

Denouncing White Privilege and Re-examining Marginality: Productions and Consequences of
Difference between Travelers and non-Travelers in North Augusta, SC

by

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Abstract

Can a group of affluent whites be considered marginal? This ethnographic study seeks to explore that question through the thoughtful consideration of the position of a group of Irish Travelers in a mid-size southern town. If categorization is necessary, how do white-skinned people sparse out distinctions among themselves, especially in a region heavily defined by relations of color. We will explore the primary methods of identifying a Traveler from a non-Traveler in North Augusta, likening the process-and its ensuing creation of essential meaning-to racial classification. Underlying the firsthand processes of identification are important structures of extended kinship shared between members for the same category. For whites, an important kinship bond is invisible privilege. Travelers-though white, skinned and affluent, are nonetheless a marked and visible entity to non-Travelers and are therefore placed outside of the invisible privilege of unmarked whiteness. Traveler visibility (behavioral markers) is experienced by mainstream whites as a rejection of kinship, and that rejection is a basis for the production of difference between the two groups. The particulars of the difference are given distinct form and undeniable truth through storytelling and representation. The resulting certitude is used to legitimate past and present actions of discrimination. Therefore, less visible forms of marginality should be considered to include those that may have faded, been circumvented, or inhabit discursive environments.

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Introduction

In Fall 2008, I took a medical leave of absence from my studies at Duke. I moved in with my Aunt Crystal and Uncle Kevin, taking up some extra room in their lovely ranch style home in North Augusta, South Carolina. They were happy to help feed and house me while I worked on my health, but we all agreed that earning my own paycheck was also important. I dutifully bounced around a couple of part-time jobs, peddling lotions and candles to the good people of the area. In early 2011, I landed at a sandwich chain about a mile from the house. My fellow employees were friendly and asked me some general questions:

“So, Crystan, where you from?”

“Augusta, but I moved over here not too long ago.”

“Where you stay at now?”

“Right here off of (Highway) 25.”

“Oh, over there by the gypsy camp?”

“I guess so.”

I wasn't really sure what my co-worker meant by “gypsy camp”, and at that point, I didn't know that the neighborhood to which they were referring was literally adjacent to my own. I had heard of the “gypsies” before, but since I grew up 40 minutes away in southern parts of Augusta, Georgia, I couldn't say much about them or pick one out from a crowd. I had one clear memory from childhood, of noticing a family at the county fair. In this particular family, the women's hair was sprayed and stacked to the sky, make-up was bright and thick, sparkly jewelry was abundant, and brands like *Tommy Hilfiger* were etched across red long-sleeved shirts. Nothing about that description is particularly unusual for the women of Georgia-lina (another way to refer to the area), but if you glanced down to the stroller each woman was pushing, you saw a 2 year

old girl dressed in an identical fashion—hair-sprayed curly up-do, colorful eye shadow and lipstick, jewelry and all. I recall thinking it was strange. I recall someone around me declaring confidently, “Must be one of them gypsies, got them little girls all done up like that. Shame.”

My experiences discussing Travelers (the term preferred by the group) beyond that instance are infrequent and grainy. My uncle (by marriage) and his family were from Jackson, South Carolina, and other towns nearby (Beech Island, New Ellington) and always seemed to have more authority on Traveler issues than my aunt or me, who both grew up in Augusta. Foggy recollections of their comments throughout the years comprise the remainder of my initial memories of the Traveler population in North Augusta. Primarily, I remember the comments being firmly and confidently asserted by the adults around me. “Them Travelers are some thieves.” The sureness of this fact was not to be doubted. The accompanying anecdotes were never greatly detailed, just broad, passing strokes in an unfavorable portrait. I acutely sensed the line being drawn between honest people and dishonest gypsies (the desired effect), but rejected the lesson being imparted—to participate in the wholesale categorization, for my own good.

The Irish Travelers of North Augusta present an interesting case study by which to understand processes of in-group/out-group determinations, the particular hazards of labeling that follow, and less visible forms of marginality. We will come to understand the clues that signify a Traveler identity and the meanings brought to bear based on that label, including the consequences of deciding that someone is not a part of your group, and the spread of specific assumptions attached to Travelerness. The Travelers experience important aspects of marginality in the American South, but their exact position is unique. Particularly contextualized by the history of race relations in the American South, their physical presentation as “white people”, and their relative affluence places Travelers differently along the spectrum of marginality.

Specifically, we will examine the role of the circulation of narrative and stories in constructing Travelerness. Indeed, it is a salient time to understand a precarious category—one that is established but not entrenched, familiar but also in flux.

North Augusta, South Carolina, sits alongside the Savannah River, in the middle of the Georgia-South Carolina border. It is suburban to Augusta, Georgia, which has a population of 200,000 and is the second largest city in Georgia (U.S. Census 2010). One could say that people from Augusta have a bit of an “inferiority complex” to Atlanta. The national perception seems to be that any city in Georgia that is not Atlanta is sparsely populated and backwards (shows like TLC’s *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*¹ confirm such ideas. The network is a strong force of media, and we will later take a closer look at the network’s impacts on the fieldsite). The Central Savannah River Area (CSRA), Augusta’s corresponding metropolitan statistical area (of which North Augusta is a part), includes counties in both Georgia and South Carolina, but the “state” identities remain distinct. Daily “going across the river” for work, commerce, and other activities is very common in North Augusta, but the town’s residents still maintain a tight, South Carolinian identity. As many residents have relocated from smaller, nearby towns in more rural parts of the state, someone from Augusta is still termed a “Georgia boy” or “Georgia girl”, even though there can be as little as a 5-10 minute geographic distance. The population of North Augusta itself is about 20,000, a small number that lends itself to tight-knitnes, but would be classified as suburban rather than rural. There are no cows or cotton fields along the well-paved roads. Small businesses and national chains all appear to thrive well in the local commerce.

