

## Article

# Encounters with Care in a Scottish Residential School in the 1980s

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**Abstract:** The meaning of care in residential child care is under-developed. It can often be represented through its absence, seen as offering at best basic physical tending but lacking emotional connection or warmth. At worst, residential care settings said to be institutionally abusive can be characterised as being antithetical to what we might imagine care should be. Residential schools and especially those run by religious orders attract particular opprobrium in this regard. In this article, I adopt a broadly autoethnographic approach to reflect on how boys (now men in their late 40s and early 50s) brought up in the 1980s in a Scottish residential school recall being cared for. The article uses Axel Honneth's theory of recognition and its three pillars of love, rights and solidarity to group themes from how former pupils speak about their experiences of care. These accounts challenge the received narrative of such settings failing to offer care. The discussion reflects some ideas around care and about how we understand public care historically.

**Keywords:** residential school; history; care; recognition; Honneth

## 1. Introduction

In this article, I reflect on the nature of care in what, in Scotland, were called List D schools but which would more widely be recognised under the term approved schools. Essentially, these were schools for those who had offended and/or were deemed to be in need of care and protection. Initially, I had intended to take a broadly empirical direction, presenting and discussing interviews from former residents of one such school, St Roch's, run by a Catholic religious order, the De La Salle Brothers, with whom I worked over the course of the 1980s. The interviews were gathered for a recent book I authored [1]. This remains an aspect of what I do in the sense that I introduce and engage with the boys' stories around their experiences of being cared for. However, the article has developed into something more reflexive. There is a valedictory dimension to it in which I indulge myself in reflecting on a lifetime's work in direct care practice and subsequently in academia where I have maintained a focus on ideas of care and caring. But the reason for the slight shift in direction is that what I write about does not lend itself to traditional research conventions of presenting and analysing data; that would be inadequate for its nature and purpose and the position from which I write. I cannot be that Archimedean voice from nowhere. Rather, the stories of those I interviewed interleave with my own memories of the school. These stories might be thought of as data, but this implies something abstracted and objectivised. The reality is that I cared for the subjects of my data gathering, not just because it was my statutory duty to do so but because I had and still have an emotional connection to them, and they to me. There is therefore an inevitable existential dimension to my engagement with the subject, which compromises any attempt to pass this off as research in a more traditional sense. This should not necessarily come as a surprise—although care is often presented in policy discourse as though it were a service or a commodity, it is, by its nature, a reciprocal encounter [2]. It is rarely spoken about in public care as such, especially in a context in which any emotional dimensions of care have been pushed aside by responses to scandals, which have led in recent decades to an unremitting focus on institutional



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abuse [3] and fearful institutional responses [4]. It is only recently that ideas of care and even love have dared (re)encroach on the residential care lexicon

In this article, I try to bring to the surface some of the features of care as experienced by a group of boys who lived in St Roch's. To group these experiences, I draw on Axel Honneth's [5] concept of recognition, which I come on to develop. But these aspects of care are refracted through the lens of my reflections about giving it. To capture this dimension of the article his requires a suitable methodological frame, and for that, I turn to autoethnography, a narrative or storytelling genre.

## 2. Autoethnography

Dipping my toes into autoethnography in some ways takes me back to my social work training, when one of the first books recommended was C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* [6]. Mills claims that 'you must learn to use your life experiences in your intellectual work: continually to examine it and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the center of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you work' [6] (p. 196). Mills argues that 'the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two in society. The challenge is to develop a methodology that allows us to examine how the private troubles of individuals are connected to public issues and to public responses to these troubles' [6] (p. 5–6). Denzin [7] takes Mills' work as a starting point in making the case for interpretive autoethnography as a methodology that allows for the examination of this interface between private troubles and public issues.

Autoethnography is 'an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience' [8]. In autoethnography, writing becomes a way of knowing and a method of inquiry through which to challenge canonical stories [8]. This might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research through what Gadamer [9] might call thoughtful reflections on experience. The theme of a recent autoethnography conference, '*Right to Roam*' [10], recognises 'a moral obligation to trouble and expand knowledge and ways of generating knowledge... perhaps protesting against constrained ideas...'. .

This is vitally important in a context in which much of sociology has lost its imagination, going further down the road of what Mills [6] identified as abstracted empiricism, within which the realities of everyday life are subordinated to grand theories. This tendency is particularly salient to residential child care, a field dominated epistemologically by other disciplinary perspectives, such as law and psychology. These impose clinical and sanitised versions of what policy makers might want residential child care to be. There are few accounts nowadays that evoke the kind of immediacy, messiness and emotional connection of everyday practice like, for instance, Henry Maier's [11] work or earlier accounts of residential child care (e.g., [12,13]). Yet Ricks [14] makes the case that knowledge about care emerges less from the normative assumptions of what it ought to be like and more through the 'hands-on' experience of everyday caring.

