The (In)visibilisation of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in

Higher Education Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Initiatives

in England and Wales

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Contributions

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Abstract

Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers are under-represented as students in higher education in England and Wales. Moreover, the communities rarely feature in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategies and practices including race equality initiatives. Drawing upon the reflections and experiences of 14 equality, diversity, and inclusion staff across 11 universities (7 post-1992 and 4 pre-1992) in England and Wales we explore the technologies through which Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers are made (in)visible in university EDI discursive spaces. Interview participants included Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller academics; subject librarians; Deans of EDI; Widening Participation Managers; Inclusion and Equality Advisors and Managers, and Researchers and Leads on Race Equality Charters and Decolonising the Curriculum. Through inductively analysing our findings, we suggest that the normalisation of neoliberalism across the higher education academy in England and Wales has resulted in Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers being constructed as 'irregular' in higher education EDI discourse. We demonstrate how neoliberal-informed discursive rules, acting as 'systems of exclusion', control what is seen as a legitimate concern, and support higher education institutions to intentionally 'look through' inequality issues affecting the communities. Informational difficulties, institutional focus on 'value for money' and numbers of students which prioritise the market-driven 'business case' over social justice, act as technologies of invisibilisation, positioning these diverse communities as not being 'within the true' in relation to institutional neoliberal discourses and 'regimes of truth'. This culminates in 'institutional inertia' and neglect towards EDI issues, further contributing to the under-representation of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in higher education.

Keywords: Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers; Higher Education; (In)visibility; Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion; England and Wales.

Introduction

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities in the United Kingdom (UK) are under-represented in higher education (HE) (Greenfields, 2019; ONS, 2023). Evidence of inequalities is apparent in England including potential awarding gaps and low undergraduate continuation rates (Office for Students, 2023a) with many students feeling 'outsiders' in HE spaces (Morgan et al, 2023). This is often compounded by experiences of antiGypsyism and antiRoma racism (Forster and Gallagher, 2020; Greenfields et. al., 2022). There are numerous explanations for the under-representation of these diverse communities in HE, including; limited policy focus and institutional response; previous experiences of schooling and a higher likelihood of inconsistencies in attendance and outcomes; the importance given, within the communities, to family-based vocational work, and; fears about HE including debt, potential racism, and the possibility that participation in HE may lead to assimilation and loss of culture (Mulcahy et al., 2017; ONS, 2022; Brassington, 2022).

(In)visibilisation of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in Higher Education

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities are often invisible within university spaces, discursive practices, and initiatives (Morgan et al., 2023; Danvers and Hinton-Smith, 2024) including university anti-racism policies, Race Equality Charters (Morgan and Stubbs, 2024) and access and participation plans (Atherton, 2020; Forster et al., 2022). This lack of recognition is despite the Office for Students in England identifying the communities as having a decreased 'equality of opportunity' in HE (Office for Students, 2023b) and initiatives such as the Gypsy, Traveller, Roma, Showmen and Boater (GTRSB) into Higher Education Pledge (Buckinghamshire New University, n.d).

Forster et al., (2022) in their analysis of access and participation plans in England highlight several narratives concerning the communities. These include universities not having enough

data on or knowledge about the communities, perceptions of few Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in HE, the perspective that inclusion of these communities in access and participation plans is optional, and ambiguity about how to record Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers (for example, under minoritised ethnic categories or in 'other groups who face barriers'). They conclude that 'dominant narratives ….of GTRSB higher education participation as an atypical event, are reflected in, and potentially reproduced through the relative absence of these groups in higher education access and participation plans' (Forster et al., 2022:25). The invisibility of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is also apparent within Race Equality Charter (REC) applications with ethnically minoritised Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers included in aggregated white ethnicity data categories (Morgan and Stubbs, 2024). The conflating of these communities with the white majority not only renders invisible their lived experiences of being a 'protected' ethnic group who face substantial inequality and racism but potentially reinforces inequality through exclusion from university anti-racist policies and initiatives focused on awarding gaps, decolonising the curriculum and differential continuation rates and experiences.