¹ A recent hit show for the network, that follows a 7 year-old name named Alana Thompson and her family in rural McIntyre, Georgia, which is 90 minutes south of Augusta. The show is mostly driven by Alana’s precociousness (“Ain’t nothing wrong with being gay. Everybody’s a little gay”, she declares). There’s a mix of fairly mainstream activities (July 4th fireworks, date night for the mother and father) and other, more peripheral activities (mud-boggin, four-wheelin). The cast members speak English, but the show is heavily sub-titled (because of the distance of the vernacular from standard English, I suppose).

Many families share membership in the same church, recreational sports league, and school system. One could say that North Augusta is not in “the country,” but that “the country” is not very far away.

Travelers, however, are often outside of these systems of membership and are understood to exist as a separate, contently isolated community. They number at about 1500, mostly all living in a neighborhood called Murphy Village. Travelers are different. In appearance, Travelers have light skin tones and European features and therefore physically present as white people. There is no “traditional garb” that would immediately separate a Traveler from a non-Traveler on a visual basis, in the way we often automatically classify other groups of people. Except for large, curly hairstyles for the women, their manner of daily dress also generally blends in with the mainstream population. Therefore, a Traveler would be fairly indistinguishable in other American cities. If, in another city, the hairstyle *was* taken note of, it would not likely be attached to the same meanings or bear the same consequences. To a North Augustan, a very certain set of cues signifies and constructs the marked Traveler identity. Auditory cues are also important, as the recognition of a distinct speech pattern often solidifies initial inklings of the identity. Many of the 1500 group members share the same five or six Irish surnames, so an individual can be labeled a Traveler without being physically present.

In this project, I seek to more fully understand the constructions of “Traveler-ness” in North Augusta because of the historically demonstrated danger in the acceptance of negative perceptions as justified truths applicable to all members of a group (Omi and Winant, 1994: 1, 4). However, the tendency to form such perceptions seems a quick and inevitable process of creating Otherness, of equating difference with disdain (Omi and Winant, 1994: 1, 4). I hope to unravel the Traveler identity as socially constructed rather than an essential truth of their

personhood, to allow for greater complexity for individual being-in-the-world². In my fieldwork, I paid special attention to classification at its most basic level; that is, the variety of clues that signify the Traveler label and the way they function together to form a system of identity.

Further building on the work of Omi and Winant, I will also discuss the assumptions and meanings attached to the application of the Traveler label as functioning as a racial or ethnic category. Evidence for those meanings are collected from interviews with and observations of non-Travelers, and it will show that although there are varying extents of positivity and negativity in non-Traveler perceptions of Travelers, the cumulative result appears to lead to a social production of difference and the distinct construction of an othered Traveler identity. That production of difference is foundational to the Traveler experience in North Augusta and merits closer examination. Once the “Traveler” label has been applied to an individual, the corresponding assumptions that are mobilized to understand the individual’s deviance from the norms are: dishonest business practices, thievery, lack of trustworthiness, early ends to formal education, marriage among first-cousins, opulence, and an inordinate attachment to material goods. The assumptions result from several stories that have been circulating in the area for at least the past three generations. In this ethnography, I am not interested in the accuracy of the stories-whether the events have actually occurred as they are told-but in the fact that the stories exist at all and, as a certain brand of shared, remembered history, the function they serve in the production of Traveler difference.

Using the work of Ruth Frankenberg, the construction of the normative white majority specific to the area will be considered alongside the social production of difference between Travelers and non-Travelers. I will argue that the Travelers’ dedication to maintaining a distinct separateness from majority whites in the area is understood as a rejection of the invisible white

² A term of Erving Goffman’s.

privilege that their physical appearance affords them. That rejection will be paired with theories of extended kinship, of the process of determining whether an individual is a part of your “group” or not, to frame the consideration of the rejection as another primary, underlying social force that perpetuates the otherness of the Travelers.

Literature on representation and marginality will be used to consider the impact on the everyday lived experience of being a Traveler in North Augusta and what sort of meaning the stories, assumptions, and otherness bear on daily life. Such a consideration is complicated by the current lack of structural oppression on the group and the affluence many of them enjoy. Travelers have a specific, marked identity that is accompanied by moral assumptions about the individuals’ way of moving in the world—a typical feature of marginality. It is interesting, then, that the Travelers do not possess the characteristics (skin tone that marks race, poverty³) typically shared by marginalized groups. It is therefore important to understand the origins of their productions of difference and the various forces that maintain that difference. Although basic human rights do not currently appear to be violated, a glimpse into the recent past will provide evidence of structured oppression. Further, new forms of marginality are suggested to encompass the effects and dangerous potential of the narratives as producers of difference.

The methods of this ethnography were primarily unstructured, (mostly) recorded interviews and participant observation, from September 2012 to January 2013. By “unstructured”, I mean that I was largely silent, sharing a short list of topics I’d like touch on, but encouraging the interviewees to respond however they like, that there were no “wrong” or “off track” answers. I conducted observations at a shopping center near Murphy Village, where interactions between Travelers and non-Travelers are frequent and necessary, and other

³ Not every Traveler is affluent.

community events around the town (middle school football game, elementary school chorus presentation). At the sandwich shop in the center, my role as a researcher may have been clearer, as notebooks and papers were scattered about my table. At the grocery store and nail salon, I appeared no different from the other patrons picking up household items and getting French manicures, save the occasional scramble to my purse for my field notebook. Unstructured interviews were often held in the homes of the participants (all located about 3 miles from each other). All participants had lived in North Augusta for at least 10-15 years and had varied extents of interactions with Travelers. Though more interviews were conducted, five conversations in particular—with Julie and Susan, Carol, Carrie, Uncle Kevin, and Heather and Joe—provided rich exploratory grounds for the goals of the project. I should note here that Julie and Susan are my only two Traveler informants; the rest of the interviews were conducted with non-Travelers⁴. Time spent with Julie and Susan was powerful and informative and will be used extensively in the thesis. In addition, two other scholars—Jared Harper and Amanda Kay Boundy—have written on the same population, in 1977 and 2007 respectively. I am supremely grateful for their scholarship and have drawn on it to provide supplemental evidence of the Traveler perspective. The reader may also notice frequent uses of nonstandard English in interview excerpts, a reflection of my choice to maintain the vernacular in which the informants and I spoke.

