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TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE PORTRAYALS OF THE ROMA  
IN A U.S. NEWSPAPER

by  
SABRINA DEATON  
B.A. Miami University of Speech Communication, 1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Masters of Arts  
in the Nicholson School of Communication  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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2013

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the media portrayals of Roma in the United States by taking a closer look at “Gypsy crime” articles in a purposive sample of newspaper articles. These newspaper articles give details of “confidence” crimes and name the alleged perpetrators as Roma or members of the ethnic minority group commonly known as Gypsies. A textual analysis was conducted of 23 articles appearing in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* from August 16, 2011 to February 8, 2013 covering fraud charges against several members of the Marks family. This primary evaluation narrowed the initial sample to nine articles that contained references to *Roma*, *Romani*, or *Gypsy*. Further analysis of these nine articles revealed four major categories of findings regarding the representation of the ethnic minority. The categories included: 1) the pairing of the preferred term, *Roma* with the pejorative term, *Gypsy*; 2) reinforcement of stereotypes; 3) portrayal of the ethnic group as foreign others; and 4) Roma portrayed as a threat to the dominant culture and its members. The theoretical bases for the study included Social Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963) and Orientalism (Said, 1978) both of which offer a critical lens through which to examine the portrayals of this ethnic minority.

This thesis is dedicated to my two heroes ...

To my mother, Dee Dee, who never got the opportunity to follow her dreams, but in the short time we had together, showed me the meaning of true courage and instilled in me the importance of following my own dreams.

To my son, Alexander, whose love has blessed me more than I can ever repay. I only hope that my completion of this work helps you to be proud of your origins and teaches you to follow your own dreams.

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Second, I would like to thank Dr. Kristin Davis and Dr. M.C. Santana for their assistance through this process as well. Their insights and recommendations served me well. It was an honor to have such esteemed scholars on my committee.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Roma, more commonly known as Gypsies<sup>1</sup>, are one of the most marginalized and socially disadvantaged people throughout the world. Their marginal status, especially in the United States, is propagated by the media. Subsequently, they endure high rates of unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty (Hancock, 2004) even in the United States, the land of opportunity. Since their emergence in the West around the fourteenth century, misconceptions, rumors, and misnomers emerged with them, eventually becoming fodder for the works of writers, filmmakers, and journalists (Hancock, 2010b). However, in the U.S., most members of the dominant culture have had little to no interpersonal interactions with Roma (Hancock, 2010b). Much of our perceptions about the social world and those within it are greatly shaped by the media (Devereaux, Haynes & Power, 2012). Individuals and groups often look to the media for information about unfamiliar groups. They then use information obtained from media messages to form their image of that group and its members (Mobasher, 2006; Signarelli, 1989). However, many of the media messages informing the majority group about this ethnic minority are “Gypsy crime” articles, newspaper articles detailing confidence crimes allegedly committed by

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use the terms Roma and Gypsy to refer to members of this ethnic minority. Roma, the more politically correct term, was employed within the last few decades by activists within the minority group in an effort to dissociate with the pejorative synonymous with the term *Gypsy* (Herakova, 2009). My choice to use both terms was influenced by two factors: 1) as a member of this ethnic minority, personally, I have found that even though the term *Roma* is becoming more widespread, the majority of *gadje* are more familiar with *Gypsy*, 2) the majority of the aforementioned crime articles use both terms. The terms Romanies and the Romani people are also used in reference to this group but on a smaller scale.

Roma/Gypsies. Therefore, the information the public gets about Roma labels them as a foreign race of criminals.

This thesis analyzes media representations of Roma in the U.S. by examining a purposive sample of “Gypsy crime” articles. Specifically, this thesis evaluates whether these texts stigmatize Roma in this country, especially considering that negative media coverage has the power to reify and propagate the spoiled identity of this ethnic minority (Stangor & Crandall, 2000; Smith, 2007; Smith & Hipper, 2010). Furthermore, the news stories are examined to determine whether they portray members of this ethnic minority, most of who have been born in this country for generations, as foreign and separate from the dominant culture.

First, this thesis provides a historical and political background of the Roma including their origins, migration, and current state. Second, this thesis presents a review of relevant research consisting of depictions of the Roma in racial works, popular literature, and media. Third, I explain the theoretical bases, Social Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963) and Orientalism (Said, 1978), that will be applied for analysis and interpretation. Next, this study examines a purposive sample of “Gypsy crime” articles using the qualitative method of textual analysis to evaluate the media depictions of the Roma in the U. S. and the underlying dominant frameworks that perpetuate them. Ultimately, this thesis will seek to fill a gap in the research focusing on media depictions of the Roma in the U.S. since very little research of this nature exists.

The next section of the introduction is a historical background of the Roma, which explains their origins, migrations, and social and political standings.

### Historical and Political Background of Roma

Roma are an ethnic minority that originated in Northern India (Fraser, 1995, Hancock, 1987, 2010a, 2010b; Herakova, 2009, Liegeois, 1986, Oprea, 2007). The timing of their exodus, around the tenth century, is agreed upon by most scholars; however, the reason behind their exodus is not. One hypothesis is that their departure was the result of a royal request from the Persian ruler, Bahram Gur (Fraser, 1995, Liegeois, 1986). Observing the low morale among his subjects, he sent word to his father-in-law, the ruler of India, to send 10,000 musicians to his territory for the purpose of entertaining his people. These musicians were ancestors of the modern-day Roma (Fraser, 1995, Liegeois, 1986).

A more popular hypothesis that is gaining legitimacy explains that Roma are descendents of Indian troops and their camp-followers who, because of their extensive military efforts during the tenth century, travelled farther and farther west into Persia, now Iran (Hancock, 1987, 2006, 2010b). Consequently, they were unable to find their way back into India, and some settled in the region while a large proportion migrated into Armenia (Hancock, 1987, 2006, 2010b).

Despite the uncertainty about the reason for the departure, scholars have been able to trace Roma origins back to India linguistically (Fraser, 1995; Iouta & Schurr, 2004; Liegeois, 1986). The first evidence of this came about in the eighteenth century, when a Hungarian student studying at a Dutch university overheard three Indian students speaking in their native language and recognized several words were the same as those spoken by the Gypsies working on his family estate in Hungary (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 2006, 2010b). Subsequently, linguistic scholars were able to not only trace their origins but also their diaspora by examining the adoption of vocabulary from other languages into Romani, the Roma language. In recent years

their Indian origins have been fortified as medical scholars have found Roma to be more closely related genetically to Indians than their European neighbors (Iouto & Schurr, 2004).

The story behind their origins has proven problematic for many reasons, with the major one resting on the fact that Roma, until recently, lacked a written language and relied only on oral tradition to record their history and culture. During the beginning of their migration and dispersion, members were able to remember their Indian roots but as centuries passed, they forgot their background, thus leaving it up to Western scholars to trace their origins and construct their ethnic identity (Hancock, 2010b). This has led to many misconceptions about this group; one of which resulted in the misnomer *Gypsy* by which they are most commonly known. They were deemed Gypsies because mistakenly, they were thought to have come from Egypt due to their dark complexions and features (Bardi, 2006; Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 2010b).

Despite a great deal of evidence to support their origins, only speculations can be made regarding their early culture and diasporic lifestyle. Many speculate the cultural structure of the early Roma was similar to an Indian sub-caste social structure, which was based on occupational specialties opposed to the primary caste system based on birthright (Fraser, 1995, Hancock, 2006). Some of the traditional occupations included metal smithing, goldwashing, basket making, musicians, fortune telling, and horse trading and care. Despite the various occupations, there were several within the group proficient in each of these trades, therefore creating a need to migrate and disperse to find demand for their services (Fraser, 1995). Another likely dimension to their culture, which persists to this day, was the desire and to a large degree, the necessity to retain a social distance between themselves and *gadje*, non-Roma. In many cases, the only acceptable association with *gadje* is for economic exchange (Hancock, 1997, 2004).

### *Westward Migration and Diaspora*

The Roma more than likely led a peripatetic lifestyle throughout their early history and was essentially responsible for their dispersion throughout Persia and migration into Armenia. Their time in Armenia was considerable, as evidenced by the adoption of a vast number of Armenian words into Romani. Although they continued their peripatetic habits, their migration westward into the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Roman Empire, was an effort to evade the state of unrest befalling the region due to the recurring military invasions by the Seljuks, an Islamic sect (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1987, 2006, 2010b).

