also have lasting negative effects (O'Brien, 2014). Peer victimisation usually operates within the power imbalance (Armitage et al., 2021) that is inherent in the hierarchical structures that are present in most schools but particularly formalised and established in boarding houses (Lambert, 1968). Victimisation can be direct or indirect, taking the form of physical and verbal acts of aggression or social exclusion respectively and both have been shown to lead to a significant and lasting impact on a person's mental health well into adulthood (Armitage et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2012; Carlisle and Rofes, 2007).

As previously mentioned, no studies could be found that attended specifically to bullying in British boarding schools and so it was necessary to refer to studies of bullying in another traditional British institution. Not unlike boarding schools, the British army also operates as a "total institution" (Kirke, 2007, p. 8) whereby a number of people are removed from wider society for a period of time and live together in a formal, institutionalised environment and in a similar hierarchical structure (Kirke, 2007) to that of boarding schools (Lambert, 1968; Schaverien, 2015). In particular, one can draw a comparison between the school's aforementioned unofficial mandate of shaping individuals, to the culture of bullying in the British army that is seen as a necessary means to an end; i.e. "oppressive coercive behaviour" used to illicit "operationally advantageous" (Kirke, 2007, p. 9) outcomes. Aggressive behaviour, the threat of violence, discipline and humiliation are all deemed acceptable if the motive behind the perpetrator's actions are within the cultural norms and the best interest of the wider institution (Kirke, 2007). Recruits are socially isolated and consequently more susceptible to bullying in an organisation that takes advantage of the psychological vulnerability of adolescents. The unrelenting pressure exerted on these

individuals is designed to break them down and rebuild them to serve a specific purpose within the organisation (Wither, 2004). Boarders are subjected to similar pressures; isolated from wider society (Wakeford, 1969), they are more susceptible to bullying as they are unable to escape the onslaught of physical and psychological torment (Kirke, 2007). They also live in an institution that values emotional toughness and whose desire is to reform the individual to serve specific roles in society (Duffell, 2014).

In the boarding houses of schools, the family unit is replaced by a substantially larger hierarchical social framework (Morrell, 1994) of peers, seniors and housemaster (Lambert, 1968). The hierarchy below the housemaster is unofficial in nature and reinforced by the system of peer discipline (Lambert, 1968) which could, depending on one's perspective, be seen as corrective behaviour or as victimisation. Kirke's (2007, p. 9) argument for replacing the word bullying with "oppressive coercive behaviour" is that an act of aggression can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. For example, a physical attack on an individual by a group may be perceived by the group as acceptable corrective behaviour; from the victim's point of view as excessive force and intimidation; or from a commanding officer's standpoint, anything including and in between (Kirke, 2007). Notwithstanding the military's understandable difficulties in defining bullying (Stuart and Szeszeran, 2020; Kirke, 2007) i.e. balancing aggressive behaviour with building a robust army where lives are at stake (Kirke, 2007), it is arguably the perception of the victim that is important when it comes to the individual psychological effect of any form of bullying.

In contrast to these behaviours , Kirke (2007) notes the necessity for, and expectation of, senior officers to form warm and supportive bonds with juniors in a pastoral sense. A similar relationship was noted by Lambert (1968, p.68) in the earlier days of "fagging"[1] at boarding schools whereby a mutually supportive and beneficial relationship is formed in spite of the imbalance of power. However, Kirke (2007) goes on to say that those in authority can easily embrace a more authoritarian approach

[1] A traditional practice used widely in public boarding schools whereby a junior student is assigned to carry out menial tasks in servitude of a senior student for a period of time (Lambert 1968).

devoid of any intent to build healthy relationship, which can lead to an abuse of the power bestowed upon them by their rank. This view is similarly shared by Wither (2004). There is, however, a general sense of ambiguity in Wither's report; a reluctance also noted in Kirke's (2007) writing, owing to the nature of the armed forces; that is the need to maintain a specific image and to balance the need for a robust army against the risk to its' personnel. This is certainly illustrated by the fact that recruits are actively discouraged from reporting bullying (Wither, 2004). Boarding schools are similarly keen to maintain their image (Hodges et al., 2013) and students likewise find it hard to articulate their experiences. This is owing partly to their traumatic experiences (Schaverien, 2015; Herman, 1992) and partly to a fear of vulnerability among social peer groups which leads to emotional repression and a reluctance to seek help (Duffell, 2000; Schaverien, 2015).