A final note of coalescence: Only after several shifts at the sandwich chain did my own system of recognition begin to concretize. Though I grew up only about 40 minutes away, and had spent time on “this side of the river”, I had to be *taught* how to distinguish a Traveler from a

⁴ I did not have any pre-existing established relationships with Travelers to draw on, but I knew someone who did. I sought her out to hopefully begin a chain of referrals. Unfortunately, response was slow and lacking (despite my friendly reminders). It was not until late in the fieldwork process that interviews with Julie and Susan came to fruition—certainly a lesson learned for this first time ethnographer.

non-Traveler. The group was not often spotted nor discussed in South Augusta; it was a particular skill of Carolina.

Chapter 1

Gypsies and Irish Travelers: Locally Understood

Section 1: How to spot a Traveler

My next-door neighbor Carol is a local banker who has 15-year-long positive relationships with many members of the Traveler community. Carol grew up 15 minutes away in Beech Island, SC. She did not begin to have regular interaction with Travelers until she began working at a bank. To do the interview, I walked 12 paces across the yard from my house to hers, and joined her at the dining room table. She was warm and smiling, comfortable and ready to help. I asked Ms. Carol how the customer-banker relationships with Travelers grew into friendships: “Once they’re comfortable around you and know you’re going to respect them [pause] and not treat them like an outcast... one person tells another person and the relationship grows. And that’s how I’ve become friends with a lot of them. I treat them like anybody else and they like that.” Due to her longstanding relationships with mostly the elder members of the Traveler group, Carol is a reliable source in establishing the history of the group’s settlement in the area, which she estimates to have been 50-60 years ago. Jared Harper, one of the few scholars who has taken an in-depth look at Irish Travelers in the American South, would support such a timeline:

“According to Traveler tradition, they emigrated from Ireland about 1847, during the Irish Potato Famine.⁵..Upon their arrival in America...the immigrants settled first in New York...Pennsylvania...and Washington, D.C...About the time of the American Civil

⁵ To my understanding, the individuals who migrated from Ireland at this time already embodied a Traveler idea in their country of origin. That is, “Travellers”, as it is spelled in Europe, emerged as a distinct minority group *in* Ireland prior to migrating to America. The emergence of Travellers in Ireland will be traced in Chapter 2.

War...they...moved to the South and specialized in the mule and horse trade until about 1955 when that business virtually ceased. In those days...*they camped by the roadside in a friendly farmer's field, living in wagons and tents...* At present, the Travelers live in several permanent and semi-permanent communities in Georgia, South Carolina. (18)"

(Harper 1971, italics added)

Here, Harper seems to imply that the Travelers who moved down South during the Civil War were itinerant nomads, so they may not have stayed in one place long enough to establish a recognizable difference from majority whites. The end of the mule and horse trade in 1955 indicates a need for a change in occupation for the Travelers. That date also coincides with Carol's estimation the North Augusta Travelers have been in the area for about 50 years, which is confirmed by Harper's 1971 acknowledgement of permanent settlements in South Carolina. If the Travelers living in North Augusta today settled permanently in the town around 1955, then 57 years (two generations) is a sufficient amount of time and extended interaction for non-Travelers to develop a system of recognition and assumptions for the Traveler identity. However, two generations is also fairly recent for a new group to be introduced to a community, which places the system at an intriguing stage of development. The present seems a salient time to more fully understand the social processes that construct Traveler difference and the consequences of that construction.

The process in constructing Traveler difference that would need to occur first is distinguishing a Traveler from a non-Traveler. As the Travelers physically present as white people, clues other than skin tone must be used to apply the label. In the research thus far, I have found that a combination of methods are used by North Augustans in the identifying process.

Using facial features alone can sometimes be unreliable, but Carol's 15-year-old daughter Carrie describes a certain "look" often used to identify a Traveler: "They just have that look on their face. Something about their eyes, and their nose, and their mouth, they just all look the same. If you put 10 of them up like this [places hands out by her face], and you only showed from their forehead to their chin, they all resemble a lot. That's 'cause they marry their cousins and stuff." Here, Carrie connects one of the assumptions about Travelers (marriage among first-cousins) to an important visual signifier ("the look"). She implies that because of a pattern of shared genetic material between parents in a small population of 1500, a certain resemblance has become noticeable to non-Travelers and used as a means to identify Travelers. Several informants also spoke of this "look", including Heather and Joe⁶, a young couple (ages 28 and 19 respectively) with whom I conducted a joint interview:

Heather: "They have very distinct features."

Joe: "You can pick a gypsy out the crowd from anybody else...They wear all that make-up at such a young age, do their hair to where it hits the ceiling..."

Heather: "...all poofy, with them skanky outfits they swear cost all that money..."

Joe: "...but you see 'em [the outfits] in Wal-Mart..."

Heather: "They glamorize it up, put sequins and sparkles on it themselves."

Heather and Joe add to the list large hairstyles and affinity for sparkles as visual signifiers used to identify women (likely on their way to a party in Murphy Village).

