Examining the Familial Impact on Traveller Women's Aspirations in Education

PATRICIA MCGRATH, B. SC. APPLIED ECONOMICS, M.A. ECONOMICS

May 2026

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of Educational Research,

Lancaster University, U. K.

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not

been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

The word-length conforms to the permitted maximum

Abstract

Lack of achievement for Travellers in education in Ireland is a continuing issue for the government, educators and the Traveller community (Government of Ireland, 2023; Higher Education Authority, 2022; Irish Traveller Movement, n.d; Limerick Traveller Network, 2025; McGrath, 2023; Oide, 2023; Watson, Kenny and McGinnity, 2017). There has been focus in this literature on why the existing educational environment is not encouraging Travellers to succeed in education but less focus on those who have achieved, and how they have achieved in education. In this thesis I focus on Traveller women graduates who have succeeded in education, despite additional pressures due to caring responsibilities for multi-generation family members, gaps in education and financial constraints. I also focus on the role of families and how they acted to impact the Traveller women either positively or negatively on their educational journey. Studies show that Traveller parents are supportive of their children's education (Bhopal, 2004; Boyle, Flynn and Hanahan, 2020, p. 1401; Hegarty, 2013; Quinlan, 2021) but there is less attention on how this support manifests, and my investigation into how these Traveller women were supported/not supported by their families helps to further illuminate the different circumstances that Traveller women were in, as they pursued educational advancement.

I used qualitative methodology, with semi-structured interviews conducted with seven Traveller women graduates, two NGO workers in Traveller Organisations, two Higher Education Officers and five Higher Education Access Officers in order to produce a contextualised account of the Travellers environment and experiences, to help establish the determinants that acted to support and guide the Traveller women from university entry to degree completion. Through the theoretical lens of the capability theory, I identified conversion factors that acted either to support or discourage the educational engagement of the Traveller women, and there was recognition of how these women used their navigational agency to circumvent the various structural barriers that presented in education, and when a clash of expectations of their university and culture occurred. The findings show that when

supported, the Traveller women were able to navigate the unfamiliar environment of higher education, and although they had to immerse themselves in the settled university culture in order to do this, it allowed them to advance their understanding of other cultures. Findings also show that following a supportive and inclusive/relatively inclusive experience in higher education, post-graduation supports were inadequate to meet their needs when accessing employment. Lack of networking opportunities resulting in lack of social capital, led to reduced opportunities to engage with the labour market, and this is an area that can be focused on by universities and employers so that real opportunities are present for Traveller women graduates and all Traveller graduates in employment. These findings are important as increased numbers of Travellers remain longer in education, and wraparound services in terms of labour market connections are needed during university and post-graduation, so that Travellers are not left marginalised as graduates.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Traveller women graduates, the NGO workers and higher education staff who generously gave up their time to help me with this research.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr. Melis Cin for her advice, support, patience and encouragement during this process, and thank the various staff members in Part 1 of the programme.

Finally I thank my son Cian for his quiet support during this challenging journey.

Publications derived from work on the Doctoral Programme

McGrath, P. (2023) Examining Social Justice, Inclusion and the Experiences of Low-income students in Ireland, through the lens of Nancy Fraser. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 21 (2). Available at: https://jceps.com/archives/15509

McGrath, P. (2024) Examining the Impact of the Recognition of Irish Traveller Ethnic Minority Status on Education through the Lens of Nancy Fraser. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, (22) 1. Available at: https://jceps.com/archives/16632

Conference Presentation from work on the Doctoral Programme

Human Development and Capability Association Conference Presentation, September 2025, Bradford. Examining the Familial Impact on Traveller Women's Capabilities and Aspirations in Education.

Abbreviations

CA	Capability Approach
CAO	Central Applications Office
CE	Community Employment
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

List of Tables and Figures

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Aspiring to third level education is a noble dream, and in Ireland the tertiary educational attainment rate is 67% for women and 60% for men (OECD, 2024, p. 1). The starting point to social mobility appears to rest on the role of education alone, and the illusion presented is that if people desire to aspire to higher education it will happen, regardless of material and other inequalities. Currently 1% of Travellers in Ireland have a third-level qualification (Higher Education Authority, 2022, pp. 102-103) and for those that do enter higher education, results show that third level Traveller completion rates are 4.7% compared to 47.7% for the general population (Government of Ireland, 2023, p. 13). These statistics prompted my questioning of why the graduate figures for Travellers are so low, and with the high non-completion rate, what factors had led to some graduates completing higher education.

I had previously worked with adult Travellers, both men and women, in Senior Traveller Training Centres and the educational courses offered were at FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council, now dissolved) levels 3-4 inclusive which equated to Junior Certificate at level 3 and similar to Leaving Certificate Applied standard at Level 4 which is a gateway to Level 5 (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2021). When I heard about Traveller women graduates celebrating their awards (Levels 7 and 8) I began to think about how and what had led them to take this pathway, and what had encouraged them to completion, given that they would have had somewhat similar experiences in education to those who had not entered higher education, and to those who had left higher education before completion.

I am aware of the importance of family to Travellers and the impact and influence of family life. I am also cognisant of the role of Traveller women in the Traveller community, and how family life revolves around the women. This led to the formation of the following three research questions:

1. How did Traveller families and the extended Traveller community impact on the decision of Traveller women to enter higher education?

2. To what extent did school experiences influence the decision to go to third level education?

3. Which support structures in higher education proved to be the most beneficial in encouraging Traveller women students to complete courses, and which areas need improvement so that Traveller women are enabled to use their qualifications in the wider labour market?

1.2 Aims, Objectives and Purpose of the Study

The theoretical perspective used was the capability approach, and my ontological and epistemological approaches were that of relativist ontology and interpretivism. The research used a qualitative research design and narrative inquiry, which involved semi-structured interviews with participants. The aim of this research is to examine the factors that encouraged Traveller women to remain in education/return to education to complete university degrees, by using the capability approach to identify the factors necessary for degree completion. I am particularly interested in how Traveller women navigate a space which gives them an opportunity to study at higher level. One objective and purpose of the research is to include their perceptions of their experiences at home, and at school/university, and how these two worlds influence each other, and also take into consideration the policies that exist to protect minority and disadvantaged groups and how these are applied. Another objective is to identify the factors that led to the Traveller women's engagement with third level education, how this experience differs from school experience and how they used their agency to deal with the demands of both home life and university life.

1.3 Background and Context

One of the first reports on Traveller education is The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy (Department of Education and Science, 2006) which called for the integration of Travellers and non-Travellers in pre-schools, the end of segregated provision in primary schools, and the phasing out of segregated secondary schools for Travellers. At that point 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school compared to 13.3% nationally (Central Statistics Office, 2006a, p. 45). Following this report came a period of severe austerity cuts for Traveller education after the 2007 economic crisis, which led to the withdrawal of: resource teachers for Travellers, visiting teachers for Travellers, and additional teaching hours for Travellers at Post Primary (Irish Traveller Movement, 2011, p. 2), despite the 2011 Census showing that 91% of Travellers left school at age 16 or younger, compared to 25% of non-Travellers (Watson, Kenny and McGinnity, 2017, p. 29). The resource and visiting teachers were important advocates for Traveller students, and their familiarity with the students and their families ensured that they were supported appropriately throughout their school journey. Regardless of the poor statistics above, the emphasis was now on selecting students for support based on priority of need, which meant that Traveller students had to compete with the settled community for resources. The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, pp. 25-26) aimed for access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education, to equal those of the majority population. At this point outcomes showed that 13% of Traveller children completed second level education compared to 92% in the settled community, and of those who dropped out of second level education, 55% had left by the age of 15 with 1% going to third level education (ibid, p. 11). The most recent strategy, the Traveller education strategy 2024-2030 (Government of Ireland, 2023, p. 13) shows that there are 10% more Travellers taking Junior Certificate examinations, and the numbers at Leaving Certificate has increased to 31.4%, which compares to 91.7% of the total cohort. Also 312 Travellers have completed third level education compared to the previous figure stated of 167 (Higher Education Authority, 2022, pp. 102-103), which still

represents 1% of Travellers, and includes both men and women. The previous figure of 167 may be understated as some Travellers do not self-identify in higher education. They are now more likely to do so as since the 2017-2018 academic year, the 1916 bursary includes the Traveller community as a priority group, and self-identification is part of the process to access it under this heading (Government of Ireland, 2024).

The difficulty with these statistics is that comparison is always made with the settled majority who are mainly advantaged (Central Statistics Office, 2024a) compared to the Traveller community. Looking at Traveller progress without the comparison will help to show more clearly how educational outcomes are progressing for Travellers. Placing a large focus on each individual Traveller in education, from pre-school to higher education completion (for those who wish to take this route) and beyond, should ensure that Travellers are being given increased opportunities to succeed in education.

1.4 Importance of the Study

This study is significant as it aims to highlight how Traveller women managed to traverse the difficult journey into, and completion of higher education. Much of the focus in research on Traveller education is on the barriers and constraints that exist in education (Berry et al. 2025; Brennan et al, 2024; McDonnell, 2023; McGinley, 2024; Morgan, McDonagh and Acton, 2023) and there is little on how Travellers, and in this case how Traveller women manage to circumvent these issues, by using their agency. The aim is not to negate these barriers but to recognise how they can be overcome, as there is unlikely to be immediate full-scale change in education for Travellers across the different levels, despite the many policies and strategies that exist to encourage change. This area – how Traveller women manage to negotiate their way to degree completion with competing demands from universities and their own family/community, is underexplored in the literature as the focus in Traveller education tends to be on the settled communities handling of education. Previous literature also states that

Traveller parents support education (Bhopal, 2004, p. 52; Boyle, Flynn and Hanahan, 2020, p. 1401; Hegarty, 2013, p. 2; Quinlan, 2021) although there is little evidence of how they provide support, nor is there exploration of the impact when parents/extended family/community do not support education, and its impact on capabilities and development. This gap is also addressed in this thesis.

Education can lead to increased change as Travellers can be influenced by others from the Traveller community who have attended higher education, as there tends to be a positive ripple effect on other family members (Berry et al. 2025, p. 83) and educated Traveller women can act as role models for other Travellers of all ages (Irish Traveller Movement, 2016). Having educated women in their midst, with their understanding of policies and strategies and how to apply them, should lead to the progress that Travellers have been striving towards.

1.5 Overview of the Chapters

This thesis has seven chapters which are laid out as follows: Chapter 2 outlines the position of Irish Travelers vis-a-vis their whiteness and ethnic minority status, and their experiences in education and argues that despite policies to protect them, these are stated on paper and are not applied to protect this group. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework, drawing on the capability approach and how agency can be used by disadvantaged groups to overcome barriers with a focus on navigational agency (Claassen, 2018) which is linked to capability formation. Chapter 4 describes the research design, the ontological and epistemological underpinnings, the methodological and ethical procedures followed, and the participants. Chapter 5 is the first of the findings chapters which explores the relationships between the Traveller participants and their parents and community in relation to school and higher education, and how conversion factors can enable and thwart development, depending on how they present. Chapter 6 focuses on the higher education experience and beyond to the labour market, and examines how capabilities can emerge within supportive environments, and the need for universities to consider the point at which their responsibility to disadvantaged

students like Travellers, ends. Chapter 7 provides the conclusion which outlines the main contributions this study has made, and proposes five recommendations for policymakers and organisations/practitioners. There is reflection on my personal experiences and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and Education

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the position of Irish Travellers in relation to their ethnicity and whiteness, and examines these features to determine how they impact on the way Travellers are treated by the majority population. There is further focus on whiteness and whiteness studies to explore how marginalised minority white groups are affected by the dominant group. The link between ethnicity, class and education is investigated in relation to Travellers to establish if Traveller parents' lack of social and cultural capital impacts on their children's education. Traveller women's experiences are investigated to see if they are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts and how this occurs. This is followed by discussion of Traveller experiences in education from the 1960's to the present day, to determine any improvements in their experiences. The next sections explore the relationship between higher education and class, higher education and ethnic minority students, higher education and whiteness to check if inequalities are continuing or reducing in universities for minority groups including Travellers. There is focus on the literature on Travellers and higher education, followed by emphasis on the gap in the literature that this thesis will contribute to.

2.2 The Position of Irish Travellers vis a vis Whiteness and Ethnicity

In terms of population and whiteness, Ireland was a pre-dominantly white country with some change in migration from 1996, when it became a positive net migration country as more people entered as a result of the Celtic Tiger years (Central Statistics Office, 2023a). In 2006 statistics of ethnicity were recorded for the first time (Central Statistics Office, 2006b) which showed that 87.5% of the population were White Irish, .5% were white Irish Travellers, 7% other white, 4% Black/other Black/Asian/other Asian and 1% not stated. By 2022 the Irish only category

constituted 80% of the population, Irish Travellers remained under 1%, dual Irish were 3%, 13% were non-Irish and 3% not stated, indicating that Ireland continues to be a mainly white country (Central Statistics Office, 2023b) – see figure 1 below which shows the breakdown of the Irish population and the size of the Traveller community compared to the settled majority:

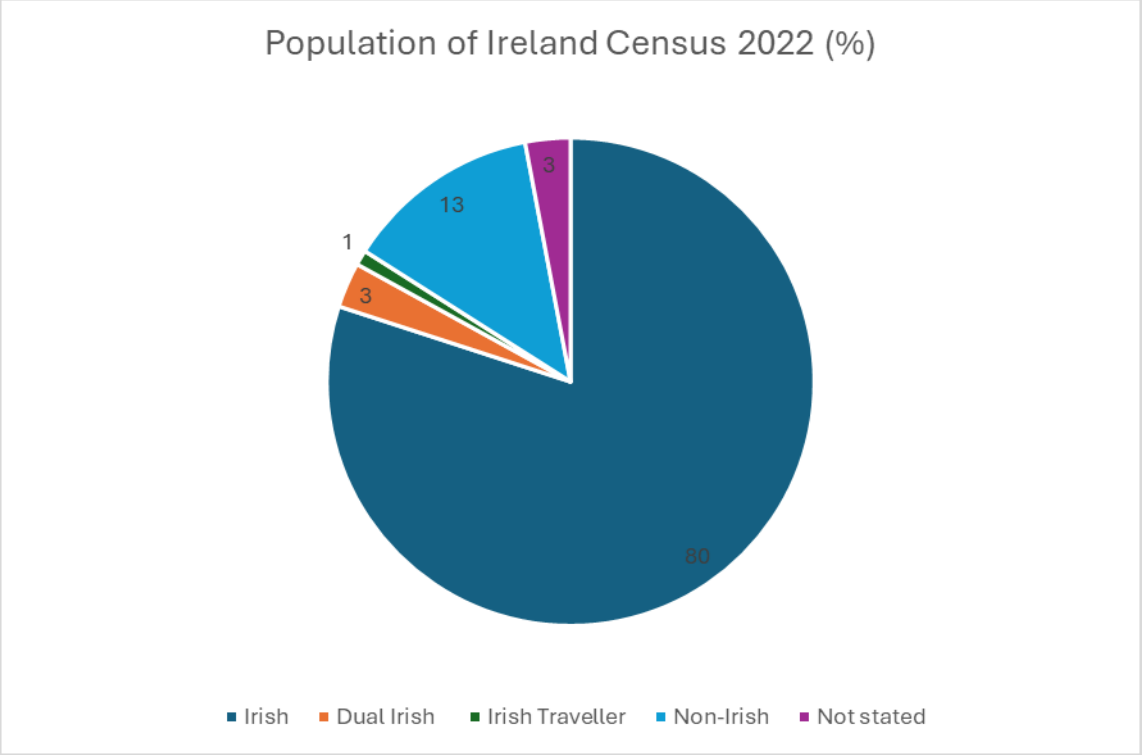


Figure 1 Central Statistics Office (2023b)

Regarding origin and ethnicity – Irish Travellers can be traced back to 12th century Ireland, and they had presence in the UK in the early 19th century (The Traveller Movement, 2025). In the UK Irish Travellers are categorised as an ethnic minority group under the Race Relations Act 1976 - now the Equality Act 2010, and the Human Rights Act 1998. Irish Traveller organisations in Ireland campaigned locally, nationally and internationally for more than thirty years in order to get recognition of Irish Travellers ethnic minority status, similar to that of Irish Travellers/Travellers in the UK (Pavee Point, 2015, p. 1), and on March 1st 2017 this was finally achieved (Department of the Taoiseach, 2025).

The current position of Irish Travellers is that they hold ethnicity status, they are white and they are Travellers. They make up less than 1% of the total population

and so remain a minority in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2022). A minority group is defined as:

> 'any group of people who, because of their physical, neurological, or cultural characteristics are singled out from others in society through differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination' (National Association of Counties, 2021).

Irish Travellers are a white minority and one would expect that they would benefit from whiteness like other groups such as Polish people, who receive a positive reception from Irish people which has led to successful economic integration in Ireland (Pszczółkowska and Lesińska, 2022, p. 137). A study of Roma and Travellers in six countries in Europe (FRA, 2020, p. 55) shows that Irish Traveller women had the third lowest employment rate in their home country out of the six countries - 17% of Traveller women were in employment compared to 69% of Irish settled women in 2018. Irish Traveller men had the lowest employment rate out of the group at 13%, which compares to 80% of Irish settled men in employment. These results indicate that whiteness has not given Travellers an advantage in the labour market.

2.3 Impact of Whiteness on the Traveller Community

Whiteness has been defined as a social construction (Garner, 2007, p. 51), that has created a racial hierarchy that has impacted all institutions. It is socially, economically and politically established and directs power and social relations through its system of white supremacy (Ansley, 1997, p. 592). Whiteness leads to economic, political, social and cultural advantages compared to non-whiteness (Owen, 2007, p. 206) and is the experience of privilege (Leek, 2014, p. 214). When the white way of operating is enforced, non-white people are othered and marginalised as a result. It shows inequality as natural and necessary (Yoon, 2012) and is invisible to those it benefits. It organises social systems, removes itself from

scrutiny and 'others' nonwhite groups (Shome, 2009). Whiteness is a collection of rules and norms, and has an assumption of superiority (Heckler, 2019, pp. 268-269).

Whiteness studies focus on how 'whiteness' operates as a system of power which impacts culture, history and institutions in a way that benefits white people (Garner, 2007, p. 27). White people, the dominant group, consider the dominated as having less worth and views them collectively. Whites are viewed as being non-racial individuals whilst the Others are raced member of a collective (Farough, 2004). White is the framing position – a dominant space where difference is measured (Dyer, 1997) with Whiteness being invisible to white people and very visible to Others (Garner, 2007, p. 54). The ability of white people to carry out their day-to-day activities without encumbrances leads them to believe that this is the case for everybody. Whiteness permits white privilege as well as impacting negatively on people of colour (McIntosh, 1988). Whiteness is defined as a construct to justify white superiority of blackness (Whitehead et al, 2021) and necessitates compliance to a predetermined set of eurocentric white norms. It is more civilised than an 'other' and resides in harmful stereotypes. Eliteness which is defined as economic rank and social status is part of Whiteness and assimilates to white norms (Gaztambide-Fernández and Angod, 2019, p. 737).

Whilst whiteness has advantages for many individuals and groups, not every person receives the privilege of being white. There are a number of groups in marginal positions in relation to dominant white cultures including Travellers, Gypsies and Roma, who have the least advantage of being white. Romany Gypsies in Britain are seen as an invisible minority due to the colour of their skin (white) and are often excluded from accounts of racial discrimination (Webb, 2019, p. 1). This research now turns to the position of Travellers in Ireland and how they are viewed in terms of whiteness. In Ireland, the Traveller community has had decades of community groups and activists from the settled and Traveller communities advocating on behalf of Travellers. Progress has been slow as it is acceptable and normalised by the settled community to be dismissive of Traveller views and their culture, and they are positioned as having an unacceptable shade of whiteness,

leading to exclusion (Devine, Kenny and MacNeela, 2004; Joyce, 2018, p. 140). They remain at the bottom of the whiteness hierarchy and are stigmatised as white 'others'. Stories about violence and theft which abound in the media are employed to justify their marginalisation, and they are known to the settled community as troublemakers (The Traveller Movement, 2020). Whilst whiteness is seen to afford cultural capital (Lareau and McNamara Horvat, 1999, p. 42) the reality is that it is a cultural process where some fail to meet ideals and are marginalised and stigmatised (Hughey, 2010, p. 1289). White 'others' do not enjoy the privilege that whiteness brings (Bhopal, 2011, p. 327). Traveller women are viewed as white women and their discrimination is not seen to be overly racist as they are white. They are forced to reject their preferred way of dressing so as not to attract attention when shopping in public, and so will dress 'white' to receive access to whiteness (Webb, 2019, p. 11) as fitting in with the majority will lead to reduced overt discrimination such as being followed by staff in shops or being refused entry (FRA, 2020, p. 29).

The majority's view of Irish Travellers is one of the most pervasive and enduring positions taken (Burke, 2009). Efforts by the Irish government to assimilate Travellers into settled communities have not been successful, and there have been systematic attacks on Traveller families which has led to their alienation, and to anti-social behaviour as a result (MacLaughlin, 1995, p. 51). Settled people consider Travellers to be one of the lowest groups in Irish society and they are placed in last position along with Roma people (O'Mahony, 2019, p. 105). This is described as 'apartheid' (McGréil, 2011) and Travellers are seen as inferior whites and a criminal subculture (Wolniak, 2019, p. 123).

Whilst whiteness indicates a non-raced identity, the visibility of whiteness rests on the location of the person viewing it (Garner, 2009, p. 790) and in the case of Travellers/Traveller women, their whiteness is masked by their identity as Travellers. Their manner of dress can identify them, or the way they speak, or their first or last names. Whiteness is produced as a norm meaning that non-white people are then seen as 'others' although it shows a social location and as a privilege it is situational (Pearce, 2003, p. 274). Travellers are identified by their

ethnicity first and the assumption is then made that they are a homogenous group, despite the community being multiple and diverse.

Whiteness becomes visible from the perspective of 'people of colour' – white people experience a number of mundane transactions as unproblematic, not realizing that this is the case because of their own whiteness, whilst others, bearing the burden of suspicion, encounter extra checks and questions (Mahoney, 1997). Irish settled people experience everyday life in an uncomplicated way due to their own whiteness, whilst others like Travellers have the burden of suspicion whenever they decide to shop for goods and services, or enter a hotel or restaurant. The Travellers whiteness is not recognised, nor is it an advantage to them, and this type of behaviour by some organisations is not seen as overly racist as Travellers are white (D'Arcy, 2014). When racism is explained as individual anti-Black discrimination, white people can continue their self-image (Lowery, Knowles and Unzueta, 2007, p. 1237) but when it is framed as white privilege, this implicates them and so their self-image is threatened. Settled people in Ireland tend not to see their settled privilege as it is normalised (Boyle, Flynn, and Hanafin, 2018, p. 40) and without measures to alert them to this, the status quo continues.

Travellers have to deal with racism as a matter for survival whilst the settled community can choose to engage with racism or not (Watson, 2015). Power differences are at the heart of this bias (Elias and Scotson, 1994) and power differentials permit the established group (the settled majority) to stigmatise the other group (Traveller community) as it is established in its position of power from which the minority group is excluded. This relationship continues as the majority views are supported by institutions in their attitudes towards Travellers - schools, hospitality businesses, police force, politicians, county councils (Council of Europe, 2025). A number of policies emphasise the requirement to recognise the needs of minority groups - the 1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities mentions the right to participate in cultural, social, religious, economic and public life at both national and regional levels in Articles 2.2 and 2.3 (United Nations, 1992). The impact of this declaration is non-existent, and the power inferiority of the

stigmatised group results in disidentification, and the superior group dismisses and ignores the other group (Powell, 2016, p. 141). Not only are Travellers seen as outsiders they are also seen as racialised outsiders, and they are viewed as not having an acceptable shade of whiteness (Bhopal, 2011, p. 327).

Regarding issues of race, white people are generally apathetic towards it (Forman and Lewis, 2015, p. 1394) and when it relates to settled people and Travellers, this issue continues. Individuals can view themselves as not racist, and by individualising racial issues rather than seeing them as systemic realities, this leads to white denial (Applebaum, 2010), which is similar to 'settled' denial. Listening to one side of the debate will not lead to meaningful progress (Cabrera, Franklin and Watson, 2017, p. 16) and without two sides of the debate (settled majority and Travellers) meeting to discuss issues, change is not forthcoming.

2.4 Ethnicity, Class, Education and the Traveller Community

One's ethnicity and social class can impact educational attainment, and the link between background and educational outcomes is the subject of many studies (Buchmann, 2002; Woessmann, 2004). Parents' cultural and social resources become forms of capital when interacting with the educational system (Lareau and McNamara Horvat, 1999, p. 42) and their cultural capital includes their extensive vocabularies and confidence to interact with teachers as equals, and their social capital includes the social networks with other parents. Social class provides cultural capital and many working-class parents including Traveller parents start off at a disadvantage when engaging with schools, as they may not have the appropriate levels of cultural capital to engage with schools successfully (Boyle, Flynn, and Hanafin, 2018, p. 26). Traveller parents are impacted by their own experiences of the school setting and may feel that their children will not be treated fairly in school, be exposed to similar experiences to their own school experiences, and may conflate rules with discriminating against their child. Educators desire family-school relationships which are based on trust and co-operation, and from the beginning this forges a difficult scenario for Traveller

parents. An aspiration deficit is assigned to those who fail to make the grade and it is especially aimed at working-class students in primary and secondary schools (Bowers-Brown, Ingram and Burke, 2019, p. 208). Educational environments do not work sufficiently well for the minority, and schools are generally set up to suit the majority and provide safety for them (Bhopal and Myers, 2008).

Minority groups (non-white and white) are subjected to racism and discrimination, including those from Eastern Europe (Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy, 2015, p. 729) as these migrants are received as not being 'quite white enough' to be culturally accepted (Moore, 2013). Positive models of whiteness are idealised in the notion of the 'white middle class' student (Bradbury, 2013) where a particular accent, language use and occupation are acceptable and others are not. Different white minorities in schools in England are positioned in relation to the way their ethnicity and class intersected (Tereshchenko, Bradbury and Archer, 2019, p. 60) and there are racialised distinctions, inter-class distinctions and intra-class distinctions (Garner, 2012). Whiteness privilege depends on the ethnic group and/or social class backgrounds that people belong to (Cole, 2009).

Some students use 'whiteness' as a means of capital to position themselves against others (Thatcher, 2016, p. 2) such as immigrant groups. Parents of immigrant groups use adaptive strategies to address the inequalities related to their racialised positions in England, and this extends to using English as the dominant language in their home to the detriment of their native language (Tereshchenko, Bradbury and Archer, 2019, p. 65). In this way they hide their immigrant status by acquiring the necessary standard of English and an English accent, and so use whiteness as a resource. Whilst there are some differences in how Eastern European students are seen in terms of acceptability with some being seen as more deserving than others, Roma students are 'pathologised' - they are at the bottom of the 'hierarchy of the other' (Youdell, 2006). They are seen as damaging to school's data whilst Polish students are seen to have a positive impact (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 169). The nearer students looked and behaved in relation to their white middle-class peers, the more acceptable they are seen to be. In

contrast Gypsy and Traveller students are seen as troublemakers (Bhopal, 2011, p. 322) and this type of racism is seen as acceptable due to their whiteness.

Ireland currently has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents in the EU (McGinnity et al. 2020, p. iii) and in schools in Ireland, black and ethnic minority students including Travellers are disproportionately represented in disadvantaged urban schools (Ledwith, 2017, p. 348). These disadvantaged or DEIS schools have a large proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Darmody, McGinnity and Kingston, 2016). DEIS refers to delivering equality of education in schools (Department of Youth, 2025). Minority ethnic children may use school to accumulate capital, and middle-class ethnic minority students can use academic achievement in order to consolidate their class position (Devine, 2009, p. 532). Teachers can impact the students' process of accumulating capital by their behaviour and progress, as 'good' ethnic minority students are assumed to come from a middle-class background (Devine, 2005, p. 64). This is more difficult for those from lower socio-economic groups such as Travellers who are more limited in the capital they can acquire. Research on post-primary students show that for migrant groups in schools in Ireland, in order to be accepted as Irish, white skin and English proficiency are the acceptable norms (Keane and Ni Dhuinn, 2023, p. 836). Traveller students are both white and have English as a main language, but being accepted as Irish does not confer privileges for them.

Classes comprise many nationalities in schools, and White/settled teachers may assume that if they treat all the students the same, that this is the best approach although this represents race-evasion and colourblind ideology (Picower, 2009, p. 198; Jupp, Berry and Lensmire, 2016, p. 1179). This niceness leads to white-saviourhood, and racial and social hierarchies are reinforced (Picower, 2009, p. 208). Moreover, it does not allow for acceptance of the fact that racial differences comprise societal differences (Nichols, 2010). The teachers in schools in Ireland (98-99%) are generally white, Irish and from the settled community (Heinz and Keane, 2018, p. 17; Keane and Heinz, 2016, p. 507) and a lack of diversity amongst staff can lead to minority capital not being recognised (Darmody and Smyth, 2018, p. 129). Bourdieu's (1984) focus on social class and whiteness that lends itself to

cultural capital, explains some of the phenomena of those perceived to be in a lower social class but does not explain the enduring, entrenched acceptable form of racism applied to Travellers in Ireland.

2.4.1 Everyday Experiences of Traveller Women

Whilst Travellers in Ireland experience racism, Irish Traveller women are further disadvantaged when compared to Traveller men as they experience sexism from within the Traveller community, and sexism, classism and racism from the settled majority (Pavee Point, 2024). Traveller women are negatively impacted by their gender and ethnicity which when combined, lead to a particular form of discrimination, and the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity leads to sexism and racism which impacts on the Traveller women's daily lives and access to opportunities (Casey, 2025). These discriminations are overlapping and can lead to further discrimination because of their interdependent nature, as these intersecting identities frame the oppression experienced, leading to increased disadvantage. Intersectionality demonstrates and confirms that all identities affect experiences, opportunities and barriers for each person.

Ireland has a number of Acts that cover inclusion – the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018 'prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education' and cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller Community (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2020). Ireland, as a member of the United Nations (U.N.) is expected to uphold the principles of the International Human Rights System which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2016). They are also bound by Bunreacht na Eireann – the Irish Constitution which is a legal document that outlines the rights of Irish people. Article 40.1 refers to the right to equality before the law, and there is an unenumerated right (not set out in the Constitution but recognised by the courts) to work and earn a livelihood (Irish Statute Book, 2020). As a member of the EU Ireland is also subject to the European

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950). Despite the numerous legal protections that exist, they do not necessarily lead to Traveller women's rights being safeguarded, and discrimination and being judged negatively continues to persist for Traveller women (McGrath, 2024). Some Traveller women feel the need to hide their identity when seeking employment, and when employed in order to remain in employment. They believe that they are judged initially by their name, their accent or address and there is nothing they could do to alter the view that mainstream society held. Traveller women are portrayed in the media as being oppressed, poorly educated, and only interested in getting married young and having children (The Traveller Movement, 2020). The focus is on gender stereotypes and there is no recognition of the women who work as community workers, entrepreneurs and professionals in education and other areas.

Alongside these external barriers they also face constraints in the form of internal barriers in terms of the amount of power they have in relation to decision making within the home (National Traveller Womens Forum, 2013, p. 2). Traveller women have gendered roles within the household and these gendered roles are normalised within the Traveller community. Traveller women are expected to look after the house and family especially if they are mothers, and the resilience of this gendered norm continues, similar to other countries (Muñoz Boudet et al, 2013, p. 36). Traveller women tend to live in groups and mix with other Traveller families (National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, 2013, p. 15). They do not automatically engage with the settled majority and observe other family set ups, with equal roles within the household and sharing of household responsibilities. Travellers' fear of assimilation leads them to reject a lot of what is now considered the norm for women eg working full-time outside of the home and being financially independent although a lot of Traveller women are employed part-time.

The impact of being a Traveller, a woman and from a disadvantaged background means that there are multiple disadvantages and the overall impact is larger than when each disadvantage is experienced separately. Traveller women experience

discrimination due to their ethnicity, and experience social-status discrimination due to the majority assuming they are all reliant on social welfare despite the fact that the FRA survey (2020, p. 55) shows that 17% of Traveller women report being in work. Whilst peer and family supports can buffer the impact of disadvantage, the reality for Traveller women is that this support may not be forthcoming due to members of their immediate and extended family also experiencing disadvantages and other concerns such as mental health and physical health issues. A study into the health of Travellers shows that deaths from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and suicide are much higher in the Traveller community compared to the general population (Health Services Executive, 2010). Lack of familial support and low levels of income add to the stress of dealing with other external issues such as socio-economic and ethnic discrimination.

Traveller women, who have the freedom to gain employment, encounter restrictions in employment which is organised around the needs of the settled community (National Traveller Womens Forum, 2013, p. 5). The demands of the workplace may conflict with the demands of their culture, placing the Traveller women in the unenviable position of either letting their workplace down or their family. Family demands can dictate the type of work they can do in terms of being available to drop and collect their children from school, and employment that includes late evenings, weekend work or overnight work will generally not be sought by these women. Their reliance on part-time work, which can revolve around family time, ensures that fewer Traveller women are in full-time employment leading to reduced necessity for the Traveller community as a whole, to reassess the role of men and women within the community.

2.4.2 Traveller Experiences in Primary and Secondary School Education (1960 to the present day)

The next section examines Travellers experiences in education through the ages, and outlines how the Department of Education adopted a deficit approach to Traveller students, where their aim was to alter this deficit by constructing policies

to include Traveller children in schools, without any further action taken to account for the Traveller culture and lifestyle. It also describes the policies that were set up to ensure inclusion, which did little to positively impact the lives of Travellers or to enhance inclusion in any meaningful way.

The initial approach to Traveller education is characterised by assimilation, followed by integration, and interculturalism. Travellers' refusal to assimilate and perceived cultural differences led to justified name-calling and exclusion in schools and urban spaces (Joyce, 2018, p. 73). In the 1960's and 1970's, despite the absorption policy, Traveller-only facilities began to emerge with Traveller-only pre-schools (Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn, 2018, p. 190) and Traveller-only 'special' classes in schools (Irish Traveller Movement, n.d.). The 1980's are defined by integration policy, whereby Travellers could decide on the level of integration needed and continue with a nomadic lifestyle or part-time nomadic lifestyle (Travelling People Review Body, 1983, p. 66). The model continues to be one of 'deficit' – Traveller students need to be included in mainstream schooling to counter their cultural deficit (Vanderbeck, 2005, p. 82). Despite the 'alleged' freedom for Travellers to continue with a nomadic or part-time nomadic lifestyle, no attempts are made to adjust the school timetable or curriculum to meet the needs of these Traveller children, nor are any efforts made to be more inclusive.

In 1990 the interculturalism phase is identified by Ireland signing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2006) and ratifying it in 1992. Its terms include the right for minority or indigenous children to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion. The 1993 Report of the Special Education Review Committee (Department of Education and Science, 2002, p. 12) states that Traveller children should be educated with their peers and not segregated. In the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) 1992 report it mentions that Traveller cultural background is rarely reflected in the school curriculum, and there is lack of economic value of post-primary education for Travellers (INTO, 1992, p. 1) which is also been mentioned by the Irish Traveller Movement in their Education and Travellers document (Irish Traveller Movement, 1993, p. 4). The INTO report also advises that modules on Traveller culture should

be included in curricula and textbooks, and be included in pre-service and in-service teacher training (INTO, 1992, p. 60). The introduction of the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill (2018) has not yet been passed into law, although it is currently before Dail Eireann, third stage – 1 May 2025 (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2025). The Bill is part of the equality and education policies which includes the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). The initial wording of the Bill includes the change from schools having to include Traveller culture and history in the curriculum, to schools having to promote knowledge and understanding of Traveller culture which gives schools leeway as to how much/little engagement they will provide with Traveller culture, if any. The slow progress of the Bill indicates the level of urgency the government has attached to it.

Policies to include the needs of minority groups include The Council of Europe's 1995 Framework Convention on National Minorities which provides protection for culture and language (Council of Europe, 1995). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) Policy now supports inclusive and intercultural education although Traveller participation rates and outcomes for Travellers remain poor (Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn, 2018, p. 191). Schools continue to focus on the needs of the majority which are settled people, and the Traveller students are expected to adapt their attitude and behaviour to comply with this.

