

Marginalisation and the Voices of Gypsy/Traveller Girls¹

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Abstract

Amnesty International has accused the media and Scotland's 32 local authorities of perpetuating discrimination against Gypsy/Travellers declaring, "despite four inquiries by the Scottish Equal Opportunities Committee over the last 12 years, little or no progress has been made" (AIUK, 2013, p. 1). The Scottish Government's (2010a) *Race Equality Statement* (2009) acknowledges that Gypsy/Travellers are "a particularly discriminated against and marginalised group". Despite an extensive catalogue of legislation, policies, and recommendations, our comprehension of Gypsy/Travellers is underdeveloped. The ESRC and the Scottish Government² have provided funding for a doctoral research project that broadly aims to enhance an understanding of the experiences of Scottish Gypsy/Travellers. Interpretations of the image and lives of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland are riddled with misperceptions, myths and assumptions based on stereotypical definitions of difference. The propagation of these images continues to contribute to the orchestration of interventionist policies that seek to "civilise" people into assimilation with the majority settled population. I am in the third year of my doctoral studies, in the process of analysing fieldwork data. This paper draws attention to preliminary findings from in-depth interviews with Scottish Gypsy/Traveller girls about their educational experiences, recognising that their voices are missing from the literature. In this paper, the girls' accounts are highlighted and juxtaposed alongside the general problems encountered by Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland, and reveal a complex narrative. Space, race, gender, culture and poverty appear to intersect where barriers continue to exist. Equally, discrepancies in levels of empowerment, public participation, media representations and respect for ethnicity are experienced at these intersections.

Keywords: Gypsy/Traveller girls, Intersectionality, inequalities, power, marginalisation

Introduction

Research by Wilkin et al. (2009) indicates that Gypsy/Traveller children are the lowest achieving minority group in the United Kingdom. As other studies attest, the perception that Gypsy/Traveller children are underachieving academically is a real concern

¹ All research participants preferred to be addressed as "girls" rather than "young women." This change in terminology is therefore reflected in the paper and is explained in section 1.3.

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(Cemlyn et al., 2009). Existing research in Scotland and across the UK tends to focus on the experience and issues of Gypsy/Traveller families or children (boys and girls). There is currently no research that focuses specifically on the educational experiences of Gypsy /Traveller girls in Scotland. Their educational experiences in terms of their level of attainment and achievement, their attendance in schools, the quality of schooling that they experience and how this relates to their ambitions and aspirations within school and beyond, the external influences that might impact on their experiences at school, have yet to be explored.

My doctoral research aims to improve understanding of the educational experiences of Gypsy/Traveller girls in Scottish schools while dispelling myths and misperceptions about them. The main research question asks how the girls frame the education they have experienced. I am interested to learn how they perceive the challenges and barriers they have faced and what explanations they offer. What are their life ambitions and aspirations? How do they perceive success? My thesis attempts to explore and critically analyse their experiences, views and perceptions in the light of the grave problems faced by of the Gypsy/Traveller communities in general.

The impetus for this paper originated from a presentation at the Kaleidoscope Conference held at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge in June 2014, in which the general issues facing Gypsy/Traveller girls in Scotland were discussed. I was then in my second year of doctoral studies, conducting fieldwork and only beginning to analyse my initial findings. Even though I have interviewed 12 girls to date, the paper focuses on preliminary themes that emerged from two in-depth interviews. Skye (15) and Rona (19) were the first two Traveller girls that I met and their powerful narratives problematise stereotyped ideas of Gypsy/Traveller women. The girls' views are markedly different from the other ten I interviewed; in particular, they critically reflected upon and questioned some of the values and norms within their own community.

The first part of this paper presents the reader with essential background information that briefly explains the history of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland, their multiple identities and the problems they face. The second part highlights some of the design issues I encountered that are, arguably, peculiar to researching hidden and marginalised communities. As I am still in the process of coding and categorising data, I have not yet firmly decided on the conceptual framework with which to critically interrogate my findings, although broadly, a critical approach within an intersectional framework could be argued for. The final section of

this paper features the views, perceptions and explanations of the two girls in response to my research questions. The data gathered from each account has revealed a rich and complex intersection of the self-prescribed advantageous life choices, alongside challenging issues and inequalities.