Heather and Joe both (separately) formed friendships with Travelers during their childhood and adolescence. Heather (with whom I worked at the sandwich shop for about 2 months before I departed for Durham) had become close with two girls during elementary school, and Joe developed his friendships in later teenage years. So, an interesting layered

⁶ Names changed.

perspective comes out from their joint interview, as the couple share experiences with two different genders at two different developmental stages and across different decades (not to mention the enjoyable rhythm of their exchanges, talking to each other, back to me, then back to each other again). Both individuals are native to North Augusta, growing up on opposite ends of Highway 25—the same highway shared by Murphy Village, the shopping center where Heather and I worked and where I conducted observations, and my neighborhood. On the evening I conducted my interview, they welcomed me in their home on a chilly night in late September. Heather was drawing jack o’lantern faces on a baby pumpkin for decorations at her daughter’s school, as Joe added:

“They got their own language, too...”

Heather: “Yeah, my ex used to be able to speak their language...”

Joe: “...talk *Cant*...They have their own dictionary and everything.”

Heather: I thought it was ridiculous, but they understand each other. I guess that’s what it’s meant, for only them to understand.”

Joe: “*Munya* means good. I used to know a few words.”

Heather: “I used to know a few words too. I can’t remember ‘em now.”

In addition to the visual cues, aural cues like speech pattern are also important, as the recognition of these additional cues often solidifies initial inklings of the Traveler identity. Interviewees have described their speech as very rapid and difficult to understand, laced with an Irish or Gaelic lilt.



Since we are emphasizing visual recognition, concrete visual aids may be helpful. The photo on the left is of two Traveler women, hopefully both the “big hair” and the ability of the women to blend in other American cities is clear to the reader. It was publically available to anyone with a Facebook account, so I feel comfortable using it here. The image on the right is a non-Traveler’s rendition of a Traveler woman using Microsoft Paint. It was obtained from Amanda Boundy’s thesis, page 62.

Interestingly, Travelers themselves use the same visual cues as non-Travelers to identify other Travelers not in their immediate social circle. “Big hair,” Julie, a Traveler woman in her early 40s (and one of Ms. Carol’s friends), says assuredly of Traveler girls, when I ask how she is able to tell another person is a Traveler even if she doesn’t know them. “And our boys dress

nice. No grunge looks, we believe in dressing up. They will have tucked in shirts and belts, short hair, no tattoos, no ear-piercings. Clean cut. You want to look presentable and decent in case you run into another Traveler. It's what we were taught. It reflects how well you take care of yourself and your children." Julie also speaks to "the look" described by non-Traveler informants:

"In Tennessee or New York City⁷, I can tell. They'll have a general appearance about them. I can't describe it. You pretty much know it when you see it. You just do, I can't be specific. It's like how all the Japanese people look alike to us, but not to them. If you put 10 of them in a row, they all got black hair, yellow or olive skin, and slanted eyes. *We* can't tell, but *they* can. It's like that."

This likening of the "Traveler look" to the "Japanese look" will be of more significance soon, as we consider the terms by which one could consider the North Augusta Travelers to function as an ethnic category. Along the same lines, an earlier statement of Julie's rebuffs the negative connotations attached to Traveler visual appearance: "Nobody ever says anything about colored people, when they have their beehives and nails and earrings and jewels. Nobody ever gives them a second look. What's the difference between that and the stereotype about us?" The implication here seems to be that women of color similarly dressed to Traveler women are not subjected to the same negative connotations. Julie may be beckoning for the protection from group-based epithets reserved for people of color: Travelers' white skin makes discursively discriminatory actions publically permissible. Harkening to the Japanese and "colored" people in describing the Traveler situation in North Augusta provides evidence for the functioning of the Traveler category as an ethnic group.

⁷ There is a significant Irish Traveler population in Tennessee. There is not, to my knowledge, one in New York City.

Additionally, Julie's use of "colored" was a complex moment for this ethnographer. I find the term outdated and somewhat offensive (interesting in the context of my later asking her about "gypsy" as an offensive term to describe her group). It isn't clear whether Julie meant to use "colored" in any knowingly pejorative fashion. It is noteworthy that in Ireland, "colored" is considered a more polite term than "black" to describe members of the African diaspora, whereas the reverse is true in the United States. I asked Julie if they maintained any connection to Traveler groups in Ireland but she shared that they did not; nonetheless, the meaning of "colored" in her community is unclear. The context of the comment and her tone did not indicate such harshness; it was more a statement of fact. It may not have been, though, that Julie was aware she was conversing with someone of African-American descent, and I'm curious if she would have used a different term if that was more apparent. I pose this question in no manner of indictment, just of thoughtful exploration considering the subject matter of categorization at hand. My own physical presentation is racially ambiguous. My father is black and my mother is white; I identify as biracial. However, my physical features do not coincide with popular notions of a black phenotype. My skin is a lighter shade of brown (friends teasingly call me "beige") and my hair is a bundle of loose black curls. That combination leads most people to think I am Latina, Middle Eastern, East Indian, or occasionally, passably white. Neither of the Traveler women I spoke with asked me about my ethnic background, (though the priest did) so I'm not sure which category they thought I might belong to.

I met Julie on a gusty afternoon at her office. I planted myself on the couch in the middle of packages and pamphlets, excited for my first interview with a member of the Traveler community. Julie introduced me to her co-worker Susan, a Traveler woman in her mid-fifties, similarly dressed in comfy velour and cotton. We were surrounded by the makings of a

productive office, compressed into an L-shaped coziness. Before I could settle in and get my notebook out, Julie declared to Susan, “You know Carol, don’t ya Susan? Crystan here lives next door to Carol. She’s gonna ask us some questions for a school project.” “Ask me some good ones!” Susan quickly added. Her enthusiasm was comforting. I asked Susan if she and Julie shared the same job: “Yes, except she’s the secretary and I’m the looney-tary.” “Yeah, she’s a little over the cuckoo’s nest,” Julie confirmed. “And she likes those *Looney Toons*, too.” *Jokes and humor!* I thought. *An even better sign!* I inquired about the task for the afternoon, (“You see that stack of papers over there? Yeah, we got to take care of all of those.”) and emphasized that they could ask me to leave if our conversation interfered too much with the work flow. To get the momentum going⁸, I started with the same two questions used in other interviews. With the first question, I learned that both women were born and raised in North Augusta and have lived there all their lives. I wasn’t sure how the next question would go: *How do you view the North Augusta community and your position in it?* “You mean about living here and being the Travelers?”, asked Julie. Well, yes, that’s certainly the perspective I was eager to hear. I was thinking in more general terms, that they might be more comfortable sharing those experiences after we had been talking for a few minutes, but these ladies were ready to get right down to it, as we say colloquially in the South, and I was more than happy to oblige. “Well, I’ll tell you one thing,” said Susan. “I’m embarrassed.” Another revealing response.

