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‘Girls just like to be friends with people’: gendered experiences of migration among children and youth in returning Irish migrant families

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Abstract

The gendered nature of children and young people’s experiences of migration are explored in this paper, drawing on research with children in Irish return migrant families. The paper focuses on the ways in which gender dynamics both reinforce and complicate the children’s complex social positionings in Irish society. It explores the gendered nature of the children’s and young people’s everyday lives, relationships with peers and negotiations of identity, through a specific focus on the role of sport, friendship and local gender norms in their lives. I suggest that gender articulates with other axes of sameness/difference in complex ways, shaping the opportunities for social participation and cultural belonging in different ways for migrant boys and girls.

Keywords: migration, children, youth, return migration, gender

Introduction

There is growing interest in the diverse nature of children’s experiences of migration, marking something of a shift from the historical tendency to focus only on migrant children in particularly vulnerable situations, such as asylum-seeking or trafficking. Studies have begun to focus more on children’s experiences of family migration (Bushin 2009, Hutchins forthcoming, Orellana et al. 2001), urban-rural migration (Bushin 2005), high-skill migration (Hatfield 2010) and internal EU migration (Ackers and Stalford 2004). A very small number of studies have focused on children who participate in return migration and in general it has been argued that they are a particularly invisible group (Hatfield 2010, Knörr 2005, Ní Laoire forthcoming). This invisibility can be understood in the context of hegemonic understandings of return migration as a relatively unproblematic reinsertion in a ‘homeland’, together with a tendency for research on family migration to assume that children are simply a form of ‘luggage’ rather than migrants in their own right (Bushin 2009, Orellana et al. 2001, Stefansson 2004). As a result, their experiences tend to be overlooked.

My research addresses the experiences of children who moved to Ireland as part of returning Irish families. While Ireland has historically been a country of high emigration, with very high numbers of young people emigrating in the 1980s (and again during the current economic downturn), there was a shift towards high in-migration during the period of economic growth known as the Celtic Tiger period from the late 1990s to the late 2000s. A large proportion of the 1980s generation of emigrants returned to Ireland as part of that in-migration phenomenon, many of them with children who were born elsewhere - in the UK, the US and a range of other countries. Previous research with adult Irish return migrants during that period revealed that many of them stated that a desire to raise children in Ireland was one of their primary motivations for return (Ní Laoire 2008, Ralph 2009). The views of the children themselves were less apparent and this research aimed to engage with them and to explore their experiences of moving to and living in Ireland. These are children who had spent part or all of their lives outside Ireland before moving there with their Irish parent(s).

This paper focuses specifically on the role of gender in the children and young people's experiences of migration to Ireland. It explores the gendered nature of their everyday lives after migration, and of their relationships with peers and negotiations of identity. It identifies two key narratives relating to the role of gender in the children's migration experiences and goes on to deconstruct these through a specific focus on the role of sport, friendship and local gender norms in shaping the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in which the migrant children are involved with their non-migrant peers.

Engendering child migration

Recent research with children emphasises their multiple identities and the importance of different aspects of their social identities such as gender, ethnicity, age and social class in the ways in which their identities are constructed (Christensen and James 2000, Morrow 2006, Stephens 1995). This is important as there can be a tendency to reify certain aspects of children's identities, such as for example, migrant background, in research with migrant children, or ethnicity in research with children in ethnic minorities. This means that the complexities of children's identities are not always recognised. As Connolly (1998) argues, discourses overlap and articulate with one another in different ways in children's identity constructions, and the importance of particular social identities depends on the specific contexts in which identities are being performed or negotiated.

An intersectionality approach (Anthias 2008, Phoenix and Pattynama 2006) illuminates the complexity of processes of social identification, and the ways in which class, gender, ethnicity and other aspects of difference are enmeshed with one another. It makes visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006). My research attempted to capture some of this complexity in the lives of the children and young people who participated, through the use of participatory methods which attempted to allow them to present their-selves to me in their own terms. While many of them chose to represent their-selves as migrants (for example, through images of planes), for most of them, other aspects of their everyday lives, such as their friendships, family connections, consumption preferences and where they live now were just as, or more important in their self-representations.

As Phoenix and Pattynama (2006) assert, power relations are central to processes of intersection that position individuals differently in different contexts. In seeking to understand how these processes work in the lives of children, I draw here in part on Bourdieu's concept of capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The concept of capital is used here in the sense of the 'range of scarce goods and resources lying at the heart of social relations' which confer status and prestige on the owner (Connolly 1998). The amount of capital a person possesses determines the amount of power they have within a particular cultural 'field', or site of social and cultural practice, such as education, sport or the 'street'. The concept of symbolic capital has been frequently applied to the dynamics of children's and young people's social worlds (see Chittenden 2010, Connolly 1998, Jarvinen and Gundelach 2007). Symbolic capital refers to the type of capital which gains recognition, status and prestige within a field (such as a peer group) and makes its bearers visible and admired (Jarvinen and Gundelach 2007). Other studies have identified the value of practices such as drinking, or material goods such as fashionable clothes, as forms of symbolic capital among young people (Chittenden 2010, Jarvinen and Gundelach 1997). Connolly (1998) has applied Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital in his research on racism and gender identities among young children in a multi-ethnic primary school in London, showing how the concept of capital can facilitate deep understandings of the multiple, contextualised and intersecting social relations and hierarchies in which the children participate.