The Roma dispersed throughout the Byzantine Empire, which was heavily steeped in Ancient Greek culture despite its sovereignty to the Roman Empire and also had a tremendous effect on the Romani language. Once again in an effort to avoid the chaos of war, many continued to move westward, fleeing the frequent incursions by the Ottoman Turks, who eventually conquered the region, making it an Islamic nation (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1987, 2010b).

Their westward movement continued over the next few centuries and brought them into the Balkans, where they were enslaved for five centuries (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1987, 2010b). Those numbers of Roma who evaded enslavement continued their westward movement out of the Balkans into and throughout the western European countries so that by the seventeenth century populations of the ethnic minority could be found throughout most of Europe. A second wave of Roma came across Europe after the abolition of slavery in the Balkans in 1856; following similar migration and dispersion patterns as their predecessors (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1987, 2010b).

### *European Reception of Gypsies*

Throughout their European immigration, Gypsies were received coldly. The Balkans proved to be an unfriendly region for this group. It was in this region, specifically Wallachia and Moldavia, now Romania, that the Roma were enslaved for 500 years, beginning in the fourteenth century (Fraser, 1995, Hancock, 1987). According to Hancock (1987) the Roma were enslaved for the very professions that inspired their migratory lifestyle. Being on a major trade route allowed the local economy to flourish for years, however, continual Islamic incursions eventually became a financial strain on the region. One such reason was the Ottoman Turks cutting off access to eastern trade routes; severing the ability to obtain valuable goods and services. A second reason was that the majority of men from the surrounding area were drafted into the military, thus depleting the labor force. Severely deficient in an adequate labor force and the funds to pay such laborers, the government detained the Roma as forced labor (Fraser, 1995, Hancock, 1987).

As previously mentioned, following their emancipation in 1856, the generations of Roma who endured slavery headed westward as their relatives did before them. Similarly, these Gypsies were received coldly in the West as well (McGarry, 2012). Shortly after their arrival, officials began drafting anti-Gypsy legislation, which carried consequences for the immigrants including among others monetary fines; forced registration; deportation; imprisonment; and execution (Bardi, 2006).

The severity of these anti-Gypsy measures culminated in the attempted annihilation of the Gypsies at the hands of the Nazis. During the Holocaust, Gypsies, along with the Jews, were targeted for extermination; however, Gypsies were the only group marked by the Third Reich

solely for racial reasons. Obsessed with the purity of their race, the Nazis viewed the Gypsies as a threat to the German gene pool, specifically citing that Gypsies possessed a genetic criminality (Hancock, 2004, 2010b). Disputes among German officials, Holocaust scholars, and Roma activists regarding the number of Roma victims exists to this day, with estimates ranging from 600,000 to 1.5 million (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 2004, 2006). Despite the controversy, the fact remains that between 1940 and 1945, about 80 percent of the Roma population in Nazi-occupied countries was killed (Hancock, 1993).

#### *Current State of Roma in Europe*

To date, the Roma are one of the most marginalized and socially disadvantaged populations throughout Europe (Gatenio Gabel, 2009; Imre, 2006; Jones, 1998). In many countries, Roma are three times more likely to be unemployed than members of the dominant culture. High rates of illiteracy also contribute to their disadvantage, with the majority of Roma having little to no education beyond primary school (Gatenio Gabel, 2009; Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008).

Their disadvantage goes beyond socioeconomic factors and has followed historical trends to include persecution at the state level. In the past few decades, they have endured ethnic profiling in Italy; segregation, discrimination and bullying in schools throughout Europe; mass evictions from their homes in Spain; the expulsion of Roma refugees from France and Germany; and forced sterilizations throughout Central and Eastern European regions (Cespedi & Simon, 2004, Lloyd & McCluskey, 2008, McGarry, 2012).

Much of this modern mistreatment and disadvantage escalated after the fall of communism in 1998 throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Although, the circumstances

underlying the treatment of Roma in post-communist Europe are complex, two basic factors have been highly influential: a heightened sense of nationalism and the transition to a market economy in these countries (Foszio & Anastasoiaie, 2001; Imre, 2006; Gatenio Gabel, 2009).

Under communism, a climate of assimilation was enforced. Roma along with other ethnicities were supposed to blend into a unified, homogeneous citizenship. After the fall, these former communist-block countries found a new nationalist pride, which excluded Roma since historically they have been viewed as possessing a transnational identity – a sense of disloyalty and otherness (Foszio & Anastasoiaie, 2001; Imre, 2006; Gatenio Gabel, 2009).

The transition from a socialist economy to a capitalist market economy initially proved to have negative effects for all populations within these countries; however, their lack of education and competitive skills has continued to block Roma recovery. Many Roma under the communist system were employed in unskilled positions in factories and on collective farms; however, amongst the various changes inspired by the transition was a move toward de-industrialization. This move took with it the majority of unskilled jobs and replaced them with positions requiring more specialized skills and education; both of which, most Roma lack. Consequently, high numbers of Roma rely on government assistance, which has proven to enliven anti-Roma sentiments among non-Roma; feeding the view that the minority is a drain on the dominant culture (Foszio & Anastasoiaie, 2001; Imre, 2006; Gatenio Gabel, 2009).

### *Roma in the United States*

One of the first records of Roma in the new world dates back to the Renaissance and cites that three came over as slaves with Christopher Columbus on his third voyage (Hancock, 1993). Slavery continued to be a part of the Roma experience as many were transported to the

colonies from Western European countries during the seventeenth century. Small numbers of free Roma immigrated to North American colonies throughout this period as well. They began migrating to the U.S. in larger numbers in the early nineteenth century with a surge after their emancipation from the Balkans in the mid-century. Roma immigration to the United States continues to this day and has seen influxes after World War II and the fall of communism in 1989 (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1993; Oprea, 2007).

Soon after their arrival, anti-Gypsy laws were enacted in nearly every state in this country. The laws against this ethnic minority often required them to register with local authorities and/or to pay a fee to obtain a license to reside in the area. Noncompliance included fines, confiscation of personal property, expulsion, and imprisonment. The total of these racist laws have since been repealed; however, the last one remained in effect until 1998 in New Jersey (Hancock, 2010a, Oprea, 2007).

Activists and scholars assert that American Gypsies to this day often face racial profiling, and police harassment (Hancock, 1997, 2002, 2010a). Congruently, Roma in the U.S. face social inequities including high rates of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, reduced access to health care and imprisonment (McGarry, 2012).

#### *American Roma Cultural Practices*

Roma are considered a pariah group, rejected or discriminated against by the dominant culture namely due to certain characteristics or behaviors that seem strange and different from the customs and practices of the ingroup. For instance, the majority of Roma in the U.S. are undereducated and/or illiterate since many families do not send their children to school past the sixth grade or at all (Hollandsworth, 1997; Vogel & Elasser, 1981). One reason for this is that

Roma believe that the skills and knowledge children learn in schools will have negative effects by essentially encouraging them to leave the Romani culture (Vogel & Elasser, 1981).

Cumulatively, they are a highly superstitious people, believing in spirits and luck. Typical Roma occupations differ from mainstream society and include fortune telling for the women while men often dabble in selling used cars, scrap metal recycling, and repair work (Hollandsworth, 1997).

Another way in which they remain distant from the host culture and in turn attempt to preserve their own culture is through the institution of marriage. Roma practice endogamy, meaning that they marry only within their ethnic group. The Roma wedding rituals diverge from dominant culture in the U.S. as well. Marriages are preceded by the negotiation of a bride price for daughters. The groom's family is required to pay an agreed-upon amount, usually between \$10,000 and \$15,000, to the bride's family, meant as compensation for the loss of their daughter. Roma weddings entail a large gathering of family and friends usually held in a place without any religious affiliation such as a hotel banquet hall. The ceremony traditionally consists of members dancing with a decorative staff around and with the bride. The couple does not take out a certified marriage license, so it is not considered a legal marriage according to the dominant culture (Hollandsworth, 1997).