Susan: “When we have our little girls all dressed up for a party, and we go out in public, to a restaurant or something, I’m embarrassed.”

⁸ Unless the interviewee has their own ideas about how to start the conversation, which I check for and embrace.

Julie: “They think we’re abusing our kids, but it’s just like *Toddlers and Tiaras*⁹, except we’re not on TV.”

Susan: “And we don’t make the shoes. Some company makes those high heels for little girls to wear.”

Susan and Julie were describing another visual method by which Travelers are identified in North Augusta, one I encountered in my childhood at the county fair: elementary school-age young girls wearing make-up, volumes of curls on their head, sparkly dresses, and high heel shoes. Many non-Travelers do react to this visual with some disgust, as did the adult next to me at the fair (“Must be one of them gypsies, got them little girls all done up like that. Shame”). Julie and Susan are aware of this disgust; it appears to be the source of Susan’s embarrassment.

Of a less-often used method of Traveler identification: many of the 1500 group members share the same five or six Irish surnames, so an individual can be labeled a Traveler without being physically present (names on an elementary school class roster, loan applications at the bank, etc.). Kevin (my uncle by marriage, with whom I live in North Augusta) is a 46 year-old operations manager who grew up 30 minutes away in Jackson, SC, but has lived in North Augusta for the past 15 years. Uncle Kevin spoke to the written method of recognition during his tenure as a baseball coach at the local recreation center. That tenure had been his most extended direct interactions with Travelers. He recalls identifying two of his team members as Travelers without photos or having met them yet: “It’s obvious. They’re name...O’Connor¹⁰. Most of the boys have three names, like Joseph Gordon O’Connor¹¹. ‘O’Connor’ is one of the very common ones.” The ability to identify a Traveler without him or her being physically present is significant

⁹ Another reality show from TLC. This one follows young girls and their families on their journeys to beauty pageant victory.

¹⁰ A fabricated pseudonym. O’Connor is not one of the common surnames associated with being a Traveler in North Augusta and is used here as a placeholder.

¹¹ Name changed.

when considering possible consequences of the construction of the (often unfavorably) marked identity. Such at-a-glance identifiability would enable discriminatory actions like exclusion from the baseball team or rejection on a home mortgage loan; however, today such direct actions of discriminations are rare. However, other possible impacts of the meaning and assumptions attached to the Traveler identity on the lived experience of being a Traveler in North Augusta should still be considered.

Thus far, one of the most immediate consequences of the Traveler label is the negative meanings attached to it. Perhaps the most moralizing is an assumption of criminality, particularly thievery and dishonest business practices. Uncle Kevin admitted:

“Most people I ever talk to about the Travelers don’t like ‘em, because of their past experiences, either with them or *hearing about them*, which has never been good business practices. They’re famous for painting two coats of paint on a house and only putting one coat on there, really cheap paint. They had done black top paving driveways for people and the driveways just, basically fall apart after a short period of time or either they don’t finish the work” (emphasis added).

This element of criminality is often the first cited in by interviewees when discussing perceptions about Travelers, and likely the most dangerous in terms of creating an essentialism of Travelers as “bad people”. Other assumptions are marriage among first-cousins (which some interviewees describe as “in-bred), a superior attitude (“they think they’re better than us”), insularity, lack of education, and an inordinate, competitive attachment to material things. All these assumptions bear negative meanings about the personhood of Travelers. They came into being through the continued circulation of similar sets of stories about past deeds and actions of the Travelers. The stories are presented and accepted as facts, constructing a remembered history about the quality

of Travelers as people. This remembered history is at the forefront of many non-Travelers' minds, and it often frames their interactions as disdainful encounters. For example, a non-Traveler with a nice set of jewelry on may be complimented for her style and effort, while a Traveler with a similar set of sparkles would be quickly deemed haughty and materialistic. In that space, the negative meanings attached to the Traveler labels are mobilized to understand the individual's expected being-in-the world.

Section 2: Travelers as an "ethnic group"

In the course of the fieldwork, I began to notice that the limiting and discriminatory attitudes of non-Travelers towards Travelers echoed the kind of discussion that, if applied to people of color, would likely be pegged as "racism". In a public environment where racism and ethnic bias are not considered publically permissible, it is curious that non-Travelers openly allow themselves to circulate a similar brand of disdainful stories and perceptions. To the extent that such attitudes shape a group's lived experience, I wondered if the Traveler identity functioned as a racial category in North Augusta. I asked Heather what she thought: "[Travelers are] not a racial group, because they're white. They don't have anything else in 'em but white. Different culture, maybe. A culture group, I would say. Because they are their own people." In the overall context of the interview, and as another discussion of the perceived Traveler propensity for dishonest business practices quickly followed, I believe Heather uses "culture group" as a term to signify the behavioral differences of Travelers versus the white normative. In the frame of discussing that behavioral difference, Heather implies a separateness between Travelers and white people, even though she has identified Travelers as white:

Joe: “Cause you don’t want them [gypsies/Travelers] to see what you got in your yard, you don’t want ‘em to be able to see what you got in your house, they might come in and try to break into it and stuff like that.

