Invisible & Inaudible – Researching Second-Generation Irish Experiences in the British Labour Market

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the ethnographic methods and approaches utilised when conducting fieldwork on second-generation Irish in the British labour market. The focus of extant literature regarding the Irish in Britain has tended to be concentrated on a small number of problem centred issues; either poor health, issues regarding the Diaspora and their identities or the role of education and the Catholic Church. The matter of second-generation Irish and their place in the labour market has been given scant attention – the paper specifically addresses this gap in our knowledge. The dearth of research in this field is somewhat surprising given that the combined numbers of first, second and third-generation Irish in Great Britain are estimated to make up more than 11% of the population and it is generally acknowledged that the Irish have been used as a source of cheap labour for more than two hundred years (Hickman, 1995; Walter, 2001; Ryan, 2008).

There has been significant debate surrounding issue of ethnicity and the Irish community in Britain. The Irish comprise a substantial minority group in Britain that has often been overlooked (Hickman, 1998; Walls, 2001). This is usually ascribed to the fact that the binary view of ethnicity has dominated the landscape of British race relations (Mac an Ghaill, 2000). This has resulted in a widespread assumption that those of Irish descent have similar experiences to the general population because they are predominantly white. Furthermore, this construction of a homogenous whiteness deracializes the Irish whilst at the same time they remain frequently parodied and problematized as feckless drunks (Mac an Ghaill, 2000). References to Irish men within popular culture generally portray them as working as either navvies or builders, on the other hand Irish women are not lampooned to such an extent, as O'Connor and Goodwin (2002:30) argue they tend to be clustered in occupations

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that 'can be regarded as an extension of their domestic role as wife/mother/carer or in the twentieth century, nursing'. A study conducted by the CRE, (1997) revealed that '…the economic contribution of Irish people in Britain was undervalued, because their presence was not acknowledged. The work they had done as labour migrants was not attributed to them' (Walter, 1999:157)

There are three key issues which require consideration when analysing what might determine a distinct Irish ethnicity. To a certain extent these are rooted in historical reasons, most notably the consequences of Hibernophobia, secondly forced inclusion based upon the binary model of race relations with its' assumption of assimilation with the host population. Thirdly, the lack of a recognised hybrid identity; which impacts on the second-generations' understanding and experience of their heritage and perceptions of Irish ethnicity in their country of birth. In order to contextualise second-generation Irish experiences it is useful to consider that the children of migrants who came from ex-colonies and moved to the former colonial power face a unique set of issues. There are a number of factors that require deliberation; whilst such groups may benefit from what Thomson & Crul, (2007:1034) describe as 'positive factors' that will influence their integration – shared history, language and similar educational systems being exemplars, they may also have to face pervasive racial stereotyping. Reflexive racialisation for those second-generation whose family come from former colonies can be problematic, especially if inter-ethnic marriage has occurred; Ifekwunigwe, (1999:206) refers to a '….profound existential paradox facing individuals whose lineages historically situate them as grandchildren of both the colonizers and the colonised'. The specific arrangements between Ireland and Britain regarding citizenship, with the automatic conferment of

the status of a British subject on anyone born in the Irish Free State and the passing of the 1949 Ireland Act (in which Britain declared that the Irish Republic was 'not a foreign country') had significant repercussions and ensured that issues of ethnicity for the Irish Diaspora in Britain remained complex and multifaceted

The Irish Diaspora: lack of multigenerational ethnic data

The prevailing hegemonic discourse on race for all of the twentieth century has led to there being no single data set for the Irish in the UK. Unlike their black counterparts they have not figured in official statistics so even recent analyses of occupational segregation by ethnicity and trends in occupational difference and disadvantage do not provide any data regarding the second-generations experience. Whilst the complexity of the historical relationship between Britain and Ireland might go some way to explaining this situation, the lack of a recognised hybrid identity alongside the influence exerted through the prevailing binary paradigm of race relations has resulted in an ethnic group that is frequently overlooked (Mac an Ghaill, 2000; Hickman, 1998; Walls, 2001). This has an impact upon those with an Irish heritage who are often disregarded because they are predominantly white and thus assumed to have similar experiences to the indigenous population.