As an ethnic group or co-culture living within the dominant culture, the Roma are constantly pressured to assimilate; however, they for the most part have stayed true and resisted. They do this by maintaining social boundaries between them and the *gadje* (Sutherland, 1975). Roma maintain social boundaries to protect their way of life or culture but also from the boundaries and prejudices of the *gadje*. The first manner in which they uphold these boundaries is by restricting contact with *gadje* to economic matters. Second, they have implemented and

upheld a set of social norms and values that act as instructions for Roma to behave within the culture but also on setting boundaries in order to maintain social distance from *gadje*. A very crucial method for keeping social boundaries is encompassed in the *marime*<sup>2</sup> status (Sutherland, 1975).

Marime has two meanings: 1) unclean or polluted and 2) the punishment of social rejection. The unclean or polluted status is intertwined with contact with *gadje* but also refers to certain items and practices in both the *gadje* and Romani culture including personal hygiene; cleansing practices of household items; and bodily functions and the items or structures associated with them. Marime as social rejection is bestowed upon a member of the culture disallowing them from enjoying fellowship or companionship with other Roma until lifted. This status can be passed along to family members or anyone else who interacts with them during the punishment period. This social rejection is often issued if a person violates social norms and values of the culture (Sutherland, 1975).

The following chapter offers a review of relevant research and literature regarding the depictions of Roma in academia, literature, and media in order to fit this study into the existing scholarship.

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<sup>2</sup> The term *marime*, specifically, translates to unclean. Beyond that, it serves as an important part of the Romani cultural system designed to establish and maintain the social, moral and religious order; and uphold boundaries between Roma and the dominant culture, *gadje*.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive research found few studies focusing on depictions of Roma in the media and the subsequent stigmatizing effects on the majority's perceptions of the ethnic minority. Thus far, studies of this nature concerning Roma have focused on European media images and their effect on *gadje*, non-Roma in Europe (Cespelli & Simon, 2004; Erjavic, 2001; Imre, 2006) with no evaluation of stigma. In the U.S. research examining the media's contributions to the stigma on racial and ethnic minorities has focused on African-Americans and Iranian-Americans (Mobasher, 2006; Voorhees, Vick & Perkins, 2007).

### Academic Research on Roma

#### *Works on Race*

The annals of racial works concerning Gypsies<sup>3</sup> are quite extensive. According to Hancock (2010b), the period of Enlightenment brought with it the necessity for scholars to classify plants and animals prevalent in the Imperial colonies, thus giving rise to several life sciences. Eventually, this crossed over to humans, spawning various works concerning race and hierarchies of human groups. Inevitably, these racial classifications and rankings extended to Gypsies – the majority of which were negative. Heinrich Grellman, who published the first linguistic evidence regarding the Indian origins of the Roma (Fraser, 1995; Grellman, 1787; Hancock, 2010b) claimed they were cannibals and equated members of the ethnic minority to

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the terms Gypsy and Gypsies in place of Roma, which is the preferred reference of the ethnic minority, is done in an effort to reflect their usage in historic racial and criminal writings as well as mainstream literature and media.

vermin (Grellman, 1787; Hancock, 2010b). Subsequent works by Theodor Tetzner and Robert Knox also ascribed a less-than-human status to Gypsies, referring to them as excrement and refuse (Hancock, 1997, 2011). Charles Darwin, the famed evolution scholar, claimed that this diasporic group was less civilized than and inferior to settled societies (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1997, 2004, 2010b, 2011).

Richard Liebich deemed Gypsies unworthy of living based on their criminal practices, which mostly consisted of stealing food and trespassing (Hancock, 1997, 2011). Criminal behavior became a recurring theme amongst published works of this period. Based on Darwin's research, Cesare Lombroso (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 2010b, 2011), an Italian scholar, published his impactful work in 1876, which claimed the ethnic minority had a genetic propensity for criminality; and was essentially, a race of criminals. It was this work, on which the Nazis based most of their racial policies and legislation (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 2010b, 2011). Another work that influenced German administrators was Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche's proposed euthanasia of Gypsies on the basis they carried a hereditary disease – criminality (Fraser, 1995; Hancock, 1993, 1997, 2004, 2011).

### *Portrayals of Gypsies in Literature and the Media*

Gypsies have excited intense reactions from *gadje* and inspired writers, journalists, and filmmakers since their emergence in the West. In Victorian literature “they were represented in the literature as exotic, attractive, erotically charged free spirits whose travelling lifestyle was the subject of both envy and fear” (Bardi, 2006, p. 33). The portrayal of Gypsies and their lifestyles during this time essentially clashed with restrictive modern society. According to Mayall (1988),

these depictions were grounded in the dialectical tensions the *gadje* felt regarding organized society.

Throughout their emergence in the Western countries, the Roma have been portrayed as foreign others despite being citizens of that country in most cases (Bardi, 2006). One such example of this othering is their portrayals as a primitive culture unrestricted by the vices of modernization. Ultimately, operating on the margins of the dominant economic, social, and political systems allowed them to keep their supernatural beliefs and practices in tact (Mayall, 1988). This is exemplified in the popular image of Roma as mystical psychics and fortune tellers (Hancock, 2010b).

Likewise, popular literature and art has served to sexualize Roma. Bardi (2006) posits that this sexualized image is rooted in the majority's anxieties regarding gender and sexuality. Many notable authors such as Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, and Virginia Woolf have depicted Gypsy men as sexually-charged beings who threaten the virtue of White women (Bardi, 2006; Hancock, 2010b). Romani women also have been sexualized, often portrayed as alluring sexual creatures that tantalize men both intentionally and unintentionally, thus making White males not responsible for their sexual pursuit of Roma women. This long-lasting sexualized portrayal of Romani women is prevalent in works by D.H. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, the opera *Carmen*, and Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Bardi, 2006; Hancock, 2010b, Mayall, 1988).

In addition to romantic and exotic images, Roma have often been portrayed as less than human. Many have likened them to animals, claiming they are cannibals, carrion eaters and parasites (Hancock, 2010b). The most prevalent portrayal of this ethnic minority has been that of a race of criminals (Bardi, 2006; Hancock, 2010b; Mayall, 1988). Overall, these portrayals

suggest an underlying fear or perception that Gypsies represent a threat to economic well-being, dominant morality, and social norms (Mayall, 1988).

The modern European media have taken a similar course in the image they present of Roma. For example newspaper articles often reinforce stereotypical Roma images including their genetic criminality; less-than-human status, and threat and drain on the superior social structure (Erjavec, 2001; Imre, 2006; Kenney, 2009; Richardson, 2006). Richardson (2006) found that many media and political messages had the tendency to talk of the large messes that migrant Roma leave behind, which inevitably have to be cleaned up by local tax-payer-funded government departments, consequently becoming an economic burden on the dominant culture. Congruent with other studies, Kenney (2009) found that in the Czech Republic, Roma were often depicted in the media as the strange Other, inevitably, placing members of the ethnic minority in conflict with the dominant social order. This conflict surfaced in the reporting of their impoverished conditions compared to that of their White neighbors; the racist attitudes and acts they endured at the hands of racist groups; and their struggles to emigrate out of the country. According to his findings, in this particular media outlet, the Roma had little newsworthiness until problems surfaced (Kenney, 2009).

The influence these prevalent media messages have on individuals' perceptions is evidenced in a study by Cespelli and Simon (2004). According to their results, the majority of the respondents, Central and Eastern European residents, perceived Gypsies as criminals, lazy, untrustworthy, and unreliable. Imre (2006) echoed these findings in a different report that showed that Eastern European respondents believed Roma to be unmotivated, primitive, aggressive, and untruthful. In addition, this study found that respondents held more positive

perceptions of Roma after being exposed to media messages that reinforced a familiar, acceptable, and romanticized image of Gypsies as entertainers; which was evidenced by the popularity of reality shows chronicling Roma musicians.

The next chapter serves to explain the theories to be applied for analysis and interpretation for this thesis. Additionally, the research questions that will guide the direction of the study are included.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORIES TO BE APPLIED

### Social Stigma Theory

The term *stigma* is of Greek origins and referred to a physical mark on the skin to signify disgrace or social deviance. During this period, the stigmatizer would physically brand or cut the stigmatized to serve as a public display and constant reminder of their devalued status.

Subsequently, the term has evolved and no longer refers to the physical mark but rather signifies an attribute that discredits the possessor, spoiling his social identity (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman (1963) there are three types of stigmas: 1) abominations of the body – physical deformities, disabilities, illness; 2) blemishes of individual character – history of deviant behavior such as crime, addiction, mental illness; 3) tribal stigma – race, ethnicity, and religion.

