'A space for me, but what about my family?' - The experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller student carers in UK Higher Education

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Introduction

The diverse and multifaceted experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students entering UK Higher Education has received increased attention in recent years (Clark, 2004; Mulcahy, Baars, Bowen-Viner and Menzies, 2017; Ryder, 2017; D'Arcy and Galloway, 2018). This empirical attention is overdue and begins to address the gaps in knowledge regarding how students from these backgrounds access Higher Education and experience their studies. What is less apparent is what happens *outside and away from* campus and classes. That is, what are the wider structural and cultural conditions that *enable* Traveller students to attend university in the first place and ensure that they can study effectively and are being supported to fulfil their potential? Similarly, what are the *barriers* to accessing Higher Education courses and outreach programmes? A key aspect to this discussion, we argue, concerns their off-campus experience of caring responsibilities. A recent study in Scotland (MECOPP, 2020) shows that a high number of younger Travellers have significant caring responsibilities, mainly for older relatives, younger siblings, and their own children. This has a bearing on access to classes, as well as focused study time when at home, and the ability to complete their degree.

To fully understand this chapter there needs to be a basic understanding of who Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are and how they experience life in the United Kingdom. Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers are often grouped under the acronym of 'GRT' and in the United Kingdom this refers to communities who have a historically nomadic existence with shared cultures and value systems (Clark and Greenfields, 2006), some with a legal ethnic status and some not. It is also important to note that nomadism is not the singular characteristic of their identities and Travellers are still ethnically Travellers even when living in flats or houses. It is also important to note that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people are not homogenous populations, and their experiences and values can and do differ vividly.

There is a wealth of data and research showing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have consistently had poor school-based educational experiences and attainment (The Traveller Movement, 2019), lower levels of life expectancy and poor health outcomes (Millan and Smith, 2019) and higher levels of involvement with the criminal justice system (James, Phillips, and Taylor, 2019). They are communities who both historically, and in the present day, find their freedoms being curtailed through government policies from the Egyptians Act, 1530 to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, 2021 which aims to curtail nomadic freedoms even further (Smith, 2021). In the spotlight of the media, they have been portrayed as everything from vagabonds and thieves to the crass voyeurism of the 'My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding' Series (Belfiore, 2020). A YouGov survey revealed that public perceptions are low, and many people would not be happy to have them as a family member or colleague, whilst 91% of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people had experienced discrimination due to their ethnicity (The Traveller Movement, 2017). The evidence paints a bleak picture of what it is like to engage in society for many Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people. In the following section, we identify how this plays out in education and results in the slow trickle of young people progressing to Higher Education.

In terms of positionality, it is important to note that the three authors of this chapter all come from Traveller backgrounds and have been through university: two of the authors are younger, female junior scholars, whilst the other author is an older male Professor. We

explore, against the national backdrop of poor educational experiences and outcomes, a series of progressions into Higher Education and the navigation of caring responsibilities. We critically reflect in this chapter on our own experiences of negotiating the (often painful) boundaries, barriers and cultures of Higher Education whilst undertaking caring duties for older relatives, siblings, and our own children, as well as the emotional impact of moving away from family and the ingrained caring responsibility culture that some Travellers may carry with them. In this sense, the chapter is informed by both existing research studies and literature as well as key auto-ethnographic insights and reflections (Collins and Gallinat, 2010). Using these academic and 'insider' perspectives, we analyse what this means for Higher Education Institutions who are serious about increasing the number of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students progressing and succeeding in their institutions.

The context of caring for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people have some of the highest rates of unpaid caring responsibilities of all groups (Hardy, 2018). Despite this, it is barely mentioned in the research literature surrounding educational attainment and higher education access. The focus of research into poor educational outcomes tends to focus on institutional failings or biological essentialist notions of 'cultural limitations'. Rarely, if ever, is consideration paid to how the intricate structures of these families facilitates increased caring responsibilities.

Caring is such an ingrained part of day-to-day Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller family life that it almost goes unnamed and unspoken. Rather, it is taken for granted and just 'done'. Households are more likely to be multi-generational, including the elderly and the young. It is a break from the white British '*nuclear family'* that has become the norm and accounts for two-thirds of family living situations, tending towards the '*it takes a village…'* (African Proverb) mindset common in other areas of the world, and indeed different ethnicities in the UK living in multigenerational households (GOV.UK, 2011). Much of this care work is undocumented and comes down to internal and extended familial responsibility and expectations. At different stages, this could have different repercussions for students, especially if there is not an understanding of these wider responsibilities.