It is axiomatic that the Irish were used as a source of cheap labour in Britain for over two hundred years and as such, large numbers of Irish migrant workers were encouraged to take up employment within Britain (Walter, 2001; Cowley, 2001; Ryan, 2008). For nearly all of the twentieth century there was unhindered freedom of movement between the two countries, founded upon a unique arrangement

regarding journeys within a designated Common Travel Area which allowed passport free travel. A consequence of this distinctive arrangement was that limited formal records were kept as to exact numbers of the Irish community in Britain. Historically then, documentary evidence on the exact size of the Irish Diaspora in Britain has been sparse and the lack of government records and statistics has impacted on second and subsequent generations. Furthermore, there has been no systematic collection of data for the Irish as a multi-generational ethnic group and consequently the descendants of Irish migrants have been unable to self-ascribe their ethnic heritage on official forms (Akenson, 1993). Thus data on the Irish community in Britain is piecemeal, scholars have had to rely on existing records such as the Census and Quarterly Labour Force Survey regarding the numbers of people born in Ireland, as a basis from which to estimate probable numbers of the second- and third-generation. Up until the 2001 census there was no opportunity on official forms for second and subsequent generations to formally record their ethnic origin as Irish. However, surprisingly small numbers of second- and third-generation self-ascribed an Irish identity in their 2001 census return, which was somewhat at odds to predicted numbers (Hickman, Walter & Morgan, 2001) and the suggestion that the opportunity to self-ascribe an Irish ethnicity would lead to a threefold increase in the officially recorded size of the Irish community (Walter, 1999). The data indicates that 149,586 people who were born in Britain ticked the Irish ethnic group box (2001 Census, Table S102 cited in O'Keeffe, 2006:179).

Locating second-generation in the British labour market is extremely problematic and four main issues emerge that go some way to explaining the underlying causes. Firstly we are faced with government imposed conceptions of ethnicity that do not

encompass any variants aside from five predetermined 2001 Census options: White, Mixed, Asian, Black and Chinese. The White category has a choice of three subsets: British, Irish or Other White and as this is the only reference to the Irish as an ethnic group on the census form, it presupposes that the Irish are exclusively white.

Secondly, as the Federation of Irish Societies, (2007) have noted subsequent analysis of the 2001 census has failed to disaggregate data for the White group hence the Irish are overlooked as a discrete ethnic group. A review of commentaries on the 2001 census indicate that the varying approaches to dealing with data on White Irish indicate a lack of consistency and call in to question the usefulness of collecting such data if it is then either ignored or subsumed into an overarching and more general 'White' category (Blackwell & Guinea, 2005; Bosveld et al, 2006; Simpson et al, 2006).

This issue also relates to a third point which has been raised by Akenson, (1993) regarding the lack of multi-generational statistics. This shortfall indicates that assimilation is assumed to have taken place by the second-generation. In the introduction to their study Connolly & White, (2006:1) refer to the various groups of migrants who arrived in Britain during the 1950's and 1960's as arriving from the 'New Commonwealth countries' , there is no mention of the Irish at all at this point. However they do provide a brief analysis of White Irish later in the article when there is an implicit suggestion of assimilation as they state: 'Those who came shared a common language and Christian background with the White British population' (Connolly & White, 2006:3). Even if the majority of second-generation have assimilated to some degree, this does not provide an adequate explanation of the continuation of ethnic occupational niches in construction and nursing as outlined by both Hickman et al, (2001) and FIS, (2007b).

Finally, official analyses of the 2001 census do not disaggregate the Irish as a distinct Ethnic group despite the British government's espoused policy of multiculturalism. Heath & Cheung, (2006) make passing reference to the White Irish population using them as an example of a group that can be overlooked when what they describe as 'lay writers confusion' conflates ethnicity with colour difference.

