

**‘Out of the mouths of babes and innocents’..... Children’s attitudes towards Travellers**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This chapter looks at children’s attitudes towards Travellers. It focuses on children in fourth class in primary school (i.e. aged 9-11 years) since it is at this stage that they are likely to be aware of socially and culturally constructed differences, and most likely to reflect parental and community attitudes towards such groups. Racist attitudes are increasingly topical since, although Ireland remains one of the more racially and ethnically homogeneous societies in Europe, this situation is changing rapidly. The arrival of refugees, asylum seekers, guest-workers and others in the mid-1990s has added in a new way to the ethnic diversity of a country where, in 1996, just under 7% of the population were born outside Ireland (CSO, 1998). However, despite newspaper headlines referring to an ‘influx’ of asylum seekers, according to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Ireland received just 25,000 refugees and asylum seekers in 1999: among the smallest numerically and per capita in the EU. The anecdotal evidence of many of these recent arrivals suggests that racist attitudes and behaviour are prevalent here. At an individual level many have experienced verbal and sometimes physical attacks; organised opposition to them has been mounted by some communities; while their treatment by the State has been severely criticised by senior legal figures.

Research on Travellers, an indigenous ethnic minority group of approx 25,000 people (less than 1% of the total population), suggests that these new arrivals are not the sole targets of racist attitudes. Thus in a recent national study, 93% of the respondents said that they would not accept a Traveller into their family; 73% would not accept a Traveller as a friend and 44% would not accept them as a member of their community (Drury Communications, 2000). Over 70 per cent of the respondents in Mac Gréil’s (1996) study said that they would not be willing to allow a Traveller into their family, and 59 per cent were not willing to accept Travellers as close neighbours: such attitudes showing ‘the extent of their lower caste, if not outcast status’ (1996, p. 319). An earlier ESRI study (ESRI, 1984), carried out by

Davis, Grube and Morgan also found widespread stereotyping of Travellers, this being associated with a readiness to engage in racist behaviour.

Mac Gréil (1996, p. 318) has observed that Irish government policy towards Travellers 'seems to be more one of assimilation than pluralism.' Traveller organisations, such as the Irish Traveller Movement; Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group and Pavee Point Travellers Centre have seen this as a failure to recognise or respect Traveller culture (D.T.E.D.G., 1992; Pavee Point, 1999). The European Parliamentary Inquiry on Racism and Xenophobia (European Parliament, 1991) and the Department of Justice Task Force (1995) have recognised their experience of social exclusion and discrimination. In Ireland to-day Travellers are generally easily identified by their accent and are frequently blamed for social ills. For a variety of reasons, including the inability of the mainstream school curriculum to recognise Traveller culture, only 20 per cent of Traveller children attend secondary school (INTO, 1992, p.24). Of the 4,000 or so travelling families in Ireland, it is estimated that almost 1,100 live on the roadside (Department of Justice, 1995, p. 107). In all, over 40 per cent of Irish Travellers do not have access to electricity, and over one quarter do not have access to running water. Their current life expectancy is twelve years below the Irish mean; a level which was achieved by the rest of the Irish population in 1940 (Department of Justice, 1995). Thus, structurally and numerically they are in a weak position.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Racism can be defined as an ideology and/or as a set of practices. As an ideology it involves a set of beliefs or prejudices which legitimate discriminatory behaviour and which stereotype and devalue the other on the basis of their (presumed) biological, ethnic or cultural background. It reflects an ethnically homogenous construction of Irishness combined with a lack of acceptance of 'Otherness.' The main identifiable targets for racism are Travellers, black Irish people and (in the 1990s) asylum seekers and refugees. The Harmony Report (1992) identified racism as the attribution of negative qualities to a race or nationality and the acting upon such beliefs. In his classic study of Irish prejudice, Mac Gréil (1977) describes prejudice as the ascription to a group of generalised negative beliefs derived from prejudging them. The United Nations Report (1980, p.3) warned that: 'Stereotypes which become fixed in the public mind, are repeated, are resistant to factual evidence to disprove them, and can become

dangerous when they are used to justify and reinforce prejudice, discrimination and the persecution of vulnerable minorities.’ Scapegoating is frequently associated with such stereotypical attitudes. Mac Gréil identified the characteristics of a scapegoat as its relative weakness, ease of identification, and association with popular problems in society. Elias and Scottson went further and noted that: ‘An established group tends to attribute to its outsider group as a whole the ‘bad’ characteristics of that group’s worst section’. In contrast the self-image of the established group tends to be modelled on the minority of its best or exemplary members (1994, p xix). Brief (1998) described such stereotypes as ‘devaluations ...transmitted to the members of a society, through the various socialisation processes’ (1998, p. 122).