In his foundational work, Goffman (1963) asserted that stigma arises when the possession of the questionable attribute creates a discrepancy between an individual's virtual and actual social identity. More specifically, society establishes the categories of people we may encounter; the attributes that are characteristic of the categories; and the rules for interacting with them. Therefore, we are able to anticipate how members of certain categories will interact with us along with the attributes they are likely to possess; therefore, because of these societal establishments “when a stranger comes into our presence, then first appearances are likely to enable us to anticipate his category and attributes, his ‘social identity’” (p. 2).

Inevitably, we apply a great deal of significance to these anticipations; thus, “transforming them into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands” (p. 3). These demands are unconscious and for the most part do not become conscious until their

fulfillment is questioned or challenged. In essence, these demands are what we perceive the individual to be, the expected category and attributes, or the virtual social identity. Conversely, the actual social identity is the category to which the individual indeed belongs and the attributes they possess (Goffman, 1963).

Furthermore, Goffman (1963) explained that if the unfamiliar person possesses an attribute that is inconsistent with others who belong to that anticipated category then this attribute is viewed as undesirable. The possession of this attribute reduces the individual from normal to tainted -- stigmatized. In other words, a stigmatized individual possesses a discrediting trait that outweighs all other traits and therefore, affects all social interactions with those not possessing the trait, or normals. He also posited that “when there is a discrepancy between an individual’s actual social identity and his virtual social identity, it is possible for this fact to be known to us before we normals contact him or to be quite evident when he presents himself before us” (p. 41). Additionally, information about the stigma conveyed either via the media or social interaction can become the base knowledge that normals possess about the stigmatized. The degree to which an individual’s stigma is evident is crucial in setting the tone for interactions between the two groups also.

The act of stigmatization is the process by which those not possessing a negative attribute devalue those who do; thus, discriminating against them, and conjuring explanations for the inferiority of the stigmatized and the dangers they pose to the nonstigmatized. The attitudes toward and actions taken against the stigmatized are predetermined by societal norms and often prove to be discriminatory. Normals often develop explanations for the stigmatized group’s inferior status and the threat they pose to normals. A whole stigma language and vocabulary are

developed and become unconsciously integrated in to the normals' discourse. Thus, the discrediting attribute becomes the root of other perceived shortcomings.

Any defensiveness exhibited by the stigmatized may be perceived as a dimension of the discrediting attribute. Furthermore, in the case of tribal, ethnic or racial, stigma the responsible attribute can then be transferred to the individual's tribe and thus viewed as characteristic of the entire group; which can become the justification for the mistreatment of group members (Goffman, 1963).

Katz (1979) expanded on the stigma taxonomy by taking it in a social psychological direction so that research could offer insights into intergroup relations. He offers three causal models to explain the stigmatizer's reaction to the stigmatized. First, the attribute-as-sufficient-cause model states that a particular attribute is enough to completely devalue the bearer in the eyes of others. Second, the labeling-perspective model asserts that stigmatization results less from the possession and display of a negative characteristic and more from the dominant group's choice to mark the other. According to this model the choice to label a characteristic as deviant is dependent on contextual variables "particularly, the power or resources of the individual, the social distance between the labeler and the labelee, the tolerance level in the community, and the visibility of the deviant behavior" (p. 451). Third, the scapegoat model posits that an individual or group feels hostility toward the target first, which is usually based on fear, threat, or nationalistic views and then a negative attribute is assigned to the target (Katz, 1979).

More recent research has expounded on the causal approach to offer more specific insights into the stigmatization process and intergroup interactions. According to this modern work, a stigma is commonly placed on a group if the dominant group perceives them as a threat

(Dovidio et al., 2000; Neuberg et al., 2000; Stangor & Crandall, 2000). The perceived threats can be physical or social. Physical threats encompass safety issues but also when a particular group is viewed as competition for community resources, which is magnified in times of economic hardship (Neuberg et al., 2000; Smith 2007; Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Social threats can include differing values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms. In cases such as this, the dominant group stigmatizes the minority for not having aligning ideologies (Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Morality also plays a role in assigning stigma (Maturi & An, 2010; Smith, 2007). As is the case with physical threats, economic hardship puts dominant group members on edge causing them to pass judgment and stigmatize those they perceive as liars, cheats, and thieves in response to fear of the groups' economic well being (Neuberg et al., 2000; Smith, 2007; Stangor & Crandall, 2000).

Concurrently, researchers have looked at the development along with the causes. For instance, Stangor and Crandall (2000) explain the development of social stigma involves “three major components: perception, function, and social sharing” (p. 73). The process begins with one group perceiving another as a threat. Next these attributes or characteristics that are perceived as threatening are distorted to amplify the differences between the two groups.

Fundamentally, stigmas function to categorize others and thus help the nonstigmatized group process information. Another function includes defining the social identity of both and as a result increasing the self-esteem of the nonstigmatized as they compare themselves to the stigmatized (Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Stigma also functions to maintain social order by allowing the dominant group to express values, beliefs, and behaviors they oppose; thus sending a message to its members about how to behave and not to behave (Maturi & An, 2010). Additionally, this social ordering can serve to enforce and reinforce the power structure, which

often leads to social inequities and exclusion for the stigmatized (Miller & Major, 2000; Smith, 2007).

Stigmas are perpetuated and supported by interpersonal and mass communicative acts (Dovidio et al., 2000; Maturi & An, 2010; Smith, 2007; Smith & Harper, 2010; Stangor & Crandall, 2000). Stigma communication must gain attention quickly and foster negative emotions toward the stigmatized group. These types of messages work to portray the stigmatized group as an entity separate and foreign from the dominant group (Smith, 2007). Stigma messages also relay the eminent threat and peril the stigmatized group poses to the physical, normative, economic and social well-being of the unmarked group. Thus, these communications promote stereotyping and discrimination toward the marked group and its members (Biernat & Dovidio, 2000; Miller & Major, 2000; Smith, 2007; Smith & Harper, 2010).

Sharing these types of messages has many effects that are favorable for the dominant group and undoubtedly unfavorable for the stigmatized group. For instance, ingroup solidarity is strengthened by communicating and re-communicating stigma messages about the marked group (Smith, 2007); however, the stigmatized do not enjoy such positive outcomes. The reactions of the nonstigmatized group toward stigmatized groups can range from aversion to avoidance (Neuberg et al., 2000). More severe social consequences for the stigmatized include discrimination, social exclusion, and marginalization at personal and institutional levels (Dovidio et al., 2000; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Yet, in extreme cases, the devalued group can become victims of racism, biased crimes, and genocide (Miller & Major, 2000). The type and degree of the stigmatizers' reactions depends on the degree to which they feel their own status or way of life is threatened by the marked group (Neuberg et al., 2000).

Research has shown that the media has a tendency to focus on crime in discourses concerning stigmatized groups (Devereaux et al., 2012; Voorhees et al., 2007). In the case of tribal stigma, devaluation based on racial and ethnic minority membership, the media portray group members as breaking societal norms and laws, thus posing a threat to the dominant culture (Voorhees et al., 2007). The dominant group is often portrayed as the victim of the minority group's deviant behavior and/or champion against the deviance. Voorhees et al (2007) found this evidenced in the portrayals of African-Americans during the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina. African Americans were often reported to be looting and stealing relief supplies that were meant to be evenly distributed among all victims. Mobasher (2006) had similar findings concerning coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis. The study showed that the U.S. media created an image of the Iranian people, their culture, and the region in general as violent, militant, and anti-American.

These discourses often oversimplify and dichotomize issues while upholding commonly-held beliefs. Religion played a key role during the Iranian hostage crisis as the situation was portrayed as a battle between Christianity and Islam (Mobasher, 2006). Additionally, media coverage of stigmatized groups are more likely to be episodic – focused on one-time occurrences – and less likely to take a thematic approach to examine underlying issues affecting the group and its members (Devereaux et al., 2007).