Whilst a lack of representation initially appears 'accidental', Honneth's theory of recognition posits that social invisibility is 'intentional', 'an active way…of looking through someone' and may be attributed to a lack of value being placed upon those made invisible (2001:112). For Honneth (2001:112), invisibility is not a physical non-presence but relates to ascribed 'social meaninglessness' and is performative behaviour on the part of those who make others invisible. To be made socially invisible and thus positioned as intrinsically of less value amounts, for Honneth, to a moral injustice. Similarly, the concept of 'anopticism' defined as the 'power exercised in making populations invisible' (Dale, 2019: 596), illustrates how

power can be exercised by dominant groups to render invisible those groups not fitting within the norm.

Invisibility, however, may also be utilised, by individuals and groups themselves, as a form of resistance (Dale, 2019; Alloa, 2023), with increased visibility not necessarily corresponding to increased empowerment or positive recognition. Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers, therefore, may be 'invisible' within HE spaces and discourses through a process of self-invisibilisation by not disclosing their ethnicity or identity whilst at university or through the playing-down of cultural markers (Clark, 2004; Danvers and Hinton-Smith, 2024). Non-sharing of ethnicity and identity, referred to as 'passing' or 'playing white' (Derrington, 2007), can be seen as a response to stigmatising unequal power ratios (Elias and Scotson, 1994) and oppressive controlling images (Collins, 1990) which position Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers as stigmatised others and outsiders to established hegemonic whiteness (ECRI, 2011; Bhopal, 2018; Matache et al., 2020). This is, of course, subject to context with self-invisibilisation evident in some situations but not others, and decisions potentially based on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of disclosing ethnicity.

Governing Social Justice within the Neoliberal University

Over the past decades, the HE policy landscape in England and Wales has increasingly been influenced by both neoliberal market-driven rationalities and technologies of New Public Management (Brown and Carasso, 2013; Ball, 2015) with the latter focusing upon efficiency, cost containment, and performance indicators (Hood, 1991). This has had a significant impact on HE due to various internal and external pressures. For example, the introduction of tuition fees and the 'rolling back' of State funding (Brown and Carasso, 2013) has meant that a 'students as consumers' marketised model has been created (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005; Tomlinson, 2017). Similarly, an emphasis on audit culture and university league tables

(Peters, 2017; Bowl, 2018), as well as the prioritising of efficiency and value for money (Johnes et al., 2017), has increased competition between HE providers (Musselin, 2018) and promoted the generation of new markets (Brown and Carasso, 2013). Such conditions, including trying to secure income from international students (De Vita and Case, 2003) and promoting transnational education (Office for Students, 2023c), has given rise to a primacy given to quantitative data (Ozga, 2008) with 'statistics [being] "proof"
 of the fact that something is "worthwhile"' (Maisuria and Cole, 2017:605).

Neoliberalism has been identified as a dominant form of contemporary governance (Larner, 2000; Giroux, 2008) that constructs neoliberal subjectivities and normalises free-market rationality, individualisation, and commodification in public life. This normalisation can result in the constraining of 'other democratic rationalities' such as equality and social justice (Brown, 2006: 693-694), and may even be incompatible with democratic principles (Klein, 2007). Fraser (2019) argues that the adaptive nature of neoliberialism means social justice discourses can be co-opted within a form of 'progressive neoliberalism', which combines market-informed discourses with progressive interests and a focus on the recognition of minoritised groups. Therefore, social justice discourses which emphasise the importance of tackling inequalities in HE can exist alongside HE neoliberal projects. In the UK initiatives based on social justice and democratic imperatives, including charters such as Athena Swan and REC, can simultaneously be subject to neoliberal governance.   Henderson and Bhopal (2022), for example, show how there was low institutional take up of Athena Swan until it was associated with the allocation of research funding.

Moreover, alongside the focus on marketisation is a 'closely linked social justice argument for expansion of HE supply and demand' (McCaig and Squire, 2022:1) with the 'economic

imperative [becoming] the embodiment of social justice' (Mavelli, 2013: 864). The structuring of social justice initiatives in 'economic–instrumental terms' (Wilkins and Burke, 2015:437) can result in depoliticised and superficially egalitarian practices, with social justice language (i.e. 'diversity', 'inclusion' and 'equality') utilised not necessarily because of a commitment to authentic progressive reform or traditional notions of equality of opportunity ('education as a public good'), but because it makes good business sense enhancing institutional reputations in a competitive HE landscape (Bowl, 2018; Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020).