Racist attitudes are classically seen as multi-dimensional: incorporating cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (Allport, 1954). The cognitive attitudinal element includes stereotyping, scapegoating, and the ascribing of generalised negative qualities to an ethnic or racial group. The affective dimension of racist attitudes is particularly concerned with the existence of prejudice defined as ‘a predisposition to think, feel and act in ways that are against or away from rather than for or toward other persons’ (Newcomb, cited in Ehrlich, 1973). The behavioural dimension is expressed in actual discrimination and social exclusion. In many studies (Bringham & Weissbach 1972; MacGreil 1996) the Bogardus Social Distance scale is used as a proximate indicator of such behavioural attitudes. It looks at people’s willingness to admit members of an ethnic or racial group to each of the following degrees of social intimacy: close kinship or marriage (1); club as personal friends (2); as neighbours (3); into employment in their occupation or in their country (4); as a citizen of their country (5); as a visitor to their country (6); exclusion from their country(7). Thus the higher the score, the more racist the subject. Using this scale Mac Gréil found that that Irish social distance scores as regards Travellers had increased since the early 1970s from 2.9 to 3.6 (see Table 1 below). Hence it seemed useful to focus on children’s attitudes to having Travellers as neighbours (i.e. number three on the Bogardus Social Distance scale: just around the limit of acceptance in Mac Gréil, 1996).

Mac Gréil’s (1977) earlier work found that women were consistently more racist than men; a pattern which was consistent with Wilson’s observations (cited in Bagley, 1979, p.22) that, as women were

more prone to feelings of insecurity, they were more likely to be racist. Hannan et al (1996) noted that girls still have lower levels of self esteem than boys. Hence one might expect that girls would be more racist than boys. However, Mac Gréil's (1996) later survey found that there had been a convergence in the prejudice scores of males and females. It is difficult to make sense of these apparently contradictory trends. However it is possible that the key factor is that an underlying lack of respect towards Travellers is expressed rather differently by men and women, and that this is what underlies the inconsistent findings as regards gender differences. Thus it seemed useful to explore the impact of gender in this study. It also seemed important to explore the relevance of social class. In Ireland, children in working class areas are more likely to have personal contact with Travellers since accommodation for Travellers is generally provided in working class areas. Such personal ties have been thought likely to bring about better race relations although Deegan (1996) concluded on the basis of a review of that evidence, that in order to eliminate racist attitudes, inter-ethnic contact had to be accompanied by an elimination of competition between racial groups. It is by no means clear that this occurs in working class areas.

**Table 1 : Overall Social Distance Scores - Percentage willing to accept a Traveller in each of the following categories.**

Year	Kinship (1)	Friendship (2)	Neighbour (3)	Co- Worker (4)	Citizen (5)	Visitor (6)	Exclude (7)	Mean Social Distance	N
1973	29.0	51.1	64.3	75.5	93.4	2.8	3.8	2.904	2302
1989	13.5	26.7	41.0	63.7	90.0	7.0	3.0	3.681	1000

*Source:* Mac Gréil (1996)

To date, there have been very few sociological studies of children's views, although it is increasingly recognised that children have the potential to engage in the research process (Morrow, 1998). Childhood has long been seen as a critical time for the internalisation of parental ethnic attitudes (Allport, 1954): a view that has been recently restated by the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson (Anti-Racism Teacher's Pack TCD, 1999). Bee (1995) found that there was widespread agreement on the importance of the behaviour and the attitudes of family and peers; while Brief (1998) observed an association between children's attitudes and those of their parents in a

number of studies. He concluded that ‘children learn not only from what their parents say, but from observing how their parents behave towards members of various groups’ (1998, p.122).

### **METHODOLOGY**

It is difficult to gain access to groups of children outside the school context (Morrow , 1998). Hence, it was decided to approach children through their schools. Segregated housing in Dublin made it possible to identify an all girls and all boys suburban middle class school; and similar working class inner city schools for boys and girls. The location of each of the four schools proved to be an accurate indicator of an individual child’s class position (crudely assessed in terms of their father’s occupation: see Drudy, 1995, for a critique). Thus in the middle class school, the fathers of the children in the study were in professional or managerial occupations; and in the working class schools, all but one of the fathers were either employed in unskilled manual work or were unemployed.