1. Background

1.1 History

According to some sources, Gypsies and Travellers have lived in the British Isles since the 15th century (Okely, 1983), but their complex history is not fully understood. Rehfisch (1975, p.272) argues that trying to piece together the puzzle of Gypsy/Traveller identity is almost futile because “their origin is lost in the far past and can hardly be reconstructed”. Theories linking their origins to Egypt and India abound, but are debated and disputed to this day. Scotland’s Travelling people or “the mist people” are thought to be a nomadic group “formed in Scotland in the period 1500-1800 from intermarriage between local nomadic craftsmen and immigrant Romanies from France and Spain in particular” (Clark, 2001, p. 112). Some sources contend that they may have existed from the 12th century, as records suggest a group known as “tinklers” were identified in the Farandman Laws (Grampian Regional Council Social Strategy Unit, 1994, p. 6). These laws permitted them to “to go about their business” and they were viewed as skilled craftsmen and artisans (Clark, 2001, p. 160). Williamson (1994) argues that they could possibly have even been hunter-gatherers from the Mesolithic period and indeed many Scottish Travellers believe this to be the foundation of their proud ancestry. Kenrick (1998) maintains that today’s Travellers in Scotland are a product of years of inter-marriage between pre-Celtic or Celtic and Romanies.

1.2 Identities and Nomenclature

Scottish Travellers refer to themselves as “Nachins” or “Nawkens”, in their native language, Cant. Like English, the language borrows heavily from a variety of sources, but it has strong links with both Romani and Gaelic. Interestingly, the dictionary defines Cant as a language used among thieves and beggars, a kind of non-standard speech (Oxford Dictionary Online, 2015). Travellers have also previously been referred to as ‘gipsy’ or ‘tinkers’ by settled communities but these terms are considered derogatory today.

The term “Gypsy/Traveller” is the Scottish Government’s (2014) most recent official terminology and is used in some academic literature as the preferred term. Gypsy/Travellers

were officially recognised as having a separate ethnic status in Scotland in 2008 (K. MacLennan vs GTEIP, 2008) and granted protection under the *Race Relations Act* (1976) (The Scottish Government, 2014). The term is capitalised; failure to do so in newspaper reports and in some government papers have caused upset amongst some in Travelling communities, as they believe it reinforces the lack of recognition of their ethnicity. The name “Gypsy/Traveller” was created to reflect the variety of communities that live, travel and have intermarried in Scotland over the centuries. Gypsy/Travellers are not a homogenous group sharing a single socio-economic stratum - Highland Scottish Travellers, Romanichals or English Romanies, English Gypsies, Irish Travellers (the Minceir), Welsh Kale, Showmen or Showpeople, and since approximately 2004 the arrival of European Roma, all reside or travel in and around Scotland. Borders are imaginary lines that seek to define identity, and restrict free movement, but do not necessarily feature in the nomadic mindset. Each community has their own understanding of their history and identity. For example, Showpeople have a distinct identity, not based on their ethnic status, but on a history of living and working in Scotland as family run entertainment and travelling fair businesses. Unlike many Gypsy/Travelling communities, Showpeople do not seek a separate ethnic status (STEP, 2013).

It is important to note that the term is not accepted by all Gypsy/Travellers and is controversial. There are “misunderstandings” (McKinney, 2001) over identity and nomenclature both by the settled community and within the groups in question. Many Gypsy/Travellers prefer to use “Scottish Traveller” or just “Traveller” instead. Some will not object to being called “Gypsies”, but many consider the term pejorative. The variety of terms used and the changes over time demonstrate that how identity is perceived and labeled is not static and impervious. The European Union’s own terminology has also changed over the years, and since 2010, refers to all its nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples as “Roma”, its latest generic term. The Council of Europe (2012) considers Scottish Gypsy/Travellers to be “Roma”, to the disapproval of many Travellers I have met. In this paper, I use the official term Gypsy/Traveller or at times Gypsies and Travellers, where appropriate. However, all of the informants I met, except one, used the term “Traveller” to describe their ethnicity.

1.3 Young Women or Girls

Gypsy/Traveller girls are often considered by their families and communities to be young women when they reach puberty. By the age of 12 years, they tend to leave formal

education and are not enrolled in secondary school. In the initial stages of this study, I took advice from an older Traveller woman who had spent many years as a liaison officer and consultant. I asked whether the term young woman or girl would be more appropriate to describe a female who is 12 years or above. She said that the former would be more accurate, but none of the research participants I interviewed thought of themselves as young women. Rona and Skye in particular were adamant and they emphatically replied, “Girls! Girls!” They explained:

Skye: Yeah I know you're meant to finish school when you're 12.

Rona: A lot of traveller girls when they finish...when they come out of school like usually they come out of primary school -

Skye: That's them...12... and that's them grown up apparently! You're still a child. I think I am a child! We are still children!... I'm quite childish for my age and I'm still a child, leave me alone!

Skye and Rona were implying that they were girls because they were not married, and thus, still children. For the purpose of this paper the term “young woman” alludes to a female who is married or sexually active, whereas a “girl, still “a child”, has not as yet reached that stage. The research participants in this study are all referred to as “girls” as that is how they self-identify.