Furthermore, symbolic capital for young people is closely related to social capital, which is understood here in Bourdieu's sense of the 'networks and connections that can be mobilised to generate advantages or benefits' (Kelly and Lusia 2006: 834). As Morrow (2001: 57) argues in her research with children, 'social capital resides in friendship relationships and peer groups that provide a sense of belonging in the here-and-now' and symbolic capital is clearly related to this sense of belonging. The accumulation of symbolic and social capital is

intimately bound up with the dynamics of power relations in particular social fields, such as the peer group. This is further complicated by migration, which usually means leaving one cultural field, entering another and having to re-learn the 'rules of the game' where different practices may have more or less symbolic value. Kelly and Lusia (2006: 845) argue that 'all forms of capital are therefore actively valued, devalued, exchanged, and accumulated in the immigration experience'.

In this paper, I focus in particular on the ways in which children's negotiation of new fields of practice after migration are inflected by gender dynamics. The gendered nature of migration is well-documented (Boyle and Halfacree 1999, Kofman et al. 2000, Piper 2007), highlighting the many ways in which migration processes are experienced differently by men and women, as well as the gendered nature of constructions of migration. As Christou (2006) argues, narratives and experiences of return migration are inherently gendered. For example, Potter and Phillips (2006) point to the gendered nature of the social marginalisation of Bajan-Brit return migrants in Barbados, with females more likely than males to report feelings of alienation. In her research with Italian second generation return migrants, Wessendorf (2007) found that female 'roots' migrants experienced gender-related cultural expectations and practices as one of the main challenges of integration in Italy.

Despite the attention paid to the gendered nature of migration, research which explores the gendering of child migration is relatively rare, although some studies of child migration do recognise the role of gender (O'Connor, J. 2009, Devine, Kenny and McNeela 2008). However, the intersection of gender with ethnicity and nationality in childhood and youth is well-documented, usually in relation to second generation youth rather than first generation migrant children and young people (Connolly 1998, Mirza 1992, Scheibelhofer 2007, Warikoo 2005). This builds on a literature which recognises that children engage in different ways with constructions of ethnicity and nation, highlighting processes of socialisation but also emphasising children's active involvement in producing and reproducing such constructs (see Ackroyd and Pilkington 1999, Hengst 1997, Howard and Gill 2007). It has been shown that othering processes among children and young people frequently draw on constructions of ethnicity and nation (Devine, Kenny and MacNeela 2008, Scourfield et al. 2005). The ways in which discourses of masculinity and femininity intersect with ethnicized and racialised discourses in the identity negotiations of ethnic minority youth have been highlighted (Hopkins 2007, Dwyer 2000, Maira and Soep 2005, Rassool 1999, Scheibelhofer 2007, Schmitt 2010). The gendered nature of identity constructions among second generation Indo-Caribbean youth in the US is explained by Warikoo (2005) with reference to three key factors: the gendered nature of media constructions of minority youth, the role of the school context in lending different levels of symbolic status to boys and girls and the gendered nature of migration.

Some research explores the precise ways in which these gendered processes are articulated in the lives of first and second generation migrant children. For example, Connolly (1998) finds that some ethnic minority boys can appropriate racialised discourses to their own benefit, while in the Irish context, both Devine, Kenny and McNeela (2008) and J. O'Connor (2009) suggest that for a number of reasons, integration among peer groups is easier for migrant boys than for migrant girls. The relationships between migrancy, gender and childhood are of course highly contextualised and complex, and they are explored here in the specific context of Irish return migration during the 'Celtic Tiger' era.

Methodology

The research was undertaken as part of a larger team-based project which explored the experiences of migrant children from a number of different backgrounds in Irish society (Ní Laoire et al. 2011)¹. The methodological approach used in the research was based on the recognition of children as social beings with agency and subjectivity, and as worthy research participants in their own right (James and Prout 1990, James, Jenks and Prout 1998,

¹ The Migrant Children project, funded by a Marie Curie Excellence Grant (MEXT-CT-014204) and based in the Department of Geography, University College Cork.

Thomson 2008). Children-centred methods were used, which allowed the children to communicate in ways with which they felt comfortable and competent (Thomas and O’Kane 1998). In my own research with children in return migrant families, this meant using a range of techniques in different combinations, including informal interviews, drawing, photography², mapping and ‘play-and-talk’, depending on the participants’ ages, abilities and preferences. This is particularly important in research which aims to uncover children’s perspectives in a context such as family migration where adult perspectives tend to dominate (Bushin 2009), although I recognise the limitations of any attempts by adult researchers to unproblematically ‘reveal’ children’s voices. While the accounts and narratives that emerge are necessarily partial and contingent, the research is underpinned by a recognition of children as competent research participants.