The dominance of the neoliberal project across HE has implications, therefore, for discourses of social justice and can result in institutional 'retreat from widening participation' (McCaig, 2016) especially for groups who are perceived as requiring significant institutional resourcing to support participation. Consequently, widening participation initiatives can increase inequality by restricting entry to those who are deemed as 'deserving of intervention…. shaped by institutional understandings of the ideal type of student' (Rainford, 2016:49; McCaig, 2016) with Harrison and Waller (2017:157) identifying a 'blurring of the lines between access...and recruitment activity'. Although there is differentiation across HE institutions, and whilst restrictions of entry may be especially the case for pre-1992 universities, changes within widening participation discourses are evident (McCaig, 2018) within post-1992 institutions with McCaig (2015: 20) suggesting that these changes 'threaten the notion of widening participation and diversity of provision and of students'.

Moreover, neoliberal regimes of truth, like all regimes of truth, operate as 'systems of exclusion' (Foucault 1970/1981) which can control and discipline social justice endeavours by limiting the types of statements or issues which can be raised, constraining those which do

not conform to the prevailing logic of neoliberalism or the business case. 'Discursive policing' of social justice discourses, therefore, along with technologies of invisibilisaton (Beihl, 2005) and irregularisation (van Baar, 2021) can result in university EDI initiatives being governed by neoliberal discursive rules which 'block' social justice discourses (Ahmed, 2012) if they do not fall within the discursive 'true' of neoliberal marketised rationality.

In addition, institutional 'commitment' to social justice can be illusory with inequality maintained through technologies of power such as 'institutional inertia', institutional neglect and non-performative 'speech-acts' (Ahmed, 2012). These 'speech-acts' are non-performative (Austin, 1962; Butler, 1993) because they name but do not 'bring into effect' what they name (for example, equality) but are 'taken up as if they are performatives' (Ahmed, 2012:117). At the same time, 'commitment' to social justice, for example diversity and racial equality, is often hyper-visible implying to the outside world through policies, discourses, charters and the visibility of staff and students who represent diversity that the university is acting upon social justice issues (Bhopal, 2023), a form of 'racial gesture politics' (Rollock, 2018:325). Of key importance to understanding HE commitment to social justice is 'who does the work', with a wide range of research, in the field of diversity and antiracism, indicating that this mainly falls on the shoulders of racially and ethnically minoritised staff (Mirza, 2006; Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020) with staff being under-resourced and having little power as 'agents of change' without senior management backing (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020; Bhopal, 2023).

Neoliberal discursive practices have important ramifications for the inclusion of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in HE social justice strategies. In this paper, we explore the inclusion of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in EDI initiatives within a marketised HE landscape in

England and Wales, and the technologies through which they are made (in)visible within HE EDI discursive practices.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative interviews were chosen to facilitate in-depth understanding of participants' reflections on and experiences of the inclusion of Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers in EDI discursive strategic practices within their universities.

Participants

An email invitation to take part in an interview was sent to 89 university EDI email addresses across England and Wales. Only those universities with a dedicated EDI email were included (n=89 universities). Out of the 89 universities, 11 responded and 14 participants agreed to take part in an interview. The 11 universities included 7 Post-1992 universities, 1 Plate Glass university, 1 Red Brick university and 2 Russell Group universities. One of the participating universities was in Wales, while the other 10 represented all regions of England.   Three universities were signatories to the GTRSB Pledge. The participants' job roles included academics, two of whom were from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller backgrounds; subject librarians; Deans of EDI; Widening Participation Managers; Inclusion and Equality Advisors and Managers; Researchers and Leads on Race Equality Charters, and; Researchers and Leads on Decolonising the Curriculum. Nine participants had managerial responsibility for EDI across the university. Whilst only a relatively small number of EDI departments contacted took part in the research, this in itself suggests a lack of priority given to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers within universities in England and Wales. Those who did participate

stated that they did so to find out more about the communities or were themselves community members.

