

**WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF TRAVELLER WOMEN
IN ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experience of Traveller women in adult and community education. It focuses on a particular group of women in a particular community centre. It was my intention to use the insights gained to develop education programmes that would be congruent of Irish Traveller culture, traditions and needs. The study shows that these women have a specific experience within the Irish education system and that this experience has been shaped and informed by the dominant culture and the discourse disseminated through government policy and found in education practise. It found that the experience of Traveller women in adult and community education was varied and complex. Four key themes emerged; Travellers are not a homogenous group, Education, Gender Roles and Discrimination. These themes are entwined and constantly overlap as they inform, reinforce and maintain the customs and traditions that are part of Traveller culture. The findings support the notion that the Traveller community is not homogenous. They also indicate that while basic education skills are seen as essential there is a clash between what the State and members of the Traveller community regard as progression during the teenage years. The teenage years are a crucial period for laying the foundations for further study or employment while Traveller teenagers are preparing for marriage a step which signifies their entry into adulthood. Bridging the gap between the States perception of progression and the Traveller community's perception of progression is necessary if we are to ensure education provision for the Traveller community meets the needs and wants of the community itself rather than those of the State.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
DES	Department of Education and Science
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
STTC	Senior Traveller Training Centre

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to provide an insight into the experience of Traveller women in adult and community education. The motivation for undertaking this piece of research grew from my experience working with a community of Traveller learners. Although I have lived in Ireland all my life and went to school with children from the Traveller community it was not until I started to tutor adult and community education classes in the Autumn of 2011 that I had any meaningful contact with members of this community.

It is widely acknowledged that education is of great importance in modern societies. We live in an ever changing world where technology and communication techniques change rapidly. The need for education and lifelong learning to enable people to adapt to these changes is becoming a vital element of modern day living. In contemporary Irish society the notion that education is linked to social success is still at large among the dominant culture, suggesting that the myth of meritocracy is still very powerful (Finnegan, 2008, p. 68). The White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life (2000) highlights the importance of lifelong learning for the achievement of personal, cultural, social and economic goals (DES). It promotes collective as well as personal advancement.

It has been 13 years since the publication of the White Paper and we are going through one of the worst economic crisis this country has ever seen. Have the proposals and policies put forward by this paper managed to enhance the personal, cultural, social and economic positions of the groups it deemed marginalised and disadvantaged? A question as complex and layered as this is beyond the parameters of this piece of research; however, this paper will look at a specific group of Traveller learners and their experience of adult education.

1.2 Background to Research

Equality and justice within the Irish education system has always been of interest to me. I can remember feeling an overwhelming sense of injustice at the way my fourth class teacher divided the class. Although I couldn't name the process that was at work I could sense that there was something inherently wrong in dividing a class into groups based on their father's occupation. It took many more years before I questioned the logic and rationale that lay behind the schools policy of separating the settled cohort from the Traveller cohort. Almost all the Traveller children were taught in one room regardless of their age or their capabilities only joining settled children for religious education for First Holy Communion and again for Confirmation.

These questions became more pressing when I began working as a tutor with a group of learners who are from the Traveller community. While all these women are more than capable of participating in class and engaging with the subject under discussion some have problems when it comes to reading and writing tasks. Some of the learners have developed strategies to mask the fact that they are experiencing difficulties. There are a small number of women who are willing to talk openly about the difficulties they experience with reading or writing. I began to question why, having spent many years within the education system, these women had gone through school without having the difficulties they encountered addressed.

This research focuses on the experiences of these women learners within an adult and community education setting. These women are all members of the Irish Traveller community and as such their experience at all levels of education is vastly different to that of the dominant culture in Irish society. Adult and community education is becoming synonymous with the notion of second chance education. When adult education is viewed in this way the functional view of education is maintained and reinforced. This view privileges the belief that education contributes to the socialisation and the training of people into a shared value system and the existing social order. To date the Irish Traveller community has been resistant to this form of socialisation. As Hourigan and Campbell (2010) suggest, the period between the ages of fifteen to nineteen are crucial within the settled community for laying the foundations for progressing to further study or to employment (p. 7). This is a critical period of development for young Travellers as they are seen to be entering adulthood and ready to

marry, a step which signifies status and progression within their community (Hourigan and Campbell 2010, pg.7).

Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) addresses the need for education for those who are living on the margins, yet, it fails to realise that, as Freire (2000) states, a marginal person is not 'outside of' the dominant culture rather she is 'inside of' her own culture (p.19). How then do we create educational opportunities that are culturally aware and relevant to learners and where respect is shown for a person's culture, traditions and values? It was this question that motivated me to begin this piece of research.

My Experience

As mentioned above, I have been delivering Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accredited modules since 2011. I came to teaching late in life and as a result have first-hand experience of adult education as both an adult learner and a tutor. These experiences have informed and shaped my teaching philosophy and practise. I agree with Freire when he states that teaching is not simply the transferring of knowledge (2001, pg. 49). As both an adult learner and an adult education practitioner I have always valued educational attainment. I have viewed it as a way to progress both at a personal and a professional level. My educational philosophy reflects the belief that all learners should be afforded the opportunity of education for active citizenship and consciousness raising.

However, my teaching experience over the past 18 months has made me increasingly aware of the dichotomy that exists within the Irish adult and community education sector. This has particular resonance with regards to the philosophy and ethos of adult and community education and the teaching of FETAC accredited courses which are funded by the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). There is an emphasis put on progression that encourages a banking style of education. I believe this style of education is of no benefit to the tutor or the learner and is in opposition to the principles of adult and community education. Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education (2000), clearly identifies early school experiences as having an impact on educational progress in later life (pg. 30). It has been argued that school was not always a positive experience for children from the Traveller community. This combined with

the fact that children from the Traveller community leave school earlier than their settled peers makes it even more important that they have a positive experience within a community and adult education setting.

Some of the participants were educated in Ireland while a number were educated in England. The vast majority left school prior to sitting state exams. Many of the women who participate in the classes attended the local Senior Traveller Training Centre (STTC) and have completed FETAC modules at level 4. It came as a surprise when a small number expressed concerns about not being able to read or write. The relevance of programmes that fail to address literacy issues must be questioned.

The initial aim of my research project was to discover what is considered useful knowledge in the Traveller community and how this could be linked to culture and tradition to adapt the FETAC modules that are delivered under the BTEI. My hope was that this in turn would lead to learning that would be of greater interest and benefit to the women who avail of these adult and community education courses. This would result in them having a more active role in their educational experience and development.

Those Involved in the Research

During the course of this research there were six people interviewed. Four out of the six participants are members of the Traveller community who attend the classes held at the centre. The other two participants work within the centre in a development and managerial capacity. As this research is about the experience of female Traveller learners and their experience of adult and community education, it was essential that they had the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions on the subject. I included the centre manager and a development worker in order to gain an insight into the value placed on the educational element of the centre. The interviews took place in the centre outside the hours set aside for adult and community education. Initial contact was made through the centre manager who asked the women if they would mind if I contacted them about participating in this research.

1.3 An Overview of the Research Process

A feminist methodological approach has been used throughout this research. Not only does it allow the voices of the learners to be heard, a feminist approach allows for personal experience and subjective feelings as well as the researchers position and standpoint to be considered (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, pg. 4-5). Hesse-Biber and Leavy maintain that a feminist approach recognises the complexities of the social world and is mindful of the impact of social differences, of being an ‘outsider’ or an ‘insider’ and at the same time considers the researchers position (2007, pg.139). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (2008) has suggested that researchers who are sensitive to their ‘outside’ role may have an advantage over those who are less aware: ‘Outsiders within occupy a special place – they become different people and their difference sensitizes them to patterns that may be more difficult for established sociological insiders to see’ (pg.317).

This research is important in an era that promotes the merits of lifelong learning. Individualism has crept into all areas of life and the notion that the individual is responsible for her own success is inherent in the majority of everyday discourse. It would seem that the Traveller community has thus far been immune to the individualisation process that is the hallmark of this capitalist era. It has been my experience that there are strong ties to kinship which reinforces a sense of identity and provides a support network for the women. These strong ties to their culture and tradition may act as a buffer to the individualisation process that is so evident within much of contemporary Irish society.

1.4 A Brief Outline of Each Chapter

Chapter Two: Methodology

Semi structured interviews will be used to explore the participants knowledge and experiences of adult and community education. This chapter will explain why I chose this approach and how it enhances the feminist perspective that underpins the study. My position in relation to my research topic will also be examined and the research process will be detailed. How the data was interpreted will be explained and clarified.

Chapter Three: Review of Literature

The literature review will examine the Traveller Community's culture and traditions and how they are perceived by the dominant cultural group in Ireland. I will discuss the gap in literature regarding Travellers before addressing the importance of ethnicity. Over the last few decades we have seen a move from multicultural practises of integration to an intercultural understanding of difference and diversity. This chapter explores the differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism and how the change in discourse has affected the Traveller community. Education policy and provision will be looked at in order to gain a better understand of how todays practises are informed and shaped by the policy of the past. However, as O'Connell (1996) suggests, it would prove limiting to look at education policy in isolation because wider social policy has shaped and informed education policy throughout Irish history.

Finally this chapter will look at what bell hooks describes as white supremacist thinking and the impact that this has on minority groups. hooks can be used to draw comparisons between the discrimination expressed by the Traveller community by the dominant culture and gain an insight into how this has impacted on their educational experience in both compulsory and adult education.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

The key themes to emerge during the research process will be discussed in this chapter. These were; the Traveller community is not a homogenous group, education, gender and discrimination. It is important to remember that while these themes are examined in isolation they are intricately woven together and underpin many of the traditions and customs of the Travellers communities' culture.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter will provide an analysis of the findings in light of the review of literature.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The contributions and implications of the research findings will be stated in this chapter. It will also look at how the findings confirm or depart from existing knowledge. Any applications or recommendations that these findings could add to enhance the delivery of adult and community education within the Traveller community will be explored. In this chapter recommendations for further research will be made.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

The opposing views within social research in contemporary society will be briefly outlined in this chapter and the methodological approach that I took to conduct this study will be discussed. My epistemological and ontological stance and the reasons this research is important will be clarified before I explain the research process. In the interest of confidentiality the community centre and the participants that were involved in this research will remain anonymous. The limitations of this study along with challenges that arose will be looked at. Last, but by no means least, I will discuss the ethical considerations which were an integral part of this research.

Social Research and Contemporary Society

Social researchers strive to understand, describe and explain how society works. Schutt (2009) explains that seeking to find out what the world is like and why it works in the way it does is the goal of basic science (p. 18). Of course, there are other reasons for exploring why society functions as it does. Social research is increasingly used to offer practical solutions for social issues. Since the nineteenth century there has been tension within the social science field surrounding the aims and objectives of social research. While some believe that social research should benefit humankind others would argue that the social sciences are not here to make the world a better place, believing the function of social science is the discovery of new knowledge (Schutt, 2009, p. 19). I believe the social sciences are more important than ever. We are living through a time of rapid change. Now more than ever before it is vital that we understand the way society functions and the impact it has on marginalised communities. History has taught us to be mindful of what we believe as universal truth. It is important to remember that there is no neutral knowledge and that it is almost impossible for research not to be coloured by the researchers own worldview. With this in mind, it is important that I outline my methodological approach as my unique view of the social world and the issue under investigation will influence the interpretation of my findings.

The Importance of This Research

As mentioned already there has been a considerable amount of literature written about the Traveller community although it has had very little effect on education policy. Two very distinct genres exist. An anthropological and a historical literature has emerged since the 1970s which focuses on distinct elements of Traveller culture and providing an accurate history. It is only since the early 1960s that the Traveller community was included in education policy however; when they were included it was in an assimilationist model (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p. 93). There is very little accurate data on the attendance, performance and attainment levels for members of the Traveller community in compulsory education. According to Lodge and Lynch (2004), even less data exists for members participating in post-secondary education programmes. In addition to this oversight there has been no independent evaluation of the merits of the Traveller Training Centres compared with mainstream education (p. 96). In order to evaluate current programmes it is important that we look at their benefits and their weaknesses and use this information to inform the design of a curriculum that meets the Traveller community's needs. Lodge and Lynch (2004) claim that part of the problem in relation to realising change in educational attitudes towards the Traveller community is linked to the exclusion of members of the community from decisions affecting educational policy (p. 98). They suggest that the perspectives and lived experiences of the community need to be taken into account at the planning and development stage to avoid the legacy of exclusion and misrecognition being perpetuated (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p. 98).

2.2 Feminist Research Methodology

What is the experience of Traveller women in adult education? To answer this question a qualitative feminist research methodology was put into practise. As Harding (1987) suggests, studying women is nothing new, however, studying women from the perspective of their own experiences has not always been a common occurrence (p.8). Research carried out using a feminist approach challenges accepted norms and values the personal and private as worthy of study. By exploring the personal experiences of members of the Traveller community who are involved in adult and community education we can start to build a better understanding of the impact that policy,

provision and practice within education has had on the community (Letherby, 2003, p.74).

