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Using counter-stories to challenge stock stories about Traveller families

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ABSTRACT

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is formed from a series of different methodological tools to expose and address racism and discrimination. Counter-stories are one of these tools. This article considers the potential of counter-stories as a methodological, theoretical and practical tool to analyse existing educational inequalities for Traveller communities. Although discrimination towards Traveller communities is well documented, there has been limited use of CRT to examine this position and challenge the social injustice they experience. In this article 'stock stories', or commonly held assumptions and stereotypes about Traveller communities are highlighted and refuted with Travellers' own accounts. It is hoped this article will dispel stock stories, raise awareness of the real inequalities Travellers face and inform methodological debate.

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Introduction

Despite widespread acknowledgement of discrimination towards Traveller communities in the UK, there is little academic literature which applies Critical Race Theory (CRT) to analyse the continuing oppression of Travellers (Ryder, Rostas, and Taba 2014). This oppression is referred to as 'Antiziganism' or 'Antigypsyism'. Antigypsyism describes the process and phenomena of discrimination, racism, ignorance, neglect and marginalisation against Traveller communities (Selling et al. 2015, preface). This article will make the methodological connection between CRT and Antigypsyism; both approaches foreground race and racism as central issues and challenge the way in which stereotypes shape impressions and judgments of minority communities as 'opposite', 'non-white' and 'Other'. This challenge is vital as deeply embedded social and structural discrimination continues to affect Travellers' inclusion and opportunities within society.

The main aim of this article is to explore the potential of counter-stories, as a methodological, theoretical and practical CRT tool, to illuminate discrimination and its impact on Travellers' educational inequalities. Evidence is drawn from a critical review of the literature and my own research. My research gathered and explored Traveller families' perspectives of school and home education. The literature revealed stereotypical assumptions and limited support for Travellers' educational needs. The stereotypical stock stories or 'scripts' (Wilkin et al. 2010) in the literature expose continuing assumptions about Traveller pupils' behaviours, abilities and desire for education. The stock story

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concept is closely associated to Delgado's (1989) early work regarding Critical Race storytelling. Left unchallenged and unchanged, stock story assumptions limit the educational opportunities available to Traveller pupils in England.

Despite rhetoric of equal opportunities in UK policy (e.g. Every Child Matters 2003; Moving Forward Together: Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement 2009) and legislation (e.g. Equality Act 2010), the issues for Traveller pupils in mainstream education continue. Traveller children have experienced long-term underachievement in mainstream schools in England (Tyler 2005). In its assessment of Travellers' inequality in the UK, a ministerial working group brought together key government departments to look underachievement and reported that:

> Gypsy and Roma pupils, along with pupils of Irish Traveller heritage, are amongst the lowest-achieving groups at every Key Stage of education, although individual pupils can and do achieve very well. In 2011, just 25% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved national expectations in English and mathematics at the end of their primary education, compared with 74% of all pupils. At the end of secondary education, just 12% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, compared with 58.2% of all pupils. (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG] 2012, 5)

Wilkin, Derrington, and Foster (2009, 7) revealed the barriers to explain this underachievement: poor attendance/participation levels, perceived lack of relevance of the curriculum, racism, and bullying, negative teacher attitudes, disproportionate levels of exclusion of Traveller pupils, inconsistent or inadequate support and children being identified inappropriately with special educational needs (SEN). Wilkin et al. (2010) suggested that cultural assumptions and stereotypes held by schools about Traveller communities can perpetuate poor achievement and inclusion practices and these must be challenged to improve these outcomes. I propose that CRT counter-stories can offer a mechanism to do this.

This article will juxtapose the negative rhetoric in the educational literature around mobility, educational desire and home education (the stock story about Travellers), against Travellers' own accounts (the counter-story). The findings section will be in two parts. The first part documents the evidence of stock stories in the literature. The second part will 'counter' these stock stories with research findings that document Travellers' own experiences and views.

The following paragraphs offer some background on the different Traveller cultures and terminology in the UK, to clarify reference towards these communities.