Data Collection

Qualitative interviews were carried out on-line through Microsoft Teams and recorded. Dialogic interviews were used to aid reflection on the topic under consideration (Tanggaard, 2009) and support critical exploration. These were loosely structured with an initial question at the beginning of the interview, 'please tell me about the EDI initiatives in your university', setting the scene. The interviewer then followed the narratives of the participants using probes such as 'why is that' to support reflection and reflexivity. The interview continued by focusing specifically on Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers and their positioning and inclusion in EDI discursive spaces and initiatives.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted by the first author and recorded using the transcription facility in Microsoft Teams. Reflexive thematic analysis of the transcribed texts was undertaken to identify patterns across the data as outlined by Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phase model of thematic analysis. The first two authors read the transcriptions multiple times to get an overall feel for the narratives, codes were then generated inductively, by hand, through a process of iterative initial open-coding of each line of the interviews. This was followed by focused coding, whereby we combined initial codes to make analytical sense. The texts were then reanalysed in relation to these focused codes. The authors discussed and negotiated the coding of the interviews throughout the analysis with five themes identified across texts.

Ethics

Ethical approval was obtained from the first author's university (UREB/ 23.1.6.i.h). Respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time and

withdraw their data. Ethical concerns were focused on anonymity and respondents were assured that no identifying data would be used in the final paper.

Results

Five themes were identified across all interviews and are discussed below with illustrative quotes. Minor changes were made, where necessary, to quotes and job titles to maintain anonymity. In the quotes below the following abbreviations are used: WPM (Widening Participation Manager), EA (Equality Adviser), EM (Equality Manager), Academic Community Member (ACM), Decolonising Lead (DL), Race Equality Charter Lead (RECL), Inclusion Advisor (IA), Academic Non-Community Member (ANCM), EDI Dean (EDID), Race Inequality Lead (RIL).

University Strategic Focus: Institutional Inertia and Discursive Exclusion

Almost all participants identified little to no strategic focus on Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) communities within their universities with the communities described as 'conspicuous by their absence' (WPM) or 'not on the radar' (EA) in EDI planning and discursive structures. Whilst a few stated that the HE experiences of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers had been raised as part of discussions around access and participation plans or were 'a work in progress' (EA), many also stated that this had not materialised into action with one participant stating, 'there is no initiative or agenda, and nothing is being done' (EM):

> There are no dedicated projects with GRT communities and there's some schools with high enrolment in our area but if it is not seen as being part of your institution's mission and vision then you are left out. Strategic plans talk about being empowering but it is not true empowerment, it is empowerment on their terms. They choose who to empower and who to leave out. It is not a level playing field…it is highly hierarchical and highly privileged (WPM).

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The idea of 'empowerment on their terms' and choosing 'who to empower' through inclusion in EDI strategy could be seen as indicative of a 'retreat from widening participation' (McCaig, 2016) for groups who do not fit within university strategic vision and the types of students targeted.

For the few universities who had shown their 'commitment' to the GTRSB Pledge, participants noted that often the signing of the Pledge becomes 'stuck' at Senior Manager level with little progress being made (Ahmed, 2012). Moreover, it was noted that if senior managers were not engaged with the issue, then participants were 'fobbed off' (ACM) or discussions were 'stalled' (EM):

> I have been given strange answers why they will not focus upon it. Their responses were very wishy-washy and vague. It was like someone was being very clever about not engaging. Sadly, I think in academia these communities have no value (ANCM).

> There is a lot of ignorance about GRT communities including amongst senior management and this leads to them being ignored because they are not seen as relevant. You raise the conversation, but the doors shut pretty quick….they move on very quickly if they don't like the topic (EA).

This was also the case in relation to access and participation plans with one participant stating that although Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers were mentioned as a group in the university plan 'there is no strategy about this… nothing is done, it is a tick-box exercise' (EM).   This apparent 'blocking' of discussions around Gypsies, Roma and Travellers was attributed to a lack of understanding of the communities; the communities being seen as 'not relevant' (WPM) or of 'little value' (EDID) to institutional strategic goals; aspirations of senior managers for their university to be seen as a high tariff university with 'GRT students not being seen as high tariff enough' (EM), and; little interest in widening participation amongst

senior managers with 'senior management paying lip service' (WPM) because of Office for Students regulatory requirements.

Institutional inertia was, therefore, apparent and acted as a technology of invisibilisation (Biehl, 2005), resulting in EDI initiatives for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers frequently becoming 'stuck', discussions 'blocked' and power exercised to control, resist, and exclude narratives which did not fit within university neoliberal regimes of truth.