As feminist methodology is not rigidly tied to any one method of research it allows the researcher the space to consider which method will best fit the topic being explored. As Oakley (2000) has correctly asserted, 'We live through experiences rather than in them' (p.8). We will never know what it is like to be someone else but we can gain a better understanding of how others experience day to day living through listening and accepting their depiction of their lived experience (Oakley, 2000, p. 3). Feminist ways of knowing are open to exploring the personal and the private to increase understanding of social issues.

Feminist methodology attempts to reduce the power dynamics that can exist within research relationships. Seeking to report the experiences of the participants in their own way and providing a structural analysis of the conditions of their lives. While the value of the participants experience is of utmost importance, the researcher's role and influence is also taken into account. Feminist research has been influential in the furthering of feminist work and aiding the advancement of women's causes in patriarchal capitalist society (Roulston, 2010, p. 22).

Caution is urged when using this approach as it can prove problematic. Some feminist researchers believe that elements feminist research strategies such as; empathy, careful listening or going native along with the use of confessional subjectivity and omitting theoretical or conceptual input, do more harm than good (Harding, 2007, p. 54). While Roulston stresses that the same claim could be made of research in general, she does concede that it is more common in feminist research. Therefore it is essential that feminist researchers work with participants in a respectful way, remain mindful of ethical considerations and allow the participants voices to be heard.

2.3 Why Use Semi- structured Interviews?

The focus of the research is the experience of the women that use the educational services of the centre. The women are Travellers and experience a higher level of disadvantage and hardship than any other group in Irish society. With this in mind it seemed natural that a feminist perspective along with a reflexive nature would underpin this research project. It is important that the women involved in this research have an

opportunity to voice their opinion and semi-structured interviews allow for the collection of subjective interpretations of the women's lived experience. Questions were opened ended to encourage the women to share their stories.

Reflexivity was very much at the core of this study. I constantly questioned my reasons for carrying out this particular piece of research with this specific community of learners. I am aware that I am gaining experience in the field of social research and adding to my educational qualifications by producing this piece of research. It was my hope that the findings would inform the creation and delivery of education programmes within the community centre resulting in the programmes that are offered being more compatible with the needs and wants of the community. It is important to be constantly aware of the reasons for the research being carried out and to resist the temptation of documenting the facts that you think are more favourable or less likely to offend. Building reflexivity into research can ensure that the researcher remains true to the initial aim of the research project.

I found being both tutor and the researcher was a challenge. I would hope in my capacity as a tutor I have forged a respectful and trusting relationship with this community of learners and at the same time I have worked hard not to let this relationship colour my judgement in relation to the research process.

Research Design

There are a number of methods that are suitable for gathering information about an individual's experience of the adult education sector. It could be argued that I would have reached a larger sample population by using questionnaires and surveys. Questionnaires and surveys would have failed to capture the individual opinions and experiences of the participants which would have resulted in a very one dimensional view of the issue at hand.

2.4 Epistemological and Ontological Perspectives

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge or the theory of how it is that people come to have knowledge of the external world. Claims to knowledge are important, even more so in a research context. A researchers why of knowing is inextricably linked to the way

they assess what is considered legitimate knowledge and what is not, which in turn impacts on their interpretation of the findings. Ontological assumptions are concerned with the nature of reality. At the heart of the matter is the question of whether we regard the social world as something that is external to us or if we consider the social world as something that we are in the process of fashioning. Epistemological and ontological questions are concerned with a person's worldview.

My Epistemological and Ontological Stance

It is essential, that as a researcher you are aware of your assumptions about knowledge and how you make sense of everyday living (Antonesca et al 2006, p. 18). I have always believed that everyone has an equal right to a good life. Like Schwalbe (2008), I consider it important that no one should enjoy power and privilege at the expense of another (p. 4). In all human society human lives are intertwined, therefore we have a collective responsibility to be aware of how our actions impact on others and their chance of living a good life. The policy concerning the Irish Traveller community since the 1960s has played a major role constructing the way Irish people view and treat Travellers this in turn has impacted on how Travellers experience day to day life including their experience of education. It is my belief that social phenomena and their meanings are constantly being constructed by individuals, they are not static but are in a constant state of flux. (Bryman, 2008, p. 19).

Qualitative research with a feminist perspective is the best approach for exploring the experience of Traveller women in adult education. It is only through recognising and acknowledging the real lived experience of these women that we can begin to understand the impact that policy provision has had on the Traveller community and the collective assumptions held by Irish society concerning Travellers. This insight can be used to ensure that future education policy includes the voices of the Traveller community.

As suggested by Skeggs (1994), research should not simply tell us about the lives of those being researched it should tell us something about how knowledge is constructed (p. 88). By interviewing the women about their experiences in adult education I hope to be able to put forward their unique view of adult education provision and how this impacts on their lives as members of the Traveller community.

Oakley (1981) was the first to encourage qualitative in-depth interviews as a method to find out about people's lives. As Letherby (2003) asserts, this approach is important in terms of developing an approach that is grounded in women's experience (p. 84). My hope is that by speaking of their own experiences these women and I can produce a work which can be used to challenge the way policy and provision has been created in the past. Hopefully this will result in the creation of educational opportunities that are culturally aware and relevant to learners.

2.5 The Research Process

Sampling Process

To examine and explore the experience of this group of women, in this particular centre, in relation to education it was important that the data collected was provided by the them. For this reason purposive sampling was used. I planned to carry out a number of interviews with women who attend the education programmes I deliver and with a Traveller activist from a neighbouring county. Unfortunately gaining access to a Traveller activist outside the county proved more difficult than initially anticipated. On reflection, I realise I should have been making links with Traveller activists at a much earlier stage in the research process. This would have allowed me to build up trust and some familiarity.

In order to gain some background knowledge about the community centre and the service it provides I asked the community centre manager and a key development worker to participate in the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with four of the women who attend the educational programmes and with the centre manager and a development worker. I had hoped to carry out at least six but not more than eight interviews. Before we broke for Christmas, I had explained to each group of women that I was carrying out a piece of research about Traveller women's experience in adult education. I asked if any of the women would be interested in sharing their experiences and opinions on the courses with me. I realised that there may be a reluctance from the women to take part. Nevertheless, eight women expressed interest in taking part.

In January I asked the manager of the centre to ask the women who had expressed interest in participating in my research if I could contact them to arrange dates and times for interviews. As the majority of the women have young children I thought it might be best to conduct the interviews out in the community centre as there are childcare facilities on site.

Included with the data collected from the semi-structured interviews are field notes that I took during a spontaneous conversation that I was privy to during a break in a class. The women were chatting about experiences they had while participating in training and education courses outside the community centre. I asked for permission to record the conversation with a view to using it in this study. The women gave me permission to record the conversation in writing only. They have all signed a consent form giving me permission to use this information.

The Community Centre

The community centre at the heart of this research is in operation since 1998. It started off as a childcare facility and provided the women with childcare while they accessed education and training at the local STTC. It was set up to meet the needs of the women on the halting site. It provided support for those in the community who wanted to avail of education and training courses and benefited the children in the community. It had been found that they were starting school too late and finishing school too early. The setting up of a preschool meant the children were transitioned into primary school at the appropriate age. It took many years before classes for women were actually held in the centre. Now with the closing of the STTC the demand for places on the education programmes at the centre is increasing.

The centre provides much more than childcare, preschool education and adult and community education. It has an open door policy and the staff are more than willing to help with any problem or issue that arises for the families in the community. During its infancy the majority of the Traveller population lived on site. In more recent times many of the families have moved into neighbouring estates. However, the centre seems to remain the hub of the community.

2.6 Organising and Preparing the Data

Transcribing

The analysis began as soon as the recorder was switched off following the first interview. I began to notice that there were themes and categories that cropped up and overlapped during the interview. Analysis proper began as soon as I began the laborious task of transcribing. There were advantages to transcribing, becoming increasingly familiar with the data being just one.

Reading the Data

Reading through the transcriptions meant that I got a sense of the information collected and was able to reflect on the meaning of it. It also allowed me the time and space to listen to what went unsaid. I found it helpful to write notes in the margins and to use highlighters to show where commonalities were occurring throughout the set of interviews. At this stage I was becoming familiar with themes that were reoccurring.

Coding

The next step was coding the data which I struggled with. Although I could see the usefulness of the data I collected and could recognise reoccurring themes and categories I just lacked confidence in my skill and competence as a researcher when it came to explicitly naming them. Rereading the data and revisiting the literature which formed the context of the research somewhat elevated the doubts. As this process unfolded I could see the data becoming more manageable. Creswell (2009) advises that the list of topics should be assigned codes and the codes should then be consigned to the appropriate segments of the transcriptions (p. 4062). Organizing the data in this way gave me a greater insight and understanding of the themes and categories.

From Chunks of Coding to Manageable Themes

In order to successfully analysis the data it needs to be transformed from chunks of coded data to a manageable amount of themes. Creswell (2009) suggests creating five to

seven themes (p. 4137). Explaining that it is these themes that appear as headings in the findings analysis of studies and as such they should illustrate multiple points of views from the research participants and be supported by quotations and specific evidence (Creswell, 2009, p.4137). As the social world is complex and layered so too are the themes that emerge from the data analysis. I have found that whilst the themes that emerged from my data collection could be examined in isolation they are also interconnected and exist side by side.

Analysis: Representing and Interpreting the Data

The data collected during this research was rich, deep and varied considerably from participant to participant. The re-emerging themes were Education, Gender, Tradition and Discrimination. While they were categorized for clarity and ease of reporting the findings, these themes are intricately woven together and are constantly overlapping. The literature, my ontological view and my teaching relationship with the participants involved in this study shaped my understanding of the issue being researched. Consequently, it also influenced my findings analysis.

2.8 Limitations of the Research Process

Limitations

There are a number of limiting factors that affected this study. The fact that I work as a tutor with the women may have influenced their willingness to participate and their responses during the semi- structured interviews. Although childcare considerations were a deciding factor in my decision to use the community centre to conduct interviews, I do believe that responses may have been a little different if the research was conducted off site.

Another factor that had a limiting effect on the research was my inexperience as a researcher. Lack of experience meant that I had to learn as I went. I would imagine if I had been more experienced I would have dealt with the problems that arose more effectively.

Challenges

I naively thought contacting a Traveller activist would be a straight forward part of the research. Contacting and arranging dates and times for interviews proved much more difficult than I had anticipated. Family celebrations and childhood illness along with cancellations conspired against me which resulted in a smaller number of interviews than I had planned. The majority of young women from the Traveller community do not enjoy the same level of freedom as their settled counterparts. As my interviews were held outside the hours of the education programmes it may have been difficult for the women to attend.

On a more personal note, my beliefs and assumptions were challenged. When reviewing the literature I found myself reading bell hooks (2013) and agreeing strongly with her suggestion that we live in an 'imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (p. 3). In an Irish context I read this to mean that we live in a society that is underpinned by the ideology of the settled community. The Traveller community have long been othered or seen as Ireland's Apartheid (Mac Gréil, 2011). hooks (2013) maintains that we must question the privilege afforded the dominant ideology if the systems of domination are to be changed (p. 6). She believes we are socialised from birth into a system of white privilege which is ingrained in our psyche, pointing to discussions of imprinting to support this claim (hooks, 2013, p.13).

The image of Ireland as a country that is homogenous, predominately white, monocultural and Roman Catholic has had a major impact on policy issues concerning ethnic minority groups according to O'Connell (1996, para.1). The absence of the Traveller community from Government policy until the 1960s speaks volumes. A look through policy from the 1960s until the early 1990s illustrates that the settled community was considered the norm in Irish society and any deviation from the norm needed to be fixed (Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, 1963). hooks would argue that the sentiments held in these policies filter through to society at large and have a lasting effect on all, even those of us who consider ourselves to be tolerant, understanding and open to change.

During an interview I found myself asking the question 'do you think co tutoring would work, a Traveller tutor and a normal tutor?'. hooks (2013) would say that I have internalized the dominant ideologies thinking and practise and also suggest that as a settled person I am not suitable to carry out research within the Traveller community

(p.13). This incident made me question the motives behind this research and interrogate my assumptions and beliefs. I cannot argue with hooks (1994) assertion that those from a marginalised community are best suited to carry out research for that community (p.104). However, I strongly believe that research relating to Traveller participation in adult and community education is much needed. In the absence of a researcher from the Traveller community I believe that my reflexive nature along with a strong belief in the ethical principles of social research will ensure that this study is conducted with rigour.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Silverman (2006) notes, that it is only in the past two decades that researchers have begun to take the ethical dimensions of their research seriously (p. 317). It is vital that the ethics and integrity of research are beyond question as the researcher has a responsibility not only to herself but to those involved in the research and to society as a whole. Studies conducted in the past serve as a stark reminder of how important it is to respect human dignity, avoid deception or coercion of any kind and to ensure those participating are doing so freely.