Caring Responsibilities and Higher Education

There is a growing academic and third-sector literature on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students entering Higher Education (see Morley, Mirga and Redzepi, 2000; Mulcahy et al., 2017; D'Arcy and Galloway, 2018; Forster and Gallagher, 2020). It indicates that there are at least three key aspects that need to be properly considered to understand experiences of Higher Education for these students: access, take-up, and delivery. Access refers to the process of gaining entry to institutions. It includes, but is not limited to, outreach work and addressing conditions for access (attainment, fee status, and application support). Take up refers to how students engage once the barriers have been overcome (acceptance of places, attendance, attrition). Delivery refers to what universities teach and how they teach it. There is emerging literature on how these areas affect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and the following section examines these areas through the lens of caring.

Access to Higher Education

For many young people, widening participation programmes are a positive tool in increasing awareness about Higher Education (Robinson and Salvestrini, 2020). In England, universities charging fees of £9250 per year are required to have an access and participation plan, and carry out widening participation activities. The overarching aim is to increase the intake of underrepresented students. There is no central ethos of how this should occur, and much is left to the individual university to choose who, how and when they target. This means that the efforts by some universities are greater than others, due in part to funding allocation, resources, and the university agenda. Only a minority of universities in the UK provide structured support for pre-entry students that are Gypsy, Roma or Traveller or young carers, let alone both. The percentage of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students accessing Higher Education is very low, with an estimate of 3-4% in comparison to 43% from across the general population (Mulcahy et al., 2017; Office for Students, 2020). This resonates with the access of young carers more generally with it being thought that only 3-6% of young carers are entering (Kettell, 2020). Evidently the barriers to access reach across structural, material, individual and cultural levels (Clark, 2004).

Outreach work often starts in secondary school or even later. Yet educators know how important the formative years are (Donnelly et.al 2019), and if students are continually behind their peers, those that reach Higher Education are the few and the privileged. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students are more likely to miss sections of secondary school, for many reasons, including caring responsibilities (Derrington and Kendall, 2008) – this includes missing enrichment activities which can include career development, aspirations and widening participation activities (Donnelly et.al., 2019). If students do not have access to this important networking and social capital information at school, and are not exposed to it at home (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students are less likely to have parents that finished formal education (Wilkin et. al 2009), then they are at a stark disadvantage. The intersectionality between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and caring means there is an opportunity to engage them in activities aimed at young carers. However, caring responsibilities are entrenched into some Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller cultures, that what they see as 'normal' would be considered having caring responsibilities. This could mean that they do not 'tick the box' for caring responsibilities that could result in signposting them to opportunities that they are eligible for and could benefit from.

Take up of Higher Education
Widening Participation programmes go a small way to address barriers facing some students but cannot reach every young person, and do not address the multiple, intersectional barriers. There is research evidence to suggest that take-up of is uneven and drop-out rates are high (Le Bas, 2014; Jarvis, 2016), as is the case for many disadvantaged students (Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui, 2020). This reflects the experiences of young carers, in terms of their drop-out rates, and is an important reminder that efforts at widening access and participation do not simply end once students are *'in the door'*. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students are more likely to be the first generation to navigate university systems such as online application portals, student services and faculty communications. This can increase the likelihood of loneliness and abandonment that both Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students (Forster and Gallagher, 2020) and Young Carers (NUS, 2013; Kettell, 2020) have described feeling. If a student is both a Traveller and a young carer not having these structures, or knowing how to access them, could compound these feelings. The academic journey needs to be followed

closely for such students - and their wider families - and support offered across the degree pathways to enable better take-up (Atherton, 2020).

Delivery of Higher Education
As well as the curriculum, delivery also includes not viewing family and caring as less important than a degree. For young carers this is harrowing enough, but for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers, this coupled with ethnicity based prejudice could lead to an increased feeling that university is not a space for them. The structure of degree programmes, particularly those with heavy contact and self-study hours, or lacking in flexibility of assignments, can be a considerable barrier to students with caring responsibilities. If they are part of a larger network of family carers this could cause tension between family members who do not understand the requirements of study at university level. It is imperative that lecturers understand that students have different responsibilities, and some do not have the privilege of attending every lecture or completing every assignment at a designated time. Being able to recognise patterns in engagement and use an empathetic, flexible approach could make the difference between a student dropping out or succeeding.