Locating the second-generation in the labour market

Walls & Williams, (2003) comment on the apparent invisibility of the Irish as a distinct ethnic group because of their whiteness. They suggest that this has resulted in the Irish community being under researched, with few accounts of their experiences, as their whiteness has rendered them invisible. It is clear that statistical evidence concerning second-generation Irish in the British labour market is partial. Neither does extant research provide a comprehensive picture of their working lives; analysis is thwarted because scholars have to rely on data for the Irish-born in Britain (Halpin, 1997; O'Connor & Goodwin, 2002) as a basis for predicting the second-generations occupations.

Whilst successive waves of Irish-born migrants have worked in stereotypical and gendered occupations their descendants' careers have not been scrutinised in any depth. There has been one study (Hickman et al, 2001) which analysed three official datasets, GHS, LFS and BCS70 in an attempt to quantify the number of second-generation Irish in Britain. They acknowledge that second and third-generation children have been overlooked by most datasets because there is an implicit assumption, based entirely on their skin colour that they have been assimilated in to the indigenous population. Early work in the area utilised data from the 1979 and

1980 GHS to investigate how far the occupational distribution of second-generation Irish mirrored that of the English (Hornsby-Smith & Dale, 1988: 527). In contrast, Hickman et al's (2001) pioneering study sought to extrapolate data from existing large datasets in order to establish a valid baseline that portrayed the second-generation. They indicate that the inclusion of the Irish 'Ethnic Group' category in the 2001 census is a step towards acknowledging the multi-generational make up of the Irish community. However, given the dearth of existing official statistics they have to resort to calculating a figure for the size of the second-generation population. They estimate that this is two times greater than Irish-born and therefore propose that if a multiplier is used the combined population of Irish-born and second-generation would equate to 1.7 million, compared to an Irish-born total of 845,057 (Hickman et al, 2001: 43) Taking in to account regional variances, in areas where there is a high concentration of second-generation then the multiplier should be 2.5.

There are inherent difficulties when attempting to extrapolate data. Hickman et al's attempts to predict the total size of the second-generation based entirely on statistics from three different datasets none of which set out to show second-generation Irish as a separate category is fraught with difficulty. They present some data on second-generation employment patterns which makes use of a three part classification developed by the Irish Republic's National Economic & Social Council (NESC), which when combined with data based on the General Household Survey (GHS) figures provides evidence of gendered socio-economic groups. This data indicates that employment for second-generation males is much more closely aligned to their British counterparts than those of second-generation females and also confirms Hornsby-Smith and Dale's (1988) findings that second-generation women have a significant presence in higher socio-economic groups. If we look at occupational

categories by gender and place of birth in the following two tables, what is evident is that many of the second-generation are engaged in occupations in between their Irish-born parents and the other UK-born white population sampled.

TABLE ONE

Occupational categories by birthplace/ethnic group, 1983 (%)

WOMEN

	Irish-born (Republic of Ireland)	UK-born with Irish parents	Other UK-born (white)
ll Prof. ed. welf. health	21	13	13
v Managerial	3	7	5
vi Clerical & related	22	37	40
vii Selling	6	12	8
ix Catering, cleaning, personal	39	21	17
xii Printing, assembling	2	2	2
Total	51,455	43,172	906,280

Source: Walter, (1988)

As Hickman et al, (2001:31) note second-generation females are found in greater numbers in clerical work than the migrant generation, there are fewer second-generation women working in domestic and personal services. There is a degree of similarity regarding second-generation men and their intermediate position in the

categories of construction and professional occupations. Again they are positioned between their Irish-born parents and the other UK-born white population sampled, indicating that whilst some men move away from the ethnic niche of construction work there are still twice as many second-generation Irish engaged in this type of work than their UK-born counterparts.