Traveller terminology

The term 'Traveller' in the UK has traditionally been an umbrella term which covers a number of distinct communities, including Fairground or Showmen, Romany Gypsies, European Roma, Circus families, Irish Travellers, New (Age) Travellers and Bargee Travellers (those living on the waterways). In this article, the term 'Traveller' includes all these groups. Romany Gypsies were defined as an ethnic minority group by the Race Relations Act in 1976. More recently, Irish (2000) and Scottish Travellers (2009) (Royal College of Nursing 2015) have been recognised as distinct ethnic groups. In the UK, the two main ethnic identities included in official educational data are Gypsy/Roma and Irish Travellers. Public information about Travellers (Royal College of Nursing 2015; Traveller Movement 2012) demonstrates that the general public appears to be unaware that some Travellers are recognised as ethnic minorities. Travellers' minority group status is also excluded from mainstream equality discourse and policy (Whitwell 2015), consequently there is significant value in linking their experience to a wider body of CRT literature which recognises the oppression of minority groups.

Indigenous Travellers from Romany Gypsy and Irish backgrounds have been living in Britain for centuries; the first documented accounts appeared around 1500 (Power 2004). Exact numbers are hard to come by. The Census results in 2011 suggest that only 58,000 Gypsy/Roma or Irish Travellers selected this ethnic category (Office for National Statistics 2014). Yet, in 2006, it was estimated that there were approximately 300,000 such Travellers in Britain (CRE [Commission for Race Equality] 2006). Many Travellers are therefore not ascribing their ethnicity and this further excludes them from the public's awareness.

The term and association to Gypsies is controversial and only acceptable to some communities, as many perceive the term as having negative connotations (Department for Education and Skills 2003). In the UK, some Traveller people might use Gypsy to self-identify; others may regard the use of the word as highly offensive. The term is used with caution by those who understand these sensitivities; however, the press and media apply no such sensitivity or cultural understanding. For example, a TV documentary called 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' offered 'a window into the secretive, extravagant and surprising world of Gypsies and Travellers in Britain today'[1] by sensationalising certain aspects of Traveller' lives. Such programmes simultaneously 'Other' and 'normalise' stereotypical assumptions about communities.

The term Traveller brings together ethnic minority Traveller groups and those who are not ethnic minorities, who travel for work purposes. For example, Showmen families, who make up a smaller, professional business community remain highly mobile and travel most of the year round.

Thus terminology is a conceptual challenge since the category is not just based on self-perceived ethnicity, but also on professional travelling activities, which makes it difficult for policymakers and opens up space for media misrepresentations. Descriptions of Traveller culture and community within legislation appear to be inept (Housing Act 2004, section 226):

> Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependent's educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism and/or caravan dwelling.

This definition focuses upon the notion that the majority Travellers are nomadic. Such a broad description of different people is problematic as it generalises all Travellers rather than characterising multiple and diverse dimensions. Carr et al. (2014, 1) confirmed that defining Traveller communities is not straightforward and the use of the term 'Gypsy' and 'Traveller' is contested both inside and outside Traveller communities. Given the controversies surrounding Traveller terminology it is more useful to think of diverse communities which represent a continuum of more or less related subgroups with complex, flexible and multilevel identities, than to assume that all Travellers have one unitary identity or culture (Bosnjak and Acton 2013).

Theoretical background

The central focus of CRT is the endemic nature of racism (Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings 2009). In this article, the term 'racism' is used to describe deliberate acts of racism as well as the less obvious forms, which operate through a discourse of culture and difference (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). CRT emerged in the US from legal scholars in response to the perceived failure of traditional civil rights theories and methods (Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings 2009). This was seen as part of a larger goal to eradicate oppression (Matsuda et al. 1993). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were the first to apply CRT's use in law to education. Much of the academic literature that followed concerned developments in the US and concerns people of colour (Leonardo 2002, 2009; Solorzano 1997, 1998).

In England, CRT has emerged as a focus point over the last decade for work on race in an educational context. Gillborn (2005) suggests that CRT offers a unique perspective on racism and is applicable to UK systems and structures as it recognises the multifaceted and deeply embedded nature of racism. CRT scholars argue that although there is rhetoric of equal opportunities in law and education, racism remains a significant and influential factor in outcomes (Dixson and Rousseau 2005). A similar argument is posed by scholars who write about anti-gypsyism (Selling et al. 2015). The reality of racism and discrimination is complex and uncomfortable – often hidden, sometimes unconscious – they remain major sources of social tension and conflict. Policy rhetoric of equal opportunity ignores past and continuing inequalities which disadvantage minority groups (Chand 2014). Chattoo and Atkin (2012) suggest that prejudice now exists in a new covert form which is just as consequential. This new form of prejudice can be referred to as 'modern racism', 'symbolic racism', and 'colour-blind racism',

and there is considerable debate over its exact shape, extent, and – indeed – existence (Healey and Stepnick 2015).