In general, the media reinforces the dominant social order and institutions while preserving the interests of the majority group. Minorities are often represented in a way that emphasizes their lower social status and lack of power within the dominant culture (Mobasher, 2006). Voorhees et al (2006) found this to be the case in the difference between the images of

African-Americans and Whites being rescued after Hurricane Katrina. Predominantly, African-Americans were seen on rooftops barely above flood waters, being hoisted to safety by helicopters, and crammed in relief shelters. Conversely, Whites were usually shown already secured in rescue boats, or in their homes.

Repeated coverage of this can create and/or reinforce a stigmatized identity for minorities (Devereaux et al., 2007; Mobasher, 2006). According to Mobasher (2006) two separate studies conducted several years after the Iranian hostage crisis showed that American respondents viewed Iran as the enemy. They also associated the country and its people with violence, terrorism, and barbarianism. These depictions also informed behaviors during the time of the crisis as several Iranian immigrants and Iranian-Americans experienced discrimination and harassment at the hands of the U.S. government and residents. During this period, President Carter required all Iranian students to have their visas reviewed. Many colleges and universities increased tuition for Iranian students or refused their enrollment. Americans initiated public protests and boycotts against their Iranian neighbors.

### Orientalism

According to Said (1978), the Orient consisted of non-Western countries and cultures such as Japan, China, India, along with Middle Eastern countries and cultures, many of which were forcibly colonized and governed by Western imperial powers. Before World War II, the colonized referred to those residing in these regions that had been ruled by Westerners and Europeans (Said, 1989). However, in more modern times, the colonized has come to encompass “women, subjugated and oppressed classes, national minorities, and even marginalized or incorporated academic subspecialties” (Said, 1989, p. 207).

As a result of this Imperial period, Orientalism, a method by which the West gathers and interprets knowledge about the Orient or non-Western cultures, emerged and persisted. Said (1978) explained that this knowledge is managed or interpreted in a way that initially serves the purposes of the interpreter - the West - by placing the two parties in an unequal power structure with the West in the dominant role. It is a social ordering by which the colonizer, the West, believes and asserts their superiority over the colonized, the Orient.

Inevitably, Orientalism serves the purpose of positively defining Western self-image more than it does to define the non-Westerner. It becomes more about asserting what the West and Europe is not in comparison to the rest of the world. In doing so, the non-Western world and its inhabitants are portrayed as the strange and different “Other” (Said, 1978, 1989). Therefore, through the Orientalism lens, the West is the stronger entity in terms of religion, politics, and culture; and from this perspective they are warranted and perhaps obligated to colonize, govern, scrutinize, and punish the inferior Orientals (Said, 1978).

Keen (1991) extended Said’s idea of Orientalism to go beyond the dialectic of superiority and inferiority and toward the creation of an antagonism between the dominant group and minority group; ultimately, this perspective results in the latter being portrayed as the enemy. One tactic the West employs is to depict the enemy as strangers, which is based on the widely held assumption that “what is strange or unknown is dangerous and intends us evil. The unknown is untrustworthy” (p. 18). Another method of constructing the enemy image of outgroup members is to paint them as the aggressor. Essentially, ingroup members “claim righteousness and purity and attribute hostility and evil to the enemy” (p. 19). Last, dehumanizing the enemy allows for them to be portrayed as being in complete opposition to

Westerners, with no similar characteristics, values, or beliefs. This is done to discourage and prohibit dominant group members from viewing the minority members as fellow human beings. Overall, these three measures create a myth allowing the West to set up the dualistic relationship and to justify their mistreatment of the enemy East (Keen, 1991).

This pertinacious Western mindset of superiority and antagonism often surfaces in media portrayals of Oriental peoples and cultures because, even though the majority of these lands are no longer under Western rule, the social values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes toward Orientals persist in much of the Western dominant culture (Akita, 2006). Kim (2004) asserts that a major function of Orientalism is “the maintenance of dominance and hierarchy through discourse images” (p. 22). Mass media such as newspapers possess tremendous discursive power to manage and interpret information about regions and peoples unknown to the populous (Yin, 2005). According to Yin (2005), two main ways in which Orientalism can slant media discourses in favor of the West is: 1) the stories can tend to romanticize, exoticize, and sexualize non-Western regions and peoples; 2) they define the identities of racial and ethnic groups and subsequently the members.

Concordant with prior Orientalism research, setting up discourses that portray non-Westerners as the strange and exotic Other allows Westerners to maintain their sense of superiority. Media messages portray these regions and its people in a way that elicits romantic, exotic, and sexual adventures; in essence their sole purpose is for the entertainment of Westerners (Akita, 2006; Kim, 2004; Yin, 2005). Akita (2006) found that the tendency to exoticize and sexualize the Orient is still prevalent in modern media in her analysis and critique of the popular novel and film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. She posits that the author, Arthur Golden,

twists an integral symbol of Japanese art, culture, and society – the Geisha – into a sexualized object for the viewing pleasure of White males.

Westerners also have a tendency to construct and substantiate the identity of racial and ethnic groups. For instance Kim (2004) found that the image of Japanese women as war brides, those women that came to the United States following World War II by marrying American soldiers in hopes of a better life, was fortified in a popular television show, *The Courtship of Eddie's Father*. Similarly, Yin (2005) found the novel and movie *The Joy Luck Club*, upheld the common image of the Chinese culture as being oppressive, sexist, and cryptic. This was actualized in conflicts between generations – mothers and daughters, with the younger generations arguing for change and progression and the older insisting on adherence to tradition.

#### Research Questions

Previous research on stigma has shown that minorities are stigmatized by being portrayed as deviant. They are portrayed in such a manner because, ultimately, they are perceived as a threat to the dominant culture. Orientalism scholarship asserts that the colonizer depicts the colonized as a foreign Other – strange and different from the West. Congruently, the two theories applied in this study examine the power structure and differential; and offer a critical perspective on how the majority group works to protect the dominant social order and their superior position within it by subordinating the minority. Therefore, I pose the following research questions:

1. How do articles appearing in U.S. newspapers outlining confidence crimes allegedly committed by Gypsies/Roma serve to stigmatize members of this ethnic minority?
2. How do these articles depict American Roma/Gypsies as foreign “Others”, separate from the dominant culture?

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

In order to address the research questions presented in this thesis, newspaper articles appearing in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* were examined. This particular publication was chosen because of the recent coverage of a Roma family charged with defrauding clients of their psychic services businesses.

This particular type of media communication, newspaper articles, was chosen for analysis because newspapers historically have served as a credible source of information for the general public. In addition to credibility, Fursich (2008) explains “media content is an important site of the ongoing struggle over meaning and common sense that defines public discourses in hegemonic systems” (p. 11).

The initial retrieval process began via the Lexis-Nexis database by entering three different combinations of terms in the key word search fields: *Gypsy crime*, *Gypsy fraud*, and *Gypsy scam*. This preliminary search produced very few connected articles. Two related articles did appear among the results, both of which provided coverage of the same criminal case, a fraud case involving a psychic in Fort Lauderdale, Florida that appeared in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, the primary daily newspaper for Fort Lauderdale and the surrounding communities.

The second phase of this search proceeded on the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* website, [www.sun-sentinel.com](http://www.sun-sentinel.com). Using content from the two related articles previously retrieved, the phrase, *Gypsy psychic fraud* was entered in the site’s search field, which produced two additional articles pertaining to this case. The last phase of the search involved including the main defendant’s name, Rose Marks, with the previously mentioned terms. This final stage produced 23 articles that encompassed the publication’s coverage to date of the alleged fraud, including

duplicates of the articles previously retrieved via Lexis-Nexis and the newspaper's website search feature. This 23-article series spanned from August 16, 2011 to February 8, 2012.

The larger sample was evaluated and narrowed to nine articles that contained the terms *Roma*, *Romani* and *Gypsy*. Each article in this final sample was read thoroughly and analyzed in accordance with the rigors of the critical-cultural textual analysis method as defined by Stuart Hall (Curtin, 1995; Fursich, 2008). Social Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963) and Orientalism (Said, 1978) served as the theoretical bases for this study as this methodology requires critical theories to guide the research (Curtin, 1995).

Essentially, textual analysis of cultural studies, critiques how texts convey cultural ideologies concerning race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class (Kellner, 2010). This methodology requires the analyst to look beyond the literal meanings and to examine the style and the social meaning to reveal the underlying dominant social, ideological, and cultural frameworks (Curtin, 1995; Fursich, 2008; Lule, 1991) that fuel the media's portrayal of Roma/Gypsies.