TABLE TWO

Occupational categories by birthplace/ethnic group, 1983 (%)

MEN

	Irish-born (Republic of Ireland)	UK-born with Irish parents	Other UK-born (white)
l Prof. manage/admin	1	6	10
v Managerial	8	12	12
vi Clerical & related	7	12	12
ix Catering, cleaning, personal	1	8	6
xi Processing, non metal	11	3	4
xii Processing, metal	11	13	14
xiii Printing, assembling	7	5	3
xiv Construction	26	10	5
xv Transport	11	13	10
Total	55,574	55,548	1,257,701

Source: Walter, (1988)

Both these studies were positivist and therefore fail to provide us with a comprehensive account of the second-generation experiences of work; consequently as Walls & Williams (2003) suggest, as a group they are rendered invisible and inaudible. Thus it appears that the labour market experiences of a sizeable proportion of the population have not been examined in any qualitative studies and consequently have no voice within extant literature.

METHOD AND SAMPLE

The research sought to obtain individualised accounts of the second-generation's experiences within the workplace, transition to work and choice of career rather than an examination of social mobility per se. The empirical data presented here come from a small scale, non-probability purposive sample collated from depth interviews, focusing on biographical narratives obtained as part of a study regarding the labour market experience of second-generation Irish. Thirty participants, living or working in a city in the English midlands with an established Irish community who make up more than 8% of the local population (FIS, 2007) took part.

The sample was made up of fourteen women and sixteen men, whose ages ranged from 27 to 76 with just over half of participants aged between 40 and 60. Criteria for inclusion in the study stipulated that all participants must have parent(s) who were born in the Republic of Ireland (or Irish Free State) with a Catholic background and they themselves must have been born in England. These parameters are easily understood and widely accepted as a credible construction of the second-generation (Ullah,1990; McCarvill, 2002, Campbell, 1999). As the primary focus of the research concentrated on labour market experiences the sample deliberately excluded those whose parents were born in the six counties due to the similarity of their

qualifications and occupation patterns with the host population (Walter, 2001; Hornsby-Smith & Dale, 1998). Furthermore, another reason for imposing such parameters is that evidence suggests that by the second generation there are differences between the attainment levels of those with a Republic of Ireland background and those whose parents are from the six counties. Moreover, extant research indicates that the children of Northern Irish-born parents have qualifications and occupation patterns that closely resemble their English counterparts (Walters, 2001; Hornsby-Smith & Dale, 1988).

It was also decided that for practical reasons participants would be recruited from the second-generation Irish who lived or worked in Coventry. The reasons for this were twofold; Coventry has historically had a large Irish community so it would be relatively straightforward to make contact with people who fell within the research parameters. Coventry, the 11th largest city in Britain, is a suitable site in which to conduct research on second-generation Irish as it attracted large numbers of Irish-born migrants in the post war years and currently some 3.5% of its' population are Irish according to the 2001 Census data. Taking these Census statistics and then applying the multiplier as suggested by Hickman et al (2001) and previously discussed in the review of the literature, would indicate that closer to 8.75% of the population was a more realistic assessment of first- and second-generation Irish in the city. However, a note of caution is necessary here as the only official figures we have to work with are derived from the Census categories, which means that it automatically excludes any self-ascribed Irish who are not 'White'. Secondly and more pragmatically, as a part time doctoral researcher who was working full time and also had domestic commitments, the opportunity to undertake fieldwork was

extremely limited and it was felt that restricting participation to those living or working in Coventry would aid data collection and would be the most efficient use of time.

Such an approach meant that the sampling was both non-probability (Blaxter et al, 2001:163) and purposive. Non-probability sampling was deemed suitable because there was no obvious sampling frame for the population in question, therefore a multiplicity of approaches had to be employed to advertise in a variety of different arenas for the need for participants to take part in the study. Purposive sampling ensured that those interviewed were 'relevant to the research question' (Bryman, 2004:334). However, once it became apparent that sufficient numbers of participants were becoming difficult to attract within the timescale available for conducting the interviews, snowball sampling was also used if interviewees suggested (without prompting) that they had contacts who might be interested in taking part.