Worryingly, in policy, race inequity has virtually disappeared from the UK agenda (Gillborn et al. 2012). An example of this can be seen in school funding systems. Up until 2011, local authorities (LAs) received an Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) to support the learning of students who have English as a second language (EAL), bilingual pupils and ethnic minority learners. This grant was mainstreamed into general school funding and there is now no requirement for it to be spent on supporting these learners (Naldic 2011).

Traveller pupils therefore no longer receive specific support, yet race and racism remain consequential for Traveller communities and continue to affect their living circumstances, education, healthcare and rights as citizens (Cemlyn et al. 2009; Save the Children 2001). This article seeks to illuminate CRT's potential in analysing and disrupting racism towards Traveller communities. This racism is still widely tolerated and was described as the 'last respectable' form of racism in the UK (BBC 2004). This article also seeks to make the connection between CRT and anti-gypsyism which analyses discrimination towards these communities. Both CRT and anti-gypsyism work towards more equitable and socially just relations of power (Ladson-Billings 2009), and education is a key focus area.

Definitions and applications of CRT in research are fluid as they attempt to reflect the character of racism as a complex and ever-changing manifestation. Solórzano (1997, 1998) identifies a number of key theoretical tenets that characterise a CRT approach:

1. the centrality of racism
2. the challenge to dominant ideology
3. the importance of experiential knowledge
4. the use of an interdisciplinary approach
5. and a commitment to social justice.

All CRT tenets can be useful in the context of analysing and addressing the exclusion of Traveller communities; however, this article focuses specifically on stock stories and counter-stories, which are strongly connected to the first three theoretical CRT tenets. CRT scholars use stock stories to document the embedded nature of racism and continuation of racism and inequalities. Wane (2008), for example, identifies stock stories as ways of referring to, or constructing knowledge about, a particular topic, practice, social activity or institutional site in society. Montecinos (1995) even describes stock stories as fulfilling the role of a master narrative:

> The use of a master narrative to represent a group is bound to provide a very narrow depiction of what it means to be Mexican-American, African-American, white, and so on […] A master narrative essentialises and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group's cultural life. A monovocal account will engender not only stereotyping but also curricular choices that result in representations in which fellow members of a group represented cannot recognise themselves. (293–294)

Given (2008, 166) proposes that stock stories are akin to grand narratives in postmodern language – they are the vehicle through which information is transmitted to satisfy dominant culture. Stock stories reflect ongoing Antigypsyism – the discrimination, racism, ignorance and neglect Traveller communities face. Yet evidence of this, in the form of overt discriminatory remarks against Travellers are hard to find. Instead they are hidden in private conversations and personal observations which nevertheless create and perpetuate the stock stories and sees them standing as a cost to taxpayer, causing mess and being 'Other' or different/deviant to the settled community (Van Cleemput 2012,170).

Counter-stories purposefully seek to assert the experiential knowledge of minority people and their communities and challenge the stock story (Ladson-Billings 2009). Delgado, for example, uses narrative or first person accounts to interject minority cultural viewpoints (Ladson-Billings 2009). Evidence of Travellers' counter-stories are also limited and seldom documented in the public domain, the aim of this article is to highlight these stories from research to provide a different perspective. This is the important feature of counter-stories – that they are told from different perspectives, and are not necessarily personal. The most notable counter-stories are those which expose injustice. At the

heart of the counter-story lie racial justice principles, not personal outrage (Ladson-Billings 2013). Thus a counter-story must be analysed and refer to structural systems of oppression. Delgado (1989) suggests that the purpose of a counter-story should not be to tell the reader what to think, but rather offer a fuller picture of the situation to enable readers to make an informed decision. The aim of the counter-story is to 'open a window into reality' (Delgado 1989) revealing new possibilities, which contrast the expected.

Thus counter-stories contest the 'received wisdom', the ingrained views and presuppositions, which drive the prevailing mind-set about certain groups. However, a gap remains in the CRT literature regarding Traveller communities. Possibly because to the observer they are white and racism towards whiteness is not widely acknowledged. Yet in the CRT sense Travellers are not white. Addressing this issue is important as Traveller communities continue to face discrimination but are simultaneously excluded from general inequality discourse and policy documentation (for example, an Ofsted report [2012] on bullying in schools made no reference to the well-documented issues of bullying towards Traveller children). This article makes a contribution to closing this gap by seeking to inform methodological debate, policy and practice in education.