Communities which have been denied in the past, like the Traveller community, need education which includes a rich curriculum, as minority students will be impacted by the absence of their culture in the curriculum (Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn, 2018, p. 191) and it communicates a message that their knowledge lacks prestige within the educational establishment (Nieto, 2004, p. 102). Focus on thinking from the space of marginalised students will show the workings of power and inequity (Mohanty, 2003, p. 232), otherwise a hierarchical society will reproduce itself (Valenzula, 1999) and a banking method of education will be used, focusing on cultural knowledge seen as valuable by the dominant society. Teachers of Traveller students may not have an awareness of the culture and how Traveller children and teenagers communicate with adults. Levinson (2008, p. 243)

found that teachers of Traveller students spoke about a disregard for boundaries and rather than assuming a different cultural orientation, their behaviour is seen as defiance. There is little acknowledgement that use of space reflects behaviour in the Traveller home environment and is preparation for future family life, and is not intended to be anti-social or regarded as anti-social. Some teachers are hostile to the Traveller community and see them as a problem, they have low expectations of Traveller student achievement and understand little of the Traveller culture (Bhopal, 2011, p. 318). Schools use of time and space can construct a barrier of inclusion or exclusion and can place Travellers in a position of disadvantage, especially if they are used to a more fluid organisation of time at home. This adds to the disconnect between Travellers and the school environment which is compounded by the fact that the capital taken to school by Travellers is not recognised. School expectations that students leave their own identity and their cultural identity at the school door leads to the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968) and negative experiences in school can lead to large numbers of Travellers leaving school early/leaving education, leading to low numbers available to enter higher education. Traveller parents may also be worried that higher levels of education will mean increased assimilation of Traveller students into the settled community and adoption of their values (Derrington and Kendall, 2003).

Power imbalances exist for Travellers in relation to the settled majority, and this leads to power imbalances and feuding within the Traveller community (Traveller Mediation Service, 2023, p. 6). Whilst change is needed at the societal level, change is also needed within the Traveller community as many families are impacted by incidents of intra or inter-family violence. For Traveller boys the pressure to be strong and tough, in order to uphold family honour in the event of a dispute, may be an issue as they are expected to combat other Traveller men, although not every family or Traveller man is involved in disputes and feuds. This way of behaviour is counter to how they are expected to behave in school and the classroom, and may act as a further impetus for Traveller boys to reject school and education. The media are quick to focus on Traveller feuds (The Traveller Movement, 2020) giving the impression that this is a normal part of Traveller

culture, thus further alienating them from forming better relationships with the settled community.

Education in Ireland has seen a major transformation in the last thirty years with large numbers of immigrant families moving to Ireland, leading to national holidays in other countries being celebrated eg they celebrate Polish days in schools (Mother Tongues, 2019). This leads to other minority groups questioning the lack of celebration of their heritage - Travellers feel that groups who have arrived in Ireland recently have access to privileges that they do not have, as days of celebration of Travellers do not exist (this conversation was recorded as part of research in Part 1 of the PhD which led to a published paper, cited at the beginning of the thesis – McGrath 2024). When Travellers complain of racist bullying in education, schools do not view these actions as being racist due to the Travellers white racial identity (Bhopal, 2011, p. 318). Students may then decide not to identify as Travellers in order to reduce the negativity of schools towards them. Whilst most Irish people would probably not consider themselves racist, they are also unlikely to take action over racist discrimination of Travellers and this inaction perpetuates it (Trepagnier, 2006).

2.5 Class and Higher Education

The difficulties that impact marginalised groups throughout school years, continue in higher education as middle class students use their privileged access to capitals such as economic supports from parents and privileged networks and contacts, to remain in dominant positions (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, p. 741). Higher education institutions (HEI's) may focus on eliminating social inequalities, although it appears that most of their efforts are concentrated at entry and admission points only, without focusing on the educational journey experienced by disadvantaged students year on year (Coulson et al. 2018, p. 3). There may be recognition that disadvantaged students encounter financial difficulties, have fewer social opportunities as they continue to live at home to save money, take on paid employment throughout university, but there is less

focus on the way in which all of this impacts directly on academic performance (ibid. p. 18).

Taking on paid employment during the university term reduces the amount of time that students have to spend on coursework and exam preparation which leads to increased levels of stress (Brennan, Dempsey and O'Dea, 2018, p. 8). If the work is unrelated to their university course this can negatively impact their academic performance (Yanbarisova, 2015) whilst if related to their subject area, this can increase their academic results (Wang et al. 2010, p. 79; Yanbarisova, 2015). The amount of hours worked can have a detrimental impact, and fewer hours worked during term time reduces the impact on academic achievement (Genett, 2017, p. 3). Working during term time can also lead to social isolation due to reduced opportunities to socialise with other students (Brennan, Dempsey and O'Dea, 2018, p. 1). Socialising can lead to immediate benefits and also benefits in the future, as networking opportunities may arise which lead to employment opportunities. Networking can impact positively on social capital, as higher amounts of interaction lead to increased co-operation with others and makes people comfortable with each other (Levin et al. 2015, p. 422). When students have pressures outside of academic work and need to invest time in paid employment or labour within the home, this leads to reduced time to nurture relationships in their subject area.

2.5.1 Ethnic Minority Students and Higher Education

There are attainment gaps between white students and black and ethnic minority students (Richardson, 2008, p. 33) with 15% of white students achieving more first-class and upper second-class degrees. Individual agency is impacted by one's position in the racialised organisation, unequal distribution of resources is racialised in organisations, and ethnic minority students may be tracked onto ordinary level/occupational degrees (Ray, 2019, p. 36). Forms of racism and discrimination include experiences of microaggressions in higher education, which are one of the most frequent interpersonal forms of racism on college

campuses (Cabrera, Franklin and Watson, 2017, p. 26) and include “subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal” (Yosso et al. 2009). Microaggressions in higher education leads to reduced mental health, lower academic performance and increased anxiety and depression (Sue, 2010). It has been reported that one sixth of black and ethnic minority students experience racism and bullying, and students face further challenges as the curriculum does not include content relating to diversity, equality and inclusion (National Union of Students, 2011). Other issues include a lack of black and ethnic minority staff (Bernard et al. 2014, p. 6) which leads to a lack of sense of belonging (Davies and Garrett 2012, p. 5) and low ethnic diversity on campus leads to relatedness not being fulfilled (Bunce et al. 2021, p. 11).

Students may adapt their behaviour or adopt coping strategies in order to circumvent obstacles – when black and ethnic minority students face exclusion by other students and staff in the UK (Osler, 1999, p. 11) their response of adopting coping strategies such as forging friendships with people from similar ethnic and social backgrounds, leads to an increase in students’ sense of connectedness to their course, campus and university. In terms of career progression, black and ethnic minority students may consider careers that would permit them to help others like themselves who might experience racism in the workplace (ibid, 1999, p. 16). Within these groups, there will be first generation students, whose parents did not attend/complete college. These parents tend to be working class, have low incomes and contribute little financial support to their children’s education (Ball, Reay and David, 2002, p. 337). These students have little knowledge regarding higher education and they rely on significant others for information, have little social capital and they tend not to leave home for higher education. There is further focus on how whiteness impacts higher education institutions in Ireland in the next section.

2.5.2 Whiteness and Higher Education in Ireland

Whiteness impacts institutions (Garner, 2007, p. 27) although little attention is given to higher education organisations (HEI's) and their leaders in terms of how whiteness functions within their organisations and how leaders support/do not support whiteness (Southern, 2024, p. 1). Whiteness permits white students to lead a life of racial ignorance leading to racial bliss (Cabrera, Watson and Franklin, 2016, p. 129) and the right shade of whiteness leads to settled people in higher education being able to do the same. Predominantly white institutions are set up in higher education in the US, which are centred around the needs of white people (Gusa, 2010, p. 464) and in the same way the universities in Ireland are set up around the needs of white settled people. HEI's exist within the middle class and can lack cultural sensitivity to those other than those who make up the predominant group – the white middle classes (Bathmaker et al, 2016, p. 83-84). Higher education in Ireland is mainly made up of white, settled middle class students, and students frequently mix with other students similar to themselves, leaving them in a state of racial arrested development (Cabrera, Watson and Franklin, 2016, p. 130). Their social comfort in these groups mean that they do not have to develop their racial selves, and they are less likely to take action to support minority groups. Results from research on race equality in higher education institutions in Ireland shows that most respondents cite a lack of ethnic diversity, especially at leadership and management levels, and lack of women at these levels (Kempny and Lucy, 2021, p. 17) which is also the case in the UK (Bhopal and Brown, 2016, p. 27; Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020, p. 4). Policies on race/ethnicity are seen as less visible in HEI's in Ireland as they are embedded within broader equality policies, and there are more policies relating to gender rather than ethnicity (Kempny and Lucy, 2021, p. 21). Regardless of the presence of policies, there is no real implementation of these policies and any visible outcomes (ibid, p. 23).

2.5.3 Higher Education and the Traveller Community

White people enter higher education without examining their race or privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 79) which includes not having to think about race (Cabrera, 2014, p. 32). When the words settled people are substituted for white people, the same arguments that apply in the Whiteness theory applies when related to Travellers i.e. settled people enter higher education without thinking about their settled/middle-class privilege. Settled people privilege is invisible to the settled people as it is normalised and leads to them not believing that they have any responsibility for racial inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Whilst those who are first generation educated, and/or from working class backgrounds may feel uncomfortable in some university settings, this is compounded for Travellers in higher education who have little experience of mixing with settled people. Their only experiences tend to be that of school experiences which for some of them include incidents of bullying - 4 out of 10 Travellers state that they or their children have been bullied in school because of their identity as Travellers (Irish Traveller Movement, 2021). Under the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2008) all children have the right to be educated without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities (Article 28). Article 29 states that the education of the child should be directed by the development of respect for the child's parents and his/her own cultural identity. For Travellers this is not the case, and many Travellers form the opinion that the lifestyle of the majority group is not for them and they reject education at an early age, so that the prospect of higher education is not entertained.

Travellers do not believe that they can use whiteness as a form of capital (McGrath, 2024) and being from this community is not regarded as a positive by the settled community, service providers and employers. There are few Travellers in Ireland, and very small numbers in higher education. Having isolated incidents of Traveller students and staff in higher education is not an indication that conditions have changed substantially for this ethnic minority group, or that racism is absent (Ahmed, 2012). In higher education if Travellers have lived experiences of racist incidents, they are not in positions of power to make significant changes. Traveller

students are likely to suffer from racial battle fatigue – a response to the daily racist actions that impacts on their mental and emotional health (Smith, 2004, p. 180).

Equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland is described as both fragmented and reactive, rather than proactive (Royal Irish Academy, 2021). Few studies into diversity initiatives employ a critical race-conscious lens (Patton at al, 2019) and in race dialogue, spaces may be set up as 'safe spaces' so that white/settled people avoid appearing racist, which inhibits attempts to be inclusive so that ethnic minority groups are again marginalised (Leonardo and Porter, 2010, p. 147). Whiteness is evident in diversity initiatives and curriculum in higher education (Ambo and Beardall, 2023) and this applies to higher education in Ireland as the majority of students and staff are white and settled, and reap all of the advantages compared to white 'others'. Generally settled people in Ireland have little interactions with Travellers unless they work in a service capacity and deal with them as customers/clients, or work for a Traveller organisation. People may hold negative views of ethnic minorities but avoid discussing this, known as silent racism (Trepagnier, 2006).

There is increased focus on how to get more Travellers into Higher Education in Ireland, and Travellers are one of three priority groups that the most recent National Access plan concentrates on (Higher Education Authority, 2022, p. 52). The aim is to increase the percentage of Traveller new entrants to higher education from .07% to .32% or 33 new entrants to 150 (ibid, p. 73). Increasing access to higher education alone does not equate to recognition of marginalised communities, as it is the capability to participate in higher education that is the crucial point (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Access to higher education is a starting point and there needs to be focus on genuine participation and development of valued capabilities. Freedoms may not be realised when higher education regulations and practices place different values on individuals (Unterhalter, 2007). Attempts to widen participation of marginalised groups in higher education may be the ambition of many higher education staff, who are mainly if not wholly middle-class, which can lead to the imposition of middle-class norms and values on students (Wilkins and Burke, 2015, p. 444). Improving educational opportunities

and experiences of working-class students operates more optimally when staff have a real understanding of working-class lives and challenges. Employing working-class professionals can lead to better understanding of the barriers that marginalised students face, and increased empathy due to experiences of being working-class, rather than middle-class sympathy. There is a need to extend the focus from places in higher education to spaces in higher education (Gale and Mills, 2013, p. 7) whose focus on higher education in Australia shows that low socioeconomic groups and indigenous Australians constitute small parts of the overall student population. Examination of why marginalised groups, including Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, are not engaging in higher education leads to focus on understanding the barriers faced by marginalised groups and on the structures of marginalisation which includes marginalisation by society – discrimination by wider society; marginalisation by systems – unhelpful bureaucratic systems; time/space – low access to spaces; and relevance – not applicable to their lives (Satchwell, Crook and Dodding, 2021). Traveller students bring many types of cultural capital to higher education such as 'aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital' (Elias and Scotson, 1994, p. 92), and a transformative approach is needed that focuses on students' assets not deficits, and belief that all students bring value to the classroom.

Traveller students may resist educational advancement due to prior unsuccessful experiences of education in school, and a lack of information on how to access further and higher education (Berry et al, p. 25). Experiences of Traveller students in higher education indicate that they face negative interactions between themselves and staff and students, which leads to their sense of belonging being threatened due to the microaggressions and biases being faced (ibid. 2025, p. 77). Some students feel the need to conceal their identification as Travellers in order to fit in, although this is a negative experience and leads to mental health issues, as being a Traveller is such a large part of their identity.

2.5.4 Traveller Women and Higher Education

To date there is limited focus in the literature on Traveller Women's experiences in higher education although as the numbers of Travellers in higher education increase, this opens up opportunities for their experiences to be recorded and examined. Morgan, McDonagh and Acton (2023) examine the experiences of Travellers (nine women and four men) in higher education in England and Scotland and find that the Travellers cultural capital is devalued in university which leads to issues regarding identifying as a Traveller. McDonnell's (2023) report on Travellers in higher education in Ireland shows that Travellers do not have easy access to information regarding higher education, there is a lack of Traveller specific supports/resources during their time in university, and issues surrounding self-identifying for some students. Brennan et al's (2024) paper on the enablers and inhibitors to higher education for Travellers has a large focus on earlier stages of education (primary and post-primary school) and discussion of three initiatives designed to increase access to higher education. McGinley's (2024) report on education for Travellers covers experiences pre university level and in higher education, and also states difficulties for Travellers getting access to information regarding higher education entry, and the need for both financial and academic supports for Travellers. Berry et al's (2025) report mentions the need for further supports for Traveller students in higher education, including wellbeing support.

2.6 Identifying the Gap

Research shows that Traveller parents, despite their own negative experiences in school, do wish for their children to attend and complete education (Bhopal, 2004; Boyle, Flynn and Hanahan, 2020, p. 1401; Hegarty, 2013; Quinlan, 2021) although there is little research on how these desires are put into action, how the parents actively encourage their children to remain in education, or how this impacts on their child and their educational journey. This thesis focuses on Traveller women who are graduates, and explores the catalysts that lead to the Traveller women taking action to begin the journey to higher education and beyond.

To date there is limited research that focuses on a range of specific enablers that permit Traveller women to enter and complete higher education; enablers that are part of the individual's personal characteristics, those within the family and extended family, those that originate in the external environment and how these all combine to permit the Traveller women to enter and complete higher education. Further there is scant focus on how Traveller women are impacted when their parents/families/wider community do not support them in education, and the impact of this on capabilities and development, and this gap is also addressed. My research examines the range of disablers that exist and persist, and how these are overcome by the Traveller women in order to have a successful outcome.

There is limited focus on Traveller women in higher education, and my research builds on the information available in the reports/papers mentioned in the previous section, and examines the Traveller women's journey into higher education with a focus on the influence of family members, and how this impacts their educational journey either positively or negatively, and ultimately leads to the women completing higher education. There is little focus in the literature on how Traveller families can inspire offspring to complete post primary school and enter and complete higher education, as the lack of academic capital held by Traveller parents is assumed to create a barrier that prevents their children from progressing in education.

The focus in this research is to examine in depth the range of enablers and disablers in the internal and external environment that impacts educational progression for the women, with the aim of highlighting the critical points where education is encouraged or prohibited, and how the Traveller women react to these situations and navigate the barriers encountered, so as to build on the research that has been completed. The capability approach (CA) is used in order to view the results through a CA lens so as to identify the capabilities and functionings that are important for successful degree completion. There is little focus in research to date that uses CA with a focus on Travellers and Higher Education in Ireland. The value of aspirations is examined in order to ascertain how differing levels of aspiration leads to successful results, and how this occurs. There is concentration

on agency and how the Traveller women use their personal agency in order to enact change within themselves, their families, extended families and communities. The results of this research will lead to new information in relation to education and the Traveller community, which can be used by the community, Traveller organisations, policy makers, educators and the government in order to further encourage more Travellers into higher education. The results will also contribute to the capability literature, as new information in relation to a white minority group like the Travellers will be created, which can help understanding of, and ways to help, marginalised groups.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the position of Irish Travelers in relation to their ethnicity and whiteness, and whilst they are a white ethnic minority, whiteness does not act as an advantage for them as their ethnicity is not recognised by the settled majority as a positive feature. The white settled majority continues to dominate, and organisations including educational institutions are set up to operate through a whiteness lens, which the minority have to adapt to, in order to participate. Travellers are seen as the underclass, and their low employment record is seen as proof of their lack of desire to be employed, and is not attributed to racial discrimination by employers. Irish Travellers remain isolated and marginalised although there are numerous policies that state on paper that their needs are important and should be addressed. This relates to services including education and there is large hope that the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 will help to illuminate the Traveller culture in schools, and provide information and clarity regarding their culture, which will help to reduce the negativity surrounding their culture. Travellers see the benefit of education although small numbers stay on in education due to negative experiences, and the focus of the rest of this thesis is on Traveller women graduates who have continued in education to degree completion. The next chapter focuses on the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: The Capability Approach, Agency and Aspiration Development

3.1 Introduction

The capability approach runs counter to traditional welfare economics, where resources and income are seen as indicators of standards of living. Results show that measuring income is insignificant as it cannot determine health, schooling and child nutrition (Laderchi, 1997, p. 349). Measuring resources alone as a gauge of individual welfare make problems invisible, such as gender stereotypes and discrimination, and how these impact on people's well-being (Oosterlaken, 2020, p. 130). When an income-based approach is used, it is often assumed that income within households is shared, which makes economic inequalities between men and women invisible (Phipps and Burton, 1998, p. 600; Robeyns 2006; Woolley and Marshall, 1994). An important aspect of gender inequality is the distribution of burdens between men and women in terms of paid work, household work and care work. Women are generally expected to do most of the unpaid household work and care work, which restricts their options and makes them financially vulnerable. Using income, wealth or labour market outcomes do not reveal issues of gender inequality.

The capability approach critiques traditional welfare economics for looking at people as being a means to an end (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). Alternatively they should be ends in themselves, and not a means to economic growth (Siddika and Baruah, 2018, p. 164). Sen (1980) criticises traditional models such as utilitarianism (actions are right if they facilitate the majority of people) and resourcism (focus on possessions) as they do not take account of beings and doings – what we can be and what we are able to do. According to Sen, people should have opportunities and freedom to make their own decisions which they value, with removal of all constraints so that capabilities are maximised. The capability approach focuses on people, not income and resources, and evaluates

progress in terms of focusing on human beings and their development, rather than per capita national income.

In this chapter, the capability approach is outlined further and examined. There is explanation of capabilities, functionings, conversion factors, agency and how the capability approach connects to well-being and aspirations. There is focus on how the capability approach relates to education, especially in relation to marginalised groups such as Traveller women.

3.2 Capabilities

Sen focuses on capabilities - the potential and power of what a person can do and achieve, in terms of their valued choices (Sen, 1985). Capability is a kind of freedom to achieve various functioning combinations i.e. a real opportunity (Sen, 1999). Capabilities are the ability to choose something or do something – beings and doings (Sen, 2009). They are the set of valuable functionings that a person has access to, and people can choose between different combinations of functionings that they have reason to value, as having a valued life represents how well-off people are, not their wealth levels. Capabilities are notions of freedom – the real opportunities one has regarding the life one wishes to lead (Sen, 1987). This is supported by Robeyns (2005, p. 95) – capabilities represent what is effectively possible; the freedoms or valuable functionings to lead the kinds of lives people wish for, so that they can do what they want to do, and be who they want to be. Expansion of opportunities means expansion of freedom, which increases the power to function and achieve well-being (Weinstein, 2020, p. 77).

Sen (2002) states that attention should be paid to the space of capabilities which exists between resources and achievements, and is the freedom to achieve or not. The capability approach starts from ends rather than means, and there are ends that do not rely on resources such as self-respect, supportive relationships in school or work, and friendships (Robeyns, 2017). Focusing on ends directly captures what is important and indicates a range of means needed to achieve these ends, rather than a narrow focus on resources. Capability is the equipment

which is intrinsic to individuals, and it is that which is needed to develop advanced capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 84-85). Internal capabilities and suitable external conditions lead to combined capabilities. Capabilities are individual powers which when used correctly, lead to well-being (Nussbaum, 2011). What people are, can be seen as well as what they are able to do, and Sen's (1993; 2004) capability approach is purposely underspecified and does not endorse a list of capabilities. Anderson (1999, p. 317) suggested three capabilities; to function as a human being, as a political agent and to participate as an equal in society. Others state that having a list at all is paternalistic as it implies that if somebody does not follow this list, their life has less quality, and correction is needed (Carter, 1996). This then becomes part of perfectionism (Deneulin, 2002, p. 6) - when bad choices are removed so that people are forced to make good choices.

Sen's (1985) focus on individuals takes account of human diversity, rather than letting governments or other institutions decide on what is best for people. His focus on the individual and what their needs and values are, indicates to some that he was dismissive of groups. When people have opportunities to lead lives they value, they must have power to focus on what it is they individually value, and not be influenced by group thinking. Capability is about ethical individualism, meaning that actions are judged by their impact on individual people (Robeyns, 2005, p. 107). Capability sets (sets of capabilities that one can choose from) must be open to people so that they can take on valued roles within society, and include a wide range of outcomes, which can be adjusted to take account of particular groups eg womens needs. She also suggests that capabilities and functionings are necessary, but insufficient for a good life as they exist in a structured way and are not free floating, but are shaped by social structures and by institutions which surround individuals. Capabilities can be final ends i.e. have value as ends in themselves (Richardson, 2015, p. 167). Alternatively they can be of instrumental value, as they lead to other capabilities being developed eg being literate leads to being able to read, and also to accessing the labour market.

3.3 Functionings

Functionings are described by Sen (1987) as the beings and doings that people value in their lives, and he views well-being in terms of functionings that a person has reason to value (Sen, 2009). He states examples of functionings such as being nourished and sheltered, and being able to be seen in public without shame, but does not elaborate further. To actually achieve a functioning depends on social and personal factors such as ethnicity, gender policy and socio-economic class. The difference between promoting capabilities and functionings lies in establishing the difference between what is possible and what is realised i.e. between the freedom to achieve and the actual achievement (Robeyns, 2005). Moving from a capability to a functioning indicates a choice made (Robeyns, 2017). Functionings may be aspired – as yet unmet but there is a strong desire and ambition to achieve them, or realised – are achieved, through capabilities (Tiwari, 2011, p. 185). These achieved functionings refer to what a person is able to do and be, and what people enjoy at a given point in time (Robeyns, 2003; Sen, 1999). Functionings or achievements indicate a person's achieved well-being (Wilson-Strydom and Walker, 2015, p. 310). Valued functionings may be intrinsic – one gives back to the community, or instrumental, which may be a long-term goal such as getting a secure job (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 153).

Functionings and capabilities are both necessary for a life of quality, as capabilities are needed to achieve valued functionings (Carter, 2014). People may choose functionings that are currently being promoted which can limit individual choice. Functionings are important when establishing inequalities between groups (Kuklys and Robeyns, 2005; Robeyns, 2003) as group inequalities in functionings may reflect group inequalities in capabilities, except if there is a genuine reason why group members might choose differently. Relevant functionings differ for individuals, as people in different places and times have different values and experiences (Alkire et al. 2015). For Sen the most important factor is the individual's capability or real opportunity to achieve functionings (Robeyns, 2003). Whether they actually achieve the functioning is up to the individual, who

exercises their options in the form of choices made between different types of lifestyles.

3.4 Conversion Factors

Conversion factors are those factors which determine the degree to which a person can transform a resource into a functioning (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999) i.e. how much functioning one can get out of a resource. Sen views resources as material goods although they can also refer to skills and social resources (Kabeer, 1999, p. 435) and services such as education (Robeyns, 2017). Abundance of resources impact the amount of freedom a person has to enjoy the life they value, and a lack of resources leads to inequalities in capabilities (Robeyns, 2003). People vary in their ability to convert resources into valuable functionings, and the primary goods approach does not take account of human diversity (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1982). Societal arrangements are necessary for conversion factors to materialise. As people differ in their ability to convert resources into beings and doings of importance, equal access to resources does not mean equal opportunities, as individual preferences influence as well as differences related to gender and class (Vaughan, 2020). In disadvantaged communities it is difficult to convert limited resources into valued functionings (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437) and having resources does not automatically mean that they are converted into functionings, as internal and external influences impact, such as the environment and agency.

Conversion factors include personal conversion factors such as physical condition, reading skill, intelligence, gender and age (Robeyns, 2017). Social conversion factors such as public policies, social norms, gender roles and power relations can be positive conversion factors (Robeyns, 2005, p. 99) depending on the society one lives in. Alternatively they can act as negative conversion factors if the policies favour particular groups. Environmental conversion factors include the physical environment in which one lives (Robeyns, 2017) which can be positive if it consists of a safe suburb with good transport links, or negative if it is a violent

inner-city environment. Analysis of resources and all the conversion factors need to be carried out in order to know what people are able to do and be.

Inter-individual differences in the conversion of resources into capabilities and functionings can be far-reaching and significant (Robeyns, 2017). Structural constraints in the form of institutions, policies, laws and social norms influence individual's conversion factors and hence their capability sets. If people face discrimination when accessing the labour market, their degrees, other qualifications and work experiences are not as useful when compared to those who do not face these obstacles. If a group is stigmatised for cultural or historical reasons, other groups in society will disrespect them.

3.5 Agency

Agency is the capacity to make meaningful choices from a list of resources which includes psychological, organisational, informational, material, social, financial and human endowments (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005, p. 8). Sen (1984) views agency as consisting of agency and well-being; agency and well-being both have freedom for achievements and actual achievements. Agency freedom is the opportunity to make meaningful choices, and agency achievement is the realisation of one's valued goals that one has reason to pursue, even if they are unconnected to one's well-being. One's well-being refers to one's personal welfare, and well-being freedoms are capabilities or opportunities whilst well-being achievements are functionings. Agency freedom may be constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities available, alternatively agency freedom may be expanded by these opportunities. Well-being may be part of one's values, or individuals may make choices that reduce well-being. Sen (1985) believes that individuals and communities must decide on their own values and decide on the actions taken to bring about necessary change. Society goals will impact agency freedoms as it influences what an individual values, and how to pursue these values (Sen, 1987). Social arrangements should contribute to improving and guaranteeing the freedoms of individuals, who should be seen as

active agents of change and not merely passive recipients of benefits (Sen, 1999, pp. xii – xiii).

Nussbaum agrees that agency is important and that people should be recognized as sources of agency and worthy in their own right (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 58). She does not use Sen's well-being/agency distinction as she believes that active striving matters, and that there is more to life than contentment (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 73). Expansion of agency freedom and well-being freedom (Sen) are viewed as capability set expansions by Nussbaum. Both Sen and Nussbaum view the empowerment of individuals as being very important although they show it differently. Having agency is important for marginalised groups such as Traveller women, and due to Sen and Nussbaum's limited conceptualisation of agency, this research turns to Claassen's agency-based capability theory of justice, which is predicated on the fact that citizens need both participatory and navigational capabilities.

Claassen (2018, pp. 48-63) defines agency as a 'form of participation in a social practice' where agency is both a capability, and also consists of two functionings – autonomous deliberation and free action, where the agent is independent and can set goals and has the freedom to act upon them. Agency has two forms – the lower level of being able to move freely within a social practice known as participational agency, and the higher level of being able to move freely within social practices known as navigational agency. Capabilities are the real opportunities one has, and navigational agency is a specific application of these capabilities to navigate and adapt within a social context. With participational agency the agents need to decide which practices they wish to participate in and how to deal with conflicts between the practices they are part of. If they do this successfully they become navigational agents as they are able to enter and exit practices easily, and resolve conflicts in the practices they join on their own terms, and create new practices. Travellers are automatically part of the Traveller community when they are born, so they all have immediate participational agency. There are differences between Traveller men and Traveller women in terms of navigational agency as Traveller

men have a lot more freedom than Traveller women, who have much stricter rules of behaviour applied to them:

(Traveller women) are still not allowed to sleep with someone out of marriage or get married again. Even if your partner dies you have to stay a widow, we are only allowed one man and that's it. The men can marry many times and marry out of our community but the women can't (Leeds GATE Gypsy and Traveller Exchange, 2017).

The type of agency one can aspire to and realise does not depend on where one starts from, but on the capability for agency acquired when one is given rights to these capabilities, and all agents are equal in terms of their potential for navigational agency (Claassen, 2018. p. 96-97). For the Traveller women their potential to become navigational agents is limited, both inside and outside their community. When they deal with the settled community, they are limited in how much they can participate due to the discrimination they face from the majority and a range of institutions, which impacts on access to services and the labour market (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2024).

Agents should claim rights to navigational agency, and participating in social practices and reflecting on their social standing should lead to the realisation that they deserve the right to navigational agency, and respect the rights of others to this type of agency (Claassen, 2018, p. 101). Presently this does not apply to Traveller women as in patriarchal cultures like the Traveller culture (The Traveller Movement, 2019, p. 4), women have a sense of self-worth which is based on their value as mothers and wives, although they may be socialised to accept this position. They see themselves in terms of their worth to others i.e. as a means to an end rather than as an end in themselves. People may adapt their preferences to their current circumstances, and whilst individuals need to have a realistic outlook in life, the lack of freedom to do otherwise and just accept what is currently happening is a cause for concern (Elster, 1982, p. 228).

With autonomy one must have the competency for practical reasoning and critical reflection (Claassen, 2018, pp. 146-147). When individuals have these skills but

submit to their circumstances, the reasons for this voluntary submission need to be examined (Khader, 2011, pp. 80-83). In these circumstances external options for action are constrained and individuals choose the best option given the circumstances they are in. It is not adaptive preference as people are not manipulated, but is a form of adaptive choice - a form of coercion. Coercion means having no choice or having no acceptable choice whilst manipulation is the influencing of the choices of others by means that might be morally problematic (Wood, 2014).

People may have adaptive preferences which prevent full use of empowerment capabilities in society, but these are formed under suspicious conditions, and manipulation has distorted their critical reflection as they believe that their constraints should not be changed (Claassen, 2018, pp. 149-154). Manipulation can be direct when a person withholds information or exerts pressure to make another person believe something that is not true. Alternatively a group may apply social norms that manipulate the preferences of its members so that they believe information that they would not normally believe, if they heard it under conditions of non-manipulation. It is necessary to be able to judge when a situation is voluntary submission or adaptive preferences as with voluntary submission, the choice is made whilst all other basic capabilities to choose otherwise are also present. This can be the case when gendered patterns of action persist without the presence of coercion and manipulation (Stoljar, 2014). Traveller women are highly influenced by others in their community, and as men hold power and are the decision makers, the norms and gendered roles that are present in the Traveller culture suit the male Travellers at the expense of the women Travellers (The Traveller Movement, 2019, p. 4). Alternatively the Traveller women may resist change due to a desire to continue with the Traveller lifestyle and oppose efforts to assimilate into mainstream society (Casey, 2014, p. 816).

Whilst the legal framework endorses a range of empowerment capabilities in society, one's own culture and social norms may imply that some options cannot be employed and one's capability is not guaranteed as a result (Claassen, 2018, pp. 154-158). Traveller women are excluded in many ways from mainstream

society, and they have to use their navigational agency in order to access their basic rights such as access to hospitality and retail outlets, and accessing the services of Traveller development groups and the courts in order to obtain justice. The right to enter and exit a social practice freely and have a voice in them so that empowerment capability is present, means that the ability to associate must be present. When the costs of exiting a practice are high, this violates the right to exit. If the cost has a negative impact on a person's basic capabilities to function so that they fall below a basic threshold, this choice is unfree. Traveller women are excluded from many social practices such as places of employment, and many employed Travellers work only in Traveller organisations which limits their voice to influence mainstream society (McGrath, 2024, p. 125).

I focus on Claassen's theory of participational and navigational agency as this theory reflects where the Traveller graduates position themselves educationally, culturally and socially. Traveller women live and socialise in groups, take part in educational programmes, and work part-time on health projects and other projects in their community. Their participational agency has always been strong, although it has been limited at times to their own cultural group. It is now that their navigational agency is being put into practice, initiated by Traveller women attending third level education and leading to increased personal confidence, vocabulary and understanding of practices and policies, which enables them to begin the process of deciding which practices they will enter and which they will exit. Their ability to critique practices and resolve conflicts, to reform areas of concern, and their capacity to create new practices leads to increased empowerment for these women, which impacts other members of their community, and future generations.

3.6 Capabilities and Aspirations

There are a number of theorists who lead aspiration theory and I outline their foci here and later describe which theorists work is more useful for my research. Aspirations are described as being related to wants, preferences, choices and

calculations and vary from individual to individual, and within societies (Appadurai, 2004). People with low levels of wealth, begin with lower aspirations than those who have higher levels of wealth. Poor people assume that they have constraints due to their lack of wealth and tend to invest less in education, which then limits their options later, and leads to continued economic disadvantage which can impact on families, generation after generation. Low motivation along with reduced hope and difficult structural conditions, leads to difficulties recognising opportunities which may arise over time but are not pursued, which can lead to poverty traps. Educational aspirations amongst disadvantaged groups need to be encouraged, as higher levels of education lead to wider horizons with potential to move people out of poverty.

Strengthening the capacity (potential) to aspire is necessary when people are disadvantaged and have reduced resources, as it can lead to improved socio-economic conditions (Appadurai, 2004). The capacity to aspire is a navigational capacity as it includes the ability to explore possibilities, by communicating with others in one's social network. Those who have higher levels of wealth tend to have more opportunities to link material goods and immediate opportunities i.e. they have more connections and therefore more access to ideas. Those with lower forms of wealth have reduced social opportunities to share knowledge and so they are constrained in terms of their future, and have lower aspirations. The capability (ability) to aspire is a resource for disadvantaged women to improve their own welfare and it leads to individuals having a voice, and these can reinforce one another.

Ray (2006) built on the work of Appadurai and looked at individuals' aspiration windows, which are the experiences they use to make comparisons, and form a view of what may be available for them to attain in the future. Individuals' aspiration levels are impacted by people in their immediate circle – parents can act as positive influences, as can teachers and peers, whilst similarly they can all act as negative influences and impact on aspiration downwards. Parents' levels of income impact on aspirations for their children and those with higher wealth tend to have higher aspirations for their children. This impacts on their investment for

them in terms of time spent selecting appropriate schools, investing in their cultural education, after school activities, and grinds to help with school grades. Parents views influence their children's views and performances, and when they hold gendered views, it is likely that their children will also do so, especially in marginalised groups (Dhar, Jain and Jayachandran, 2019). People may be highly influenced by their own peer group, and potentially appealing messages may not lead to higher aspirations, due to peer pressure to act otherwise (La Ferrara, 2019, p. 1719).

The aspiration gap is the difference between what individuals aspire to and what they actually achieve, and this gap determines the level of investment made (Ray, 2006). If the gap is too large, investment will be low as the outcome will seem unachievable. Similarly if the gap is too small, investment will also be low as it may not seem worth investing, for so small a gain. Hope can ignite aspirations and a role model can impact on what an individual expects to achieve and hence their aspirations, which may impact on behaviour (Dufflo, 2012). If the gap between an individual and a role model is too large, there is a rational temptation to hold back on efforts.