Both students and carers, within family contexts - how University is experienced by Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers

This next section is based on our individually written personal testimonies. We adopted a 'reflexive self' methodological approach, one that is both autobiographical and autoethnographic in format and style to convey what we have uniquely experienced (Okely and Callaway, 1992). Such an approach is common within social anthropology, and we have produced a text that critically self-reflects on our backgrounds, experiences, and memories of caring and Higher Education. In doing this, we think about issues such as ethics, authenticity, shared knowledge and how (auto)biography is processed and understood (Collins and Gallinat, 2010). These sections are deliberately written in the first person to best convey the meaning and the message. We each come to this issue with our own unique experiences, backgrounds, and circumstances. We have allowed ourselves space to consider the diversity and differences between us, as much as the similarities based around ethnicity, class, age, dis/ability, gender, and sexuality. We reflect on our experiences as both students and as employees within, and outside of, Higher Education and how different types of caring roles have framed our respective lifecycles and transitions. Indeed, where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are perhaps heading next are the three stages, or narratives, that we wish to examine. In doing so, we tease out some general points about Higher Education policy and practice and how colleges and universities respond, or don't respond, to the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students and their families.

Chelsea

At the time of writing this, I have recently finished my master's and am coming to the tenth-year anniversary of my grandmothers' stroke, one that left her unable to walk or talk, and the wider family as her carers. Many country people (non-Travellers) are confused when I explain that we do not believe in the use of care homes, not when it is still possible for us to undertake these duties at home. These caring responsibilities have come with great sacrifice for everyone involved. When I first applied for university, the weight of these responsibilities,

including for younger siblings and nieces – which is common in Traveller families - meant that I opted to stay at home and commute. I would attend lectures and classes in the day and fulfil caring responsibilities in the evenings and doing the night shift, and as time went on it became unmanageable as I tried to balance university, work, placement, and sport. At times I felt guilty about not fulfilling these responsibilities as much as I should have done. I have been able to push back on these caring responsibilities as other family members pick up the slack but this is not a privilege that everyone has.

These responsibilities, as well as others, have meant that university has often felt like a side project. I have felt this greatly during my masters which I split part time over two years because I could not afford to do it in a single year. There are modules where I attended only a single lecture, and I would often scan the key readings as I stood outside the lecture door, or my friends would pass me their notes across the table for me to gain at least a surface level understanding. Flexibility and understanding from many lecturers meant that I was still seen as a *'good'* student, even if I did not always attend or do the additional tasks. But there were modules where mandatory participation marks meant that I lost out when I could not participate in the same way as my peers. How do you e-mail a lecturer you have only met once and explain that you are interested in the subject, and want to do well, but you do not have time to make it to the lectures or do all the readings? Sometimes you do not and just try your best on the assignment, even if their feedback reminds you that the range of responsibilities prevents you from reaching the heights you are capable of. The support of a handful of lecturers during my undergraduate and master's degrees have helped me in part to navigate this, particularly the support from those that extended beyond the topic and module. The hours spent discussing theory, life, and the place I occupied at the intersect between two worlds has been more important than they could ever really know. It has reassured me that I was still a 'good' academic, even if I did not do all of the things that other students did. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that universities are seemingly more understanding about the impact of outside responsibilities, and extenuating circumstances[1] have been more readily available, but where was this option and support when we carried that burden alone? Prior to the pandemic many universities did not reach out proactively and instead it was a rigid and formal process that required written evidence. The irony is that I have never ticked the caring box on the university form because no one told me I should. I was never made to feel as though the range of caring responsibilities I have are valid. My assumption was that to tick the carer box on that form, was to mean that you are the sole carer, and not one of the collective carers.

The interconnectedness of Traveller families lives means that the Eurocentric, nuclear family model does not reflect the reality of my family. I grew up next door to my grandparents and surrounded by aunts, uncles, and cousins – a situation that continues to this day. This means that the responsibility for children spreads across the family, even when you did not bring them into this world. Something that is not easily understood in a society that promotes individualism. For my non-Traveller peers, it was not common for them to have caring responsibilities that extended far beyond parents caring for their children, or children caring for their parent. It meant that the categories used to collect data on caring responsibilities

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[1] 'Extenuating circumstances' can be applied for during university courses to ensure that penalties are not issued if, for example, submitting assessments late or missing examinations. It is a formal process that operates in most UK universities.

were redundant and did not take into consideration my unique caring experiences as a Traveller student.