Methodology

This article draws upon original data from my research, which focused on educational inequality in school and home education in England (D'Arcy 2014). The study included a review of literature and interviews with nine Romany Gypsy families and two Showmen families, who were interviewed twice over a period of six to nine months. Traveller families were invited to participate using educational gatekeepers who were working with these families. The research set out to explore Traveller families' experiences of school and their own reasons for home educating as I had observed inequality but only read negative stock stories.

A critical review of literature (academic journals, government reports and text-books) considered the reasons behind Travellers' underachievement in education and their withdrawal from mainstream schooling. The aim was to find evidence of stock stories. Interestingly, there were many explanations of the inequalities faced by Traveller pupils, but scarce evidence of actual negative, racist claims or stories of Travellers. Hence I have presented a number of 'stock statements', which may be deemed as a limitation but confirms the complexity of racism.

Findings: existing stock stories within the literature

UK literature suggests that home education is chosen by Travellers because of mobility and a lack of commitment to education (Ivatts 2006; Ofsted 2003). This section will document common stereotypical assumptions and myths to illuminate these stock stories.

Stock story: mobility

Stock stories are particularly visible when it comes to the subject of the nature and content of home education for Traveller children in England. Home education is a legal alternative to school in England and referred to as Elective Home Education (EHE) (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2007). There is little research on home education more generally and there are no confirmed statistics on the number of children who are home educated in England. This can be explained by the home education system which does not require parents to register their children as home educated. There is evidence from my own research that many Traveller children are home educated as are those with a statement of SEN (Arora 2006).

Within the EHE literature reviewed, mobility was cited as the main reason for Travellers' uptake of EHE (Ofsted 2011; Webb 2010). Ofsted (2010) stated that 'Traveller, Gypsy and Roma families chose home education so that they could continue children's education whilst travelling' (7). Research on

EHE (Bhopal and Myers 2009) found that professionals all stressed that the highly-mobile nature of Traveller families was the key reason for uptake of EHE. Professionals assumed that Traveller families were moving around, yet when Travellers were interviewed mobility was not a reason and none 'currently lived mobile lives' (12). Ofsted's findings cannot be verified as there is no evidence of consulting with Traveller families as part of their study.

Cemlyn et al. (2009) refer to the crucial concept of sedentarism (McVeigh 1997; Power 2004) which drives discrimination and prejudice against Travellers because of their nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, or simply previous history of nomadism. In his analysis of parliamentary language Turner (2002) found that the most important condemnatory factor levelled at Gypsies, was that they were 'nomadic'. Yet research (Derrington and Kendall 2004; Bhopal and Myers 2009; Wilkin et al. 2010) has shown that many Traveller communities are no longer nomadic.

Stock story: Travellers do not support their children's education and are unable to educate their children at home

Views on home education are divided: in the wider literature there are those who are critical (Apple 2000; Brighouse 1997; Lubienski 2000, 2003), those who argue for better regulation of EHE systems (Reich 2002) and those who advocate home education (Ray 2000). Webb (2010) describes LA officers and teachers as often astonished about parents feeling that they can provide their children with an education of the same standard as that delivered through school. Thus home-educators are widely critiqued. Those from Traveller background receive further criticisms.

In 2003 the UK educational inspectorate body, Ofsted, expressed concerns about the quality of home education provision among Traveller families (5). As a result, the Department of Education commissioned research in 2006 to investigate the situation regarding the current policy, provision and practice in EHE for Traveller children (Ivatts 2006). Ivatts sent out two questionnaires to 23 LAs, one to Traveller Education services (return rate 91%), the other to those responsible for inspecting or monitoring home education (return rate 72.7%). Ivatts' reported that almost 50% of the LAs (and 94% of Traveller Education Services did express genuine concern about Traveller children receiving full-time (20 hours per week) and appropriate educational provision. Questionnaire data revealed that 43% of LAs noted concerns over parents' skills, especially in regard to literacy and numeracy (Ivatts 2006, 13). Nineteen per cent of LAs suggested that home education was being used as a device to avoid school attendance without legal penalty.

