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Criss-crossing the Irish Sea: Shifting Traveller Womens' Identities in Home and School Environments

Abstract

In recent years there have been increasing demands to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Gypsy/Romani/Traveller communities (e.g. Author 2 2014; Tong 2015; Tremlett 2013). There have also been suggestions of a need for more gendered analyses. A growing number of sources (Kóczé 2009, 2011, 2015; Magyari-Vincze 2006, 2007; Muñoz nd; Oprea 2005a; 2005b) have focused on Gypsy/Romani/Traveller women's identities, studies that are all outside of the UK and Ireland. This article addresses that gap, highlighting the differences within Irish Traveller communities, showing the ways in which identities fluctuate as participants criss-cross over the Irish Sea between Ireland and England. It shows ways in which participants use identities of 'Irishness' while in England, so as to distinguish themselves from other Travellers, while back in Ireland, they revert to Traveller identities, or use strategies such as 'Polishing' to distance themselves from those (disadvantaged) identities. Using data gathered from an ethnographic study of Irish Traveller women in the fictional townland of *Baile Lucht Siúil* in the Republic of Ireland, the authors consider the implications for participants and their communities through such transitions.

Key Words: Irish Travellers; Gendered Identities; Nomadism.

Introduction

Irish Travellers (or Pavees or Minceirs as they refer to themselves) are an indigenous group of people traditionally resident on the island of Ireland. Whilst Travellers are often presented as a distinct group, it is important to recognise that they are not a homogeneous group (AITHS 2010: 119) and are perhaps better viewed as 'a community of communities' (Parekh 2000: 34) with the extended family operating as the pivotal unit of organisation. Whilst the majority of Irish Travellers live in Ireland, they also reside in the UK and in the USA. According to the All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS, 2010) the number of Travellers on the island of Ireland is 40,129 (Republic of Ireland 36,224, Northern Ireland 3,905). Results of the UK 2011 census state there are 57,680 Gypsies and Travellers living in the UK. This number is considerably lower than the UK Government's estimated figure of 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers (Department for Communities and Local Government,

2012). According to the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (2013), the disparity in numbers reflects the large numbers of Gypsies and Travellers who chose to hide their ethnicity in order to avoid widespread discrimination and racism in tandem with lower educational attainment and poor literacy, skills that may impact on ability to complete the census forms. The Irish Traveller Movement estimates around 25% of all Travellers are mobile at any given moment (McVeigh et al. 2007: 5). According to the AITHS (2010) most Travellers remain in one place and only 14% noted that they 'go on the road' once a year. More recent data (K.W. Research Associates 2013) highlighted in a report for the Housing Agency (2014) noted that the majority of Travellers reside permanently in their local area, however, this data is contested – the same report acknowledges that Traveller organisations argue that these figures are undervalued.

This paper explores the manner in which changing lifestyles require young female Travellers to reformulate their own understandings of Traveller identity. The Previous conceptions of Traveller identity have been shaped and dominated by associations with nomadism, but this element, so often viewed as an identity marker, is complex and variable. Some of the reasons that Travellers practise nomadism include maintaining social networks (visiting family and friends), seasonal employment and pilgrimage. The advent of new media, including social networking sites and mobile phones, help to support opportunities to articulate the affective and symbolic aspects of mobility. McVeigh et al. (2007) and, more recently, Watson, Kenny & McGinnity (2017) and Myers (2016) draw attention to the importance of mobility in maintaining social networks. McVeigh's (1997) suggestion, building on the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) of a consideration of a 'nomadology' (a particular mind set or way of viewing the world) is useful here. So, whilst Travellers may no

longer travel in traditional ways, both metaphorical and symbolic realisations of movement are still adhered to across the generations. A number of authors have described the manner in which encroaching state intervention limits the practice of nomadism (Bhreatnach 2006; Crowley and Kitchin 2007; MacLaughlin 1998; Picker, Greenfields and Smith 2015). Meanwhile, others (see Watson, Kenny and McGinnity 2017; Kenrick and Clark 1999; Smith and Greenfields 2013) suggest that alternative practices are evolving. Spatial practices have changed significantly over time due to external factors (namely the curtailing of public space which limits opportunities to practise nomadism), which significantly impact on the ways in which Travellers conduct their lifestyles. Belton (2005), Author 2 (2004) and Kelleher et al. (2012) indicate that external factors have limited the ability to practise traditional Traveller understandings of extended family life.