Mkwananzi (2018, p. 111) focuses further on aspirations and separates them into resigned, powerful, persistent or frustrated. When a person has resigned aspirations, they believe that their opportunity to pursue their aspirations has passed, even when this is not the case. Powerful aspirations occur when a person is pursuing a life they value, and they have the opportunities and freedoms to do this. They are in control of their lives, and the surrounding social and structural conditions are supportive, which leads to strong agency although they may also experience challenges. The individual sees the potential in these circumstances, indicating the relationship between agency and social conditions. Experiences may be negative, yet they can motivate an individual to raise their aspirations to begin living a life they value. Persistent aspirations exist when an individual has agency, despite difficult social and structural conditions. Intrinsic motivation helps them to achieve valued outcomes, such as gaining employment. Present conditions, which may be difficult, does not derail any future plans as the

individual has high levels of agency and optimism. When structural conditions are very restrictive, an individual may take longer to realise their plans, and their conversion factor of motivation plays a strong role. Opportunities met will be taken readily and the individual will take action (have agency) to seek out opportunities. They may be subject to resigned aspirations if their circumstances do not change over a long period of time. Frustrated aspirations have both low agency and negative influences of social and structural conditions. The individual resigns their aspirations and lowers their self-belief, leading to frustrated aspirations, as opportunities appear to be absent. Using the capability to aspire may lead to disadvantaged individuals having a voice, which can also lead to autonomy, and voice and agency support one another (Walker, 2007). Voice can be hearing one's own, that of others, and hearing it through the curriculum and pedagogy. The capability to aspire is important for girls/women and is an education capability in itself, because of its importance in changing adapted preferences to settle for less or not to aspire.

My research aligns with Appadurai's (2004) view, as its focus on disadvantaged groups can be applied to disadvantaged women such as Traveller women who traditionally leave school early and quickly immerse themselves in family life. Their lack of education prevents them from accessing the labour market and without tangible examples of other Traveller women continuing in education and gaining employment, their aspiration levels stall. It also aligns with Ray's (2006) work on the aspirations window - the level of social mobility within one's environment. Traveller women live in groups, usually with their husband's/partner's family and with other Traveller families, and their social circle is narrow. When low aspirations are the norm in one's social reference group, no incentive exists to change the behaviour of individuals within the group, and this continues for future generations. When the aspiration gap is large, individuals do not take action unless interventions take place either in the form of new information being received or motivating role models becoming available or both, in order for aspirations to be strengthened. Information needs to be accessible and coherent, and role models should be similar to recipients in terms of background, to be believable.

This research also aligns with Walker's and Mkwananzi's perspectives. Walker (2007) views the capability to aspire as important for girls/women as adapted preferences can be changed so that women aspire for more, and strive higher. Resigned aspirations (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 111) can occur early for Traveller women, as they consider themselves 'old' at relatively young ages. Whilst they may be able to see and appreciate how further and higher education can open up opportunities and lead to increased income and standards of living, they may find it easier to continue as they are and focus instead on the opportunities for the next generation. Frustrated aspirations may occur when they lower their aspirations and levels of self-belief, as they do not have the confidence to try something new and challenging. Without appropriate interventions and support, individuals will continue with the status quo.

3.7 Justification for Using a Capability Approach

The capability approach is used in this research as its focus on inequalities, well-being and development leads to increased understanding of these aspects, by examining the real opportunities that people have, to be and do in relation to education, which is important for all and especially for marginalised groups such as Traveller women. As the capability approach examines structural constraints and explores how people's capabilities can be turned into real opportunities, it permits focus on particular situations and locates positions where specific conversion factors are needed. Applying the capability approach to education allows exploration of: outcomes as a result of education, how education contributes to choice, how agency is used to exercise these choices. As the focus is on Traveller women, an alternative to the capability theory could be to use feminist theories which analyse social, political and economic inequality from the perspective of gender (Crossman, 2018) with focus on how women's experiences have been impacted by discrimination and oppression. The aims of feminist theories are to help understanding of gender inequality and to challenge patriarchy, and given the environment that Traveller women grow up in, it could be

an interesting choice of theory to apply. Due to my experience of working directly with Traveller women, I am cognisant of how they are fiercely protective of Traveller men and the men's reputation, and any approach from this perspective would lead to a firm refusal to be involved with my research. The Traveller women do not associate themselves as feminists, and they act as gatekeepers in relation to gender inequality. I did not wish to cause any tension with my interactions with the Traveller women, and my responsibility towards them is stronger than my desire to research in particular directions. This research focuses on ethnicity and class as well as gender, and using the capability approach allows me to have a broader approach of these overlapping issues.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the capability approach framework and outlines its main facets; capabilities, functionings, conversion factors, agency and aspirations. It examines the importance of participational and navigational agency, and how they can be developed for disadvantaged women, and how aspiration levels are impacted by one's social environment. It also outlines why the capability approach is used to examine the real opportunities disadvantaged women have in relation to education. The next chapter focuses on methodology.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

4.1 Introduction

The research used a qualitative research design, and this chapter outlines the ontological and epistemological assumptions employed in order to answer the research questions, and the researcher's positionality in the research. It describes the methodologies and methods selected, explains why semi-structured interviews were used, the characteristics of the participants and how the participants were located. The ethics process is also detailed and the thematic analysis procedure.

This study aims to answer three research questions:

1. How did Traveller families and the extended Traveller community impact on the decision of Traveller women to enter higher education?

2.To what extent did school experiences influence the decision to go to third level education?

3. Which support structures in higher education proved to be the most beneficial in encouraging Traveller women students to complete courses, and which areas need improvement so that Traveller women are enabled to use their qualifications in the wider labour market?

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

My research paradigm led to my ontological position - the nature of research (Pryce, Spencer and Walsh, 2014), that reality is created for individuals through their experiences, and so multiple realities exist as different people can experience the same event differently, based on their own reality of that event (Pretorius, 2018). I took a relativist ontological stance as I believe that situations are experienced differently based on individuals personal and cultural circumstances. As multiple realities exist due to individuals interpreting experiences differently, I was interested in finding out what these realities are for the Traveller women in

terms of how their, and their families, experiences of education had impacted on their educational decisions later in life. I wished to understand more clearly how these experiences impacted on them individually, and on their families and extended families, and the wider Traveller community. My epistemological approach – the theory of knowledge (Pryce, Spencer and Walsh, 2014) was that of interpretivism – there are multiple interpretations of every event (Merriam, 2009, p. 9) and my interest was in how these realities were individually experienced. Interpretivists are interested in understanding the lived experiences of people and see individuals as experts of their own experiences. They focus on understanding people's social worlds and the subjective meaning that individuals attach to their lived experiences, and do not aim to change people's social worlds. The voices of participants hold supreme although they take into account the role of reflexivity; exploring the ways in which a researcher's involvement will influence and inform the study to some degree (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, p. 228). Interpretive investigators aim for objectivity in the data analysis process (Mack, 2010). By understanding the topic being investigated in reality (ontology), and how interactions with interviewees generates knowledge (epistemology) a balance can be found between the reality beyond the interview setting i.e. the topic being investigated, and the ways that participants experientially locate themselves in relation to this reality through the interview setting (McLachlan and Garcia, 2015). I believed that it was important to hear the voices of the Traveller women, who were the main participants in this study, and to hear their accounts of their experiences. By taking this ontological and epistemological approach, I was able to examine these experiences by interviewing the Traveller women individually to gain knowledge of what these experiences were, how they interpreted them and how they were impacted by them, in order to answer the three research questions outlined above.

4.2.1 Researcher Positionality

My own position in relation to Travellers originated when I was the Director of three Traveller Training Centres, two of which were mixed centres in that they offered

education to both Travellers and the settled community (those who had not completed Junior Certificate level which is equivalent to G.C.S.E. level). There was a dearth of my personal experience of the Traveller community before I began working directly with them and initially I worked with Traveller women only, as no Traveller man would join the programme. When I read about Traveller women receiving degrees and further qualifications from universities in Ireland, I found myself in awe of their achievements, as I saw in the training centres how difficult their lives could be. I wondered how they had made decisions to enter third level study and the challenges that it would have posed for them from a financial and cultural perspective. I realised that I had totally taken for granted the education that I had received and that the idea of going to university had been the norm for everybody in my class at secondary school. It had also been the norm for my family as all my five siblings have a university education, and my parents and grandparents. This activated my interest and led to my exploration of this topic and the resulting research questions.

I was cognisant of my role as a 'settled' person and that I was entering a community that I was not part of and would never be part of, and conscious that I was part of the 'settled' community that had caused distress to Travellers for many years. I was also aware that all the benefits of the interviews would go to me, and that the Traveller women were engaging with me and giving up their time due to their generosity of spirit, without any direct gain.

4.3 Research Methodology

In order to answer the three research questions, the research design took a qualitative approach – qualitative research examines the social construction of realities and focuses on participants perspectives (Flick, 2018). The decision to take a qualitative approach was influenced by my interest in how reality is constructed by individuals' interactions with their social world (Merriam, 1998, p. 6) and the main concern in qualitative research is understanding the topic from the participant's viewpoint (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

In this research the process known as the inductive process used the data gathered to generate themes, as the process moved from the specific to the general.

4.3.1 Narrative Research and Narrative Inquiry

Within qualitative research lies narrative research, which is a broad qualitative research tradition which focuses on studying people's stories, told by individuals (Polkinghorne, 1988) and narrative inquiry is an approach to studying these experiences, and it provides insight into the complexities of culture and human behaviour (Creswell and Poth, 2016). It involves collecting data in the form of narratives through interviews or other materials, and focuses on marginalised populations and aims to give them a voice (Bleakley, 2005). The relationship between personal experience and the social and cultural context is examined, and narrative researchers are interested in the chain of experiences and how these are discussed in the narrative. Stories are interpreted to understand how people make sense of their experiences and perceptions and it also highlights ethical issues. The actual experience is less important than the way that people make sense of their experience, and experiences are continuous and interactive (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry was used in this thesis which gave the Traveller women a voice and their stories became the raw data. It allowed them to make sense of the experiences they had in education, both positive and negative as it is a way of understanding experiences, and it concerns studying how a story is told. New theoretical understandings of people's experiences may be found (Clandinin and Huber, 2010) as the relationship between personal experience and the social and cultural contexts are all examined simultaneously. Narrative inquiry with its focus on the marginalised voice coupled with the capability approach, permits the disadvantaged, in this case the Traveller women to recognise how others acted on their behalf or not, and permits them to see their strengths in being able to negotiate and overcome barriers and constraints.

4.4 Sampling, Characteristics and Resourcing of Research Participants

The sampling method selected for the Traveller women graduates was purposive sampling, which means that respondents with particular characteristics were chosen (Bryman, 2012); those who had identified as Irish Travellers, were women and had completed a university course up to degree level. The reason why I wanted to interview degree holders was due to the extended time the graduates had invested in their education, as degree courses in universities in Ireland take between three and four years. I felt that the time and commitment necessary to pursue studies at this level would lead to extensive educational experiences, and that recounting these experiences would lead to rich, nuanced descriptive data which would be suitable for the purpose at hand (Charmaz, 2006). My selection of participants, which was based on their educational achievements, represented a sample 'deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 157).

At the time of beginning this thesis I was not in direct contact with Traveller women as the Senior Traveller Training Centres had been closed for some years. In Year 1, in Part 1 of this doctorate programme, I met Traveller women when I completed an assignment on the experiences of Travellers in education after gaining ethnic minority status. This paper was published and upon publication I sent details to the individuals who had participated directly and indirectly. These included Traveller health workers, a Traveller education officer, a settled community officer and settled support workers who worked with Travellers – all these workers were women. I initially asked the workers if they knew of women from the Traveller community who had studied up to degree level who might want to take part in my research. The study then used a snowballing method whereby respondents who met the criteria were asked if they knew anybody else who might take part, in order to maximise the number of students for interview. Snowball sampling is a method of gathering information to access specific groups of people and it can be applied

when there are difficulties accessing samples with the target characteristics (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017).

I received contact details for seven Traveller women graduates who wished to take part, and I contacted these women by email and outlined my research plans and what their role was. The women all agreed to take part and I sent each of them the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form and explained that my supervisor would have access to my completed report, although I would use pseudonyms so that nobody could be identified. I also explained that I would not mention the name of their university or area to ensure anonymity. My original plan was to interview sixteen Traveller graduates but I found it difficult to recruit sufficient numbers due to the dearth of Traveller women graduates generally, the fact that a lot of Traveller women graduates do not self-identify, and also that some graduates do not currently get involved with research projects due to work/time constraints. I contacted a national organisation for Travellers and outlined my plans, and whilst they tried to help me, they did advise that a lot of the Traveller women graduates had already been interviewed for other research, and were suffering from 'research fatigue'. The reluctance of this marginalised group to take part in my research, may have been due to historical experience with research and its use in reinforcing harmful stereotypes (Daniel, 2005; Kanyeredzi, 2018, p. 2). Participants in interviews may also feel objectified by interviewers – where they are treated as a tool for another's (researcher's) purpose (Nussbaum, 1995). When I spoke to another Traveller worker, they advised that Travellers themselves wished to carry out research on Travellers. This alludes to the increasing confidence that Travellers have in their abilities to conduct and lead research, and not just be involved on the periphery. This also indicates that Traveller women wish to be more than participational agents (Claassen, 2018, pp. 48-49) as they also desire to act as navigational agents where they decide on the purpose of the activity, and which research activities they enter and exit. My focus on Traveller women graduates meant that the graduate numbers and therefore the total population was very small.

As a result of the low number of available Traveller women graduates, I also interviewed a number of people who worked directly with Travellers in higher education/when entering higher education and they consisted of two employees in two Traveller non-governmental organisations (NGO's), five higher education Access officers and two higher education officers, in five universities. These interviews were useful for supporting the data obtained from the graduates, and they provided greater understanding of the institutional policies to support the Traveller women when accessing and during higher education. Convenience sampling was used – the researcher chose the sample she could access easily (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2011, pp. 155-156) as the contact details of these participants were available online. These employees signed the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms. Overall I believed that this was a sufficient number, sixteen in total (seven Traveller women graduates and nine employees), in order to draw out the necessary data for analysis.

Information regarding the Traveller women graduates, the Traveller NGO employees, the higher education access officers and higher education officers was anonymised which meant that their names, universities, workplaces and places of residence were not included. In order to present the analysed data in a more meaningful way and to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used. In Table 1 below, the first seven names selected are traditional names used by Traveller women, and the following nine names are random names used to represent the Traveller NGO employees, and university access and education officers.

Participants	Pseudonyms
1 Traveller graduate	Molly
2 Traveller graduate	Eileen
3 Traveller graduate	Margaret
4 Traveller graduate	Mary
5 Traveller graduate	Annie
6 Traveller graduate	Nora
7 Traveller graduate	Winnie

8 Traveller NGO worker	Helen
9 Traveller NGO worker	Karen
10 Higher Education Access Officer	Anne
11 Higher Education Access Officer	Fiona
12 Higher Education Officer	John
13 Higher Education Officer	Linda
14 Higher Education Access Officer	Jackie
15 Higher Education Access Officer	Maureen
16 Higher Education Access Officer	Paula

Table 1: Participants and Pseudonyms

4.5 Research Methods – Interviews

Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research and in-depth interviews are a useful tool for gathering data on individuals' experiences especially if the interview topic is sensitive (Woodsong et al. 2005, p. 2). Whilst the questions being asked of the Traveller participants in this study were not particularly sensitive per se, they could have caused participants to react sensitively as they related to their upbringing and types of schools attended. They could also have triggered memories of past events which would have been traumatising. In order to counter these difficulties the participants were given the interview schedule in advance, so that they were aware of the different areas being questioned, and they could choose to answer some or all of the questions.

A zoom interview, whilst slightly different to a traditional face-to-face interview, will elicit an in-depth response with nuances and contradictions (Woodsong et al. 2005, p. 30). It involves the interviewer locating an interpretive perspective where the interviewee begins to see connections between particular events and beliefs. Benefits of Zoom meetings include the rich data that accrues from the meetings, and the fact that participants may be more comfortable in a setting of their choice, probably their home (Oliffe et al. 2021, p. 1).

On-line interviews are criticised for lacking social context cues including non-verbal behaviour (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986). I countered this issue by having both audio and video recordings and I could see and hear when the participants seemed enthusiastic, emotional, etc. There can be issues regarding emotional distress during interviews, although online interviews may make it easier to deal with this, as a participant can close the interview by pressing a button (Thunberg and Arnell, 2021) rather than asking the in-person interviewer to stop the interview. Participants need access to devices and relevant software (Namey et al. 2020) although it is likely that currently everybody has a phone they can use to access the software, and people are involved with online learning/working and know how to use this software. There can be issues getting informed consent when conducting interviews online (Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman, 2022) and I ensured to send all the necessary paperwork to the participants in advance of the interviews, and they could either sign, scan and send me the documents or complete a statement stating that they had read and consented to the interview.

In order to draw out rich data, qualitative researchers need to ensure that they adopt the right approach as they need to have a questioning stance, have tolerance towards ambiguity, ask good questions and be a careful observer (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). I ensured to be sympathetic if any of the respondents seemed emotional during the interviews, when they spoke about difficult times in their lives. Participants were asked to select the date and time of the interview, which gave them scope to choose a work location or other location where they would be comfortable to participate in the interview. All participants agreed to be interviewed via Zoom.

The research interviews, which were conducted once and lasted around fifty minutes, consisted of semi-structured interviews which are in-depth interviews where participants answer preset open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014). They are useful in that they contain pre-set questions yet remain flexible so that topics can be explored in-depth, and additional insight can be gained by the use of follow-up questions. There was scope to ask further questions and probe particular answers in order to elicit further information. When I opened the

interview I ensured to adopt a friendly tone when I introduced myself, and I asked the participants if they had any questions and if they were ready for the interview, before I began. The interviews were recorded using the Zoom audio recording function and verbatim transcripts were generated from the interviews.

4.5.1 Interview Guide

The interview questions for the Traveller women graduates consisted of initial questions about their background and growing up as a Traveller. This was a way for them to ease into the interview by revealing information that they would have been very familiar with. Next there were questions about their experiences in primary and secondary school, followed by questions regarding their family's attitude to them staying on at school, and later applying for higher education. There were questions about their expectations and experiences in higher education, life after university and how they had been impacted by the higher education experience – see Appendix A for list of questions. I was conscious of my ethical responsibility to my participants in terms of the questions I asked and the responses elicited from them.

The questions for the employees concerned their role in supporting Traveller women into higher education, the barriers that they perceived to exist for Traveller women in relation to university access and entry, the supports offered to the women during their higher education experience, and supports offered post university in terms of employment – see Appendix B for the full list of questions.

4.6 Pilot Studies

Prior to the interviews I completed a pilot study whereby I carried out an interview with a Traveller woman graduate to see if the questions were clear, and elicited responses that contained the information I needed to answer the three research questions, and to check if there were any questions/areas that needed revising. My participant was educated to degree level and I was aware that she would be

competent in completing an interview without needing extra support. However I was also conscious that they may have been encountering difficulties in their home life/working life and aware that I needed to pay attention to any difficult moment/s in the interview and to be able to stop the interview if needed, or take a break, or offer advice/support if necessary. I carried out this interview in person, and after receiving reassurance that the questions were clear and in order, and observing that my research questions would be answered, I then contacted the Traveller women graduates, the Traveller NGO personnel, the higher education access officers and education officers to set up the further interviews.

4.7 Ethical Approach and Approval

Qualitative researchers must adopt an ethical approach throughout all of the research process and there is a strong link between ethics, reflexivity and positionality. Researchers need to reflect on the impact of power relationships on the research process as they hold power through their role, the study design, the questions asked and how they interpret and present the data (Atlas.ti, n.d.). Reflexivity – a capacity to look at ourselves in the research process (Harding, 1993, p. 461) is an important part of qualitative research, although it is the awareness that is important and its possible influence on the process. It is not possible to put aside completely one's preconceptions (one cannot fully bracket) as people are always in the world and their involvement cannot be separated (Heidegger, 1962). In other words, the researcher will be subjective and this should be embraced (Warin, 2011). The management of impressions and expectations, and the recognition of the different positions of the participants and researcher as they interact, is part of the research process. Being reflexive and writing oneself into the research process bring an authenticity to the process (Coffey, 1999). The presence of the researcher is inherent in the process and research must be planned to use this presence (Stanley and Wise, 2002). The experience of the researcher is as important, if not more so, than theory, and data will include beliefs and values. Researchers cannot separate themselves from experience which they experience

as people, and understanding takes place as people experience what is going on. Both the researcher and the participants will have emotional involvement and the research experience will also be impacted by attempts to understand and explain the events. The acknowledgement of reflexivity aligned with my epistemological position of interpretivism.

Ethics in the practice of research includes the unanticipated ethical decisions that were not obvious at the beginning of the process (Guillemin and Gilliam, 2004, p. 273). Reflexivity and ethics are connected when the researcher owns up to their involvement in the research process. Research reflexivity contains relational awareness – a sensitivity to self and others (Holland, 2007, p. 207) and there is recognition that the researcher influences the participants' perceptions and recognition that they are influencing the researcher. Being ethically minded and reflexive involves the researcher interpreting the participant's interpretation of their experiences. Recognition of one's emotions in the research process will lead to researchers being less influenced by them (Kleinman and Copp, 1993). I was conscious of recognising the fact that I as a researcher, was part of the research process and would impact the research process. By claiming that this research provided objective knowledge independent of the researcher, would mean omitting and downplaying my involvement and also reducing the role of the women interviewed. Acknowledging that my personal experience was the basis for my behaviour and actions, meant that I could more fully understand the behaviour and actions of my participants.

Reflexivity encourages reflection on one's own assumptions prior to the research and in the course of the research, and about how these assumptions may impact the research and its findings (Willig, 2001, p. 10). I was conscious prior to the interviews that I had not met many Traveller women graduates, as the Traveller women learners in the Senior Traveller Training Centres, studied at FETAC levels 3 and 4, not Level 7 (Ordinary Degree level) and above. I was also careful not to take a deficit approach to these individuals, whereby I would assume that their achievements were somehow of lower quality than others, because of any extra supports they received.

I completed the online Ethics Application Process on REAMS which included completing a Participation Information Sheet, Participation Consent form, an email inviting participants to take part in the research, and an outline of the interview schedule (see Appendices A and B for samples). Once these were passed by the Ethics Committee at Lancaster University I then began contacting likely participants. For this research I had to ensure that my need for research data did not outweigh my obligations towards my participants, the Traveller women, who are part of a vulnerable group. When I introduced myself in my email, I explained why I was conducting the research, who would see it, and where the results might be published.

4.8 Thematic Analysis, coding and concepts

The capability approach looks at people's ability to convert resources into real opportunities (Sen, 1982) and it is a normative framework which can be applied to a variety of theories and applications such as the conceptualisation of education. The theoretical concepts in this study informed how the data was collected, as the data attempted to capture and reflect the capability approach concepts (Morrow, 2014), and using capability theory aided with drawing conclusions from the results of the empirical research.

Thematic analysis (TA) was used as the methodology whereby the researcher identifies, analyses and reports on themes within the data, and interprets aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2022). TA proved useful, as with my interpretivist approach, I was cognisant of the need to interpret the data and not just to describe them. Initially I transcribed the data manually verbatim, as I was interested in identifying each and every nuance of the conversations – without this step there may be data loss and/or distortion (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 426). I listened to each transcription a number of times, and although this was time consuming, it meant that I began to search for recurring themes which began the analysis stage. I wanted the participants own words to propel the research forward and I was conscious of not beginning the coding process too early and

then being locked into these codes. I used the Meaning Condensation approach (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) to bring the main themes together. This involved reading the whole text in order to get a sense of it, 'meaning units' of the text were decided on by the researcher, themes were then identified which meant that units were examined in relation to the study's purpose and the useful themes were brought together. I allocated codes to the concepts i.e. the inductive approach was used. I then used qualitative research software Nvivo 14 to further sort and organise the data in the search for codes, themes and subthemes (see Appendix C for themes and subthemes) in order to strengthen the credibility of the outcomes. I compared the manual codes with the software produced codes, and once these were consistent I continued coding and began to see how the themes developed and how they were related and inter-related. Initially I was nervous when it came to analysing the data as I was conscious that I might confuse a sensational item with a source of rich data, or over emphasise an area that was repeated simply because of repetition, rather than its own worth. Over time this reduced as I became more familiar with the data and I found that I became more confident as the codes emerged and the resulting themes.

I was conscious of my own prior assumptions, and concerned that I would pay too much attention and give too much weighting to these assumptions if they were confirmed by the answers in the transcripts. In order to avoid this, I continually checked the transcripts to ensure that I was not focusing unduly on some areas rather than others. Listening and recording the narratives of these Traveller women enabled me to subject their experiences to analysis, and this ensured that knowledge was gained about these experiences. Unless these stories are told, they become part of routine everyday life and useful knowledge cannot be obtained and used to improve the lives of others. Traveller women are not a homogenous group and they may not share the same experiences, as forms of oppression may differ and it is important that individual accounts are recorded. I was also aware that I was an outsider; I was not a Traveller woman and had not experienced life the way these women had. I was also relying on their

interpretation of events which would have individual meanings for each Traveller woman.

The assertions in this research are subject to the interpretivist orientation which means they are limited and context-bound (Willis, 2007). Researchers may reify meanings as expressions of reality, as they express meanings they want to read into the data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 218) and constant reflexivity is needed to remove bias from the emerging theory. For qualitative researchers, the importance of credibility and trustworthiness is paramount (Suter, 2012). In order to ensure these parameters existed, the participants exact words were used in the quotations in the next chapters, and I have outlined a clear audit trail in this (Methodology) chapter to show how these findings were deduced. The next chapter focuses on Findings and Discussion.

Chapter 5: Conversion Factors and Educational Opportunities

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between the Traveller girls and the school culture, the barriers that exist in education, and the influence of social categories on how they are treated by the settled community. It examines their initial educational experiences in school, and the impact of their parents and school personnel on their educational aspirations. It also looks at how the attitudes and behaviour of the wider Traveller community and settled community led to strengthening of their resilience, and ultimately led them to entering higher education albeit at different stages of their lives. To date, the needs of Traveller women students in education and beyond to the labour market, have not been analysed through the lens of the capability approach, and this research should make a significant contribution to this literature. Given the Irish government's many policies, strategies and focus on widening higher education participation for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Higher Education Authority, 2022) this research will be useful in uncovering the policies and systems that helped these individuals on their pathway to higher education completion and beyond, and those that need to be developed further.

In this chapter focus is on three of the six themes developed which include the impact of the Traveller parents' experiences in education on their attitudes to education, the participants' experiences in school, and the attitudes of the wider family and community on their decision to enter higher education. These are related to two research questions; examining the impact of Traveller families and extended families on the women's decision to enter higher education, and the influence of school experiences on this decision.

5.2 Parental Experiences of Education and Resulting Attitudes towards Education

This section examines how the parents of the participants experienced education, and how the results of that educational experience impacted on how they viewed education generally, and how they behaved in relation to their daughter's educational capability development. This area aims to identify barriers or constraining conversion factors (Calitz, 2019) which can act to reduce the participants' capability to be educated, and can also reduce freedoms in person-specific ways (Robeyns, 2018). It also aims to recognise the most relevant conversion factors which acted positively for the participants. As conversion factors can create or reduce barriers to educational capabilities, these are important aspects which can help to inform policy attempts at reducing injustices in educational development for Traveller women. There may be a perception that people from the same ethnic group are homogenous although the reality is that Travellers differ in their experiences and behaviours, and this lack of homogeneity was evident in the different experiences of parents' whilst in education, and their resulting views of and support for education. Overall the mothers/both parents acted as positive conversion factors for their daughters as they all supported their education and attendance in school, up to the end of primary school. The stance of parents/families differed considerably from the settled community, and from each other in the Traveller community at the end of primary school, as for some parents the completion of primary school indicated the completion of education for their daughter, as the level of education received was seen by parents as sufficient. For others the demands of the household in terms of care and housework needs, overrode the need for further education i.e. secondary school entry. For those who continued on in school, some students were permitted to leave school early, without completing compulsory education. Others were supported in their studies throughout primary and secondary school, and to apply for higher education.

5.2.1 Parents as Positive Conversion Factors up to the End of Primary School

Traveller mothers are aware that their own limited formal education impacts negatively on their ability to participate in structures (Boyle, 2007) which includes being able to access the labour market. The mothers of the participants in this research wanted their children to have some level of education to ensure increased capability to participate. Education can be viewed as a final end and also have instrumental value, as it leads to the development of other capabilities (Richardson, 2015, p. 167). For Molly's mother, the instrumental value of education was of importance and she valued education for its functioning – it's contribution to literacy capability. She was also aware of the importance of regular attendance in school - school absenteeism impacts negatively on learning, academic achievement and educational outcomes (Gershenson, Jacknowitz and Brannegan, 2017, p. 137; Kirksey, 2019; Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022, p. 1).

Molly explained her mother's initial role as a positive conversion factor in encouraging her capability to be educated:

> 'Mum never had the opportunity of schooling. It was a big thing for Mum that we'd all know how to read and write, we'd have to learn. My Mum made very sure we were out to school every morning' (Molly, Traveller).

Mary's mother took a similar stance and whilst she didn't have access to education, she valued education for her children:

> 'My mother didn't go to education, but always saw the value in education. She kind of always encouraged us to stay (in education)' (Mary, Traveller).

Overall the mothers/both parents acted as positive conversion factors for their daughters as they supported their education and attendance in school, up to the end of primary school. The Traveller mothers were the main instigators when it came to ensuring school attendance, and one mother used her agency which

involved using her voice and arguing on behalf of her children and speaking up to ensure that the school calendar was adhered to, despite the fact that it interfered with traditional Traveller culture. Travellers have always regarded nomadism as an important part of their culture and it remains a defining feature of many Irish Traveller lives (Boyle, Flynn and Hanafin, 2018, p. 23; Donahue, McVeigh and Ward, 2005). Despite it being a valuable functioning within their culture, Winnie commented how her mother always insisted that school attendance was more important and that travelling could work around the school calendar:

> 'My father always wanted to go out travelling in the summertime. My mother would also ensure that we finished up school, and then be back for the first week of September. Now my mother always pushed that with my father on us to make sure we'd finish school in June' (Winnie, Traveller).

Education's value outweighed one of the 'norms' of the Traveller culture for Winnie's mother and despite the conflict created with her husband by insisting on full school attendance for her children, she managed to change the natural course of the family's behaviour to achieve a goal beyond her own personal welfare. Winnie's mother used her agency freedom to make this meaningful choice, and used her agency achievement to realise this valued goal, even if it was unconnected to her personal well-being but directly connected to her children's capability to be educated (Sen, 1984). Travellers are aware that choices need to be made when negotiating the Traveller culture and the settled culture. Traveller culture is an evolving culture with interaction between older traditions and emerging new ideas (Cork Traveller Women's Network 2025; Irish Traveller Movement, 2019).

5.2.2 Parents as Positive Conversion Factors after Primary School

When parents are supportive of education this acts as a positive conversion factor for students and enables them to remain in education. Some Traveller parents have different expectations regarding completion of education levels, depending

on whether it is their son's or daughter's education. Traveller boys are expected to contribute to family income at a young age, whilst Traveller girls are expected to help with looking after the home which they can fit in around school time.

For Eileen there were different expectations for girls within her family:

> 'Like in my family it was expected that all the girls would complete second level education and it was ok for the boys to leave at Junior Cert' (Eileen, Traveller).

The different parental expectations for their children depending on their gender, does not mean a lack of support for boys' education but rather a priority for the development of their sons' economic capabilities. Eileen's parents' expectations regarding her education enabled her to continue with her education which added to her capability set. She was then able to use these increased capabilities and agency to expand her capabilities further when she went directly from school to higher education. Education leads to expansion of individual freedoms and abilities through increased access to subject knowledge, practical reasoning – thinking and deciding a course of action, and social skills. Higher education can lead to increased expansions of these freedoms and abilities as education can 'act as a capability multiplier to expand epistemic capability, practical reason, knowledge and imagination, social relationships and networks with respect, dignity and recognition' (Khoo, 2021).

Eileen continued:

> 'Even though education wouldn't have been something that was been encouraged a whole lot they still saw the value in it. So when I began speaking about the CAO (university application form), they were all for it' (Eileen, Traveller).

Supportive parents who value education impact positively on the aspirations of Traveller girls. Eileen's parents, who had limited knowledge of education at secondary school and third level, were able to provide verbal support and despite the lack of academic guidance offered by her family, these words of encouragement were of sufficient value to empower her to access higher

education. Although lacking educational opportunities themselves, Eileen's parents were very aware of the advantages of education, which they clearly recognised as a capability. This is supported by other studies - Traveller parents indicate that presenting their children for education was a priority issue for them (Bhopal, 2004; Boyle, Flynn and Hanahan, 2020, p. 1401; Hegarty, 2013; Quinlan, 2021).

The importance of family support was also mentioned by two access officers and one outreach worker in third level:

> (Family support in third level) 'It's an enabler....when they've a supportive family/husband. Their parents, o(Family support in third level) 'It's an enabler....when they've a supportive family/husband. Their parents, or family or husband may not be at that level of education, but that they can see the value in it' (Maureen, higher education Access officer).r family or husband may not be at that level of education, but that they can see the value in it' (Maureen, higher education Access officer).

Family support for education is invaluable for Traveller women, and whilst verbal support may appear insufficient as an enabler to enter higher education, for these women it provided an important means of support and helped determine their educational direction.

5.2.3 Parents as Positive Conversion Factors in Terms of Education, Alongside High Expectations of In-House Labour

Mary's parents also supported her in continuing education although there were competing expectations as she was expected to keep up with schoolwork whilst also taking on domestic responsibilities within the home from a young age. Mary viewed the extra responsibility at a young age as an opportunity, as it provided her with the skills to be able to manage her own finances, the household finances and younger children:

> ‘Usually the first-born daughter is kinda a second mammy. You kinda had to assume the role of leader, em when my mother wasn’t able. I think that’s a good thing because I see people not able to manage the household like do bills or budget or mind kids and I’ve been doing this (laughs) forever’ (Mary, Traveller).

The early responsibility permitted Mary to use her agency in order to give back to her family, which was a valued functioning for her. The need for a labour force in the home, places adult responsibilities on Traveller girls at a young age and there is a tendency to see young girls as adults, and impose gendered adult responsibilities on them. The extra pressures of family life would have meant more stress for Mary when navigating the demands of school life with coursework and terminal examinations to complete, although it did not impact on her persistent aspirations to enter higher education.

5.2.4 Parents as Negative Conversion Factors After Primary School

One’s culture and social norms may impact on the empowerment capabilities one can enjoy, and lead to individuals lacking capabilities like the capability to be educated, despite government support for it (Claassen, 2018, p. 154). The Irish Education Act of 1892 required parents in cities and urban areas throughout the country to send children between the ages of 6 and 14 to school for at least 75 days a year (Central Statistics Office, 2024b). This was updated by the Education Act 1998 which states that education is compulsory for children in Ireland aged 6 to 16 or until they have completed three years of secondary school education (Department of Education and Youth, 2025). Despite the legal requirement to attend school for at least eight/ten years, some of the parents made decisions to end their child’s education after primary school.

Molly’s mother’s stance towards education changed when Molly completed primary school as her mother’s value of education was linked to how it could lead to literacy, and education was seen as a means to an end, and this end result, that of having a literate daughter, had been achieved:

> ‘I didn’t go to secondary as by the time I was 12, Mum was kind of happy enough at that time. She valued education but people at that time didn’t value the more formal side of it’ (Molly, Traveller).

Her mother’s lack of familiarity with educational spaces, and lack of knowledge of the long-ranging positive impacts of increased education led to constraints on Molly’s agency to develop the capability to be educated further. Molly’s mother was concerned only with education’s immediate effect i.e. its functioning in helping with communications inside and outside the household.

Molly’s mother’s lack of education and the subsequent impact on her own literacy capabilities led her to believe that literacy was important for the next generation, although it did not appear to have impacted her own literacy aspirations. Literacy gaps impact on aspiration gaps - the difference between aspirations and actual achievements and it is likely that Molly’s mother believed that the investment in her own education to become literate was pointless, given the size of this gap (Ray, 2006). Her own resigned aspirations may have led her to believe that for her, opportunities were absent (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 111) and subsequently literacy capability for her children was extremely important and she focused on her children’s attainment in this area, rather than entering or re-entering education directly herself. This short-term view of education and its capability to lead to literacy only, also led to resigned educational aspirations for Molly until she became an adult and was able to use her individual agency to re-enter education.