Heather: “And you *wouldn’t be like that with any other group. I mean, a white person* you wouldn’t be like that with unless they look like a thug, y’know.” (emphasis added).

Wondering how the Travelers might frame their own identity in these terms of race and ethnicity, I asked Julie, one of the two Traveler women I interviewed. She was comfortably decked out that day in sweatpants and shirt, rummaging around stacks of papers as I lobbed the question, *Do you consider Travelers an ethnic group?* “Some people might like to say that, me personally, I don’t think we are”, she responded. I waited for a further elaboration that did not come.

Although both Traveler and non-Traveler informants specifically do not use the term “race” or “ethnic group” to describe Travelers, the categories of “Traveler” or “gypsy” in North Augusta do function very much like racial classification, both in how the labels are affixed and the consequences of the label’s meanings. This is perhaps less remarkable for non-white non-Travelers, as basic racial difference would be apparent and operable regardless. Because Traveler/gypsy is a special, sufficiently different category, white non-Travelers interact with Travelers much the same way as other groups of nonwhites. Uncle Kevin acknowledges: “That’s a bad thing here in North Augusta, of the talks of the Travelers, and having issues with them. *[It’s] probably no different than whites or blacks and Indians or whatever*” (emphasis added). Uncle Kevin likens the interactions between Travelers and non-Travelers to similar tensions between other racially classified groups (“whites or blacks and Indians or whatever”). He seems to be aware that the group-wide attribution of fixed qualities (like criminality) is a “bad thing.”

Here's why: Racial classification is one of the basic methods used to order concrete assumptions about an individual's expected inhabitation in the world. Such ordering is not a singular determination limited to inconsequential opinions about another's identity. Far-reaching implications are brought to bear through these codes, such as a worldview that justifies "the expropriation of property, the denial of political rights, the introduction of slavery...as well as outright extermination" (Omi and Winant 1). In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant provide further insight into the scheme and its consequences. In order to interact, individuals must assign racial categories to one another: "One of the first things we notice about people when we meet them...is their race" (4). That assignment is an automatic and necessary response to the presentation of a new body, a way to use physical qualities like skin tone to quickly organize ideas about ways the body should be presenting itself: "Our compass for navigating race relations depends on preconceived notions about what each specific racial group looks like...the content of such stereotypes reveals a series of unsubstantiated beliefs about who these groups are and what 'they' are like" (4). In North Augusta, the compass points to "gypsy" instead of "regular white person" using the visual and aural clues outlined earlier ("big hair", Irish lilt in speech). Once the determination is made, the relationship to the individual is navigated much the same way as race relations. A "series of unsubstantiated beliefs" are quickly mobilized to characterize the individual's ways and qualities, i.e. the individual must behave this way and be of this morality because they present as a member of this group. As we have seen, the beliefs about North Augusta Travelers include lack of education, in-breeding, criminality, dishonest business practices and materialism.

Following these ideas of the social construction of race, Ruth Frankenberg considers the specific terms that accompany the recognition of (normative) whiteness. Two terms that are

particularly important to the gypsies' case: first, that "whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege" and second, that "whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (1). As a result of colonialism, whiteness has been produced as normative and invisible (6, 17). Once an individual has been read as white, prevailing racial classification expects that individual to occupy a corresponding position of dominance. That expectation also ends any further consideration of their racial identity, for the normative is invisible and requires no demarcation. In the case of the Travelers, their light skin tones coincide with popular notions of whiteness, but their social position is incompatible with *meanings* of whiteness.

I believe this incompatibility leads to "a source of discomfort and a crisis of racial meaning" (Omi and Winant 4) for non-Traveler North Augustans. Inasmuch as non-Travelers understand Travelers to be white, and to therefore lack ethnicity, the prevailing racial code permits non-Travelers to build a discursive environment that would not be permissible (or at least less so) for individuals of darker skin tones. That is, the assumed privilege of whiteness precludes Travelers from a protected category in which the public circulation of negative perceptions is not permissible. On the other hand, and to the extent that participants in the normative white population function as a collective, the Travelers' behavioral difference is read as an active rejection of the unmarked privilege of whiteness. This rejection is perplexing. If the lightness of one's skin tone affords one the luxuries of social privilege, why would that opportunity be purposely rejected? The rejection of privilege could also be read as a choice not to reproduce a (highly advantageous) kinship bond with white non-Travelers.

We have learned a bit about the ways a non-Traveler picks a Traveler out from a crowd. It is a skill set one can acquire only after extended residence in North Augusta, that informants of

both groups simply describe as “a look”, though big hair is a helpful marker when spotting a Traveler woman. In addition, non-Traveler ears are attuned to a difference in speech pattern, one that is rapid and Irish-accented. With the application of the Traveler label comes a set of assumptions mobilized to understand how that person is, based on the negative ideas spread around town about Travelers. This direct attachment between physical identification and meaning mobilization is the way in which the Traveler category functions much like a category of color, though neither group would directly consider Travelers as a racial or ethnic group (they are just white). Because Travelers have white skin, it seems more permissible to openly circulate ideas about the entire group that would otherwise be pegged as racism. The Traveler position problematizes the racial code in the area-how are these white people so outside of the mainstream? The Travelers are, in a way, simultaneously white and nonwhite. They are white (and rich) enough *not* to be protected from overt discriminatory attitudes, but they are different enough to merit a separate category that is inhabited much the same way as any nonwhite category.

Once a Traveler is recognized as such, how is the difference between a Traveler and a white non-Traveler further produced? What does is the basis for the permissibly harsh environment? Frankenburg demonstrates that those of white skin are supposed to enjoy invisible privilege, but the Travelers have white skin *and* are very much visible in their Otherness. That visibility, that difference, precludes Travelers from the unmarked, invisible privilege of whiteness. To the extent that members of the same category share an extended kinship that comprises their sameness and solidarity, privilege would be an important bond of that kinship among people with white skin. Perhaps the absence of the bond is more powerful than the production of difference in legitimating the prejudice imposed on the “gypsies”.