Co-operation was sought and obtained from the Principal Teacher in each school and exactly the same procedure was used in each case as regards selecting the children. Thus roughly one in three children from each fourth class in each school (i.e. 9-11 year olds) were randomly selected and invited to participate in a group discussion for thirty minutes in a spare room. Each group participant was given a page with a brief description of six individuals of the same gender and age-group as themselves, but each from different ethnic backgrounds, namely Bosnian, British, Japanese, Traveller, Irish and French. Each group was told: ‘The house / flat next door to you is for sale. Each of these people is thinking of moving in. Discuss if you would like each one to be your new next door neighbour.’ These group discussions, involving a total of twenty three children, were recorded and transcribed. Most of the discussion in fact focused on the Traveller children and this is the focus in this article. Pseudonyms are used in the text to ensure confidentiality.

At the same time the other children in the class remained in their classroom with their individual teacher and spent the thirty minutes drawing and writing in response to the stimulus ‘What I think of Travellers’. These drawings and individual written work were also collected and analysed. The methodology used thus allowed attitudes to be revealed in both an individual context (by analysing what they drew or wrote under the open-ended heading ‘What I think of Travellers’); and in a

collective context (by analysing the text of the four taped transcribed group discussions). In total sixty nine children took part in the study: twenty three children took part in the group discussion and forty-six completed drawings and wrote down individually what they thought of Travellers.

Other studies have noted that each of these approaches are particularly suited to children (Morrow, 1998). The use of vignettes of various kinds is common in studies of children's attitudes (O'Brien et al, 1996; Morrow 1998). Drawing is seen as fun and it 'deflects the adult gaze' although such drawings can be difficult to interpret (Morrow, 1998). Cox (1992) has seen drawings as a kind of writing that the child employs when s/he cannot express his/her ideas and feelings as s/he comes in contact with his/her environment. Replying to an open-ended question is seen as an equally appropriate method for children since it means that they are not privy to any biases the researcher may have and are invited to say what they think. All of these approaches are seen as much more suitable for children than formal individual interviews since the latter are associated in children's minds with being reprimanded (Morrow, 1998).

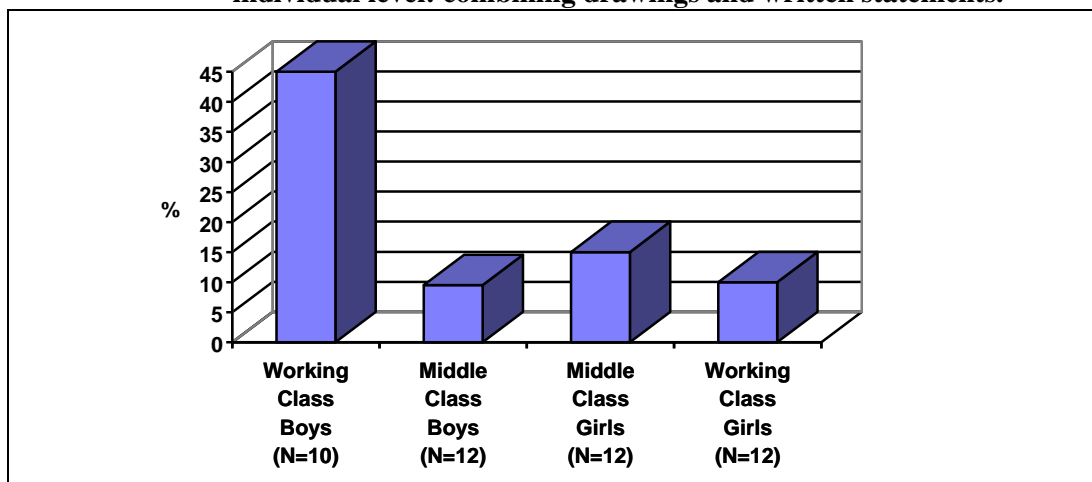
Racist attitudes were measured at both an individual and group level. Thus the cognitive dimension was assessed by quantifying the stereotypical statements which were made about Travellers in the group discussion in reply to the stimulus 'What I think of Travellers;' in group discussions or deduced from their drawings. In the two former cases this involved classifying each statement (i.e. sentence or clause) using Laffal's fourteen item dictionary for classifying ethnic descriptive words and stereotypes (Ehrlich, 1973). For the drawings each item or scene was classified using the same dictionary. For example, a drawing of a horse and caravan was classified as an 'economic characteristic', while a drawing of Travellers involved in an assault was classified as a 'negative moral quality'. Similarly the affective dimension was operationalised by quantifying the frequency of positive and negative dispositions towards Travellers as reflected in the group discussion; in individual written statements or as deduced from the drawings. Every expression (statement, item or scene drawn) was also assessed and classified as expressing a positive, negative or neutral disposition towards Travellers. At both the cognitive and affective level, the degree of racism was defined on the basis of the proportion of negative statements within the total number of statements. The behavioural dimension was

operationalised at group level only, using item three of the Bogardus Scale of Social Distance, that is looking at the children's willingness to have Travellers live next door. Thus the study uses material collected in three different ways to explore these children's attitudes towards Travellers.