Research was conducted over a period of almost two years (2007-2009) with 36 children and young people, and 21 parents (in 16 families) who had moved to counties Cork and Kerry in the south-west of Ireland. The ages of the young participants ranged from three to 18, and three young adults in their early 20s were also included. There were 15 boys and 21 girls. While I recognise that children have different competences and can experience different types of issues at different ages, I argue that age boundaries are blurred and fluid, and that fixed distinctions between ‘children’ and ‘teenagers’ reproduce a developmental model of childhood/youth. Therefore age is not prioritised as a social category above others here. Age sometimes emerged as an important social dimension in the children’s and young people’s lives, but only alongside gender, social class and ethnicity, among others. Some of the children had one or two Irish-born parents and some had one or two second-generation Irish parents. They lived in urban, rural and suburban locations, and they all moved to Ireland during the period of high return migration between 1995 and 2007. The most common countries from which participant families had moved were the USA and England, while families that moved from South Africa, other parts of Europe and from East Asia were also represented. Repeat visits were made to each family (on average three to four visits with each family), when participative research activities, such as artwork and photography, were conducted with the children and teenagers, and in-depth interviews with parents. The artwork and photography were used as methods to facilitate communication with the children and young people, rather than as products in themselves (see also White et al. 2010). Conversations with the participants, often while they were drawing or talking about their photographs, were recorded and transcribed, and copies were taken of the artwork and photographs. Usually, parents were not present during research with children, and neither were children present during research with parents. However, the family and home-based focus facilitated the exploration of intergenerational dynamics and allowed the researcher to interact with the children in their familial contexts.

Irishness and belonging

The positionality of children of return migrants in Irish society is a complex one. To set it in context, it is useful to highlight that prevailing ideas about migration and diversity in Ireland today tend to involve assumptions of a host-newcomer dualism, frequently underlain by a white-black dualism. In other words, it is assumed that a sharp division is emerging in Irish society between a white Irish host population and non-white non-Irish migrant population (Ní Laoire 2008). While this representation certainly has validity, it does tend to deny the immigration experiences of groups perceived to be culturally similar to the Irish, such as, other Europeans and British migrants in particular, and it also denies the role of Irish return migration in the recent return flows. Irish-born migrants (that is, people who have ever lived abroad) comprise 9 per cent of the current population (CSO 2007), almost the same as the non-Irish migrant population, but this is rarely acknowledged. Added to this is the prevalence of narrow and fixed ideas about Irishness which tend to deny the Irishness of second-generation Irish migrants, or children of the diaspora (Hickman et al. 2005).

² The photography activity involved giving each participant a disposable camera with which to take photographs to document their lives, and using the photographs as a springboard for discussion, following the principles of the photo-elicitation method (Clark-Ibáñez 2004).

The research has illuminated the ways in which children in returning Irish families can accumulate social and cultural capital in Irish society as a result of their formal Irishness. For example, all of the children who participated in this strand of the research had, or were entitled to, formal Irish citizenship, as is the norm for returning Irish families. This means that they can consider a future in Ireland. They can assume that staying in Ireland, going to university there, and so on, are taken-for-granted possibilities. This can enable strong ties to develop in Ireland. Unlike other migrant children, it also means that there is freedom to travel outside Ireland without fear of being unable to return. Along with formal Irish citizenship, these children also usually have strong familial connections in Ireland. Family was certainly a very important source of social capital for many of the participant families. This was apparent on my research visits to their homes, when relatives might drop by, or children would mention that they go to their grandparents after school for example. While the network of reciprocal arrangements between family members was extremely important in shaping the space of family life for many of the children in this research, the role of cousins was a particularly common theme in the children's narratives. Connections with cousins sometimes facilitated integration in local peer groups for the children. Potential markers of difference could be rendered unimportant by a family connection which supports the child's claim to belong. Having family connections in Ireland frequently worked to embed these families locally - culturally, socially and economically. All of these factors work together to reinforce the children's connectedness in Irish society and to facilitate their settlement in Ireland in the short and long-term.

However, none of these factors can be taken for granted and the realities are often far more complex than this. Children in returning Irish families can and do experience difficulties in being accepted in Irish society (as other migrant children do). This can involve being made to feel different, being excluded in peer group contexts and experiencing struggles over identity and belonging. Some of the children talked about having felt different, or being identified as different, when they started school in Ireland; this is related to factors such as having a different accent, standing out from the crowd, or just being the new boy/girl.

Anne³: It was like you know I was stared at and things.

Interviewer: Really?

Anne: Like I don't think that would have happened in England if you know somebody with an Italian accent you know that maybe that had Italian parents that had a bit of an Italian accent like for instance I don't think they'd have been talked about and stared at in England whereas in Ireland like... it really... I was stared at (laughs), and there was no other returning migrants in my class they were all Irish totally that had always lived in Ireland (Anne, early 20s, moved from England aged 4).

These feelings of difference, while they are often temporary and can diminish with time – partly because of their own efforts in asserting their sameness – could be a significant source of anxiety and distress for the children at the time.