1.4 The Demonised “Other”

The stereotype of the Gypsy/Traveller is a powerful image that has been, consciously or subconsciously, embedded in the minds of the settled community for hundreds of years. Gypsy/Travellers have traditionally been viewed as “rogues, vagabonds and vagrants” (Mayall, 1995, p. 40) and have experienced multiple forms of persecution and marginality (Dawson, 2005). The symbolic public perception reflects a demonized “other”, whereby Gypsy/Travellers are wild and cunning, dirty thieves. They are accused of not being gainfully employed, their children not going to school, and their girls only aiming to marry and have children. Many amongst the majority think of Gypsy/Travellers as entirely poor and essentially living in caravans.

Various means have been used to control them, ranging from death penalty in the mid-16th century, to deportation to the colonies, ethnic cleansing, removal of children from their parents to be sent to Australia and Canada, and forced assimilation (Dawson, 2005; Fraser, 1995; Groome, 1890; MacRitchie, 1894).

It would be incorrect to imply that all Gypsy/Travellers suffered relentless persecution across the centuries in Britain, as they have from time to time lived and worked harmoniously alongside settled populations (Kenrick & Clark, 1999, p. 51). However, sections of Gypsy/Traveller communities, as yet to be defined, continue to encounter grave problems in having their needs and their rights met in a way that does not compromise their ancient traditions and culture. The *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey* (Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2010) and Amnesty Reports (2012a and 2012b; BBC News, 2012) demonstrate the complexity of the situation that remains largely unchanged. The Scottish Government's (2010a) *Race Equality Statement* in 2009 acknowledges that Gypsy/Travellers are "a particularly discriminated against and marginalised group".

According to the charity Save The Children (2005), 92% of young Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland claimed that they have been bullied because of their ethnic identity. A doctor's surgery can still refuse to accept Gypsy/Travellers onto their patients' list despite there being vacancies (MECOPP, 2012). Over 50% of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland will have spent at least part of their lives without access to running water (MECOPP, 2012). The *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey* (Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2010) confirms that there are negative and racist views towards Gypsy/Travellers. It is undisputed that the life experiences of some Gypsy/Travellers in all the key areas - accommodation, health, education and employment - reflect an unacceptable level of gross mistreatment and marginalisation, what Coxhead (2007) describes as the "last bastion of racism."

Out of the 12 girls I interviewed, only two seem to have had different educational experiences. "Never! I've never experienced any of that" (Rona). They were adamant that they had "never" been bullied and they enjoyed being in school. "Everyone like knows we are Travellers and that we live on a site... nobody cares, there's been no hassle like" (Skye). They found their teachers supportive and were happy to attend school, "to mix with non-Traveller friends" (Rona). They both felt that this was because of their "attitude" and their family's support and encouragement to be "open and friendly to others [non-Travellers]" (Skye). Most are "not keen on travellers marrying non-travellers.... That's like making people more racist... like Travellers say Oh My God! They are so racist towards us... it's a two-way thing... we are racist towards them" (Skye).

As the girls point out, "the other" can be demonized on both sides. There are misperceptions, fears, prejudices and racist attitudes in Traveller populations as well as in

settled. A general reluctance to associate, befriend and even intermarry fuels these rifts and exacerbates misunderstandings. The situation also demonstrates the complexity of power relations between two seemingly opposing sides, and the spaces in which these relations are enacted.

1.5 The Paradox of Legislation

These power struggles are particularly reflected in the history, discourse and effects of legislation, which have had a detrimental impact on the lives of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK (O’Nions, 1995). In the last 50 years, Gypsy/Traveller communities have experienced draconian legislation, particularly regarding accommodation and camping sites, which have undermined the communities’ traditionally semi-nomadic way of life, affecting their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing (MECOPP, 2012).

The *Housing (Scotland) Act 2001* places a duty on Local authorities to regularly review and update their Local Housing Strategy to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsy/Traveller communities in Scotland. Scottish local authorities currently do not have a legal duty to provide caravan site accommodation for Gypsy/Travellers. However, *The Children Act (Scotland) 1995* states that public authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote a child’s welfare and “any intervention by a public authority in the life of a child must be properly justified” (The Scottish Government, 2006). The lack of stopping sites for Gypsy/Traveller families, the denial of space and time to rest, hiding from the police, together with the consequences of being evicted, must have a negative impact on children and their education. Stopping and camping sites, authorised or unauthorised, do not fit into traditional concepts of “home” held by settled populations and policy makers, and are viewed instead as squatting, invasions upon space as real estate. The majority settled community sees itself as host and Gypsy/Travellers as unwanted guests. The conflicts and controls over space can have direct links with race and power. In her work on *Race Space and the Law*, Razack (2002) argues, “spaces [can be] organised to sustain unequal social relations and... these relations [in turn] shape spaces” (p.1). Space can be used to empower some and disempower others, and in the process a child’s educational experiences may be adversely affected, as I have discovered from some of the girls I met.