Adopting alternate identities is an established strategy among minority group members. 'Passing', whereby an individual decides not to disclose an aspect of their identity, as described by Goffman (1963), is used at different times by significant numbers of the Travelling Community as a means of diverting negative attention and discriminatory behaviour and has been noted by a number of observers (see Acton, 1974; AITHS 2010: 120; Berlin 2015; Clark and Greenfields 2006; Cullen et al. 2008; Author 2 & Sparkes 2006; Okely 1996; Smith 2005). Brown (1991:33) summarised passing as an adaptation to circumstances of oppression, 'wherein individual members of various minority/subordinate groups will achieve an identity as a member of the dominant superordinate group'. Kanuha (1999) proposed a more fluid concept, whereby the process was not so much about rejecting a stigmatised identity as about being situationally employed to resist social oppression. Indeed, Barnartt (2016) has emphasised that Goffman's own conception of stigmatised

groups needs to be viewed as fluid and active rather than fixed and passive. Nevertheless, models around the phenomenon invariably consider relationships between two entities, without really considering the impact of relationships between the dominant group and third parties who might enter the landscape. In the case of Irish Travellers, the particular type of identity chosen indicates changes taking place in wider society, in which new groups have entered the scene, and this offers opportunities to develop 'multiple' or 'hybrid' identities (cf Bhabha 1994; Hall 1996; Said, 1978; Soja, 1989) in anticipation of the emergence of new cultural forms which straddled previously distinct identity categories.

Theories of multiple and fluid identities (e.g. Hall 1996) and hybrid identities (e.g. Bhabha 1994) seem to have passed by Traveller communities. Liégeois (1986: 13), writing on European Gypsies has suggested that they are viewed as 'a rich mosaic of ethnic fragments' the diversity of which is an asset through which they 'borrow and absorb' from the host cultural environment without diluting their definitely separate identity, what Hannerz (1992: 217-67) terms 'creolization'. Several observers testify to the relationship between Traveller groups and sedentary society - that it is through their relationship with the wider sedentary group that Travellers define themselves by (see Csepeli & Simon 2004; Gay y Blasco 1999; Ivanov 2012; Author 2 2005; Liégeois 1998; McGarry & Tremlett 2013; Ní Shúinéar 1997; Okely 1983; Rughiniş 2010; Szelnyi & Ladnyi 2006). This idea can be linked to Barth's (1969) notion of the definition of ethnic groups who, through 'self-ascription rather than objective traits' (Barth 1969: 60) create a boundary between themselves and outsider groups that are acknowledged by other groups. Krizsán (2012), Liégeois (1987), and Belton (2005) have suggested that opposition to the majority culture is also a key factor in asserting and defining Gypsy / Traveller identity. Bauman (1989) has explained that

definition is the way in which groups mark their boundaries. Hall (1996) proposes that the 'marking of difference' that occurs during the construction of identities needs to be considered within the context of power relations. This may be because of the tendency of Traveller communities to set up binaries of Traveller and Non-Traveller, as well as host communities setting them apart as the 'Other'. Smith and Greenfields' (2013) research conducted in the UK noted 'a degree of convergence and hybridisation of identities is occurring between themselves and other youth in their neighbourhoods" (p. 149).

Maffesoli (1996) proposed a consideration of selective identity in the form of 'neo-tribes' and 'elective communities' as a response to modernisation and globalisation. Whilst Hetherington (1998) identified the emergence of 'elective communities', this approach may be seen as influenced by the choice of fieldwork, which was conducted with New Traveller groups in the UK (Hetherington 2000). Yet Hetherington's research is particularly salient when considering the lives of young people and second generation Travellers to England and to sedentarism. This argument is supported by Belton (2005) who draws on the work of Harvey et al. (2002) to demonstrate the ways in which groups draw inspiration from older cultures thereby reinventing themselves.

Adaptive strategies are not limited to younger generations however as adaptive strategies have been employed by Gypsy / Traveller communities since the earliest historical records of them arriving in England and posing as Egyptians (Mayall 2004). The ability to 'borrow' from groups outside the community in response to changing times also highlights the connections both across communities and between generations. Belton (2005), Smith and Greenfields (2013), and Clark and Taylor (2014, p. 6), have all identified the need for consideration of the intersection between commonalities of class and ethnicity as an

appropriate mode of inquiry. Links across communities are also important when considering intersections of generational status (Smith and Greenfields 2013).