Although I was aware of the ethical principles that underpin all social research I took the time to familiarise myself with NUI Maynooth Research Policy prior to beginning this study. I was conscious that the only reason I had access to members of the Traveller community was because of my position as a tutor, something I did not want to take advantage of. I was mindful of my responsibility to the participants who agreed to take part in my research. The consent form that I drew up was clear and concise, devoid of unnecessary jargon and explained what my research was about. It also explained how I was going to collect the data, how it would be stored and informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time up until the thesis had been printed. Provisions were made for participants with literacy difficulties.

Throughout the research process I was conscious that the dissemination of this research could have an impact on the community involved. For this reason I was mindful to act with integrity and openness at all times. It has not been my intention to further stigmatize the Traveller community. By exploring the experiences of this community of women hope to gain an understanding of their particular needs in relation to adult and community education provision.

Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

As I tutor in the community I wanted to research it was important that the participants understood their participation was voluntary and they could remove themselves from the study at any time. It was vital that they understood that their data could be withdrawn up until the completed work was finished and they were informed they could withdraw from the study at any time without risk of any repercussion. I did not want the women to feel in any way coerced into participating in this study. I made it very clear when asking for volunteers that the decision to participate was their own. To ensure that the women were aware of this I informed them at every step of the interview process.

Do no Harm

In designing, implementing and writing up this piece of research I was acutely aware of those who took part and how this study may impact on their lives. Again, the importance of sensitivity combined with voluntary and informed consent was central to all considerations ensuring no harm came to anyone as a result of their participation in this study (Ryan, 1996, para. 10). Traveller culture has a patriarchal dimension that I as a settled person had to respect. Whilst the majority of women in the settled community have the freedom to come and go as they please our Traveller counterparts have considerably less. As Hourigan and Campbell (2010) suggest the patriarchy that is evident in some families can impede women's participation in education (p. 47). I would suggest that the patriarchy and tight knit nature of the Traveller community can in some cases affect the choices made by some women. With this in mind I was mindful of how I contacted the women to ask them to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

I have taken steps to provide confidentiality for all participants of this study however, given the population of the Traveller community in the area where I work there are concerns that there may still be identifiable markers within the data collected.

The consent form was designed with my participants in mind. Before each interview I read through the consent form allowing the participants' time to read it themselves. When they had finished reading over the information I explained what the research was

about, reiterated that they could remove themselves from the study at any time up until the study was published. Each interviewee was asked if they would agree to having our conversation recorded. It was made clear that once the interview had been transcribed I would return it to them for approval before using the data. All interviewees consented signed their transcribed interview as proof that they had read and approved it.

Storing the recordings and transcripts of the interviews to ensure confidentiality is important. Both are stored using numerical code and have been transferred from the hard drive of my laptop to a USB key which is securely stored at all times. I assured those taking part that the information given would be used by me alone and would only be used for the purposes that were outlined in the consent form.

As an outsider researching the Traveller community I believe that I was conscious of my position at all times. I was mindful and sensitive to the customs and traditions of the community and treated those who participated in this study with respect.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by discussing the importance of social research in a rapidly changing world, why social research takes place and the differing opinions surrounding its purpose. As the voices of the learners are of utmost importance in this study a feminist methodology was taken. Epistemological and ontological perspectives are explained before I move on to outline my own epistemological and ontological position and discuss why I feel this piece of research is important. In explaining the research process I detail the sampling process used to decide who would be participating in this study and the background to the community centre. This is followed by an outline of the limitations and challenges that arose. Finally the ethical considerations involved with undertaking social research with individuals from a minority background are deliberated. Whilst this came last in the sequence of writing the methodology chapter ethical considerations have underpinned and been a guide throughout this study.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

As Irish society becomes more diverse greater attention is now being paid to the experiences and human rights of minority groups (Share, Tovey & Corcoran, 2003, p. 513). However, diversity is not a new concept on these shores. Travellers have always been a minority group in Irish society yet despite pressure from different social movements, within the Traveller community and within the dominant culture, equality of opportunity and condition for Travellers has not been reached to date.

It can be argued that an increased level of tolerance of diversity has had a positive impact on the Traveller community in terms of expanded educational provision and improved living conditions. Conversely, it may be argued that while tolerance of diversity has increased in Ireland Travellers are still facing prejudice and hostility in their own country. Mac Gréil (2011) has found that while more people would welcome Travellers as ‘members of their family’ a considerable number of people would ‘deny them citizenship’ (p. 9). Illustrating that while there is a certain level of tolerance among Irish citizens for Travellers there is still a substantial amount of prejudice and hostility directed towards them.

As Ireland becomes more diverse it is more important than ever that we examine the uneasy relationship that exists between the settled and Traveller communities. The findings of the greater Dublin Survey in 1972 - 73 highlighted the position of the Travelling community in Ireland to be one of lower cast (Mac Gréil, 2010, p.295). By 1988-89 the prejudice recorded in the National Survey was becoming more malevolent and the level of social distance towards Travellers had increased leading to Travellers being classed as out casts. Mac Gréil (2010) suggests that the deviant behaviour from some of the Travelling community, who felt aggrieved by the surveys outcome, was an inevitably reaction (p.295).

The behaviour of some Travellers has resulted in the community being portrayed negatively by the media and fostered a relationship based on distrust and contempt with the settled community. Nevertheless it is important to remember that there are good and bad in all walks of life.

bell hooks examines the issue of discrimination by the dominant culture on grounds of race and ethnicity, through the lens of white privilege. While the focus of hooks argument is different the essence is relevant to the problematic relationship that exists between the settled and Traveller community. By using hooks theoretical framework we can examine and explore how the state has colluded in the anti- Travellerism that is so prevalent in contemporary Irish society. Furthermore it will illustrate how education has been instrumental in reinforcing and maintaining the perceptions widely held regarding the Travelling community.

Gaps in The Literature

Hourigan and Campbell (2010, p.10), suggest, there has been a considerable amount of literature written about the Traveller community, yet, it has had very little effect on contemporary Irish education policy. There are two scholarly traditions in terms of this research. The first, a body of anthropological and historical literature, began to emerge around the 1970s and aims to describe the distinctive elements of Traveller culture. This branch of research is concerned with providing an accurate history of the Traveller culture, studies of the Traveller language and identifying family structure and gender roles that are distinctive elements of the Traveller tradition (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010, p.10).The second, is the wealth of literature which concentrates on the conflict that exists between the settled and the Traveller community. Despite this, Hourigan and Campbell (2010) would argue; there are still gaps in terms of scholarship on Traveller culture (p.10). They also believe that the way in which Traveller and settled communities tend to be presented as homogenous entities can be problematic.

3.2 A Question of Ethnicity

Ethnicity and the Traveller community was not something I gave much thought to until I began to work with members of the Traveller community. The Traveller community is Ireland's largest indigenous minority group but has so far failed to be recognised as an ethnic group. While there are a growing number who recognise Travellers as an ethnic minority (Ní Shúinéar, O'Connell, Mac Gréil) there are those who argue against labelling the community in this way. McLoughlin asserts that it is more productive to

recognise that Ireland has been ‘oppressively monolithic and that many minority groups have been denied full expression of their individuality (Mc Cann et al, 1994, p. xiv).

Recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic minority alters the way we understand Travellers, their culture and the policies that are implemented to resolve issues between them and the settled community. Travellers will still have to fight for their human rights however; they will be fighting from a different perspective. Recognition as an ethnic minority will help dispel the myth that Travellers are simply failed settled people who could not make it in modern society. Their culture will be recognised as distinct and valued in its own right. While the scope of this piece of research does not allow for a full and in-depth analyse of the ethnicity debate that surrounds Irish Travellers minority status, I do think it is important to outline my position on this contested issue.

Ethnicity Defined

Travellers have been afforded ethnic status in the UK and Northern Ireland. In contrast, the Irish State has conceded that Irish Travellers constitute an ethnic group in all but comprehensive legal protection (Quilligan, 2013). According to Ní Shúinéar there are a number of objective characteristics that can identify ethnicity. Biological self-perception, shared fundamental cultural values and cultural difference, social separation from other groups and hostility or antipathy between the group and members of other groups are some of the objective characteristics that can be evidenced within the Traveller community (Share, Tovey, Corcoran, 2007, p. 515). The subjective criteria are usually used by sociologists and anthropologists to understand ethnicity. This way of knowing locates ethnicity

- in the belief by members of a social group that they are culturally distinctive and different to outsiders
- in their willingness to find symbolic makers of difference and to emphasise their difference
- in their willingness to organise relationships with outsiders so that a kind of ‘group boundary’ is preserved and reproduced (Share, Tovey & Corcoran 2007, p. 515).

Again, these are characteristics that we can readily identify with the Traveller community.

Looking at the issue of ethnicity through each of the lenses outlined above, combined with the knowledge I have gained from working closely with members of the community, I would have to concur that the Travellers are an ethnic minority. Through weekly contact with members of the Traveller community (both learners and users of the centre) I have gained a better understanding of their customs values and traditions. I have seen how the women identify as Travellers by birth. The fact that some have never lived a nomadic lifestyle does not change the why they identify themselves or their cultural background. A close look at Irish society will illustrate the separation that exists between the Travellers and those of us who live a sedentary lifestyle. These women believe that they are culturally different to the settled community and while they are willing to mix with people from the settled community there are boundaries in place that are not crossed.

3.3 A Brief History of Travellers Position in Irish Society 1960 -2013

The Traveller community, formerly referred to as ‘tinkers’, have become synonymous with uncleanliness, vagrancy and petty crime to such an extent that they are thought to be unfit for Irish citizenship (Mac Laughlin, 1999, p. 129). This notion is further reinforced by the findings of Mac Gréil’s National Survey based on attitudes and opinions to pluralism and diversity. He found that 18.2% of those surveyed would deny citizenship to Travellers (2011, p.310).

The history and origins of Travellers are contested due to Traveller history having gone mostly undocumented. Quite a few accounts exist about the origins of Travellers. Some of the more prevailing are; Travellers are descendants of peasants forced onto the road during the famine of 1840, Travellers belong to a ‘culture of poverty’ and Travellers dropped out of the dominant culture.

What we do know is that until the 1960s Irish Travellers lived a nomadic lifestyle and moved relatively freely throughout the country. Tents, horse drawn barrel wagons and trailers drawn by cars or vans provided shelter. It was not unusual to see encampments along the roadside. Traditionally Irish Travellers were transient traders. They became a less familiar sight as the introduction of temporary halting sites were followed by the provision of permanent sites until finally the introduction of a policy of housing Travellers in urban areas became the norm. The publishing of The Report of the

Commission on Itinerancy in 1963 encouraged the view that itinerancy was linked to vagrancy and that Travellers were social drop outs who failed to conform to dominant ideology. The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy was produced without any Traveller representation, portrayed Travellers as a social and moral problem and was a cornerstone of Government policy in the years that followed. Travellers were settled in urban areas as a result of The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy and subsequent reports and Government policy.

The solution to the presence of itinerants in the country was to assimilate the Traveller community into the dominant culture. A brief look at the history of the Irish Travellers highlights a lack of understanding, tolerance and empathy for the Traveller community by those who produced Government Reports and policy from the 1960s through to the 1990s. Although there is greater understanding, tolerance and empathy towards diversity in contemporary Ireland there remains within Irish society a legacy of the past that impacts on the relationship between the Traveller community and the settled community.

To fully appreciate the experience of Travellers in the Irish education system it is essential that we look at the policies that surround their participation in Irish society along with those that frame their participation in education.

3.4 Integration verses Acknowledgement of Difference Debate

The Three Phases of Irish Policy in Relation to the Traveller Community

As already mentioned above, Irish policies concerning Irish Travellers can be separated into three very distinct phases. Each phase marked a specific approach taken by the State to integrate Travellers into the dominant culture. These phases have had a long lasting effect on how the Traveller community is viewed and treated within Irish society and also the experiences that many Travellers have had in the education system. Over the past two decades, as Ireland becomes ever more diverse, assimilation has been replaced with multiculturalism and interculturalism. In order for Ireland to fully endorse this notion we need to do more than accept the principles of equality of rights, values and abilities. It is vital that we develop and apply policies which promote interaction, collaboration and change among people with different cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities and religions (Lesovitch, 2005, p.7). By embracing the concept of interculturalism we

are accepting the notion that difference is a positive thing that can enrich society and we are acknowledging that racism needs to be confronted if we are to develop a more inclusive society (Lesovitch, 2005, p.7). Progress has been made in relation to people from different countries however strengthening ties between the settled and Traveller community has a long way to go.