2. Research Method

My thesis is largely an exploration of individuals’ perceptions, experiences and understandings of a particular phenomenon. I am interested in the way a Scottish

Gypsy/Traveller girl views the world specifically within the context of her educational experiences in Scottish schools. As Conelly and Clandenin (1990) argue, “humans are storytelling organisms, who individually and socially lead storied lives” (p. 2). There are multiple realities and multiple constructs of knowledge, even if one reality may be viewed as “privileged” within our society. Within these varied realities and stories are issues and struggles to be analysed and, as Lorde (2007) reminds us, “there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives” (p.138). As this is a qualitative, inductive study, I acknowledge that research cannot be neutral, value-free or just ‘informative’ (Hammersley, 2003). Given this view of reality, the aims of my research, and the critical approach needed to “constructively disrupt” (Cochran-Smith, 2009) current modes of thinking and practices within this subject area, I wondered if quantitative or mixed methods of inquiry would suffice, in this instance.

2.1 Qualitative or Quantitative

I initially felt compelled to conduct a quantitative study as previous efforts to gather statistical data on the population and experiences of Gypsy/Traveller communities have been largely unsatisfactory. Intermittently, since approximately 1895, successive governments have made formal attempts not just to “count”, but also to comprehend and cater for Gypsy/Traveller communities. The inability of the twice-yearly counts conducted by the Scottish Government (The Scottish Government, 2010b), along with various other statistical data to accurately shed light on the lives and experiences of Gypsy/Travellers, is evidence that a quantitative study will not yield a better understanding. The 2011 Census, for example, suggests that there are 4,200 Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2015) acknowledges that it is highly likely that this figure is not reliable. Problems linked to sampling, coverage, literacy levels, non-response and measurement have had a direct impact on the accuracy of statistics. Gypsy/Travellers are generally suspicious of official governmental authority and opposed to being counted and surveyed.

A qualitative approach is particularly useful for data collection of perspectives that have been traditionally marginalised. The findings would not only add to the existing bank of knowledge and explain some of the limited statistical information, but could have more positive and significant results for Gypsy/Traveller communities in the long term. Their elusiveness and their reluctance to self-identify also presents challenges to the qualitative

researcher in trying to capture a representative sample, to draw conclusions or make generalisations that are both internally and externally valid. However, it is not the purpose of this study to draw firm conclusions, neither can it claim to be representative, because of the variety, heterogeneity and relatively limited size of the sample members who were willing to be interviewed.

2.2 Sample

It took over a year to gain access to research participants. In studies such as this where sections of a population are challenging to locate, a degree of flexibility from the outset is necessary to allow for a careful interweaving of individual stories and the common themes that could be gleaned upon analysis of these narratives. Okely (1983) in researching Travellers revealed that she “could not select a single “village”, nor was it feasible to restrict [herself] to one “group”, even if it were possible to isolate such an entity... thus [she] only observed travellers when they entered [her] location” (p. 48). She relies on the argument put forth by N. Dyson-Hudson that “[our] analytic units need not be population aggregates of some sort: they can as well (and sometimes more revealingly) be segments of time or action, points of contact or separation” (cited in Okely, 1983, p. 48).

There was no sampling frame from which to represent all of the elements of this target population. Neither could the participants be randomly sampled. I, therefore, opened my selection of participants to any Gypsy or Traveller girl aged 12 and over, with some experience of Scottish schools or who self-identified as Scottish. I also tried to locate girls who had achieved notable success so that I was not deliberately finding cases to support any personal or anecdotal theories that all Gypsy/Traveller girls are disadvantaged by their educational experiences.

I had to use a non-probability sampling technique like a snowball sample. Each encounter with a Gypsy or Traveller girl led to the introduction to other Gypsy/Traveller girls, and occasionally contact with one charity or organisation led to introductions to others. Each organisation that was willing to help provided access to yet another prospective participant. Given the restricted time and budget I had for fieldwork, this process of networking across Scotland continued until sufficient data was collected for detailed analysis and no new, or significant data emerged.

This kind of opportunistic sampling is arguably a disadvantage as it is not a firm representative sample of Gypsy/Traveller girls in Scotland, but I believe it was the only

method available to me because of difficulty gaining access. Moreover, Bechhofer and Paterson (2000, p. 42) suggest that “representativeness... is difficult to achieve” and recommend that “You have to use judgement to decide whether that which you are studying is typical of all other relevant situations.” I am unable to provide assurances of how representative the final sample of participants is. I can make assertions about the particularities of the sample I was able to work with. The sample was not representative in a quantitative sense, but I tried to gather enough data, including negative samples, to seek out differentiated views and to enhance credibility in the findings I obtained.