According to Stuart and Szeszeran (2020) bullying is more prevalent in institutional environments. Organisations which hold fast to tradition and for whom discipline and compliance is strongly encouraged, normalise bullying as part of the culture making it more likely to reoccur and harder to reform. The psychological effects of bullying in the British army is shown to manifest in anger and anxiety disorders, suicidal ideation and completion of suicide, depression and post-traumatic stress (Stuart and Szeszeran, 2020; Kim et al., 2019). Similarly, bullying at school has been shown to lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, aggression, withdrawal, suicidal ideation and completion of suicide (Carlisle and Rofes, 2007). Army recruits who attended boarding schools consider the enrolment in the armed forces to be a natural progression and even an extension of their schooling (Kayss, 2018) and so it is reasonable to suggest that these correlations in the aforementioned environment, ethos, aggressive bullying behaviours and the consequential psychological impacts lend their relevance to this review.

Cyber bullying is another possible way of understanding the unique aspects of bullying at boarding school as it allows perpetrators to engage with their victims beyond the school gates, unrestricted by time or teacher intervention (Ackers, 2012; Mason, 2008). Home is therefore no longer a place of safety and refuge to which they can return (Mason, 2008). Bullying at boarding school is similarly unrelenting (Lester et al., 2015) and protected from scrutiny by the accepted ranking system, tradition and ethos

of the school (Poynting and Donaldson, 2016) where bullying is an accepted cultural norm within the framework of accepted tradition (Wakeford, 1968). The psychological impacts of cyber bullying include anxiety, eating disorders, suicide ideation and completion, depression and low self-esteem, all of which have been shown to last beyond the victim's school years (Mason, 2008).

The psychological consequences of bullying mentioned above are, of course, not exclusive to boarding schools. Any child faced with the challenge of a new school environment would be subject to similar forces (Lester and Mander, 2020). However, Lambert (1968) asserts that tensions are intensified when living communally, Kirke (2007) suggests that living in close quarters makes individuals more susceptible to bullying, and Lester and Mander (2020) point out that children who board have the additional burden of dealing with these difficulties without the support of their parents or siblings. Furthermore, Mander et al (2015) found levels of stress, anxiety and depression to be substantially higher in boarding students than their non-boarding peers

Prolonged abuse and trauma in captivity

Trauma has been through many shifts in definition, understanding and treatment over time (Jones and Wessely, 2006; Herman, 1992). Today, it is generally accepted to be an event, or series of events which overwhelm the autonomic nervous system of an individual (Payne et al., 2015) resulting in psychosomatic responses due to a compromised ability to self-regulate (Levine, 1997; Herman, 1992). Although speaking primarily of sexual abuse, Herman (1992) argues that a single traumatic event can occur anywhere, but prolonged trauma can only occur in an environment where the victim is held captive and unable to flee the perpetrator. Boarding schools do fit these criteria, but it is worth being cautious at this point not to suggest that all boarding students will suffer, or fail to recover, from their experiences at school. Some students adapt relatively quickly from the rupture of separation and go on to relish their time at school. For others, the trauma is too overwhelming and many do not recover (Schaverien, 2011).

As discussed previously, one of the core elements of the social construct of boarding schools is a hierarchy that is established between the members of the institution; one which, defined by authority and power, provides the potential and motivation for the oppression of those lower in status (Kirke, 2007; Kira et al., 2017). In schools, discipline may be initiated not only by staff members during the course of a normal school day but also by senior students who are permitted to engage in disciplinary action that may otherwise be deemed the responsibility of adults (Lambert, 1968). Wakeford (1969) suggests that this hierarchy is maintained by the threat and execution of verbal and physical assault and humiliation (Wakeford, 1969) and, though written in the late 1960's, his observations and research are consistent with accounts of boarding school attendees throughout the twentieth century and to the present day (Schaverien, 2011; 2015; Duffell and Bassett, 2016). In stark contrast, Lambert (1968) presents biographical evidence that, at the time of his writing, shows the hierarchical nature of the boarding houses starting to break down and the senior boys reporting their enjoyment and satisfaction in bonding with, and gently guiding, the younger boys in their charge. Nevertheless, some found it difficult to reconcile the relentless lack of privacy and autonomy and this resulted in an enduring hatred of authority (Lauryn, 2012; Lambert, 1968).