I try and reflect on some of that experience of everyday care here, engaging in an ongoing fusing of horizons between past practical experience and my knowledge developed as an academic to reach a deeper understanding of the field. In painting a positive picture of St Roch's, the findings of this research, unquestionably, challenge the canonical story of residential schools. While I write as an insider on account of my practice experience, I also find myself as an epistemic outsider. I offer a counter narrative, described by Bamberg and Andrews as 'the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives' [15] (p. 1). Even attempting such a task is difficult when the grand narrative of residential schooling as failing to offer care is so powerfully embedded [16].

The canonical story of residential schools that I challenge is well established across the Western world. Ferguson [17] claims that those cared for in Irish industrial and reformatory schools run by religious orders were 'routinely starved, beaten, humiliated, sexually abused,

deprived of education and basic knowledge about life, and their emotional needs were often totally neglected'. He asserts that 'it is beyond question that the entire industrial and reformatory regime was an abusive and cruel one' [17] (p. 124). In a Scottish context, Kendrick [18], in evidence to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, extrapolates from gang member Jimmy Boyle's book, *Sense of Freedom* [19], in which he describes his experience in a school run by the De La Salle Brothers, to claim that approved schools operated rigid regimes in which corporal punishment and violence involving young people or staff was routine. DeWilde et al. [20] discuss how an abuse narrative has become a 'normative truth' with regard to how residential care is thought of. The accounts I introduce here interrupt that grand narrative. They are based around one school at a particular point in time but might serve to ask questions more generally of the singular story about residential schools that has taken hold [1], locating a concept of care at the heart of what they offered.

Styles of autoethnographic writing vary, some becoming very introspective. Stahlke Wall [21] stresses the need to balance the value of personal experience while maintaining scholarly rigour. This, I guess, is consistent with my own approach; I recognise the importance of personal experience but balk at that itself becoming the story. The approach I take here is consistent with Atkinson's [22] discussion of autoethnography in interspersing personal reflection with more conventional academic writing.

According to Denzin, [7] (p. 4) autoethnographic accounts should have the following features:

- People depicted as characters;
- A scene, place or context where the story occurs;
- An epiphany or crisis that provides a dramatic tension, around which the emplotted events depicted in the story revolve (and towards which a resolution is pointed);
- A temporal order of events;
- A point or moral to the story that gives meaning to the experiences depicted.

I use this as a loose framework to ground and to structure this article.

### 3. The Characters in the Story

This book on which this article is based is essentially a case study based around St Roch's. It tells the stories of seven men who, at the time of writing, are around 50 years old, but who, in the mid to late 1980s, were teenagers residing at St Roch's. I also interviewed two former staff members there with connections to the De La Salle Order. The former pupils are Brian, Stu, Dom, Ciaran, Darren, Billy and Ricki. The two De La Salle Brothers are Lawrence and Felix.

As intimated in the introduction, what follows cannot be just my interpretation of others' stories as it is just as much my story. Denzin [7] speaks of interpretive autoethnography as a critical, performative practice that begins with the biography of the writer and moves outward. In that sense, it behoves me to position myself, however superficially, in relation to the research, to outline what Finlay [23] might identify as my reflexive journey. The book gives a fuller account of my positionality.

Reinharz [24] identifies three different categories of 'self' that researchers bring to the research process and how this might impact it: the brought self, which brings in one's personal history, the researcher self, within which research orientations come into play, and the situationally created self, which recognises the possibility that the research process might itself shape or reshape the researcher's identity. Briefly, I started working in St Roch's in 1981, straight out of university, with no idea what a List D school was. But my family background was working class and Catholic, and I was starting to become informed by Catholic social teaching. My background had also instilled in me the importance of education for individual and social progress, and I had thought of going into teaching. So, a school setting with a Catholic ethos offered something of an existential fit for me.

But there is another family ghost that lingers in the background. Doucet [25] suggests that a researcher's engagement with their subject matter can be 'haunted' by 'ghosts' from their own experiences. After I started at St Roch's, I discovered that both my paternal

grandfather and one of my aunts had been brought up in care. I recall taking my grandfather down to St Roch's for an open day. He recollected having been there before. He did not attend St Roch's but had visited it from a working boys' hostel in a nearby town and spoke of the school having a pipe band. He himself was a drummer and I wondered if he had learned that through being part of the band. After my grandfather's death, my dad sought to find out more about where he had been placed but did not manage to do so. I know nothing about his experience in care—he did not really speak of it either positively or negatively. My aunt recalls a very positive experience of being looked after by nuns. I am not quite sure what this adds to what and how I write but feeling some sort of personal connection to care refracts one's experience through what Doucet [25] calls a gossamer wall and adds a further layer of complexity to any engagement with its subject matter.