Whilst Traveller families have regard for education and value it, the pressures of family life can override the need to develop the capability to be educated further. Traveller girls’ responsibility towards family can start at a very young age. Nora had to assume family responsibilities and had to support her extended family when aged 12 she took over the care of her younger cousins and her aunt who was unwell. Nora had been capable of taking the decision to continue her education but she was limited by her home background. Her family viewed the educational system as having less value than her contribution to caring for the household, thus reducing her functioning to achieve academically, and her agency and freedom. Viewing education in this way does not indicate a lack of support for education but

indicated that the need to support one's family/extended family was viewed as more important than scholarly tasks. Traveller families tend to rely on each other for support in these situations rather than engaging outside resources such as social services, as they see them as a threat who will remove their children, rather than as a resource for support (Hardy, 2018).

Nora's ability to be a capable social actor was severely reduced and as she was at a young age, she did not question this and followed her elders wishes:

> 'So when I had my Confirmation made, in my head I said I'm going to secondary school like everybody else. But I suppose my aunt had different plans (laughs). I left school to help her out because she became really unwell so my responsibility I suppose was to look after her and the kids' (Nora, Traveller).

The gendered role of Traveller girls means that their responsibility for care in the home reduces their income generating ability, and their lack of education further restricts their access to the labour market. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have insecure functionings (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007, p. 10) as individuals' actual achievements are not guaranteed. Disadvantage means having low levels of income, and reduced social advantages which impacts on opportunities to be successful. In these circumstances individuals have higher levels of risk than those who have more advantages, and disadvantage and risk can intensify the negative impact of one another. For Nora this was not a case of voluntary submission as she did not have additional basic capabilities to choose otherwise. Nor was it a case of adaptive choice (Khader, 2011) as she did not have the choice of staying on in school. Nora would not have yet developed autonomy as one needs the competency for practical reasoning and critical reflection in order to do this (Claassen, 2018, p. 146). As she was a child of 12, this was a case of manipulation as Nora's choice regarding her education was not considered, and her extended family's need for support outweighed her need to exercise her capability to be educated (Wood, 2014). Preferences of members of the group may be manipulated by others in the group, so that they believe the information that is given to them (Claassen, 2018, p. 149). As a Traveller girl the manipulation she was

subjected to involved gendered patterns of action (Stoljar, 2014) which were normalised within the Traveller community. Actions should be judged by their impact on individual people (Robeyns, 2005, p. 107) and Nora's lack of capability due to her relative's insistence on her providing support for her extended family, ensured that she was seen as being a means to an end, rather than her value as an end in herself (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). Despite the decision to remove Nora from the school system after primary school, this does not mean that her family devalued education but rather indicated a practical response to a critical family situation which she could resolve.

Nora's aspirations could have been resigned or frustrated at that point (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 114) but she found a space of resistance and used her agency to enrol on a part-time Youthreach course, where she took educational classes whilst still providing full-time support to her relatives. Youthreach is an educational programme for early school leavers, focusing on basic education, personal development, vocational training and work experience (Citizens Information, 2025a). Nora's resilience in coping with this challenging position led to her developing persistent aspirations which enabled her to complete various educational courses, and eventually enter higher education.

5.2.5 Parents as Negative Conversion Factors Due to their Acquiescence with Early School Leaving

The families' different approaches to education meant that their daughters followed different pathways to higher education due to their parents own educational experiences, their support or lack of support for education, competing values and needs within the family, and their daughters' aspirations. Three of the seven students left school voluntarily between the ages of 13 and 14, which led to the girls having reduced agency within the capability of being educated due to limited parental agency and lack of parental engagement with educators, as a consequence of their parents own lack of academic capital (Spiteri, 2022, p. 84). None of the graduates mentioned their parents discussing their plans for early

departure from school, with any personnel in the schools involved. Parents from disadvantaged backgrounds can be intimidated by the school environment as they have little familiarity with it, and secondary schools present a more daunting experience for them as they have to deal with a lot more teachers than in primary school (McGrath, 2024, pp. 120-121). The parents lack of cultural capital and social resources impacts on their confidence to speak to educated staff in the school, and they are not involved in social networks with other parents from the settled community (Lareau and McNamara Horvat, 1999, p. 42).

These participants who left education voluntarily were influenced by the personal and social situations that they found themselves in, once primary school ceased. People have different abilities to convert resources into functionings, and these conversion factors determine courses of action taken. When resources are absent eg lack of role models in schools, this may ensure that the functioning of being educated does not take place. It can be difficult for Traveller girls to see the value of formal education when they do not have positive role models in the form of Traveller teachers in schools. Other Traveller students may not need the presence of Traveller teachers in order to be motivated to continue education, as conversion factors may operate negatively for some students and positively for others (Sen, 1999).

Experiences of discrimination in school and in wider society impact on aspirations for the future. When Margaret entered secondary school she failed to see how it could benefit her, and due to experiences of discrimination she did not perceive how education would increase her capabilities and ability to enter the labour market. Margaret's aspirations were influenced by the action of her relatives who had left formal education early, which led to her reduced value of education as she felt that staying in education would be a wasted effort. She resigned her aspirations and lowered her self-belief that she could access the labour market, leading to frustrated aspirations (Mkwananzi, 2018, p. 114).

Margaret was influenced by her cousins leaving secondary school:

> ‘In secondary school I only did first year. You see all your cousins leaving, and you think it’s a waste of time. A lot of Travellers feel that they’re going to be discriminated against and what’s the point in doing education if I’m not going to get a job’ (Margaret, Traveller).

Margaret viewed education for its instrumental value only i.e. that of gaining employment and saw it as a means to an end, rather than regarding education for its intrinsic value - the development of intellectual and/or social capabilities. Margaret, as a young teenager, made the decision to leave education, despite the legal stipulation that students must attend secondary school for at least three years (Irish Statute Book, 2000). The issue of children being free to decide what they consider of most value continues as an open debate, and is a special problem (Sen, 2007) as generally children do not make their own decisions but are influenced by parents/guardians. Children are social agents in their own right and entitled to some element of choice, although there are freedoms that also depend on the actions of others. This view is supported by other literature - children can act as ‘capable social actors in certain fundamental aspects of their life’ (Biggeri, Ballet and Comim, 2011; Brando, 2020; Hart and Brando, 2018, p. 295) although making life changing decisions such as leaving school aged 12-14 requires both adult agency and educator engagement. The decision to leave compulsory education early, whilst not taken lightly by Traveller families, tends to be more the norm than the exception. Children’s capabilities and functionings can be limited due to their social and physical environment (Biggeri, Ballet and Commim, 2011) and often rely on the parents’ capabilities. Children need to be able to be free to decide what they value, but this freedom can be reduced due to their parents’ limited agency due to disadvantage. This can then influence the child’s ability to attend school and achieve academically and thus experience educational well-being. Family can be a motivator of extended education or a constraint (Posti-Ahokas and Okkolin, 2016, p. 322).

Traveller parents may have been influenced by the immediate environment that their daughters were in at school, and a desire to protect them from negative

surroundings may have been the deciding factor. Traveller parents are interested in their children's education and their well-being, and their desire to ensure their child's well-being as they understand it, can involve relinquishing educational attainment as they do not trust schools to accommodate the educational or emotional well-being of their children (Hegarty, 2013, p. 2). Early school leaving can lead to the possibility of cumulative disadvantages for these already disadvantaged Traveller girls. Existing policies may not focus sufficiently on the importance of early intervention to prevent early school leaving during compulsory education, and how socio-economic and structural factors can contribute to this decision (Spiteri and Cin, 2025). Despite the different stances of parents regarding their daughter's education and the fact that some participants' education was interrupted at a very young age, these women were able to use their agency together with educational resilience to navigate these obstacles (Mkwananzi, 2019; Walker, 2006a; Wilson-Strydom, 2017, p. 387) and the next chapter will investigate how they overcame these barriers. The next section looks at the experiences of the Traveller girls in school.

5.3 Experiences of Traveller Girls in Schools

Students' experiences in school are greatly influenced by the people they meet and interact with, and the relationships formed at school strongly impact students. Quality relationships between teachers and students predict positive academic performance (Lippard et al. 2018, p. 1; McCormick & O'Connor, 2015) and positive socioemotional development (Heatly and Votruba-Drzal, 2017; Spilt et al. 2012, p. 1180). Peer relationships (peer acceptance and peer number of friends) impact both on children's life satisfaction and academic achievement (Tepordei et al. 2023, p. 1). Most of the participants (five out of the seven) recounted their experiences in primary school, as they had little experience of secondary school due to leaving formal schooling early. The Traveller women's relationship with their primary school teachers impacted strongly on how they felt about school and

about themselves, and their self-validation was heavily influenced by how they were treated by staff and 'settled' students/'settled' community.

5.3.1 Relationships with School Staff

Whilst Traveller girls have different experiences throughout life, their school experiences were similar in some ways. The Traveller women all spoke about experiencing discrimination at primary school because of their ethnicity, which for some included teachers not taking an interest in them. Other measures included being taken out of class, and being separated full-time from peers. When students are denied the capability to be educated i.e. real opportunities to learn alongside their peers, their opportunity freedoms are impacted negatively. Opportunity freedoms are interlinked and the absence of one can impact on the availability of others (Mkwananzi, 2019, p. 233). It is very difficult for students to re-engage with mainstream class material if they are being taken out of this class for 'other' learning on a regular basis, as classroom activities and learning are based on additive learning which engages prior knowledge.

Teachers act as positive conversion factors when they are attentive to students' needs. Molly's teachers were unaware/chose to be unaware that she was having difficulties with academic work in primary school:

'I never remember any teacher kind of like, you know, giving me support. I didn't know how to ask for it either. So maybe if I'd asked…' (Molly, Traveller).

Molly internalised the fact that she was responsible for her situation although it is very difficult for a young child to ask for help in a large classroom. Lacking real opportunities to ask for help impacts on academic performance at that point and in the future. Socioemotional development is impacted adversely by teacher's lack of support and leads to trust issues between students and staff. Aspirations to succeed academically can be reduced downwards along with self-esteem, and it can be difficult to reverse the damage caused by a lack of teacher engagement and being 'othered' due to ethnicity. Schools do not always develop student's agency (Hart and Brando, 2018, p. 305) and when students are not supported in school

they are not in a position to empower conversion factors, and their freedom and achievements are impacted (Spiteri, 2022, p. 99).

Molly's capability to learn an additional language was denied to her by the school, as they took the view that she would not have a talent for languages despite Travellers using their own language 'Cant' regularly when conversing with other Travellers, as well as English. Molly explained:

'I wasn't taught Irish because they thought I wouldn't have any aptitude for it' (Molly, Traveller).

It is damaging to students to exclude them directly from particular parts of the curriculum due to discrimination because of their ethnicity. The Irish language is needed for many university courses including primary school teaching. By denying Molly the capability to be educated in the use of one of Ireland's official languages, her opportunity to follow particular career pathways - her functionings, were already thwarted in primary school.

Another way the schools denied full participation for the Traveller students was to remove them from mainstream class to 'learn' with other Traveller students in a mixed age and mixed ability class, and this was a regular incident in many schools. This occurred despite the Department of Education and Science's 2002 policy to fully integrate Travellers into mainstream schools (Department of Education and Science, 2002). A recent report on the barriers that Traveller children experience in school advises that Travellers are still being segregated from mainstream classes (McGrath, 2023, p. 5).

This was the case for Eileen, who did go straight onto university after school:

'More often than not we would have went to a resource class, and it wasn't really a resource class you know' (Eileen, Traveller).

'A resource classroom is a specialised learning environment designed to cater to students who require extra academic support, addressing their unique academic and behavioural needs' (Hanson, n.d.). This was a case of discrimination due to Eileen coming from a Traveller background, and there was wholesale movement of

Travellers into this 'resource' class without any initial intervention to ensure that they were in need of this extra academic support.

These students were too young to recognise that they were not getting access to the full curriculum and that their educational capabilities were being denied, and it was only later in life that this treatment was questioned. Margaret explained:

'It was just when I got a little bit older I was hey why did they take me out just because I was a Traveller? I'm sure there were many other students in that classroom that needed the extra support you know, and never actually received it just because they weren't a Traveller' (Margaret, Traveller).

Margaret recognised later as an adult, that resources had been spent on her and other Travellers, that could have been focused on students with learning difficulties or other needs. The decision by school management to segregate students due to ethnicity, meant that other students were denied opportunities for one-to-one support from staff, or smaller classes. Both the Traveller and mainstream students had reduced opportunities to be educated, due to the discriminatory actions taken by the school.

Traveller parents have limited agency when dealing with professionals in an educational environment and it can be difficult for parents to enter secondary schools as their habitus and lack of familiarity with educational spaces forms a barrier, which prevents them approaching schools and looking for advice or explanations. Parents' capital and the capability to engage with their child's learning creates a gap between those who own it and those who do not. Despite the lack of educational experience, Winnie's mother challenged the strategy of taking Traveller students out of class for certain periods throughout the school day, and although the segregation continued it was in a reduced fashion:

'My mother came in and she challenged the nuns inside in the school so em, we didn't really go down much' (Winnie, Traveller).

Parents and families can act as positive conversion factors and impact the agency of their children to develop capabilities and functionings in relation to being educated. Despite Winnie's mother having reduced educational capital, she had

the capability to engage with her teacher, and she acted as a positive conversion factor for her daughter as she used her agency to enact change.

For some students the segregation was more widespread and extended to having totally separate Traveller classes, a separate schoolyard and a separate transport system, which was the case for Nora:

'The school we attended, there was two classes specifically for members of the Traveller community and we had our own playground and our own classes so I would have noticed then that there was a difference in me compared to the wider community. To stick us out even more we had a yellow bus (laughs) to pick us up' (Nora, Traveller).

The provision of entirely separate systems for Travellers and mainstream students ensured that the Travellers were isolated from the main school community. Their peers would have seen a need to 'other' these students, and the actions of the school normalised this behaviour for them and their families. The 'othering' of these young Traveller children indicated the societal prejudices of the educators and mainstream society towards them and their community, as there was no action to change the situation, which denied them parity of social status (Dejaeghere, 2020). Recognition can operate as a relational capability when it is put into practice through social relations, and individuals have recourse to the capability of respect, dignity and recognition. When people are 'othered' and not recognised, and when this is accepted by the majority, groups like Travellers cannot use their agency to access this opportunity freedom. If mainstream society normalises this behaviour it is very difficult for minority groups to interrupt this injurious conduct due to their lack of numbers, lack of power and empowerment.

5.3.2 Resources Provided by Schools

Schools can act as positive conversion factors when they offer resources that are of use and benefit to their students. Offering segregated classes is a form of negative conversion factor, as marginalisation in the form of Traveller only classes and Traveller only schools have led to poorer educational outcomes for Travellers

(Irish Traveller Movement, n.d.). Schools in Ireland receive the Traveller capitation grant of €213.50 per student, which is paid every December for Traveller students' enrolled in schools (Department of Education, 2024). There have been difficulties getting access to information about how this is used by schools, despite Traveller organisations asking for a breakdown (McGrath, 2024, p. 118). Lack of transparency of financial information can lead to suspicion and distrust amongst parents.

Schools should operate to expand the agency and freedom of young people although schools may be places of freedom or unfreedom, as capabilities can be diminished as well as enhanced (Unterhalter, 2003, p. 11). Educators' mission should be to encourage and motivate students to use their capability to be educated, and to act as a capability multiplier (Khoo, 2021). This was not the case for Mary who expressed interest in attending higher education when in secondary school, but was denied access to basic information about the process:

'I was told at one stage that "I (teacher) have two college prospectus' and you're not getting one"' (Mary, Traveller).

Unequal access to resources and opportunities can lead to adapted preferences downwards, especially for disadvantaged groups (Nussbaum, 2000) although in this instance Mary did not lower her self-belief and she used her social capital to contact another Traveller woman who had completed university, to get the information required. Despite this teacher acting as a negative conversion factor, Mary's powerful aspirations continued and she converted her social capital into capabilities and functionings and thus used her agency to enable her to transition to higher education.

Some schools were active in supporting Traveller students - Eileen's school provided capabilities in the form of real opportunities for her to continue her education in school, when they offered practical resources to use in class:

'I knew I could go to the office for certain things…if I needed a calculator. There was a girl in my sister's class and she was getting similar support. Em and it

became apparent throughout the years that it wasn't just us, it wasn't the case just for Travellers' (Eileen, Traveller).

As part of the only Traveller family in the school, Eileen was not treated differently or 'othered' by the school and this was a positive conversion factor for her. She also availed of further supports as the school looked ahead to supporting her when she was investigating the different universities she could attend, and they provided extra support for completing coursework for her final school assessments which increased her capability for academic achievement. She explained:

'There was actually a 'university' fund. I remember having maybe up to three trips to (different colleges). It also paid for an additional subject teacher to give me additional classes after school when I was preparing for the assessment at the end' (Eileen, Traveller).

The conversion factor of educator engagement and the student's own agency in academic achievement reflects a great part in achieving this functioning or not (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). The combination of extra resources ensured that Eileen completed school and went onto further studies, which indicated that investment in disadvantaged students can lead to large advancements for them.

Secondary schools did intervene at times and offered further help when students indicated that they were leaving formal schooling early. This was the case for Winnie:

'There was a vice principal at the time and there was a principal. They thought that it was books, or uniforms…but I just had enough of the school. So I left school at a very young age, 13' (Winnie, Traveller).

Despite the offer of extra resources in the form of school materials, this offer was too little too late for Winnie. Further supports are needed for disadvantaged students and especially for Traveller students as they do not have the economic or cultural capital that other mainstream families have, and intervention needs to start early and not at the point when they have already decided to leave school. None of the Traveller women interviewed mentioned the role of the schools Careers Guidance Counsellor and any advice given to them from this source. This

was also mentioned by five of the Traveller access officers/education workers. John spoke about his conversation with a guidance counsellor in a secondary school who commented:

‘She (Traveller student) has the potential. But we didn't think she'd go to college (and so she wasn’t offered guidance)’ (John, higher education officer).

The implication in school was that guidance counsellors were there to offer advice for those definitely heading to further education or higher education after school completion. Others commented that there is a shortage generally of guidance counsellors in secondary schools, and that they need to be appropriately experienced to be able to advise these disadvantaged students. There is also a need for early intervention for those who are traditionally early school leavers:

‘They should do guidance in first and second year….early intervention is required’ (Fiona, higher education access officer).

A lot of the participants mentioned the fact that Traveller students tend to leave school early (and five of the seven interviewed had done so) yet there was no specific careers provision for this young cohort. A recent report (McGrath, 2023, p. 30) found that teachers actively encouraged Traveller students to leave school once they had reached the age of 16.

Traveller parents are limited when it comes to providing any academic knowledge, guidance or leadership for their children, and so they are reliant on others to provide this. Their lack of familiarity with the rules of education and learning means that their children cannot rely on familial educational capital. Low literacy skills mean that they are not in a position to explore subject choices and career pathways with their children, and there is dependence on outside resources to provide this information. Academic capital is defined as – ‘the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school, the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family’ (Bourdieu, 1984). Lack of academic capital means that individuals are totally reliant on others to provide educational support such as the school system.

Individuals' aspiration levels are impacted by people in their immediate circle – parents can act as positive influences, as can teachers and peers, whilst similarly they can all act as negative influences and impact on aspiration downwards (Ray, 2006). Traveller parents have very little knowledge of tertiary education, and this leads to fear about their daughters going to higher education and a lack of understanding of the need for this level of education. In order for people to be able to expand their capabilities and functionings, there must be opportunity – what people are able to achieve in terms of what they value, given their personal and social circumstances (Sen, 1999, p. 17). They must also have freedom of choice and the ability to act as agents in regard to their own capabilities which may be constrained.

When parents had questions about student life in higher education, the Traveller participants did not have ready answers. This was evident for Eileen:

'I can remember my father feeling a little bit apprehensive and he was like, oh well are you sure about this, what's gonna happen, what time will you be leaving in the morning? I had the conversation with one of my teachers in my school and they arranged for a meeting with my parents' (Eileen, Traveller).

The academic capital of this family was non-existent and whilst the school responded to the student's request for more information for herself and her family, this was not something that the school had readily set up in advance. The assumption that all this knowledge would become clear at a later stage, was insufficient for this family and for all families who are first generation third level students. Whilst schools act as positive conversion factors for students who do go to higher education, their efforts to prepare students for this experience fell short of what was necessary for those who did not have familial experience of higher education. Capabilities and functionings are necessary but insufficient for a good life (Robeyns, 2003) as they exist in such a way that advantaged groups have more immediate access to them due to their advanced social networks, contacts and economic resources (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, p. 731). Middle-class reproduction continues through education and majority groups remain in dominant positions, whilst marginalised groups continue to operate on the fringes.

5.3.3 Relationships with Peers

The capability approach starts from ends rather than means, and there are ends that do not rely on resources such as self-respect, supportive relationships in school or work, and friendships (Robeyns, 2017). There is a direct positive effect of the perceived number of friends that children have, on life satisfaction (Țepordei et al. 2023, p. 1). Schools can act to promote students' cultural assets (Borrero et al. 2012, p. 1) which will lead to student empowerment and expand their capabilities for participation. In contrast 'othering' by the school will permit stigmatisation of minority groups (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Kumashiro (2000, p. 29) defined the concept of 'other' to groups that have been traditionally marginalised in society i.e. that are other than the norm. When groups like Travellers are othered, it is difficult for them to reconcile the difference between their self-perception and societal perception.

The Traveller participants tended to mix with Traveller families only, including their own relatives and most of the participants mentioned how proud they were to be a Traveller. Entering primary school led to their first encounters with the settled community, and for some of the Traveller students their peers caused difficulties, whilst for others they recognised that it was both the peers and their parents who held discriminatory attitudes towards their culture. Five of the Traveller women mentioned the difficulties, and for Molly this amounted to her peers treating her differently because of her ethnicity:

> 'If I'm being honest I would say it was the other kids, mostly (who caused the difficulties). You were seen as different you know but children are children' (Molly, Traveller).

Molly had normalised this behaviour in her wording that children are children. Children receive messages about other cultures from a range of sources including their parents, teachers and the media, and they are influenced by these messages. Parents' subtle prejudices predict children's implicit prejudices, regardless of the way parents bring up their children (Pirchio et al. 2018, p. 1). These messages may be reinforced at school especially if students see other students being treated

differently eg with segregated classes, different timetables, and different applications of school rules.

> 'I suppose I would say that growing up, you know you're a member of the Traveller community, and you're a little bit guarded because you don't know how you are going to be received because there's times when they find out' (Molly, Traveller).

Molly had learned to be guarded in her behaviour as a result of discrimination, and her fear of others finding out about her ethnicity must have been a source of permanent micro-anxiety. This would have impacted severely on her freedom to engage with friendships in school, and her relational capabilities would have been very compromised due to the lack of respect, dignity and recognition offered to her from her settled peers (Dejaeghere, 2020).

Eileen believed the discrimination she received in primary school was directed primarily by the parents' attitudes towards her community which they deemed as sub-optimal, and this had impacted on their children's prejudices:

> 'It would have been name calling or maybe invitations to parties' (Eileen, Traveller).

Verbal bullying represents a lack of well-being achievement, and the blatant exclusion of Traveller students from after school social activities sends a clear message to their children of who is acceptable and who is not (Elias and Scotson, 1994). Discrimination can lead to feelings of unworthiness, incompetency and incapability, and ultimately to lower self-esteem (Yang et al. 2019). Whilst students are equal in their potential for navigational agency (Claassen, 2018, p. 96), without adequate support from others within the school system it was impossible for most of these students to access navigational agency. They accessed partial participational agency only in school, due to separate classes and lack of access to relational capabilities with the settled students.

One of the two students who stayed on after Junior Certificate experienced discrimination from peers in secondary school. Up to this she had managed this by

ensuring she had backup in the form of a group of Traveller peers, which provided insulation against a lot of the discrimination that was present:

> 'A lot of the discrimination I got in secondary school kind of went over my head from first to third year, because there was a group of us' (Mary, Traveller).

Her empowerment as a group member helped her to ignore the discriminatory comments made by her settled peers. The situation changed after third year when she was the only Traveller completing the Leaving Certificate, and all the comments that were passed about her ethnicity were now taken as a personal attack:

> 'When comments were made I took it 25 times more personal. I'd say a lot of me staying in school would be encouragement from my family and stubbornness, not feeding into that stereotype of what's expected of me' (Mary, Traveller).

Mary had continued engagement with schools after higher education and she commented that nothing had changed since her time at school:

> 'When I go in and out of secondary schools and talk to students about the situation I was in, not much has changed. We're accepting people from all over, and we're expecting people to you know disregard their own' (Mary, Traveller).

This was in contrast to Nora who believed that schools had improved in terms of access and acceptance for Traveller students, and that the barrier was within the Traveller community:

> 'They (schools now) love when they see a Traveller young fella or girl in secondary, they'd do anything to keep them there further' (Nora, Traveller).

Nora felt that schools were being hampered by the Traveller parents lack of experience in education, which impacted on how they viewed education for their children:

> ‘But the challenge is their parents you know because they don’t have that experience that their kids are having now. There’s a lot of discrimination within our own community because there’s no point outside of our community if everybody’s doing this while the block is within our community you know’ (Nora, Traveller).

Some schools go overboard to welcome Traveller children but there are more exceptions to the rule (McGrath, 2024, p. 122).

The experiences of the Traveller girls in school were impacted both positively and negatively by school personnel and peers, although more negativity existed as the norm was for their community to be ‘othered’. Despite the existence of challenges, powerful and persistent aspirations were evidenced by the action of two students who went directly from school to higher education. Five students were withdrawn or had withdrawn themselves from education, and their pathway to higher education was hindered initially by these frustrated and resigned aspirations.

The next theme examines how the Traveller community’s attitude to higher education impacted on the Traveller women interviewed.

5.4 Family and Community Attitudes to Higher Education

Individuals are impacted by the social and personal circumstances they find themselves in and this applies particularly to Travellers, who generally live in groups in halting sites, local authority or private housing (Centre for Housing Research, 2008) alongside other Traveller relatives. People may be highly influenced by their own peer group, and potentially appealing messages may not lead to higher aspirations, due to peer pressure to act otherwise (La Ferrara, 2019, p. 1719). Whilst individuals can operate as positive conversion factors for some students, they may alternatively act as negative conversion factors (Sen, 1999).

An individual’s aspiration window consists of people surrounding them and it is influenced by both the perception and actual social mobility within their environment (Ray, 2006). Aspiration windows are used to make comparisons, and

they help to form a view of one's likely future. One's culture and social norms can impact aspirations, and capabilities such as the capability to be educated may be impacted upwards with help from a local role model, or they can be impacted downwards in the absence of interventions, and individual resilience is required in order to counteract this.

The families of the Traveller women, extended families and the wider Traveller community had differing views on their decision to attend higher education and these views were formed due to their own experiences in education, lack of experience of higher educational spaces, and lack of information about higher education. The views ranged from believing that the settled community were following a rule hence the offer of higher education; there was need to study subjects that would lead directly to employment; there was a lack of any link between higher education and employment; the belief that they were betraying their culture by acting 'settled'.

Annie's family believed that the offer of higher education was due to the settled community needing to show they were following procedures and giving Traveller women something to do:

> 'My family initially thought, they couldn't see long term, the benefits. And they thought this was something you know, just another tick box exercise, where I'd be doing something you know. I wouldn't have any benefit. I was also influenced by a girl, she had gone through education, a Traveller woman' (Annie, Traveller).

Annie's family had no experience of higher education and this led them to believe that she would not benefit from the experience or the qualification. It is difficult for those who have little experience of education to be able to see any direct or indirect benefits of third level education, and this exerted pressure on her to explain why she had chosen this pathway and to defend this position. She had witnessed another Traveller woman returning to and completing higher education who acted as a role model, and she perceived that her own future would be positively influenced by returning to education (Ray, 2006). By engaging with the

role model, this inspired hope which ignited her aspirations and it impacted on her behaviour to return to education (Dufflo, 2012). Annie used her powerful aspirations to continue her pathway to higher education despite her aspiration window consisting of mainly negative influences.

Other families questioned the subject choice of the Traveller women and it was clear that they valued higher education for its instrumental value i.e. that it would/could lead to employment. This was the case for Molly whose family could not understand her subject choice:

> 'My mum didn't understand why I was doing Arts and Humanities and she asked me why I didn't do something where I would get a job out of, like nursing' (Molly, Traveller).

Molly's mother viewed education as having instrumental value which could lead to increased access to the labour market, and did not see education as an end in itself (Richardson, 2015, p. 167). Lack of familiarity with university and what it can offer, can lead to individuals not recognising that higher education is more than a subject choice and is also about acquiring transferable skills. Undeterred by this stance Molly held the capability to aspire - 'where an individual is able to identify one or more aspirations that they hold, revealed or concealed, this offers evidence of the capability to aspire' (Hart, 2016, p. 327). Despite Molly's aspiration window consisting of people who were similar to her in terms of a lack of education, her functioning to be educated and have a degree was strongly aspired at that point, and later her functioning was realised through her capabilities (Tiwari, 2011, p. 185). Persistent aspirations exist when an individual has agency, despite difficult social and structural conditions (Mkwananzi and Wilson-Strydom, 2018). Molly's own self-motivation negated the need for a positive role model from her community, and her conversion factors of both resilience and self-motivation (Walker, 2006b) led her to use her agency and played a strong role in a successful outcome. For Molly education was a capability and a functioning, as it was both an opportunity to gain more knowledge and acquire a qualification.

Economic capabilities are important for Traveller families and they refer to capabilities which enable individuals to 'generate an income, own property, inherit property and to control their own earnings' (Cin, 2017, p. 44). Employment capability is described as having a good job (Walker & Mkwananzi, 2015); being able to choose desired jobs (Flores-Crespo, 2007, p. 54); and paid work (Walker, 2006b). For those who are unfamiliar with higher education, they may not recognise how further qualifications can impact on accessing the labour market and lead to more professional types of employment. Lack of solid examples can lead to people taking this perspective - there is high unemployment amongst Traveller women (FRA, 2020, p. 55). Some family members believed there was no justification for moving out of employment to study, and then having to access the labour market later. Nora had spent time in the labour market and had to defend her decision to return to education to her family:

> 'My family were so used to me always working, my brothers were like why would you go back, just get yourself a job, why would you go back to college? My Mam now, she'd be like, what are you reading all them books, and all? She didn't understand it' (Nora, Traveller).

For Nora's family, employment meant a paid job (Walker, 2006b) and they did not view education as a functioning; an outcome with value in itself, nor did it have instrumental value as they did not link education with better employment prospects (Richardson, 2015, p. 167). These family members were in employment without qualifications, and did not understand the need for anybody to get further qualified if they had a work history. This lack of enthusiasm was also linked to the view that finding employment was always difficult for Travellers and having further qualifications would not impact that. Nora explained further:

> 'Another part of it was like who's gonna give you a job? There was some sort of truth in that because I had to hide my identity throughout most of my jobs, you know when I was younger' (Nora, Traveller).

Nora had used her agency to gain employment in the past although she had chosen not to self-identify as a Traveller in order to get access to the labour market, and for self-preservation within employment. Her lack of freedom to be able to be seen in public without shame meant that she suffered from reduced functionings as a result (Sen, 2009). Despite having an extensive employment history, this did not convince her family that she could return to the labour market in the future. Their continuing view was that the settled community's discriminatory attitude towards employing Travellers would impact again, thus negating her efforts in education. It is understandable that Travellers have this belief that they cannot find work easily as the settled community holds all the positions and power in the labour market. Over 80% of Travellers are unemployed (CSO, 2022) and Irish Travellers have the lowest overall levels of employment for both men and women, in Traveller and Roma groups in six European countries (FRA, 2020, p. 55).

Nora remained confident that further qualifications would help her in accessing a professional position. When people have opportunities to lead lives they value, they must have power to focus on what it is they individually value, and not be influenced by group thinking (Sen, 1985). Nora viewed acquiring a degree as a capability that would lead to a valued functioning – that of accessing a professional position in the workplace, which is where she wished to be (Robeyns, 2005, p. 95). She located a space of resistance in order to counteract the negativities she received from her family, and persistent aspirations helped her to enter the course of her choice.

For other Traveller women the comments were more deepfelt as the extended family accused them of betraying their heritage. This was the case for Mary who faced accusations of wanting to abandon her cultural background:

> 'I got a lot of pushback from a lot of my family when I decided to stay in education. It was when I became, when I wanted to go to third level, to college - "You're wasting your time". Then you'd get the snide comments – "You think you're better than us, or you're losing your culture"' (Mary, Traveller).

The extended family and wider Traveller community conflated being educated with trying to emulate the settled community. Traveller women may resist change due to a desire to continue with the traditional Traveller lifestyle (Casey, 2014, p. 816) and older Travellers may fear that increased education will lead to increased assimilation (when ethnic groups are absorbed into the dominant culture of the society).

The women faced negativity regarding their educational choices and also accusations of perceiving themselves as better than others in their culture. Although the women understood that lack of information was usually the reason why these accusations were made, it meant that they were under pressure to convince their families that their choice would lead to increased opportunities, which would have led to increased pressure to perform in third level. Whilst the negativity of all these individuals' comments could have posed as constraining conversion factors for these women (Calitz, 2019) their persistent aspirations and resilience outweighed all these negative conversion factors.

5.5 Conclusion

Parents reduced and negative experiences of education did not preclude them from viewing education positively for their children especially at primary school, and the Traveller students all achieved education up to the age of 12. Both powerful and persistent aspirations were demonstrated by two students who went directly to university after school, despite some negativity from their own family and extended family, which was countered by words of encouragement from parents. Resigned and frustrated aspirations were evident when students either had their educational journey terminated after primary school by relatives, or they took the independent decision to leave formal school early. Despite these difficulties the students converted their personal resources and external resources into positive conversion factors at a later stage, and their powerful and persistent aspirations which had developed over time, led them to access and complete higher education. The next chapter focuses on the different pathways taken by the

Traveller women to higher education, their experiences in higher education and beyond.

Chapter 6: Agency, Higher Education and the Labour Market

6.1 Introduction

Travellers' lives are shaped by systemic barriers and structural inequities in society, and also in education. Despite these challenges there are some who have managed to oppose these barriers and used their agency in order to enter the unfamiliar habitus of higher education. In this chapter the experiences of seven Traveller women in higher education are examined, alongside the challenges that existed for them, and the strategies they used for overcoming these barriers. There is exploration of how the Traveller women used social connections and other conversion factors in order to enter higher education. The use of individual capabilities is analysed in order to examine how the women navigated the unknown environment of higher education, and there is examination of how they used their agency to take advantage of external conversion factors in order to traverse the complex journey to degree completion.

Using Claassen's (2016) concept of navigational agency, the Traveller women's ability to navigate the socio-cultural environment of the 'settled' community in higher education, shows how navigational agency can potentially transform the lives of disadvantaged women. There is examination of how they managed to adapt so that they met academic demands whilst also being available for their own families and community. There is exploration of how they navigated entry to the labour market as graduates and how the aspirations and resilience shown by these women, challenges the view that Traveller women are dependent on state welfare. This chapter contains three themes - the pathways to higher education, the experiences of Traveller women in higher education, and experiences of entering the labour market after graduation, and addresses the third research question: Which support structures in higher education proved to be the most beneficial in encouraging Traveller women students to complete courses, and which areas

need improvement so that Traveller women are enabled to use their qualifications in the wider labour market?

6.2 Pathways to Higher Education, Capabilities Developed and Conversion Factors Availed of

The capability approach acts as a lens for exploring theoretically, the transition to higher education from a social justice point of view, and it can also be used as a basis for interventions (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 58). This section focuses on the pathways of the women into higher education and it explores the capabilities that were important for the Traveller women, and the conversion factors which proved positive in encouraging the women back into formal education or to continue on in education, and the negative conversion factors which discouraged the capability to be educated. Conversion factors are useful when used in an unequal educational system, in order to search for ways to enhance the capabilities of those who are disadvantaged (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 72).

It is critical to highlight the successes and resilience of the Traveller women and not to focus on the deficit-only lens of analysis (Hoffman et al. 2019; Yosso, 2005, p. 69). Using the capability approach permits the focus to be on the capabilities and the conversion factors that enabled the women to enter higher education. By focusing on enabling and disabling conversion factors, the focus moves from focusing on the deficit of the student, to analysis of the broader conditions that impact positively on well-being (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 158).