## FINDINGS

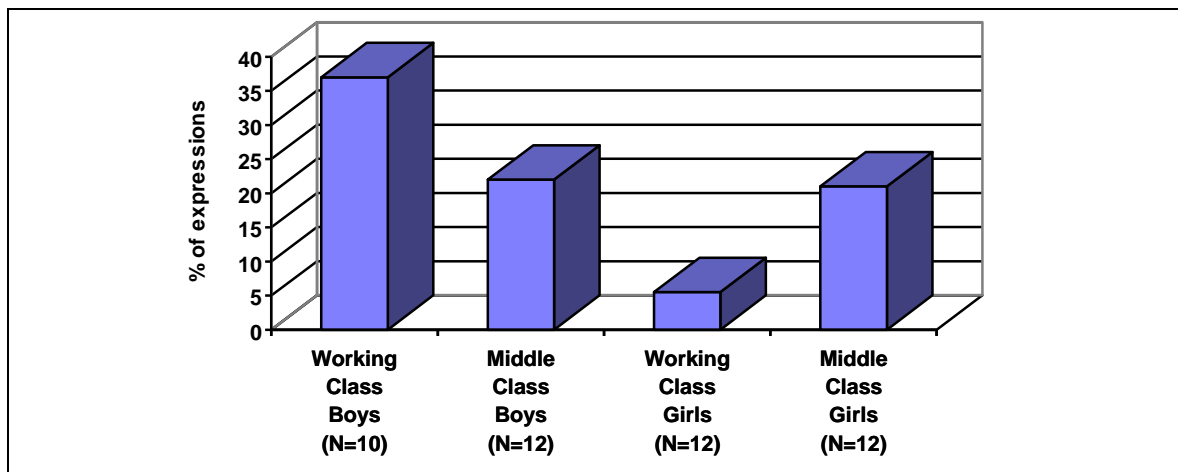
The results show that racist attitudes exist towards Travellers at both the individual and group levels and at the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. Firstly then at an individual cognitive level, there was widespread evidence of negative stereotyping and scapegoating in all the children's written statements and drawings. Individual written expressions of negative stereotyping included: 'They leave loads of rubbish and mess behind'; 'They spend it all [money] on drink'; 'they hit the horses'; 'They rob'; 'They kill'; 'They break into peoples' houses.' Many of the children said that Travellers were 'dishonest', 'dirty' 'have too much money', and 'are cruel'. It seems plausible to suggest that children repeat what they have heard at home so that their views reflect those in the wider society. The numbers are small and the conclusions necessarily tentative but it was striking that negative stereotypes were most frequently expressed individually by the working class boys with relatively little difference in the cognitive attitudes expressed by the other children (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Negative cognitive stereotypical expressions as a percentage of the total expressions at individual level: combining drawings and written statements.**



The affective attitudinal element involves the extent and depth of prejudice: it refers to attitudes based on pre-judgements, and is generally expressed by demonstrating negative dispositions towards a group based on its ethnicity. Again, there was a suggestion in the data that the working class boys in their individual written statements and drawings were the most negative in their affective disposition towards Travellers. Their prejudiced attitudes were reflected in individual written statements such as: ‘Knackers should be put away’. In their drawings, 45 per cent identified Travellers with crime, 18 per cent with drunkenness, and 54 per cent with forms of dirt and squalor. Most drew campfires, surrounded by litter and vermin. Begging also emerged as a common theme in the drawings, and was referred to by over 50 per cent of the middle class girls in their individual statements. Almost one quarter of the drawings of middle class boys showed Travellers with new vans, while many of them in their individual statements also noted this and said that ‘they spend their money on drink’(the implication being that their wealth was not acquired honestly). Such attitudes are clearly prejudiced, and indicative of negative affective dispositions ( See Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Negative affective dispositions towards Travellers as a percentage of total expressions at individual level: combining drawings and written statements.**