#### 4. Scene Place or Context

Reform schools dealing with youngsters who had offended and industrial schools dealing with non-offenders have existed since the Victorian period. These came together in the 1930s under the general heading of approved schools (2009). Following the Social Work (Scotland) Act (1968), such schools, in Scotland, were, administratively, renamed List D schools. A majority of such schools were run by religious bodies, such as St Roch's, which was run by the De La Salle Brothers, a worldwide teaching order with a historical mission to educate the children of the poor. Its existence as a teaching order says something about the nature of the establishment. I remember my interview for the job at St Roch's back in 1981, and, not knowing much about List D schools, I made the mistake of likening them to borstals (which were institutions for young offenders) to be put right by the then headmaster, Brother Oswald, that they were schools—their purpose was broadly educational. The Brothers brought a long tradition of care and education to the work of the schools and a particular philosophy within which they aimed to achieve the following:

[. . .] to foster a kindly spirit in their intercourse with the student and to maintain that discipline which is, of course, essential in every school, not so much by the enforcement of rigid rules and regulations, as by advice and guidance, given in a brotherly spirit, the object being to make the school not only a place for education, and for the moulding of character, but likewise a happy home [. . .] [26] (p. 79)

For staff, there was an element of care as a commitment to community living. The task was seen, in some respects, as a vocation or 'calling' [27,28]. This was reflected in the expectation that staff stay on-site, with working hours that were long and that, at times, needed to be flexible. Paralleling the emergence of the family group homes in community settings, St Roch's moved away from what had been a 'block' school where boys were housed in large dormitories towards a 'cottage' model where they were looked after, albeit in groups of 20, in discrete units with a combination of smaller bedrooms housing three or four boys, with some single-room accommodation. One of my memories of the school was of space. The buildings and rooms within them were large and there were expansive playing fields. Space, as Maier [29] observed, is a rarely acknowledged determinant of the nature of care that can be offered. In St Roch's, boys, in many ways, had room to grow.

#### 5. The Epiphany or Point of Tension

Depictions of residential schools asserted in the public story of them jar with what I saw and experienced. Moreover, what I experienced was also captured in contemporary literature, which was not afraid to talk about qualities of affection and love. Battersby [26] (p. 92), for instance, spoke of the De La Salle ethos being based around 'the cultivation of an outlook', within which all staff were to contribute to a wholesome atmosphere, characterised by 'kindness, affection and love'. More broadly, a report for the Home Office produced by the Dartington Research Centre [30] (p. 9) spoke of discipline in approved schools being maintained through internal controlling processes such as modelling and identification, but which, importantly, also spoke of caring, warmth and love.

The ethos of St Roch's was, as far as I am concerned, a similarly healthy one. A few years after I started there, we produced a booklet, an early attempt at marketing the school, I guess. It sought to lay down a philosophy, recognising that 'a child's place is with his or her family but that some children, for a variety of reasons, need 'time away' to provide breathing space for themselves, their families and their local communities'. The stated aim of the school was to give boys a sense of their own worth and dignity; an appreciation of the feelings and needs of others; an understanding of what life has and will offer them; and an environment in which they can be accepted, treated as individuals, managed with warmth and humour and dealt with fairly and consistently.

The schools, more broadly, were not institutionally punitive (in fact, corporal punishment was banned in them before it was in mainstream education). Through the work of the List D schools' psychological service, they spawned some of the progressive ideas that informed the Social Work (Scotland) Act [31]. There is little point of connection between what have become received accounts and other sources of knowledge, including the accounts of staff who worked in the schools and the residents who recall positive experiences there.

The cognitive dissonance between my own experience and the abuse narrative that has emerged became an itch that needed to be scratched. In an era when discourse around residential schools is about bringing a legal sense of justice to those who claim their lives were damaged by their time there, I am driven by an equally strong sense of social and natural justice to show another side to this story.

## 6. A Temporal Order of Events

A prompt for me to take on this task came a number of years ago now. One evening, I was walking along a street near my home. I noticed three young adults walking towards me. As they walked past, one shouted out my name. 'It's me, Brendan', he said. Brendan had been at St Roch's towards the end of the 1980s. As we stood talking, I was struck (although not surprised) that he described his time in St Roch's as the best days of his life and how he wished he could turn the clock back for just a moment. Brendan and I said our goodbyes that evening, promising that we would catch up again. But we never did; a few months later, he ended up back in prison and died there. . . . But that encounter confronted me with the narrative chasm of how what is so readily assumed to have been an abusive experience could be recalled as the best years of one's life.

Not long after hearing of Brendan's death, I was on the touchline for one of my sons' football games. The coach of the other team, Stu, was another former St Roch's boy and again had nothing but good memories of the school. He took it upon himself to set up a Facebook page, which built up to around 28 former pupils and staff. Several of those became the interviewees for my book (COVID prevented me from interviewing others as I did not want to do so online).

### *Methods and Ethics*

Consistent with an overall narrative approach [2], I conducted life history interviews with the former pupils. These gave the boys scope to talk about their lives before, during and after their time in St Roch's. Beyond that basic structure, they were able to take the interview in whatever direction they liked. The interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. The utility of Honneth's [5] framework to analyse boys' stories and to group themes was one I came to after my book was published and in light of my growing interest in Honneth's work.

Stories of personal experience are said to offer a counterpoint to overly positivist and abstracted accounts of the social world [32]. They can be claimed to 'give voice' to individuals and groups who can find themselves silenced beneath dominant versions of how the world is presented, which is of relevance to the context of this study.