There was a time when I felt torn between two worlds with two different viewpoints, a broader society view where you put yourself first and a Traveller viewpoint where you put your family first – but why should we have to sacrifice our family to do well at university? Why is there not a space for us to do and have both? I have now completed my master's and whilst I do not want it to be the end of my academic journey, I cannot help but feel tired and exhausted. Many supportive academics ask me about my next steps but how do I explain that I am tired of balancing plates that just feel like they keep falling? The structure of Higher Education means that those who do not have financial backing and do not have the luxury of being able to focus solely on academia find the possibility of a career within academia being pushed far beyond their reach.

Chrissie

Before I describe my time at university, it is important to know the context that journey sat in. I attended university at age 26, but how I interacted with the education system changed over the years and provides the lens of my university experience. As with many Travellers, I did not have the *gorger* (non-Traveller) myth of what a Gypsy or Traveller upbringing should look like. I was raised on a Traveller site until the start of primary school, which coincided with my parents' divorce. I moved into a house with my mum (my dad is a Traveller, my mum is not), and spent the weekends on sites or the roadside. To me this was normal but led to a compartmentalised life: I did not speak about living on a site to my housed friends or my week at school to my site friends. There was already subtle knowledge about the differences between the worlds and the need to keep them separate, and the loneliness that came with that.

The strongest memory that persists of my childhood and my families, both Traveller and not, is the work ethic and contributing to the household. The importance of work was always there, from going out calling with my dad, going with mum on her cleaning or caring rounds, or keeping the house clean. This is not to say I had an unhappy childhood, but these formative years created different thought processes than some other people my age. By secondary school I was more interested in work than education. Cleaning and household tasks were not a method of *'pocket money'*, they were just part of being a family unit. By sixteen, my entire locus of success was based around working. This may be why it came as a shock to my family when I decided to go to university at twenty-six via an access course. For many years I had lamented about *'lazy students'* needing to *'join the real world'*. Two of my brothers had been to university but it was not something that was spoken much about at home. All I knew was that they were *'away'* and not there for the family. This led to feelings of bitterness, that I have since transferred to myself.

My family have always been supportive, but throughout my degree I felt like, while excelling academically, I was failing at what I *'should'* have achieved. All I could think of was that I should be married, should have children, should have a home to call mine. There were also regrets over family events that I missed. The first day of my degree was the day after my Grandad's 90th birthday (a feat for anyone, let alone a Gypsy man) and there was a big

celebration on my brother's land. Everyone was there except me. I missed an important family event to pick up an ID card and a few free pens from stalls trying to entice me to join in the university experience. There were thousands of people on campus, but I'd never felt so alone.

Over the four years of my degree, my grandad's and other family members health got worse, every call home included the dreaded question of *"how is…?"*. My brother, dad, step-mum, aunties and uncles carried the collective burden of caring, a part of family life I was no longer involved in. My family never once suggested I should be there doing it as well, but I felt like I should have been. On the outside I looked like every other privileged white woman choosing to go to university (and most people on my course were privileged white women). On the inside I felt like I was unsuccessful for not working full time, a failure for not having a child, and guilt for not being there to share the caring responsibilities. Emotions that, when I tried to share with my personal tutor or other *gorgers*, were rebuffed as *'you are still young, plenty of time for all of that'.* I never felt like my lecturers were approachable or understanding. It was as though having a life outside of academia was not something that could be uttered in the university building. These attitudes have made me question my career choices, as I feel like I have come from too different a direction than others.

Until I started connecting with other Traveller university students, I felt alone at university, but couldn't tell my family because I wasn't there for them either. University was an amazing opportunity not everyone gets, especially not in my family, and I did not want to seem ungrateful for it. I was privileged to go to university, but I will never get the time back to be there for my family. It doesn't end when university ends either, my career is in a different city to where my family is, and I again must choose between 'being there' and 'being here'. In many ways, it felt like the girl that kept her *'site life'* and *'school life'* separate almost twenty years previously.

Colin

My experiences of university life, in multiple roles, vary across an extended period and they cover different kinds of family caring responsibilities. It is probably easiest to think about this in terms of defined periods of time, with some overlap.