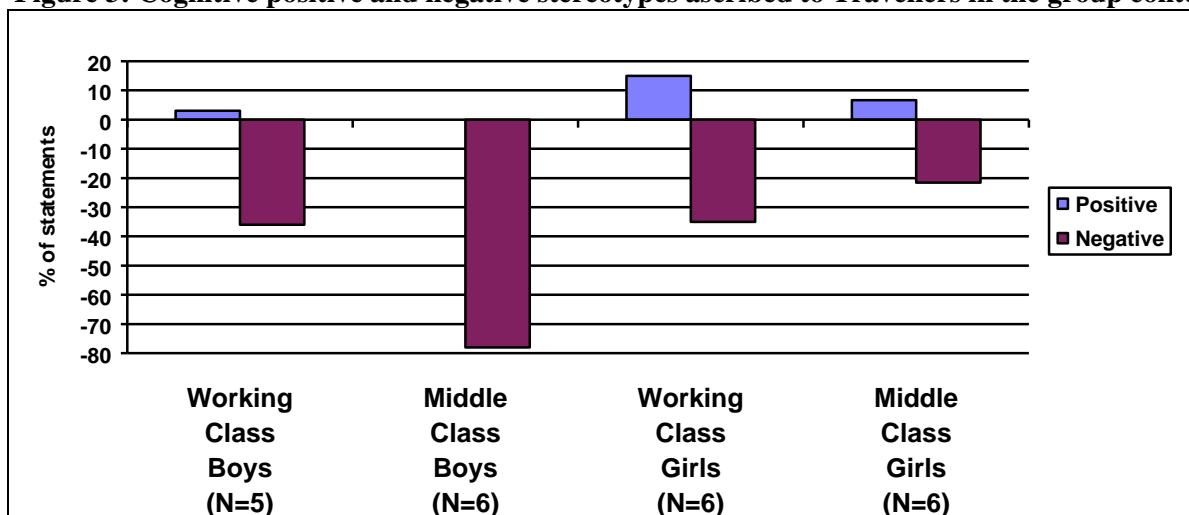
The girls also stereotyped Travellers, describing them as ‘smelly’, ‘dirty’, ‘brought up badly’, saying that they ‘make the place look dirty’ and that they ‘leave rubbish all over the place.’ However their individual statements also displayed pity towards them: ‘I feel sorry for them because they have no clean clothes’; ‘You couldn’t make any friends because you would be moving around all the time.’



Such statements can be seen as reflecting a kind of patronizing pity- involving a degree of compassion but also a kind of moral superiority. These kinds of sentiments were peculiar to the girls, and as will be shown later, they also emerged in the girls’ group discussions. Such attitudes were not included in the quantitative analysis. They can be seen as reflecting a lack of respect for travellers-albeit one which is rather different from the boys’ racist attitudes. It is possible that they underlie apparent conflicts in the literature as regards the existence of gender differences in this area.

In each of the four group discussions, at a cognitive level, Travellers were stereotyped as dishonest, drunken, dirty, and selfish. In all cases the number of negative qualities ascribed to Travellers far exceeded the positive qualities and there was also widespread scapegoating of Travellers. Travellers were seen as the ones to blame for social ills such as stealing cars, vandalism, violence and cruelty to animals. In the group context, negative stereotypes were most commonly used by the middle class boys: they referred to the Travellers as ‘doing bad things’ ‘like robbing’ ‘messing at the church...I think they done some damage to it’ ‘they rip the licence plates off them’[cars]; ‘they do be up to all sorts of trouble and all. You invite them in and that’s it.....your house is gone in the morning’ ‘they never get themselves in trouble-always other people.’ It was implied that they were responsible for even more serious things: having bonfires by throwing petrol over cars: ‘And there was a man burned inside a car.’

**Figure 3: Cognitive positive and negative stereotypes ascribed to Travellers in the group context**

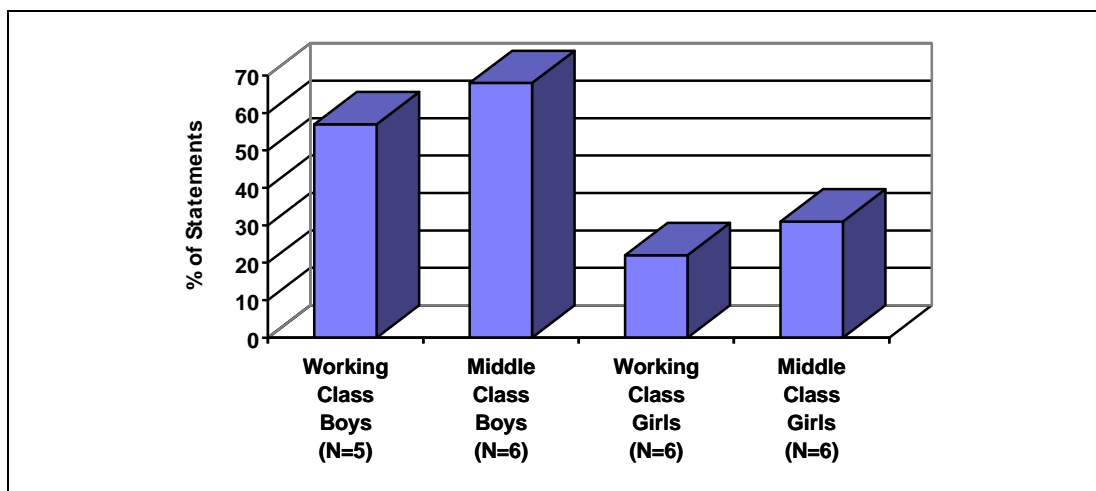


Cognitive negative stereotypes accounted for, on average, 28 per cent of the total comments made by both groups of girls, while for the boys, the average level was 57 per cent. However the level of