Lack of Data and Institutional Neglect

Many respondents identified data issues as contributing to a lack of strategic focus on social justice for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers within their universities. The 'data-driven' focus of university strategic planning was highlighted coupled with little statistical data on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers resulting in the communities 'not being seen as a priority' (EDID).

The issue of students not disclosing their ethnicity within the university was raised and identified, by some, as a possible contributing factor to a lack of data. However, participants situated this discussion within the context of barriers to disclosing ethnicity which included community members feeling unsafe within university spaces, not trusting the institution, and a lack of opportunity to have their voices heard:

> The issue is the data, if you have no data on a group then no issues can be identified. The data leads strategy as it does everywhere. But there is a risk of information becoming decontextualised, which is a problem for these communities, and it can be blamed on groups well you didn't identify so there is no data, without understanding why they don't identify. With GRT if you don't feel like these institutions are safe spaces for you to put your hand up and say I am here, you're not going to because the trust isn't there. The issue is if no one is identifying then [senior managers] can ignore any issues…but why are they not identifying? (DL).

Students from the communities are not given a platform to talk. The university will say we didn't hear you. You weren't heard. You weren't seen, as though it is their fault, but the university didn't make any spaces available for them to speak or to be heard (EM).

The prioritising of statistical data across the participants' universities resulted in groups without such data being rendered invisible, with statistical data driving social justice initiatives and being 'proof….that something [is] worthwhile' (Maisuria and Cole, 2017:605). Institutional neglect compounded the issue, in many instances, with little strategic attention paid to understanding and supporting disclosure of ethnicity or 'understand[ing] the size of the GRT community both within the university or in [the] local communities' (WPM). Other participants spoke about how there was a perception that Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers were 'not a big category' (EM) in both the local area and within the university. However, this was viewed as contradictory, by some, given the lack of data, with a participant stating, 'the university has not done the work on GRT communities in the first place so how do they know' (IA).

Financial 'Bottom Line': The Primacy of Discourse related to Business Case

A tension between neoliberal discourses which manifested in discussions about the business case and those related to social justice was identified. This tended to result in EDI university strategy focusing on groups with larger numbers and groups who were perceived as requiring little resourcing to support their participation into HE:

I think there's a tension between social justice and bums on seats……we focus on the majority rather than minority because the minority require a lot of work and a lot of effort. The university is about the numbers on programmes not necessarily who these individuals are (EM).

Institutions were viewed as reluctant to 'devote resources to small groups' (EDID), with 'Gypsy, Roma and Travellers not being seen as important because of small numbers' (WPM). However, contradictions within university rhetoric were highlighted with 'other groups with low numbers being prioritised in university strategy but not GRT' (EM). These smaller groups could include care-experienced students who may be more likely to be positioned, within dominant narratives, as more 'deserving'. Moreover, one participant stated that in their university area Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were the largest minoritised ethnic group and this made little difference to strategic focus. Stereotypes and unconscious bias about the communities were highlighted by some participants as a potential factor explaining the lack of priority given to them:

> Lack of knowledge about GRT communities means that senior management think why put all this effort into this group who don't even care about education…put it elsewhere. Look at other marginalised groups who do care about education, ones with bigger demographics where there will be more of a measurable outcome (EM).

Many participants, however, 'wanted to do work with GRT communities' (EM) but 'less work is done on GRT even in widening participation' because university senior managers 'decide what is important and that goes to the top of your list' (WPM). Moreover, the focus on 'numbers of students' and 'lack of return for resources expended' (EDID) was resisted by many participants who highlighted how this was in opposition to social justice and widening participation initiatives:

> The focus is proportionate to the population of the community that we serve….although there is a community of GRT people in the area, it is not a high proportion and if it was then maybe the university would focus upon it. But this is wrong as it is about widening participation initiatives (EM).

The financial 'bottom' line, therefore, was emphasised as key to strategic thinking, which directly impacted EDI initiatives, with some participants stating there was a perception amongst university senior management that a focus on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers would not 'bring much benefit' (EM) or 'added value' (EDID) to the university. It was emphasised by participants that with the senior management team 'if you don't talk to the bottom line, they're not talking and they're not listening' (EM) and that to 'get them to listen, you need to speak [about social justice in terms of] the money language' (RECL). 'Discursive policing' of what could be spoken about and how it could be spoken about were, therefore, evident. This was seen as being problematic, especially in relation to EDI, with participants stating:

> Talking about the business case is the wrong question. You are just using 'the masters tools' essentially (EM).