Autoethnography also brings some other challenging ethical considerations. Mollenhauer [33] notes that when a child grows up, the asymmetry of a previous care relationship dissolves and any continuing relationship is characterised by a greater mutuality. So, the

research relationships (re)established for the book project incorporated elements of friendship and emotional connection within which there could be argued to be a degree of ethical symmetry. On the other hand, the stories I was told were constructed within the context of a previous caring relationship. In this sense, there was a lingering sense in which the research interviews were an extension of these previous relationships, fulfilling some of Denzin and Giardina's [34] purposes for research as involving ongoing pedagogical, political, moral and ethical purposes. Again, this would be consistent with autoethnographic principles, according to which a researcher's primary obligation is to those who are the subjects of their research and their endeavour is underpinned by qualities of kindness and care [7]. In this case, kindness and care went both ways.

At a practical level, while all of the boys I interviewed for the book were happy for me to use their names, I made the decision to give them pseudonyms to offer some level of plausible deniability were they to be identified. I went through standard university ethics processes. However, for a project of this sort, procedural consent is inadequate. Pirrie et al. [35] claim that the personalised nature of some educational research foregrounds the exercise of personal virtue and ethical imagination over adherence to procedure. This requires a reflexive and relational approach to ethics [7]. One thing to point out is my use of the term 'boys' to describe people who are very definitely men but that reflects how they wanted to be thought of and identified.

### **7. A Point or Moral to the Story That Gives Meaning to the Experiences Depicted—Encounters with Care**

For the purposes of this article, I focus on boys' accounts of their experiences of care in St Roch's. For a long while, over the course of the 1980s and 90s, and reflecting the emergence of legal perspectives on care, children's rights became a prominent focus. It is only in recent years that people have begun to talk about love as a possibility in out of home care. Neither rights nor love on their own are sufficient. One of the things that is missing is the broader social dimension. Paul Natorp [36] (cited in [37], often thought of as the father of social pedagogy, identifies the essence of the discipline as being the upbringing of an individual and their integration into society. Children, thus, need to be brought up as social beings. While I have always been wary of trying to apply any single theory to residential child care (Burns' and Emond's [38] article in this volume highlights some of the complexities in seeking to do so), I do think a broad heuristic can be helpful in orienting how we might think about care. In this sense, Gharabaghi [39], in this volume, offers four defining signifiers of quality that one might look for in residential care settings. In a similar spirit, in this article, I draw on Axel Honneth's [5] theory of recognition, as it offers a tripartite schema of love, rights and social solidarity, under which I proceed to group boys' experiences of care in St Roch's.

### **8. Honneth's Theory of Recognition**

Honneth is a German critical theorist associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. He emphasises the importance of the inter-personal sphere and the basis this provides for one's interactions within the wider world. He makes the case that human flourishing is built upon three pillars of love, rights and solidarity, each of which emerges through a struggle for recognition in the domains of family, civil society and the state, respectively. His theoretical model identifies three types of relation to self, which map onto his three pillars: self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.

The broadly ecological nature of Honneth's theory makes it a suggestive framework for social work, and a growing body of literature draws upon it [40–42]. It has also been used in child care [43–46]. Before I go on to say a bit about Honneth's three pillars of recognition, it might be helpful to orient his idea of a struggle for recognition within some of its roots in the work of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Broadly, and very superficially, the wider Hegelian dialectic poses ideas of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. An idea is proffered, it is opposed and some middle way is

found. Hegel identifies such a dialectic as a method of historical/philosophical progress towards individual and societal consciousness (or perhaps in a social work context, identity) (see [47] for an application of Hegel's ideas to social work).

### 8.1. Love

The 'love' pillar of Honneth's theory may be seen to have particular resonance in residential child care, in which there has been an upsurge of interest in recent years [48]. One of the difficulties with this, though, is that ideas of love can become shallow and sentimentalised if not rooted in any wider theoretical understanding of what it might be, how it might come about or how it might intersect with other facets of a child's life and experience. Honneth's work allows for such necessary grounding.

Drawing upon Donald Winnicott's [49] ideas about 'good enough' parenting, love, for Honneth, refers to multiple sources of emotional connections among a small number of people. It takes us beyond the dyadic relationship of attachment theory [45] to incorporate a variety of reciprocal interactions between children and their caregivers, through which each acquires the capacity for affective approval and mutual encouragement. This resultant quality of emotional recognition allows a child to learn that they exist and matter, connected to but also separate from others [50]. One's sense of self emerges through mutual recognition; it is a social, iterative and negotiated process. We cannot demand love as some advocacy groups have sought to do; it needs to emerge through relationships and through everyday activities.

I now turn to consider how St Roch's boys described love, which was undoubtedly part of their memories. They conveyed a clear sense of feeling cared for in St Roch's in a way that went beyond physical care to what Maier [11] calls a state of caring care, encapsulated in what Ciaran called 'a nice kind of warm feeling'. Former residents consistently described their feeling of being cared for in relation to an idea of family. Several made explicit reference to St Roch's feeling more like what they imagined an ideal family to be, which had not necessarily been their experience in their own families. As Stu said, 'St Roch's . . . it was more of a family orientated place than I think it was being back home'. Ricki also made an explicit reference to the sense of family encountered in everyday routines:

Aye, I loved it. It was like a family. I felt it was a bit more like a home. Get your slippers and your jammies (pyjamas) on. (The housemother) all the time being like your mum. I loved it, I really did. . . I don't know, maybe because I was used to being with parents who weren't there for me.