Whilst it might initially appear that the research design to obtain a relevant sample lacked coherence, the combined approaches constituted 'Opportunistic sampling' and enabled the identification of appropriate individuals. Adopting an opportunistic approach enabled a variety of methods to secure participants to be utilised and also ensured any unexpected opportunities that presented themselves were pursued (Marshall & Rossman, 1999: 78), as Rossman & Rallis, (1998:94) observe qualitative researchers need to 'develop a repertoire of strategies to gain access'.

When determining the size of the sample to be interviewed it was clear that it would not be possible to claim that self-selected participants were truly 'representative' of the second-generation Irish in Coventry in terms of quantifiable variables such as social class, gender or age. Rather, composition of the opportunistic sample sought

to ensure sufficient respondents with as far as possible a balanced mix of age and gender being achieved, in order to give the research face validity.

Gaining access

A variety of organisations were contacted to negotiate and/or facilitate access to potential participants with a relevant background; these included Coventry Irish Society (CIS), Coventry Mayo Association, Catholic churches in Coventry, the Coventry branch of the Irish Professionals Network (IPN), Gaffney's Irish shop and BBC Coventry and Warwickshire local radio. Finally, during the early stages of the research when it was proving problematic to obtain participants, the researcher approached personal contacts who were second-generation Irish. The contacts approached were people the researcher knew through her previous employment and business contacts. The table below summarises where the participants were recruited from:

TABLE THREE SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

SOURCE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
MAYO ASSOCIATION	1
IRISH PROFESSIONALS NETWORK	8
PARISH CHURCHES	11
PERSONAL CONTACT	6
SNOWBALL SAMPLE	4
RADIO APPEARANCE	0
GAFFNEY'S IRISH SHOP	0
FÁILTE MAGAZINE	0
TOTAL	30

Biographical methods

Biographical research is an ideal method through which to explore an individuals' social construction of reality. It seeks to reveal and understand individuals' lives in terms of both their distinctiveness and also within their social context (Roberts, 2002) and for that reason was deemed particularly suitable for this research. It is an established and recognized approach which according to Lieblich et al, (1998:9)

encompasses 'life experience and identity as connected to social groupings, situations and events.' Utilising this method enables the fusion of life and work histories alongside discussing the narrative of their lives, so that the individual constructs personal meaning during the telling (Bruner, 1986). Thus narration provides stories at different levels and as Chase, (1995) suggests that narratives contain submerged stories which:

> 'tells us more about the individual; specific themes or issues that relate to the larger issues of gender, class and culture and whether there are any patterns that emerge; or gender, class and culture underpinnings in the narrative.'

Narrative is also recognised as a universal mechanism that provides a means of recalling and deciphering the past whilst at the same time connecting our understanding of the world and our attempts to make sense of it (Reissman, 1987).

Life story interviews were particularly apposite for use with the second-generation Irish participants in this study because capturing the life stories of under-researched groups adds to existing knowledge of the social world. It is generally acknowledged that much of the life story data within extant academic literature tends to relate to dominant groups and gathering personal narratives through life story interviews helps facilitate inclusion for marginalised or overlooked groups (Bertaux, 1981; Bornat, 1994; Atkinson, 1998; Bloor, 2002; Chamberlayne et al, 2000). The potential of personal narratives is alluded to by Miles & Crush, (1993:84) who believe that they are beneficial in 'contesting academic androcentrism and reinstating the marginalized and dispossessed as makers of their own past'. As Josselson, (1995) argues, how individuals recount their life stories is told through the filter of our society and customs, hence under-represented ethnic groups are likely to have

experienced a different social reality from the indigenous population. Indeed, with its emphasis on the individual experience, life stories facilitate the comprehension of different cultural situations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This is particularly relevant for this group as they have been categorised as an under researched group (Arrowsmith, 2000; Walls & Williams, 2003). A pragmatic strategy was adopted whereby the researcher sought to obtain 'in-depth portions' of a life story rather than a 'superficial overview of an entire life' (Miles & Crush, 1993:90).