> People who work at universities think that universities and education is a moral good. But in reality, universities are a business and therefore you can push GRT people to the side because if you work in a world in which you don't like anything with resource implications then you can decide that some things are not worth it. They are not important because of the time and resources that are needed (ACM).

Invisibility within Race Equality

Some participants reported a lack of focus on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in race equality initiatives. This was attributed, in part, to data collection processes, for example Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which compares a single BAME category (defined as Black, Asian, Chinese, Dual/Mixed heritage, or Other "non-white") with a single white category which includes those who identify as Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller. This was seen as problematic given the ethnically minoritised status of these groups, leading to their invisibilisation within race equality measures:

It is the HESA categories that are used. GRT are reported under the white umbrella. You know this white category is so problematic, having GRT under the white category which is then compared with BAME …. And I am wondering is this political in some way…not wanting to allocate funding (RECL).

Other participants stated that their university focus, in relation to antiracism and race equality, tended to be on 'visibly racially minioritised people' (RECL) which resulted in ethnically minoritised groups such as Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers 'being forgotten about' (EM). The focus on race as 'colour-coded' was attributed, by some participants, to a lack of understanding about racialisation amongst senior managers and by others to universities wanting to be 'seen to be doing something about race and ethnicity with allocating resources to white Gypsies, Roma and Travellers not having the same kudos or publicity as allocating resources to those who are more visually racialised' (RIL). Interestingly some participants highlighted that not focusing upon Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in race equality work was strategic to avoid talking about whiteness. By not focusing on ostensibly white groups such as Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, these participants suggested that whiteness, the 'location of [unearned] structural advantage', remained normative and 'unnamed' (Frankenberg, 1993:1):

GRT are white….there is something underhand going on here and I think the reason why it is not of interest is because whiteness [The Higher Education Academy] has decided that it is not an issue for them. Universities don't want to talk about whiteness, and they don't allow the conversation to be had, so one way to not talk about whiteness in race equality is don't talk about GRT (RECL).

It was also evident from some narratives that the legally recognised ethnic minority status of racially minoritised Gypsies, Roma and Travellers was questioned, with some EDI staff and

senior managers believing, incorrectly, that 'Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are not an ethnic minority and should not be included in race equality initiatives' (EM):

> It is about establishing whether you think GRT communities are racially minoritised groups – I think they are, but many don't. If you don't think they are racially minoritised then you may not include them. They have all the same sorts of stereotypes and narratives as other racialised groups. But people only see skin colour rather than the history of the group of people and their heritage and the impact of power, the power to racialise, categorise, oppress and control (EM).

Within HE discussions about racial equality, therefore, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers were positioned as outsiders to anti-racist initiatives and discursive structures. Technologies of invisibilisation such as data collection methods which placed Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in the white ethnicity group, and narratives of the communities 'not being [real] ethnic minorities', supported their absence in race equality measures. This potentially contributed to racism towards these groups being ignored and to students not feeling safe within university spaces, which conceivably impacted on the likelihood of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers disclosing their identity. Moreover, it made invisible any differences in continuation rates, student experiences and awarding gaps.

Individualisation of Social Justice Work

Institutional inertia and neglect pertaining to social justice in HE for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers often necessitated staff and students from or with an interest in the communities being or feeling responsible for raising the visibility of the communities and 'pushing forward' (EM) EDI initiatives. This resulted in the individualisation of social justice work rather than it being the collective responsibility of HE institutions:

> You were forwarded to me, so I'm the go to person on GRT issues because of my interest in the communities, so no one else was copied into that email….that's quite telling. This is a university with 2000 employees and there is just one person that focuses on the communities (ANCM).

> It was the student ambassador (community member) who was raising the issue. If he didn't push it, I am not sure there would be any conversation at all about GRT (DL).

Participants expressed reservations about this and stated that 'it shouldn't be the responsibility of students or individual members of staff to do this [social justice] work' (EM) and that students/staff 'should not have to come forward to voice their marginalisation' (RECL). However, other participants highlighted the importance of student voice within current university practices with responsiveness to student voice seen, by HE institutions, as making 'good business sense' (EM). The focus on student voice leading social justice initiatives, of course, can be problematic if students from the communities do not feel the university is a 'safe space' to disclose their ethnicity.   Additionally, leading social justice initiatives can be experienced as stressful (Clark, 2017). Moreover, an over-reliance on students can lead to social justice being overlooked if students including the Students' Union, as non-community members, are 'unaware or not interested in the issue' (EDID).