In line with the critical-cultural textual analysis method, the text were decentered, a process by which the focus was not on the texts themselves but rather what they signified (Johnson, 1986 – 1987). This approach looked at the preferred reading within the contexts of its production, why the dominant group produced it and consumption, the historical and dialectic relationship with the reader (Curtin, 1995; Lule, 1991). Decentering the text served to deconstruct it, hacking away at the form, appearance, and style to reveal the underlying social and historical processes (Curtin, 1995; Fursich, 2008).

During the deconstruction process, the structure of the narrative in each of the articles was evaluated, which included examining the lead and evaluating the ordering of the story to determine its role in the readers' interpretation of the content. (Curtin, 1995; Fursich, 2008). In addition, the language of the articles was studied to identify general values and beliefs commonly held by the dominant culture (Lule, 1991). Portions of text from the articles in the sample were provided as evidence of the findings (Curtin, 1995; Fursich, 2008; Kellner, 2010; Tompkins, 1994). The analysis of these findings follows in the discussion section of this thesis.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DATA

This chapter presents the data from nine articles that appeared in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* as part of the 23-article series that covered members of the Marks family who were accused of defrauding clients of their psychic services businesses. The nine articles were identified as directly referencing *Roma*, *Romani* and/or *Gypsy*, whereas the other 14 articles made no reference to the Marks' ethnicity.

Further analysis of these nine articles revealed four major categories of findings regarding the representation of the ethnic minority. The categories included: 1) the pairing of the preferred term, *Roma* with the pejorative term, *Gypsy*; 2) reinforcement of stereotypes; 3) portrayal of the ethnic group as foreign/exotic others; 4) *Roma* portrayed as a threat to the dominant culture and its members. These concepts were reified through word choices, headlines, leads, repetition, and the ordering of paragraphs, as well as other techniques.

### *Roma and Gypsy*

As stated previously in this thesis, *Roma* is the moniker preferred by members of the ethnic minority. There has been a movement to distance themselves from the term *Gypsy* (Herakova, 2009), which is a pejorative rooted in misconceptions, prejudice, and stereotypes; however, in seven of the nine articles, both terms are used. The term *Roma* is used and then most often is followed within the same sentence by the more widely known pejorative, *Gypsy*, to clarify the preferred term:

...Fort Lauderdale family of Roma, or gypsies ... (McMahon, 2012a).

...members of the Roma community, also known as gypsies ... (McMahon, 2012b).

In keeping with Romani or gypsy culture ... (McMahon, 2012c).

Additionally, the first two of the nine articles, (McMahon, 2011a; McMahon, 2011b) do not even contain the term *Roma* and only use *gypsy* or *gypsies*. This omission ignores the term preferred by the members of this ethnic minority and identifies them solely as the pejorative that the dominant group more readily identifies them as. Concordantly, there is a denial that *Gypsy* is even derogatory because “experts say many people have no idea that it’s a bad word” (McMahon, 2011d).

Conversely, the negative connotation of the term *Gypsy* is acknowledged in three of the articles (McMahon, 2011c; McMahon, 2011d; McMahon, 2012d). In fact, the use of the derogatory term is labeled as misconduct and possible grounds for dismissing charges against the Marks family; however, the term continues to be used in the articles following these.

### Reinforcement of stereotypes

#### *Roma as criminals*

Rose Marks, the main defendant, is labeled as the *matriarch* and/or *ringleader* of the group in seven of the nine articles. In the majority of the articles she is identified as the *matriarch* and/or *ringleader* of a fraud conspiracy or a family of psychics that defrauded clients. Both terms connote a person who leads others and is the mastermind behind a sinister act:

Marks was the family matriarch and ringleader of a conspiracy ... (McMahon, 2012e).

...family of Roma, or gypsies led by fortunetelling matriarch Rose Marks ... (McMahon, 2012a).

This analysis also revealed that the ordering of leads the journalistic equivalent of thesis statements and the overall structure of the story itself aided in the reification of the stereotypical perception that Roma are criminals. For example, the ordering of this lead places more focus on the group being charged with a \$40 million fraud than it does on federal agents being accused of bias and misconduct against the ethnic minority.

Defense attorneys for a group of Fort Lauderdale fortune tellers charged with running a \$40 million fraud accused federal agents of misconduct and bias against Romani people in court records ... (McMahon, 2011d).

Furthermore, the ordering of this entire article also asserts that the agents' misconduct against witnesses is more reprehensible than that of their bias against Roma. The issue of investigators pressuring some of the Marks' clients into testifying against members of the family is addressed first within this article. It is not until the fourteenth paragraph that the claim of bias against Romani people is addressed.

Once the bias issue is addressed, biased language appears within this section. This is evidenced in the statement, "the defense also accused federal authorities of showing bias against the Romani fortune tellers by calling them "gypsies" in court." Identifying the defendants as *Romani fortune tellers* instead of as the Romani family or simply the Marks family, illustrates bias as well.

Additionally, the ordering of another article (McMahon, 2012b) establishes Wolofsky being convicted of laundering money for drug dealers – criminals – and then explains that he gave a mortgage loan to Rose Marks. Therefore, the explanation that Marks engaged in financial

transactions with a person convicted of illegal financial transactions with criminals indirectly associates her with criminal activity.

Insights into the Romani culture are only given against the backdrop of the criminal case. This is exemplified in the article “Fortune teller case shines light on little know group, the Roma (McMahon, 2011c). A member of the Romani culture, George Eli, conveys various nuances about his people’s traditions and beliefs but then is identified as a cousin to Rose Marks who is described as the ring leader of a fortune teller fraud. Within this same article the defense attorney explains that he is posing the argument that his clients’ actions are justifiable and are protected as religious rights and cultural traditions. Directly following this statement, it is reiterated that the Marks are accused of defrauding “50 victims” out of \$40 million.

Amidst the conveyance of the Romani marriage tradition of paying a dowry, it is explained that while the Marks family was under investigation for the fraud case, before charges were brought against them, they consulted law enforcement to settle a dispute with another Romani family over a wedding dowry. Details about Rose Marks’ family, her father’s respected position within the Romani community; her arranged marriage to her late husband; and her family’s immigration to this country are brought to light only because she is the main defendant in a high profile criminal case (McMahon, 2012e).

#### *Roma as mystics, fortune tellers, and psychics*

The stereotype that Romani people are mystics, fortune tellers and psychics is a prevalent theme through the analyzed sample. This is displayed in the headline “Fortune teller defrauded bestselling author, others” (McMahon, 2011a). In fact, all nine of the articles have headlines that contain the words *psychic* or *fortune teller* with none in the final sample referencing the Marks

family in the headline by name but rather identifying them with the descriptors *psychics* or *fortune tellers*.

Within the text of that same article, a few words of the Romani language are translated and explained. Accordingly, all of those words have to do with mysticism such as “in the Romani language, a fortuneteller is called a ‘drabarni’”. Another story highlights other Romani words all dealing with spirituality and mysticism, which include the words for “God (Del), the Devil (Beng), curses (amria), bad omens (prikaza), and the spirits of the dead (mule)” (McMahon, 2012a). No other Romani words are translated; thus severely limiting readers’ insights into the Romani culture to mysticism and spirituality.

#### *Roma as untrustworthy*

Eight of the nine articles in the final sample repeat the charge that the accused allegedly told their clients that they would cleanse their money and jewelry of curses, evil spirits, and negative energy and then return all of it to them. According to prosecutors and investigators, the items were never returned. The notion of a promise and the nonfulfillment of that promise were repeated throughout the series of articles.

[The family] falsely told the clients that the cleansing would result in the disappearance of all curses and evil spirits, the curing of illnesses and the end to bad luck and they would return all of the money jewelry, gold coins and other valuable items after they had been cleansed (McMahon, 2011b).

An undercurrent of doubt regarding the legitimacy of the family members’ claims and abilities is present in the series. For instance an example of the subtle conveyance of doubt can be seen in the use of the adjective *so-called*:

... the Marks family, a so-called Romanian gypsy clan whose members were born and grew up in the United States (McMahon, 2011a).

... offering a rare glimpse inside the secret world of so-called Gypsy fortune tellers ... (McMahon, 2012e).