I argue that whilst the conclusions in my thesis are linked to specific findings around specific circumstances, there is room for some generalisations to be expressed that could be helpful to all communities in influencing policy debates. Okely (1983) clarifies, “each [story] retains its specificity while illustrating a wider theme... The single carefully chosen example offers generality through its very specificity” (p. 48). I can make assertions about the particularities of the sample I am working with currently. In addition, the issues, controversies and challenges surrounding Gypsy/Travellers in general, also demand a critical approach. The emphasis on “improving understanding” implies the need to review critically current ideas, policies and practice, to help inform or create meaningful change.

Each research participant chose the setting in which we met, usually in an informal venue outwith schools, in their homes, or in cafes away from their local area. This choice further ensured anonymity, confidentiality and safety of the participants. To safeguard my own safety, a gatekeeper facilitated each meeting and made introductions, though gatekeepers were not present at any of the interviews. Subsequent meetings were then organised on my own. Although it took a year to forge relationships with gatekeepers and interviewees, and many are resistant to this day, I could not have gained access without the trust and support of the few gatekeepers that paved the way. The issues surrounding the role of gatekeepers, the power they wield and the knowledge they inadvertently conceal within their ranks is critically analysed in my thesis, but not in this paper.

2.3 Outsider and Insider

As I am not a Gypsy/Traveller, I am considered an “outsider researcher”. Weckman (1998), a Finnish Gypsy activist, warns the “outsider” against the limitations of attempting to represent the experiences of a group or groups. Working with members of Gypsy/Traveller communities as an outsider has its unique challenges. The language of the majority may not

truly capture an account of Gypsy/Traveller life and experience. Moreover, there are, perhaps, aspects of the experience of “hard to reach populations” that cannot be fully expressed by the language of the outsider researcher.

According to the 2011 census, as an Indian I am a member of a very small minority ethnic community in Scotland (approximately 0.6%). As an Indian woman, I have a particular set of experiences and views that helps me to empathise with the girls I met and interviewed. Even though Weckman (1998) might consider me an “outsider” I do understand what it is to be the “other”, to feel marginalised and just how difficult it can be to confront ingrained, and sometimes subtle, systems of prejudicial thoughts and behaviour. Fine (cited in Griffiths, 2011, p. 143) states that reflexivity demands an attention to biography as part of an honest dialogue about “forces of difference, divergence and contradiction.” I was aware that the girls I met were curious about me, as much as I was curious about them. Following tradition in Gypsy/Traveller communities, the girls recognised that as an adult, mother, researcher and teacher, I was, in their eyes, a person with experience and knowledge, and in this sense I was aware of their respect, my power and status. In this social context, I managed “to develop a safe, comfortable and supportive relationship and environment with which they could discuss, disclose, and share their experiences” (Renold, 2007, p. 280). The interviews were semi-structured, but conversational in style. As researcher I was aware of how my background and experiences interacted with theirs, and it was not possible to detach myself entirely (Mason, 2002, p. 149). I was consciously partial (Mies, 1983). My research position, power and control of the interview process shifted. I might have seemed like the adult in charge at times, but they were in control of what they wanted to reveal. As Backs (2007) argues, participants can “undermine playfully the implicit hierarchy between the questioner and respondent” (p.19), or they may choose to fit or modify their responses because they know they are being researched – the Hawthorne effect. Moments of hesitation and silences surrounding certain taboo topics exposed levels of discomfort. The research was neither easy nor always comfortable. There were no simple neat categories of truth and experience.

Participatory research with young people might seem empowering or an ideal way of collaborating to provide research credibility, but it is challenging, given the complex power relations between researcher and researched, adult and young person. Participants might not wish to take part, and indeed most of the participants in this study were unable to formally collaborate in the verification of findings for two main reasons. First, further access to most of the participants beyond the initial interviews was challenging to arrange, as gatekeepers

were reluctant to compromise their longstanding trust and cooperation with the girls' families. In other instances, the participants could not be reached as they were away travelling or had moved on to a different location. To achieve authenticity and trustworthiness of findings, I conducted a focus group discussion with four members of Article 12. This discussion helped to check the accuracy of the emerging themes, my interpretations and potential conclusions. Article 12 is a charity that works to empower the lives of young Gypsy/Travellers, and other marginalized young people. The non-governmental organisation respects and facilitates young people's right to be heard and to participate freely as equal citizens.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to rules set out by the Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee and British Educational Research Association guidelines (BERA, 2013). The core principles of anonymity, confidentiality, safety of participants, informed signed consent, and the freedom to withdraw acted as a crucial guide throughout the 12 interviews I conducted and the focus group discussion held subsequently. Travellers and those who work with them are a network of close-knit communities. There are a limited number of Council and privately run Traveller sites and it would not be too difficult to identify the girls and their families. For their protection, I do not disclose names, places and schools. The girls were less guarded in their communication with me because of their assured anonymity. In some cases, family members met with me, gatekeepers shared information in confidence, and this provided additional background knowledge. I have given the girls pseudonyms and as they are all from Scotland, I thought it appropriate to use the names of Scottish islands.