The multiculturalism verses interculturalism debate is layered and complex and would constitute a thesis in itself. Nevertheless, I will attempt to outline the shape this debate has taken in Ireland and how it impacts on ethnic minority groups with special attention given to the Traveller community. Three distinct phases exist in the history of Irish policy in relation to the Traveller community. These are:

1. Assimilation Phase 1963
2. Integration Phase 1980
3. Intercultural Phase 1990 (O'Connell, 1996, para.3).

These phases have shaped and informed Irish policy and the attitude of those who live a sedentary life towards the presence of Travellers in Irish society. The first report to formally express concern about the Traveller community in Ireland was published in 1963. At the official launch Charles Haughey's comment; 'There can be no final solution of the problem created by itinerants until they are absorbed into the general community', set the tone for how Ireland would 'deal' with Travellers (McVeigh, 2007, p.91). From the early 1960s until the 1980s an assimilationist approach was used to absorb members of the Traveller community into the dominant culture by providing them with sedentary accommodation. It wasn't until the 1980s that Traveller culture was recognised but even then it was only as a subculture of poverty (O'Connell, 1996, para 9).

The Beginning of Integration

Between 1980 and 1990 there was shift from assimilation to integration with the publication of the Report of the Travelling People Review Board. From the 1980s on there is a noticeable shift in the terminology and conceptual frameworks used to describe Travellers and the reports written seem to accept that Travellers have a distinct culture (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, p.92). The Report of the Travelling People Review

Board signified a markedly different conceptualisation of the issues (Norris & Winston, 2005, p.805). As Norris and Winston (2005) explain, policy was dictating a move away from the practise of absorbing Travellers into the dominant culture and the subsequent loss of Traveller identity (p.805). Integration was the way to go.

How Did Integration Differ From Assimilation?

But how did integration differ from assimilation? In practise it differed very little and failed to recognise Travellers as a separate ethnic group. This refusal to accept that Travellers have a distinct culture can be seen in the way policy was employed through the 1980s. Norris and Winton claim this can be seen clearly in the accommodation policies of the time. The following extract is an example of the contradictions that were inherent in policy at the time.

For instance, it recommended that local authorities should provide serviced halting sites for those who do not wish to live in houses. However, it emphasized that halting sites should be kept to a minimum level necessary to provide for Travellers who would find the transition to a house too radical.

(Norris & Winston, 2006, p.806)

While acknowledging the debate about Traveller culture the review body refrained from committing itself on the question of ethnicity. Accepting the idea that there were Travellers who wished to remain on the road they advised that respect and dignity was their right but at the same time stressed that those who choose this lifestyle could not expect to avail satisfactorily of services such as education or health and welfare (O'Connell, 1996, para.14). Recommending that;

Newly - wed couples who have to occupy caravans following their marriage should be considered extra sympathetically for housing to lessen the risks of regressing to a Travelling way of life and the consequential negating of permanent accommodation and education.

(O'Connell, 1996, para.14)

Although there was a shift in the understanding and the discourse that surrounded these issues the practises involved were still very much entrenched in the assimilationist camp.

Multiculturalism, Intergration and Interculturalism

Integration is seen as a move towards an multicultural society but can only happen if the structures in place act out of respect and understanding for the minority culture. In the case of the Traveller community there was still an element of assimilation surrounding the policy concerning Travellers and their culture was seen as an expression of choice rather than collective rights (Norris & Winston, 2006, p.803). Whilst agreeing that multiculturalism is an important progression from assimilation Watt (2005) cautions against using it as a method of encouraging minorities to adapt rather than emphasising the equal responsibility of all parties (p. 154).

The publication of The Task Force Report in 1995 marks a new departure for the Traveller community within Irish policy. Traveller culture was clearly recognised and there were calls for anti-discrimination legislation. The accommodation recommendations in The Task force Report differs vastly from previous reports. No longer were those making policy identifying what was appropriate accommodation for Travellers (Norris & Winston, 2006. p. 807). Instead the culture and nomadic traditions of the community were taken into account. The task force recommended that both sedentary accommodation and accommodation suited to a transient lifestyle would be needed depending on individual Travellers preference. However there are those who insist that while the Task Force was much stronger on the positive aspects of Traveller culture than previous reports it still carried a minority opinion from some who contributed to it who continued to insist that Travellers who choose this lifestyle are consigning themselves and their children to a life time of disadvantage (McVeigh, 2008, 94).

Where Are We Now in Relation to Integration verses Interculturalism

Throughout each of these stages Travellers have been seen as a problem that needs solving. Moving from an assimilationist approach to one of integration seems to have

been little more than a name change. While there have been some advances the Traveller community is still the most marginalised in Ireland. Travellers represent a small minority of the Irish population at just over 22,300 (Mac Gréil, 2011, p.295). The findings from Mac Greil's (2001) survey on pluralism and diversity in Ireland are a clear indication that the policies and programmes aimed at integrating the Traveller community into Irish society have not achieved their goal (p.297). Inclusive, intercultural societies happen by design, the conditions for interaction, equality of opportunity, understanding and respect calls for a more considered approach. An approach that involves members of the minority communities it hopes to assist.

McVeigh (2008) suggests the gains of recent decades are being systematically eroded (p.99). He suggests the increase in reformism with very little actual reform illustrates his point (McVeigh, 2008, p. 99). If this is the case, now more than ever before it is vital that the Traveller community are part of policy planning and that those of us who live a sedentary lifestyle begin to question our assumptions and perceptions of the Traveller community. The minority community in union with the majority community and the State need to work together to accommodate diversity and the creation of an intercultural society where all are valued. Education has a vital part to play and lessons need to be learned from the past. It is time we let go of the narrow view that the educational problems of the Traveller community '...are similar in many respects to those of backward children ...' (O'Connell, 1996, para.7). This way of thinking is offensive and causes more harm than good. If we fail to address these modes of thinking all the policy recommendations in the world will not advance the position of the Traveller community in Irish society. bell hooks (2013) stresses;

Despite gains in civil rights a huge majority of white Americans and some non-black people of colour continue to believe that black people are less intelligent, full of rage and more likely to express anger with violence than all other groups.

(p.15)

In contemporary Ireland we need only substitute the words Irish for American and Traveller for black people and this statement would be true. It is time we began to challenge our own assumptions and perceptions about Travellers. Most of which are made without ever having had any real contact with the community in question.

3.5 Education, Policy and the Traveller Culture

Context

As mentioned already, the Traveller community is an indigenous minority. According to Pavee Point, an organisation that promotes Travellers rights, Travellers have a shared culture, tradition, language history and a nomadic way of life that marks them as a distinct group (Pavee Point www.pavee.point.ie). Although they have been part of the Irish landscape for hundreds of years it was only in 2002 that a question relating to membership of the Irish Traveller community was included in the census. The information gathered makes the stark reality of Traveller's lived experience all the more concrete. The clearest message coming from the census of 2002, and all successive census, is that low life expectancy of Travellers is one of the strongest indicators of social deprivation and the presence of unnecessary health hazards (Mac Gréil, 2011, p.297). As Mac Gréil (2011) points out, these health hazards are normally caused by socio-economic conditions and material quality of life such as living accommodation, health care and education (20011, p.297). Socio-economic conditions and material quality of life are intrinsically interlinked when examining educational outcomes. Therefore as already suggested by O'Connell it is crucial when considering matters relating to education within the Traveller community that we look at the wider context and framework of policy and provision.

Historically, Irish educational policy and practise has tended to overlook the Traveller community. Early reports and policy documents where written from the assumption that Irish Travellers were deviant, destitute drop-outs from the dominant culture. Policies focused on their rehabilitation through an 'assimilationist model of integration' (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p.93). Education policies were framed in the same vain and aimed to eradicate what was perceived to be Traveller deviancy and to alleviate destitution. Focusing on hygiene facilities reinforced and maintained the assumption that Travellers were vagrant and unclean pushing them to the fringes of Irish society. Segregated schools and separate curricula managed to heighten the perceived differences that existed between Travellers and settled people.

Measures of Progression

Hourigan and Campbell (2010) have highlighted that progression rates in relation to schooling and education are different for the Traveller and settled communities. Lodge and Lynch (2004) draw attention to the practise of Travellers transferring out of education into paid training at the age of fifteen (p.96). They suggest that this practise is a factor in lowering Traveller participation and progression to second level school (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p.96). The merits of these training centres in comparison to mainstream school were rarely evaluated. A value for Money Report in 2008 found progression rates to work or further education were low (McCarthy, 2009, p.5). It can be argued that reports like this fail to recognise the high level of prejudice that Travellers experience in contemporary Irish Society and the cultural differences in attitudes relating to work and continuing education that exist between Travellers and those who live a more sedentary life (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010, 11).

Since the introduction of The White Paper on Adult Education there has been a concerted effort to encourage a move towards a society where lifelong learning is the norm. Learning within the Traveller community takes a different shape to the learning that is valued and encouraged by the dominant discourse surrounding educational policy in Ireland. This difference needs to be explored and addressed if change is to happen. To understand the value that is placed on education within the Traveller community, it is vital that members of that community are consulted and their views documented.

Education Policy

How have these different phases impacted on the educational attainment of Irish Travellers? Pavee Point state that in 2003 alone there was €46 million spent on Traveller education (Pavee Point, n.d.). Despite this injection of money attendance numbers for progression to post primary education remained low. According to Pavee Point, the national retention rate to Junior cert is 94.3% dropping to 51% for the Traveller community. As the leaving certificate is seen as a minimum requirement to enter the labour market the low retention rate for Travellers is a cause for concern. A review of how this funding is spent is long overdue. The following sections will explore education policy from the 1960s to the present day.

Education policy has adapted and developed dramatically since official recognition of Travellers in Irish policy provision in the 1960s. Early policy reports were directed by an assimilationist model of integration and expected the Traveller community to conform to fit into the dominant culture. Lodge and Lynch (2004) explain that education policy focused on reforming Travellers deviancy and alleviating destitution (p.93). The conditions for segregated schools were created by early policy reports as they reinforced and maintained the notion that Travellers were social drop outs who had somehow failed to conform to the dominant culture. The Education Facilities for the Children of Itinerants states that the educational problems evidenced within the Traveller community were due to the fact that the ‘...itinerant children are similar in many respects to those of backward children aggravated by social disabilities and a vagrant way of life’ (DES, 1970, p.4). These low expectations combined with segregated special schools resulted in children from the Traveller community starting their educational journey at an unfair disadvantage. Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, this disadvantage impacts negatively on all future learning possibilities.

As bell hooks (1990) suggests;

Marginalized groups may lack the inclination to engage in certain ways of thinking and writing because we learn early that such work may not be recognized or valued. Many of us experiment only to find that such work receives absolutely no attention. Or we are told by gatekeepers usually white, often men, that it will be better for us to write and think in a more conventional way.

(p.128)

By placing the Traveller community in special segregated schools their educational attainment was always going to be unequal to their settled peers.

From the early 1980s there was a noticeable change in the language used in education policy in relation to Travellers. Although their culture was regarded as a subculture of poverty there was recognition that the community had the right to retain its own identity and traditions (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, p.93). It is evident from the Report of the Travelling People Review Body (1983) that education for Travellers was seen as compensatory. Preschool for Traveller children combined with special classes and schools were believed to be the solution (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p. 93). While the

discourse surrounding education policy had evolved somewhat, the experience for Travellers was still one of assimilationist integration.

It was the establishment of The Task Force on Travellers in 1995 that signified a step forward for Travellers in relation to education. Finally they were recognised as partners in policy making with respect to their own community (Lodge & Lynch, 2004, p.93). The Report of Task Force on The Travelling Community (1995) highlighted the failures of the education system hitherto fore to take account of their culture and way of life (DES, 1995). Accurate records of attendance and attainment rates for Travellers are few. One of the reasons given for this is that there has been no agreement on an ethnic identifier in relation to this group (Lodge & Lynch, 20084 p.94). The lack of nationwide figures concerning Travellers academic achievement and the extent of their interaction with the settled community is a cause for concern according to Hourigan and Campbell (2010, p. 26). History has illustrated that simply changing the language and terminology of policy that impacts on Travellers is not enough. We need to acknowledge that the experience that members of the Traveller community have had within the Irish education system thus far has coloured their perception of the system and how it works.

We have seen how scarce policy concerning the Traveller community was prior to 1963. We have looked at how policy writers and those in power saw the Traveller community as a problem and the methods put into action in an attempt to reform them. In the early years the focus was on primary education and in later years this widened to take progression and retention at secondary level into account. Over the past decade or so there has been a move towards a knowledge economy. Education is no longer seen as a fixed term pursuit. Lifelong continuous learning is seen as essential in terms of both personal fulfilment and the needs of the economy. So how has policy addressed this issue in relation to the Traveller community.