Researchers working with Gypsy / Traveller groups have acknowledged the impact that increasing exposure to television has had on challenging young Travellers' perceptions of gender roles (Kiddle 1999; Author 2 & Sparkes 2006; Smith 1996). AITHS (2010, p. 118) Bhopal and Myers (2008), Bhreatnach (2006), Kenrick and Puxon (1972), Mayall (1988) and Moore (2012) noted the ways in which Gypsy / Traveller groups were often depicted as pre-industrial societies, and as such, viewed with nostalgia. The reality is that Gypsy / Traveller groups inhabit both urban and rural landscapes, and in each context, they are exposed to a media culture. Media culture delivers the 'materials out of which people forge their very identities' shaping perceptions and attitudes towards others (Kellner 1995: 1; McNeill 2010: 58; Scott 2016). Beach et al. (2013) argue for reflexivity in recognising how dominant group discourse shapes perceptions of subordinated groups through media thereby limiting life successes. Stereotyping and misrepresentation operates in a landscape where current recommendations from the Irish Government acknowledge the 'particular vulnerability of Young people to negative self-image and media pressure surrounding body image'(*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, 2014: 54). Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) highlighted the discrimination implicit in a range of media channels which focus on Traveller crime, anti-social behaviour, nomadism and ethnicity implying that there are cultural traits which result in these anti-social behaviours (ITM, 2012 – submission to Leveson enquiry). This reporting further exacerbates racialised stereotypes of the Travelling Community.

To date, very little has been written about the changing identities used by Irish Travellers as they move back and forth between Ireland and England. Ryan (2007) has

drawn attention to the impact on identity of Irish migrants working in the UK, and to the fluid and multi-layered dynamics around constructions of identity. The situation becomes still more complex in the case of Irish Travellers, whose 'Irishness' is liable to be denied in Ireland, and whose 'Traveller' identities tend to be perceived in a negative light on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Such transitions may be what Beach et al. (2013: 257) have described as 'active coping mechanisms … developing through interaction and as acting as a protective armory against stigma and other identity threats'.

Of course, such movement across the Irish Sea is long established in both Irish (Hazelkorn 1990; Hickman 1995) and Irish Traveller nomadic patterns. Gmelch and Gmelch (1985) viewed this practice of continued movement of Irish Travellers back and forth between the UK and Ireland in the context of a response to increasing industrialisation and modernisation and as a mode of cultural preservation and adaptation. A number of authors have detailed the processes whereby the Irish community was constructed as 'other' by the English (see Hickman 1995; Dummett and Nicol; Curtis 1968; Mac an Ghaill 2000). From an English perspective, Acton (1974) and Griffin (2002), and from and Irish perspective, Hayes (2006) noted that English Gypsies looked down on Irish Travellers referring to them as 'the whipping boys of English Romanies' (see Griffin 2002: 114 and Acton 1974). From an Irish Traveller context, Ní Shúinéar (1997; 2002) demonstrated the dynamic whereby Irish sedentary people magnified those aspects of their prescribed identity from an English perspective onto Irish Travellers in an attempt to shed the stereotypes of English racism. The fear of a corrupting influence, when considered within a wider historical context is something which crosses the Traveller-Sedentary divide permeating Irish nationalist discourse.

The change in Irish society over the last two decades has provided young Travellers with opportunities to explore alternative identities. During the last two decades Irish society has undergone a significant shift from a society predominantly white Irish and Catholic to a multicultural society with an influx of a number of groups from Eastern Europe arriving on the surge of a wave of the Celtic Tiger looking to avail of employment opportunities. One of the largest groups to avail of this newfound employment during the Celtic Tiger in Ireland was the Polish community (Krings et al 2013a; 2013b). Against a background of changing lifestyles, younger Travellers are required to reformulate their own understandings of Traveller identity.

Methodology

The initial research was informed by Author 1's practitioner-based experiences working as a Home Youth Liaison officer with the Travelling Community since 2006. The research outlined in this article formed part of a larger ethnographic study exploring Irish Travellers inhabiting home and school environments conducted over a six year (2009-2015) period in the North Western region of the Republic of Ireland. The majority of the participants had at some point in their lives moved between the UK and Ireland. As Author 1 had extensive contacts within the Travelling Community, there was no need for gatekeepers.

Choosing to involve participants in the research is contentious when attempting to circumvent literacy challenges. Even those participants who did not struggle with literacy were not keen to trust the written word. Offering written transcripts is also advocated in research methodologies, yet participants rejected this. As for anonymity, the universal preference was to take the line that: 'It's fine as long as you can't tell it's me'. In order to

address this request all research participants involved in this project have been assigned pseudonyms. Participants rejected the option of having a copy of the audio recordings.