3. Discussion

3.1 Skye and Rona - Bigger, Fatter, Gypsier?

Skye is 15 years old and described herself as a Scottish Traveller. She is the youngest in a family of seven children. She lives with her entire family in two permanent trailers on a council-run site. Gypsy/Travellers call caravans "trailers". Skye is still at school and enjoys being there. Unlike most other research participants, her family has remained in one place. Explaining her school life, Skye said that she has had only positive experiences at the nursery, primary and secondary schools she attended. She also said that she has ambitions to carry on with formal education until she is 18 years old and completes sixth year studies. She is adamant about wanting to have a career, and plans to gain the qualifications she needs to

do so. She clarified, “Like if you want to get a good job you'll need your qualifications.” When I first met her she was in an all-black ensemble, with a striking red-tie, her jet-black hair cut short and swept back with gel. At a quick glance, she could have passed off as a male, but on closer inspection she appeared an attractive girl, tastefully self-fashioned like a Goth. Of all the 12 girls I interviewed, Skye was the only one who seemed to consciously make a statement of rejecting an overtly feminine image, projected by and expected of Traveller girls. Within a few minutes of meeting her she declared defiantly, “I’m not big, I’m not fat and I’m not Gypsy!” I was not expecting to meet a Traveller Goth and this in itself questioned my own stereotyped ideas of how a Traveller girl should present herself. Skye is a young carer for a close member of her family.

At 19 years of age, Rona is the oldest research participant who took part in the study. Like Skye, she lives on a council-run Traveller site with her family. Unlike the other research participants, she attended her local nursery, primary and secondary school. Rona chose to go to the main school in the local area because she “liked being around other people [non-Travellers]”. Rona said that her family have always encouraged her to mingle with non-Travellers and would not object if she married someone from another culture. One of her sisters is married to a non-Traveller. Her parents would rather they married a “good non-Traveller”, than a “bad Traveller” from a rival family. Rona is currently looking for a job at a hair and beauty salon. “Yeah and I was like well hopefully like...finish qualifying for a hairdresser and a family and one day open my own shop.” She said that she would never deny her ethnicity and would reveal her background to any prospective employer.

I didn’t hide it, I didn’t try to hide it and I didn’t boast about it. If someone like asked me, I would say yeah I am and that was it... I don’t see the point in hiding who you are to make someone else happy (Rona).

Like Skye, she is a carer. This common experience brought them together several years ago. They have remained firm friends ever since. I interviewed them together over coffee and lunch in a small rural hotel. My abiding memory of them was their insistence that they were “never” bullied in school, had “never” encountered any racism, and that in their opinion, they were both very unlike other Traveller girls, declaring that they were “unique”. This declaration of difference is the main reason why I have chosen to highlight their stories in this paper.

3.2 Education and Success

Skye and Rona were asked about their views on education and their ambitions for their future. They stressed the importance of learning more than just basic literacy and numeracy. Skye said that she would like to go as far as she can and “maybe even attend university.” Unlike other research participants, they not only valued and argued for pursuing what they called a “good education,” but critically appraised their community’s traditional views about the role of education in Traveller women’s lives. Both were proud to be Scottish Travellers, but expressed their disapproval of what they perceived as “racism” and “sexism” (Skye) within their communities.

Both girls chose not to attend the mobile school made available on their Travellers’ site, but attended the local State school throughout their education. They highlighted the importance and benefits of socialising with peers from both the Traveller and non-Traveller communities. “Why would you wanna be with Travellers all the time... it’s so boring!” (Skye) She elaborated,

I was asked whether I wanted to go to secondary school and I said yes because like it’s the normal thing to do...like my sister didn’t ask any of her kids if they wanted to go to school... they just went (Skye).

They also believed the curriculum offered at mobile schools was deliberately made simple for Traveller children “as if they were too thick to understand,” and the behaviour in these schools is poor. This level of provision was not in their view a “good education.” “We’ve got like a portacabin and a teacher used to come down and go in twice a week for the kids from the site” (Rona). “And there was like limits...there was like limits...because like the...in normal school it’s like um...you can...they’ll help you do whatever you want, whatever you want to [achieve]” (Skye). In one such school I was at, teachers used magazines like *Heat* and *Take A Break* to teach Literacy because the girls were interested in the material. Rona explained further, “I have heard for myself from like a Traveller mum... [If her daughter goes to school her] daughter will have boyfriends, start smokin’, drinkin’, sleep around with boys ... you’ll be classed as like a little whore basically.” Skye interjected:

But it’s not like that at all...It’s more like a fear sort of... but it’s ridiculous!