Learning for Life: The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) acknowledges that Travellers may have distinct needs and cultural patterns which 'must be respected' (DES, p.13). There is recognition that equality proofing within education begins with a commitment to minorities and Travellers are specifically named (DES, 2000, p.48). The White Paper (2000) states; there are times when a uniform nationally organised education system cannot cater to the needs of particular sub-groups, citing the Traveller community as an example (DES, p49). Despite the recommendations put forward in recent education policy there is still an exceptionally high dropout rate among

Travellers. There are sufficient gaps between Government policy and the reality on the ground (Pavee Point, 2005, p.14). The Traveller Inclusion in New National Agreement (2005), published by Pavee Point, suggests that there is a scarceness of data on Traveller needs (p. 12). While they welcome the move by the Central Statistics Office to include the Traveller question on the 2002 census they suggest a broader data collection strategy that would provide on-going data concerning Travellers needs might lead to more informed policy decisions (Pavee Point, 2005, p.12).

Integrated primary education has been supported in government policy since the mid-1990s. Yet, until June of 2012 adult Travellers who participated in education and training course were segregated from the settled community. While it is too early to say what impact the closure of the Senior Traveller Training Centres has had on Travellers participation on education and training courses I can say from direct experience that demand for places on the courses delivered at the community centre at the heart of this research has increased threefold. Although mainstream provision exists within the wider community there are a number of Travellers who for whatever reason prefer to remain within their own community when participating in education programmes. This indicates the rhetoric of policy documents does not easily transfer to practise within the education sector.

A quick look through the Digest of Research Supported or Conducted by National Bodies highlights the distinct lack of research carried out on education or education related issues within the Traveller community between 2000 and 2011. Four pieces of research relating directly to Travellers have been conducted. Two of these focused on education in the early years, one on dropout rates among young girls and the fourth explored the nomadic lifestyle associated with the Traveller culture and aimed to identify the perspectives and aspirations of the Travellers (DES, n.d.). The lack of available research and data relating to Travellers participating in adult education and training courses is a serious oversight by the Department of Education and Science. To gain an understanding of the experiences of the Traveller community in the education system thus far it is essential that research is conducted. By gaining an understanding of the experiences this community has had we can start to work together to put a system in place that addresses their needs.

3.6 White Privilege in an Irish Context

Exploring the experience of Traveller women in adult and community education is a complex task. There are many issues both societal and personal to the women themselves that impact on the experience. Issues that constantly reappear are discrimination and ethnicity. hooks offers an insightful way of understanding these dynamics that can be applied to this research. She addresses the issue of providing people with the necessary skills so that they can have ‘access to lives of optimal wellbeing’ (hooks, 2013, p. 28). Explaining that depriving a people of these skills consigns them to the ‘very bottom of our nation’s economic totem pole’ (hooks, 2013, p. 28). While it is clear that hooks is writing from a feminist African American stance I believe that her theory can be used to understand the experiences of the Traveller community in Ireland. The rhetoric of policy documents in the 1960s othered the Traveller way of life. Although the discourse contained in Irish policy adapted and changed over time the practises that accompanied the early policy recommendations were not as easy to change.

Mc Veigh (2008) claims that anti Traveller discourse has evolved very little with the passing of time (p.92). He suggests that it is a classic example of ‘racist anti-nomadism’ (Mc Veigh, 2008, p.92). McVeigh (2008) posits that Travellers were constructed as a problem that needed to be solved and these notions were repeated and reworked at all levels of Irish society until it became difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. bell hooks suggests that this negative stereotyping has a detrimental effect on those being marked as different. She argues that white supremacist thinking informs the consciousness of everyone (bell hooks 2013, p.11). It is my understanding that the white supremacist thinking that bell hooks speaks of has informed relations between the Traveller and settled community for many decades in Ireland. For hooks, white supremacy is much more harmful than race and racism because of the covert way that it causes harm. The attitudes and assumptions embedded in early Irish policy concerning the Traveller community highlight the importance and value given to the dominant ideology. Despite the progress made from the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy (1963) to present day policy there is still a marked absence of Traveller voices within research and policy.

Unfortunately, being labelled marginalised in contemporary Irish society automatically places you outside what is considered to be the dominant norm. It would be more constructive to recognise that those who do not conform to the dominant cultures

ideology are not ‘outside of’ the dominant culture they are simply ‘inside of’ their own culture (Freire, 2000, pg.19).

For both hooks and Freire literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It is about acquiring a critical consciousness. According to them education is a way for socially and politically marginalised groups to take control of their own learning and in turn effect social change. There is a need for education that is meaningful and relevant to learners lived experience if we are to see a fully inclusive adult and community education sector in contemporary Irish society (hooks, 2003, p.19). There is a clash between the needs and wants of the learners and the needs and wants of the education system when it comes to the programmes of education for Traveller participants. In order to encourage meaningful participation it is necessary to engage members of the Traveller community in the earlier decision making to ensure the programmes offered are relevant, culturally aware and mindful of Traveller culture and customs.

3.7 Conclusion

As illustrated above, diversity and difference are not new concepts in contemporary Irish society. This chapter highlights the fact that although Irish society has become more diverse prejudice and discrimination of Ireland’s largest indigenous minority group is still at large. Whilst there has been research carried out with the Traveller community by historical and anthropological scholars the topic of adult participation in education has not been explored in any depth. The question of ethnicity is an important one that has not been adequately addressed in Ireland. Recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group would change the way we understand Travellers, their culture and the policies that are implemented to aid the resolution of differences between the Traveller community and the settled community. Gaining ethnic recognition would lay to rest the myth that Travellers are failed settled people who could not conform to the dominant cultures ways.

The Traveller community has been problematised since the 1960s when the state began its programme of assimilation. Although the approach and discourse surrounding the issue has changed and adapted with time a reading of the literature reveals that the underlying assumptions and perceptions regarding the Traveller community remain the same.

hooks notion of patriarchal white supremacist thought can be used to explore the concept of discrimination by the dominant culture because of race or ethnicity. Although the context is different the essence of the argument is similar. Rather than problematising the minority group hooks asks us to take a step back and begin by examining the privileges and advantages that are inherent with belonging to the dominant culture.

A reading of the literature will show that the approaches used thus far have had very little if any effect on enhancing the lived experience of the Traveller community and the relationship between the Traveller community and settled society. It is time to try a new approach and using hooks theory as a starting point may be a positive step towards a truly intercultural Ireland.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings from this study. These findings are based on the data gathered through semi-structured interviews. I am conscious that the findings are shaped by the literature I reviewed, my epistemological and ontological stance and by my teaching philosophy. This chapter will explore and develop the key themes that emerged from the research data.

Key Themes

There was a vast amount of data generated over the course of this research project. The key themes seemed to occur naturally. These themes underpinned each interview and constantly overlapped and combined to shape the women's view and experience of the social world. While discussed in isolation for clarity of understanding within the findings chapter they do not present in isolation in the lived experience of the women who participated in this study. They are intricately woven together and inform, reinforce and maintain the traditions and customs that are part of the Traveller community's culture.

These themes are;

- Travellers are not a homogenous group
- Education
- Gender Roles
- Discrimination

Irish Travellers, a homogenous entity?

The findings from this study highlight the differences that exist within the Traveller community and point to the limiting nature of generalisations. They suggested that Anti-

Traveller sentiments serve to weaken relations between members of the Traveller community and the settled community.

The data collected indicates the belief that all Irish Travellers are the same is somewhat misleading. This is a notion that the women involved in this research dispelled through their interviews. During the interviews and throughout the spontaneous conversation, the women expressed the view that attitudes and behaviours differ from family to family and from county to county. In addition to this the findings illustrate that while the women share a common culture, customs and traditions their lived experience is unique and personal to them.

Education

The education findings are the ones that perplexed me most. In my capacity as a tutor I had often heard the learners express boredom and disinterest in the modules that are offered. I had anticipated gaining an insight into the needs and wants of the women in relation to the courses which in turn would inform the provision and delivery of courses in the future.

The findings relating to this theme range from early educational experiences to experiences in adult and community education. Although this research is focused on the experiences of Traveller women in adult and community education it is important to bear in mind that our lived experiences shape and inform our perceptions and beliefs about our social world. Early educational experiences can have an impact on educational progress in later life.

Gender Roles

Gender roles and family obligations are just two aspects of Traveller culture that clash with the states model of educational progression in contemporary Irish society. The data collected revealed a community that is highly gendered and patriarchal. The lack of freedom that is afforded to girls as they reach the early teen years is evident through many of the interviews. Traveller girls are socialised into assuming caring roles from an early age in preparation for marriage and the responsibilities that come with starting families of their own.

Discrimination

It was revealed through the interviews and spontaneous conversations that while the women experienced discrimination and hostility they were quicker to reveal situations that illustrated positive relations between themselves and members of the settled community. This suggests that the women are counteracting the negative attitudes and assumptions that exist relating to Traveller behaviour.

4.2 Irish Travellers, a Homogenous Entity?

The following findings from the interviews should help to illustrate the notion that assuming the Traveller community to be homogenous group is limiting and counterproductive.

Looking to the future

Gaining qualifications was an important element of participation in the courses on offer for the women who were working at the moment;

Interviewee B tells how; ‘..after doing it [working] for ten years it would be nice to have the piece of paper.’

And;

I’ve all the experience and everything like that, I could get all this experience but I’ve never properly got A levels, GCSE levels. O levels whatever you want to call them to back me up.

One of the women who spoke during the spontaneous conversation pointed out; ‘If I was to teach, be a doctor whatever, I wouldn’t be accepted by Travellers or by the settled community. Where would I go?’

These findings suggest that while Travellers have ambitions in relation to education and employment that they have to navigate a quagmire of cultural and social expectations in order to reach them. The process could result in them not only being marginalised by society in general but by their own families and community.

Behaviours

During a spontaneous conversation the women in my class were discussing male attitudes and behaviours.

‘.....it’s just the men from X that don’t push buggies, the men in Y and Z push buggies, there’s nothing wrong with it....’

This highlights that attitudes and behaviours are not universal within the Traveller community rather beliefs and behaviours are regional.

In relation to her time spent doing voluntary work interviewee C commented; ‘it’s work experience I wanted to experience, which I did and I loved it.’

Again, this contradicts the notion that Travellers don’t want to work.

Traditions

There is an assumption that members of the Traveller community leave school and marry at young age. The following quotes show that while the women interviewed did leave school at an earlier age than the majority of their settled peers there is no rule of thumb as to what age is the appropriate age to leave. The findings indicate that this decision rests solely with the individual family.

When talking about what age she was when she left school, Interviewee A stated; ‘... I was sixteen’. This woman would have left school in the 1970s a time when it was virtually unheard of for Irish Travellers to stay in school beyond primary school.

This woman also stated ‘then I got married when I was 19.’ which again questions the assumption that all Traveller girls get married in their middle teen years.

Interviewee B was educated in England. She revealed that she ‘had done more than most Travellers did’ in relation to her time spent in school. She was ‘at least going on fifteen’ when she left school. She said; ‘Well I know most Travellers that didn’t pass primary school and they left, and then other Travellers that are like eleven or twelve would be out, do you know?’

She went on to demonstrate that her mother held different views;

But obviously enough my mother didn't think like that, an education is an education do you know that type of thing. So she didn't mind and left it down to me to decide if I wanted to leave school or not.

Interviewee B also disclosed the fact that she was not kept home from school to cook and clean; 'not necessarily sit at home do the housework but you don't have to go to school now.'

Interviewee C left school at twelve. She revealed she left school because 'it was just my mother, it was time to have more children and I had to mind the other kids.'

Interviewee D left school at fifteen.

The findings revealed that the women left school when it suited the needs of their individual families. While it is clear that they left school earlier than their settled peers it has been shown there is no set age and that the reasons for leaving vary from family to family.

Assumptions

There is a general assumption that Travellers in general do not work and it is rare to find a Traveller women working outside the home. The findings of this research indicate that it is less rare than imagined. Out of four Traveller women interviewed three have been gainfully employed. One woman had also worked in a voluntary capacity.

Interviewee B; 'I do training courses for my job.'

Interviewee C;

I did like volunteer work, I started of the first year every weekend, every Saturday and then a year later when we had to do this volunteer work again I obviously said were I wanted to go and mmm, went back to that place and I was meant to be there actually mmm, a couple of days a week but I actually did the five days a week for three months. I loved it.

She also worked for a year in her late teens before marrying; 'I got work when I was seventeen.'

These extracts illustrate that the women's experience are varied and unique. If the experiences of four women can vary this much it stands to reason that the experiences and realities of an entire community cannot be described or treated as homogenous.

4.3 Education

Education is the cornerstone of this research project. The question posed by this study was; What is Traveller women's experience of adult and community education? However, adult education does not happen in a vacuum and so the data gathered also covers the women's early educational experiences. The women's thoughts and opinion's regarding their educational experiences will be introduced in this section.