In addition, the individualisation of social justice work for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers resulted in this often being undertaken in the individual's own time and not part of a recognised institutional role. Some participants believed this to be strategic, enabling institutions to be seen to be doing 'something about the issue but at the same time not committing resources to it….they can say we are working on the Pledge if asked but the person is doing it in their own time' (RECL). Lived experience was felt by some participants

to be key in EDI work, however, participants also highlighted the 'emotional labour' for 'those with lived experience' (RECL) especially when they were the 'only voice' (ACM):

> The person who is pushing it through at my university is from the community. It is more powerful because you have lived experience. However, it is enormous emotional labour. I have felt this as a person of colour….there is a pressure on you because you look a certain way that all the work is then dumped on you because apparently you will be able to solve it. It becomes your responsibility to sort out (EM).

Moreover, some participants stated that if they were no longer at the university then any focus on social justice for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers 'would be lost as there would be no one else to take it forward' (ACM). This was exacerbated by a perceived lack of allies within the university, with staff reporting feeling 'overwhelmed' (EM) by the 'lack of support' (ANCM):

> Thinking about my university nothing would get done about GRT if I hadn't done it. It is me that started it and me that's pushing it. I had to put my head above the parapet. The major issue I have is that I don't have any allies. And it's exhausting… I can't sit in every meeting. We expect GRT to represent GRT in universities, without support behind them….it should be the whole organisation doing this, not just specific people. With GRT it comes down to just me, they had no back up plan if I said no to sitting on these committees and if I left there would be no one to replace me (ACM).

> No one speaks for the GRT community. Who would put themselves forward to do this as it is so emotionally exhausting. We need to try and fathom out why people aren't allies. It just doesn't seem to compute that this is about social justice. The issue is if no one is supporting GRT from the university or coming forward from the community, then there is no voice (EDID).

The individualisation of social justice work, therefore, often functioned as a smokescreen giving the impression of institutional 'commitment' to supporting equality for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers. Moreover, it was also indicative of a lack of value being placed on social justice work for the communities, seemingly not important enough for collective institutional support. As a result, if individual staff or students did not make themselves visible or couldn't attend meetings there was 'no voice'.

Discussion

Although universities across England and Wales have social justice remits for increasing access and participation (Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, 2021; Office for Students 2023d) and acting upon inequality (Equality Act, 2010), the normalisation of neoliberalism across the HE landscape (Maisuria and Cole, 2017) can result in social justice discourses being governed by neoliberal and New Public Management rationality (Mavelli, 2014). This may have consequences for social justice measures with the progressive intentions of EDI staff potentially being 'policed' by neoliberal economic discursive practices and EDI measures evaluated according to their contributions to the business case and the financial bottom line (Ahmed, 2012). Social justice, therefore, can be undermined by depoliticised economic imperatives for EDI which maintain inequalities by glossing over unequal power relationships and structural barriers which impede equity (Archer, 2007; Noon, 2007; Bhopal, 2023).

This paper contributes to discussions around the positioning of social justice initiatives in 'economic–instrumental terms' (Wilkins and Burke, 2015:437) and shows that Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers were generally invisible within the EDI discursive practices and initiatives of the interviewees' universities. This invisibility was the case, in our sample, for both pre- and post-1992 institutions with little differentiation apparent between types of