It is this confinement and power differential within the walls of the school that can reasonably be likened to prisons (Wakeford, 1969) where inmates are similarly held captive against their will. For those children who find themselves at the mercy of senior students or teachers and for whom the day and night are tainted with anxiety and fear, respite from this environment is not forthcoming.

> *"I would have been bullied at any school, but at boarding school, the bullying was remorseless and inescapable. Sometimes it lasted through much of the night."* (Monbiot, 1998)

People subjected to prolonged trauma may suffer from post-traumatic stress and are sometimes unable to recall all of their time at school (Schaverien, 2011). They may suppress painful memories (Herman, 1992) split or dissociate to dull or deny the emotional fallout, and embody the trauma resulting in physiological symptoms (Schaverien, 2011). Unable to reconcile the experience cognitively, and discouraged

from feeling, boarding school students, while subject to prolonged stress and trauma, may be forced to split from memories (Schaverien, 2011) and adapt by means of dissociation by creating a new narrative (Herman, 1992). With emotions too overwhelming to bear, these children, now adults, can present as intellectually impressive but with very little capacity for emotional articulation (Schaverien, 2011).

Writing about bullying in the military, Kirke (2007) surmises that any bullying that occurs in army units will be intensified by the fact that the persecuted is unable to walk away (Kirke, 2007). In describing the repetitive nature of prolonged trauma, Herman writes that captivity "brings the victim and perpetrator into prolonged contact" (Herman, 1992, p. 74). It was not uncommon for a boarding student in the early 20th century to witness or experience beatings and even death at the hands of their peers (Turner, 2015; Schaverien, 2015; Schaverien, 2011). Beatings and humiliation, especially in the context of an inescapable environment (Kirke, 2007; Herman, 1992) that lacks the basic benefits of autonomy and privacy (Lambert, 1968), can be considered to be a serious violation of a child's integrity, and can arguably lay the foundations for sexual abuse (Herman, 1992; Schaverien, 2011).

Although sexual abuse of children by staff in boarding schools has been much publicised, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) (2018) states that a quarter of all reports made through a temporary helpline for boarding school students in the early to mid-1990's were regarding peer on peer sexual assault. The IICSA report highlights the nature of residential schools as increasing the risk of such abuse occurring. Specifically, the fact that children of different ages reside together in close quarters and for long periods of time with little or no parental oversight (Ward and Rodger, 2018). This same environment allows boarding staff unfettered and prolonged access to the intimate routines of a child's life opening the potentiality for physical and emotional abuses (Ward and Rodger, 2018).

The effect of sexual abuse on an individual is well researched and publicised and Herman describes it thus:

> *"The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness. Unable to care or protect herself, she must compensate for the failures of adult care and protection with the only means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defenses."* (Herman, 1992, p. 96).

3 | Benefits of boarding schools

It is important to acknowledge that there are children who seem to thrive at boarding school, and who maintain strong bonds with both the school and their peers for decades after they graduate. This is perhaps through the mechanisms of membership to old boys clubs, a recognition of an intense shared experience (Lauryn, 2012), and the desire to remain loyal to the collective (Reeves et al., 2017). Perhaps, as Lauryn (2012) posits, the boarding school itself becomes an attachment object having had such a profound influence on identity formation in adolescent years. We have already seen how an increased sense of identity and the consequent improved parental relationship can impact positively of an individual's wellbeing (Blau and Blau, 2019). Lester et al. (2020) showed that peer protection and care for one's peers increased significantly in comparison to non-boarders after the first year of attendance. It is therefore suggested that the boarding environment contributes both to the likelihood of bullying but paradoxically to the prevention of it as well (Lester and Mander, 2020). An extensive study of thousands of boarding and day students found that boarders scored modestly higher in "meaning and purpose, life satisfaction" and "parent relations", although also scoring higher on maladaptive motivation and emotional instability (Martin et al., 2014, p. 1035). Where a child lacks a sense of basic safety and security at home, in the case of domestic abuse for example, it is understandable that a boarding environment may provide this security (Murphy et al., 2020). However, when it comes to the psychological wellbeing of boarding school students, the

literature is scarce and non-specific. Without studying the lived experiences of each individual in a therapeutic setting one would not know for sure whether this apparent ability to thrive is one of genuine resilience or of psychological protective measures deployed in the light of overwhelming emotional ruptures (Faulkner, 2020; Duffell, 2000).