Early Years

Three of the women were educated in England. The fourth women interviewed was educated in Ireland but gave very little detail about her early education during the interview.

Interviewee A tells of happy schools days in England. She doesn't recall being made to feel different because of her cultural background and goes on to explain;

I didn't know I was a Traveller, when I came back I didn't know I was a Travellereh, I grew up in with country people [settled people], houses, and in with country people and that was it.

She told of her shock on arriving in Ireland and realising that her family didn't live in houses: 'When I came back my grandparents were in caravans and my aunts and uncles. And I kinda just went(raises eyes and shrugs shoulders).....couldn't be me.'

Conversely when asked if she enjoyed school she asked; 'back here?' and continued by saying 'noooo.... Couldn't settle at it.' She didn't elaborate as to why.

The findings show that the women who were educated in England remember their early education in a favourable light.

Interviewee B felt that 'England was a lot better' in comparison to her sons experience in Ireland. She went on to say;

Actually, just overall with the education I thought it was great, you know, we'd be in different groups, we'd always have four colours, blue, red, green and yellow and whatever colour you were that was you for every year so you did everything together and all that, so.

During the spontaneous conversation one of the women told how she remembered being excluded and treated differently in school; 'I remember kids who wouldn't hold your hand because you were dirty.'

The women discussed how in England you were just Irish rather than an Irish Traveller when you went to school. One woman told how on her return to Ireland she was initially placed in a classroom with her peers only to be moved to a different class a short time later. Considering it strange to be in a class with children of all ages she questioned the reason for the move. She was told she needed extra learning support. After being assessed it was found that she was more than capable to be placed back with her peers.

Many of the women in this group said that while they had a positive experience of their school days they did; 'know Travellers who have had very bad experiences.'

These findings illustrate the differences in experience that exist between those who were educated in Ireland and England.

Experiences in relation to Adult education and Training Provision

As mentioned already the findings relating to the women's experience and opinions on the programmes delivered at the centre were not what I had expected. The women stated that they enjoyed the modules and found them interesting and helpful.

Opinions on the modules taught at the centre were mostly positive;

Interviewee A; 'very good,more understanding and it helped with the kids a lot, me own kids.'

Interviewee C felt that she had learned a lot more than she had learned in school; '.....learning new things....to be actually understanding them now.'

Interviewee D found them, 'good, I enjoyed them and I learned a lot more out of them.'

Although interviewee B thought the courses were fine she did point out that they didn't challenge her;

So, there's no challenge there, and I'm not saying that I'm real good or anything like that but....pretty much the stuff that we are getting to do in the courses I already know how to do or if you tell me at least once I can go from there.

Findings in relation to adult and community education held outside the community centre varied. One of the women had attended a course that was delivered once a week over a six week period. She felt that it was a challenge to keep up with the tutor and that some of the jargon used was over her head. 'If it had been two or three days a week well then yeah, you still have it in front of you.'

'....she'd go to use words that I wouldn't understand.'

She went on to tell how this experience had resulted in her not taking a place on a course the following year; 'I was meant to start something last, not this January gone but the January before that and I said I wasn't going back.'

Experience of adult education and training within the Senior Traveller Training centres was also discussed. When talking about her experience in the STTC Interviewee C said she, 'was there for four years, couldn't believe I was there for four years like mm it was great I learnt a lot.' She went on to say that she received certificates and awards during her time there, 'yeah two certificates, mmm I got two of them before I left.'

The women who were present during the spontaneous conversation had a slightly different experience of the STTC. They explained how they were made to feel different. There were some members of staff that had to be referred to by their surnames. They also spoke of one lady who 'didn't like Travellers.'

Another woman explained that even though she couldn't 'read or write my folders passed every year'. She went on to say that she had told those in charge on a number of occasions that the work in folders 'was not hers.'

The findings clearly indicate that the women interviewed are happy with the programmes that are available at the centre. However, I would strongly argue that there is a need for the women to be involved in early discussions and decision making in relation to the programmes made available to them. Through dialogue meaningful programmes of learning relevant to the women's lived experience can be created. While

it is important that the women's experience and opinions speak for themselves I would caution that there may be a certain amount of submission and acquiescence at play.

Inappropriate Curriculum

There are a noticeable number of young women who left school at a very early stage seeking places on the programmes delivered at the community centre. The findings indicate that these girls are leaving school before sitting state exams. A clash of values is highlighted through the findings.

Interviewee A explained; 'you know how you have education, sex education as you call it, in schools? We don't allow our kids to go on that course.'

Interviewee B also commented that Traveller families weren't too keen for their children, especially the girls being taught sex education in school; 'the sex education and all that as well, they weren't too keen on them listening to these things or watching videos or anything like that.'

These findings show that Traveller parents are not happy with elements of the secondary school curriculum and so girls are leaving school earlier than necessary.

As interviewee C states when talking about the importance of adult and community education;

...it's for them yeah [the young women who leave school early], because they're leaving school at a certain age and then they're learning here then. It's not an all-day thing for them it's actually a few hoursthey go home then.

The Need for Adult and Community Education

The findings reveal a divergence in the women's expressed experience and the perception that the community centre workers believe their experience to be. This may be due to the fact that three of the women interviewed were schooled in England and so have experienced a different type of early years education to their Irish counterparts. Only one interviewee was educated solely in Ireland.

When asked about the need for adult and community education the community centre worker stated;

Interviewee E

The simple answer to that is mm all of the adult Travellers that we would work with would have had a bad experience in school simply because they were Travellers. A lot of them would not have done the full curriculum when they were in school....

This interviewee went on to say; ‘ehh now this ...wasn’t Government policy, this wasn’t Department of Education policy this was local schools.’

The findings also show that the community centre staff member felt that literacy skills were not as strong as they could be. ‘...mmm once you get up into the older Travellers at all, the literacy levels go right down.’

It was thought that some of the issues with literacy within the community could be associated with dyslexia that went undetected during early education. ‘I think part of the factor is dyslexia.’

These extracts show a tendency to group all Travellers together regarding educational ability. The community centre was established in the late 1990s, these findings indicate that it is time a study was carried out assessing the Travellers immediate needs in relation to adult and community education provision. It may be the case that positive progression has been made and the needs and wants of the community have evolved with the passing of time.

Interviewee F explained that initially there was nothing for the women,

...the feeling was initially that the women, when we started working here, didn’t have anything and really it was to get them into adult education to help build on their self-esteem, to build on their knowledge also to give them a break from the home.

These findings indicate a need for on-site adult and community education.

The Social Aspect of Adult and Community Education Provision

All those interviewed noted the importance of the social aspect of the education programmes provided by the community centre.

Interviewee E acknowledged the fact that Traveller women are the primary carers and are ‘burdened with a lot of stuff.’

This supports the view that interviewee F had revealed regarding the break from the home being an important element of the provision provided.

Interviewee C recognised the social element when she explained; ‘you know it’s all girls there like the girls you don’t see out of work hours if you know what I mean’.

During the spontaneous conversation one of the women commented to another, ‘it’s not about the money, it’s meeting the women getting a break from the house.’

These findings illustrate that there is both an educational and a social aspect to the programmes provided by the centre.

These findings show there is a value placed on the programmes being delivered at the community centre. However, it is not clear whether the accreditation or the social aspect of the classes is more important.

The findings indicate the importance of reputation for young Traveller woman. This is connected to their eligibility to marry. The study has shown that there is a clash between what Traveller parents and the state deems acceptable subjects resulting in parents removing their daughters from schools in order to keep her reputation intact. This in turn places greater demand on adult and community education programmes.

4.4 Gender Roles

This section will look at the findings that emerged in relation to gender and gender roles. Progression and status within the Traveller community is linked with marriage and family.

Status

Interviewee F explained that status was linked to marriage by describing an incident where a young unmarried woman was not taken seriously because she was not married. Describing a situation where a young Traveller woman arrived to tutor a class of older women the following scene emerged; the first question asked was if she was married and when she answered that she wasn't the women in the class were not prepared to listen to her. According to Interviewee F, the attitude was; 'who'd listen to her, I might as well go home and listen to my daughter'. The interviewee continued to explain that within the community;

..there would be people who would carry more weight simply because of their status.
....you sort of figure that if someone gets to, you know, like they're a grandmother then they must know how to deal with things, they know.

This shows that age and marital status carry weight within the community and that there is a value put on the lived experience.

Freedom

The interviews revealed that boys and young men are afforded more freedom than girls.

Explaining why girls leave school earlier than the boys, Interviewee C states;

Because mm how do you say, when they're fifteen, sixteen they're fit for marriage and so because there's adult boys, there's lads in the school so you have to, before someone says well look it you're going out with him, so that gives her a bad name. So when you're thirteen, fourteen you're still a kid, if you know what I mean. So you leave at that age before you get to fifteen, sixteen, developed whatever and the boys watch you. That's how it is.

Interviewee A also pointed to the fact that girls have to leave school at a certain age; '...but Traveller girls has to leave , you see, when the Traveller girls comes to a certain age they don't want to let their Traveller girls into community schools.'

She continued;

...you see a lot of parents does....with Traveller girls well ahh they're ...fourteen, fifteen years of age time now to be having them at home cos they're going to school and they don't know who they might met.

While boys have the freedom to come and go as they please; 'the boys can go to pubs, they can go into town walking, they can go to the shops', the girls movement is much more controlled; 'if girls is going they have to wait for their mothers to go or maybe sisters or you know the family.' (Interviewee A)

This indicates that the women are constantly chaperoned. The mothers by their young daughters and the young daughters by married members of the family.

The comments made by interviewee A; 'the rules is different with girls' and '...boys would be different, you wouldn't pass much heed on boys.' Illustrates the differences in attitudes towards parenting boys and girls.

Social Construction

It is not unusual in the Traveller community for young people to take on adult responsibilities at a young age. As highlighted by the findings, Traveller girls take on a caring role within their families while they are still at school.

Interviewee A explained that when her younger sister got married she left school because her mother; 'needed help at home.'

She; '...had to leave school at sixteen to be the help, to be the house worker.'

She also noted that; 'Travellers were different, when they go home [from school] they get the dinner, take off their uniform, they wash up'.

Interviewee A explains how chores have to be done before anything else. 'You had to do work when you went home [from school], maybe in the evening time if they get half an hour, they had to do the school work.'

Interviewee C left school at an early age to help with her mother look after the smaller children; 'I had to mind the other kids.'

These findings highlight how socialisation into a gender role is part of everyday life. Girls help at home from a young age and are in turn ready to take on the responsibility of their own home when the time comes.

4.5 Discrimination

The findings concerning discrimination reveal that while the women experience hostility and discrimination regularly they are quicker to reveal situations that depict positive relations between themselves and members of the settled community. The following quotes will illustrate the discrimination and prejudice that is part of these women's lived experience.

Acceptance

One lady described her shock at discovering her family lived in caravans when she moved to Ireland from England at thirteen years of age;

There was nobody saying oh she's a tinker, cos I didn't know what a tinker was til years after that but then when years after then when, then I started going places then I got to know our own ways.

Interviewee B told how she attended a weekly training course as part of her job. She explained how;

I'd go once a week for a training course and there was other people there and do you know what, I did kinda feel left out at one stage but once I got chatting to people in there do ya know, even one woman gave me a lift home a couple of times.

Interviewee C told how she had worked in a voluntary and paid capacity. Whilst chatting about her experiences she explained how she fitted in with her settled colleagues. She revealed how they made her feel welcome. '...but even though I was a Traveller and all that the women actually made me feel welcome not like you're a Traveller girl why are you here for?'

These findings show that these women are counteracting the dominant belief about members of the Traveller community. They are putting forward a positive image of themselves within the settled community.

Assumptions

Before getting a place on the education programmes provided by the community centre the women usually attend an interview. According to interviewee A, these interviews establish why participants want to take part on the programmes and establish if they can read and write. She felt the interview process was a way of weeding out trouble makers. She explained; ‘the quiet one could play you along but the wild one could be the goodest one out of the whole lot of us’. She continues to say that the experience can be very hurtful; ‘Kinda hurtin, cos you’re putting down one more than the other and we’re all the same at the end of the day’.

The women involved in the spontaneous conversation spoke of their time in the STTC. They experienced discrimination from several of the teachers. They recalled one woman who ‘didn’t like Travellers,’ and another who would not answer them unless they called her by her full title.

While these findings may seem minor we need to understand that the constant discrimination that these women live with is corrosive to their self-esteem and self-worth.

Colonisation of the Mind by the Dominant Culture

One women disclosed that she had been told by her own mother that; ‘I was a Traveller and not equal to settled children.’ This highlights the damage that socialisation into the dominant culture can have on minorities if we as a society are not mindful of the uninformed assumptions and perceptions that we constantly reinforce and maintain.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the key findings that emerged through the use of semi-structured interviews and a spontaneous conversation between a group of learners during a break in class. The fact that Irish Travellers are usually portrayed as a homogenous group was questioned in light of the data gathered. The data compiled illustrated that while there were many similarities between the women interviewed there are significant differences between them. This may be a result of a number of the women being raised outside the region they are currently resident in.