In some cases, the children had been excluded from peer groups, often temporarily. This was sometimes related to being unfamiliar with local norms - for example, behaving in ways which are not socially acceptable in the new peer group context, or, alternatively, being familiar enough to know that they should not push themselves forward and as a result becoming somewhat isolated. In certain cases, children described being bullied. For example, their accents and other aspects of their behaviour which apparently diverged from the norm had been ridiculed, or they were targets of verbal abuse. However, many of the children did not report any such problems and most of them seemed to have negotiated their positions within local peer groups quite successfully.

Children in returning Irish families are positioned in complex ways in Irish society. On the one hand, their acceptability is facilitated by the symbolic and social capital of their citizenship and their familial connections; on the other, their claims to the symbolic capital of 'being Irish and like everyone else' can be undermined by the reproduction of exclusivist discourses in everyday interactions with peers. The rest of this paper explores the ways in which this complex positioning is gendered, by focusing in particular on the gender dynamics of their involvement in sport, friendships and peer relations.

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout. Most of the young participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Gender and dynamics of inclusion/exclusion

The lives of the children and young people who participated in the research were marked by gender in profound ways. This is not surprising given the highly gender-differentiated nature of children's lifestyles in Ireland, in particular in areas such as sports, media and culturally-related activities, although it has been argued that aspects of consumer society are eroding traditional differences (O'Connor, P. 2008). The children in this research mostly participated in single-sex friendship groups, their activities were highly gendered and many of them attended single-sex schools. Single-sex schooling is relatively common in Ireland (Lodge and Lynch (2004), with 26 per cent of primary school pupils attending single-sex classes and 38 per cent of second-level pupils attending single-sex schools (Department of Education and Science 2007). The school and playground are clearly important contexts for the formation and performance of gender identities among children (Thorne 1993, Mac an Ghaill 1994), and the prevalence of gender-differentiated norms in Irish schools can be expected to impact on this (Lodge 2005). Some of the research participants found gender-segregation in primary schools strange, having attended mixed-sex schools before moving to Ireland.

Esme: ...And in [previous country] we used to go to a mixed school and here it's only a girls' school, so that's a big change. It's kind of a difference not having boys making commotion.

Emily: ...And you can't play all the games

Interviewer: Like what?

Emily: Boys catch girls! We used to play that all the time. We'd run away from the boys the minute we got out and they'd come looking for us and they'd shout! (Esme and Emily, aged 7-9, moved from continental Europe)

Research has highlighted the profound ways in which gender boundaries are reproduced in families, schools, consumption patterns and in children's interactions with each other (Morrow 2006). Children's friendship patterns are influenced by ethnicity, gender and other aspects of social identities (Epstein et al. 2001, Devine, Kenny and McNeela 2008, George 2007, Kehily et al 2002). The ways in which discourses of masculinity and femininity intersected with discourses of migrancy in the lives and identities of the children emerged in my research in a number of ways. Two dominant narratives could be identified among both the children and their parents in relation to the differences that gender can make to the children's experiences of migration. The two narratives are summarised in this interview extract:

Interviewer (I): Would ye say it's easier or harder for boys or girls who move from another country?

Sean: Easier for boys

Niamh: Easier for girls [...]

I: Explain to me why you think that.

Niamh: Girls are more nicer.

Sean: But you can make friends from football and stuff easier

I: So joining football and sport and things like that helps a lot?

Sean: Yeah, mhm

I: And usually boys do that?

Sean: mhmm

I: So you think girls are nicer [Niamh]?

Niamh: Got more feelings

I: Really? Why?

Niamh: 'Cos in my class like all the boys say mean stuff to all the other girls and boys. 'Cos they don't really care or anything, they'd say stuff the girls wouldn't say (Sean, aged 12, Niamh aged 10, moved from US).

There are two opposing core narratives present here: (1) that sport facilitates integration for boys more than for girls, and (2) that girls are 'nicer' than boys; therefore it is easier for girls to make friends. The remainder of this paper deconstructs the two narratives in more depth.

Sport, gender and 'integration'⁴

The first of these narratives is supported by some existing research. Leisure and shared interests can provide an important point of connection with other children and young people. Research shows that nearly two-thirds of young people in Ireland report having hobbies (such as playing music, looking after pets), although the proportion is higher among girls than boys (NCO 2004). However, 88 per cent of young people report involvement in at least one sport,

⁴ 'Integration' is a highly contested term. In this context it is understood simply in terms of the formation of meaningful social connections with others.

with the proportion only slightly higher among boys than girls. The key gender distinction is in the range of sports, with boys overwhelmingly involved in competitive team sports (soccer and GAA⁵) and girls having a wider range of sporting interests (NCO 2004). This reflects the male dominance of team sports like soccer and GAA, which play a pervasive role in Irish society.