4 | Critical reflection

Where an author may have previous experience of the subject they are writing about, McGhee et al. (2007) suggest that open acknowledgement of the potential for that experience to impact on the research is essential to share with readers. As an ex boarding student of a school in South Africa, founded by a Briton, and modelled on Eton (Morrell, 1994), the author's lived experienced of this subject has been in constant awareness during the process of writing this paper.
It is consequently noted that this review is weighted toward the negative aspects of the psychological impact associated with boarding school. However, the author believes this is an unavoidable reality given the similar weighting of the available literature to date. A concerted effort was made to find studies which attended to or mentioned positive psychological outcomes for boarding school students. Other than those already mentioned, no others were found. Studies reporting positive outcomes in children who attend these schools tend to focus on academic achievement, and if any psychological element is introduced, it is usually that of an increased sense of independence and resilience or an undefined measure of psychological wellbeing (see Blau and Blau, 2019; Martin et al., 2014). These studies go no further to explore where positive outcomes originate and, as has been argued in this review, traits such as independence and resilience can be the result of long held adaptive behaviours (Duffell, 2000; Duffell, 2015; Duffell and Bassett, 2016; Schaverien, 2015; Herman, 1992).

Some children did undoubtedly enjoy their school experience. The substitute family could foster an intense loyalty to the school, to the team and to the house in which they lived (Hodges et al., 2013; Morrell, 1994). For some, this provided an enduring sense of security, community, camaraderie and identity that they did not experience outside of school (Lambert, 1968). For others it was a welcome respite from home

(Murphy et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2014). While not wishing to lose sight of these facts, we must also acknowledge those who were mistreated (Schaverien, 2015). While children, who are now adults, may have appreciated certain benefits associated with the social standing of their school, some were certain that the separation from home, the subjugation, lack of privacy and the intensity of an enclosed society would influence the remainder of their lives and pervert their sense of the world outside (Lambert, 1968).

While this review is concerned primarily with British schools, the long arm of the Empire has also been addressed. Colonial schools helped to maintain a distance from their indigenous population who were seen as inferior (Morrell, 2001; Morrell, 1994). This sense of elitist privilege, superiority and power, both at the time of the Empire and beyond, was the foundation of a system at home and overseas tasked with producing leaders and influencers (Poynting and Donaldson, 2016; Rich, 1989; Morrell, 1994). The unintended consequences of this produced men in positions of power who displayed a façade of confidence that belied the wounded child whose separation at a young age from their parents, and exposure to prolonged trauma, had a deleterious effect on their psychological wellbeing well into adulthood (Duffell, 2015; Lauryn, 2012; Schaverien, 2015; Herman, 1992).

The environment in which these children spend their formative years was also explored. Boarding schools and the armed forces share more in terms of their environment and ethos than initially meets the eye. The minimal research found on the psychological impact of bullying in boarding schools and in the British Armed Forces suggest that these are both areas which are deemed appropriate to remain as they are; woven into the fabric of our society and unchangeable because they serve a greater purpose. Independent boarding schools are successful businesses that promote British values and support a positive international reputation for education (Faulkner, 2020). The British Army needs to create a strong unified image of emotionally defended soldiers (Wither, 2004). In both cases, the emotional and mental well-being of students or recruits appears secondary. Consequently, psychological studies that question whether the short-term gains in total institutions are at the expense of long-term psychological effects are perhaps understandably unwelcome.