Ivatts (2006) summarised that LAs and Traveller Education generally judged Traveller parents to be ill equipped to organise or deliver an education suited to their children's ages, aptitudes, abilities and any special needs they may have. Concerns also centred on levels of parental commitment, enthusiasm and motivation and difficulties encountered in monitoring/inspecting EHE provision for highly mobile families. It is my opinion that these concerns centre on two factors: (1) judgements of home education compared to school; and (2) Traveller parents' ability to educate their children at home. This combination exaggerates the issues regarding EHE and Traveller communities, yet the EHE system is out of parents' control.

The EHE system was formally reviewed and critiqued (Badman 2009) for not requiring formal registration, set hours or curriculum. Comparing EHE to mainstream school provision is not fitting, as recent research, evaluations and the monitoring of EHE demonstrate (McIntyre-Bhatty 2007; Taylor and Petrie 2000). Despite these criticisms, Kendall and Atkinson's research (2006) indicated a prevalence of school bias as EHE officers with teaching backgrounds monitor EHE practice and Ofsted's (2010) consultation on EHE involved school professionals rather than EHE experts.

Stock stories about Traveller parents' ability to educate their children at home were also located in a textbook which provides the only recent overview of home education in the UK (Webb 2010). Webb suggests that 'traditionally, this group [Travellers], values practical skills over academic achievement' (103). He also claims that it is a concern that many Traveller children are home-educated, and that there is a suspicion that Traveller girls are not provided with any formal education after the age of

eleven. Although these claims are not further elaborated on or justified, they add to the derogatory stock story of Traveller communities within the literature: poor educational ambitions and skills to home educate. These stock statements can influence the expectations of some teachers who may receive no other insight into Traveller culture.

As suggested, documented evidence of racism and discrimination in the form of quotes from educators themselves, appears to be extremely hard to find although the references below provide an insight:

> The majority of staff welcomed them with open arms, tried very hard with them. But I have to say and I am ashamed to say it … a very small minority were terrible. As far as they were concerned, they were thieves from the minute they walked in … there were certain times when I witnessed them on the corridor perhaps disciplining them for something they wouldn't discipline another child for because of who they were. (Derrington 2005, 60)

Lloyd and Stead's (2001) reported that all Traveller pupils interviewed in their study mentioned continuous verbal abuse and harassment, with the school staff appearing unaware of the scale of this abuse:

> Young people felt that this was an issue they had to face by themselves, that teachers tended not to believe them or that when they did this sometimes made things worse. Many of the parents were virtually resigned to the situation and expected their children to defend themselves when necessary. Several young people had been excluded as a result of fighting in retaliation for being called names. (4)

Wilkin et al. (2010) conducted focus groups with Traveller pupils in school who also maintained other pupils were unfriendly towards them in school. Their coping responses included hiding their own identity and relying on social support from their cultural peer group.

A CRT analysis would suggest deep-rooted discrimination, racism, ignorance and neglect which is often covert, particularly cultural racism, which does not use the word race but race is still an issue (Barker 1981; Gillborn 1995). Racism and discrimination are central barriers and I propose they are driven by stock stories based upon myths and stereotypes of Traveller communities. The issue is that both covert and direct racism remains unchallenged and low attainment and discrimination in education continues. As Derrington and Kendall (2004) suggest, 'individuals who feel isolated, socially and culturally, are unlikely to reach their full potential'.

Findings: a collection of counter-stories within research

Families' stories recorded during field work lay in stark contrast to the stock stories documented in the literature. Their stories revealed that they were committed to education but withdrew their children due to ongoing racism and discrimination in school. I found that families' experiences indicated that current education systems did not facilitate the inclusion and wellbeing of their children; this, in turn, limited opportunities which many Traveller families desired for their children's success.

As outlined earlier, stock stories and consequential assumptions often imply a causal relationship between the cultural differences of the Traveller community, and underachievement and withdrawal from school. For example, the perception that all Travellers remain highly mobile can mean that non-attendance might not be followed up, and efforts to support their education are minimal as teachers presume they will move on shortly anyway (D'Arcy 2014; Danaher 2001). Nomadism is frequently used to label Travellers' deviance, and Travellers' uptake of EHE is commonly assumed to be down to their mobility. Yet my interviews with 11 families found that no single family referred to mobility as the reason and their stories clearly counter the stock story.