For many of the boys who took part in the research, playing football was a key social activity which facilitated their entry into local peer groups. Whether children are formally involved in clubs and teams or whether they play these sports informally with friends in the local neighbourhood, the value of sport as a source of symbolic and social capital is clear. It can be seen in the first place as representing a shared frame of reference, to use Lidén's (2003) term, in other words as a shared set of codes and skills which create shared meanings with other children. Secondly, it can also be an important means of meeting new friends and building social capital. Because of their relative familiarity with Irish society, return migrant parents and relatives understood and recognised the importance of institutions such as sport and other extra-curricular activities as a means of integration for their children. As a result, they frequently encouraged the children's involvement in these and provided the resources to make it possible. For example, this parent explicitly identified sport as a key mechanism of integration for her son:

Paula: ...But I got him stuck in that [football] then and he got to know the lads and he was going in to town and the team was in town so he plays with [the town] all the time and that got him into a lot of things. It got him active.

Interviewer: So do you think things like sport have an important role to play?

Paula: Oh I think huge for boys (Paula, parent, moved from US).

Sport is of course ethnicized in particular ways. Involvement in sport sometimes contributed to children's assertions of their Irishness, as some sports (such as GAA) are bound up with particular narrow cultural definitions of Irishness, and thus could be used as a badge of identity. Sports such as Gaelic football and hurling are traditionally male-dominated and have also been associated with a cultural nationalist ideology of Irishness, in other words, closely tied to assumptions of an authentic unique and pure Irishness with its origins in 19th century nationalism. In this way, the GAA has played an important role as a symbol of Irish identity in the Irish diaspora. Many of the children in this study grew up with this type of relationship to GAA while in the diaspora.

I think one of the things is being Irish in [that country] there's, there's a GAA association, they have, like, they were the only other Irish people that I knew so now there's tonnes of Irish people here so in [that country] I didn't know any other Irish people (Homer, aged 9, moved from outside Europe).

In this quote, Homer explicitly connects 'being Irish' in his previous country of residence with his involvement in the GAA, contrasting it with being Irish in Ireland, where it is no longer about performing an ethnic identity which is different to the mainstream, but instead is an integral part of mainstream society.

Participation in sport is of course highly gendered. Despite increasing female participation, football is still a male-dominated sphere. Its pervasiveness in Irish society means that it is also a key means of social acceptance, particularly dominant in boys' cultures. J. O'Connor's (2009) study of peer relations in a multi-ethnic youth club in Ireland identified sport as a key mechanism of peer integration for ethnic minority boys. Research by Devine, Kenny and McNeela (2008) also points to the important role of 'sportiness' in the inclusion of boys, both minority and majority ethnic, in peer groups. While both boys and girls have access to, and participate in, the dominant team sports (GAA, soccer, rugby), these can have quite different meanings in the lives of boys and girls. All of the boys in my research sample of 14 played either Gaelic football, hurling or soccer on a regular basis, while many of the girls did too. Of the 14 boys, 12 of them presented some type of football as being *central* to their lives and identities. When asked to draw a self-image, many of them drew an image of themselves playing football or another team sport.

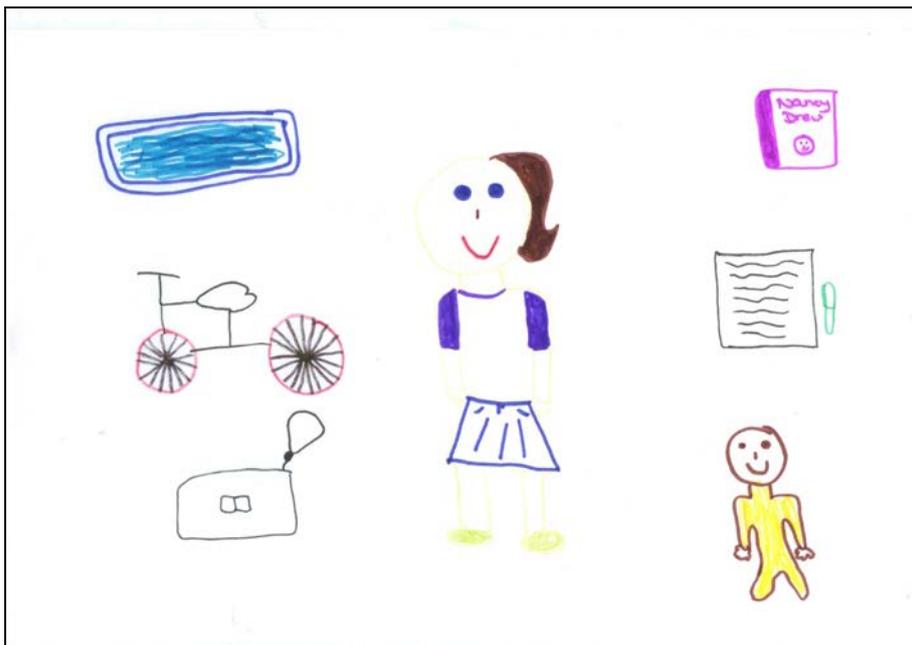
⁵ Gaelic Athletic Association: an umbrella term for the games of Gaelic football, hurling and camogie

Figure 1: 'My life' by Bart, aged 7, moved from outside Europe



However, while two of the girls (both sisters) presented sport, including competitive team sports, as central to their identities, none of the others did. The younger girls tended to mention their involvement in sport in passing, as one of a range of activities in which they were involved. For example, Figure 2 is a self-image by Michelle, aged 11. It includes representations of her interests in swimming and cycling, alongside her other hobbies (reading, writing and so on).