Perhaps the most insidious impact on children who essentially grow up outside of their family unit is that of adaptive behaviour. It is not exclusive to boarding school, but it has been shown to be significantly increased in an intense and unrelenting environment (Herman, 1992; Kirke, 2007; Schaverien, 2015). Any display of emotion is discouraged by both the school and by one's peers so it must be hidden for fear of being vulnerable to attack (Lewis, 1956). These children consequently grow up with a compromised ability to express any emotion (Lambert, 1968). In adult life this has been shown to lead to relationship difficulties, a lack of empathy, aggression, depression, and anxiety disorders to name but a few (Duffell, 2014; Duffell and Bassett, 2016). Extrapolated over many years, and in a captive environment where the abuse of power is more likely and difficult to escape, the effect of prolonged trauma can be profound (Herman, 1992).

It is very clear from the research included here and more so from the research that doesn't yet exist that more time and effort is needed to understand the full psychological impact of sending children away from home to be schooled, socialised and parented institutionally. In particular, the unique ethos and traditions associated with British and colonial schools, and the way in which these things are preserved warrants further study as it appears to be a significant source of the attitude toward, and expectation of, children in boarding schools.

If boarding schools provide psychological benefits to students, these are yet to be explored to the same level of psychological scrutiny as the literature presented in this paper. The scarcity and indeterminate nature of studies that do briefly mention positive outcomes has led the author to identify this as another avenue of research that is required in order to potentially balance the reported outcomes of attending boarding schools.

5 | Conclusion

This literature review set out to consider the implications of boarding schools on the psychological wellbeing of their students, and whether or not there was cause for concern. The author believes that the evidence to date, academic or otherwise, points overwhelmingly toward a need for concern about the psychological impact of boarding

schools in Britain. Until such time as significant research is presented to prove otherwise, the evidence collated here, the autobiographical accounts of ex-students and the news reports of historical and current institutionalised sexual abuse support this view. In concluding her thesis, Faulkner (2020, p. 184) suggests that sending children away to boarding school amounts to "emotional neglect and psychological cruelty"; a crime under the Serious Crime Act of 2015. While boarding schools may now have counsellors and modern amenities, it is the separation and rejection, fear, anxiety and the increased likelihood of experiencing abuse and other traumas that are shown to have a detrimental effect on the mental health of boarding students well into adulthood (Faulkner, 2020; Duffell and Bassett, 2016). In the absence of evidence to the contrary we are left with the fact that children being separated from their families is not supported by any child development theory (Duffell and Bassett, 2016) and is considered the last resort by the social care system in Britain (Murphy et al., 2020).

6 | Implications for counselling practice

Although corporal punishment was officially outlawed in state schools in the UK in 1987, it would be a further twelve years before private schools fell in line. Many UK students since have reported that the unofficial beatings, humiliations and sexual assaults have continued largely unabated and unchallenged to this day (Schaverien, 2011; Faulkner, 2020; Ward and Rodger, 2018). Duffell and Bassett (2016) rightly point out that even if these practices had been eradicated there is still significant rupture in the separation of a child from their parents. It is for this reason that the knowledge compiled in this review is still relevant to therapeutic work (Schaverien, 2015).

The first step for therapists is to recognise that boarding school has an impact on the development of a child. The nature of a scoping review does not lend itself to making specific recommendations on clinical practice (Munn et al., 2018) and it is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore the ways in which clients can be supported.

Perhaps a universal starting point for therapists can be found in Bowlby's (1999) concept of a "secure base" (p. 103). According to Holmes (2001), the aim of the therapist is to provide the foundational constituents of a secure base for their client: "consistency, reliability, attunement, rupture, repair" (Holmes, 2001, p. 46). Both

Holmes (2001) and Bowlby (1999) emphasise the fact that, just as a child cannot safely explore without a secure base to return to, so too is a client hindered from their exploration should the therapist be unable to provide such a base in therapy (Holmes, 2001). However, forging a healing therapeutic relationship with an ex-boarding client who is not conversant in intimate relationships can be challenging (Duffell and Bassett, 2016), and the adaptive strategies employed by the child in order to survive can manifest in the adult as self-reliance, avoidance, self-denial, aggression, hyper-vigilance, over achievement, and emotional detachment (Duffell, 2000). Frustratingly it can be just at the point at which these individuals begin to explore these adaptive patterns that many terminate therapy (Duffell and Bassett, 2016).

Word Count: 8175

Author: Greg James

Submitted Bath Spa University 2021 MA Counselling and Psychotherapy

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