Chapter 2

Difference as the Absence of Extended Kinship: White Privilege Denounced

Section 1: The compulsion to separate/Differences as a social product

“Country boys [the rednecks] and the gypsies butt heads really, really, really hard. They fight a lot. They just don't like each other, it's just two different kind of groups mixing and that's like two different gang groups mixing, it just don't go together, you know what I mean?”

-Joe, September 2012

As a discipline, cultural anthropology offers a theoretical wealth by which to understand the categorization of others as a foundational social impulse. It is a basic, common, and frequent act, and one could design many an argument around its auspices. I would like to consider for a moment *why* categorizations and in-group/out-group determination appears to be a universal necessity. The impulse to categorize is driven by an overarching need to follow rules and maintain order. To function properly with others, to coordinate his or her interactions with other people, a person needs to make the beings-in-the-world of other individuals intelligible according to a framework or grid (this grid, crafted from shared rules, maintains the order). The grid maps out differences (and similarities) in a hierarchical fashion, or, as Tracy Ore puts it in social constructionist terms, “[Paraphrasing Frye 1983]...the construction of difference is not arbitrary but systematically created and transformed into systems of inequality in an effort to advantage some at the expense of others (15).”

When confronted with a new body, the individual must satisfy the need to maintain order by quickly using the grid of intelligibility¹² to assign that body to various categories. Those categories may or may not be the same ones that the individual belongs to (he or she would of course achieve a thorough understanding of the categories to which he or she belongs—it is the basis for comparison in the next step). Carrying the understanding (burden?) of one’s own category, the next step in categorization would be deciding who else is or is *not* also in that same category. This could also be described as the separation of self and other, determining who is in-group and who is out-group, or deciding who is and is not like me. For persons who are outside of the individual’s own category, the other category they belong to is understood according to its position on the grid relative to the individual’s category. The relative position shapes how the individual regards and interacts with other persons, which then shapes the everyday lived experiences of those other persons (Ore 6, 9).

There are a variety of consequences to this drawing up of categories, and a major goal of this project is to better understand those consequences for the Travelers in North Augusta. At present¹³, the most immediate consequence seems to be a discursive environment of Otherness—but what are the consequences of that environment? If, for some people, the Travelers are “congenially Othered”, that is constructed as different or weird under an umbrella of affinity and warmth, how does that complicate the consequences drawn from the environment? For example, Carol, my kind neighbor who shares close friendships with members of the Traveler community, points out differences between Travelers and herself with affectionate glee. In recounting recent baby-naming traditions in the Traveler community (“It’s a big thing to reveal the name, they have a party and everything and they want it to be different and unique. And for a while there

¹² A term used by Rebecca Stein in her Spring 2012 Theoretical Foundations course.

¹³ The picture was a bit different 16 years ago, as we will explore in later chapters.

they were namin ‘em kinda like after cars, or places. One of ‘em, name is Lexus, Royalty, Vegas”), Ms. Carol went into a discussion of the trips some Travelers take to Atlanta for fertility treatments, which then brought her to a realization of the first-cousin intramarriage in the community. I asked what she thought about that:

“That gets a lil hard to swallow, when I find that out sometimes. I’m like, “Why did I have to know that part?”, you know?...It’s kinda weird...I figured out, omigosh, sister’s children [are married] to each other, first cousins. And I’m like, Oh, I just rather not know that part, that part’s weird to me. I guess ‘cause *we didn’t grow up like that*, so that part’s hard to me, to understand with them. *That’s their lifestyle though, that’s their thing*. [pause] That part’s hard, to know that you’re married to your [pause] first cousin? I wouldn’t want to be married to my first cousin! [laughs] You know, that part...ugh” (emphasis added).

Here, Carol is kind and open-minded in her consideration of the Travelers’ “lifestyle.” The differences themselves, though, are not altogether dismissed; the weirdness is still operative. Perhaps, as a member of the white majority, this “congenial Othering” could be read as a benevolent allowance from the majority for the Travelers to live “their way.” Or, Carol’s humored reaction could stem not only from her positive relationships with Travelers, but also from her simultaneous discomfort with their departure from norms. The laughter dissolves the tension, as cultural relativism (understanding a group on its terms) and ethnocentrism (precedence of one’s own values) attempt to coexist in an utterance.

As categories of difference are constructed to keep all persons intelligible (and therefore maintain order), a typical consequence is that the individual applies their understanding of the

category to *all* members of the group. It is an oversimplification that neatly satisfies the need for order—to consider possibilities for individual complexity, that a member of a group need *not* be wholly outfitted with all the corresponding assumptions to the group’s identity, would be a disruption to that order. Interestingly, it is just that possibility for complexity that Julie directly requests from non-Travelers: “I just want us to be taken on an individual basis. Don’t lump us all together. Try to understand, everybody is different, not everybody is the same.” This quote (and its variants) was repeated at several points throughout the interview, as a concluding statement to Julie’s general accounts of her experience as a Traveler in North Augusta, and her knowledge of the markers of difference most prominently circulated by non-Travelers. So as the conversation turned from younger girls in high heels, to perceptions of rudeness and that Travelers act like “it’s their world and everybody else just lives in it”, to the crimes committed by some individuals, Julie’s closing thought to each account was the request that each Traveler be understood as an individual. This indicates that Julie is aware of the majority’s power to create meanings about her minority group and that these are harsh meanings under which she is expected to thrive (Hall, recorded lecture). These meanings are, in brief, stereotypes: sprouted by difference, spread as truth, and sourced as rationale for a range of oppressive acts.