It’s like you have to send your kids to high school or they’re not going to have much of a future... they (Traveller girls) depend on the man. The man will bring in all the money all the time.

When asked about their aspirations and ambitions they explained how much they valued formal education as a means to get a job. They wanted to pursue a career and gain financial and social independence from men. They believe education and success are linked. Skye spoke of “achieving [her] dream but has “no ten year plan.” Achieving good grades and working hard in school are part of the plan for the moment. For Skye, success would be getting a place at university. Rona wanted to own her own business as a beautician and hairdresser.

The girls also had strong principles and values they wanted to uphold. Rona said she hoped she would “just stay [herself] and not try to like...hide... not change.”

Rona: Yeah I think that would be success for me like just...grow old gracefully.

Skye: I think another way of success to me would be...just being happy with my own life.

Skye: I think to be successful you've got to be happy.

Rona: Yeah I think for success I'd probably just like surround myself with...

Skye: Things that make you happy.

Rona: Yeah like...my family have a lot to do with my happiness...

Interviewer: You're a Traveller and I get the feeling that you're very proud of being a Traveller?

Skye: I don't know...I hope I'm a good person so...I don't know...I would hate it if anybody described me as...narrow-minded or...I don't know I just...I really just want to be open about my thoughts.

Both had ambitions not to marry at a young age, but to pursue a “good education” and a career first. Unlike all other participants I interviewed, they believed it was possible to combine a career and marriage.

3.3 Education, Gender Expectations and Equality

For a young person aged five to 16 years to have no access to education is illegal and a criminal offence in Scotland, but according to the Head of Education Law, Ian Nesbit (personal communication, May 2014), this is apparently rarely enforced – usually with a caution, a fine and a recommendation made to The Children's Panel to monitor and ensure proper access and attendance. The panel is part of Scotland's Children's Hearings System and comprises lay members of the community who safeguard the welfare of vulnerable young people at risk. The system was introduced in 1971 as a result of the Social Work (Scotland)

Act 1968, which recognised that young people under the age of 18 needed to be treated and supported differently to adults by legal courts. The panel is now governed by the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011.

Skye and Rona stated strongly that from their view most Gypsy/Traveller girls are not allowed to go to school: "They have like no choice in anything and that really sucks!" (Skye).
Rona: I'm going to make sure my kids are in school.

Skye: You're surrounded by other travellers [at the mobile school] and maybe if you pick the wrong thing to do...maybe if like the boy picked something that wasn't...manly enough.

Rona: I've kind of noticed that as well.

Skye: He'd be sort of picked on by the rest of the travellers as well...

Rona: Like a girl becoming a mechanic!

Skye: Travellers are quite sexist.

Gypsy/Traveller girls, often considered by their parents and communities to be young women at 12 years, leave school because their parents do not want them to be "contaminated" by non-Traveller boys, drinking, drugs, sex education, and what Gypsy/Traveller parents perceive as the morally corruptible lifestyle of the settled community. One Traveller mother I met said that she did not want her daughter to touch textbooks touched by non-Traveller children because it is unhygienic (personal communication, June 2013). Gypsy/Traveller parents are not only concerned about their daughters' exposure to other cultures, but also their safety and their purity, which have to be preserved to protect family honour. Issues of safety and cleanliness are two emerging themes that will be discussed in the thesis. Dana, a 13-year old Traveller girl, explained why it was important to stay safe and clean. If she was seen talking to a "country boy" (non-Traveller boy), her marriage prospects would be damaged and her family's honour destroyed. According to her, she never leaves home unaccompanied by a family member. She is transported by taxi to attend classes in literacy and numeracy at a youth centre twice a week with other Gypsy/Traveller children. She told me that she would never do anything that would jeopardise her image and her family honour, because "family is everything."

In contrast, Skye and Rona considered themselves to be "different" from the norm as the following conversation suggests. The girls looked critically at some of the behaviour and traditions within their community.

Rona: They [Traveller girls] don't have any friends.

Skye: Their friends are like just their cousins yeah.

Rona: They don't really get out much either.

Skye: No but that's not the question. It's like -

Rona: Yeah what stops them?

Skye: What stops them yeah like...no yeah it's just like the gender stereotypes, they're meant to stay at home with the children and that's what their goal is.

There's like nothing passed that.

bell hooks (1981) argues, as many other feminists do, that minority women are worst affected as they are often doubly oppressed because of their race and their gender. Just as there are stubborn perceptions in Western consciousness about other types of female minorities (Groot, 2013, Spivak, 1988), there exist stereotypical perceptions of the life ambitions and aspirations of young Gypsy/Traveller women. Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland include semi-nomadic minorities whose identities clash with the majority population not just because of their race, ethnicity, cultural traditions, but also over class and gender. These differences and conflicts are interrelated and reflect the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination and oppression (Knudsen, 2006).