negative stereotyping among the middle class boys was more than twice as high as that of the working class boys. Furthermore, the frequency of negative stereotypes expressed by the middle class boys within the group context was over eight times higher than at the individual level, rising from 9 per cent of cognitive expressions in reply to the stimulus ‘What I think of Travellers’ to over three quarters (78 per cent) of the cognitive expressions in the group context.

Similarly at an affective level, negative dispositions towards Travellers constituted a much higher proportion of the total statements made by boys than girls. Thus, negative dispositions in the group data were expressed by girls only half as often as the boys. Furthermore, only a tiny minority of the statements of the working class and middle class boys reflected a positive disposition with a slightly larger proportion of such statements being made by the girls- especially the working class girls (see Figure 3). The numbers are very small but it was striking that at a behavioural level both groups of girls expressed a willingness to accept the Traveller girl as a neighbour in the vignette. The boys were much less willing to accept a Traveller into their neighbourhood, with the middle class boys being least willing to allow Travellers into their neighbourhood.

**Figure 4: Frequency of negative affective dispositions to Travellers, as a percentage of the total statements expressed by each group.**

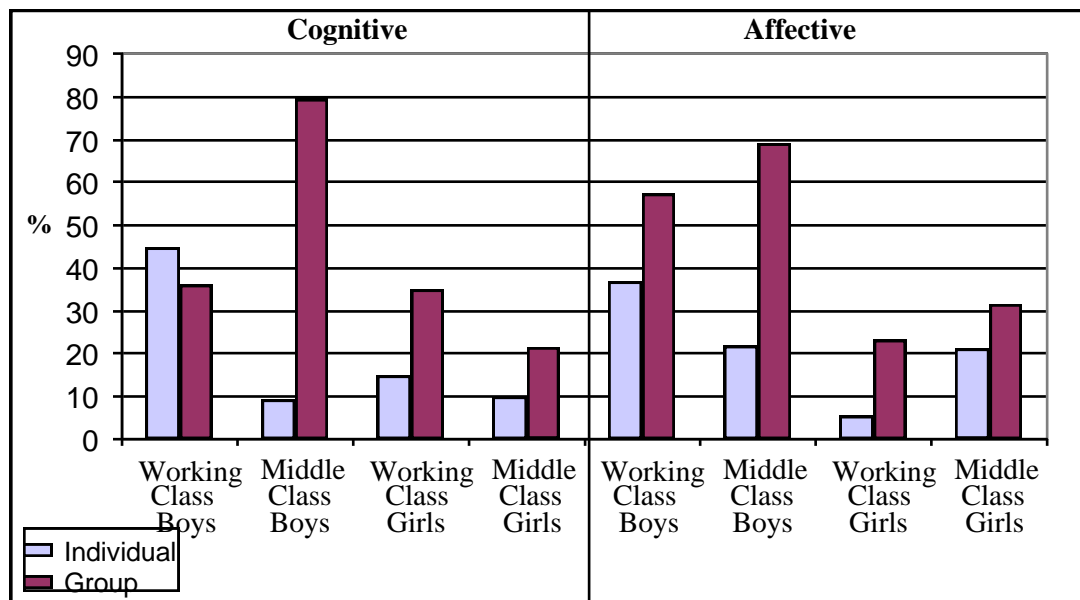


Since there are only four transcripts available, it is impossible to generalise since idiosyncratic factors may be involved. It was striking however that a very clear leader emerged within the middle class boys group (Nicky) who led the hostility towards and cognitive stereotyping of Jimmy, the Traveller, in the

group discussion. His very first comment about Jimmy indicated his disapproval of the Traveller life style: 'It would be better if he stayed in one place'. When asked directly if he would like to live near a Traveller he laughed and said that he would not: 'They might rob you'; and 'They'd be kicking your bins and say the dog done it or something.' Shortly afterwards he said that Jimmy should be the last one to get the house. At this early stage in the group discussion two of the other boys in the group who had previously spoken up for Jimmy twice said that Jimmy should be the last one of those in the vignettes to get the house. Even when reminded of their earlier positions by the facilitator, they simply said 'changed my mind'. Nicky asserted his position of power by repeating his own decision to put Jimmy last and asking: 'Who do you pick?.' Four of the five middle class boys in the group, including both of those who had previously supported Jimmy, then said 'Jimmy last.' Shortly afterwards Nicky took an even more overtly authoritative role in the group ('Don't all talk at the same time. If everyone talks at the same time it won't record').