The boys' sense of care was also equated with a feeling of safety. For Ciaran, St Roch's 'was home. It was where I felt safe, and where I was happy. I wasn't happy at home. I wasn't safe at home. So, it was where I was happy'.

Stu took the view that, having been placed in St Roch's, "This is my family. What happened with my mum and dad. . . Never wanted to go home. I would rather stay here. . . Because this is where I felt safe'. Some of this family analogy was played out in relationships described with particular members of staff. Ciaran recalls his experience with one of the Brothers as follows:

. . . I felt safe like. . . Brother Barnabas made me feel safe. . . Like I'd play a game with Brother Barnabas, we'd just have a laugh. . . I was small and I just, I just, first time there. So, Brother Barnabas was a big strong man. So, I stood beside him. And he made me feel safe. . . Yeah, just generally I felt safe. I felt safe with him, and we grew a bond. A bond that only like a father, a son, a father would sort of be like.

Ricki continued this family theme, claiming that he 'loved them (the staff) to bits'. He spoke about one in particular 'He was like your uncle, man. Used to go about with him all the time'.

While the nature of the housemother role might be thought of as stereotyping the caring role of women, housemothers validated an element of domesticity in the experience

of care, making boys feel cared for, something that was perhaps lost as care became more 'professionalised' over the course of the 1980s. The housemother role was one that the boys appreciated: 'I think to be truthful as well, I think a lot of the kids had really a lot of respect for the housemothers' (Stu). Darren concurred noting that: 'I never ever misbehaved because I respected her. She's just like my mum, you know. My mum, I didn't respect so much, but I didn't do anything bad in front of my mum'. One of the key roles performed by housemothers was around food practices [51]. Stu provided an example of this:

If you're lying ill in your bed, your housemother would bring you soup and tea to see if you're all right and check. She would let you sleep. She would come in and you were up, she would come in and make sure you were all right and that. . .

A sense of being recognised in caring relationships is demonstrated in the small things of everyday living [52]. One of the things that struck me from the boys' stories was just how significant small things that I or any other staff member had perhaps no memory of could be. Ciaran, for instance, remembers me being instrumental in the decision to take him on our annual football trip:

Like, you gave me, even though I wasn't in the football team, because I'd help out or whatever, but you gave me the chance to go to Liverpool. I'd watch us play football. So you're good enough to let me come down there. Things like that. You don't forget. It sticks with you. It sticks with you.

Conversely, the good feelings of getting positive, caring messages also brought home to me how other interventions I and others had been involved in might not have been heard or felt as respectful and how these might colour how they look back on their time in St Roch's. Honneth [53] addresses the implication of such disrespect in his later work.

## 8.2. Rights

While Honneth's theory is a normative one, I take a few liberties here in considering how the second pillar of his theory of recognition, that of rights, might play out in a residential care setting. Honneth links love and rights, arguing that the experience of being loved is a prerequisite to becoming a bearer of rights [5]. While children's rights have been a prominent motif of residential care over the past three decades or so, they have been framed in legalistic and contractual ways that do not convey the realities of life. A more realistic and helpful framing of rights might revolve around how we are with one another. Like love, this cannot be a demand but, according to Honneth, 'is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction. . .' [5] (p. 92). The experience of love or care developed in the living setting enables an individual to view himself or herself as a subject with dignity and moral worth. From this basis of self-confidence, rights become realisable in the process of an individual striving for self-respect within a community of other rights-bearers.

The St Roch's boys did not speak of rights in any legalistic sense but about a sense of fairness and what might be termed 'right relationships' [54], negotiated through peer relationships and against a backdrop of adult authority. This process emerged through and was apparent in daily living and in inter-personal relationships.

In group care contexts, peer relationships, as Emond [55] argues, are often couched in problematic terms, being associated with bullying and issues of group control. However, in her own research, Emond found that young people placed significant value on the peer group for offering information, security and care, and this is borne out in how the St Roch's boys recalled their peer relationships. Stu reflected: 'And to be truthful, there was never any trouble in there. I just think the kids became like brother and sister. . . but you made loads of friends as well'. He only remembered one fight when one of the lads 'battered' another 'for picking on somebody wee'er [smaller]. Trying to take their money or their tuck or something off them'. However one might think of this example, it evidences a sense of fairness and sets down norms of inter-personal behaviour.

Billy picked up on the sibling idea that Stu introduced:

You just got on. Like your brothers. Your best mates or your brothers, would do, you'd hang about with your pals at that age. You all spoke to each other. You'd all have a cigarette, you'd give them a cigarette. They would give you one. Everybody made sure they had something.

