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Living on the Edge in Ireland

Stories and images of exclusion have characterised all cultures over long historical periods. In our western contemporary society of racism, sexism and marginalization of minority groups, exclusion has become the dominant factor the creation of psychological, social, cultural and spatial boundaries. 'Ireland's Own' Glimpses of the Excluded - Surviving on the Edge, seeks to identify the forms of social and spatial exclusion and examine accounts of members of the Irish Traveller community.

In embarking on a Doctoral thesis and evaluating documents and testimonies on the lives of Irish Travellers by a variety of writers, the author asks why the history of Irish Travellers is so neglected by the academic establishment. I dare to suggest that both the practices which result in the marginalization and the exclusion of certain minorities and those which also result in the denial and exclusion of valuable knowledge, have important implications for society, and for ways of celebrating difference and diversity.

Having drawn on a wide range of ideas and evidence this paper presents some accounts which highlight the tendency of powerful groups to view Irish Travellers as defiled, folk devils and deviants threatening to society; and those representing the 'difference' and 'diversity' of the lives of Irish Travellers.