This research was approved via an ethics committee prior to beginning fieldwork, but efforts were made to go beyond standard practices, through a desire to protect participants. Care was taken not to exploit researcher relationships that were already well-established with Traveller families by the time that focused research began. It was made clear that despite the warmth of these relationships, consent could be withdrawn at any stage. It is our view that, in the case of such fluid research over a long period, an initial explicatory document is insufficient as a means of achieving 'informed consent'. Indeed, with a community that mistrusts the written word (Author 2, 2007), such information carries little value. By constantly chatting to participants about nature of the research, however, we feel that 'informed consent' was more successfully achieved. Moreover, as far as possible, research questions were co-constructed with participants.

Research continued alongside social interaction, and throughout this project, participants were provided with information regarding training programmes and resources, support with college assignments and preparation for interviews. With such ethnographic work, the data-gathering process can seem quite 'messy', with it being difficult, at times, to decide where 'conversations' end and 'interviews' begin. Nor is it possible to impose a standard interview length or schedule. However, we would contend that by conducting the research within the framework of natural relationships, there ensued the acquisition of richer and more authentic data.

In all, twenty eight Irish Travellers were 'interviewed' in total, comprising 25 women (18 - 45 years of age) and 3 men (20 - 54 years of age) who lived in a variety of

housing situations including trailers, halting sites, council housing, and private rented accommodation. It might be noted that whilst 45 years of age may seem relatively young in terms of the sedentary community, the lifespan of Travellers tends to be an average of 11.5 years less for women than that of the sedentary community 15 years less for men (AITHS 2010). In many cases, participants were interviewed on several occasions, as this was constructed within a framework of established relationships. In effect, they were more like structured or focused conversations. We believe that this provided greater opportunities for the participants to explore their own beliefs over time.

At the start of the research process semi-structured interviews specifically focussed on education were conducted in the home space with the older participants. Later, the nature of the interactions changed as the research progressed and relationships with the research participants deepened. Gradually, conversations became far more focussed on specific themes. At the same time, they also became more naturalistic and interactive, involving the sharing of experiences between researcher and participants. The principle was that it was unreasonable to expect people to share intimate details about their own lives without something reciprocal, and in this way trust was developed. Data processing took place within the context of on-going family and individual family member discussions. Whilst early research had provided much information, the 'voices' of the participants were curiously absent therefore, after reviewing and processing data I then re-entered the field to conduct a third phase of research as strong bonds forged with the research participants was from an academic perspective silencing their voices, as I struggled to find an appropriate way in which to represent them without identifying them. This was made particularly challenging because of the close relationships that I had developed. For some, the interviews were audio

recorded and later transcribed. For others, notes were taken immediately after leaving the field and written from memory.

The research process and the acquisition of knowledge followed the notion of the rhizome as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) whereby knowledge is recognised as being multi-dimensional and non-hierarchical. This understanding of research acknowledges the importance of relationship wherein the struggle between alternative views is enacted. Marvasti (2004) has advocated the value of a braided approach to data collection and analysis that contributes to 'thick descriptions' (Geertz 1988). While attempting to situate different, and often competing, voices (Bakhtin 1984), the research involved on-going discussion with participants, facilitating opportunities for negotiated understandings; nevertheless, inevitably, there has been some constraints on polyvocality and a channeling of meaning towards the perspectives of the authors.

Nature of Nomadism for Irish Travellers

The participants in this study moved back and forth across the Irish Sea between the U.K and Ireland often in response to family commitments or life stage celebrations:

We grew up doing it [travelling] so we were used to it, it was normal. Communion I did when I was 8, my mum and dad were back in Ireland for some reason, my grandad arranged it and my parents came over. Marie (30)

Marie (who continues to move regularly back and forth between Ireland and England) added that a settled address was needed in England when the children arrived, for medical

appointments, etc.   For other participants, however, the lack of appropriate accommodation often instigated periods of travelling. Marguerite (age 45), for instance, described how her father had taken the family to England after finding a house there. Subsequently they returned to a Traveller site in Ireland. Modern sedentarist planning ensures that meeting basic needs for families becomes a daily struggle. When without a house, Rosita (34) (currently living in Ireland, but who had for much of her early married life lived in the U.K travelling around England, Scotland and Wales) went on to portray existence in England as being one of constant instability. Each time the family stopped to set up camp, the police would appear to move them all on within a day or so:

> *So really and truly you get nothing done. You're packed back down again so you*
> *have to pack everything back down, all your dishes and all your everything.*

This gives a clue to the nature of nomadism for such families. It is filled with uncertainty and threat each day, a very embattled lifestyle choice. Yet residing with extended family is often essential for continuing economic activities, which contribute towards household resources. Attempts to reside with extended family are severely curtailed by nuclear family-oriented policies, which remain sedentarist in scope and fail to take into account the needs of an extended family:

> *We had a person in here a while back and he said, 'What would you like on-site?' and*
> *I said, 'Well we're just wasting our time with you, despite me telling you what we*
> *would like. It's not happening. For instance the kids are going to school and there is*

not proper facilities for them, there's no electricity in, there is no lighting, what difference does it make?' and he gives me the best answer he could ever give me, it was, 'Why did you choose to live here?' Well I moved here because my family is here. When you make this place you made it for Travellers, the car park with streetlights, that's all you can do. Anthony (40, returned to Ireland after living in the U.K for the last 5 years).

Space shapes social relations – different environments define the manner in which people mix either between genders, generations, nationalities or ethnicities. Similar to Ní Laoire's (2011) findings with migrant children returning to Ireland, The liberation experienced in England was something to which all respondents (both male and female) alluded:

I do miss England. You're more busier; back here you've too much time on your hands…Town over here is so small, but over there, all the wee towns are so near each other and then you had the weekend, at the weekend you could go to markets, you'd always have something to do. Marguerite (45)

Observation over a sustained period left the impression that when encounters took place outside of the local town, especially in Northern Ireland, the encounter was far friendlier and much more relaxed, particularly with the strict codes for interacting between the genders. Findings suggest that experiences of living in England may also affected gender relations and Traveller-sedentary relations as Traveller men were more open towards me if

they had lived in England, and both older and younger generations referred to the freedoms they experienced in England when they were able to 'pass' as Irish as opposed to being trapped in the gaze of being 'Traveller' (Foucault 1977), however, as the focus of the research was on female participants, this requires further exploration.

Changing Identities Across the Irish Sea

Nomadism as a distinct aspect of identity influences the manner in which Travellers are defined as they move through certain spaces; crossing national boundaries creates opportunities for mixing and passing which are not readily available back home in Ireland. The opportunities for passing as a different identity in England allowed some Travellers to avail of employment opportunities, which they felt would be unavailable to them in Ireland. Some also acknowledged that the recognition afforded them in Ireland of being a Traveller meant that they could avoid pressures from the government to actively seek paid employment. Therefore, crossing boundaries throws up interesting possibilities for creating new and hidden identities which can be manipulated in particular contexts to support individuals attempting to access supports / resources:

> *I wanted to go [to England], though, there was no place just for you as a Traveller, that's only in Ireland. Over there, if you walk in and say you are a Traveller they say 'What?' Back here, not being rude or nothing, the local people they know you are a Traveller, just by the look of you, or the way you talk. Some people may be rude and say you are a 'Knacker' or a 'Tinker', whatever they're going to say it doesn't matter, but what I'm saying here is when you go over there, they see you as Irish, it's like*

you're a tourist, you're Irish. Unless they get down to work and say you are a 'Pikey';

if you used to say that you lived in a caravan, then they would know you were a

Gypsy, but when you went to job centres and places like that you are Irish. So

sometimes it works to say I am a Traveller, and sometimes it doesn't. Leanne (18

returned to Ireland with her family after living in the UK for 7 years).

In contrast to UK findings (Greenfields 2008; Smith and Greenfields 2013; Power

2004) a number of Irish Travellers spoke of the possibility to pass as simply Irish in England

as opposed to Irish Traveller. This passing allows access to certain freedoms from a stigma,

which is not so easily shed in Ireland:

You can be categorised, when you fill out the forms, black ethnic, Irish, or Traveller

Irish, but I used to take on the Irish. Anthony (40)

Maybe there's more cultures over there, so people are more easy-going. Ireland

hasn't changed in years. Ireland is behind. Yes it's a bit like ourselves. When we came

back you expect things to have changed. But they hadn't. Marguerite (45, Irish

Traveller currently living in Ireland who spent much of her twenties and thirties living

in England)

On return to Ireland, similar Nı´ Laoire's 2011 research with returning migrant

children, however, confusion occurred for their children who were immediately defined by

their Traveller status:

It's a different lifestyle over there than here. Back here you are pinpointed. In England, they don't pinpoint you out…they weren't called Travellers or tinkers or whatever they call them…pikeys. Back here they were coming home crying. They were being called 'itinerants' and 'Travellers' and they were asking, 'What does that mean? They have no clue. Marguerite (45)

Different environments provided opportunities for experiencing different aspects of identity or alternate identities, which provide relief from stigmatisation and opportunities to access resources:

In England there was more mixing, and I prefer to see more mixing. I would love to mix with the settled, I would. There are some who mix with Travellers, but there are many who wouldn't mix at all. Even at Mass on Sunday, you see them all staring at you. Rosaleen (27, Irish Traveller living in Ireland who spent much of her teens and early twenties living in the U.K)

The biggest majority of Travellers are living in England, they are Irish Travellers, for instance they have these rules for Travellers and halting sites, but we are still not accepted. We are lower class people. It's easier for Travellers to get work in England. If you can do what they want then they will take you on. I think the only way for Travellers to work back here is to work for themselves. It also has to do with the name. Anthony (40)

Experiences in both countries varied between respondents with some preferring the care available in Ireland and others the U.K. However all respondents seemed to feel that they experienced less discrimination towards themselves as Travellers in the UK.:

The things they gave you in England were just unbelievable. Yes - in England you don't need a medical card. She was sick; all went into the hospital you would be given top priority. But it's not the same here. If you said you couldn't read or write they would just ask your name and date of birth, or maybe nationality: there's no big details. Ailbe (28, Irish Traveller currently living in Ireland moving back and forth every few years between Ireland and UK).

Despite the opportunities for assuming hidden identities in different places, those Travellers who lived in England, i.e. English-Irish Travellers were assigned the role of embodying all the negative aspects of Traveller culture; in particular, the controversial behaviour of 'grabbing' was highlighted by the UK television series *My Big Fat Gypsy* Wedding. This involved contexts in which young males made univited sexual advances, man-handling girls:

*Even that **grabbing** thing, I tell you, if anyone tried that grabbing – you'd flatten 'em! We've* never *ever heard of that until we seen that, I go, 'What the hell's grabbing?' I've* never *heard of that,* never *heard of anything like that in my life. That's what I'm*

saying to you, even that 'Big Fat Gypsy Wedding', that's my first time to nearly see *anything like that in my life.* Marguerite (45)

This comment highlights the manner in which national identities are ascribed moral practices within the Irish Travelling Community as Hickman (1995) has documented with the Irish community in England. External forces have contributed to this through the impact of changing accommodation practices. Forces, such as the media, have also been complicit in this. The media is involved in reconstructing a Traveller identity from across the Irish Sea. These misrepresentations are active in creating new definitions of Irish Traveller identity. The response from the older generation living in Ireland is similar to the response of the Catholic bourgeoisie in Ireland following the adoption of the Irish Free State when all that was considered morally suspect was ascribed to outside influences (Ní Shúinéar 1997, 2002) and echoes earlier statements made by the Irish church fathers. Ascribing outside influences from the UK to becoming more like sedentary society (non-Traveller), is troublesome for Travellers within the same family, particularly when those defined as 'English' are female. If taking on English traits is seen as morally lax then this causes increased guilt and anxiety for young Irish Traveller women.

The majority of Travellers involved in this research identified themselves as Irish, however within some families, different siblings defined themselves as different nationalities. The children born in England stated that they were English, whilst the children born in Ireland stated that they were Irish, despite their parents both being Irish Travellers who travelled back and forth between the UK and Ireland - often in response to external forces such as limited accommodation options as described in the previous section. This finding

highlights the complexities involved in constructing a unified identity and highlights the challenges involved in negotiating ascribed identities, which are defined by changing spatial practices. Within one family the children can be either Irish or English. Whilst ethnicity, (i.e. Traveller) is foregrounded as the most defining aspect of identity, certain attributes are associated with 'English' Irish Travellers and Irish Travellers. This difference in moral status is also generational and is acknowledged by the older generation who are keen to ascribe the worst excesses and flaws within the Travelling Community's behaviour to the English influence, whilst the younger generation were keen to explain to me that they were worldly, more modern because they had lived in England and mixed more:

> *They are all backwards. They believe in witchcraft and stuff. I mean you can tell them a mile off they all look the same. Those two over there are double first cousins and they're married! That's like the kid of a sister married the kid of a brother. That's why they have so many problems with their children. They don't marry out enough.* Ellen (22)