Dom took a pragmatic approach to how he approached peer relationships:

Well, the way you had to look at it is, I could fight him five days a week, but I've got to live with him seven days a week. . . Ken (know) what I mean? So, what's the point? Ken (you know), I'll beat him four times, but that one time there's the chance that he's going to beat me the once, ken what I mean? So it was pointless. See when people that you sometimes disagreed with, you still had to get on with them in life, ken what I mean?

As I suggest above, peer relationships were mediated against a backdrop of adult authority. As Stu said: 'A lot of the laddies never had fear. But they had respect for the staff'. This notion of respect rather than fear perhaps evokes Baumrind's [56] notion of staff reflecting an authoritative parenting style, which is associated with the best outcomes in terms of children's upbringing. Their relationships with the staff were identified as good. As Ciaran said: 'They helped me. In many kinds of situations'. Billy said, 'Everybody was quite friendly. There wasn't any bad staff or anything like that'.

Part of the negotiation of what was considered acceptable within a relationship was negotiated in everyday interactions and in the requirement to fit in with different staff members' expectations. Dom, for instance, described Brother Barnabas as follows:

[. . .] a character himself. He used to. . . you used to hear him marching up that hall for to get you out of your bed in the mornings. So here he comes. . . And he was just sort of regimental. He had everything, six o' clock on the button, you would hear him coming up those stairs, seven o' clock, and that was it. "Oh, it's Brother Barnabas that's on duty, let's go [laughs]. Let's get moving".

In some ways, Dom's example of Brother Barnabas being a stickler for routine highlights some of the process through which children build up a sense of care. Maier [11] outlines how the kind of rhythmic interactions between adults and children that emerge over everyday events can lead to an experience of predictability and subsequent dependability and that, paradoxically, each side of this relationship achieves greater freedom as a result of it [1]. There were expectations, however, as to what was considered acceptable behaviour and these were generally adhered to. Expectations were reasonable and there was an element of consent. A Home Office publication [30] on discipline in approved schools recognises that control cannot come through coercion and that coercion is more likely to be a symptom of control having been lost in an establishment. Control could only emerge from what the authors identify as follows:

[. . .] a unified acceptance by staff and inmates (sic) of the authority which each adult has within the institution. From this acceptance comes a strong normative influence on institutional members through internal controlling processes such as modelling [. . .]

So, while the care we offered at St Roch's happened without any reference to rights frameworks, it embodied an innate understanding of rights existing within the nature of the relationships that were formed. Latter-day claims to bring children's rights into care settings often floundered because the mutually respectful relationships that are required to realise these were compromised by a lack of adult confidence or, ironically, authority [1].

### 8.3. Solidarity

The third pillar of Honneth's schema posits that when children can negotiate and feel confident in their rights, they can take these into the social sphere. Rights exist in different forms and the cultural climate which, in Scotland, gave rise to the progressive

reforms of the Children's Hearings system in the 1960s was informed by a recognition of broad social and cultural, rather than just individual, rights [57]. Honneth posits that individuals have the opportunity to earn esteem if their particular traits and abilities are in tune with the values of their society. There is a predominant communitarian rather than an individual dimension to this. However, in an era that has become increasingly individual and 'therapeutic' [58], we can lose sight of Natorp's identification of the essence of bringing up children as involving their integration into society [36].

The St Roch's boys did not speak directly about their relationships with or in the wider world and I guess I did not really ask them. But, while the articulation of it might be retrospective, my own thinking was to encourage the boys to adopt a place facing the world [33]. The culture of the school was outward facing—we took part in a lot of charitable events. One of the social workers would teach boys guitar and take them to entertain the residents in local old people's homes. Felix spoke of one of the teachers setting up a scheme for boys to befriend older people in the community, which had to be curtailed when one was caught stealing. But setbacks like this did not stop us taking risks.

Again, I might understand this next example retrospectively in light of Mollenhauer's identification of the role of upbringing relationships being to pass on a valued cultural heritage from one generation to the next, but one of the things I did was to take out membership with the local theatre company, which gave us group rates of 50p a seat. With a colleague and his wife, I would drive the school bus with around 20 boys to the theatre to see shows like *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and a Moliere season performed in Scots. We would finish off the evening with a fish supper on the way home. We also organised regular cycle trips around youth hostels. Latterly, other staff took trips across Europe or to North Africa. In many respects, we offered what might be thought of as a 'rich childhood' [59].

### 9. A Point or Moral to the Story That Gives Meaning to the Experiences Depicted—Reflections on Care

My focus in this article is on the nature of care in a residential school prompted by claims that such settings did not and perhaps could not provide care. The stories of the boys I interviewed might suggest that care was indeed possible and was felt at an existential level in St Roch's (and I have no doubt in most similar schools). Inevitably, I bring my own preconceptions, Reinharz's [24] 'researcher self', to what I think about what care might be. Like many residential workers, I went through a period while still in practice of thinking that I was missing something and that there was some body of, probably psychological, theory that if only we could bottle, we could solve all the problems of residential care. Others have tried and still try to do this; for a number of years, we witnessed a focus on attachment theory and as I write, trauma-informed care seems to be the only show in town [60]. I am now confident in a view that no such theory maps directly onto residential child care and that the kind of programmes that proliferated from the 1990s onwards are a dead end [61]. Those programmes (in a broad sense) that do seem to work are those that are based in the principles of good, everyday caring relationships [62].