Figure 2: 'My life' by Michelle, aged 11, moved from US



In my discussions with siblings Sean and Niamh, although Niamh said that she played football, my questions to her about playing football were all answered by her brother.

Interviewer: And so do ye play that [football] much?

Sean: Well I played under 14s and under 13s and under 12s. Under 14s we won the county and [...]. we beat our rivals in the both of them [...]. and then in under 12s we didn't really win anything but we won some matches and under 13s we were in a shields final but we lost by a few points but our best player pulled a ligament so he got taken off in a stretcher

I: And who do you play for?

Sean: [Local village]. And the minute he went off we scored a goal

I: So do ye play football? [to the two girls]

Niamh: Yeah.

Emma: No.

I: Is there a girls' football team?

Sean: Well there's a girls' football team, like [local district]. If she wanted to, she could play with them.

(Sean aged 12, Niamh aged 10, Emma aged 6, moved from US).

In this case, the older brother Sean seems to see Gaelic football as his 'thing' and he speaks on behalf of his younger sister. According to Clark and Paechter (2005, p. 265), 'by investing so much of their effort and identity in football, boys effectively assume ownership of the game'. Sean talked a lot to me about his teams (his local club and the local school team) and their success in various competitions. I failed to ascertain whether his sister played for a club or only in school. This exchange reflects the traditional gendered nature of Gaelic football, whereby the existence of male teams is a taken-for-granted norm and female teams (while very popular) are still something of a novelty. So Sean has been able to gain a strong sense of local belonging, and probably also considerable status among his peers and in the local community, as a result of his involvement in football. Gaelic football and soccer both featured heavily in his self-representations. Niamh drew on Irish dance, music and local landmarks in her photography project about her life, with no reference to football.

However, the reproduction of traditional gender stereotypes was not the norm for all of the participants. For example, Caoimhe and her sister Jane both presented sport as being central to their lives.

... yeah I still see myself as a tomboy, sporty (Caoimhe, aged 15, moved from England).

The sporty self-image seems to fulfil a number of functions in Caoimhe's life. Firstly it fits with her self-identity as a tomboy. Existing research suggests that during adolescence, which is a time of identity choices and decision, girls seem to face a decision about whether or not to continue participating in sport (Elling and Knoppers 2005). Because of the close association of sport with masculinity, and the associated forms of social control which require girls to behave in particular non-masculine and non-aggressive ways, most girls choose at some point to stop participating in competitive team sports (Clark and Paechter 2005, Elling and Knoppers 2005). However, it is increasingly possible for girls to challenge these gendered boundaries by continuing to participate in sport. Adopting a 'tomboy' identity, as Caoimhe does, may be one way of doing this and of accumulating symbolic capital. Involvement in sport appears to be a way for Caoimhe, as she says, of just 'having fun' and 'being accepted' on the basis of her sporting abilities.

The role of sport certainly shapes 'integration' experiences in different ways for migrant boys and girls. While sport is available to both as a way of building symbolic capital and developing a sense of belonging in a new environment, the role that it plays is different for both. Because of the close relationship between masculinity and football in Irish society, football is more all-pervasive in boys' cultures than girls', especially in the teenage years. This means that the social pressures for migrant boys to participate in sport are greater than for migrant girls. According to Liston (2006, p.621), 'Irish males, virtually independently of social class, are forced to develop an internalized adjustment to sport'. This certainly raises questions in relation to the pressures on those boys who do not conform to dominant masculinist stereotypes (Connolly 1998, Devine, Kenny and McNeela 2008), thus challenging dominant ideas, common in policy-making, which associate sport with immigrant integration in unproblematic ways.

The reward of participation for boys, however, is acceptance among their peers and in local communities, and sport can become an integral part of their identities, in a way which is less easily available to girls. This does not mean that sport is not important to the girls also. Girls

do participate in different sports and can benefit from this. The social pressures to participate are not as powerful as they are for boys and it is just one of a range of options open to them in terms of forming identities and socialising with peers. It is not necessarily perceived as a 'natural' or 'normal' choice for girls and in any case, female sports are still relatively marginal in relation to male sports in terms of the status and prestige associated with them. So, while involvement in sport can facilitate belongingness for migrant children, the ways in which it does this are highly gender-specific and bound up with dominant local constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Gender, friendships and 'othering' processes

The second dominant narrative articulated by research participants is that moving to live in Ireland is easier for girls because 'girls are nicer'. The main argument here is that boys' cultures are crueller than girls' cultures, and therefore, that boys are more likely to be targets of abuse than girls. This is supported by some international research, which finds that boys are generally more likely to be bullied, and to bully, than girls, and that physical aggression is more common among boys (Shute, Owens and Slee 2008). Caoimhe articulates this very clearly:

I think it's a lot easier though for girls to make friends because if you come over at a young age and you have an English accent the girls don't care, the girls won't care at all, you know, they'll be like "Come on, let's play Ring-a-Rosy" or something like that, like, they just want to make friends, the new girl and "Oh, I'm going to be friends with her first" (Caoimhe, aged 15, moved from England).