> *We were always brought up by settled people, so I find it a bit easier than most other people in work, because you can get on, with some of the others [Traveller families], they wouldn't know how to be like that. They don't mix. It can be very important to mix, to mix with settled people like.* Briana (20)

Attitudes towards who constitutes an outsider and mixing with the sedentary community vary generationally, however, mixing is contentious and risks losing group

identity so this is something that requires vigilance and negotiation, particularly for young women and, in particular when young children begin to move towards adolescence. Certainly the older generation involved in this research seemed to mix less than the younger generation. These findings support Smith and Greenfields' (2013:149) research, which noted that, particularly amongst younger Gypsies and Travellers many of whom have spent most, or all, of their lives in housing, a degree of convergence and hybridisation of identities is occurring between themselves and other youth in their neighbourhoods.

Polishing

Respondents acknowledged that the lack of recognition for Travellers within Irish society was similar to the struggle of other outsider groups and ethnic minorities living in Ireland:

> *I think we are the same as other nationalities, there will always be people who think, 'Oh they shouldn't be' and there are some people who will accept Travellers but would maybe not accept foreign people. And some people who would accept foreigners but wouldn't accept Travellers.* Ailbe (28)

One of the largest groups to avail of newfound employment during the Celtic Tiger in Ireland was the Polish community and incidents of racism were fairly common towards the Polish community at this time. During the course of fieldwork it became apparent that a number of the Traveller girls involved had befriended a number of Polish women with whom they had made contact through the local youth training centre. During fieldwork, on several occasions

in the gym young women from the Polish community were observed, mistakenly, identifying some of the research participants as Polish, and had struck up conversations with them in Polish. Though rectified by the research participants, this later led to the beginnings of tentative friendships. Subsequently, young Traveller women were observed during fieldwork engaging in a game developed with their younger siblings called 'being Polish':

> *One of the girls in the centre starts talking to Kathleen because she thought she was Polish. And she does look Polish and it would be easy to mistake her for Polish. So we play a game with my little cousins 'Are you Polish?'* Keela (25)

'Being Polish' or 'Polishing' provides an insight into understandings of the way in which these young Traveller women perceive themselves within the context of the wider society and within the context of their own community. As previously noted, young women have little power or voice within their community. 'Polishing' creates an opportunity for social mobility. Whilst the Polish community are perceived as outsiders in Irish culture with second class status, young Traveller women attempting to adopt alternate identities seems to suggest that being classed as Traveller is of lower status than Polish. Young Traveller women choosing to adopt a Polish identity indicates that they view themselves as third class citizens in the eyes of the majority and want to be equated with second-class citizens. Whilst adopting alternate identities is not new, passing as an adaptive response to a hostile environment and discriminatory practices is well-documented (see Acton, 1974; Berlin 2015; Clark & Greenfields 2006; Cullen et al. 2008; Author 2 & Sparkes 2006; Okely 1996; Smith 2005), what is interesting here is that 'Polishing' is different to 'passing' whereby an identity

is hidden. Whilst observations during fieldwork did not reveal any older males involved in the identity play of 'being Polish', younger boys joined in identity play of 'being Polish' whilst under the care of older female relatives.

Discussion

Respondents from both generations acknowledged the freedom of escaping a prescribed identity (with attendant negative associations) in England. This finding is particularly interesting as it offers an alternative perspective from research conducted with Irish Travellers in the UK (Power 2004). Helleiner (2000) has documented the way in which the impact of colonisation in Ireland contributed to Irish Travellers being left out of the hierarchy of classification of Gypsy / Traveller groups, which may contribute to the sense of freedom from stigma experienced when in England to which the Travellers who participated in this research alluded.

In 'Polishing' an outsider identity is adopted which has higher status than Traveller identity, but is still an outsider; still distinct and separate from mainstream society. The influx of foreign nationals into Ireland, creates opportunities to define an alternate identity, as Poles are viewed in a more favourable light than Travellers. The strategy seems to be gendered, one that is employed, particularly, by the young female participants in this study.

Nevertheless, the impact of the outsider / insider division between Traveller and sedentary communities remains at the fore in identity construction. Furthermore, specific familial practices such as sibling childcare influence younger siblings through the creation of new games, which play with new identities. 'Polishing' indicates an attempt to escape categorisation as Traveller, but at the same time to maintain a distinct identity suggesting

again that Traveller identity is heterogeneous, complex and nuanced, and indicating the opportunities for young women within the community to develop agency through the active adoption of distinct identities which raise their status within the outside community.