1988-1992
Despite successive periods of interrupted learning and various school moves in the north-east coast of Scotland - all related to family employment opportunities - I was able to secure a place to study Applied Social Studies at Paisley College of Technology in 1988 with just a C grade in Higher English and BBB grades (as resits) in Higher Geography, History and Economics. Between the last two years of secondary school, over the summer, I worked as a labourer on a building site in Dundee, and this focused my mind to continuing education, with the full support of my Mum. I was the first person in my family to go to University and I had no idea what to expect. Of note, I now teach and hold a Chair, at the same institution that was the only one to accept me as an undergraduate student back in 1988 (now called the University of the West of Scotland). My undergraduate years in Paisley were not easy, largely due to bullying and a failure to grasp the expectations and demands of the curriculum. I also missed home. As a result of not settling, at the end of my second year, I managed to negotiate a transfer from to Dundee University. I'd had enough of shifting between these two worlds

and wanted to be closer to my family so I could fulfil my caring roles and meet the expectations placed on me. This was at a time when such *'transfers'* between institutions during undergraduate study was not common - so I was nomadic even during my undergraduate years. This transition *'home'* was successful, both academically and in terms of extended family life, and I managed to graduate with an Honours degree in Political Science and Social Policy. It was just before graduation that a lecturer at Dundee, Dr Richard Dunphy, suggested I should aim to continue my studies and apply for a PhD.

1992-1994
Thanks to the guidance and advice of Richard, I was able to apply for a PhD scholarship at Edinburgh University. At this point in time, I still did not fully know or appreciate what a PhD was (Richard had just said it was like *'a big essay'*). I did not undertake an MSc degree, going straight from an exam-based undergraduate degree to a PhD. Looking back, I know I would not have dared to apply for or venture into postgraduate studies - or move to Edinburgh - without Richard's support. The influence that one person *who cares* can have should never be underestimated. The transition to Edinburgh was also not very easy, for reasons I will come on to discuss, although as I was still on the East coast of Scotland, I remained close to my family and could get home easily to help with caring duties and attending family events. However, Edinburgh felt a world away from my reality and lived experience, both the city and the University. It was here that the social class differences, much more than ethnic identity, really came into focus and my sheer lack of social, cultural, and economic capital was made clear to me, both by fellow students and some staff. However, thanks to a supervisor who I was able to trust and confide in, I was able to keep my studies (just about) going. I was also able to take on part-time employment in Edinburgh to contribute financially to the family pot.

1995-2013
The main period that is particularly relevant spans nearly eighteen years. During this time, I found myself occupying multiple caring roles and identities, not least becoming a parent to four boys myself. I also started working full-time as a Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Glasgow (1995-1996), and then other posts followed at Newcastle University (1996-2004) and Strathclyde University (2005-13). The periods at Glasgow and Newcastle are important to note here as at both institutions I was playing a dizzying day-to-day mixture of multiple roles; I was, at one and the same time, a part-time PhD student (I would not submit my PhD until 2000), full-time Lecturer, partner and husband, parent, and member of a demanding extended family. Combining these roles was challenging, and not just in terms of finding the time, space, and energy to try and fulfil them to the best of my ability, and to not let anyone down. Caring for small children, being a part-time student, and full-time Lecturer was almost impossible, and I nearly gave up on my PhD numerous times. Pressures at work, and health issues within the immediate and extended family, required that I adopt working practices that were ultimately damaging and unhealthy. A period of *'burnout'*, and struggles with work and mental health, occurred between 2007 and 2008 and signalled a need for fundamental change. It was at this point the backdrop of care and caring was sharply brought home to me, as much as being a carer I was now the person *in need of* care from the extended family.

2013-2021
Since 2013, when I moved to a professor post at the University of the West of Scotland, the caring dynamics have changed a lot as small children have, of course, become young men.

Indeed, three of my older children have now graduated from Higher Education themselves. They have done so through their own hard work and efforts, but also as second-generation entrants who have gained knowledge through my immediate experiences and working/practical knowledge of how universities operate. This form of social and cultural capital (and finances) is important to appreciate as many Traveller families do not possess it. This is one aspect, I think, that widening participation measures need to appreciate a lot more as well as working with the families of Traveller students and not just students themselves.

Analysis of the Three Autobiographies

What are some of the common themes and issues emerging from the three testimonies presented above regarding higher education and caring? There seems to be at least four main themes that require some further critical discussion. 1) the idea of being located *in 'two different worlds'*, and the methods and caring strategies for trying to cope with this lived reality; 2) the social, cultural, and financial capital required to stay in University, make progress and succeed whilst also caring for family; 3) the impact of caring on individual and wider family health and wellbeing, and making time for self-care, 4) the importance of being aware of support within and outside University for studying and caring duties. We will discuss each of the themes in a little more detail and try to best capture the experiences and realities that the narratives convey.