Analysis of the data aided in identifying the capabilities that had helped the Traveller women to enter higher education, and also helped in recognising the conversion factors that had assisted entry, which is explored in this section. The different pathways taken by the Traveller women are shown in Table 2 below:

Left school aged 12, entered the labour market and worked for ten years in the private sector and for a Traveller organisation prior to entering higher education (Molly, Traveller)
Left school aged 12, began a part-time Youthreach course for two years and provided full-time care to family members, then worked full-time, completed a C.E. Scheme* and entered higher education sixteen years after leaving formal schooling (Nora, Traveller)
Left school aged 13 and later completed a C.E. Scheme in a Traveller Development Group and other courses, worked for a Traveller NGO and then entered higher education (Winnie, Traveller)
Left school aged 14 and worked, then completed a C.E. Scheme and worked for a Traveller NGO and then entered higher education (Annie, Traveller)
Left school at 14, joined an early school leaver's programme, completed courses and a C.E. Scheme in a Traveller Development Group and entered higher education nine years after formal schooling (Margaret, Traveller)
Completed Leaving Certificate and went directly to higher education (Eileen, Traveller)
Completed Leaving Certificate and went directly to higher education (Mary, Traveller)

Table 2: Pathways Taken by Students to Higher Education

*'The Community Employment (CE) programme (more commonly known as the 'CE Scheme') is designed to help people who are long-term unemployed (or otherwise disadvantaged) to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities' (Citizens Information, 2025b).

Whilst each of the early school leavers took their own pathway to higher education, there were commonalities in their approaches as they all entered employment at some stage after leaving school. The importance of economic capabilities for the individuals and their families arose many times in my conversations with the Traveller graduates, and their desire to be employed and earn income was clear, despite their official unemployment rate at 61% (Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, 2023) which is linked to low educational

rates, health problems and discrimination (Carron-Kee, McGinnity and Alamir, 2024, p. 5).

Some of the Traveller women began working at a very young age, notwithstanding the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 (Irish Statute Book, 2000) stating that 'the minimum school leaving age is 16 years, or until students have completed 3 years of second-level education, whichever is the later'. Nora began full-time work two years after leaving primary school, and the economic capability was vital for her and her extended family:

> 'I'd say I was 14 and I started working so that was a full-time job. So I loved that, because I was able to make money, and give money to my aunt, and have money for myself, you know' (Nora, Traveller).

Focusing on economic capabilities was a way of life for Mary, who went directly to higher education after school:

> 'At home I was bartering and trading and haggling with people for certain things and it was just bred into me to be honest, from a young age going to fairs and car boot sales, and I was always good at buying and selling and earning money. Em and that kind of followed me through secondary school' (Mary, Traveller).

Economic capability was also important for the Travellers prior to entering higher education as there are direct and indirect costs of attending university including university fees, printing costs, and food and travel costs. Unlike other settled students, they mainly relied on external sources i.e. sources outside of their families in order to access information and knowledge about the costs involved in third level education, funding for courses, application forms for funding, and advice about how to complete these application forms. The importance of economic capability was mentioned by one of the higher education officers, indicating the importance of individual financial contributions to family income:

> ‘They also need in my view, a bursary, that doesn't deny them applying for other bursaries, but an additional bursary for Traveller participants because a lot of the younger ones I have experienced, they're under pressure from families to go out and get work’ (Linda, higher education officer).

Accessing information regarding courses, universities and entry routes was necessary for these women, and the lack of familial educational capital (McGinley, 2024, p. 112) impacts on how and where they could access this information. For the Traveller women who were early school leavers, they were the first person in their immediate family to begin a university degree, and for some of the women, employers acted as positive conversion factors as they supplied encouragement and practical information about the application procedure. This was acknowledged in their comments:

> ‘The (NGO I worked for) they supported me and they actually encouraged me as well to go to third level. They gave the confidence to say that, you know, that you can do it, because I didn’t even know what a CAO application form was like. I never had any family members speaking about the CAO application form. I think information awareness is important as well among Travellers, to get information out there because silly information that we think people know, and many people do not know. Then I heard about the SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland, 2024) grant. I don’t think I’d have went to college if it hadn’t been for (the NGO) and that’s being honest’. (Margaret, Traveller).

Margaret’s lack of access to intergenerational educational capital and reduced social opportunities to gain knowledge about educational opportunities (Appadurai, 2004) led to her looking elsewhere for information regarding higher education entry (Ball, Reay and David, 2002, p. 353). She used her social connections within the workplace in order to access important information for successful university entry. These connections operated as positive conversion factors, as they supplied information about entry routes and finance for higher

education access. Other employers set up links to information days for the women to access details about particular courses and routes to degree completion. Nora had an opportunity to attend an Open Day, which her employer had organised access to. Prior to this, Nora's main pre-occupation was with achieving economic capabilities - being employed and earning a living:

> 'We had an Open Day with third level and this would have opened my eyes that I could have gone on a little bit further, you know, if I wanted to. No one in my family had gone to third level. Was never in the picture, in my head, a job, employment, what the focus was on. When I went I was blown away by it' (Nora, Traveller).

Nora's experience of university in the form of the Open Day, when she was given access to information about the different courses and subjects by lecturers, meant that these staff posed as positive conversion factors for her as they influenced her decision to begin the process for entry to higher education. Role models within their community, who had already gone through the process of acquiring a higher education qualification, were also valued conversion factors for the Traveller women. This was the case for Annie who was influenced by another female Traveller graduate who outlined the advantages of having a third level qualification and the overall benefits it could bring. Annie had attended a presentation given by a university staff member about university courses and the combination of the two conversion factors inspired her to consider higher education entry:

> 'The head of department did a presentation with (NGO) many many years ago and her presentation had a big impact on me, and started me thinking about going back to education. So I was also influenced by a girl……. she had gone through education, a Traveller woman. She said if you want to make something of your life and if you want to have an easier life and a better life for yourself … think about education. But that initial presentation, … that was the turning point for me. And that encouraged me back to education' (Annie, Traveller).

Having a role model within her community, who had gone through the university experience successfully, acted as an inspiration for Annie to consider higher education as a future prospect. This positive impact on what she might be able to achieve, led her to take action to enrol in her local university (Dufflo, 2012). Interaction between the Traveller community and the settled community helped the Traveller community to access important information regarding courses, subjects, and university locations/campuses and the closing of information gaps led to changes in behaviour, attitudes and aspirations towards higher education as an option.

The access officers also commented on the need to link in with the Traveller community in order to promote access and entry routes to higher education and they were very proactive in their approaches:

> 'I'm encouraging (two women Traveller students) to come to (our university) next year. So I've helped them with the CAO. And I'm gonna help them with the SUSI and stuff. So I'm kind of supporting them one on one' (John, higher education officer).

The university staff also ensured that they had strong links with personnel and organisations such as schools, Traveller Development Groups, and non-traditional educational organisations that had direct and indirect links with Traveller families, by setting up relationships with these organisations and maintaining contact with them:

> 'We've done outreach visits and taster sessions. We work very closely with the home school and community liaison (officers) here (in schools) and we are expanding that relationship all the time. We have a good relationship with all of the Traveller advocacy groups here ... and other stakeholders, such as partnership companies' (Linda, higher education officer).

Their knowledge of the Traveller community and the likely barriers that exist for them as a community, and the issues that persist for particular individuals and families, helped the education officers to identify a route that could work for the

Traveller women to enter higher education immediately or at some point in the future. Linking in with other organisations that were Traveller specific or directly and indirectly linked to the Traveller community, ensured the higher education institutions continued to connect with the Travellers, who tend to listen to people they trust in the settled community, and who they have built up strong relationships with, over time. Widening participation in higher education involves having mechanisms to support success, so that increased access to university for those previously excluded will align with increased success of students (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 5). The main activities carried out by the outreach and access workers to encourage inclusion of these disadvantaged women are shown in Table 3 below:

Doing outreach work with Travellers
Working closely with school personnel
Setting up shadowing experiences for second level students
Setting up new entry requirements for those without formal qualifications
Recognising of prior learning for entry (RPL)
Offering courses over an extended time period
Providing practical supports in the form of creches, help in completing application forms

Table 3: Supports Offered by Higher Education Institutions

Other people who acted as positive conversion factors for the Traveller women were other Travellers, such as supportive families and partners. Their words of encouragement increased the women's confidence, and actions such as offering to mind their children when they would be in college acted as catalysts to begin the unfamiliar journey to higher education completion. This was the case for Winnie:

> 'My mother was very supportive… (my partner said) he'd mind my kids and my father was saying why are you doing it? He didn't understand … as he came from an older generation as well and he didn't really understand and I did explain it to him so this is very

> relevant to my job and all that. When I did explain it to him he never stopped me. Some men in the community are funny about women like doing courses but to be honest my husband was very supportive. And if I didn't have his support I wouldn't be where I am now' (Winnie, Traveller).

The verbal support of Winnie's mother and husband, and the practical support of childcare acted as enabling conversion factors for Winnie to attend the course and university of her choice. One of the NGO workers spoke about the constraints that some of the Traveller women face, because of their husband's/partner's attitude to them attending courses:

> 'We get a lot of the men in as well that wouldn't allow the women out to do courses. You would have the older women that would have the interest and can't do it. (They say) "I've always done what I've been told to do, so I'll continue doing that" ' (Helen, NGO worker).

University staff also spoke about how families can act as negative conversion factors when Traveller women try to access courses:

'I've had women and young women in particular, whose families were disenabling them, and they were completely unsupportive, and nearly tried to thwart and sabotage the education that their daughters were trying to pursue, and that was really difficult' (Jackie, higher education access officer).

Social conversion factors originate in the society in which one lives such as public policies, social norms, discriminatory practices and power relations related to gender (Robeyns, 2017, p. 46). A person's social conversion factors may hinder their ability to convert resources into a valuable capability, which occurs in a patriarchal society when Traveller men ensure that social norms that suit them are continued, and the impact of this behaviour influences individuals' conversion factors, and their capability sets. For Traveller women, their inability to avail of courses which would help their literacy, numeracy, and level of qualifications also leads to a negative impact on their ability to access the labour market and earn

income. Capability to be educated and enjoy economic capabilities can be severely impacted by one's own culture and social norms (Claassen, 2018). This lack of participational agency amounts to manipulation - as the choices of others influence the decisions made (Wood, 2014). Whilst change is needed within the settled community so that the rights of Travellers receive recognition, there is also a continued need for change within the Traveller community to recognise the rights of Traveller women:

> 'You should be entitled to do what you want to do, stand up for your rights, and we are all, we are fighting for our rights among the wider community. We need to start doing this in our own community before we can do that, you know' (Helen, NGO worker).

For Traveller women they have a double struggle regarding getting their rights recognised; initially by the Traveller men, and then by the settled community. Helen also worked with young Traveller women and was pro-active in getting them to see where their ideas regarding their culture had become conflated:

> 'We're teaching the younger ladies that's coming in and getting married. They say it's culture, but that's not culture' (Helen, NGO worker).

Another education worker mentioned the pressure that Traveller mothers put on themselves to be the backbone of the family, and looking after children is automatically the mother's responsibility. Traveller women can act as negative conversion factors towards their own capability to be educated:

> 'There's a lot of reliance when it comes to children and the home, and neglecting any of those factors would be seen as a negative. It would be seen as shameful and shame on that person. But I think you know there are more progressive partners there, and they are encouraging, I think, when they see what the potential is and the earning capacity you know' (Karen, NGO worker).

In summary the Traveller women entered higher education from different pathways and all displayed strong aspirations to enter higher education despite a lack of any familiarity with it and what it would entail. The capabilities which were important for the Traveller women prior to university entry included economic capability in order to contribute to family income and for personal survival, and the capability to access information regarding university entry. Their ability to use positive conversion factors appropriately, evolved as they joined education courses, employment schemes and employment, and took advantage of courses and work experiences to develop confidence, and educational and workplace skills. Supportive staff in their workplaces whom they regarded as trustworthy, were instrumental in providing opportunities for the Traveller women to be educated further. The women relied on employers and university personnel to convey information about entry routes to higher education, and funding opportunities and how to access them. These staff members acted as positive conversion factors as they ensured the Traveller women got maximum support (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999). The Traveller development groups and higher education outreach and access workers were aware of the need to inform these women of educational opportunities, and they acted as positive conversion factors in their many approaches to communicate with the women and support them to enter third level. There were differences in terms of the amount of support offered by families with some families being very supportive verbally and/or practically, and others not being in a position to support due to a lack of knowledge about third level education. There were also accounts of families acting as negative conversion factors as they sought to interfere with women's capability to be educated further. There was evidence that the Travellers themselves saw the need for change, and that they perceived education to be at the centre of this change, which also needed commensurate change within the Traveller community, so that women could aspire and take action to realise their aspirations.

Having access to finances and information is a starting point for disadvantaged groups when entering unfamiliar and challenging environments like higher education, although this is insufficient without also having navigational capability,

where individuals are empowered to engage in social practices freely and autonomously (Claassen, 2018). As agency is linked to participation in social practices, there will be instances when many practices exist, which may act as competing practices. Navigational agency, in the context of this research, involves Travellers being able to reflectively stand back from the practices they are participating in, and to choose freely and autonomously which ones to participate in, and to resolve conflicts within practices. Winnie needed the offer of help from her partner to mind their children, as this was seen to be her responsibility up to that point, in order to enter higher education. Her father's questioning of her choice, indicated that he needed to be convinced of the instrumental value of getting a higher education qualification before he consented to her completing the course. Without the family's practical and verbal support Winnie would have been in a difficult position and would probably not have been able to continue with her education. Her wording of her father's reaction 'he never stopped me' indicated that without her verbal reassurance that higher education was in her best interests, she would have been prevented from taking this course of action. Winnie navigated the difficulty by accepting the help offered and giving further explanations when necessary, to appease her father. With competing practices, individuals cannot merely participate but must navigate between these practices. When individuals are involved in this type of navigation, they have navigational agency which means that they will have autonomy to decide which practices to enter and exit, and will also be able to reconcile any conflicts encountered. Navigational agency involves individuals taking a reflexive stance and making decisions on when and how to take action, and this is explored further in the next section in the examination of the Traveller women's experiences in higher education.

6.3 Experiences of Traveller Women in Higher Education

In this section the experiences of the Traveller women in higher education are explored, both positive and negative. There is examination of their individual capabilities which helped them to deal with navigational issues and how they used

their agency to utilise external conversion factors to ensure degree completion. Navigational agency is explored to analyse how they managed to ensure that the demands of university life and concerns of their families were met, and how they operated when there were competing demands from both worlds. Barriers and constraints in higher education are investigated and there is examination of how the students negotiated inequities in education. Whilst higher education institutions aim to make education accessible to all, they also remain elitist institutions (Brennan and Naidoo, 2008) as they can reproduce and reinforce class inequalities with their ethos of individual achievement and competition (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003, pp. 1-2).

6.3.1 Navigational Agency, Higher Education and Traveller Women

One's ability to act as a navigational agent involves being able to decide which practice/s to join, which practice/s to leave, which practice/s need adaptations and which need to be entirely transformed so that they become new practices (Claassen, 2018). Traveller women in higher education have two social practices to deal with – their own Traveller culture, and the culture of the settled community which they are less familiar with, and they have to learn the written and unwritten rules of operating in this new world. Expectations from both cultures have to be met, and conflicts that ensue have to be dealt with appropriately, which can lead to increased pressure at a time when they are also dealing with academic demands.

In order for navigational agency to occur in higher education for Traveller women, they must have capability which allows human empowerment – ability to claim their rights; a sufficient amount of socio-economic factors; and political participation – ability to influence (Claassen, 2018). Social and political barriers may limit choices of individuals, and some individuals will have access to more navigational agency opportunities than others. In order for a just society to exist, all individuals need education capabilities and freedom from coercion (Claassen, 2016). Whilst navigational agency ensures that individuals have freedom to enter,

exit, adapt and transform practices, the reality is that individuals will be influenced by the resources within their community (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014). These resources and conversion factors determine how well individuals are able to take advantage of opportunities for achievement and well-being.

6.3.2 Transformative Experiences in Higher Education

The Traveller women entered higher education at different points in their lives with contrasting pre-university experiences. There were similarities in how they experienced higher education as they all recounted positive encounters which included the skills and knowledge gained, the freedom to be themselves and not having to explain their ethnicity to others, and confidence building. For some they had the security of knowing there was somebody to turn to for academic support if needed. Higher education should be conceived as a site where all students expand capabilities and achieve functionings (Walker et al. 2022, p. 16). For Molly, access to new information and the opportunity to learn new skills were important capabilities for her:

> '(What was important), it's the ability to research, to reflect. Knowledge is power' (Molly, Traveller).

Molly's newfound knowledge, and her ability to research further and reflect on this knowledge permitted her to learn more about her own culture, and how discrimination and prejudices formed. This increased knowledge led to better understanding of the settled community, which reduced the power that prejudice had over her.

Transformative learning – transforming frames of references which includes mindsets so that they are more inclusive, capable of change, and reflective (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7), took place for many of the students. It manifested in terms of the freedom they had to reflect on what they had learned, the experiences of listening to the viewpoints of other students which led them to understand how and why others think differently to them (Ashwin, 2020). They learned how to understand the challenges they had experienced, and how and why they had

happened and although they didn't mention it specifically, how the 'settled' world operated. Some of the students spoke about the freedom they experienced to be themselves, and look at how society operated due to mixing with different individuals and groups:

> '(It was) the freedom to just be and do. In college, they forced me to reflect, and consider everything, everything about what I do or say, and how we operate within society. Em it makes me question a lot, and I think just the experience of college and engaging with lots of different people, and how one person from one type of community and another person from another community will view one situation very differently to the other, and understanding that and the complexities in that' (Eileen, Traveller).

Eileen spoke about the freedom to just be and do that she experienced in college, where she could explore her identity and actions, beyond the constraints imposed on her as a Traveller. From a navigational agency lens, this freedom marks her capacity to move between social worlds (the Traveller community and the settled academic world) and to make sense of the different ways that knowledge, behaviour and values were understood. Her words signalled a shift from survival-based navigation which is often required of marginalised groups, to a more emancipatory form of navigation, rooted in critical consciousness. Through higher education Eileen gained the tools to interrogate how social structures shaped her possibilities of being, whilst also carving out a space for self-definition and freedom of thought.

Other students spoke about how they experienced freedom in higher education to be themselves i.e. not to have to decide to self-identify or not, as the pressure to do so was not present:

> 'I was the only Traveller in the classroom but I was never made feel uncomfortable. I seemed to somehow fit in. Which meant that I suppose that gave me a kind of shield to not identify and not talk about who I was' (Mary, Traveller).

The freedom to be a student only, and not having to be defined by one's ethnicity meant that Mary could relax in the university environment as her student identity allowed her to be part of the overall student community, and not be seen as different or 'othered'. Another student found that, for the first time in her life in education, identifying as a Traveller was a positive factor:

> 'You had to do a personal statement and for positive kind of things; being a member of the Traveller community was actually welcomed. It was positive and I thought this is great, you know (laughs), great I'm gonna be accepted for who I am, you know' (Nora, Traveller).

Nora had previously not self-identified in the workplace in order to gain access to it, and for her the acceptance of who she was, and her ability to appear in public without shame (Sen, 2009) meant that for the first time her ethnicity (which she was personally very proud of) could now be vocalised and lead to acceptance in the settled community, or at least in the higher education environment of mainstream society.

In order for navigational agency to occur in higher education, one needs to have access to a certain amount of resources – have sufficient socio-economic factors (Claassen, 2018). The availability of resources that one can access is dependent on one's level of wealth which impacts on one's capabilities and resulting functionings. In higher education, learning resources need to be distributed so that the possibility of transformative learning is increased (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015). This constitutes an equitable distribution of resources where those in most need, receive more resources than others. Educational policies often fail to meet student's material needs (Walker et al. 2022) and there is an assumption in higher education that each disadvantaged student has a similar lack of resources. Pre-existing circumstances impact on individuals' instrumental freedoms and functionality, which impacts capabilities (Flores-Crespo, 2007, p. 63). Access to equitable amounts of resources was important for the Traveller women in order to address gaps in education, and there were differences in how universities responded to student's need for extra supports. Nora quickly realised that her

preparedness for this level of course was insufficient especially in Maths, as she lacked the basics having left school so early. She was given extra supports to help her to complete the Access course before degree entry and on her degree course, and she demonstrated educational resilience – a capability which involves being able to negotiate risks, persevere academically and to be responsive to educational opportunities (Velasco and Boni, 2020; Walker, 2006a; Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 118). Nora's higher education experience contrasted vastly with previous experiences in education:

> 'The difference in that experience (in education) compared with the experiences I had before, kinda just made me feel I could be accepted for who I was. I had my flaws, I had my gaps and I was still getting that support, still able to do it. You know it was a struggle. I kept it up. If I didn't have that support I don't think I would have gone on further' (Nora, Traveller).

Navigation capability involves the development and use of skills to find resources, information and staff to help completion of higher education (Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez and Cooper, 2009, p. 15). The use of agency and resilience enables students to prosper (Stanton-Salazar and Spina, 2000) and the willingness to learn and the skills to learn are an important part of the learning disposition (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 121). Positive conversion factors like educational supports in the form of literacy and numeracy supports can enable individuals to navigate capability constraints (Calitz, 2019; Mkwananzi, 2019). These conversion factors alongside educational resilience enabled Nora to complete her studies successfully (Walker, 2006b) The positive aspects of higher education compared to previous educational experiences, were also commented on by one of the access officers:

> 'I suppose that negative experiences of education at a young age can run quite deep. I have heard people say that, you know. that if they do get to higher education that the experience can be a lot better' (Anne, higher education access officer).

Educational, social and personal conversion factors influenced the Traveller women positively and permitted transformative learning, although there were barriers experienced by some students, which are outlined in the next section.

6.3.3 Nontransformative Experiences in Higher Education

Middle-class social reproduction occurs in higher education and middle-class students remain in dominant positions, helped by access to parental economic supports and privileged networks and contacts (Bathmaker, Ingram and Waller, 2013, pp. 737-738). Adjustment of university conditions could lead to mobilisation of navigation capabilities for disadvantaged students such as Traveller women, so that they can participate in a similar way to middle class students, with increased financial security and more familiarisation with the university system (Walker et al. 2022, p. 66). The reality was that challenges existed for the Traveller students during their experience of higher education in the form of financial challenges, academic challenges, ethnocentric curriculum, social challenges, and time constraints due to family demands. Lack of material resources was outlined by some of the students who were then under pressure to compensate for this by using university resources, which were only available during the day and when they themselves were free from lectures. For Mary she was disadvantaged in her studies due to not having a laptop:

> 'My first three years of college, I didn't even have a laptop. I found myself inside in the library using the library laptop all the time because my parents couldn't afford a laptop for me. I spent a lot of time in class just making sure I had everything right just so I'd have to translate it back onto a computer, where everybody else had already put in what they needed. Em it was a bit of an obstacle' (Mary, Traveller).

Individual's functionings are impacted by one's level of advantage or disadvantage in society (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 73). Mary had to spend an inordinate amount of time on a daily basis for three years to ensure that she had completed notes

from class, then further time inputting the information onto the laptop. These extra steps, which other students did not have to complete, would have decimated the time Mary could allocate to other parts of her studies. Other students worked whilst in college and for Winnie this involved spending time in college, working for a NGO, and also looking after her children which placed a lot of pressure on her:

> 'We got support from the local project, we got some money from it. Now we had to pay some contribution ourselves at the time towards it, They did have a payment plan as well which was really good because financially like you're trying to keep your home going like, and it did mean a lot at the time so em it was very good' (Winnie, Traveller).

Winnie attributed the partial funding of her course as a positive, and was grateful for the staggered payments on the payment plan, although she also had to provide for her family's needs at that time – economic capability was important for her for the duration of the course. The lack of access to sufficient funding was also mentioned by one of the higher education officers:

> 'I think that all fees should be lifted, all fees for every Traveller and Roma entering higher education' (Linda, higher education officer).

Economic constraints acted as negative conversion factors for the Traveller women, especially for those who were parents and had direct responsibility for ensuring the family's economic survival. Other university staff outlined a very positive position of the financial supports given to disadvantaged students and although they may seem sufficient, Travellers tend to have larger families than the average disadvantaged family and therefore have more financial pressure, and economic capability is important as young Traveller women are expected to contribute to family income.

Academic challenges existed due to reduced literacy – grammar gaps, lack of understanding of the terminology in subject areas, and lack of awareness of university systems such as being able to use libraries, and lack of experience of compiling reports, completing long assignments, and meeting deadlines. A lot of

the basics that lecturers assume students are already familiar with, were not a given for this group of students. The students who had left education early discussed the gaps in their education, how it impacted on them, and how they dealt with it. Strong aspirations and resilience led the students to use their navigational agency to overcome these issues – Molly enrolled on an extra college course in another university and travelled there after lectures to attend a night class in order to learn about essay writing:

> 'There was actually a course on at night time in (another university) that helped you write an academic essay so .... (I) got on the bus and did the night class and it was explained to me' (Molly, Traveller).

Molly had been told by one of the staff in her university that:

> 'You'll get no special treatment here' (Molly, Traveller).

She was aware from the beginning of her degree that she needed to be self-reliant in order to achieve, and her own personal capabilities permitted her to use her resilience during challenging times in university. Other students self-educated on the basics of report writing and referencing. Mary spent a lot of time in the library self-instructing:

> 'I spent an awful lot of time in first year learning about the layout of a report or how to Harvard reference or things that naturally everybody else in my class would have already known. I spent an awful lot of time kinda going over and making sure, you know' (Mary, Traveller).

Mary had entered higher education directly from school and would have had similar educational experiences to the students in her class in university. It is unlikely that these other students would have had access to information about referencing styles, as these are generally not covered in schools in Ireland, although Mary assumed that others had access to this knowledge. Some students set up peer groups so that they could educate each other in areas that they found

difficult, and this helped them to deal with the challenge of jargon and domain-specific terms in the different subject areas within their course:

> 'We had the peer-to-peer support em, as time went on then in the college. If there was something I didn't understand my colleague would be able to explain it better and vice versa' (Winnie).

Students had to deal with testimonial injustice at times, and did not have freedom to be listened to, despite having sufficient reserves of narrative capital (Watts, 2008). Traveller women can be marginalised and experience a lack of credibility when the majority do not understand their experiences (Fricker, 2007), and higher education should lead to rights to be both a knower and teller in society (Fricker, 2015, p. 83). Higher education contributes to human development by expanding capabilities and functionings that people have reason to value (Ul Haq, 2003). In order to participate fully and contribute, students need opportunities to develop contribution capability - the capability of being able to receive information and then make contributions to knowledge and understanding (Walker and Boni, 2020). Strong connections need to be made between the university staff and participants in order for this to happen, and the capability and corresponding function - that of being a contributor, are equally important. Universities should provide opportunities to develop contribution capability (Curren and Metzger, 2017, p. 80) although relationships can enable or alternatively disable its development (Hoffmann and Metz, 2017). This was the case for Mary who had concerns about the ethnocentric curriculum she faced each day, and she looked forward to a particular module and being able to contribute directly to this discussion as it covered the nine grounds of discrimination in Ireland, which included discrimination against the Traveller community. Mary explained:

> 'They started to talk about the nine grounds of discrimination and we went into detail for each, and you know I was sitting there patiently waiting, and I was going to give all the input I could to the ethnicity one, em and it just wasn't covered. Em and when I asked about it afterwards, "oh we don't have time for that". And then it became an issue for me because I said you're training future HR

> (human resource) managers and managers (who) hire people from diverse backgrounds and you haven't covered the main Irish one you know. Em and that was my time to turn around and say no, you need to start talking. You need to start saying something. Just sitting in the class isn't good enough anymore' (Mary, Traveller).

In order for navigational agency to take place, individuals need political participation – the ability to influence (Claassen, 2018) and for Mary the exclusion of her culture from the discussion in class did not permit political participation for her, as she was unable to take part due to her lecturer dismissing this part of the curriculum. It can be difficult to convert different personal educational conversion factors of language, confidence, approaches to study, determination and hard work into opportunities and freedoms for epistemic contribution, unless the opportunity to contribute is given by lecturers and other students. Mary realised at that point that it was her time to begin speaking up about discrimination which she had experienced previously, both socially and at school. Her increased knowledge of discrimination, and new-found confidence in her ability to use her voice and speak up, was developed in higher education despite finding a clear gap in inclusivity, displayed by a lecturer in a module about discrimination. It led to a resolve not to let these opportunities pass in future without comment/intervention, which represented a fundamental narrative capability for her. Political poverty occurs when individuals do not have the freedom to be heard, and their voice and ideas are not taken into account (Bohman, 1996). They are denied opportunities to convert their voice into capabilities and cannot participate in public deliberations to raise their concerns. Asymmetry of public capabilities and functionings mean that there are power asymmetries, and groups such as Traveller women cannot access the public sphere. Participants need to have opportunities to be part of epistemic practices (practices relating to knowledge) in higher education (Velasco and Boni, 2020).

Most of the group spoke about being accepted socially by their peers in higher education, although for Winnie this acceptance took time:

> ‘We all got on well together. There was a few within the group, I’m not gonna lie, you know, settled people. They were a bit like, they kinda kept back like a bit from us and then as time went on we all got on very well together then, do you know what I’m saying. It took a bit of time, you know. And then we’d have a laugh and a joke. So you know what I mean’ (Winnie, Traveller).

The settled students were only able to accept the Traveller students once they got to know them, and this hesitancy to mix with Travellers was also mentioned by one of the outreach workers:

> ‘We had an event last week specifically for Travellers, and settled women. But no settled women turned up. It was only all Travellers, Traveller women’ (John, higher education officer).

The students found spaces of safety in class by mixing with other Travellers, mixing with other individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, and waiting until their settled peers were willing to accept them. They were unable to take on middle-class practices which some race and class disadvantaged students do, for social mobility (Bettie, 2002, p. 420) as their names would have singled them out as Travellers and outsiders. Student friendships are important for student retention (Chambliss and Takacs, 2014) and middle-class students operate to strengthen their friendships with other students from similar backgrounds. The Traveller women used their navigational agency by waiting until the settled students, who were excluding them, were ready and able to accept them, and their patience and resolve helped them to integrate more closely with the larger group.

The students also faced challenges when entering university due to their unfamiliarity with the university habitus - the set of beliefs and attitudes that people hold which impact how they think, feel and speak (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466). The higher education habitus impacts how people perceive the world around them and their sense of place, which is influenced by their culture (Bourdieu, 1990). Research on access and transition tends to take a deficit view of students and interventions are made based on this approach (Whittaker, 2008, p. 26) although

this was not the case for Molly as she was not offered any further supports when she received her university offer, despite some of the university staff believing that the demands of the course were excessive for her. She faced a lack of confidence initially:

> 'I'd been doubly nervous (going in) as I had been told that I wouldn't be able for it, and in the back of my head I thought they may be right. Like when you have a deadline to meet, you're saying to yourself why am I putting myself through this?' (Molly).

Molly had a strong love of learning, and resilience and persistent aspirations enabled her to voice her opinion that she was capable and willing to put in the required effort to complete the course, despite being told that she would not get any special treatment. As she was traversing this difficult journey, she did not have positive conversion factors in the form of family members supporting her, as at this stage they did not understand why she wanted to be educated further or her choice of subject, and this would have been a difficult and lonely process for her. Her navigational agency led her to take additional classes to self-educate further, and she manoeuvred through all the restrictions and barriers she encountered when she first sought out the course. Molly's ability to challenge the opposition of some lecturers to her being placed on this course, and being able to seek out ways of counteracting any of the structural constraints she faced, led to her finding a space of belonging in higher education. Disadvantaged students enter higher education with low levels of capital, although university regulations require them to be able to achieve at the same level as those who have had uninterrupted education, have similar access to necessary resources and supports, and family familiarity with the higher education habitus.

6.3.4 Using Navigational Agency to Negotiate the Demands of the Settled World and the Traveller World

Traveller women's social interactions tend to be within their own community, and their exclusion from mainstream society in terms of access to hospitality,

educational opportunities, accommodation services (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2024) and the labour market has led them to be guarded when dealing with the settled community. Whilst I found them to be very open, honest and informative regarding their experiences in higher education, as a member of the settled community I believe they were somewhat guarded in what they revealed, and that they were careful not to criticise the settled community except when recounting the few examples they gave me, of when exclusion by the settled community was explicit. Their inexperience of the settled world could have meant that the obstacles they faced when dealing with the settled world in higher education were too overwhelming, although this was not the case as their determined use of navigational agency ensured they negotiated their way into and out of the different social practices. Their ability to enter and exit the Traveller world and the settled world began and ended each day during the week for four years, as they encountered the settled world of other students, lecturers and other staff in their day-to-day activities in university. They experienced being with large numbers of mainly well educated, middle-class, settled students in an educational environment which had not been set up with their needs in mind. There was a need to develop competency in living in this new environment, and to be able to manoeuvre between the two environments on a daily basis, and to resolve any clashes they encountered.

Traveller women need to have navigational capability in order to engage in social practices freely and autonomously (Claassen, 2018) and they use this capability when participating in different social practices as they have to navigate between the practices. The Traveller women faced clashes in terms of time, when the demands of university and the demands of family life coincided. This was the case for Mary as she entered and exited the higher education practice and family practice, and reconciled the difficulty of family members not understanding that classes had to be attended on time, each day, and university expectations that assignments needed to be submitted on time and the importance of deadlines. Mary found the balancing act stressful as she tried to maintain her role as a student and also support her family as a responsible family member:

> ‘The balance between family life and college life was extremely hard and it became if my family needed me then college would have to take a back seat. And unfortunately for me in my fourth year, in my second semester, I missed 11 out of 13 weeks because of family circumstances. Now I found it very hard to manage family life and education life especially if you were going home to a family that they don’t understand the purpose of why you’re there or you know or the reasoning behind why you have to be there at a certain time’ (Mary, Traveller).

Mary faced a habitus tug (Ingram, 2011) as she was pulled by the forces of the two different cultures; that of her family and that of the higher education environment. She took a reflexive stance when deciding on how and when to take action (Claassen, 2018) and this occurred when she permitted the demands of her family life to outweigh the demands of university life, by removing herself from the university environment for 85% of one semester, due to the pressing household needs. She then used her personal conversion factors of educational resilience, grit, determination and hard work (Walker, 2006b) to catch up on the missed classes and passed all coursework and examinations for that year. Although Mary managed to meet the expectations of university during her fourth year, the pressure of having to keep up with the two worlds must have been extreme, which would have impacted her physical and mental health negatively. She managed to reconcile both habitus; belonging in neither and both places at once (Burke et al, 2015). Other students had financial stresses and had to work many hours outside of their courses whilst still providing care for family members and meeting labour demands within the home, and working on assignments and preparing for examinations. For Winnie this built up over time and led to sufficient stress and pressure that she contemplated leaving her course:

> ‘What happened to me anyway there was assignments due, and personal stuff going on at home and the job was getting too much’ (Winnie, Traveller).

In order to navigate between the practices Winnie also took a reflexive stance and took action (Claassen, 2018) by contacting her employer to negotiate a reduction in her work hours, in order to reduce the impact on her academic studies (Genett, 2017, p. 3). She also contacted her lecturers who gave extensions for assignments, and her negotiation of these two constraints acted as an enabler for her to continue on and complete her degree.

Educational, social and personal conversion factors in the form of understanding lecturers, support from Traveller peer groups, and strong personal aspirations and resilience influenced the Traveller women positively, and permitted some transformative learning to take place in higher education. Personal dispositions and values were important for the Traveller women when they faced challenges in the form of lack of funds, lack of information, hostile (settled) peers and competing demands between practices entered. Ultimately the Traveller women were successful in using their navigational agency to negotiate the unfamiliar world of higher education and its socio-cultural environment (Claassen, 2016) and they managed to transform their lives within the constraints of established rules and norms (Claassen, 2018). The next stage of their journey involved entering employment, which is the focus of the next section.

6.4 Experiences of Entering the Labour Market after Graduation

The capabilities approach can be applied to the development of real opportunities for successful transition to the labour market, and a removal of barriers to these opportunities. It also focuses attention on the different ways contextual factors help or hinder students' agency and opportunities (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 156). Conversion factors reflect the point where individual agency and context align, and the interaction between context and agency can be examined to see which enables and disables this agency (ibid, p. 138). Poor access to labour market opportunities acts as a corrosive conversion factor for disadvantaged students, although if universities have structures in place to address this, individuals can be enabled to navigate the capabilities constraint (Calitz 2019; Mkwananzi, 2019).

This section examines the supports and constraints that existed for Traveller women post-graduation in terms of entering the labour market. It explores how universities view the supports they offer in terms of their career services, and how these services function on a practical basis for Traveller women. There is focus on the identity issues and discrimination that exist for Traveller women, regardless of their status as graduates when approaching potential employers and when in the workplace. The section also examines the employment opportunities that were taken up by these Traveller women graduates.