Thus in the middle class boys group, Nicky's position of dominance was established early on, and his views were influential in the group discussion. In quantitative terms his position was reflected in the number of interventions he made in the group discussion as compared with the other children (72 as compared with an average of 40; the range being from 9-72). The difference in the level of cognitive racist attitudes expressed by the middle class boys at the individual and group level dramatically illustrates the impact of his leadership in this setting (see Fig 5).

**Figure 5: Comparison of cognitive and affective racist attitudes at individual and group level**



Working Class Boys:- Individual: 10, Group: 5      Middle Class Boys:- Individual: 12, Group: 6  
 Working Class Girls:- Individual: 12, Group: 6      Middle Class Girls:- Individual: 12, Group 6

It was striking that in the three other group discussions no clear leader emerged. In the working class group two boys contributed almost equally to the group discussion (average of 24 inputs: range from 10-38). Initially they started from very different positions. Thus, at the start of the group discussion, one of these boys (Danny) said ‘I like Jimmy. I’d like to have him [live near me]’ with the second one (Joe) saying that ‘We don’t like ‘em [Travellers] at all’. Shortly afterwards Danny named a friend ‘who is a knacker’ prompting Joe to say ‘I do be playing with him and if anyone call him a knacker I’ll beat him up’. This suggests that realistic knowledge of a Traveller lifestyle may be negatively associated with the attribution of negative qualities to Travellers - a trend which was supported across the study as a whole (Spearman’s correlation co-efficient: -.5, sig.006). In Dublin, working class children are more likely to have contact with Travellers. The numbers are small but the trends bear out suggestions that opportunities for co-operation challenge stereotypes and reduce racism (Ehrlich, 1973; Brief, 1998). However this appeared only in the male group context and only influenced the cognitive dimension. Thus, arguably because of Danny and Joe’s own experiences with Traveller children the cognitive racism expressed by these working class boys in a group context was lower than their individual expression.

No clear leader emerged in either of the girls’ group discussions. Amongst the middle class girls there was no clear leader although Jane made slightly more interventions than Anne or Sally (46 as

compared with 41 and 38 respectively: average across this group being 29 and the range 9-46). Jane was the first to refer to Travellers- after some initial hesitation- in a negative stereotypical way: 'The only thing I don't like about Travellers.....They are ....you know...dirty'. She was faced with an immediate challenge by Anne to this position ('Not all of them'), and modified her view ('Well, some people'). Shortly afterwards however, it was Anne who expressed such stereotypical views: 'When the children go to school, they can't afford to pay. They have spent it all on drink'. These stereotypical views were also articulated by Sally, the third contender for group leadership: 'Whenever they want money they pretend to hurt themselves..... If the women get money they keep it for themselves. They don't buy something for their child'. The silences in the transcript suggest a degree of unease with the direction of the discussion and/or with what appears to be a competition for leadership amongst these three girls. However, in contrast to the boys' groups, a different discourse then begins to emerge, initially characterised by concern and justice and later by a kind of patronising pity.

*Anne:* 'I suppose its not fair. They've nowhere to go. They should build a few things for them.....'

*Jane:* 'Some Travellers and their parents don't have any jobs , but am, they rob money , they shoplift and things. They don't get any help out I know but its their own fault for doing it , but am they can't help it. Their Mom and Dad have no money.'

*Laura:* They might have no food.

*Jane:* And sometimes their caravan gets burned down.....'

*Sally:* Some people like, they might talk common or dress common, but they are nice'.

At the end of the group discussion the three contenders for leadership chose Katie (the Traveller vignette) as a neighbour; with Jane articulating their feelings of patronising pity: 'I feel sorry for Katie. That is why I picked her.....And you could tell her what's right and wrong.....' Thus one might suggest that the articulation of a kind of moral superiority is an acceptable discourse amongst these middle class girls.