Key to this approach is an individuals' reflexivity and their ability to rationalize and describe past events, present situations and future plans. It was not anticipated that it would be difficult to get people to talk about their working lives, since the qualitative research interview was an ideal vehicle for uncovering layers of meaning within the topic as it provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on past and current careers. By concentrating the majority of time in the interview on aspects of participants work history, the design adhered to Robson's, (1993:382) advice, whereby a chronological presentation is eschewed in favour of the 'principle turnings' of an individual's life.

There are many challenges and complexities inherent in conducting research interviews and such encounters are not devoid of power relations as King, (1994:15) points out there can never be such a thing as a 'relationship-free' interview. Attention must therefore be paid to the association between interviewer and interviewee; as Roberts, (2002:87) reports, the customary idea of an impartial non-judgemental data collector has begun to be replaced by an acknowledgement that the 'role of the researchers life in the research process is increasingly part of the methodological discussion'. However, Oakley, (2003) espouses a non-hierarchical approach and

points out that when interviewer and interviewee are both members of a minority group then the interviewer will be acutely aware of the need to ensure equality in the relationship (Oakley, 2003: 252).

The researcher was aware that as she shared an Irish heritage with her participants it would be easy for those who had not met her before to identify commonality which could be ascertained from her first name alone – all initial contacts and interviews were arranged using her married (English) surname. During the interview process, many participants did allude to a shared experience or identity, asking whereabouts in Ireland her family were from, or which parish she was from; perhaps the most extreme example being the participant who asked:

> *'Where are your parents from as a matter of interest - you've got a Mayo look about you?'*

There was an implicit assumption by many participants that there was no need for full explanations of various cultural phenomena to be articulated, so for example they might refer to someone as being a 'Catenian' or a 'Pioneer' without further explanation. The researcher was also party to confidential family information; on a number of occasions during fieldwork as soon as recording had stopped participants discussed the well documented health problems of the Irish community, namely alcohol dependency and mental health issues and alluded to instances in their own families.

Photo-elicitation

When an appointment for interview was arranged each participant was asked to bring with them a photograph of their parent(s). Requesting photographs of parents

was chosen as a way of exploring issues of identity and ethnicity and were deemed particularly apt as extant literature suggests that it is an especially useful approach when the 'invisibility of ethnic difference to outsiders makes photo elicitation a natural method'.(Harper, 2002:22). Each interview started with the participant showing the researcher their chosen photographs and talking about who was in the picture and when and where it was taken. Strangleman, (2004: 183) indicates that the rise in visual aspects of contemporary culture has not been matched by an increased use of photographs within academic journals in the social sciences. Nevertheless, photo-elicitation is a useful method to employ, as Harper, (2002:21) asserts that it 'bridges the gap' between subject and researcher thereby yielding 'richer data' as it ensures that the depth interview is grounded by the image presented in the photograph. More importantly, he advocates that the use of photo-elicitation 'breaks the frame of normal views' and in doing so may provide a new perspective of their 'social existence' for participants. On occasion it was clear that particular photographs did break the frame of reference and prompted rich memories with participants commenting on the social milieu of the Irish diaspora. The use of photo-elicitation at the outset of each interview ensured rapid establishment of rapport and allowed the interviewee to control the pace of questions. It also engendered a relatively informal relaxed start to the proceedings, although as Oliffe and Bottorff, (2007:853) point out the data is grounded in the images that participants chose to present rather than responses to predetermined interview questions.