This doubt is also implied by the use of quotation marks around the word psychic. This is exemplified in the headline “‘Psychic’ accused of fraud wants to work for online service” (McMahon, 2012c). Other implications of doubt appear in such statements as “Marks ... claimed to be a clairvoyant or psychic ...” (McMahon, 2011b). A more direct approach is taken in this same article as the defendants’ abilities are equated to “magicians’ tricks”.

#### Roma as foreign/exotic Other

The notion that Roma are the Other, separate and different from the dominant culture is strongly evidenced throughout the sample articles. Members of this ethnic minority, the overwhelming majority of who were born and have lived their entire lives in the United States, are depicted as foreigners within this country. This is evident in a title of a photo, “American Gypsies blending into U.S. culture” (McMahon, 2011c) that appears in one of the articles. Also within this article it is expressed that “the Roma have no sovereign homeland or flag and speak a language understood by few outsiders ...”

Another tactic employed in these news stories is depicting the Roma as an exotic people with beliefs, values, and traditions far different from that of dominant society. First, this is done by portraying Roma’s cultural practices as antiquated. Next this is done by highlighting Roma religious and spiritual beliefs that are in opposition to traditional beliefs:

Many Roma still arrange their children’s marriages ... (McMahon, 2011c).

While Roma live in the modern world, they still pay marriage dowries ... (McMahon, 2011c).

One of the photos shows a deceased relative with jewelry displayed beside her in the coffin (McMahon, 2012b).

Members of the sect ... believe in good and bad energy ... (McMahon, 2012a).

According to the Gypsy belief, if a person dies with feelings of resentment or hostility... then he or she will return from the 'other side' ... (McMahon, 2012a).

In the Marks family the paranormal was the norm (McMahon, 2012e).

Additionally, several of the articles make implications that Roma operate outside of dominant societal norms and values even in their day-to-day life. In one such article, it is divulged that Rose Marks sought and obtained a mortgage loan from a man who was convicted of laundering money for drug dealers "because many Roma have difficulty getting traditional loans from banks and other financial institutions" (McMahon, 2012b). In this same article the main defense attorney argues that the majority of the jewelry prosecutors seized from the family's home and safe deposit boxes was "bought with legitimate income — including millions of dollars that Rose Marks said she and other family members won playing slots at the Seminole Hard Rock Casino near Hollywood and a lottery at the old Seminole bingo hall." These two examples imply that Roma resort to unconventional means – means deemed unacceptable by the majority – in the operation of their everyday life.

## Roma portrayed as threat to dominant culture

### *Roma as predators*

Another recurrent theme was the portrayal of Roma as predators. Members of the Marks family are “accused of preying on vulnerable and gullible clients who walked into their storefront psychic businesses ...” (McMahon, 2012e). Concordantly, the clients are painted as victims. Their emotional and physical struggles are detailed in several articles, especially that of novelist Jude Deveraux. The details about the charges that the defendants allegedly defrauded Deveraux are given in eight of the nine articles, including the monetary amount the Marks family supposedly attained from her. Further details are given about Deveraux’s personal struggles, especially her childbearing woes as well as the death of her son. Also, reiterated in a few of the articles, is that the successful author was found by investigators in this case, suffering financially and emotionally because of her association with the Marks family. The unfortunate circumstances of other clients are reported, although not in as much detail, nor as frequently. Examples of depicting clients as victims include:

The family is accused of preying on people at the lowest times of their lives, including exploiting bestselling romance novelist Jude Deveraux during several miscarriages and again after her 8-year-old son, Sam, died in a traffic accident in 2005 (McMahon, 2012a). Other purported victims of the psychics included a woman with a brain tumor who was told she would receive “positive energy” but is now out of work and in danger of losing her apartment; a person from Japan who gave them \$496,000; and a man from Denmark who sent about \$186,000 he thought was going to charity work. (McMahon, 2011a).

### *Extravagance*

There is a repetition of the alleged worth of the cash, jewelry, and other items as well as an implied extravagance of some of the other items that were in the possession of the Marks family and as a result seized in relation to the fraud case. This effort shows that via behaviors and values that are in opposition to the dominant beliefs, values, and norms, members of this out-group live extravagantly – beyond the means of most dominant group members:

Federal agents ...told prosecutors they had never seen anything like the amount of top-end jewelry, fancy cars and gold coins seized from the main family home ... (McMahon, 2011a).

More than 400 rings, many with large diamonds, at least 100 watches and 200 necklaces were seized ... (McMahon, 2011a).

...they seized hundreds of items of jewelry, more than \$1.8 million worth of gold coins, luxury cars and a fancy home overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway in Fort Lauderdale, all paid for with the proceeds of the fraud ... (McMahon, 2012a).

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes the findings of this study and applies Social Stigma Theory and Orientalism to the data. These theories were used to view the four major categories of findings that were prevalent in this study: The categories of findings included: 1) the terms *Roma* and *Gypsy*; 2) reification of stereotypes; 3) Roma as foreign/exotic others; 4) Roma as a threat to the dominant group.

Roma are relatively unknown to most; therefore, Social Stigma Theory and Orientalism offer lenses through which to view and interpret information about this unfamiliar group. Unfortunately, these distorted perspectives often result in negative portrayals of this ethnic minority. The unknown can be disconcerting and evoke fear in others. Essentially, to calm those fears and to gain a sense of control, the dominant group often tries to define the people it encounters, by placing them in pre-existing categories with preset rules regarding those members' characteristics and behaviors. This categorization process usually places the dominant group in a superior position, one that according to their perspective qualifies them to judge as well as punish the inferior group. The detailed examination of the sample articles have revealed that their purpose is to indeed place the Roma in an inferior category.

As previously explained in this thesis, a stigma is a discrediting trait that overshadows all other attributes of the possessor, and thus, spoils his identity. Although, the traits that can discredit a person or a group of people are infinite, Goffman (1963) asserted that there were three main categories of stigma; the applicable one in this study is *tribal stigma*, which pertains to one's ethnicity. The Roma suffer a spoiled identity because of their ethnicity, therefore, all interactions with *gadje*, are affected by this stigma. The nine articles analyzed in this study are

part of the stigma language that has been developed to explain the devaluation of this ethnic minority. In addition, these articles about this one Romani family, serve as stigma communication, and work to transfer the stigma to all members of the Romani community.

The articles in the final sample perpetuate the spoiled identity of the Roma. In order to accomplish this, these communicative acts gain attention and evoke negative sentiment quickly (Dovidio et al., 2000; Maturi & An, 2010; Stangor & Crandall, 2000; Smith, 2007; Smith & Hipper, 2010) by including biased and threatening language within the headlines and the articles themselves. This is also achieved by portraying the Roma as a threat to the dominant group, both physically and socially. The repetition of these stereotypes in these news stories functions to reify negative images of this group and its members.

Additionally, analysis of these articles identified that Roma are portrayed as outsiders. Even though, they live in this country, they are separate and foreign from the majority. Often they are depicted as having values, beliefs and ideologies fundamentally different from those on which dominant society are based. These differences usually breed uneasiness and fear; however, in some circumstances, these differences can cause the majority to view the Roma as an exotic and entertaining group.

#### *Roma and Gypsy*

This thesis has established that the term *Gypsy* is a pejorative, steeped in negative perceptions and bias that was contrived by the dominant group to label members of this minority group. It has since become part of the stigma language, both conscious and unconscious, that is used in association with its members to communicate their spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963). Therefore, even though this group prefers the term *Roma*, one that is from their own language,

the dominant group continues to pair and even replace the preferred term with the derogatory one to signify, spread and solidify the stigma they have placed on the ethnic minority.

The in-depth analysis of the sample articles revealed that as part of the overall stigma communication, each one is designed to perpetuate the devalued status of the minority by use of the term *Gypsy*. Ultimately, the consistent placement of this pejorative throughout these articles illustrates that the dominant group is still following its historical patterns of devaluing this entire group.

#### Reinforcement of stereotypes

Stigmatizing and Orientalizing a group, as has been done to the Roma, allows the dominant group to create and define the identity – usually negative – of this ethnic minority. An integral part of that identity is an inferior position in the dominant social order. Repeated media coverage like those in the sample aids in the construction and reinforcement of the groups' tainted identity but, also allows the majority group to create an identity for itself that places itself in the superior position. Recurrent stigma communication such as the articles contained in the sample, promote and strengthen stereotypes of the Roma.