According to Caoimhe, she was bullied only by boys and not by girls, and she claims that boys continue to victimise her for being 'from England'. She argues that boys are more obsessed with ethnic/national difference than girls are. Other research seems to support this distinction, highlighting for example, that being a 'new girl' in school can be an indicator of high status among girls (Devine, Kenny and McNeela 2008). This is also consistent with dominant and conventional gender discourses which associate masculinity with aggression and femininity with 'being nice', discourses which are highly influential in children's relationships (Nilan 1991, Goodwin 2002).

In a number of cases in the research, it was evident that some of the boys had been targeted by aggressive, overt and physical forms of abuse. Usually, it was the boys' parents who told me about these incidents and not the boys themselves. In one family that had moved from England, the mother, Tina, explained to me that generally the children had got on well with local children, but there had been some unpleasant experiences. For example, both James (aged 12) and his sister (aged 9) were subjected to hurtful comments relating to their perceived Englishness. However, only James was physically hurt in one incident which took place with another boy. So, while both boys and girls in the study were subject to bullying and exclusion, only the boys had experienced physical violence and threats of violence. Some of the participants seemed to be aware of this gender distinction. For example, Caoimhe told me that she worries a lot for her younger brother who is already the target of verbal abuse from other boys, but she seemed less concerned for her younger sister. In another family, Colin, aged 18, had moved from the US aged 11. According to his mother, Colin found the culture of physical violence in his new all-boys' school something of a shock when he moved there first from the US. He was also bullied, according to his mother.

Paula: He used to come out every day out of the [primary] school and I'd be waiting in the car with my father and I'd say, "How did you get on today, [Colin]?" "I was 'dead' again today, Mom, but I'm still here." This was said to him every day. He was told he was going – he was 'dead' after school.
Interviewer: Really?

Paula: That was a shock the first week... But after about three weeks we got used to it and then it stopped (Paula, parent of Colin, aged 18, moved from US).

She surmised that he had been targeted because 'he spoke different - he was soft looking' (Paula's words). In other words, he was audibly and visibly different in a way that did not conform to local masculinist norms.

Pressures to conform to dominant masculine and feminine norms can be a source of distress to children who have been socialised in contexts where different norms may prevail. Research has shown how 'boundaries in relation to gender content are actively policed by

children, particularly markedly for boys, in the ways in which behaviour and qualities deemed to be 'feminine' are very quickly pounced upon by peers and adults' (Thorne 1993, cited in Morrow 2006, p. 95). This seems to have been significant in the case of one participant, a six year old boy who did not play with the other boys in the neighbourhood, because 'there are a few boys that are mean to him,' according to his sister. On the contrary, his sister, Jade, had a lot of friends and sometimes they let him play with them, although this breaching of the gender boundaries also seemed to cause tension:

Jade: Then sometimes I say I'm going to go by myself this time not...

Will: ...not with you. Meanie!

Jade: Not to be mean, just because we want to play girl things.

(Jade, aged 9, Will aged 6, moved from outside Europe).

A conversation with some of Jade's female friends revealed that they believed that the local boys were mean to Will *because* he played with girls.

Yeah he used to sometimes play with us and then they would make fun of him and then he would tell on them and then they would go 'oh go home and tell Mammy, go home and tell' (Emily, aged 8, moved from continental Europe).

This suggests the existence of different cultural norms in relation to both gender boundaries and adult-child boundaries, which resulted in the active exclusion of Will from local peer groups. However, when I returned a year later for a follow-up visit, it seemed that the dynamics had changed and Will was now accepted among the local boys. His mother explained what she felt had happened when they first arrived:

Emer: So I would say socially he's settled far more now than he had. I think at first he was just like sussing out what the boys, how the boys play. They play very, they were playing differently to what he was used to.

Interviewer: Really? In what way?

Emer: [He came] from quite a sheltered environment [...] You know, there was no bullying and there was no ... You just weren't ugly to your friends. You, you just wouldn't have like, why would you be like that, do you know? So that he really struggled with.

(Emer, parent of Jade, aged 9, and Will, aged 6, moved from outside Europe).

While boys are characterised in the research as more likely to behave in bullying or aggressive ways, girls are described by some participants as being 'nicer' and more interested in making friends than in perceived differences. However, the social norms around femininity and requirements to 'be nice' can lead to hidden cultures of aggression, according to Clark and Paechter (2007). They draw on previous research by Simmons (2002 cited in Clark and Paechter 2007) and others to argue that middle-class discourses of femininity require girls to behave in particular ways, that is, polite, kind and unassertive, but that this means that their anger can be expressed in more subtle and perhaps damaging ways. Research by Goodwin (2002) has explored in depth the hidden, and less hidden, forms of aggression used by girls to control inclusion in and exclusion from peer groups. These include purposeful withdrawal of friendship as well as insult, storytelling and degradation rituals.