Reflecting back on the basis of the relationships that were formed at St Roch's, they were never overtly 'therapeutic', but they were real. As Howard [63] observes, 'residential care is messy, ambivalent, tempestuous, volatile and sometimes dangerous for children and staff'. So care could be messy but it was, in Winicott's terms, 'good enough'. Care was built, primarily around fun and healthy, authoritative relationships between children and adults. As Felix observed of the residential school ethos: a 'notion of giving kids a good experience of working and living with adults is central. Central to it'. This is a humanistic rather than a clinical endeavour and looking for or operating from the assumption of any external clinical expertise can let workers off the hook of the kind of relationship building that is based on genuine respect and of liking and mattering to one another [64].

Nevertheless, Burns and Emond [38] recognise the merit in staff teams having some theoretical direction of travel, to an extent, regardless of what this is, and I agree. So, while reluctant to pin my colours to any particular mast, I think that Honneth's idea of

recognition gives a sufficiently broad conceptual grounding within which to locate the practices of residential care. But whatever theoretical framing we choose to inform our thinking about residential child care, it needs to move beyond inter-personal psychological models of human interaction and legalistic and contractual versions of rights. In this sense, an attraction of Honneth's work is that it is essentially relational and because it is also messy and involves struggle, as different consciousnesses, child on child and child on adult, vie for position and mutual accommodation and ultimately lead to human growth and flourishing, often through a process of rupture and repair.

In group care settings, this process of relationship building happens in what Maier [65] (pp. 408–409) described as the “critical strategic moments when child and worker are engaged with each other in everyday tasks”—the daily events of wake-up and bedtime routines, shared meals, chores and recreation. The inevitable crises and fallings out that these often involve, provide rich opportunities for bonding, strengthening relationships and developing a sense of competence and worth.

But what do we mean by relational? Steckley [66] identifies different orientations towards relational practice, in each of which relationships between adults and youth are seen to be central but also fraught with tensions. We have spoken about relationship-based practice for the past decade or so, but we often pull back from the implications of being truly relational, which involves levels of closeness and risk-taking that political and practice cultures balk at [4]. Gray and Webb [67] draw on Noddings' [68] ethics of care to suggest that care is ontological in the sense that it is intrinsic to who we are as human beings and it is reciprocal. It is based on the view that humans are relational beings, and a context must be created in which the one caring and the one cared for both derive benefit from the caring relationship. Relationship-based practice is not one approach among many to providing care as some iterations of the term might imply—it is the essence of care. It might in certain circumstances cross over into relationships that could be called love although as bell hooks [69] (p. 127) observes: ‘To speak of love in relation to teaching is already to engage a dialogue that is taboo. . . . When we talk about loving our students, these same voices usually talk about exercising caution. . . . So, we row back and talk again of about boundaries [70] that are often more barriers to the kind of relationships that are required to make a difference in children's lives [71]. Monteux and Monteux [2] suggest that everyday care is best understood as a series of human encounters that require courage to embrace the complexity and uncertainty of encountering the essential humanity of those we care for. In order to do so, practitioners need to develop moral integrity, enabling them to navigate situations of care without fixed recipes. This moves us away from ideas of care rooted in clinical traditions to consider philosophical ideas deriving from phenomenology and ethics.

In many respects, this is the kind of care, however rough and ready it might have been at times, that was offered at St Roch's and other schools and which has been pilloried in the grand narrative that has come to define such establishments. It was replaced by a raft of bureaucratic measures designed to eradicate what were identified as the excesses and the procedural deficiencies in the sector. The result of this is that one tyranny, that of abuse, was substituted for another, that of blandness and what [28] terms ‘insidious leniencies’. Staff members lost the sense of optimism which I had when I started in residential care and the spontaneity to respond to situations as they arose. Fundamentally, surrounding daily acts of care with ever more rules and regulations dissipated the moral impulse to care [72].

I now turn to the backdrop behind this shift in residential care cultures, which has not been sufficiently considered. While I have become a bit leary of blaming all of the world's troubles on neoliberalism, without saying what neoliberalism is or how this is the case, much of this bureaucracy and lack of care might be traced back to the influence of neoliberalism on relationships. Neoliberalism saw large institutions as antithetical to its core tenets of ‘personal autonomy, individual rights and opportunities for self rather than collective advancement’ [62] (p. viii). This was when any notion of care became lost to residential care. Neoliberalism commodified relationships reducing them to their fiduciary and contractual bottom lines. This was even reflected in changing terminology,

from care with its associations with warmth and affection to 'looking after', which carries connotations of short-term tending. Rights became contractual and subject to someone making a claim against that right. Essentially, this opened the field up to lawyers, which led to foreclosing and risk-averse institutional responses. As one of the respondents in my book, a residential care worker, observed, their risk assessment protocol:

[. . .] ran to about three yards in length, there was a rule for everything. Why do we need a risk assessment to allow the kid to go to the theatre? How many children have been hurt going to the theatre in the last year? It is just nonsense. [1]

Matt, one of the teachers at St Roch's, recalled taking boys home to help with bits of work around the house, with the boys being given some extra cash for their help. Over time though, having boys help out at home or doing tasks like washing a car became frowned upon. Somehow or other, it was deemed to be exploitative, in which labour was only seen for its contractual value, rather than as a gift relationship within which there might be reciprocal and generative element.