It would seem that the minority ethnic female who leads a semi-nomadic lifestyle and who is also inhibited by her economic circumstances lies at the very crux of this intersection. One should not necessarily assume that all minority ethnic women are vulnerable or feel vulnerable, and are in need of protection. Vulnerability can generate, in the case of some of the girls I have met, a formidable spirit of resilience and determination to succeed beyond the realms of marriage and childrearing. In this respect, Skye and Rona have challenged my own stereotyped perceptions of Traveller women.

Lancaster University Guidelines (n.d.) and the Moray House School of Education Ethics Form (2011, p.4) imply that research participants from ethnic minority communities constitute a vulnerable group, but I question the assumption that all research participants from ethnic minority communities are necessarily "vulnerable," and ask if they should all be treated as such from the outset. Conversations with Skye and Rona demonstrate that the situation is more complex. Both young women are strong, independent, and ebullient and had some powerful opinions about gender equality, marriage, school, their family, their identity, and racism.

There's like no gender equality among travellers, they're just like the women and men have to...they have like no choice in anything and that really sucks because like I won't...when I grow up I want to have my own job and everything and I don't want to have to live off... like... a man... Yeah it's ridiculous! (Skye)

Both retain a strong sense of self, but also a strong loyalty and love for their families. Yet, both acknowledged that they are who they are because their families have allowed them to be so. Like Dana, family is [also] everything to Skye and Rona.

My mother is still kind of like...she has sort of the old traditions in her because of the way she was brought up. But she's trying to keep me as open as possible but I can tell that she would rather me be like...she'd rather I'd have a boyfriend right now and she'd rather I'd be talking about marriage and stuff. I think my mum still has some of those beliefs but she's trying...she doesn't force anything upon me (Skye).

Skye is sensitive to the difficulties involved in accepting, orchestrating and navigating change, both for her and for her family. It would seem that the self-image of Gypsy/Traveller girls is intertwined with their gender, femininity, roles as women (both are also young carers) and family expectations. Their voices reveal the tension between divergent elements.

Rona: I think the mother and father kind of put that into their head as well and plus they see it from what their mother and father act like and they think oh well that's the way I should be.

Interviewer: So that's their role models?

Rona: Yeah!

Skye: They don't see anything wrong with like their mother and father's relationship because...it depends on what type of family.

Conclusion

Whilst academic literature (Clark, 2001; Clark and Greenfields, 2006; Kenrick and Clark, 1999), reports from the Equal Opportunities Committee (EOC) and Amnesty International tend to point to the "single issue" of racism that is experienced by Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, interviews with the young women I met suggest a rather more complex interplay of multiple issues. One of the most striking findings is the liminality of their positioning betwixt and between complex intersections of space, race, gender, class, culture and intergenerational tensions. Some of these young women seemed doubly oppressed by systemic institutional inequities and fixed gender expectations from within their culture and

families, whilst others express strong views and aspirations about their future roles as women, which may challenge stereotypical perceptions. Yet, all seem governed by their family and their locality, the physical, social and emotional spaces they inhabit. Their varied experiences illustrate that “there are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise” (Lorde, 2007, p. 53). The multiple voices reflect multiple realities influenced by long-standing institutional, structural, political and cultural agendas. The girls are caught within these structures.

As Backs (2007) suggests, “the capacity to hear has been damaged and is in need of repair” (p.5); and those in the majority or dominant position of power in particular cannot readily see the experience of the minority or the effects of their subliminal supremacy over others. The French philosopher Albert Camus (1947) once observed that “the evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack [genuine] understanding” (p. 131). In helping to promote a better understanding of the multiple realities in what is essentially a conflict spanning centuries, in elucidating connections, “what understanding begins to do is to make knowledge available for use, and that’s the urgency, that’s the push, that’s the drive” (Lorde, 2007, p. 109). Preliminary findings suggest that there is not only a range of levels of insight, but also a lack of concerted effort amongst various groups, institutions, government departments and Gypsy/Traveller communities themselves. All parties concerned lack the bridging capital at times to connect with one another, recognise commonalities and value differences.

There is the view that Gypsy/Traveller cultures “expose and provoke the pathologies of European culture” (Heuss, 2000, p. 52). It is perhaps time to value more than one gaze, one perspective of the world, to look further than dominant white male perspectives. What is also clear from the girls’ narratives is that strict gender expectations and cultural taboos can also restrict the physical, emotional and mental space to flourish as a human being. Some of these girls are beginning to challenge these binding spaces of long held values and traditions, reimagining a world in which they have agency and choice. Some girls are content and have chosen, as is their right, to accept that this is just part of who they are as Gypsy/Travellers. Acknowledging how external and internal structural inequalities affect some Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland, particularly young women, is key to improving understanding and taking committed action to tackle these power imbalances, restore trust and heal centuries of conflict.

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