Emma (aged 16) hinted that she had been bullied, and she suggested that she had found it difficult to fit in with local female peer groups since she had moved back to Ireland. Although she did not relate a specific incident, Emma referred indirectly to what she saw as the particular nature of the ways in which girls can be nasty to each other:

Boys seem to balance it out almost, they kind of lighten situations and they stop almost the cattiness of what could otherwise be there (Emma, aged 16, moved from continental Europe).

For this reason, she chose specifically to attend a mixed-sex school on her return, displaying awareness of the key role played by gender dynamics in experiences of migration.

I've been in a mixed school since, that was mainly the choice, why we chose [name of school], is because it was a mixed school, instead of an all girls school, which could be very hard to settle into, simply because of almost the bitchiness of girls that 'oh my God, you are the new kid from [previous country]', or even wherever and that it could almost just be quite catty towards somebody who is quite different (Emma, aged 16).

Subtle exclusion within peer groups, or even within friendship groups, can be viewed as a hidden form of aggression. For example, Elaine (aged 7) was excluded within her peer group; she was teased and ridiculed by peers about her accent (but did not seem to be subject to overt name-calling or abuse). Her peer group was quite small because of the low population density of the rural area in which she lived and it was difficult for her to break into established friendships. She was very careful not to appear smarter than her peers in class (to avoid

being teased), and most importantly to her, she did not have a best friend, which is clearly a very important form of both social and symbolic capital.

Interviewer: Would you say that it's easier or harder for boys or girls moving here from a different country?

Elaine: Girls. Or boys - easier for boys.

Interviewer: Why?

Elaine: I haven't really got a best friend in school. [My brother] has. He had one like two weeks after he moved here (Elaine, aged 7, moved from US).

According to Kehily et al. (2002), the dynamics of girls' friendships are central to the regulation and negotiation of gendered identities and the production of differentiated sex-gender hierarchies. Research suggests that friendship has different meanings for boys and girls, with girls frequently expressing intense anxiety about friendships (McLeod 2002). Many of the girls who participated in my research appeared to have been successful (even if not always at first) in forming meaningful friendships in their new schools and neighbourhoods. They talked a lot about their friends and they took photographs of them for the photography projects. Despite challenges many of them had experienced, they had negotiated satisfactory positions for themselves within peer groups, and had thus staked their claims to belong. For others however, like Elaine, it continued to prove a challenge, not helped by the characteristics of the particular rural context in which she lived.

Both of the migration narratives outlined above, then, are valuable in beginning to understand the complexity of the gendered nature of the children's and young people's migration experiences. As Sean and Niamh argue, sport facilitates integration for boys, while girls are less often subjected to overt abuse. While sport plays a central role in the integration experiences of boys in particular, the negotiation of friendships among both boys and girls involves the negotiation of local gender norms, which can present challenges. The children and young people display their social and cultural competences in recognising these norms and, in different ways, adapting to them in order to facilitate their accumulation of cultural and social capital and negotiating acceptable positions for themselves.

Conclusions

The research highlights the gendered nature of experiences of being a migrant child in contemporary Ireland, in the specific context of Irish return migration. The particular role of sport as a mechanism of 'integration' is highlighted, but the research also highlights its highly gendered (and ethnicized) nature in the Irish context. Sport is just one of a range of media which can work to foster meaningful connections among children and young people. Like other activities and frames of reference in which children participate, it is closely bound up with particular ways of performing masculine or feminine identities. While gendered identities are increasingly globalised and homogenised, they are also produced and reproduced in local contexts. This means that migrant boys and girls can find themselves negotiating new sets of cultural norms as they set about learning new and sometimes different ways of being girls/boys/children/teenagers/friends in new environments.

Children in returning Irish families are positioned in complex ways in Irish society, resulting in negotiations of dynamics of inclusion and exclusion around their claims to sameness, Irishness and belonging. These experiences are complicated further by the gendered nature of the children's lives. Gender articulates with other axes of sameness/difference in complex ways – both reinforcing and undermining them – and shaping the accumulation of capital in different ways. Being a boy or a girl can facilitate or undermine the accumulation of symbolic and social capital for return migrant children in different ways, depending on the specific articulation of gendered discourses, norms and institutions in the children's worlds before and after migration. This highlights the gendered nature of child migration and the diversity of child migrant experiences, challenging accounts of child migration which assume universal and predictable experiences. This research therefore contributes to an emerging body of research which seeks to undermine many of the assumptions which underlie adult-centric migration research. Furthermore, it is argued here that research with children requires a fine lens through which to capture the multiple axes of power which shape their lives. Research which recognises the intersectionality of power relations in children's lives thus can begin to unpack the complexity of dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and to reveal deep understandings of how children and young people experience and negotiate their own social worlds.

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