6.4.1 Supports from University Pre and Post-Graduation

The universities had differing views on how their obligations should operate towards the Traveller women after graduation, and most spoke very positively about the career services that existed pre and post-graduation for all their students. The assumption that they had fulfilled their obligations to the Traveller women, although not explicitly stated, was evident from the answers given by most of the access and outreach workers:

> 'You can stay in contact with career advisors for two years' (John, higher education officer).

> 'The careers network is available for recent graduates to come back to. But again it would be up to the students' (Fiona, higher education access officer).

The indication here was that students had opportunities to gain support post-graduation although this may not necessarily have been seen as a real opportunity by Traveller graduates. Public resources may be equally distributed but disadvantages may still exist which are constructed by social norms (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009; Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). Travellers tend to communicate with those they know and trust from the settled community, and having access to strangers at the graduation stage would not necessarily mean a capability for them. The career support staff did not appear to act as a conversion factor for the Traveller women interviewed, as none of the graduates mentioned contacting

career supports at any point during their education or after completion. One higher education officer recognised that there was more to be done, and they were also aware that their institution had little cognisance that this need was present:

> 'I also think that the higher education institutions have a very powerful piece and role to play. There are employers out there who are looking to satisfy their diversity and inclusion remit, and we should really help them with that' (Linda, higher education officer).

Another access officer agreed that employers needed help in increasing their awareness of the Traveller culture, and how this could help them to interact and attract Traveller women into their workplace:

> 'There's that cultural awareness piece and responsibility, you know, in terms of your employer's knowledge. That would be really important, if you're going to attract more Traveller women into your business or work environment' (Maureen, higher education access officer).

There was little acknowledgement of the role that universities could play in conjunction with these employers, by having co-ordinated cultural awareness training for all staff in both sectors and all students. Employers could learn about the Traveller culture and their needs when in employment, university staff could learn more about the barriers that currently exist for Traveller graduates when accessing the labour market, and the Traveller women/Travellers could also learn the written and unwritten rules of engagement when working with the settled community. Whilst the increased access to university and the supports and resources to complete higher education were welcomed by the Traveller women, the universities were not all aware of the barriers that historically excluded students face, post third level education. There was a deficit in the universities' understanding of Traveller women's social category in the labour market, and their lack of cultural capital to find networking opportunities. The universities appeared to underestimate how difficult the job market is for Traveller women, and failed to

recognise the need to offer tailored career development programmes with culturally competent approaches, to ensure that the needs of this group were met.

6.4.2 Identity-based Employment Discrimination

Whilst education is important for women's empowerment, it's existence does not automatically mean that women will be empowered, due to the different contexts in which women's lives are situated (Murphy-Graham, 2012). Education resources are necessary but insufficient, as it is the ability to convert these resources into valued capabilities and make choices regarding outcomes, that needs to be evaluated (Walker, 2006a, pp. 32-33). One of the key barriers for Travellers in availing of employment opportunities is the high level of discrimination they experience (Peelo, O'Connor and O'Toole, 2008).

Mary commented on an earlier quest to find employment:

> 'I'm working in a Traveller specific role (in third level education) whereas… if I had to go …and try to find work in the wider workplace….even with all my qualifications I would still struggle. I did kinda set a social experiment one time, and I sent out ten CV's with a site address, and then I sent out ten CV's with a house address, and I put my name in Irish. And for the ten CV's that I sent out with the house address I got a call back, and for the ten that I sent out with the site address I didn't get any. It's who you know, not what you know. You don't necessarily have these connections or social connections …. in the workplace…and that in itself is a barrier, you know' (Mary, Traveller).

Mary's educational achievements should have expanded her capability set but her lack of social capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) limited her navigational agency; her capacity to move freely between occupational spaces. Her choices were therefore not reflections of preference alone but of constrained opportunity structures.

Travellers can experience anxiety when taking up opportunities in new environments as a fear exists that they will be treated less favourably or excluded, and people may feel they have to negotiate their identities when trying to get hired (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). This was confirmed by Nora:

> 'There is a lot of people, there is a higher amount in employment than we think but they just won't open (up)' (Nora, Traveller).

Nora had mentioned at her interview for her current position that she is a Traveller although she did not openly announce this at work, as she had experienced co-workers behaving differently to Travellers when they encountered them:

> 'A (patient) came in and … you see the tone of the voice changes straight away, when it's a member of the Traveller community. They have to make a point of who they are. But if you're from the settled community they don't say oh he's from the settled community' (Nora, Traveller).

Nora's experience further illustrates the emotional and ethical dimensions of navigational agency. Her decision not to disclose her Traveller identity at work represents a strategic form of self-protection; a navigation of identity in the face of prejudice. By "passing" as non-Traveller, Nora maintains workplace belonging and employability, but at the cost of her capability for human empowerment (Velasco & Boni, 2020); her freedom to claim and express her identity without fear of discrimination.

Nora could see that her colleagues automatically assumed a deficit because the patient identified as a Traveller and felt the need to treat them differently to other people. This was a form of discrimination as the person was not being treated as an individual but as part of a particular ethnic group, and it was evident that cultural training is needed in this organisation. Navigational agency can be threatened due to external barriers such as social exclusion or stigmatisation, as individuals are limited in their ability to participate. For Nora, her ability to claim her right to state her ethnicity was compromised, as she feared it would lead to

discrimination for her as an employee, similar to what she had seen in relation to patients.

6.4.3 Current Employment Positions for the Traveller Women Graduates

Six of the seven Traveller women graduates interviewed worked for Traveller organisations or in Traveller specific roles in higher education, and one graduate was employed in the public sector in a professional role. It is likely that this is due to adapted preferences because of previous experiences in the workplace, or a lack of opportunities. None of the Traveller women mentioned self-employment, although this may have been due to wanting to help their own community/others, and they believe that this is only possible by working for an organisation. When Traveller women have reduced labour market opportunities, this leads to reduced navigational agency as they cannot easily exit employment in Traveller organisations, as this could lead to permanent unemployment. Exit rights do not protect some individuals especially when they are born into a particular culture which marks their identity and affiliation, and protection in the form of giving them a voice within the group is a better protection for them (Newman and Newman, 2007).

People have different abilities to convert resources into valued functionings (Sen, 1980) and universities recognise that societal inequities exist by offering extra supports to disadvantaged students on entry and throughout university courses. The disadvantages that Traveller women have on higher education entry, persist when they leave university regardless of their status as graduates, as recognition of their degrees is not automatic in the same way that it is for settled students. Acquiring a degree is not a social leveller for Traveller women as discrimination persists for them when accessing labour market opportunities, and further supports are needed in order to help them to navigate these constraints. Traveller families do not have access to social and economic capital which means that universities can become another area where the middle-class exploit their

advantages (Bathmaker et al, 2016, p. 97). For these Traveller women, class disadvantage intersected with ethnicity to create increased inequalities when negotiating the labour market.

The difficulty for universities is that currently the number of Travellers entering higher education is low - there are 61 Travellers (both men and women) in higher education (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2025). With large numbers of settled students to provide for, the concentration on providing complete wraparound services for this disadvantaged group is absent. Another way of looking at the situation could be to operate from a capability approach lens, and focus on the real opportunities the Traveller graduates have, to find employment after graduation. Universities will already be familiar with the number of graduates from the Traveller community from first year, as they have to apply for the 1916 bursary (Government of Ireland, 2024) at this point. They will also be aware of the courses they are studying, and connections could be made with prospective employers and links made throughout their studies, so that the Traveller students can undertake paid internships with these organisations on an ongoing basis to see what the best fit is, for both the students and the companies. Traveller women graduates will then be able to develop 'transition to the labour market' capabilities, and be able to activate these to achieve the valued functioning of being employed in either the private or public sector, in professional positions in a range of different types of organisations. Whilst the Traveller Graduate Network exists to provide information and support for students and graduates (SOAR, 2025) the Travellers that are involved are already full-time employees with large demands on their time, and it is likely that careers

advisors in universities have advanced links with local and national employers. Using a capability lens, and a concentrated approach by the careers advisors on Traveller students, would ensure that real labour market opportunities exist for these Traveller graduates, where they would have real choices about the different organisational practices to approach regarding employment.

6.5 Conclusion

The Traveller women entered higher education with different experiences in terms of education and work experience. There were differences in terms of preparedness for higher education and the universities responded in distinct ways to their need for extra assistance, from offering extra tuition and supports to stating clearly that this was not on offer, leading to some students taking on further courses or self-educating. Overall the Traveller women believed that the university experience was transformative for them as they had experienced supportive staff, access to increased knowledge and a qualification, and freedom to be themselves. Constraints occurred in the form of accessing resources, the pressure to self-educate and being isolated from certain groups at times. The Traveller women responded by using their personal conversion factors to overcome these barriers by exercising patience and resilience, working extra hard, and locating resources to address these issues, and they were all successful in gaining their degrees. Post graduation led to difficulties for the Traveller women in a way that most settled graduates do not experience, as many of the Traveller women believe that regardless of their work experience and qualifications that they cannot access the labour market in any meaningful way. The labour market consists of settled employers, and having experienced prejudice in the past regarding employment prospects, the Traveller women thought that this would continue for them regardless of their graduate status. Whilst the participants did not labour this point, it was clear that it was an underlying issue, and the universities did not assume that they had any extra responsibility to these graduates post-

employment, beyond what they offered to all other graduates. This is an area that could be focused on by universities in conjunction with the Traveller students on entry to university, when networking opportunities could be set up in a range of organisations and offered on a continuous basis, thus increasing the Traveller women's social and cultural capital, and helping Traveller graduates to operate on a more equal footing regarding employment, post-graduation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Main Research Findings

In this section I outline the three research questions and the related findings.

Research Question 1: How did Traveller families and the extended Traveller community impact on the decision of Traveller women to enter higher education?

This research identifies a number of opportunity freedoms available to the Traveller women, due to the presence of positive conversion factors in the form of Traveller parents, families and the wider Traveller community, who acted to expand the women's capability to be educated further. This originates in parents' encouraging school attendance and emphasising the importance of regular attendance, as parents are the instigators of their children's attendance patterns (Gershenson, Jacknowitz and Brannegan, 2017, p. 137; Kirksey, 2019; Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022, p. 1). Verbal support was forthcoming from some of the parents which encouraged their daughters to stay on in school and achieve the necessary qualifications for direct university entry. Role models, in the form of graduate Traveller women in the community, helped one of the women to return to education to gain a valuable qualification which increased their overall well-being (Sen, 2009).

Conversion factors also operated negatively for some of the women as a lack of supports from parents, families and the wider Traveller community initially impacted on their educational well-being, as parents/relatives actively encouraged the women to leave education after primary school despite the legislative environment dictating otherwise. These obstructive practices impacted negatively on their daughter's capability to be educated further, alongside other parents' acquiescence in their teenage daughter's decision to leave education early. Peer pressure from relatives, who had also left education early, acted to incentivise the premature exit from compulsory formal education, although some of the women found opportunities in second-chance education environments.

In later years five of the seven women entered higher education with varying support from their families ranging from a need to understand why university entry was being considered, a lack of understanding of subject choice, verbal support for the choice, whilst extended families and the wider Traveller community conflated entering higher education with acting settled.

Research Question 2: To what extent did school experiences influence the decision to go to third level education?

School experiences varied for the Traveller women, with differences in their positive experiences and similarities in their negative experiences, which depended on the school attended and the resources offered. There were contrasting school experiences for the two women who went directly from school to higher education with one student receiving supplies for use in the classroom, financial supports to visit university departments offering her subject choice, and academic support in the form of after school classes to help with coursework. This school experience helped and informed her decision to enter higher education. The other Traveller woman was refused resources and she also experienced discrimination in school from peers. The school experience encouraged higher education entry for her, as she refused to let her school experience define her and as she wanted to shape her own identity, she entered higher education with this in mind. The school experiences of these two women impacted positively on their decision to enter higher education directly from school, albeit for different reasons.

The remainder of the students spoke about having reduced timetables, lack of support from teachers, unnecessary resource classes, with one woman having a completely segregated school experience, away from her settled peers. Apart from structural constraints, the women faced social constraints when their settled counterparts refused to mix with them in the playground or include them in after school activities. For these five women, the school experience was not an encouraging factor for further education, and other forces impacted which encouraged higher education entry at a later stage in their lives.

Research Question 3: Which support structures in higher education proved to be the most beneficial in encouraging Traveller women students to complete courses, and which areas need improvement so that Traveller women are enabled to use their qualifications in the wider labour market?

The Traveller women benefited from financial supports offered in higher education, extra academic supports and peer mentoring, although not all of the students received this assistance and one student did not receive any further aid. Further supports included the academic offering of information and knowledge, access to digital supports and opportunities to develop transferable soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, time management and skills in research, academic writing and communication.

The women did not benefit from any of the general graduate assistance due to the nature of the offerings, as the expectation was that Traveller graduates would individually initiate contact with career advisors. The reality for Travellers is that they tend to trust those from the settled community with whom they have built relationships with, over a long period of time. Time constraints, family responsibilities and the need to work part-time further limits opportunities to network during term time. All the Traveller women ended up in graduate/management positions although all these positions were in Traveller organisations or in Traveller related positions, with one exception who did not self-identify at work.

7.2 Contribution to Knowledge

Exploring the impact of Traveller families on Traveller women's aspirations in education through a social justice theory, permits a deeper understanding of inequalities experienced in education due to ethnicity and disadvantage (Ray, 2019, p. 36), and inequalities at home and their link to capabilities and agency (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437; Sen, 1985). This research leads to a number of empirical contributions to knowledge, as it may well be the first to examine the impact of families on Traveller women's aspirations in education using the capability

approach. My contribution to knowledge is four-fold as it makes an empirical contribution to knowledge in the following ways:

First, the results show that Traveller mothers are instrumental in developing their daughter's capability to be educated as they are active in encouraging regular school attendance, which is of paramount importance for positive educational outcomes (Gershenson, Jacknowitz and Brannegan, 2017, p. 137; Kirksey, 2019; Klein, Sosu and Dare, 2022, p. 1). Active encouragement of school attendance extended to intervening in traditional Traveller lifestyles, to ensure that school engagement was more valuable than continuing Traveller traditions which could be altered to suit the school calendar year. Mothers also intervened and altered school policy when inappropriate interventions were made by school staff, to ensure that their daughter's educational capabilities were encouraged. The impact of mothers, as a positive conversion factor, ensure that their daughters educational capability development and educational aspirations are encouraged, leading to increased educational outcomes and educational wellbeing, despite the lack of educational opportunities available to the mothers. This helps to build on previous research which indicates that Traveller mothers supported education but did not reveal how they did so (Bhopal, 2004; Boyle, Flynn and Hanahan, 2020, p. 1401; Hegarty, 2013; Quinlan, 2021). The capability approach permits us to view the main participants' parents as active agents in their daughter's destiny (Sen, 1999, p. 53) and not in deficit terms (Calitz, 2019).

Mothers/relatives also behaved in a way that impacted their daughter's negatively when they removed their daughters from formal education after primary school, and their impact as a negative conversion factor was felt by two Traveller women, who both needed extra academic supports when they entered higher education later in life. In these instances the mothers/relatives negotiated barriers in order to develop their daughter's economic capabilities, by operating outside of the law and not sending them to formal education, and permitting and encouraging entry to the labour market in a full-time capacity despite their daughters being seen as 'children' in the eyes of the law (Irish Statute Book, 1936; Irish Statute Book, 1977; Irish Statute Book, 1996). Lack of intervention by the authorities in these situations

indicated that the movement of these Traveller students out of education was not a concern for the schools involved or the children's employers. These Traveller women, as minors, were unable to negotiate this barrier to their human flourishing as the economic needs of their families outweighed their need to be educated further. When mothers acquiesce with early school leaving in secondary school, this also impacts negatively as their daughter's education is hindered at this point. The literature on school attendance focuses on Travellers being on reduced timetables (McGrath, 2023, p. 5; McGrath, 2024) and there is little attention given to the role and responsibility of Traveller parents in ensuring their child's attendance in school (Irish Statute Book, 2000). Previous negative experiences in education leads to Traveller parents deciding on the cessation of educational attainment for their children, in order to protect their emotional well-being (Hegarty, 2013, p. 2). Sen (1999, pp. xi-xii) suggests that the 'the freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us'. Constraining factors such as these leads individuals to adapt preferences downwards at least initially, until they become adults and are capable of navigating constraints. Adaptive preferences can identify where capability deprivation is occurring, which may lead to policy makers taking action to prevent recurrences (Gore and Walker, 2020).

Second, family support, either at school leaving age or later, acts as a positive conversion factor for the Traveller women and is a crucial turning point, as they relied on verbal support from their families when they broached the subject of higher education entry (Posti-Ahokas and Okkolin, 2016). The Traveller women all engaged with family members when they discussed their desire to enter higher education, and the verbal 'permission' to continue education was an important enabler for the women, despite five of them being adults by the time they entered third level institutions. Lack of social and cultural capital means that the Traveller women have to look outside the family for resources and turn them into capabilities, and the initial starting point of verbal family support is vital for their educational direction.

Third, the contribution this research made to the literature is a focused celebration of the Traveller women's engagement with education and their achievements in education, and it is important that this is noted, as so much of the literature focuses on the difficulties that Travellers face when dealing with structured systems such as the educational system (Bhopal, 2011, p. 318; Joyce, 2018, p. 73; Levinson, 2008, p. 243; Nieto, 2004, p. 102; Vanderbeck, 2005, p. 82). This is not to suggest that difficulties do not exist or that changes are not necessary, although the Travellers themselves seem to get lost in the research as the focus tends to be on the external environment. Despite some of the Traveller women deciding to leave the negative experience of secondary school, these girls used their navigational agency to join other educational programmes in order to gain qualifications, and entered the labour market by working in Community Employment programmes for Travellers and/or Traveller organisations, gaining confidence, work skills and social contacts which they used in order to enter higher education. This research shows how the women successfully used their agency to circumvent the many barriers encountered – financial, family/extended family opposition, household demands, lack of information and resources, ethnocentric curriculum, literacy gaps and academic challenges. The Traveller women are active agents rather than acting in any deficit way (Calitz, 2019) and conversion factors which act as enablers lead to this minority group being able to mobilise their agency and navigate the constraints encountered, which expands their capability to be educated and other freedoms. Given appropriate enabling conditions such as access to helpful university staff, physical and financial resources, and academic support enables the women to navigate barriers to current or future freedoms, and their resilience and persistent aspirations ensured successful completion to graduate status.

Fourth, the creation of conversion factors and list of capabilities/functionings (in Appendix D) increases understanding of the barriers - structural and social - that financially insecure individuals face, such as Traveller women. Identifying capabilities and conversion factors that are needed for disadvantaged communities, helps policymakers and educators to understand the specific needs

of these communities, and aids design of effective policies which address social and economic factors, and impacts how resources are converted into capabilities. Creation of conversion factors helps to explain complex reasons for variations in the conversion of third level qualifications into valued opportunities (Mkwananzi, 2019) as differences exist in the amount of social and cultural capital that Traveller graduates hold compared to settled students, which impacts on networking opportunities and employment prospects. These differences, which exist pre-university and continue throughout the university experience and persist post-graduation, limit the amount of functionings that Traveller graduates get out of their degrees. The role of external and internal influences on individual agency and well-being, influences the impact that education has on disempowering some individuals whilst empowering others (Unterhalter, 2003). A third level qualification is not necessarily a social leveller for Traveller women graduates, as a lack of social and cultural capital continues to impact the Traveller graduates as they try to access the labour market, and their ability to convert resources into valuable capabilities in employment is vastly reduced.

Notwithstanding the barriers that exist and persist, the higher education experience is transformative for the Traveller women in many ways, as increased contact with the settled community permits increased understanding of how and why people behave in different ways in society. This increased freedom to reflect allows them to critically examine societal injustice and it also allows them to be themselves, and not be what society deems them to be. This research builds on the work of other researchers (McDonnell, 2023; McGinley, 2024) which outlines the gaps in provision for Traveller students in higher education/in the school system in Ireland, by providing knowledge of how a disadvantaged minority group uses their agency to navigate restrictions and restrictive practices in education. This does not mean that all barriers are negotiated successfully and that higher education is freedom based, as after the higher education experience there is discovery that having higher education and being a graduate is not a social leveller for these Traveller women, as the social constraints that they had been subjected to all their lives, re-emerge as they sought to begin employment. A lot of the

research focuses on access and participation in higher education (Berry et al, 2025; Brennan et al, 2024; McDonnell, 2023; McGinley, 2024) but there is less attention given to labour market issues. The social and economic differences that had been present for these women prior to attending university continue to persist post-graduation, and they cannot take advantage of any social or economic capital which are readily available to the middle-class, at this stage in their educational journey (Bathmaker et al, 2016, p. 97). Lacking social capital to begin with, and being excluded from the socially advantaged groups, means that the Traveller women's social capital remains stagnant. Although not explicitly stated, it is likely that Travellers face an 'ethnic penalty' (Bhopal, 2018) when they leave university and try to enter the labour market, as they do not enter a wide range of occupations post-graduation. Whilst expansion of human freedoms leads to expansion of individual well-being, this does not indicate that inequalities are addressed (Dejaeghere, 2020). The benefits of third level education can be overstated, and educational systems can 'entrench rather than weaken inequality' (World Bank, 2021).

7.3 Recommendations and Implications

In light of the research findings there are a number of recommendations which can be made regarding parents and their support for education. The findings indicate that all Traveller parents are supportive of primary school education for their children, and differences occur when this stage is completed. Competing demands mean that caring responsibilities for family members and the need to make economic contributions impact on their daughter's capability to be educated, and in these instances the Traveller girls follow their parents' directions. In other cases the girls decide to leave second level education early, after first year, due to resigned aspirations. Historically education in Ireland has not operated well for Traveller students in any of the different phases; the so-called assimilation phase which Travellers did not want, included Traveller only education; the so-called integration phase existed without any practical measures being put in place

to accommodate Travellers; and the so-called interculturalism phase, where the rights of Travellers to learn about their own culture and language are stated in policy, but not acted on. There is a lot of optimism regarding the forthcoming Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill (2018) and the hope that its inclusion in the curriculum leads to increased awareness, acknowledgement and respect for the Traveller culture. As the wording changed from schools having to teach students about the Traveller culture to having to promote it, this removes the legal requirement (Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021, pp. 564-565). Traditionally schools in Ireland show little engagement with non-statutory curriculum interventions (Kavanagh, 2013, p. 282). The impact depends on how much schools include Traveller culture in the curriculum and how much they engage with it on a continuous basis. Teachers will also need to have training in order to handle this content sensitively, and it will be interesting to see how schools react to its introduction into the curriculum, and how much focus will be on it eg if the school has no Traveller students. Difficulties can arise for students if they are the only Traveller in the class, and teachers and schools will have to ensure their handling of the topic does not serve to further alienate Traveller students. Nor should it offer a tokenistic approach, as meaningful change is needed in order to challenge dominant perspectives and system inequities (Kavanagh and Dupont, 2021, p. 553).

Currently educational experiences tend to start off well for Traveler children - Traveller children made up 1.3% of children attending the Early Childhood Care and Education programme (pre-school) in 2017-2018 which relates to their share of the child population in Ireland (Early Childhood Ireland, 2020), and 74% of Traveller children enrolled in pre-school then enrolled in primary school. In 2022-2023 83% of Travellers enrolled in secondary school, and 31% completed secondary school (Oide, 2023, p. 12-13). The first recommendation is that all Traveller students are provided with a special needs assistant or resource teacher in primary school so that any special needs/learning difficulties can be immediately identified and addressed, although not all Traveller students will have difficulties. The drop in attendance relates to secondary school and Traveller

students should also have an individual special needs assistant or resource teacher at this point to help with this transition, as the academic demands increase at this stage.

The second recommendation is to introduce a choice for Traveller students after first year in secondary school as a dual approach may help to increase attendance and school completion. This capability to be educated further means continuing on at their secondary school, or being offered home-schooling in their home/halting site/area delivered by qualified experienced staff, with expertise developed from working with disadvantaged groups. The Traveller students continue onto Leaving Certificate if desired after compulsory education, either in a secondary school or they continue being home-schooled. The choice involved increases their capability to be educated, leading to functionings in the form of valuable qualifications, which makes it easier for them to enter the labour market. It would also allay fears that Traveller parents have about their children taking on the values of the settled community which they do not agree with, as the desire to continue with the Traveller lifestyle is an overriding concern for them. Having education within their physical and cultural environment helps to maintain their way of life.

The third recommendation relates to the way Traveller girls have increased pressure to take on adult responsibilities within the home, especially if they are the eldest girl in the family. For those who continue in school, academic supports should be in place which help them to complete coursework and prepare for examinations. Currently there is a meagre payment of €213.50 per Traveller student (DES, 2020) and lack of transparency of how it is used by schools (McGrath, 2024, p. 122). By giving increased academic supports in schools this reduces academic pressure, which reduces the stress that some of these women are under when competing household pressures clash with academic demands.

The fourth recommendation is that schools give stipends to Travellers who stay on in school post Junior Certificate (aged 16) which reduces the pressure they are under to contribute to family income at this stage. They should also receive financial supports to visit colleges of their choice. For those still being home

schooled, the timetable will not be as onerous as a school timetable as non-examination subjects will be absent, which gives more free time for students to take on part-time work. Attending higher education should be free for all Traveller students along with sufficient stipends, which act as a measure of corrective justice for the educational debt owed to Travellers, who were denied culturally appropriate education across many generations. Given the small number of Travellers in Ireland, any financial outlay represents a miniscule amount of money for the government.

The fifth recommendation relates to higher education and the need to offer cultural training for staff at every level in the organisation, and for students in all aspects relating to ethnic groups including the Traveller community. Training in how to develop capability to be employed should be offered to all students, with additional focus on paid internships for Traveller students from entry to university to the final year, with a focus on subject areas/areas of their choice. Traveller students are owed both an education debt and an employment debt (McHugh, 2023, p. 37).

7.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is a small-scale study and whilst it makes no wide generalisation claims, the reality is that it does represent life for Traveller female students, with similarities in their negative experiences in education and variation in the positive aspects. Traveller students are all from a disadvantaged group, and this will not change in the future unless further interventions are made on their behalf. I am aware, as a member of the settled community, that my presence impacted on the responses given to me, and although I did not doubt any of the information presented, there were probably a lot more negative encounters that they did not share. I hope that the final version of this thesis is read by the participants, in order that they continue to celebrate their academic achievements.

Policy after policy is written about Traveller education, and numerous strategies are set out that repeat earlier information with more up to date statistics, but real

change is not forthcoming for Traveller students. I believe that the recommendations above will go some way to increasing Traveller attendance and engagement with education, leading to increased completion rates in school and higher amounts of university entrants. This thesis is not envisioned to make wide sweeping suggestions for change, and strategies that make small changes at many points are useful (Marginson, 2011) for real change to occur.

Whilst the agency of Traveller women is increasing due to increasing levels of education, the way the majority views Travellers continues to be negative (O'Mahony, 2019, p. 105; McGréil, 2011). Travellers are viewed as one group, and research focuses on them as a group. The feuding that is carried out is not enacted by the women, and whilst Traveller women are seen as supportive of Traveller men, this does not mean that they support violence and feuding. Settled women are more comfortable than men with Travellers (Carron-Kee, McGinnity and Alamir, 2024, p. vi) and the over-reporting by the media of violence by Traveller men, may be one of the reasons why settled men are so ill at ease with them. Future research that focuses on Traveller women only, may realise different results, and research on Traveller women could reveal that the majority has favourable/more favourable views of them. This may lead to Traveller women becoming the main spokespersons for this disadvantaged group and whilst they currently have a voice, the educated Traveller women have a stronger voice, and it may be that the settled majority will be more inclined to listen to them. It would also be interesting to see research that focuses on how educated Traveller women are changing the dynamic in Traveller families and how Traveller men are reacting to this change, although this is research that is firmly in the hands of Traveller women and should be carried out by them.

7.5 Final Reflections

My intention when beginning this thesis was to show how Traveller women's academic achievements need to be named and celebrated. When I mentioned my thesis topic to friends, the usual response was to say that they didn't know that

Travellers go to university. Whilst I am inspired by all the participants accounts of their educational and life experiences and qualifications gained, the persistent gaps and barriers reveal that despite the numerous policies, the lack of selective enforcement of these policies show that intention without action is meaningless. The recommendations above, if acted on, will ensure increased capabilities for all Travellers in education and increased functionings, leading to better quality of life, increased well-being and justice for Travellers and their families.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. (2012) On being included, racism and diversity in institutional life. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Alkire, S. Foster, J. Seth, S. Santos, M. A. Roche, J. M. & Ballon, P. (2015) Multidimensional poverty measurement and analysis. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199689491.001.0001

Alsop, R. & Heinsohn, N. (2005) Measuring empowerment in practice: Structuring analysis and framing indicators. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23549768_Measuring_Empowerment_in_Practice_Structuring_Analysis_and_Framing_Indicators/citation/download [Accessed 6th November 2024]

Ambo, T. & Beardall, T. R. (2023) Performance or progress? The physical and rhetorical removal of Indigenous Peoples in settler land acknowledgements at land-grab universities. American Educational Research Journal, 60 (1), pp. 103–140.

Anderson, E. S. (1999) What is the point of equality? Ethics, 109 (2), pp. 287–337.

Ansley, F. L. (1997) White supremacy (and what we should do about it), in: R. Delgado & J.Stefancic (Eds) Critical white studies: looking behind the mirror (Philadelphia, Temple University Press), pp. 592–595.

Appadurai, A. (2004). The capacity to aspire. In M. Walton & V. Rao (Eds.), Culture and Public Action (pp. 59–84). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Applebaum, B. (2010) Being white, being good: White complicity, white moral responsibility, and social justice pedagogy. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Archer, L. Hutchings, M. & Ross, A. (2003) Higher education and social class. Issues of exclusion and inclusion. London: Routledge Farmer.

Ashwin, P. (2020) Transforming University Education. A manifesto. London: Bloomsbury.

Atlas.ti (n.d.) The ultimate guide to qualitative research – Part 1: The basics. Available at: https://atlasti.com/guides/qualitative-research-guide-part-1/power-dynamics#:~:text=The%20researcher%20or%20their%20research,perspectives%20shape%20the%20data%20collected. [Accessed 12th January 2024]

Ball, S. J. Reay, D. & David, M. (2002) Ethnic Choosing: Minority ethnic students, social class and higher education choice. Race Ethnicity and Education, 5 (4), pp. 333-357, doi: 10.1080/1361332022000030879

Bathmaker, A.M. Ingram, N. & Waller, R. (2013) Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: recognising and playing the game. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 34 (5-6), pp. 723-743. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2013.816041

Bathmaker, A. M. Ingram, N. Abrahams, J. Hoare, A. Waller, R. & Bradley, H. (2016) Higher education, social class and social mobility: The degree generation. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bernard, C. Fairtlough, A. Fletcher, J. & Ahmet, A. (2014) A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning. The British Journal of Social Work, 44 (7), pp. 1934–49.

Berry, M. Hennessy, C. Joyce, D. Joyce, S. Maguire, J. Mallon, H. Mihai, C. Ní Chorcora, E. Paszkowska, V. & Treacy, M. (2025) A community needs analysis with Traveller and Roma students on their experiences of higher education: A call to action for accountable and transformative policy and practice throughout the higher education system. Available at: https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/19725/1/Full%20Report%20with%20Appendices.pdf Link: https://doi.org/10.48460/vd15-nn04 [Accessed 27th July 2025].

Bettie, J. (2002) Exceptions to the rule: Upwardly mobile white and Mexican American high school girls. Gender & Society, 16, pp. 403-422.

Bhopal, K. (2004) Gypsy Travellers and education: Changing needs and changing perceptions. British Journal of Educational Studies, 52 (1), pp 47–64.

Bhopal, K. (2011) What about us? Gypsies, Travellers and white racism in secondary schools in England. International Studies in Sociology of Education, 21 (4), pp. 315–329. doi:10.1080/09620214.2011.640520.

Bhopal, K. (2018) White Privilege: The Myth of a Post-racial Society. Bristol: Policy Press/University of Bristol.

Bhopal, K. & Brown, H. (2016) Black and minority ethnic leaders: Support networks and strategies for success in higher education. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, London.

Bhopal, K. & Myers, M. (2008). Insiders, outsiders and others: Gypsies and identity. University of Hertfordshire Press.

Bhopal, K. & Pitkin, C. (2020) Same old story, just a different policy: race and policy making in higher education in the UK, Race Ethnicity and Education, 23 (4), pp. 530-547, doi: 10.1080/13613324.2020.1718082

Biggeri, M. Ballet, J. & Comim, F. (2011) Children and the capability approach. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Biggeri, M. & Ferrannini. A. (2014) Sustainable human development: A new territorial and people- centered perspective. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bleakley, A. (2005) Stories as data, data as stories: making sense of narrative inquiry in clinical education. Medical Education, 39 (5), pp. 534-40. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2929.2005.02126.x

Bohman, J. (1996) Public deliberation: Pluralism, complexity, and democracy. MIT Press.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003) Racial attitudes or racial ideology? An alternative paradigm for examining actors' racial views. Journal of Political Ideologies, 8 (1), pp. 63-82.

Borrero, N.E. Yeh, C. J. Cruz, C. I. & Suda, J. F. (2012) School as a context for othering youth and promoting cultural assets. Teachers College Record, 114.

Available at: C:/Users/patri/Downloads/School_as_a_Context_for_Othering_Youth_and_Promoti%20(1).pdf [Accessed 2nd February 2025]

Bourdieu, P. (1984) Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste (tr. R. Nice). Cambridge M.A.: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology. Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. P. D. (1992) An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bowers-Brown, T. Ingram, N. & Burke, C. (2019) Higher education and aspiration. International Studies in Sociology of Education, 28 (3-4), pp. 207-214, doi: 10.1080/09620214.2019.1641307

Boyle, A. (2007) Traveller education in Ireland, parental involvement in preschool education. Aesthethika, 2, pp. 33-43. Available at: https://www.aesthethika.org/Traveller-Education-in-Ireland [Accessed 15th February 2025]

Boyle, A. Flynn, M. & Hanafin, J. (2018) From absorption to inclusion: The evolution of Irish State Policy on Travellers, in L. Burton, É Ní Shé and P. Danaher (Eds) Social Capital and Enterprise in the Modern State. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.75---115. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-68115-3_5

Boyle, A. Flynn, M. & Hanafin, J. (2020) Optimism despite disappointment: Irish Traveller parents' reports of their own school experiences and their views on education. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24 (13), pp. 1389-1409.

Boyle, A. Hanafin, J. & Flynn, M. (2018) Parental involvement: Irish Travellers and early years education. Encounters in Theory and History of Education, 19, pp. 186-204.

Bradbury, A. (2013) Understanding early years inequality: Policy, assessment and young children's identities. London: Routledge.

Brando, N. (2020) Children's abilities, freedom, and the process of capability-formation. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 21 (3), pp. 249-262.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022) Thematic analysis: A practical guide. London: Sage Publications.

Brennan, R. Cummins, A. Leane, M. Súilleabháin, F. Ó. McGovern, S. & Quilligan, A. M. (2024) Pavee Leaders – enablers and inhibitors to accessing higher education for Irish Travellers. Irish Educational Studies, 44 (3), pp. 379–400. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2024.2330890

Brennan, A. Dempsey, M. & O'Dea, M. (2018) The link between off campus work for students, reduced academic performance and increased mental health issues. International Academy of Technology, Education and Development (IATED), Conference paper. doi 10.21125/inted.2018.1429

Brennan, J. & Naidoo, R. (2008) Higher education and the achievement (and/or prevention) of equity and social justice. Higher Education, 56, pp. 287-302.

Bryman, A. (2012) Social research methods. New York: Oxford University Press.

Buchmann, C. (2002) Methodological advances in cross-national surveys of educational achievement. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi.org/10.17226/10322.

Bunce, L. King, N. Saran, S. & Talib, N. (2021) Experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) students in higher education: applying self-determination theory to understand the BME attainment gap. Studies in Higher Education, 46 (3), pp. 534-547. doi: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1643305

Burke, M. (2009) Tinkers': Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Burke, C. Thatcher, J. Ingram, N. & Abrahams, J. (2015) The development of Bourdieu's intellectual heritage in UK sociology. In Bourdieu, the Next Generation. London: Routledge.

Cabrera, N. L. (2014) Exposing whiteness in higher education: white male college students minimizing racism, claiming victimization, and recreating white supremacy, Race Ethnicity and Education, 17 (1), pp. 30-55, doi: 10.1080/13613324.2012.725040

Cabrera, N. L. Franklin, J. D. & Watson, J. S. (2017) Whiteness in higher education: The invisible missing link in diversity and racial analyses. ASHE Higher Education Report, 42 (6). John Wiley & Sons.