Progression within education diverges significantly for the Traveller community and the settled community during the teenage years and this in turn impacts on the delivery of adult and community education programmes to young women from the Traveller community. Adult and community education is seen as an extension of compulsory education. As it is delivered in a community setting it is deemed more appropriate for young women on the cusp of adulthood. This notion was supported by the findings.

Gender and gender construction are an important aspect of Traveller culture and tradition. Traveller girls are socialised into assuming caring roles from an early age. Marriage is important in relation to entering adulthood. Participation on education programmes can be reliant on the male authority figure in a family. It is also important to bear in mind that these women must negotiate the many responsibilities that go hand in hand with being a young wife and mother as well as the pressures involved with taking on the challenge of adult learning.

Travellers experience prejudice and discrimination on a daily basis. There is no reason to believe that they do not experience it within the education system. The evidence from this study shows that the Traveller community are willing to see the positive within relationships they forge with members of the settled community. The findings indicate evidence of ambition however; they also highlight the task of negotiating two social spheres could result in not fully belonging to either.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

It is a life of appetite ungoverned by intellect. It is a life which marauds over private property and disregards public laws. It is a life of money without production, land without cost, damage without compensation, assault without arrest, theft without prosecution, and murder without remorse. It is a life worse than the life of beasts, for beasts at least are guided by wholesome instinct. Traveller life is without the ennobling intellect of man or the steadying instinct of animals. This tinker 'culture' is without achievement, discipline, reason or intellectual ambition.

(Synon, 1996)

Statements like the one above assume that all Travellers are the same when in reality this is not the case. The findings from this study highlight the differences that exist within the Traveller community and point to the limiting nature of such generalisations. Anti-Traveller sentiments like the one above only serve to weaken the turbulent relations between members of the Traveller community and the settled community.

This chapter will analyse the findings of the research through an exploration of the interviews conducted in light of the thesis question and the literature reviewed. It was hoped that by examining the experiences that Traveller women have of adult and community education a more informed approach, shaped by an appreciation of Traveller culture and tradition, could be adopted when creating and delivering educational courses within this area.

Key Themes

As outlined in chapter four, the themes that emerged during this research were;

- Travellers are not a homogenous group
- Education
- Gender Roles

- Discrimination

As already mentioned these themes do not exist in isolation, they are interdependent.

5.2 Irish Travellers, a Homogenous Entity?

It emerged quite early that the notion that all Irish Travellers represent a homogenous group is somewhat misleading. Hourigan and Campbell (2010) point to the fact that within existing research the Traveller community and the settled community are depicted as homogenous entities which they suggest is problematic (p.10).

Behaviours

During their research Hourigan and Campbell (2010) found significant regional differences between Traveller communities (p.10). Data collected during the semi-structured interviews also support the notion that Travellers are not a purely homogenous entity. While analysing the data collected it became clear that although all the Traveller women who took part in this research shared a culture, customs and traditions their lived experience is unique.

Looking to the Future

There is a perception in Ireland that Travellers do not contribute fully to society. Since the 1960s they have been portrayed as a problem that needs to be solved. This message has been conveyed through social policy, provision and practise. Sentiments like those of Mary Synon (1996) mentioned above, only serve to reinforce the negative aspects associated with the Traveller culture and undermines relations between members of the Traveller Community and the settled community.

We are lead to believe that Travellers have become accustomed to a life of dependency since their movement was curtailed with the introduction of policy recommending the housing of Travellers in urban areas. Although the numbers of Travellers in gainful employment are extremely low in comparison to the general population, Mac Gréil (2011), asserts that 25.1% of Travellers eligible for work are in employment (p.304).

Recognising that the figures are appalling when compared with those of the National population Mac Gréil (2011) suggests that these figures are representative of the new demands on education for gainful employment combined with the widespread discrimination and anti-Traveller prejudice in Irish society (p.305).

The findings indicated that the women were willing to work and were hopeful of gaining the qualifications that would enable them to progress within their chosen sector. They also revealed that there was a willingness to work in a voluntary capacity to gain work experience. Educational opportunities are needed that will encourage these ambitions.

These findings do not echo the sentiments conveyed in Mary Synon's article however they do support the view that Travellers, like all social groups, are not homogenous. Hourigan and Campbell (2009) have mentioned, the regional and demographic differences that exist within the Traveller community have not received enough attention (p.10). The differences that existed between the women's experiences of education, work and family painted a clear picture of a community that was extremely close knit but where privacy and the right to make your own choices based on what was best for you remained an important factor.

5.3 Education

The Early Years

As already mentioned the education findings are the ones that perplexed me most. However, they help create an understanding of both the early experience and the experience these women have had as adult learners within the Irish education system. Understanding the experience of early education is vital as adult education does not happen in a vacuum. The White Paper (2000) recommends that adult education be underpinned by three core principles (p.12). The first is a systematic approach which acknowledges the influence that early years education has on an individual's motivation and ability to access further education (DES, 2000, p.13). The second is equality and addresses issues of access, participation and outcomes for those availing of adult education programmes. It recommends employing pro-active strategies to counteract the barriers that arise from socio- economic status, gender, ethnicity and disability, emphasising the fact that a key priority to promoting an inclusive society is targeting

those most at risk (DES, 2000, p.13). The third principle is interculturalism. The White Paper (2000), discusses the need for educational policy and practise to recognise that it is serving a diverse population rather than a uniform one (p.13).

I have found that there are inconsistencies between what the White Paper recommends and what is practised on the ground. If the influence of early years education was acknowledged in relation to these learners experience there would be a more structured framework in place to help them make the transition into adult and further education. Contact hours would be increased and basic literacy skills would underpin all programmes. The emphasis would be on learning fundamental literacy skills which could be built on rather than concentrating on accreditation and progression up the FETAC ladder regardless of ability. Support mechanisms are necessary to enable those who are capable to make the transition into mainstream educational provision.

Social Construction and Education

While this research is focused on the experiences of Traveller women in adult and community education it is important to bear in mind that our lived experiences shape and inform our perceptions and beliefs about our social world. hooks (2010) talks about the colonisation of the mind, she claims that education has been used as a tool of colonisation within the United States (p.25). If we look at this in the Irish context we must examine the provision and practice of education in Ireland since the 1960s. The Teach Report(2010) by Hourigan and Campbell describe the provision and practise of education as a tool of enculturation (p.18). They highlight the fact that almost all Western democracy have engaged in constructing national identities in order to support the operation of the nation state and national economies (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010, p.18). It is fair to say that the construction of a national identity and culture results in the suppression of minority cultures. In light of Irish policy affecting the Traveller community since 1960 there is clearly a concerted effort to assimilate or exclude those who do not conform to the dominant culture norm.

The absence of Traveller culture from education curricula speaks volumes. Education that is simply concerned with the transferring of knowledge that bears no relation to how an individual lives is simply reinforcing the dominant cultures ideology (hooks,

1994, p.3-4). To encourage Traveller participation in meaningful learning dialogue and consultation with the learners is necessary at the development stage of programmes.

Submission and Acquiescence Regarding Experiences of Adult Education

I would argue that Irish policy and in particular policy relating to education has played a significant part in the colonization of the mind. The failure to include any elements of Traveller history, culture and tradition has resulted in the state privileging the dominant cultural group. As hooks asserts (2010), we are constantly bombarded with colonizing messages that not only shape our consciousness and actions but also rewards submission and acquiescence (p.26). As mentioned above, I was perplexed by the findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews in relation to how the women viewed the modules delivered at the centre.

All the women stated that they enjoyed the modules and found them interesting and helpful. This response was in direct contrast to the opinions that had been expressed during conversations within the class prior to the research process. All of the women who took part in the semi- structured interviews had participated on the programmes offered through the community centre on a number of occasions. Three of the women participated on the training and education courses that were delivered by the local STTC with two of the women attending for over four years. Two of the women had on occasion participated in courses delivered by independent providers.

The findings clearly indicate that the women interviewed are happy with the programmes that are available at the centre. It is important to take the findings at face value however, I would argue that there may be more to them than meets the eye. The relationship between members of staff and the service users at the community centre for the most part is relaxed and happy. Everyone is on first name terms. Some of the young women participating on the education programmes went to the after school that the centre runs. I would suggest that the women may have been stating what they thought I wanted to hear. I would also argue that they have built up a relationship of trust with the members of staff that run the centre over a long period of time. Many of the learners have known the staff members for decades. I, on the other hand am still a new comer. Whilst I had gone to great lengths to explain that this piece of research was independent

of the centre and the local VEC there may still have been some concern about reasons for this study and the availability of courses in the future.

In *Teaching to Transgress* hooks (1994) looks at white female perceptions of black women and vice versa. She argues that much of the scholarship produced by white women on the relationships between black women domestics and white female employers has focused on presenting what can be seen as positive aspects of the relationship (hooks, 1994, p.98-99). According to hooks (1994), this fails to recognise the many negative interactions that took place in these worker employee relationships(p.99) It also fails to recognise the mistrust and hostility that existed between the two groups (hooks, 1994, p.99). hooks suggests that the fact black female domestic workers interviewed by white women gave the impression that their working relationships had positive dimensions, was the result of saying what they felt was the polite and correct version of reality (p.99). While every effort was made to capture the true experiences and opinions that the women had in relation to adult and community education it is impossible to eliminate all elements that can skew results.

The Need for Adult and Community Education: Qualifications verses socialising

All those interviewed expressed the opinion that there was a need for on-site adult and community education. The findings indicate that when assessing the needs of the women in the early days it was felt that providing on-site courses would improve literacy and build confidence and self-esteem. The findings show how education was seen as a way of getting the women away from the home for a break. The learners who participated in the semi- structured interviews all agreed that there was a need for community centred adult education. The findings indicate that the women believe the provision of adult and community education is essential as many young women leave mainstream education in their early teens. They feel that it is important that these young girls have a chance to participate in education on a part time basis in an environment that is considered appropriate by the standards imposed on them by the tradition and culture they belong to.

The courses at the centre are funded by BTEI and there is an expectation that those participating on them are readying themselves for the jobs market or to continue with further education. Programmes aimed at making learners work ready are maintaining

and reinforcing the idea that gaining qualifications results in gainful employment. In relation to Traveller education this naiveté reveals a failure to recognise how culture and Tradition impacts on the lifestyle and life choices of members of the Traveller community. As Freire states;

...merely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them. (p. 17)

There is also a failure to acknowledge that seeking employment as a Traveller in Ireland is no easy feat. Irish Travellers are doubly disadvantaged when it comes to seeking employment because very few hold educational qualifications. In addition Mac Gréil (2011) highlights only 41% of Irish people would be unwilling to employ a Traveller (p.325).

Adult and community education is viewed as second chance education. However, for a generation of Travellers educated under the policies of assimilation and integration adult and community education is often their first point of contact with post-secondary, or for some post primary education. To ensure that Travellers have a positive experience in adult and community education it is vital that the legacies of past education policy and provision are not carried forward. Before attempting to make a group of learners work ready time should be spent assessing their needs. As Lodge and Lynch (2004), have highlighted, to benefit from most adult and further education literacy skills are essential (p.97). Ensuring that all adult learners are adequately equipped for the programme they are participating in is an essential part of providing education that will result in change.

5.4 Gender Roles

Status

Nomadism, gender roles and family obligations are just some aspects of Traveller culture that clash with the states model of progression. This section will examine how the construction of gender roles within the Traveller community conflicts with the states model of progression (Hourigan & Campbell, 2009, p.39). The teenage years are important within the settled community because it is during these years that the

foundation is laid for progression through taking state exams. These years are no less important within the Traveller community. It is during this time that young people prepare for marriage which marks their progression into adulthood.

Freedom

The findings revealed that the boys have more freedom than the girls supporting Hourigan and Campbell's (2009) assertion that there are constraints on Traveller girl's freedom and behaviours before marriage (p.39). Although female members of the Traveller community tend to leave school between the ages of fourteen to sixteen it seems to be common practise for the boys to remain until they reach the age of sixteen. The interviews revealed distinct differences between the freedoms allowed to both genders. It is important to note that male values and beliefs regarding education are important when considering educational development for the community. Without their consent the women cannot avail of the courses on offer. Dialogue with all parties is needed to ensure the successful implementation of any future policy plans.

Social Construction

It is not unusual within the Traveller community for young people to take on adult responsibilities at an early age. As highlighted during the interviews, many Traveller girls take on a caring role within their families while they are still in school. Gender is inextricably linked to all aspects of Traveller culture and tradition and lifestyle. As illustrated in Hourigan and Campbell's report (2009), the construction of gender in the Traveller community emphasises the notion that the man of the house is the authority figure (p.40).