Dempsey and Tucker, (1991:164) also argue that photo-elicitation 'yields richer data' because it requires participants to react to memories or recall when viewing specific images. They believe that this method has the potential to be more than a data

source because it can also be used for 'grounding contexts and illustrating concepts' (Dempsey & Tucker, 1991: 184). Certainly Rose, (2008:151) agrees that the use of photographs in research projects can be much more than 'descriptive illustrations'. However as Clark-IbáÑez, (2004:1512) posits the photographs in themselves do not have to be particularly remarkable, they generate more than the sum of their parts:

> 'Yet there is nothing inherently interesting about photographs; instead, photographs act as a medium of communication between researcher and participant. The photographs do not necessarily represent empirical truths or "reality". In this sense, photographs used in the photo-elicitation interview have a dual purpose. Researchers can use photographs as a tool to expand on questions and simultaneously, participants can use photographs to provide a unique way to communicate dimensions of their lives.'

A large number of the photographs presented by participants were formal pictures – either wedding or studio portraits, whilst others represented significant rites such as First Holy Communion or St. Patrick's Day celebrations. One woman recounted how her family were relatively poor and did not own a camera so that each time her mother came home from hospital with a new baby a neighbour took a picture for them. All four siblings had been pictured in the same pose in exactly the same spot.

Sontag, (1977:8) describes how each family 'constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images' through photographs. Such 'portrait-chronicles' were presented by participants; this was particularly marked where families had broken up and three participants were keen to explain that no photographs with both parents together remained in existence, many had either been destroyed or the absent parent literally cut out of the picture. Other participants wished to demonstrate the prosperity achieved by their parents; in one case the initial photograph captured the participant's mother as a new émigré in nurse's uniform whilst a later picture showed

her mother in evening dress enjoying a Caribbean cruise. Several of the male participants carried remembrance mass cards which incorporated pictures of their deceased mothers which demonstrated an adherence to certain Catholic traditions even though they had described themselves as lapsed.

A number of ethical issues arise when using photographs as some images provoked powerful highly emotional responses. Clearly the use of photo-elicitation had to be carefully monitored to ensure that participants maintained their equilibrium when answering questions and that use of photographs did not trigger reminiscences that were outside the scope of the research. In two instances when participants became emotional or tearful whilst discussing the photograph the interview was halted and the researcher waited until they had regained their composure. Both these episodes were very brief and occurred when participants were reflecting on how hard migration must have been for their parents who were relatively young when they first left Ireland. An added dilemma was whether or not photographs could be used in the published research given that all participants were from one geographical area and thus could be easily identified by other members of the local community. For that reason only two participants were asked if their pictures could be used with very specific criteria relating to what circumstances would be appropriate.

Conclusion

The life story interview method does have its limitations as it is principally dependent on participants' memory; throughout the interviews participants had to rely on accurate recollections which sometimes meant that narratives became circuitous as participants' looped back and forth when discussing work histories. Additionally the

thematic arrangement used relied on participants' having some knowledge of their parent's life before migration. This was awkward where family rifts had occurred – in the most extreme case one participant's mother had simply refused to ever talk to her children about Ireland and her upbringing. There were instances when the narrative interview format obviously became tiring and emotionally draining for participants; this was most apparent when reflecting on and discussing the privations that parents had endured on migration.

Grele, (1998) discusses the problems inherent in narrative interview, mainly the likelihood of bias due to poor memory. This is also touched on by Plummer, (2001:235) who describes what he terms 'narrative memory' when selective recall occurs and some events take on greater significance than others as they become distorted through time. There is also the possibility that participants self-censor when they know that their responses are being recorded. Likewise, post-hoc rationalisation may come in to play whereby participants may seek to promote their previous behaviour in a more favourable way. Despite it being impossible for the interviewer to know with any accuracy if this is happening, chatting at the end of the interview after the recorder is switched off did at times generate more data, although as mentioned earlier much of this related to family experiences of alcoholism and depression.

The use of photo-elicitation was a powerful technique in generating detailed data that provided information on unexpected yet related areas of the research. The selection of photographs was under the control of participants who determined which images to share with the researcher albeit having been given a clear rationale when setting up the interview. Using photographs generated rich qualitative responses with images prompting recall of family stories. It should be used with a caveat, family

photographs provoked powerful emotional reactions and researchers need to remain sensitive to the impact pictures can have.

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