Living in 'Two Different Worlds'

It is striking that all three testimonies discuss the lived reality of shifting between what feels like two very different worlds, a Traveller world (of caring, of home, of family, of work) and a university world (of studying, of social relationships, of time away from family, of thinking about *'next steps'*). From what is raised here, it is clear this split takes its physical, mental, and emotional toll, just in terms of the ability to manage these tentative transitions and how occupying *'two different worlds'* is often rendered possible. However, it is evident the impact is very real so universities engaged in widening participation work should appreciate this dynamic more and the stresses it can produce on students and families with demanding caring responsibilities. In effect, how can two worlds become one shared world and is this feasible in developing university action plans? Some of these complex issues are also faced by many first-generation working-class students and some universities have attempted to address with some success (Wainwright and Watts, 2021).

The Importance of Capital

A significant aspect emerging from the three narratives is the importance of possessing different forms of capital, especially social and cultural capital in relation to negotiating the everyday demands of university life (Mishra, 2020). However, underlying such forms of social and cultural capital – meaning here, the formal and informal networks that assist cooperation within and between individuals and groups (Son, 2020) - is the importance of having actual financial support and assistance to continue studying and maintain a physical presence and to be able to afford the expenses that arise from participating in Higher Education. All three testimonies, at various stages, discuss financial costs as having an important bearing on what has been undertaken and achieved, alongside the role played by part-time work and

combining this with unpaid caring obligations. This is an issue facing many students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds (Brown and James, 2020). It is recognised here that the pressure of playing multiple roles has a cost to it, and university structures could better allow for the use of hardship funds to support students in such precarious positions. The narratives also raise fundamental questions about the impact of tuition fees and debt burdens, as seen in the English context.

Caring for Others, but also Self-Care

A further theme that is clearly identifiable from the testimonies is the health and wellbeing impact that caring for other family members has on the person studying and/or working at university. Such cultural concerns often relate to wider extended family relationships and an experience of '*guilt*' is often felt in terms of the fact that time spent on university work is time spent away from often more pressing and immediate family responsibilities. Further, time at university can be regarded as somehow '*delaying*' other life options and choices, such as starting a family and seeking paid work to support the household. The assumptions and expectations that lie behind such lifecycle markers for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people are deeply embedded and culturally significant - to be working, contributing to the household, married, a parent - all by certain ages - is part of the 'stuff' of growing up in the communities (Marcus, 2019). University, in practice, can become relegated to a 'side project', even when studying full-time. It is recognised here that what counts as '*caring*' also needs to be extended to notions of self-care, to allow the university '*world*' the time and space it requires. Caring, we suggest, is not just about '*caring for others*', it is the ability to be able to say 'no' to demands asked of us, as well as knowing when to take time out from additional requests. All three narratives talk about tiredness, exhaustion, and the dangerous presence of '*burn out*', and how this needs to be minded.

Supporting Structures and People

The final key theme to arise from the testimonies would seem to be one around the available supporting structures and services at university for carers, as well as the importance of key individuals - usually academic staff and supervisors - who might act as mentors, supporters, or champions. Whether arriving at university at 17 or 26, the matter of managing transitions to university needs to be fully realised and appreciated for all students, but especially those who are first generation students and are coming from families where collective caring is the norm and there are high expectations of family involvement. Offering flexible modes of studying and individually tailored curriculum design, as well as suitable assessment regimes, can make a world of difference. For example, offering a curriculum that in some way reflects the realities of Traveller life, family circumstances and week-to-week timetables can help enormously. We would also note here that offering additional 'time management' classes are not always the effective 'one size fits all' solution that is so often imagined by university managers.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that although Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller student access to, and presence within, universities is gaining attention, there needs to be more focus on how such

students navigate Higher Education experiences when there are significant, culturally specific, extended family and community-centred caring responsibilities. Often, it feels as if the widening access conversation is dominated by just getting such students 'in the door' and not really considering what supporting mechanisms and structures are necessary to allow students not only to stay, but to flourish and succeed. Although the three narratives are not necessarily reflective of the experiences of *all* Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students - how could they be - they do illustrate that there are (thematic) threads of commonality across our experiences that are likely to be experienced by other Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students. In closing, we would want to stress that just because some people can traverse the barriers, this does not mean that all are able to do so. There is a real danger in trying to hold anyone up as an archetypal 'role model' or idealised 'community champion' - it can lead to charges of 'if they can do it, why can't you?'. This kind of 'heroic struggle' and 'individual resilience' narrative is very common in Higher Education today. We have argued that making space and time for student carers and their families - focussing on life *off-campus* as well as *on-campus* - is important, otherwise we are again relying on individuals to bear the burden of wider societal failings in balancing family-based caring and pursuing Higher Education.

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