Counter-story: mobility

My research included one highly-mobile family who took up home education due to a failure of the school to support and respond to their son's needs, not mobility:

> There was no interest in him. The school were not organised, we had a meeting to discuss his GCSEs, they would call us up for meetings which was fine and they would say: 'What do you want to learn?' and they would 'Sort it out' … and send us the work. Even then it was slap dash – they did not give him any text books, the school wanted them, so they photocopied but you know when it is a bad photocopy … and you can't read it … pages were missing. When we did send work back nobody ever emailed to say: 'Oh that is good'… or … 'you need to

> work harder on this'. We sent a journal about all the places we had visited, history and geography … It was quite big … it had all kinds of bits … interviews with the director of the theatre and the school never looked at it. So that made me a bit cross. He was diabetic and hated going … he says not but I don't know if he was being bullied. … I don't know … so I thought he can stay home this winter. (Anita[2] 2011)

There is further evidence in the literature to counter assumptions around mobility (Derrington and Kendall 2004, Wilkin, Derrington, and Foster 2009). A report issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2004 suggested that although mobility issues still impacted on access and attendance for some children, the majority of Travellers in the UK were no longer nomadic for the purpose of employment because of social, economic and legal constraints (Wilkin, Derrington, and Foster 2009). Derrington and Kendall (2004) and Wilkin et al. (2010) established that mobility was no longer the main issue regarding Travellers' education, attendance or disproportionate exclusion levels.

Counter story: Travellers do not support their children's education and are unable to educate their children at home

Ivatts (2006) research findings reflected how LAs and Traveller Education services compared school hours to EHE and raised concerns about receiving full-time education. This may be a genuine concern but is one which should apply not only to Travellers but to all home educated children. If it is applied only to Travellers, it is discriminatory. Ivatts' research also revealed judgements about Traveller families' commitment and ability to educate.

My interviews with Traveller families revealed that they felt compelled to home educate, rather than adopting it as a positive and desirable choice. Home education was not chosen as something that was 'better' educationally. Indeed, most parents had wanted their children to stay in school if they would have been safe and cared for. EHE was simply viewed as a safer educational space than school. Their accounts directly counter stock stories about levels of parental commitment, enthusiasm and motivation towards education. Although professionals in Ivatts (2006) study cite home education as problematic, I found that for Traveller families it was the suitability of school that was the issue:

> It's the bullying, they [school] say it does not happen but it do happen … (Tina 2013)

> My son went to secondary school and had a terrible experience, yes … because he's a Traveller. He got picked on, even by the teachers. I was not prepared for Rosanne to go through that. We had the same when we went to school, my brother and sisters so … (Carol-Anne 2013)

Problems in their schools had driven them out but worryingly, on withdrawing their children, teachers and schools expressed little interest in why this was happening:

> I decided to take my kids out of school and there was no feedback what so ever, nobody said 'Is there a problem? Would you like to discuss it?' I just said the boys are not coming back anymore and it was "'OK, thank you' just send a letter in … that was it. If I was a teacher I would like to say: 'Would you like to make an appointment and we'll see if there is any reason or discuss if best move for the children. Do you know what you are getting yourself into? Do you know what they need?' (Jolene 2013)

Parents were not consulted; they spoke more generally about not feeling confident to raise or deal with the issues whilst their children were in school. Within this context, evidence of racism, bullying and discrimination in school becomes lost; whilst key issues affecting children's wellbeing remain diluted and ignored. The data about the reasons for withdrawals should be collected and shared with LAs, academics and policymakers, since it can highlight why Traveller (and other) parents withdraw their children. For example, within my study home education was being as an educational alternative, which enabled children to escape the bullying and discrimination in school:

> He was being bullied at school and the school locked him in a room by himself. He was being bullied for quite a few months and nothing was done about it. (Tina, 2013)

> Bullying, I did not have any friends at this school either and honestly don't … it was a very good school altogether … (Courtney 2013)

> I don't think it was more the children, it was more the teachers than children, not violent bullying but they call you square peg compared to other children. (Shannon 2013)

> They should take bullying seriously … other children have killed themselves. They should not take it lightly. … She is a strong person, she'd come home and have a cry and get on with it … some children are not like that. (Vanessa 2013)

Traveller children in school were not discriminated on ethnicity alone; some also experienced different treatment because of their learning needs, in this case towards a boy who had entered secondary school unable to read:

> The class were all looking at a certain page, the teacher said 'not you, you look at the picture book – because you can't read or write. (Marie 2013)

A Traveller pupil, who was Gifted and Talented[3], received equally non-supportive attitudes:

> I liked the little school; I was a 'gifted and talented' pupil and top of the class with everyone at primary. I liked the little school … they [primary school] used to send out work packs for when travelling and I did them because I wanted to. The [primary] school wasn't racist. I dropped down at secondary. I hated it. … I felt excluded. At secondary school you were just a number not a pupil. (Caprice 2013)

She explained that the level of work she was given was inadequate. She said she wanted to complete her secondary education because it offered her an alternative vocational pathway if she did not want to follow the Showmen lifestyle. Yet, the staff 'did not bother with her' because they assumed that she would follow a career in the family business and did not need a school education. She concluded that if her secondary school had been better; she would not have taken up home education at all.

Gifted and Talented children, along with children who had a statement of SEN, were two other groups of children, alongside Traveller children, who made up the largest populations of home educated groups in the county under study, and this was referred to by the EHE administrator as being due to the failings of the mainstream system (D'Arcy 2014). These failing were further substantiated by Traveller families:

> I started her late because we had a bad tragedy. … I stayed with her at the start then I got phone calls to say she didn't feel well so I went to get her … nothing wrong with her. One day I picked her up and she said she got pulled out, she said this lady pulled me out to give me extra help. When I questioned it they said 'she is a Traveller, she needs extra help. Why? She did not … they just thought Travellers needed that … (Anona 2013)

Derrington and Kendall (2004) found that over half the primary school head-teachers in their study spoke of the entrenched attitudes and endemic racism towards Travellers in their local community. This awareness was much lower amongst secondary schools. Power (2004) argues that some schools fail to make the connection between racism in the wider community and what happens in school; consequently, there is little response to name-calling, bullying and racist behaviour.

It can be suggested that limited information and lack of recognition of racism drives the formation of cultural stereotypes which function not only as a form of victim-blaming, but embody a reframing of historical and contemporary cause-and-effect that obscures race, and renders it neutral (DePouw 2012; Dixson and Rousseau 2005). Because modern Traveller cultures are rarely shared or celebrated in educational materials, wider society has a very limited amount of information to inform their attitudes towards Traveller communities. O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004) report on a case study which found that seven of the eight head teachers interviewed in England admitted that Traveller culture was not reflected in their school curriculum. In a survey of 81 mainstream primary school teachers, almost half the respondents said that there were no Traveller-related resources in the school (Wilkin, Derrington, and Foster 2009). Derrington and Kendall (2004) and Bowers (2004) reported that Traveller pupils felt that their teachers generally had a limited understanding of their culture and predicaments in school, and as seen in earlier quotes, some were less than sympathetic when racism was reported. Interestingly, Wilkin et al. (2010) highlighted how staff perceptions of the social inclusion of Travellers were more positive than those of the pupils themselves.

Law and Swann (2011) found that teachers tended to attribute physical responses to racist name calling to Traveller pupils' behaviour problems rather than a racist incident. They also suggest that racism in school has tended to become normalised as a white–black issue and racism towards whiteness is not acknowledged. CRT is useful and appropriate to analyse and challenge this issue and offers a

framework to do so. The counter-story is one that can inform opinions and challenge negative stock stories.

Discussion – the need for counter-stories

Delgado (1989) suggested that the counter-story should provide a fuller picture of the situation to enable an informed decision to be made. The aim of this article has been to use the counter-story to 'open a window into reality' and contrast common negative discourse regarding Travellers. This is important as barriers still exist and current education systems do not facilitate the opportunities which many Traveller families desire for their children's success.

In the case of Traveller children, stock stories ensure that failure in school is directed back to them and to their family. Villenas, Deyhle, and Parker (1999) suggest this process masks the fact that racism is the cause of this failure. Parents in my study were genuinely concerned about their education: among all 11 Traveller families interviewed, all children had attended school for as long as they could. All parents were working very hard to provide their children with a suitable education at home. Indeed, it was their concern about their child's wellbeing and safety in the school environment which had compelled them to withdraw their children. This analysis and counter-story is essential to disrupt the stock stories, which depict minority communities as anti-school or anti-intellectual (Stovall 2006).