In the working class girls' group no clear leader emerged either and it was much more difficult to keep the discussion focused on the issue than in the other groups. Helen is one of the three children who effectively dominated the group discussion (48 interventions as compared with Lorna's 31 and Liz with 28: the average being 22; range 6-48). In contrast to the middle class boys' group Helen was unsuccessful in getting her leadership accepted. She had a stereotypical view of Travellers: 'You can

get anything off them. You can get nits off them'. It is clear from the other girls response (giggles and 'I'm telling the teacher') that this is not a socially acceptable view in their classroom. However it is one that is very clearly repeated by Helen: 'They're very dangerous, cause they might rape you or anything'. However as in the middle class girls group, negative stereotyping of Travellers competes with concern. Thus, right at the start in the working class girls' group discussion Lorna, one of the contenders for group leadership says that: 'No matter what she [Katie- the Traveller child] is, she is still a person, even if she is a Traveller.' Later on she says: ' They are not monsters or anything that you can hate them or something. A Traveller is good to play with cause you can learn things about them'. Liz, the third contender for leadership endorses a similar view: 'like we are all the same.' As in the working class boys group, she mentions that she knows one and 'she is all right.' Nevertheless, negative cognitive references continue to occur in the discussion ('They're dangerous, they do things for food'; 'If you say you have no bread around you they'd hit you or something'). However a more compassionate tone also emerges: with Lorna saying that ' Some people say they [Travellers] want a beating but that's mean. I wouldn't mind playing with them; 'Its not fair us having food and leaving the gypsies going to the dumps and looking for food because they will get rubbish food'. Faced with both Lorna and Liz's tenacity in insisting that 'I think that we should help the gypsies more', Helen who has consistently expressed negative stereotypical views capitulates at the end of the discussion saying: 'I think we should help them cause it is not fair on gypsies'-reflecting a similar kind of patronizing pity to that which emerges amongst the middle class girls. This kind of pattern is very different to that which emerges in the boys' group discussions.

One might suggest that in our particular social and cultural context girls are comfortable with a discourse of pity: 'I feel sorry for them because they have no clean clothes, just smelly clothes, and not that nice houses' ( middle class girl); 'I'd give them food and money' (working class girl). This can be seen as reflecting a kind of compassion, but one which simultaneously asserts a degree of moral superiority. In the girls' group discussions it was associated with an unwillingness to accept a leader. This is compatible with Connell's (1995) view that the kind of domination that is acceptable in male contexts is more muted in female ones (not least because the whole construction of femininity is in a context of male hegemony). This would certainly help one to make sense both of the leadership

struggles in the girls' groups as well as the importance of a kind of moral superiority towards Travellers. Such attitudes, disguised as pity or compassion, are compatible with the dominant conception of femininity that focuses on caring, service etc (O'Connor, 1998). This discourse of femininity legitimates the group expression of patronizing pity in a way that a discourse of masculinity does not do. However, such attitudes, although ostensibly less noxious than racism are ultimately not however any more respectful of Travellers and their life style.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research into 9-11 year old children's racist attitudes to Travellers has differentiated between cognitive, affective and behaviour dimensions, and has explored these in their individual written statements and drawings, as well as in the content of their taped group discussions. The results demonstrate the existence of racist attitudes towards Travellers (at cognitive, affective and behavioural levels) amongst the children in this study -thus suggesting the need for a three-pronged approach to tackle such racism.

The numbers are small and hence any conclusions are extremely tentative. This caveat is even more important since quite a complex picture emerged as regards the relationship between racist attitudes, gender and social class. In this small study working class boys expressed the highest proportion of negative cognitive and affective racist attitudes in their individual written statements and drawings. However, in the group discussion context, it was the middle class boys who expressed the most negative cognitive stereotypes and behaviours. It is not clear to what extent this simply reflected the strong leadership exerted within that group. However there was some suggestion that the negative cognitive stereotypes expressed by the working class boys in an individual context were modified in the group context: a context where one of the leadership contenders drew on his own experiences of Travellers to challenge the others' cognitive stereotyping of them. This raises interesting questions about the conditions which are associated with the emergence of a strong leader; about middle class boys' needs for group acceptance and leadership; about the impact of the leader on group behaviour; and the extent to which stereotyping can be offset by actual contact with travellers. Overall, the proportion of negative affective dispositions expressed in the group context was larger amongst the

boys than girls; with the boys being less willing than the girls to have a Traveller living next door. The interaction between boys during the group discussions suggests that change in racist attitudes amongst them will only occur if such group phenomena are tackled.

In looking more closely at the girls' group transcripts it was striking that attempts to establish leadership in these groups were unsuccessful: so that the impact of the group context was less obvious amongst them. It was also striking that a kind of patronising pity was much more likely to occur amongst them than amongst the boys. One might suggest that this reflected a kind of compassion, but one which simultaneously asserted a degree of moral superiority towards Travellers. It can be seen as less noxious than racism, but it is ultimately not any more respectful of Travellers and their life style. It is of course not possible to generalise from this study since it is based on a sample of 9-11 year old children in fourth class within two single sex middle class and two working class schools in Dublin. However, it does provide an interesting insight into the extent and nature of racist attitudes amongst such children.

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**Brief Biographical note**

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