institutions, and between the three universities which had signed the GTRSB Pledge and those who had not. Participants highlighted how institutional market-based logic which prioritises economic utility results in discussions about the communities often being 'blocked', with social justice initiatives for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers typically positioned as not falling 'within the true' of HE neoliberal projects. Technologies of power such as institutional inertia and neglect (Ahmed, 2012) frequently lead to the individualisation of social justice work with staff and students, mainly from the communities themselves, having to self-identify and do the work in their own time. Neoliberal and New Public Management technologies of invisibilisation such as the focus on quantitative data, including the 'desire to measure the measurable' (Harrison and Waller, 2017: 157) and narratives around 'small numbers' and 'the amount of resources needed for little return', constructed the communities as having 'little value' in relation to the business case. This was reinforced by a lack of student voice in raising inequality issues related to the communities. These 'systems of exclusion' allow universities to intentionally 'look through' inequality issues. Moreover, 'systems of exclusion' such as the categorisation of these communities in the white ethnicity group in HESA data compounds the issues and supports their invisibility as not 'within the true' in the discursive field of race equality and anti-racism (Morgan and Stubbs, 2024). Thus, Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers tend to be constructed as 'irregular' within neoliberal-governed university EDI strategy leading to a lack of recognition within EDI discursive structures and practices, potentially contributing to the communities' under-representation as students in HE (Forster et al., 2022). Moreover, technologies of invisibilisation render it difficult for EDI staff to resist neoliberal discourses. Though participants highlighted utilising both student voice and 'the language of money' to push through social justice measures in the past for other groups, this was seen as more

problematic for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers due to a lack of student voice, including from students' unions, as well as difficulties in quantifying these communities and low numbers.

To overcome institutional reluctance to engage authentically with the social justice remits of EDI, initiatives such as the REC need to be mandatory (Bhopal, 2023) and Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers must be included in access and participation plans (Forster et al., 2022) as well as the REC. It is significant that the GTRSB Pledge does not come under the auspices of AdvanceHE who are responsible for the REC, instead being introduced by community members and allies of the communities. This may be reflective of a general apathy and lack of commitment in relation to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller inclusion across the HE academy.

Similarly, it has been argued that 'self-regulation cannot be depended upon to deliver equality and social justice to marginalised groups' (John, 2005:597) with universities needing to be 'prodded' to initiate social justice measures (Pilkington, 2013). Recent changes by the Office for Students to access and participation plans in England including the introduction of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register and Office for Students guidance, which explicitly names the communities as under-represented groups in HE, may be such a 'prod'. However, the emphasis on the universities themselves identifying groups who may experience risks to equality of opportunity is somewhat problematic, and increased scrutiny of those access and participation plans which do not mention Gypsies, Roma and Travellers may need to be undertaken by the Office of Students. In addition, attention needs to be paid to the quality and implementation of initiatives that are outlined in access and participation plans to ensure they are more than just 'tick-box exercises'. Moreover, naming groups within access and participation plans is not enough, as this study has shown, and a concerted effort is needed on the part of HE institutions to recognise how far their procedures and actions (including lack of action) maintain anoptic practices and thus inequalities.

Institutional attention, therefore, needs to be directed towards increasing long-term positive engagement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and organisations to develop relationships of trust and understand community perspectives on HE. This should not be the sole responsibility of individual community members but the collective responsibility of universities. Our paper had shown the possible limits of the 'one dedicated staff member' model that so many HE institutions rely on. Increased recognition of the communities within the discursive practices of universities is essential, including an appreciation of the constraints of current HESA data collection methods. Disaggregation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller data from the white ethnicity group is key as well as a greater understanding of the diversity of the communities and their intersectional identities which are often obscured in terminology such as 'GRT' or 'GTRSB' (Forster et al., 2022; Morgan and Stubbs, 2024). Without disaggregation of data, Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers will continue to be invisible within race equality initiatives including strategy for decolonising the curriculum, awarding gaps, and anti-racist work. In addition, quantitative data should be supplemented with qualitative data (Forster et al., 2022) to enable thick descriptions of lived experiences and the production of counter-narratives that challenge deficit discourses.

Further research to understand the perspectives of senior management teams across universities on the inclusion in EDI initiatives of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers is needed. This research could also explore the perspectives of EDI staff in Scotland and Northern Ireland to understand differences across the devolved nations. Research on the role of the Students' Union in raising awareness of social justice matters for the communities would also be insightful, as would research exploring how Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are included in EDI initiatives in universities which have signed the GTRSB Pledge. Recent changes by the Office of Students in England, and the impact on future access and participation plans, would also be worth studying.

Finally, whilst the context of this paper is specific to England and Wales and to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, an exploration of how these groups are included in EDI initiatives may have relevance for global contexts, for example Roma in Europe and other regions.

Moreover, this paper may contribute to discussions of how the perpetuation of whiteness and the normalisation of neoliberalism, which often go hand in hand in Western universities, may lead to the invisibilisaton and irregularisation of social justice measures for minoritised groups in general.

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