Educational policy in the UK rarely analyses the reasons as to why discrimination occurs. Healey and Stepnick (2015) proposes that prejudice continues because of an elaborate and widespread set of prejudiced beliefs, which are fundamentally common and unremarkable, and therefore accepted as part of everyday life – this is the stock story.

Discriminatory power systems have been described (Tatum 1997) as a moving conveyor belt. The belt, which represents the systemic nature of racism, moves in the direction that benefits the dominant group regardless of an individual's path of travel on the belt. Whether one is standing idly by, walking in the direction of, or running in the opposite direction of it, the belt compels all of its passengers to acquiesce, willingly or unwillingly, to its forward momentum.

In the case of Travellers, pre-judgements and stereotypes fuel the treadmill and provide an easy vehicle to those who hold limited understanding about the community. Antigypsyism describes this phenomenon for Travellers – one of discrimination, racism, ignorance and neglect. To challenge this effectively requires a structural change – one that aims to reverse the direction of the belt in a methodical manner and this is not an easy accomplishment. Recent research (Wilkin et al. 2010) tells us what the key barriers are but as Lord Avebury (2011) commented[4], 'good intentions have done little for Traveller children over the past 50 years and governments have yet to match their deeds to their words' (2011, Column 709).

CRT can be instrumental, counter-stories expose Antigypsyism and barriers to inclusion as well as the structural inequalities and power relations that prevent change. My own counter-story telling approaches are to share the voices of Traveller (as I have done in this article) to audiences, to counter negative stock stories and raise awareness of ongoing inequalities. Results are harder to quantify.

In my own experience as a teacher in Higher Education I found that most of my students had never received academic information about Traveller communities. Sharing these counter-stories in lectures made students aware of the educational issues for Travellers. Consequently, students chose it as a topic for further study and challenged inequality in their own environments. Sharing counter-stories with policymakers and commissioners resulted in further research funding and ideas to effect change. Physically bringing Traveller communities and settled communities together is one of the most powerful ways to change mind-sets. I have initiated head teachers' home visits to Traveller pupils, which had some of the most productive change in attitudes and support towards those pupils in schools. These are small changes at an individual level and it is clear that further national interventions are needed to address the barriers for Traveller pupils and evaluate their effectiveness.

Conclusion

Subordinated groups have always told stories and Delgado (1989) explains that this is no accident or coincidence; they are seen as a way of survival and liberation. Stories can be therapeutic and enable self-preservation; they can also lessen feelings of subordination. Stories can therefore be personally beneficial to marginalised groups. The counter-story, however, does more: it uses stories to challenge the status quo and name oppressive systems of belief and power. Counter-stories draw on the voices of marginalised groups to build up a counter attack to negative stock stories told about them. Learning about other's realities can be a humanising experience for dominant groups (Delgado 1995). Reality is not fixed, it cannot be considered objectively, and reality is constructed through conversations and experiences with other people. Listening to stories enables us to observe the lives of others and better understand their world.

Within the CRT literature there is a notable gap on the subject of Travellers and there is no obvious connection made between Antigypsyism and CRT. Linking Antigypsyism to CRT may direct academics, policymakers and those working in schools and communities to a point where the evidence presented to them calls them to action. CRT scholars recognise that this is no easy process (Gillborn 2005; Hylton 2012) because making improvements for Travellers requires people to defend positions that are marginal, challenging and unpopular. As Hylton (2012) suggests:

> There is simply no positive spin on 'race' and racism because 'race' is a construct that is used to differentiate, (dis) advantage, and (dis)empower each time it is uncritically invoked. Even positive social transformation will involve remarking upon these racialised concepts and processes and to this end, simply, involves telling someone something about themselves and the world that needs to change. (36)

This is where the use of counter-stories may help. There may be no obvious interest in hearing Travellers' stories, but when they are heard, they tell others something about themselves and society and that the world needs to change. This may well help address complacency and inaction.

Notes

1. http://www.channel4.com/programmes/big-fat-gypsy-weddings/episode-guide.
2. All the real names of research participants in this article have been replaced with pseudonyms.
3. 'Gifted and talented' describes children and young people with an ability to develop to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities): 'gifted' learners are those who are considered to have abilities in one or more academic subjects, like maths and English. 'Talented' learners are those who are considered to have practical skills in areas like sport, music, design or creative and performing arts.
4. In his stated concerns within the House of Lords regarding the new Education Bill 2011.

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