In this study, the promotion and strengthening of stereotypical images of Roma was achieved by depicting them as separate and different from the majority in terms of their beliefs, values and behaviors. In addition, the ethnic minority was portrayed as a threat to the dominant group, physically and socially. Therefore, in communicating these stigma messages, the news stories reify the stereotypes of Roma as criminals, psychics and fortune tellers, and untrustworthy.

### *Roma as criminals*

Depicting Roma as criminals is a tactic that has been employed by the majority since their emergence in Europe around the fourteenth century and has continued into modern times. These articles follow that historical pattern. The portrayal of Roma as criminals in these articles serves to perpetuate the stigma that this group bears.

Essentially, the Roma are stigmatized because they are perceived as a threat to the majority group. Their portrayal as criminals in this situation, infers that they are viewed as a threat to the economic well-being of the dominant group. It can also be deduced that they are perceived as competition for valuable resources.

The media coverage of stigmatized groups tends to focus on crime, which inevitably transfers criminality as a trait of that group (Deveraux et al., 2012; Voorhees et. al, 2007). Accordingly, the coverage of Roma exhibited in the sample follows this pattern. Because the alleged crimes are economic in nature, these charges are repeated throughout the series of articles to divulge the eminent threat this group poses, especially considering the large monetary amounts associated with the alleged fraud.

### *Roma as mystics, fortune tellers, and psychics*

The purpose of reinforcing the stereotype of Roma as fortune tellers and psychics is to convey the social threat they pose to the dominant group. The social threat, in this instance, encompasses different beliefs, values, and norms. This stereotype asserts that Roma have beliefs, attitudes, and values that do not align with the majority; which means they behave differently from and toward the dominant group. Following this line of logic apparent in these articles, it is

easy to make the leap that because Roma have differing values and beliefs, they will behave in a manner that poses a threat to the dominant society and its members.

Additionally, upholding this stereotype serves to exoticize and romanticize (Said, 1978) this group and its members. By highlighting the mysticism associated with the Roma, they essentially become a desirable oddity. Inevitably, the uniqueness and exoticism of the supernatural identity of this minority group becomes entertainment for the majority group.

#### *Roma as untrustworthy*

Similar to the other two stereotypical depictions of the Roma, the persistent conveyance of them as being untrustworthy stems from the dominant group feeling threatened. Essentially, marking them as trustworthy in these articles serves to permeate the economic threat they pose, as the dominant group has the tendency to stigmatize those it perceives as a financial risk or drain. The main focus of these articles is the fraud allegedly committed by the Marks. Fraud is a confidence crime, which requires the assailant to gain the trust of their victims by making false claims in order to steal from them. The violation of trust that the Marks family is accused of deems them liars and thieves.

Moreover, by reifying the stereotype that Roma are untrustworthy, the dominant group is attempting to preserve the social order. This stigma label implants a sense of caution and fear in majority group members; this caution and fear becomes a reason to distance themselves from members of the ethnic minority. Members of the in-group are more likely to keep a distance from the Roma if they are believed to be liars and cheats; hence, causing the Roma to suffer prejudice, discrimination and exclusion.

### Roma as foreign/exotic Other

The portrayal of the Roma as the foreign and exotic Other is an attempt to maintain the social order. This social ordering is one that places the gadje in a superior position, thus placing the Roma as the inferior. First, by depicting Roma as foreigners, despite the fact most of them were born and raised in the U.S., the dominant group is indirectly portrayed as the ones that belong in this country and are being intruded upon by this ethnic minority.

Next, certain aspects about the Romani culture are highlighted and for the most part distorted to amplify the differences between the two groups. Drawing attention to Romani beliefs, attitudes and cultural practices, especially against the backdrop of a criminal case, makes implications that criminal activity is interwoven into Romani society. Conversely, the notion that the values, beliefs, and norms that structure dominant society are superior is asserted; and therefore, the dominant group has the right to judge and punish this inferior group. (Said, 1978)

### Roma portrayed as threat to dominant culture

#### *Roma as predators*

Several of the sample articles portray Roma as predators, which is an attempt to generate an antagonism between the Roma and the gadje, the dominant group. Basically, by depicting the Roma as a depraved group, who take advantage of vulnerable and trusting people, they become the enemy (Keen, 1991). Accordingly, this media coverage has aided in portraying the Roma as aggressive thieves that have no moral qualms about defrauding, lying, and stealing from dominant group members, especially those that are vulnerable because of unfortunate circumstances beyond their control such as heartache, illness, and death.

Congruently, these articles portray the dominant group as victims of the deviant behavior of the minority, which is characteristic of stigma communication. Even though those victims named or highlighted in the news stories, were wealthy enough to pay the Marks family large fees for their psychic services, they are painted as gullible, unsuspecting people who were experiencing hard times. This is done in an attempt to gain sympathy for these alleged victims from the readers, even though the victims most likely are in a higher socio-economic class than most of the readership. This is evident in the portrayal of Jude Deveraux, a successful novelist who is depicted as being vulnerable and distraught because of several miscarriages and the death of her adopted son. Ultimately, this humanizes Deveraux, making her more relatable and worthy of sympathy; conversely, Roma are dehumanized, possessing such depravity that they could prey on a member of the dominant group during the lowest point in her life.

### *Extravagance*

The repetition of the amount of the alleged fraud serves to accentuate the economic threat the Roma pose to the majority. Constantly reminding readers that members of this ethnic minority not only stole but were able to steal millions of dollars from their clients effectively conveys the extent of the threat. The fact, that the amount of the alleged fraud was so high, works much better to exemplify the threat than if the amount had been less.

Additionally, the repetition of the extravagance of this alleged crime serves to maintain the dominant social order. Members of this ethnic minority, who are lower in the social ranks, were able to attain wealth and luxury. These measures of wealth – high-end jewelry, luxury cars, and prime real estate are symbols of high social status, generally reserved for the dominant

group. Therefore, these articles communicate not only that this inferior group is encroaching on the dominant social order but also for them to achieve a higher status, they had to commit fraud.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This thesis has attempted to provide a window into the media representations of a marginalized group, the Roma, in the United States. This study has explored newspaper articles detailing confidence crimes purportedly committed by Roma and how they function in the stigmatization of this ethnic minority. The resulting analysis of these articles identified and interpreted negative portrayals, labels and perceptions that construct and reconstruct the spoiled identity that Roma have carried throughout their history in the Western world. Furthermore, this study revealed that these types of portrayals give rise to and reinforce perceptions that this ethnic minority threaten the economic and social well-being of the majority, and are therefore undesirable.

Additionally, this thesis has described how this type of negative media coverage serve to represent the Roma, as the foreign “Other”, separate and different from the majority. This thesis also revealed that these portrayals of otherness extend to the Roma having separate and oppositional values, beliefs, and norms from those of the dominant society. Examination of these media portrayals revealed that perceptions of Roma as the “Other” is rooted in the dominant group feeling threatened and somewhat entertained by this ethnic minority.

The research underlying this thesis is not without its limits. First, a limited number of articles in one newspaper were analyzed. Time limited a narrow view of the media representations of the Roma to this one publication during a particular period. More time also would have allowed for several newspapers to be analyzed, or a broader view of the media coverage pertaining to Roma in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel over a longer period of time. However, this thesis provided a window into the negative perception and misrepresentations of

the Roma that have still been occurring in this media outlet within the past two years. Therefore, it is hoped that this thesis will inspire further research and discussion into the media representations of the Roma in the United States; and ultimately result in the fair, unbiased coverage and treatment of this ethnic minority.

Second, this study analyzed only newspaper articles, and although this type of media is integral in informing the public's perceptions about different peoples and events, there can only be speculation about the effect this type of coverage might have had on the dominant groups' view of the Roma. Thus, interviewing dominant group members to discover their perceptions about the Roma before and after reading this series would have provided insights into the effects this type of coverage actually has on individual's perceptions. Additionally, interviewing members of the Romani community to discover their point of view on this series of articles, and how this type of coverage effects them in their intergroup and intragroup interactions, would have provided another insightful layer to this thesis. It is therefore, hoped that this thesis will spur not only more research into the Roma in the United States, an area of scholarship that is lacking, but also studies that include the insights of American Roma themselves.

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