Another aspect of the political culture that emerged over the course of the 1990s harkened back to the Poor Law doctrine of less eligibility, whereby children in care were denied experiences that might be considered as rewarding their bad behaviour. I remember when I was still in practice, newspaper articles railing against 'holidays for hooligans' and Scottish Office guidance that reacted to this by putting an end to such holidays, the result of which was that many of the experiences the St Roch's boys had were no longer possible. When politicians and advocacy organisations talk of the stigma of being in care, this is where much of it came from. I was never aware of the boys feeling stigmatised on our hostel trips or on the various outings and holidays they were taken on. Ironically, we have gone full circle and the latest Scottish Government initiative, *The Promise* (2020), identifies the need for children's care to move beyond a bureaucratic, unfeeling 'care system', with no insight or institutional memory of how we might have got to this state.

## 10. Drawing to a Close

As I indicate at the beginning, this article has taken me on something of a reflexive journey. I am aware that in reflecting on what I consider to have been a positive and formative professional (and indeed personal) experience at St Roch's, I am inclined to remember the good parts. I wondered if the accounts of the former pupils I interviewed might take the gloss off this rosy picture, but if anything, they were even more positive than I was in their memories. Others will say that what I present is so at odds with the received view of residential schools that it is at best naive and even disrespectful of those who claim different experiences of the schools. This takes us into the realms of how stories and memories are constructed. What I would say is that I did not cherry pick those I interviewed. I became a bit anxious when Ricki came forward as I never felt he was particularly happy at St Roch's—yet he gave a very positive and insightful interview. All of those who attended St Roch's had broadly similar experiences, but for a variety of reasons, some have come to interpret these differently. As Atkinson [73] points out, one needs to be mindful that the relationship from a life to a life history is rarely straightforward: 'lived experience' can be understood and interpreted in very different and ever-changing ways, in light of changing circumstances in indeed individual dispositions. These different perspectives and the contradictions within and between them need to be surfaced in order to bring some nuance and complexity to the story of the schools.

The last note I would like to end on is that recognising that good experiences did not necessarily translate into good outcomes for some of the boys I interviewed. That fact might offer some support to Fraser's [74] argument in her debate with Honneth, in which she criticises him for failing to give sufficient weight to the structural causes of disadvantage and for the need for measures of economic redistribution to tackle this. The reality is that the boys I interviewed left school at a particularly difficult time economically and culturally, at the height of Thatcherite de-industrialization, and many fell into drug use. Against the backdrop of a powerful cultural script that demonises residential schools, it would be

easy for them to blame their time there for subsequent adversities. But they did not do so. Several described their time in St Roch's as the best years of their lives. Subsequent poor outcomes perhaps confuse causation in assuming that these can be laid at the door of residential schools, with the perhaps inevitable correlation between being placed in a residential school and subsequent poor outcomes. The reasons for this are complex and to reduce the primarily structural causes of poor outcomes to a couple of years spent in residential school is both lazy and complacent. It is complacent because it proceeds from an assumption that state care has become better as a result of managerial reforms. I am reminded of article by Webb in which he reflects on the work of a great aunt who had been matron of a Church of England children's home in the 1950s. He contrasts the moral purpose and the obligations carers felt towards children with the confusion, ambiguity and doubt that characterises much of present-day child care. In contrasting a religiously-inspired version of care with what might be claimed to be progressive developments since, he cautions that 'the drawing of any invidious comparisons with what takes place today in 'corporate care' might invite a brief reflection on the parable of the mote and the beam' [28] (p. 1400).

## 11. Conclusions

This article has questioned what has become a normative truth: that residential schools institutionally failed to offer care. That this question should be asked is a matter not just of historical accuracy but of social justice for those who worked in the schools but also those residents whose stories are swept aside by the grand narrative of a lack of care and of abuse. This spoiled identity is not one that the boys I interviewed would recognize or subscribe to. In the context of this article, autoethnography proved to be an appropriate methodology through which to challenge this grand narrative, offering a counter narrative which, drawing on Honneth's [5] theory of recognition, speaks of residential schools as being capable of offering care and even love, of boys' cultural social and interpersonal rights being respected and of them being provided with opportunities to participate in the public sphere. Such a positive depiction poses a fundamental challenge to the received story of residential schools, transcending the image of abusive institutions and replacing it with that of a happy home. As with most stories, such a binary representation is unlikely to capture the complexity of school life, but it does suggest that we need to be open to plural and conflicting accounts. It highlights a need to look past received narratives to gather more finely grained histories of schools and other care settings.

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