5.5 Discrimination

Since the early 1960s there have been various policies, recommendations and strategies to bring about change in education and society in general for Irish Travellers. However, they are still not recognised as an ethnic minority in their own country. In addition to this, Travellers experience discrimination and prejudice on a daily basis. This study

found that although the women experienced hostility and discrimination they were quicker to reveal situations that illustrated positive relations between themselves and members of the settled community.

Acceptance

hooks would argue that this reflects the women have internalised the dominant cultures perception and beliefs regarding the Traveller community and are using these experiences to reinforce the idea that they are just like everyone else regardless of their Travellers culture. For hooks the dominant culture has chipped away at the confidence that Travellers should have regarding their history and heritage. Irish policy and education practise has managed to erase all positive aspects of Traveller culture. Continually emphasising the problematic nature of the Traveller community, results in generations of Traveller families feeling shame about their origins which in turn leads to low self-esteem. This low self-esteem has the potential to prevent full and meaningful engagement in education programmes.

Colonisation by the Dominant Cultures Way of Thinking

hooks suggests, people of colour are socialised into white-supremacist thinking and behaviour just like their white counter parts. Using this theory to explore the relationship between dominant Irish culture and Traveller culture illustrates how Travellers have been socialised into the dominant cultures way of thinking and behaving (hooks, 2003, p.57). hooks maintains that in order for there to be a chance of equality for all, white supremacist thinking and behaviour must to be addressed. In the Irish context this would mean interrogating the privilege that goes hand in hand with belonging to the dominant culture. According to hooks we are socialised from birth to believe that the dominant culture is positive while those who don't conform are deviant in some way. If we reflect on the discourse used in Irish policy that affected the Traveller community since the 1960s we can begin to see how the dominant culture portrayed the Traveller community as the other. Furthermore, we can see that this has had a negative impact on the educational attainments and advancements of those belonging to the Traveller community.

Assumptions

While conducting this research I was faced with the realisation that as a member of the dominant culture I have been socially constructed to take many things regarding the society we live in for granted. hooks suggestion that white supremacist ways of knowing, thinking and behaving are instrumental in maintaining and reinforcing the segregation that still exists within the minds of Americans regarding African-Americans resonated with me. During an interview, I posed the question; ‘somebody from the Travelling community teaching with a normal person?’ As the word normal tripped from my lips I was instantly aware of exactly what hooks was speaking of. She claims, ‘White supremacist thinking informs the consciousness of everyone irrespective of colour (hooks, 2013, p.9).’ I would argue that dominant sedentary thinking has informed, shaped and maintained the thinking and behaviour of Irish society since the 1960s.

McVeigh (2008) maintains that the constructed notion of the Traveller is important as it provides the other that can be contrasted to both the colonial and the post-colonial Irish respectability (p.92). He points to the use of anti-Travellerism throughout local and national media, in local councils and the Dáil and in pubs and households across Ireland (McVeigh, 2008, pg92). This echoes hooks argument. It is time that these issues were challenged so that education is seen as something that empowers rather than represses minority and marginalised groups.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the key findings that emerged throughout this research. The fact that Irish Travellers are usually portrayed as a homogenous group was questioned in light of the data gathered. The data compiled illustrates the similarities between the women interviewed as well as the significant differences between them. Suggesting that this may be a result of a number of the women being raised outside the region they are currently resident in supporting Hourigan and Campbell’s (2009) finding that there are significant regional differences between Traveller communities (p.10). The question of acquiescence was explored in relation to relationships forged with the members of staff who work at the community centre and how this may have resulted in data that may not be representative of the women’s experience.

The findings highlight the significant differences in progression during the teenage years for the Traveller community and the settled community and the impact this has on the delivery of adult and community education programmes to young women from the Traveller community. Adult and community education is seen as an extension of compulsory education rather than continuous lifelong learning. The findings support the notion that an education in a community setting is considered more appropriate for young women preparing for marriage and the responsibilities that adulthood brings.

Gender and gender construction were found to be important aspects of Traveller culture and tradition. The social construction of Traveller children begins early with young girls being socialised into assuming caring roles during their formative years. It was shown that school work takes second place to doing chores in the home. Marriage is a progression to adulthood and recognition that you are ready to accept the responsibility of parenthood and housekeeping (Hourigan & Campbell, 2009, p.40). Participation on education programmes can be reliant on the male authority figure in a family.

Travellers experience prejudice and discrimination on many levels daily. Name calling, refusal of entrance into pubs (Hourigan & Campbell, 2009, p.9) combined with the general anti-Travellerism that is evident in all aspects of Irish society. By comparing the relationship between Irish Travellers and settled people to that of Americans and African-Americans I used hooks theory of white supremacist thinking and behaviour to examine and explore dominant Irish cultures assumptions and beliefs regarding the Traveller community. Looking at the situation through this lens illustrates how Irish policy has played a significant part in constructing the Traveller community as the other in Irish society.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the insights gained during the investigation of the experiences of Traveller women in adult and community education. It discusses these in relation to the research question and the literature reviewed. These are shaped and informed by my epistemological and ontological leanings insights are specific to this group of learners and would not have been uncovered if this research had not been carried out. Therefore, it can be argued that this research has contributed to the existing knowledge in this area.

The limitations of this study are presented in this section along with ideas and recommendations for further study arising from this thesis.

6.2 Limitations

Acquiesce

As mentioned in chapter two there were a number of limiting factors that affected the research process. The fact that I was both tutor and researcher may have influenced the learner's willingness to participate. Equally it may have resulted in the experiences being shared by the participants being censored due to acquiesce.

Setting

There were advantages and disadvantages related to conducting the interviews in the community centre. As already mentioned some Traveller women do not experience the level of freedom that their settled counterparts enjoy. As a result it was thought the community centre provided a familiar and safe setting for the participants and I to meet. However, it is possible that the setting combined with my role as tutor could have influenced the extent to which the women shared their experiences.

hooks addresses this problem by suggesting that research on minority communities should be conducted by a member of the community (hooks, 1994, p.104). It is my opinion that this research, which gives a voice to the Traveller community's lived experience in relation to education, is much needed. In the absence of researchers from the Traveller community, the alternative is that those who carry out research on the community are respectful and mindful of traditions and cultures that are part of the Traveller lifestyle. The use of reflexive research methods can ensure that the research process is conducted with rigour.

Time and Experience

Time management in relation to interviewing was difficult and resulted in fewer interviews being conducted than I had originally anticipated. Contacting a Traveller activist was not as easy a task as I had assumed. These are things that will improve through experience.

Gender Specific

It is important to note that not only was this study gender specific it relates to a particular community of Travellers and as such it may not reflect the experiences and opinions of the Traveller population in general. There is a need for research relating to the lived experience of male Travellers; however it was beyond the range and scope of this study to attempt such an undertaking.

6.3 Where do the Findings From This Research Support or Depart From Existing Knowledge?

Homogeneity

It has been shown that assuming the Traveller community are a homogenous group leads to policy and practise that has served to further marginalise and stigmatise the community as a whole. The findings illustrate the difference in the experiences the women had in England compared with those they had in Ireland suggesting, it is time for the question of ethnicity to be seriously considered. Hourigan

and Campbell (2010) have suggested in the past that it is misleading to refer to the community as a homogenous entity yet there has been little recent research to support this claim.

Prejudice and Discrimination

While this study confirms that prejudice and discrimination are experienced by some of the women who participated in the research it also shows that others were more willing to share positive interactions between themselves and the settled community. By stressing that they had been accepted as part of the group they are demonstrating the dichotomy that exists between those living a sedentary lifestyle and those from the Traveller community. Which suggests, that the women are counteracting the negative attitudes and assumptions that exist relating to Traveller behaviour. An interrogation of the white privilege that is inherent in dominant Irish culture is needed if we are ever going to get to a place where accountability is accepted. It is only by accepting accountably for the legacies of past policy that we will move beyond blame and start to investigate where our responsibility lies (hooks, 2013, p.30). Since the closing of the STTC there has been an effort to transition adult learners from the Traveller community into integrated learning environments. This study would suggest that a transitioning phase may be needed to ensure that the learners are on a par with their settled counterparts.

White Privilege in the Irish Context

White privilege in the Irish context can be compared to hooks' theory on patriarchal white supremacist thinking. In an Irish context it would be referred to as the dominant cultures thinking. Enculturation takes place at many levels. Educational institutions have been used as a method of inculcating the dominant cultures ideology since the states independence (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010, p.18). While the Traveller community has not conformed as such the findings show that they have internalized the ideology that the settled lifestyle is positive and desirable whereas their lifestyle is regarded as deviant and less desirable. In an effort to address this issue a curriculum that values and respects Traveller culture is needed combined with courses that are relevant to the culture and traditions of the community.

6.5 Implications of this Study for Adult and Community Education and Practise

The research has shown that the experience of Traveller women in education is different from person to person. It is evident that educators and programme planners need to be congruent of Traveller culture, tradition and needs when it comes to development, provision and practise. It is essential that Traveller education should be from the ground up if we are to see positive changes in the future.

6.6 Recommendations for Further Study

This study has only scratched the surface of the complexities that exist surrounding the issue of female Traveller participation in education. A deeper and more detailed understanding could be gained given more time to build trust and respect with this community of Travellers.

To ensure Traveller participation in adult and community education is both real and meaningful there needs to be dialogue with members of the community, both male and female from the development stages. This will ensure that programmes are relevant to the particular wants and needs of the learners rather than the needs and wants of the dominant culture.

A review of the literature highlights the significant lack of data regarding Traveller participation in further education and training. It has been claimed that the distinct lack of information available, in relation to Traveller attendance and performance rates in compulsory education, is due to Traveller culture not being properly recognised as an actual ethnic group (Lodge and Lynch, 2004, p.94). This may account for the lack of data available for adult education and training courses. This suggests two things. Firstly, the issue of ethnicity needs to be discussed forthwith. Secondly, Traveller participation, attainment and progression rates in all areas of education are in need of further examination.

6.7 Conclusion

This thesis has explored and examined the experience of Traveller women in adult and community education. It has shown that these experiences are complex and layered. It has shown that the dominant culture has informed and shaped the settled communities assumptions and perceptions in relation to the Traveller community since the early 1960s. Although there has been a significant shift in the policy and provision surrounding education the underlying assumptions and perceptions still remain the same. This research has shown that educators and programme planners need to be congruent with Travellers wants and needs when developing programmes if Traveller participation at a meaningful level in adult and community education is to be encouraged.

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NUI MAYNOOTH
Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Informed consent form for the Med in Adult and community Education

This informed consent form is for the Department of Adult and Community Education who are inviting you to participate in research carried out by Karen Shiels.

Researcher:

Karen Shiels

Dept. of Adult and Community
Education

NUI Maynooth

Co. Kildare

Tel: (086) 2588021

Supervisor:

Michael Murray

Dept. of Adult and Community
Education

NUI Maynooth

Co. Kildare

Tel: (01) 708 3591

Interviews

This research will involve your participation on a one to one or focus group interview that will take about an hour. A follow up interview may be requested with your permission.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research to give an account of your experience within adult and community education in the Irish education system. I feel you can contribute to the understanding and knowledge in this area and that the findings may lead to improving services in the future.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You may choose to change your mind at any time. You may choose to stop participating at any time up until the final draft of the thesis is submitted.

Procedures

I am asking you to help me learn more about how understanding the values, beliefs and culture of the Travelling Community could improve the courses that are offered at your community centre. If you agree to take part in this research you will be asked to take part in one to one interviews and to join in a discussion facilitated by myself. The questions will be about you and your involvement in the education system. The main focus will be on your thoughts and opinions about your participation in the adult and community education in the community centre.

The Focus Group

There will be time at the start of the focus group for you to ask any questions that you may have about this research. I want everyone involved to feel as comfortable as possible with their decision to take part. Once everyone is fully informed and comfortable with the answers they have received we will begin a conversation about education and give each participant time to share their thoughts and opinions.

Confidentiality

Your safety and wellbeing is most important throughout this process. I will not be sharing any of the information that I gather with anyone outside of the research team. The information that I collect will be kept private and confidential.



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

I have been invited to participate in this piece of research. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research project and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Print Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____



I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant. The individual was given the opportunity to ask questions. I consent that the individual has given consent freely.

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have read out the information sheet to the potential participant. I have made sure, to the best of my ability that the participant understands fully that the following steps will be taken in order to safe guard their privacy:

- 1. All names will be kept private**
- 2. All transcripts will be kept private**
- 3. All research will be given back to me before final submission**

I confirm that the participant was given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. All questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly to the best of my knowledge. I confirm that the participant has not been coerced into giving consent. The consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the National University of Ireland Maynooth Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

Print Name of Person Taking the Consent: _____

Signature of Person Taking the Consent: _____

Date: _____