It would be interesting to explore this further. If 'Polishing' is just a strategy to escape identification as a Traveller, one may wonder at what point this becomes a 'multiple' or 'hybrid' identity. To fit in with the projections of e.g. Said (1978), Bhabha (1994) or Hall (1996), one might anticipate the emergence of new cultural forms for this to occur. Cultural hybridization, 'the ways in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices' (Pieterse, 2004: 64), may well be an exaggeration in this instance. However, as the mainstream Irish population become increasingly, and more intimately, acquainted with Polish culture, for the strategy to operate effectively, Travellers will need to perform a set of identity markers that suffice to convince the observer of their 'Polish' credentials. In the longer term, this could produce slightly amended and hybrid identities. Such hybridity might challenge prejudices and subvert fixed hierarchies in Irish society, whereby acknowledgement of diverse Traveller identities would result in re-evaluations. While Travellers merely seek to pass as something else, this will not occur.

Differences of 'nationality' within families was an interesting, and rather unexpected, finding of this research. Many conceptualisations of Traveller identity are based around ideas of tension / conflict between Traveller and non-Traveller identities. The dichotomy seems to mask greater complexity, with children from families identifying with different nationalities. This does not necessarily imply any deep division within families. It may merely signify that nationality is just not as important identity-marker among Travellers as it might be among

non-Travellers. There are actually multiple constructions of Traveller culture, all in competition with one another. These derive from nuanced conceptions across families and communities that allow for subtle distinctions. They also emanate from non-Traveller constructions of 'Travellerness'. It is hardly surprising in such circumstances if young Travellers play with their identities, creating new spaces, new conceptualiations. This all feels a little different from Hall's theorisation around 'multiple' identity or Bhabha's around 'hybrid' identity, both of which are formulated by colonial discourse.

Conclusion

Transitions between Irish (non-Traveller) identities in England and Traveller or Polish identities in Ireland suggest a hitherto unacknowledged complexity in self-ascription, and perhaps, the performance of *self* by Irish Travellers. Whilst choosing to adopt alternate identities is an age-old response to prejudice, what is significant in this research is that 'Polishing' provides opportunities for participants to step beyond the limitations imposed on the identity of being a Traveller whilst simultaneously offering opportunities to remain outside and distinct from the wider majority community. In this way it is different from 'passing.'

Such variations also invite a reconsideration of Goffman's theories about 'passing', and a need to consider the phenomenon not simply within the context of historic relationships between dominant and minority groups but within the wider environment and the context of relationships across all the communities that inhabit that space.

The research also invites further consideration of differential identity formation within families. Whilst previous research has highlighted how Gypsy/Travellers choose to

reveal their identity dependent on external consequences, of particular interest to us was the finding that children born in England stated that they were English, whilst the children born in Ireland stated that they were Irish, despite the fact that in each instance their parents were Irish Travellers who travelled back and forth between the UK and Ireland. In effect, within one family the children can be either Irish or English. Consequently, negotiating a unified identity is complicated by crossing nation borders, changing spatial practices and preserving a distinct identity. Whilst ethnicity, (i.e. Traveller) is foregrounded as the most defining aspect of identity, certain attributes are associated with 'English' Irish Travellers and Irish Travellers. This difference in moral status is also generational and is acknowledged by the older generation who are keen to ascribe the worst excesses and flaws within the Travelling Community's behaviour to the English influence.

Finally, the authors have called for recognition of the fluctuations that exist within a particular identity category as one moves through different spaces and generations. Our findings are based on the testimony of one group of young Traveller women. It would be interesting to explore further the extent to which the strategies of becoming *Polish* in Ireland and *Irish* in England operate at the wider group level. It would also be revealing to consider ways in which different identities emerge in Irish and English school contexts, and the ways in which these different identities persist or are concealed in the home-place. Of further interest, it would be useful to reflect upon the implications of such fluid identities alongside our participants. Such fluidity might be viewed from a Social Identity perspective with regard to inter-group relationships (Stathi & Roscini, 2016), within the framework of changing ideas about the mechanics of acculturation. We believe that it is equally important to consider the phenomenon in the context of intra-group outcomes. By suggesting differences between

sibling identities, the implication is that there is a need to question assumptions of

homogeneity within the family as well as across the group.

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