Cabrera, N. L. Watson, J. S. & Franklin, J. D. (2016) Racial arrested development - A critical whiteness analysis of the campus ecology. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299502656_Cabrera_Watson_Franklin_-_Racial_Arrested_Development-_A_Critical_Whiteness_Analysis_of_the_Campus_Ecology [Accessed 14th June 2025]

Calitz, T. (2019) Enhancing the Freedom to Flourish in Higher Education. London: Routledge.

Carron-Kee, E. McGinnity, F. & & Alamir, A. (2024) Understanding attitudes to Travellers and Roma in Ireland. Available at: https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/JR9%20Travellers%20and%20Roma_signed%20off%2028%20Nov%202024.pdf [Accessed 18th March 2025]

Carter, I. (1996) The concept of freedom in the work of Amartya Sen: An alternative analysis consistent with freedom's independent value. Notizie di Politeia, 12 (43–44), pp. 7–22.

Carter, I. (2014) Is the capability approach paternalist? Economics & Philosophy, 30 (1), pp. 75–98.

Casey, M. (6 March 2025) International Women's day: The voices and struggles of Traveller women. Available at: https:// www.ucc.ie/en/ace/news/international-womens-day-the-voices-and-struggles-of-traveller-women.html#:~:text=For%20Traveller%20women%2C%20gender%20and,also%2C%20racism%20and%20sexism%20externally. [Accessed 19th October 2025]

Casey, R. (2014) Caravan wives' and decent girls: Gypsy-Traveller women's perceptions of gender, culture and morality in the North of England. Culture, Health & Sexuality, 16 (7), pp. 806-819.

Central Statistics Office (2006a) Census 2006 volume 5 - ethnic or cultural background (including the Irish Traveller community). Available at: https:// www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/census2006results/volume5/vol_5_2006_complete.pdf [Accessed 12th August 2025]

Central Statistics Office (2006b) Census 2006, volume 5 – ethnic or cultural background including the Irish Traveller community/C0503 – Population usually resident and present in the state. Available at: https://data.cso.ie [Accessed 19th July 2025]

Central Statistics Office (2022) Census of Population 2022 - Summary Results, Migration and Diversity. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/migrationanddiversity/ [Accessed 19th July 2025]

Central Statistics Office (17th October 2023a) Ireland and the EU at 50. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ieu50/irelandandtheeuat50/society/migration/ Accessed 15th September 2025

Central Statistics Office (17th October 2023b) Ireland and the EU at 50, Migration. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ieu50/irelandandtheeuat50/society/migration/#:~:text=Positive%20net%20migration%20starts%20in%201996%20and%20in,beginning%20and%20end%20of%20the%20decade%20are%20assessed. [Accessed 19th July 2025]

Central Statistics Office (2024a) Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 4 Quality Education 2024. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-sdg4/irelandsunsdgs-goal4qualityeducation2024/overviewoftheirisheducationsystem/ [Accessed 23rd November 2025]

Central Statistics Office (2024b) Life in 1916 Ireland: Stories from statistics. Available at: https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-1916/1916irl/society/education/#:~:text=The%20Irish%20Education%20Act%20of,least%2075%20days%20a%20year. [Accessed 17th March 2025]

Centre for Housing Research (2008) Housing policy discussion series Traveller accommodation in Ireland: Review of policy and practice. Available at: https://www.housingagency.ie/sites/default/files/67.%20Traveller-Accommodation-in-Ireland_Review-of-Policy-and-Practice.pdf [Accessed 28th January 2025]

Chambliss, D.F. & Takacs, C. G. (2014) How college works. Cambridge. M.A: Harvard.

Charmaz, K. (2006) Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis. London: Sage.

Cin, F. M. (2017) Gender justice, education and equality: Creating capabilities for girls' and women's development. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.

Citizens Information (2025a) Youthreach. Available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/further-education-and-training/youthreach/ [Accessed 15th February 2025]

Citizens Information (2025b) Community employment (CE) scheme. Available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/unemployment-and-redundancy/employment-support-schemes/community-employment-scheme/ [Accessed 23rd March 2025]

Claassen, R. (2016) An agency-based capability theory of justice. European Journal of Philosophy, 25 (4). https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12195

Claassen, R. (2018) Capabilities in a just society: A theory of navigational agency. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=5569618.

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000) Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research. San Francisco, CA: Jossey–Bass Publishers.

Clandinin, J. H. & Huber, J. (2010) Narrative inquiry. International Encyclopedia of Education (Third Edition), pp. 436-441.

Coffey, A. (1999) The ethnographic self: Fieldwork and the representation of identity. London: SAGE.

Cohen, L. Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2011) Research methods in education (7th ed.). Oxon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Cole, M. (2009) Critical Race Theory and Education: A Marxist Response. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cork Traveller Women's Network (2025) Who are the Irish Travellers? Available at: https://ctwn.ie/about/who-are-the-irish-travellers/ [Accessed 4th November 2025]

Coulson, A. Garforth, L. Payne, G. & Wastell, E. (2018) Admissions, adaptations and anxieties, social class inside and outside the elite university in book Higher education and social inequalities: university admission, experiences and outcome, edited by Richard Waller, Nicola Ingram and Michael R.M. Ward. London: Routledge.

Council of Europe (1950) European convention of human rights. Available at: https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG [Accessed 1st July 2025]

Council of Europe (February 1995) Framework Convention for the protecting of national minorities and explanatory report. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/16800c10cf#:~:text=The%20framework%20Convention%20is%20the,the%20protection%20of%20national%20minorities. [Accessed 28th July 2025]

Council of Europe (3 February 2025) Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland. Commissioner for Human Rights. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-the-human-rights-of-roma-in-ireland-by-michael-o-flahert/1680b44725 Accessed 4th August 2025]

Creswell J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2016) Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications.

Crocker, D. & Robeyns, I. (2009) Capability and agency. In Amartya Sen. Contemporary Philosophy in Focus, edited by C. J. Morris. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 60-90.

Crossman, A. (2018) Feminist theory in sociology: An overview of key ideas and issues. ThoughtCo. https://www.thoughtco.com/feminist-theory-3026624 [Accessed 3rd February 2024]

Curren, R. & Metzger, E. (2017) Living well now and in the future: Why sustainability matters. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Daniel, B. J. (2005) Researching African Canadian women: indigenous knowledge and the politics of representation. In: Sefa Dei GJ and Johal GS (eds) Critical Issues in Anti-racist Research Methodologies. New York: P. Lang, pp. 53–73.

D'Arcy, K. (2014) Educational inclusion: Meeting the needs of all Traveller pupils. In Richard Race & Vini Lander, (eds) Advancing Race and Ethnicity in Education. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137274762_4

Darmody, M. McGinnity, F. & Kingston, G. (2016) The experiences of migrant children in Ireland in Williams et al., (eds.), Cherishing All the Children Equally? Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

Darmody, M. & Smyth, E. (2018) Immigrant student achievement and educational policy in Ireland. In L. Volante, D. Klinger, & O. Bilgili (Eds.), Immigrant Student Achievement and Education Policy. Cross-Cultural Approaches, (pp. 119–135). New York: Springer.

Davies, C. & Garrett, M. (2012) The BME student experience at a small northern university: An examination of the experiences of minority ethnic students undertaking undergraduate study within a small northern university. Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching at the University of Greenwich, 5, pp. 1–10.

Dejaeghere, J. G. (2020) Reconceptualizing educational capabilities: A relational capability theory for redressing inequalities, Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 21 (1), pp. 17-35.

Deneulin, S. (2002) Perfectionism, paternalism and liberalism in Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach. Review of Political Economy, 14 (4), pp. 497–518.

Department of Education (2019) Education. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/policy/655184-education/ [Accessed 3rd February 2025]

Department of Education (2024) Revision of capitation grant rates for voluntary secondary schools in the free education scheme. Available at: https://Downloads/885c0597-f482-4001-8699-50196f77ea1d.pdf [Accessed 2nd January 2025]

Department of Education and Science (2002) Guidelines on Traveller education in second-level schools. Dublin: Stationery Office. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/24938/f90751a700764029ac8d6cb02085ea6f.pdf [Accessed 26th December 2023]

Department of Education and Science (2006) Report and recommendations for a Traveller education strategy. Dublin: Government Publications

Department of Education and Youth (8 July 2025) Education. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/policies/education/ [Accessed 16th September 2025]

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (12 April, 2025) Travellers and Roma in higher education supported, as Minister Harris announces rollout of €450,000. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-further-and-higher-education-research-

innovation-and-science/press-releases/travellers-and-roma-in-higher-education-supported-as-minister-harris-announces-rollout-of-450000/#:~:text=“Participation%20by%20Travellers%20in%20higher%20education%20remains%20at,Only%201%25%20of%20Travellers%20have%20a%20third-level%20education. [Accessed 19th September 2025]

Department of Justice (n.d.) Traveller and Roma policy in Ireland. Available at: https://www.travellerinclusion.ie/website/TravPolicy/travinclusionweb.nsf/page/traveller_&_roma_communities_in_ireland-en [Accessed 28th July 2025]

Department of Justice and Equality (June 2017). National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/national-traveller-and-roma-inclusion-strategy-2017-2021.pdf [Accessed 12th August 2025]

Department of the Taoiseach (11th April, 2025) Statement by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD on the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group, Dáil Éireann. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-the-taoiseach/speeches/statement-by-an-taoiseach-enda-kenny-td-on-the-recognition-of-travellers-as-an-ethnic-group-dáil-éireann/ [Accessed 19th July 2025]

Department of Youth (4th July 2025) DEIS Delivering equality of inclusion in schools. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-education/policy-information/deis-delivering-equality-of-opportunity-in-schools/ [Accessed 25th July 2025]

Derrington, C. & Kendall, S. (2003) Gypsy Travellers in English secondary schools; a longitudinal study. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Devine, D. (2005) Welcome to the Celtic Tiger? Teacher responses to immigration and increasing ethnic diversity in Irish schools. International Studies in Sociology of Education, 15 (1), pp. 49–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210500200131

Devine, D. (2009) Mobilising capitals? Migrant children's negotiation of their everyday lives in school. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 30 (5), pp. 521–535. https://doi.org/10. 1080/01425690903101023

Devine, D. Kenny, M & MacNeela, E. (2004) Experiencing racism in the primary school: children's perspectives. In Primary Voices- Equality, Diversity and Childhood in Irish Primary Schools, edited by J. Deegan, D. Devine, and A. Lodge, pp. 183–205. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.

Dhar, D. Jain, T. & Jayachandran, S. (2019) Intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes: Evidence from India. Journal of Development Studies, 55, pp. 2572–2592.

Dickens, D.D. & Chavez, E.L. (2018) Navigating the workplace: The costs and benefits of shifting identities at work among early career U.S. black women, sex roles. 78 (11-12), pp. 760–774. doi:10.1007/s11199-017-0844-x.

Donahue, M. McVeigh, R. & Ward, M. (2005) Misli, crush, mislÌ: Irish Travellers and nomadism: A research report for the Irish Travellers movement and Traveller movement (Northern Ireland). Dublin: Irish Traveller Movement.

Dufflo, E. (2012) Human values and the design of the fight against poverty. Tanner Lectures. Available at: https://economics.mit.edu/sites/defautl/files/2022-08/2012.05%20 TannerLectures_EstherDufflo_draft.pdf [Accessed 3rd December 2024]

Dyer, R. (1997) White. London: Routledge.

Early Childhood Ireland (April, 2020) Statistical spotlight: Young Travellers in Ireland. Available at: https://www.earlychildhoodireland.ie/statistical-spotlight-young-travellers-in-ireland/#:~:text=On%20the%20other%20hand%2C%20Pobal,children%20are%20not%20left%20behind. [Accessed 7th August 2025]

Elias, N. & Scotson, J. (1994) The Established and the Outsiders. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Elster, J. (1982) Sour grapes – Utilitarianism and the genesis of wants. In Utilitarianism and Beyond, edited by Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, pp. 219–38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Farough, S. (2004) The social geographies of white masculinities. Critical Sociology, 30 (2), pp. 241-264.

Flick, U. (2018) Designing qualitative Research, 2nd Edition. London: Sage.

Flores-Crespo, P. (2007) Education, employment and human development: Illustrations from Mexico. Journal of Education and Work, 20 (1), pp. 45-66.

Forman, T. A. & Lewis, A. E. (2015). Beyond prejudice? Young whites' racial attitudes in post–civil rights America, 1976–2000. American Behavioral Scientist, 59 (11), pp. 1394–1428.

Fox, J. E. Morosanu, L. & Szilassy, L. (2015) Denying discrimination: Status, race, and the whitening of Britain's new Europeans. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 41 (5), pp. 729–748. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2014.962491.

FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020a) Roma and Travellers in six countries. Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf [Accessed 17th January 2024]

Fricker, M. (2007) Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing. Oxford: OUP.

Fricker, M. (2015) Epistemic contribution as a central human capability. In G. Hull (Ed.), The equal society (pp. 73–90). Cape Town: UCT Press.

Gale, T. & Mills, C. (2013) Creating spaces in higher education for marginalised Australians: Principles for socially inclusive pedagogies. Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences, 5 (2), pp. 7-19.

Garner, S. (2007) Whiteness, an introduction. London: Routledge.

Garner, S. (2009) Empirical research into white racialized identities in Britain. Sociology Compass, 3 (5), pp. 789-802.

Garner, S. (2012) A moral economy of whiteness: Behaviours, belonging and Britishness. Ethnicities, 12 (4), pp. 445-464.

Gaztambide-Fernández, R. & Angod, L. (2019) Approximating whiteness: Race, class, and empire in the making of modern elite/white subjects. Educational Theory, 69, pp. 653-758.

Genett, A. (2017) The effect of paid work on academic performance amongst UNH undergraduate students. Perspectives, 9 (7). Available at: https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives/vol9/iss1/7

Gershenson, S. Jacknowitz A. & Brannegan, A. (2017) Are student absences worth the worry in U.S. Primary schools? Education Finance and Policy, 12 (2), pp. 137-165.

Gewirtz, S. (2002) The managerial school: Post-welfarism and social justice in education. London: Routledge.

Government of Ireland (2023) Traveller and Roma education strategy 20204-2030. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/traveller-and-roma-education-strategy-2024-2030.pdf [Accessed 27th July 2025]

Government of Ireland (2024) The 1916 bursary. Available at: https://1916bursary.ie [Accessed 27th March 2025]

Guillemin, M. & Gillam, L. (2004) Ethics, reflexivity and ethically important moments in research. Qualitative Inquiry, 10, pp. 261-280.

Gusa, D. L. (2010) White institutional presence: The impact of whiteness on campus climate. Harvard Educational Review, 80, pp. 464–490.

Hanson, J. (n.d.) Understanding resource classrooms: Key to inclusive education and learning diversity. Available at: https://special-education-journey.com/understanding-resource-classrooms-key-to-inclusive-education-and-learning-diversity/ [Accessed 2nd February 2025]

Harding, S. (1993) Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is strong objectivity? In L. Alcoff & E. Potter (Eds.), Feminist epistemologies. New York: Routledge, pp. 49-82.

Hardy, R. (June 6th, 2018) Working with Gypsy and Traveller communities: Key advice for social communities. Available at: https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2018/06/06/working-gypsy-traveller-communities-key-advice-social-workers/ [Accessed 18th March 2025]

Hart, C. S. (2016) How Do Aspirations Matter? Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 17 (3), pp. 324-341

Hart, C. S. & Brando, N. (2018) A capability approach to children's well-being, agency and participatory rights in education. European Journal of Education, 53 (3), pp. 293-309.

Health Services Executive (2010) Irish Travellers. Available at: https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/travellers-and-roma/irish-travellers/#:~:text=the%20number%20of%20deaths%20among,compared%20to%20the%20general%20population. [Accessed 22nd October 2025]

Heatly, M. C. & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2017) Parent-and teacher-child relationships and engagement at school entry: Mediating, interactive, and transactional associations across contexts. Developmental Psychology, 53, pp. 1042–1062. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000310.

Heckler, N. (2019) Whiteness and masculinity in nonprofit organizations: Law, money, and institutional race and gender. Administrative Theory & Praxis, 41 (3), pp. 266–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2019

Hegarty, M. (2013) Classed: A study of Traveller mothers and their children’s schooling. PhD thesis. Available at: https://hmural.maynoothuniversity.ie/id/eprint/5397/1/Martina%20Hegarty%20EdD.pdf [Accessed 22nd January 2025]

Heidegger, M. (1962) Being and time. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Heinz, M. & Keane, E. (2018) Socio-demographic composition of primary initial teacher education entrants in Ireland, Irish Educational Studies, 37 (4), pp. 523–543. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/03323315.2018.1521731

Higher Education Authority (August 2022) National access plan, a strategic access plan for equity of access, participation and success in higher education 2022-2028. Available at: https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2024/07/National-Access-Plan-2022-2028-FINAL.pdf [Accessed 27th July 2025]

Hoffmann, N. & Metz, T. (2017) What can the capabilities approach learn from an Ubuntu ethic? A relational approach to development theory. World Development, 97, pp. 153-164.

Hoffman, G. D. Rodriguez, F. Yang, M & Ropers-Huilman, R. (2019) Assimilation and subversion on campus: A critical discourse analysis of students' experiences of race and institutional resources. Journal of Diversity in H.E., 12, pp. 230-241.

Holland, J. (2007) Emotions and research. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 10 (3), pp. 195-209.

Houses of the Oireachtas (2016) International human rights law: operation and impact. Available at: htttps://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2016/2016-09-28_spotlight-international-human-rights-law-operation-and-impact_en.pdf [Accessed 24th October 2025]

Houses of the Oireachtas (2025) Traveller culture and history in education bill 2018. Available at: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/71/ [Accessed 2nd May 2025]

Hughey, M.W. (2010) The (dis)similarities of white racial identities: The conceptual framework of hegemonic whiteness. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 33 (8), pp. 1289–309.

Ingram, N. (2011) Within school and beyond the gate: The complexities of being educationally successful and working class. Sociology, 45 (2) pp. 287-302. DOI: 10.117/0038038510394017.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020) The equal status acts 2000-2018. Available at: https:// www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2022/08/IHREC-Equal-Status-Rights-Leaflet-WEB.pdf [Accessed 2nd October 2025]

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (17th June, 2024) Promoting Traveller rights. Available at: https://www.ihrec.ie/promoting-traveller-rights/#:~:text=Members%20of%20the%20Traveller%20community,culturally%20appropriate%20accommodation%20to%20Travellers. [Accessed 19th April 2025]

Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (2023) Census 2022 key statistics. Available at: https://www.inou.ie/analysis/e-bulletin/2023/12/18/census-2022-key-statistics. Accessed 27th March 2025]

Irish National Teachers Organisation (1992) Travellers in Education. Dublin: INTO Publications.

Irish Statute Book (1936) Conditions of employment act, 1936. Available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1936/act/2/enacted/en/html. [Accessed 16th November 2025]

Irish Statute Book (1977) Protection of young persons (employment) act, 1977. Available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1977/act/9/enacted/en/html [Accessed 16th November 2025]

Irish Statute Book (1996) Protection of young persons (employment) act, 1996. Available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1996/act/16/enacted/en/print.html [Accessed 16th November 2025]

Irish Statute Book (2000) Education (welfare) act (2000) Available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/22/section/17/enacted/en/html#sec17 [Accessed 9th April 2025]

Irish Statute Book (2020) Constitution of Ireland. Available at: https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html [Accessed 24th July 2025]

Irish Traveller Movement (n.d.) Education. Available at: https:// itmtrav.ie/our-work/education/#:~:text=Into%20the%201990s%20Travellers%20were,levels%20of%20literacy%20and%20numeracy [Accessed 3rd January 2025]

Irish Traveller Movement (1993) Education and Travellers. Dublin: Irish Traveller Movement.

Irish Traveller Movement (April 2011) Cuts to Traveller education. Available at: https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ITM-Position-Paper-Traveller-Education-Cuts.pdf [Accessed 12th August 2025]

Irish Traveller Movement (2016) Inspiring Traveller women. Available at: https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Inspiring-Traveller-Women.pdf [Accessed 15th August 2025]

Irish Traveller Movement (2019) About Irish Travellers. Available at: https://itmtrav.ie/what-is-itm/irish-travellers/#:~:text=Traveller%20Culture,happen%20as%20society%20changes%20globally. [Accessed 16th February 2025]

Irish Traveller Movement (2021) Submission to the department of further and higher education, research, innovation and science and the higher education authority. Available at: https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ITM-Submission-to-the-National-Access-Plan-2022-2026.pdf [Accessed 3rd December 2023]

Jackson, P. W. (1968) Life in classrooms Minnesota. Holt: Rinehart and Winston.

Jamshed, S. (2014) Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation. Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy, 5 (4), pp. 87-88. doi: 10.4103/0976-0105.141942

Joyce, S. (2018) Mincéirs siúladh: An ethnographic study of young travellers' experiences of racism in an Irish city. Limerick: UL. [Accessed 25th July 2025] https://ulir.ul.ie/bitstream/handle/10344/7535/Joyce_2018_Minceirs.pdf ?sequence=6.

Jupp, J. C. Berry, T. R. & Lensmire, T. J. (2016) Second-wave white teacher identity studies: A review of white teacher identity literatures from 2004 through 2014. Review of Educational Research, 86 (4), pp. 1151-1191. doi:10.3102/0034654316629798

Kabeer, N. (1999) Resources, agency, achievements: Reflection on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change, 30, pp. 435-464.

Kanyeredzi, A. (2018) Feeling 'like a minority . . . a pathology': Interpreting race from research with African and Caribbean women on violence and abuse. Qualitative Research, 19 (4), pp. 399–417.

Kavanagh, A. M. (2013) Emerging models of intercultural education in Irish primary schools:A critical case study analysis. Dublin, DCU Institute of Education. Available from: https://doras.dcu.ie/22493/1/Anne%20Marie%20Kavanagh.pdf [Accessed 7th August 2025]

Kavanagh, A. M. & Dupont, M. (2021) Making the invisible visible: Managing tensions around including Traveller culture and history in the curriculum at primary and post-Primary levels. Irish Educational Studies, 40 (3), pp. 553-569.

Keane, E. & Heinz, M. (2016) Excavating an injustice?: Nationality/ies, ethnicity/ies, and experiences with diversity of initial teacher education applicants and entrants in Ireland in 2014. European Journal of Teacher Education, 39 (4), pp. 507–527.https://doi.org/ 10.1080/02619768.2016.1194392

Keane, E. & Ni Dhuinn (2023) But you don't look Irish': identity constructions of minority ethnic students as non-Irish and deficient learners at school in Ireland. International Studies in Sociology of Education, 32 (4), pp. 826-855, DOI: 10.1080/09620214.2021.1927144

Kempny, M. & Lucy, M. (2021) Race equality in the higher education sector. Available at: https:// hea.ie/assets/uploads/2021/10/HEA-Race-Equality-in-the-Higher-Education-Sector-Analysis-commissioned-by-the-Higher-Education-Authority-1.pdf [Accessed 6th June 2025]

Khader, S. (2011) Adaptive preferences and women's empowerment. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Khoo, S. (2021) Participatory research capabilities and epistemic justice: A transformative agenda for higher education. Policy and Practice, A Development Education Review, 32. Available at: https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue/issue-32/ngo-representations-versus-mediation-learner-centred-approach-public-understanding [Accessed 27th January 2025]

Kirksey, J. (2019) Academic harms of missing high school and the accuracy of current policy thresholds: Analysis of preregistered administrative data from a California school district. AERA Open, 5 (3), Article 233285841986769

Klein, M. Sosu, E & Dare, S. (2022) School absenteeism and academic achievement: Does the reason for absence matter? AERA Open, 8, Article 23328584211071115

Kleinman, S. & Copp, M. (1993) Emotions and fieldwork. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kuklys, W. & Robeyns, R. (2005) Sen's capability approach to welfare economics in W. Kuklys (ed) in Amartya Sen's capability approach, theoretical insights and empirical applications. Berlin: Springer.

Kumashiro, K. K. (2000) Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. Review of Educational Research, 70 (1), pp. 25–53.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009) Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Laderchi, C. R. (1997) Poverty and its many dimensions: The role of income as an indicator. Oxford Development Studies, 25 (3), pp. 345–60.

La Ferrara, E. (2019) Presidential address: Aspirations, social norms, and development. Journal of the European Economic Association, 17 (6), pp. 1687–1722.

Lareau, A. & McNamara Horvat, E. (1999) Moments of social inclusion and exclusion, race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships. Sociology of Education, 72 (1), pp. 37-53.

Ledwith, V. (2017) State supported segregation? Examining migrant clustering in schools inIreland. Space and Polity, 21 (3), 335–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2017.1387222

Leeds GATE Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (2017) One punch kills, Leeds Gypsy and Traveller exchange domestic violence project report. Available at: https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/One%20Punch%20Kills.pdf [Accessed 10th January 2024]

Leek, C. (2014) Whiter shades of pale: On the plurality of whiteness. In Privilege: A Reader, edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Leonardo, Z. & Porter, R. (2010) Pedagogy of fear: Toward a Fanonian theory of safety in race dialogue. Race, Ethnicity and Education, 13 (2), pp. 139–157.

Levin, D. Z. Walter, J. Appleyard, M. M. & Cross, R. (2015) Relational enhancement: How the relational dimension of social capital unlocks the value of network-bridging ties, Group & Organization Management, 41 (4). doi: 10.1177/1059601115574429

Levinson, M. P. (2008) Not just content, but style: Gypsy children traversing boundaries. Research in Comparative and International Education, 3 (3), pp. 235–249.

Limerick Traveller Network (2025) Traveller education change project report. Available at: https://www.exchangehouse.ie/userfiles/file/reports/research/TECP_FinalReport_2025_01.pdf [Accessed 1st July 2025]

Liou, D.D. Antrop-Gonzalez, R. & Cooper, R. (2009) Unveiling the promise of community cultural wealth to sustaining Latina/o students' college-going information networks. Educational Studies, 45 (6), pp. 534–555.

Lippard, C. N. La Paro, K. M. Rouse, H. L. & Crosby, D. A. (2018) A closer look at teacher-child relationships and classroom emotional context in preschool. Child & Youth Care Forum, 47, pp. 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-017-9414-1.

Lobe, B. Morgan, D. L. & Hoffman, K. (2022) A systematic comparison of in-person and video-based online interviewing. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221127068

Lotz-Sisitka, H. Wals, A.E.J, Kronlid, D & McGarry, D. (2015) Transformative, transgressive social learning: Rethinking higher education pedagogy in times of systemic global dysfunction. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 16, pp. 73–80.

Lowery, B. S. Knowles, E. D. & Unzueta, M. M. (2007) Framing inequality safely: Whites' motivated perceptions of racial privilege. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33 (9), pp. 1237–1250.

Mack, L. (2010) The philosophical underpinnings of educational research [PDF File]. Polyglossia, 19. Retrieved from https://en.apu.ac.jp/rcaps/uploads/fckeditor/publications/polyglossia/Polyglossia_V19_Lindsay.pdf

MacLaughlin, J. (1995) Travellers and Ireland: Whose country, whose history? Cork: Cork University Press.

Mahoney, M. (1997) Racial construction and women as differentiated Actors, in R. Delgado and J. Stefancic (eds) (1997) Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror, pp. 305-309. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Marginson, S. (2011) Equity, status and freedom: a note on higher education. Cambridge Journal of Education, 41 (1), pp. 23-36.

McCormick, M. P. & O'Connor, E. E. (2015) Teacher–child relationship quality and academic achievement in elementary school: Does gender matter? Journal of Educational Psychology, 107, pp. 502-516. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037457.

McDonnell, A. (September 2023) Action research project, what works in supporting Travellers' access and participation in higher education. Available at: https://www.tudublin.ie/media/website/news/2023/main/What-works-in-supporting-Travellers%27-Access-and-Participation-in-Higher-Education.pdf [Accessed 6th December 2023]

McGinley, H. (2024) Hand the shame back, A qualitative study of Traveller experiences across the education continuum enabling a university for all. Available at: https://www.ucd.ie/universityforall/t4media/Hand%20the%20Shame%20Back%20%20-%20Dr%20Hannagh%20McGinley%20-%20Final%20May%2024.pdf [Accessed 4th August 2024]

McGinnity, F. Privalko, I. Fahey, E. Enright, S. & O'Brien, D. (2020) Origin and integration: A study of Migrants in the 2016 Irish census. Dublin: ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute).

McGrath, P. (2023) Exploring barriers to education for Traveller children in the North Cork region and identifying local solutions to address these barriers. University College Cork. Available at: https://nc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Draft-Research-report-Exploring-Barriers-to-Education-for-Traveller-Children-in-the-North-Cork-Dr-Patricia-McGrath-2023.pdf [Accessed 2nd January 2025]

McGrath, P. (2024) Examining the impact of the recognition of Irish Traveller ethnic minority status on education through the lens of Nancy Fraser. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 22 (1). Available at: www.jceps.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/22_1_4-patrmc.pdf [Accessed 18th May 2024]

McGréil, M. (2011) Pluralism & Diversity in early 21st century Ireland, Dublin: Columba Press.

McHugh, T. (2023) Black female student experience and white supremacy historicity in HE: An intersectional analysis of the Black female student experience from access to career. Phd Thesis. Available at: https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/210288/1/2023McHughPhD.pdf [Accessed 8th August 2025]

McIntosh, P. (1988) White privilege and male privilege. A personal account of coming to see correspondences in Women's Studies. Working Paper 189, Wellesley Centres for Women.

McLachlan, C. J. & Garcia, R. J. (2015) Philosophy in practice? Doctoral struggles with ontology and subjectivity in qualitative interviewing. Management Learning, 46 (2), pp. 195-210.

Medina, J. (2017) Varieties of hermeneutical injustice. In I. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus Jr. (Eds.), The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice (pp. 41–52). Routledge.

Mezirow, J. (2000) Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress. San Francisco CA: Jossey Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (1998) Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education. 2nd revised and expanded edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. (2009) Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2015) Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mkwananzi, F. (2018) Higher education, youth in contexts of disadvantage: Understanding aspirations and capabilities, Springer International Publishing AG, ProQuest Ebook Central. Available at: https://ebokcentral. proquest.com/lib/Lancaster/detail.action?docID=5608

Mkwananzi, F. (2019) Higher Education, Youth and Migration in Contexts of Disadvantage: Understanding Aspirations and Capabilities. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mkwananzi, F. & Wilson-Strydom, M. (2018) Multidimensional disadvantages and educational aspirations of marginalised migrant youth: insights from the Global South, Journal of Global Ethics 14 (1), pp. 71-94.

Mohanty, C. (2003) Feminism without borders. Duke University Press.

Moore, H. (2013) Shades of whiteness? English villagers, eastern European migrants and the intersection of race and class in rural England. Critical Race and Whiteness Studies, 9 (1).

Morgan, J. McDonagh, C. & Acton, T. (2023) Outsider status, and racialised habitus: the experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students in higher education. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 44 (3) pp 485-503, doi: 10.1080/01425692.2023.2167702

Morrow, J. D. (2014) The interaction of theory and data. International Studies. Oxford University Press. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.334 [Accessed 3rd January 2024]

Mother Tongues (2019) Students celebrate their Polish heritage and roots in honour of Poland's national independence day. Available at: https://mothertongues.ie/2019/12/01/students-celebrate-their-polish-heritage-and-roots/ [Accessed 23rd July 2025]

Muñoz Boudet, A. M. Petesch, P. Turk, C & Thumala, A. (April, 2013) On norms and agency conversations about gender equality with women and men in 20 countries. World Bank. DOI: 10.1596/978-0-8213-9862-3

Murphy-Graham, E. (2012) Opening minds, improving lives: Education and women's empowerment in Honduras. Nashville: Vanderbilt Press.

Naderifar, M. Goli, H. & Ghaljaie, F. (2017) Snowball sampling: A purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. Strides in Development of Medical Education, 14 (3), e67670. doi: 10.5812/sdme.67670 Available at: https://sdme.kmu.ac.ir/article_90598_3632edfb2e97c38d73c0bdea8753195c.pdf [Accessed 8th November 2023]

Namey E. Guest G. O'Regan A. Godwin C. L. Taylor J. & Martinez A. (2020) How does mode of qualitative data collection affect data and cost? Findings from a quasi-experimental study. Field Methods, 32 (1), pp. 58–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X19886839

National Association of Counties (Nov 29, 2021) Diversity, equity and inclusion: Key definitions. Available at: https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/key-terms-definitions-diversity-equity-inclusion [Accessed 3rd January 2024]

National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (2013) Annual Report. Available at:assets.gov.ie/static/documents/annual-report-2013-national-traveller-accommodation-consultative-committee.pdf [Accessed 1st April 2025]

National Traveller Womens Forum (2013) Gender position paper. Available at: htpps:// www.ntwf.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/NTWF-Gender-Position-Paper.pdf [Accessed 3rd March 2025]

National Union of Students (2011) Race for equality: A report on the experiences of Black students in further and higher Education. London: National Union of Students.

Nichols, D. (2010) Teaching critical whiteness theory: What college and university teachers need to know. Understanding and Dismantling Privilege, (1) 1. Available at: https://www.wpcjournal.com/article/view/5421 [Accessed 1st July 2025]

Nieto, S. (2004) Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education. The Journal of Negro Education, 61 (3) doi: 10.2307/2295263.

Newman, B. M. & Newman, P. R. (2007) Theories of human development. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Nightingale, D. & Cromby, J. (Eds) (1999) Social constructionist psychology. Open University Press, Buckingham.

Nussbaum, M. (1995) Objectification. Philosophy & Public Affairs, 24 (4), pp. 249-291.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2000) Women and human development: The capabilities approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2006). Education and democratic citizenship: Capabilities and quality education. Journal of Human Development, 7, pp. 385-395. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880600815974

Nussbaum, M. C. (2011) Creating capabilities. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

OECD (2024) Education at a glance. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/09/education-at-a-glance-2024-country-notes_532eb29d/ireland_6f2e6652/962b6c53-en.pdf [Accessed 15th September 2025]

Oide (2023) Traveller and Roma education strategy 2024-2030. Government of Ireland. Available at: https://oide.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Traveller-and-Roma-Education-Strategy-2024-2030.pdf [Accessed 7th August 2025]

Oliffe, J. L. Kelly, M. T. Gonsalez Montaner, G. & Yu Ko, W. F. (2021) Zoom interviews: Benefits and concessions. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20, pp.1–8 doi: 10.1177/16094069211053522

O'Mahony, J. (2019) Traveller community national survey. Community Foundation for Ireland. Available at: https://www.exchangehouse.ie/userfiles/file/reports/research/National_Traveller_Community_Survey_2017_07.pdf [Accessed 26th November 2023]

Oosterlaken, I. (2020) Resources or capabilities? An introduction to the debate, in Chiappero-Martinetti, E., Osmani, S., & Qizilbash, M. (Eds.). (2020). The Cambridge handbook of the capability approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osler, A. (1999) The educational experiences and career aspirations of Black and Ethnic Minority Undergraduates, Race Ethnicity and Education, 2 (1), pp. 39-58, doi: 10.1080/1361332990020104

Owen, D. S. (2007) Towards a critical theory of whiteness. Philosophy & Social Criticism, 33 (2), pp. 203-222.

Patton, L. D. Sanchez, B. Mac, J. & Stewart, D.-L. (2019) An inconvenient truth about progress: An analysis of the promises and perils of research on campus diversity initiatives. Review of Higher Education, 42, pp. 173-198.

Pavee Point (2015) Ethnicity leaflet. Available at: https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/EthnicityLeaflet.pdf [Accessed 19th July 2025]

Pavee Point (2024) Traveller women. Available at: https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Factsheets-Pavee-Point-WOMEN.pdf [Accessed 20th October 2025]

Pearce, S. (2003) Compiling the white Inventory: The practice of whiteness in a British primary school. Cambridge Journal of Education, 33 (2), pp. 273-288.

Peelo, D. O'Connor, A. & O'Toole, G. (2008) Positive action for Traveller employment. The Equality Authority, https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/positive_action_for_traveller_employment.pdf [Accessed 29th January 2025]

Picower, B. (2009) The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. Race Ethnicity and Education, 12 (2), pp. 197-215. doi:10.1080/13613320902995475

Pirchio, S. Passiatore, Y. Panno, A. Maricchiolo, F & Carrus, G. (2018) A chip of the old block: Parents subtle prejudice predicts children's implicit prejudice. Frontiers in Psychology. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00110

Phipps, S. A. & Burton, P. S. (1998) What's mine is yours? The influence of male and female incomes on patterns of household expenditure. Economica, 65 (260), pp. 599-613.

Polkinghorne, D. (1988) Narrative knowing and the human sciences. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Posti-Ahokas, H. & Okkolin, M-A. (2016) Enabling and constraining family: young women building their educational paths in Tanzania. Community, Work & Family, 19 (3), pp. 322-339, DOI: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1047737

Powell, R. (2016) Gypsy-Travellers/Roma and social integration: Childhood, habitus and the we-I balance. Historical Social Research, 41 (3), pp. 134-156. Available at: https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.41.2016.3.134-156 [Accessed 26th December 2023]

Pretorius, L. (2018) Ontology, epistemology and research paradigm. June, 21st, Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkcqGU7l_zU [Accessed 6th October 2023]

Pryce, J. Spencer, R. & Walsh, J. (2014) Philosophical approaches to qualitative research. The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods, pp 81-98. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, School of Social Work: Faculty Publications and Other Works, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/ 9780199811755.001.0001 [Accessed 1st January 2024]

Pszczółkowska, D. & Lesińska, M. (2022) One step forward, two steps back in political integration: why are Polish candidates not making progress in Irish local elections?, Irish Political Studies, 37 (1) pp. 125-146. doi: 10.1080/07907184.2021.1929186

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2021) The national framework of qualifications. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/national-framework-of-qualifications [Accessed 11th August 2025]

Quinlan, M. (2021) Out of the shadows, Traveller & Roma education: Voices from the communities. Available at: https://1d3ad8c0-4fe5-46e5-9b07-dc213044ac84.filesusr.com/ugd/5cfafe_0dc001ab34414419b855ebe82b7890f1.pdf, [Accessed 28th July 2025]

Ray, D. (2006) Aspirations, poverty, and economic change. In A. V. Banerjee, R. Benabo, & D. Mookherjee (Eds.), Understanding Poverty (pp. 409–421). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ray, V. (2019) A theory of racialized organizations. American Sociological Review, 84 (1) https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335

Richardson, H. S. (2015) Using final ends for the sake of better policy-making. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities 16 (2), pp. 161–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2015.1036846

Richardson, J. T. E. (2008) The attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education. Studies in Higher Education, 33, pp. 33–48.

Robeyns, I. (2003) Is Nancy Fraser's critique of theories of distributive justice justified? Constellations, 10 (4), pp. 538–554.

Robeyns, I. (2005) The capability approach: A theoretical survey. Journal of Human Development, 6 (1), pp. 94–114.

Robeyns, 1. (2006). The capability approach in practice. The Journal of Political Philosophy, 14 (3), pp. 351-376.

Robeyns, I. (2017) Wellbeing, freedom and social justice, the capability approach re-examined. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.

Robeyns, I. (2018) The Capability Approach, In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition) [online]. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/capability-approach/

Royal Irish Academy (October 2021) Equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Available at: https://www.ria.ie/assets/uploads/2024/06/he_futures_-_equality_diversity_and_inclusion_discussion_paper_0.pdf [Accessed 2nd July 2025]

Satchwell, C. Crook. D & Dodding, J. (2021) Rewriting the future, phase 3: Report 2022 perspectives of marginalised groups on HE and progression in education, including social and cultural contexts. Available at: https: www.researchgate.net/publication/359746271_Rewriting_the_Future_Phase_3_Report_2022_Perspectives_of_marginalised_groups_on_HE_and_progression_in_education_including_social_and_cultural_contexts [Accessed 9th November 2024]

Sen, A. (1980) Equality of what? In The Tanner Lecture on Human Values, 1, pp. 197-220. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sen, A. K. (1982) Choice, welfare and measurement. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Sen, A. K. (1984) Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984, Journal of Philosophy, 82 (4), pp. 169–221.

Sen, A. K. (1985) Commodities and capabilities. Amsterdam: North-Holland.

Sen, A. K. (1987) On ethics and economics. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Sen, A. K. (1993) Capability and wellbeing, in the quality of life, edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, pp 30-53, Oxford: Clarendon Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/0198287976.003.0003

Sen, A. K. (1999) Development as freedom. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. K. (2002) Rationality and freedom. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sen, A. K. (2004) How does culture matter? in V. Rao and M. Walton (eds.), Culture and Public Action. Stanford University Press, pp. 37–58.

Sen, A. (2007) Children and human rights. Indian Journal of Human Development, 1 (2), pp. 235-245.

Sen, A. K. (2009) The idea of justice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Shome, R. (2009) Outing whiteness. Critical Studies in Media Communication, 17 (3), pp. 366–371.https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030009388402

Siddika, A & Baruah, B. (2018) Can understanding phenomenology and human capabilities help us address acid violence? Journal of South Asian Studies, 41 (1), pp. 153-172. https://doi.10.1080/00856401.2017.1361311

Smith, W. A. (2004) Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-civil rights era. In D. Cleveland (Ed.), A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students at predominantly White institutions (pp. 171–190). New York, NY: Lang.

SOAR Inter Institutional Collaboration on Access (2025) Traveller Graduate Network. Available at: https://www.soarforaccess.ie/latestnews/traveller-graduate-network/ [Accessed 2nd October 2025]

Southern, D.E. (2024) Redressing a gap in higher education and whiteness literature: Conceptualizing the pervasiveness of whiteness in higher education organizations. Review of Educational Research, pp. 1–41. doi: https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543241287234

Spilt, J. L. Hughes, J. N. Wu, J. Y. & Kwok, O. M. (2012) Dynamics of teacher-student relationships: Stability and change across elementary school and the influence on childrens' academic success. Child Development, 83, pp. 1180-1195. https://doi.org/10. 1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01761.x.

Spiteri, P. M. (2022) The capability of being educated in relation to ELET - developing an equity-based SBAF policy opportunity, to target the unjust case of family disadvantage in Malta and within the EU. PhD Thesis. Available at: https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/173086/1/Thesis_20th_May_2022_Pamela_Marie_Spiteri_13th_July_2022.pdf [Accessed 14th January 2025]

Spiteri, P. M. & Cin, M. (2025): Bridging home and school: Enhancing the capability to be educated to prevent early leaving from education and training in socio-economically marginalised contexts. British Journal of Educational Studies, DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2025.2533133

Sproull, L. & Kiesler, S. (1986) Reducing social context cues: Electronic mail in organizational communications. Management Science, 32 (11), pp. 1495-1512.

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (2002) Breaking out again, Feminist ontology and epistemology, new edition. Taylor and Francis e-library, Available at: xyonline.net/sites/xyonline.net/files/2019-09/Stanley%2C%20Breaking%20Out%20Again%20-%20Feminist%20Ontology%20and%20Epistemology%20%281993%29.pdf [Accessed 22nd November 2023]

Stanton-Salazar, R.D. & Spina, S.U. (2000) The network orientations of highly resilient urban minority youth: A network-analytic account of minority socialization and its educational implications. The Urban Review, 32 (3), pp. 227–261.

Stoljar, N. (2014) Autonomy and adaptive preference formation. In Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender, edited by Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper, pp. 227– 52. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sue, D.W. (2010) Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

SUSI (2024) About SUSI. Available at: https://www.susi.ie/about-susi/#:~:text=Student%20Universal%20Support%20Ireland%20(SUSI,further%20and%20higher%20education%20grants [Accessed 8th April 2025]

Suter, W. (2012) Qualitative data, analysis, and design. In: W. Suter (ed.), Introduction to Educational Research: A Critical Thinking Approach (pp. 342-386). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Țepordei ,A. M. Zancu, A. S. Diaconu-Gherasim, L. R. Crumpei-Tanasă, I. Măirean, C. Sălăvăstru, D. & Labăr, A V. (2023) Children's peer relationships, well-being, and academic achievement: the mediating role of academic competence. Frontiers in

Psychology. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1174127. PMID: 37251055; PMCID: PMC10219606.

Tereshchenko, A. Bradbury, A. & Archer, L. (2019) Eastern European migrants' experiences of racism in English schools: positions of marginal whiteness and linguistic otherness, Whiteness and Education, 4 (1), pp. 53-71. doi: 10.1080/23793406.2019.1584048

Thatcher, J. (2016) A better choice? A case study of Polish migrants' educational aspirations and school choice for their children. Thesis. Available at: https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/4404961c875e2371b59f8a301cf6eb6c5f1a92cc2ba2f48994077dc7610e2c1a/3967223/Jenny_Thatcher_PhD_Thesis_2016.pdf [Accessed 29th November 2023]

The Traveller Movement (March 2019) Traveller Movement submission to women and equalities committee inquiry into the mental health of men and boys. Available at: https://wp-main.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mental-Health-of-Men-and-Boys.pdf [Accessed 4th August 2025]

The Traveller Movement (2020) Media Representations of Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller women – Depicting Stereotypes rather than Role Models. Available at: https://travellermovement.org.uk/news/may-2020-blog-media-representations-of-gypsy-roma-and-irish-traveller-women-depicting-stereotypes-rather-than-role-models [Accessed 28th July 2025]

The Traveller Movement (2025) Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller History and Culture. Available at: https:///travellermovement.org.uk/gypsy-roma-and-traveller-history-and-culture [Accessed 19th July 2025]

Thunberg, S. & Arnell L. (2021) Pioneering the use of technologies in qualitative research—A research review of the use of digital interviews. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 25, pp. 757–768. 10.1080/13645579.2021.1935565

Tiwari, M. (2011) Global poverty reduction to 2015 and beyond. Global Policy, (with A. Sumner) 2 (2), pp. 138-151.

Traveller Mediation Service (2023) Strategic Plan 2023-2026. Available at: http://travellermediation.ie /wp-content/uploads/2023/07/TMS-Strategic-Plan-2023-26-1.pdf [Accessed 25th July 2025]

Travelling People Review Body (1983) Report of the Travelling People Review Body. Lenus, The Irish Health Repository. Available at: https://www.lenus.ie/handle/10147/46682

Trepagnier, B. (2006). Silent racism: How well-meaning White people perpetuate the racial divide. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Ul Haq, M. (2003) The human development paradigm. In S. Fukuda-Parr & A. V. Kumar (Eds.), Readings in human development (pp. 17–34). Oxford: OUP.

United Nations (1992) Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.17_Declaration%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Persons%20Belonging%20to%20National%20or%20Ethnic.pdf [Accessed 26th December 2023]

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2006) Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 44 of the convention of the rights of the child: Concluding observations, Ireland. Geneva: United Nations.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2008) Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention : Convention on the Rights of the Child : concluding observations : United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Geneva: United Nations.

Unterhalter, E. (2003) The capabilities approach and gendered education, Theory and Research in Education, 1 (1), pp. 7–22.

Unterhalter, E. (2007) Gender, schooling and global social justice. Oxon: Routledge.

Valenzula, A (1999) Subtractive schooling, US- Mexican youth and the politics of caring. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Vanderbeck, R. (2005) Anti-nomadism, institutions, and the geographies of childhood. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 23 (1), pp. 71–94.

Vaughan, R. (2020) Measuring capabilities: an example from girls' schooling, in Chiappero-Martinetti, E., Osmani, S., & Qizilbash, M. (Eds.). The Cambridge handbook of the capability approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Velasco, D. & Boni, A. (2020) Expanding epistemic capability in participatory decision-making processes: The Universidad de Ibagué capabilities list in Melanie Walker and Alehandra Boni (Eds) Participatory research, capabilities and epistemic justice: A transformative agenda for higher education. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, M. (2006a) Higher education pedagogies. Berkshire, UK: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Walker, M. (2006b) Towards a capability-based theory of social justice for education policy-making. Journal of Education Policy, 21 (2), pp. 163-185.

Walker, M. (2007) Selecting capabilities for gender equality in education, in Walker, M. and Unterhalter, E. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Walker, M. & Boni, A. (2020) Epistemic justice, participatory research and valuable capabilities in Melanie Walker and Alehandra Boni (Eds) Participatory research, capabilities and epistemic justice: A transformative agenda for higher education. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, M. McLean, M. Mathebula, M. & Mukwambo, P. (2022) Low-income students, human development and higher education in South Africa. Opportunities, obstacles and outcomes. Cape Town: African Minds.

Walker, M., & Mkwananzi, F. (2015). Theorising multiply disadvantaged young people's challenges in accessing higher education. Perspectives in Education, 33 (1), pp. 12-25.

Walker, M. & Unterhalter, E. (2007) The capability approach: Its potential for work in education. In Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education, edited by M. Walker and E. Unterhalter. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, pp. 1-18.

Wang, H. Kong, M, Shan, W & Vong, S. K. (2010) The effects of doing part time jobs on college student academic performance and social life in a Chinese society. Journal of Education and Work, 23 (1), pp. 79-94.

Warin, J. (2011) Ethical mindfulness and reflexivity: Managing a research relationship with children and young people in a 14-Year qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) Study. Qualitative Inquiry, 17 (9), pp. 805-814. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800411423196 [Accessed 6th November 2023]

Watson, J. S. (2015) White undergraduate social justice advocates: Experiences that influence continued participation in racially and ethnically diverse campus settings (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Watson, Kenny & McGinnity (January 2017) A social portrait of Travellers in Ireland. The Economic and Social Research Institute. Available at: https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS56_0.pdf [Accessed 12th August 2025]

Watts, M. (2008) Narrative research, narrative capital, narrative capability. In J. Satterthwaite, M. Watts, & H. Piper (Eds.), Talking truth, confronting power (pp. 99–112). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Webb, E. (2019) An invisible minority: Romany Gypsies and the question of whiteness, Romani Studies, 29 (1), pp. 1-25, Available at: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/728295/pdf [Accessed 27th November 2023]

Weinstein, D. (2020) Intellectual history and defending the capabilities approach, in Chiappero-Martinetti, E., Osmani, S., & Qizilbash, M. (Eds.). (2020). The Cambridge Handbook of the Capability Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Whitehead, M.A. Foste, Z. Duran, A. Tevis, T. & Cabrera, N.L. (2021) Disrupting the big lie: Higher education and whitelash in a post/colorblind era. Education Sciences, 11, 486, pp. 2-14. https://doi.org/10.3390/ educsci11090486

Whittaker, R. (2008) Quality enhancement themes: The first experience. Transition to and during the first year. Mansfield, Scotland: The quality assurance agency for higher education. Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/11595/1/transition-to-and-during-the-first-year-3.pdf [Accessed 28th March 2025]

Wilkins, A. & Burke, P. (2015) Widening participation in higher education: the role of professional and social class identities and commitments. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 36 (3), pp. 434-452

Willig, C. (2001) Introducing qualitative research in psychology. Adventures in theory and method. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Willis, J. W. (2007) Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wilson-Strydom, M. (2015) University access and success: Capabilities, diversity and social justice. London: Routledge.

Wilson-Strydom, M. (2017) Disrupting structural inequalities of higher education opportunity: 'Grit', resilience and capabilities at a South African University. Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 18 (3), pp. 384–398.

Wilson-Strydom, M. & Walker, M. (2015) A capabilities-friendly conceptualisation of flourishing in and through education. Journal of Moral Education, 44 (3), pp. 310–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2015.1043878.

Woessmann, L. (2004) How equal are educational opportunities? Family background and student achievement in Europe and the US. CESIFO Working Paper No. 1162 Category 4: Labour markets.

Wolniak, M. (2019) Travelling through shades of whiteness: Irish Travellers as inferior whites in book Shades of Whiteness, edited by Ewan Kirkland, BRILL. ProQuest Ebook Central, Available at:

http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/lancaster/detail.action?docID=6481688 [Accessed 25th November 2023]

Wood, A. (2014) Coercion, manipulation, exploitation. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/book/4870/chapter-abstract/147239348?redirectedFrom=fulltext&login=false [Accessed 8th January 2025]

Woodsong, C. MacQueen, K. M. Guest, G. & Namey, E. (2005) Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide. North Carolina: Family Health International. Available at: C:/Users/patri/Downloads/QualitativeResearchMethods-ADataCollectorsFieldGuide.pdf [Accessed 14th November 2023]

Wolff, J. & de-Shalit, A. (2007) Disadvantage. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woolley, F. R. & Marshall, J. (1994) The Review of Income and Wealth, 40 (4), pp. 415-43.

World Bank Group (November 30, 2021) Education as the Great Leveller? Not Necessarily, Says New Research. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/11/30/education-as-the-great-leveler-not-necessarily-says-new-research [Accessed 9th August 2025]

Yanbarisova, D. M. (2015) The effects of student employment on academic performance in Tatarstan higher education institutions. Russian Education and Society, 57 (6), pp. 459-482.

Yang, T-C, Chen, I-C, Choi, S-W. & Kurtulus, A. (2019) Linking perceived discrimination during adolescence to health during mid-adulthood: Self-esteem and risk-behavior mechanisms. Social Science and Medicine, 232, pp. 434-443. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.06.012

Yoon, I. H. (2012) The paradoxical nature of whiteness-at-work in the daily life of schools and teacher communities. Race Ethnicity and Education, 15 (5), pp. 587–613. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.624506

Yosso, T. J. (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. Race Ethnicity and Education, 8 (1), pp. 69–91.

Yosso, T. J. Smith, W. A. Ceja, M. & Sol´orzano, D. G. (2009) Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and the campus climate for Latina/o undergraduates. Harvard Educational Review, 79 (4), pp. 659–690.

Youdell, D. (2006) Impossible bodies, impossible selves: Exclusions and student subjectivities. Dordrecht: Springer

Appendices

Appendix A Interview Schedule for Traveller participants

Growing up in a Traveller family

1. What was it like growing up in a Traveller family?

2. Were you aware that you were part of the Traveller community?

3. How did you feel about being a Traveller?

Experiences in School

4. What were your experiences in schools?

5. How did your family and the extended Traveller community react when you stayed on in school?

Accessing Higher Education

6. What/who influenced you to go to university?

7. How did your family and community react to your plans for Higher Education?

8. How did you access resources for university (grants, laptop, internet, transport, food, etc.)?

Experiences in Higher Education

9. Was university similar to what you expected?

10. Did you consider leaving at any point and what encouraged you to complete?

11. How can more Traveller women be encouraged into Higher Education?

Life after Higher Education

12. What did you do after university?

13. In what way have you used your university experience to help others in your family/community?

14. How has your life changed as a result of the university experience?

Interview Schedule for NGO and Higher Education staff

1. Have you encouraged Traveller women to access H. E. (Access courses/Degree courses/Masters courses)?

2. How do you assess which Traveller women are suitable for this level of study?

3. Which key factors played a role in enabling the Traveller women to access H.E.?

4. What are the main barriers to entry to H. E. for Traveller women?

5. Do these challenges continue throughout their course?

6. Which supports/outreach programmes do you offer Traveller women to encourage them to enter H.E.?

7. How do you respond if Traveller women tell you that they are thinking of leaving H.E. before course completion?

8. Have you experienced Traveller women having difficulties in getting suitable work placements during university courses?

9. Which supports do you offer Traveller women whilst they are taking their degree courses?

10. Do you continue to be involved with the Traveller women after course completion, and what form does this take?

11. How can more Traveller women be encouraged to enter and complete H.E.?

12. At which stage should schools begin to encourage Traveller women to enter H.E.?

13. Which further supports should schools be offering to encourage more Traveller women applicants to H.E.?

14. How can employers be supported to increase their intake of Traveller women on work placements during H.E.?

15. Which further supports do employers need to increase the number of Traveller women in employment post H.E.?

16. Do you offer peer mentoring/other mentoring programmes where successful Traveller women act as mentors to the rest of the community?

Appendix B Participant Information Sheet

Project Title Examining the Familial Impact on Traveller Girls' Aspirations in Education.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the personal characteristics, family values, school and Higher Education Institution factors which aided you in accessing and completing Higher Education.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to examine the characteristics and external environment that is needed for prospective female students from the Traveller community to enter and complete Higher Education (H.E.). Particularly I wish to explore the personal characteristics that influence the decision to enter HE. I also wish to examine how immediate and extended family members, and the wider Traveller community may influence this decision. The project will also involve examining the types of primary and secondary schools attended and their role in impacting future lives of Traveller women. Finally I will look at the environment within the HE institution and how conducive it was to a successful experience in HE and completion of the course. This will involve examining how inclusive the institution was in terms of access to courses, atmosphere in lectures and tutorials, safety and inclusivity on campus, relationships with other students and staff, support from staff.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am aware that you have completed a course in H.E. and I am asking female Travellers who have completed a H.E. course to become involved with the study. Your experiences are very valuable and will help inform the study.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following: I will organise a face-to-face meeting or Zoom meeting and advise you of the date and time after a discussion with you regarding suitable dates and times. I will ask you a range of questions which I will have given to you in advance. These questions will ask you about growing up in a Traveller family and community. The questions will also cover your experiences in school, and the impact of the wider Traveller community on the decision to enter H.E. and how H.E. institutions act to support Traveller women in their studies. You can decide if you do not want to answer particular questions, and ask for more information about the questions, if they are not clear. The face-to-face/Zoom meeting will be recorded by me, and will take around forty-five minutes. I will then examine the answers to search for themes. This will take around two weeks after the date of the interview. You can ask for the results of the data to be given to you. The results will be seen by me and my supervisor. All information is confidential and anonymous i.e. you will not be able to be identified from the data. A pseudonym will be used to ensure that the data is anonymous.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

You will have a chance to share your experiences in H.E. which will help to inform others in the Traveller community/working with the Traveller community regarding the particular areas that you found helpful both before entry and during the H.E. experience. Your insights will contribute to understanding of the supports that are necessary for Traveller women so that they feel both supported and included in H.E. institutions.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 6 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. You can decide if you do not wish to answer a particular question/questions. You will have to commit to spending forty-five minutes for the interview.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview only I, the researcher conducting this study, and my supervisor Dr. Melis Cin will have access to the ideas you share with me.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:

I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself at: p.mcgrath3@lancaster.ac.uk or Melis Cin at: m.cin@lancaster.ac.uk . Melis can also be contacted on 0044 1524 592884 and at Lancaster University, Tower Ave, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4XX, UK.

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact: Dr. Jan McArthur, j.mcarthur@lancaster.ac.uk , 0044 1524 593572 and at Lancaster University, Tower Ave, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4XX, UK.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title Examining the Familial Impact on Traveller Girls' Aspirations in Education.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the supports offered by you and your organisation which enables Traveller women to enter/consider entering Higher Education (H.E.) and the supports offered when accessing H.E. and during their time in H.E.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to examine the supports offered by NGO's to help Traveller women access and complete H.E. courses.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am aware that you work with Traveller women and help them to further their studies at different levels. Your experiences are very valuable and will help inform the study.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following: I will organise a face-to-face meeting or Zoom meeting and advise you of the date and time after a discussion with you regarding suitable dates and times. I will ask you a range of

questions which I will have given to you in advance. You can decide if you do not want to answer particular questions, and ask for more information about the questions, if they are not clear. The face-to-face/Zoom meeting will be recorded by me, and will take around forty-five minutes. I will then examine the answers to search for themes. This will take around two weeks after the date of the interview. You can ask for the results of the data to be given to you. The results will be seen by me and my supervisor. All information is confidential and anonymous i.e. you will not be able to be identified from the data. A pseudonym will be used to ensure that the data is anonymous.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

You will have a chance to share your experiences, which will help to inform others working with the Traveller community regarding the opportunities and challenges that exist for Traveller women to access and complete H.E. courses. Your insights will contribute to understanding of the supports that are necessary for Traveller women so that they feel both supported and included in H.E. institutions.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 6 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. You can decide if you do not wish to answer a particular question/questions. You will have to commit to spending forty-five minutes for the interview.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview only I, the researcher conducting this study, and my supervisor Dr. Melis Cin will have access to the ideas you share with me.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:

I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself at: p.mcgrath3@lancaster.ac.uk or Melis Cin at: m.cin@lancaster.ac.uk . Melis can also be contacted on 0044 1524 592884 and at Lancaster University, Tower Ave, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4XX, UK.

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact: Dr. Jan McArthur, j.mcarthur@lancaster.ac.uk , 0044 1524 593572 and at Lancaster University, Tower Ave, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4XX, UK.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title Examining the Familial Impact on Traveller Girls' Aspirations in Education.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the supports offered by you and your organisation which enables Traveller women to enter/consider entering Higher Education (H.E.) and the supports offered during their time in H.E. and post H.E.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to examine the supports offered by Higher Education Institutions to help Traveller women access and complete H.E. courses. It also looks at the enabling factors and barriers that Traveller women experience when trying to access and complete H.E. courses which includes accessing work placements during their course.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because I am aware that you work with Traveller women and help them to further their studies at different levels. Your experiences are very valuable and will help inform the study.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following: I will organise a face-to-face meeting or Zoom meeting and advise you of the date and time after a discussion with you regarding suitable dates and times. I will ask you a range of questions which I will have given to you in advance. You can decide if you do not want to answer particular questions, and ask for more information about the questions, if they are not clear. The face-to-face/Zoom meeting will be recorded by me, and will take around forty-five minutes. I will then examine the answers to search for themes. This will take around two weeks after the date of the interview. You can ask for the results of the data to be given to you. The results will be seen by me and my supervisor. All information is confidential and anonymous i.e. you will not be able to be identified from the data. A pseudonym will be used to ensure that the data is anonymous.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

You will have a chance to share your experiences, which will help to inform others working with the Traveller community regarding the opportunities and challenges that exist for Traveller women to access and complete H.E. courses. Your insights will contribute to understanding of the supports that are necessary for Traveller women so that they feel both supported and included in H.E. institutions.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together

with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 6 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part. You can decide if you do not wish to answer a particular question/questions. You will have to commit to spending forty-five minutes for the interview.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview only I, the researcher conducting this study, and my supervisor Dr. Melis Cin will have access to the ideas you share with me.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:

I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

How my data will be stored

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your

views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself at: p.mcgrath3@lancaster.ac.uk or Melis Cin at: m.cin@lancaster.ac.uk . Melis can also be contacted on 0044 1524 592884 and at Lancaster University, Tower Ave, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4XX, UK.

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact: Dr. Jan McArthur, j.mcarthur@lancaster.ac.uk , 0044 1524 593572 and at Lancaster University, Tower Ave, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4XX, UK.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

Participant Consent Form

Project Title Examining the Familial Impact of Traveller Girls Aspirations in Education

Name of Researcher Patricia McGrath

Email Address p.mcgrath3@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box in the table below

Statement Tick box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. •

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within six weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within six weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed. •

3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researcher(s), but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project. •

4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent. •

5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and videod and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure. •

6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study. •

7. I agree to take part in the above study. •

Participant's details

Participant's name_____

Participant's Signature_____

Date_____

Declaration of researcher/person taking the consent

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

Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____Patricia McGrath_____

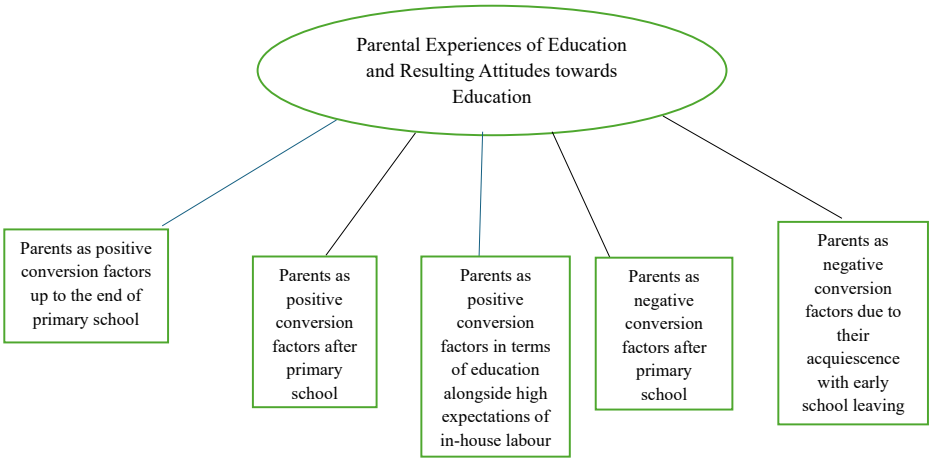
Signature of Researcher/person taking the consent ____Patricia McGrath_____

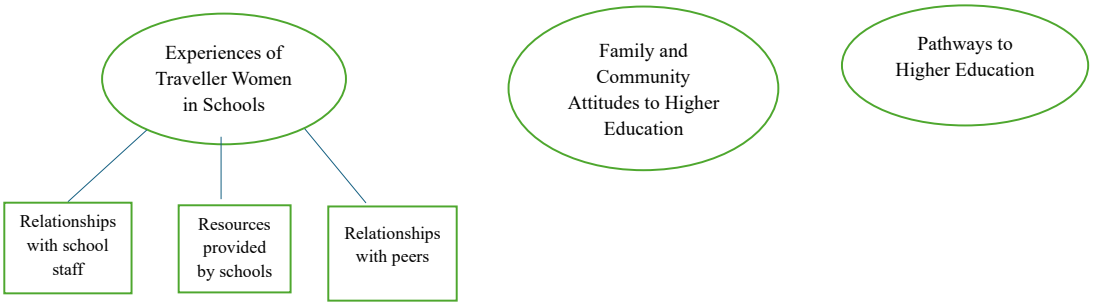
Date (Day/month/year) _____

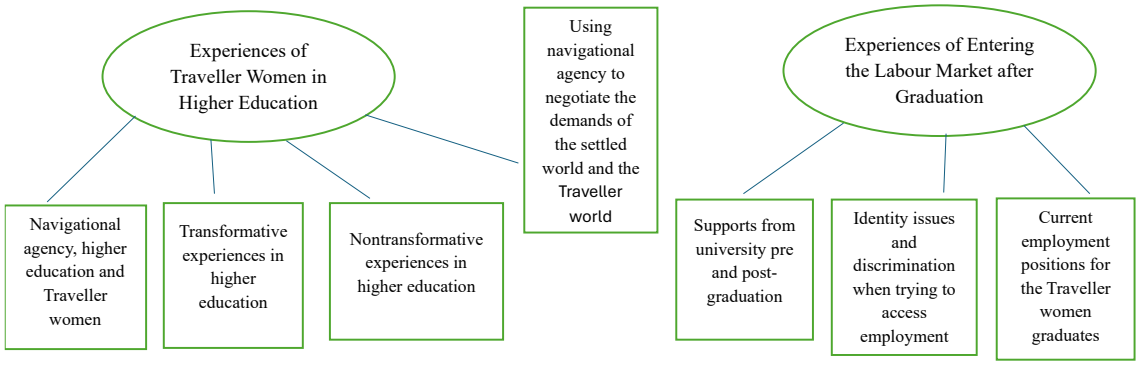
One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University.

Appendix C

Themes and Subthemes

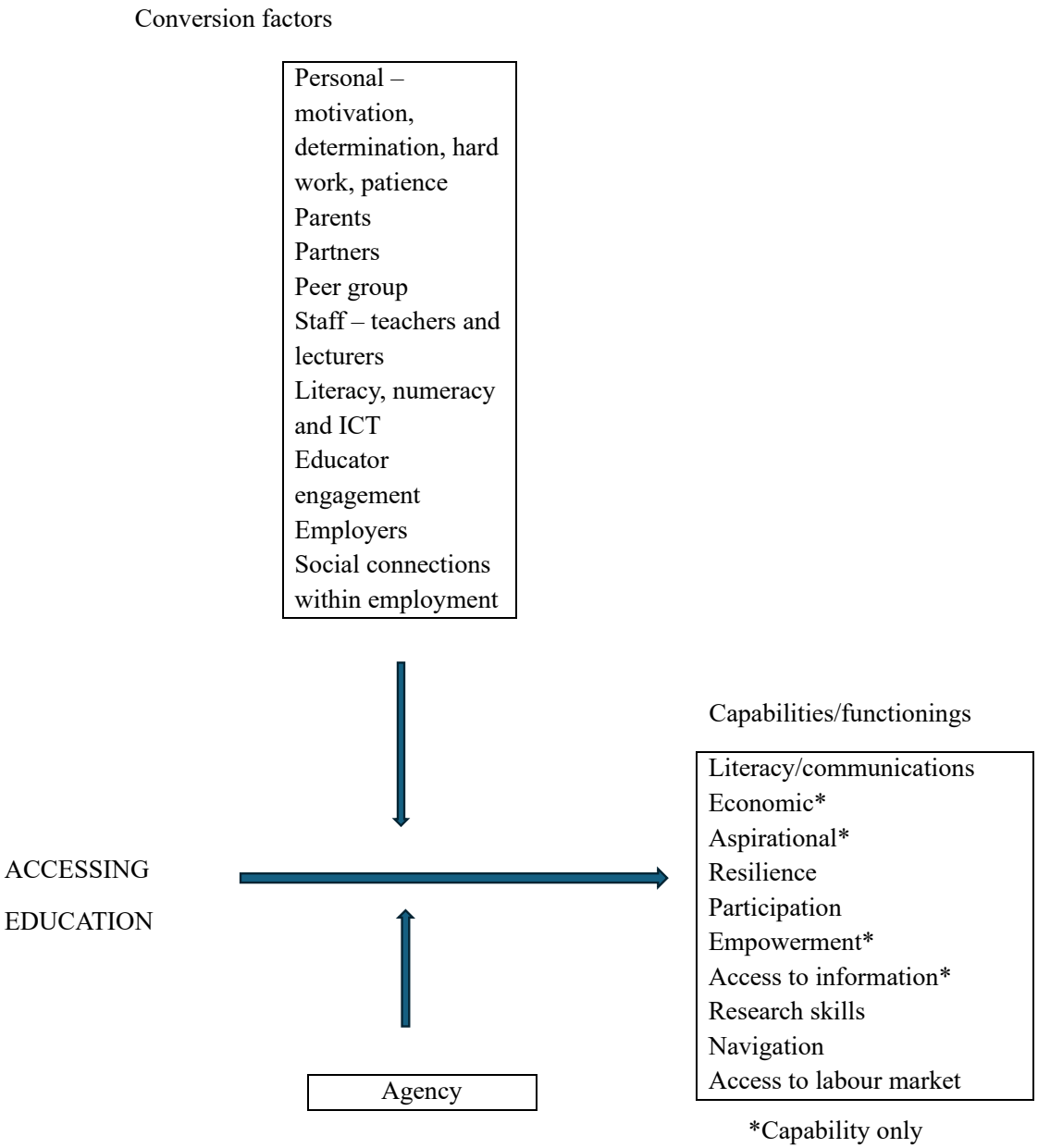






Appendix D

Education, Agency, Conversion Factors and Capabilities/Functionings



Appendix E

Excerpt from Transcript of Traveller Graduate Interview

Interview with Molly (Traveller) 4th April 2024 11.am

WEBVTT

1

00:00:02.710 --> 00:00:04.209

Patricia McGrath: What was it like growing up in a Traveller family?

2

00:00:06.210 --> 00:01:57.105

Molly: Emm, I was thinking about that one, and I suppose I never thought of myself as growing up in a Traveller family, I just grew up in a family. You know, I wouldn't, growing up you wouldn't be defined, you know you wouldn't like. As I said, I didn't know maybe that I was a Traveller until I went to school, you know that kind of way and you experienced discrimination. But other than that, you just grow up in a family, I mean I was blessed with my family, you know I mean I had great parents, very strong, very strong principles and values. You know both, I have two brothers and one sister and so emm, today now I have nieces and nephews and grand nieces and nephews, and they're my family but growing up, it was like, thank God I was blessed, I was supported, I had a very good family, I had great parents, and I was, you know later on in life you realise, somebody said to me before you know, when you mention family to me, you know, it's all positive, it's my sense of safety but you could mention it to somebody else and it could be their worst nightmare you know but I was blessed you know. So growing up I'd say I was no different to any normal family, you know just Mum and Dad, siblings, you know, Mum and Dad struggling to survive, doing their work. Brought up with a very strong work ethic, and a sense of responsibility and that so a good family.

3

00:02:06.980 --> 00:02:11.553

Patricia McGrath: Were you aware that you were part of the Traveller community?

4

00:02:14.430 --> 00:03:13.790

Molly: I was aware, you'd be aware, you see you grow up, like being an Irish person in America, you know or in a different part of the world. You know you belong, you have a sense of values and traditions, and you know my extended family, my aunts, they were more defined as family you know but looking for an identity we knew we were members of the Traveller community, but that wasn't the first thing you thought of, you just took it for granted, it was natural. It was like saying I'm Irish, you don't go around thinking I'm an Irish person. It was just the natural environment you lived in. Yes I was aware as a child that I was a member of the Traveller community, from an early age but it was a very natural, it was more like growing up as I said if you from a