Many people may deny their own practice of the wholesale application of one feature to an entire group. Perhaps the impulse reveals itself more in the *occasional* exception. If exceptions to the group understanding are made, it is a special, surprising case of the other person somehow *disproving* the attached assumptions. One can often detect the sense of surprise in an informant’s voice by the high and hopeful intonation of their voice, as they present the novel fact. Ms. Carol and Carrie ping-ponged such a conversation about Travelers and formal education:

Carol: “I heard that one of ‘em out there’s an attorney”

Carrie: “Wasn’t there a boy a couple years ago that went on a baseball scholarship to some school? Good for him.”

Carol: [brightly] “It’s okay to break the cycle!”

Such an occasional acknowledgement of departure from expectations could be a step in the right direction, but it is still a process that happens *after* the accepted, pre-existing knowledge of personhood has been overcome. It barely fractures a tendency that needs to be massively reshaped, if not obliterated.

In North Augusta, many members of the white majority would likely describe their primary goal in life as “just to be a good, hard-working Christian¹⁴”. Most have pledged *staunch* allegiance to the football teams of either the University of Georgia, the University of South Carolina, or Clemson University. Overall, football is serious business in North Augusta. At a middle school football game, a large percentage of the crowd was decked out in black and gold t-shirts proclaiming, “One Town. One Team. One Goal” (solidarity indeed). I believe the high value of the “hard-working” aspect of the majority identity also heavily informs the lack of extended kinship between Travelers and non-Travelers. Non-Travelers think that Travelers have accumulated their wealth dishonestly, in ways that specifically avert hard work (shoddy home repair that doesn’t last).

Such is the way that categories of difference are constructed. I would argue that bonds of extended kinship among members of the same group are forged due to the expectations of non-members shared between them. Members of the same category move and operate the same way in the world in relation to members of other categories. So, to be a part of my group is to be

¹⁴ As the Travelers are devout Catholics, and considering the history of the divide, it is interesting that none of the difference produced between Travelers and the Protestant majority in North Augusta appears to be attributed to religion.

attached to the same set of assumptions that are attached to me. That shared set of assumptions is a kinship bond, reproducible outside of the family, but inside members of the same social category.

Section 2: Extended Kinship Bonds among Group Members

Though a long way from the charts of circles and squares of Levi-Strauss' time, any modern efforts to reconsider kinship, including the works included in the collection *New Directions in Anthropological Kinship* (Stone 2001), keep ideas of extended kinship in the frame of specific family roles. Consanguinity is wholly dismissed as a criterion for kinship bonds, but non-consanguineal relationships still achieve "kinship" status through the attribution of close family roles like mother, father, brother, and sister. The possibilities of a more extended notion of kinship are hearkened to here and there, but only in passing, as an ideological accompaniment to ideas about constructed families. However, the passing references lead to a 1969 essay by David Schneider in support of the notion of kinship in wider social groups without relying on the structure of specific family roles. Schneider posits primarily that, in America, the terms of nationality and religion share a similar structure with those of kinship; namely, "relationships of diffuse, enduring solidarity" (120). He shares specific reasons for using the words "diffuse" and "enduring"¹⁵, however, I think a different reading would still be compatible with his argument. "Diffuse", I propose, could be understood in its sense as spread out across partitions of identity and not confined to a specific aspect, unit, or place. Such an understanding would aid the theory

¹⁵ "Diffuse" because [the symbols of American kinship] are functionally diffuse rather than specific in Parson's terms [see page 116]. That is, where the "job" is to get a specific thing done there is no such specific limitation on the aim or goal any kinship relationship. Instead the goal is "solidarity," that is, the "good" or "well-being" or "benefit"... Whatever it is that is "good for" the family, the spouse, the child, the relative, etc. is the "right" thing to do. And "enduring" in the generalized sense symbolized by "blood"; there is no built-in termination point or termination date. Indeed, it "is" and cannot be terminated" (120).

of “extended kinship” as I use it, in which one can have kinship bonds with members of his or her various types of groups or categories. “Enduring”, I think, could refer to the depth and long-lasting quality of the bond, similar to Schneider’s use of the word as interminable (120). The meaning of “solidarity” carries its general definition for Schneider, perhaps with emphasis on the shared “code of conduct” (118) among the group kinsmen.

The crux of the essay is the case for nationality and religion as kinship-like structures. Interestingly, Schneider mentions that kinship is distinct from other community relationships (117). However, in that gesture of establishing religion- and nationality-as-kinship, I think the possibility comes forth to consider other group affiliations as structured along kinship bonds, particularly when membership in the group is ratified by his two “distinctive features of American kinship” (117), birth (relationship by natural substance) or law (relationship by code of conduct) (122).

Nationality and religion are *types* of groups that bring forth various *elements* of difference among individuals. From that point, one could dissect those elements to include a host of finer and finer groups; within nationality there is regionality (based on part of the nation, as in North, South, West, so forth), then states within a region, cities within states, neighborhoods within the city (the “nice” or “bad” parts of town), then, to return to the original unit of kinship, families within the neighborhood. This is perhaps how we could consider group kinship as *extended* kinship, in that it extends in scale from the family to the nation. At each partition, there is kinship (diffuse, enduring solidarity) among individuals, often established through birthright, as is traditional kinship (consider the deep and basic curiosity about where an individual is “from”, despite their travels). The law also institutionally validates membership in-and officially

demarcates the boundaries of-nation, state, city, and in fact, family (i.e., paternity tests, adoption, marriage).

Religion, Schneider's second kinship-structured element, is less seated in geography, but considering the social function of religion, from this element one could also parse out kinships based on morality and a shared quality as people¹⁶ (indeed, those ideas oversee the creation of law in this country). People convert (just like they move geographically), but religion is often also profoundly connected to birth (the event itself, the prerequisite actions, the soul of the new child). In this pattern, one could probably slice and dice extended kinship across a multitude of identifiers (class/occupation, age, gender etc.), and I think the argument could be coherently made for each of them. Indeed, that coherence is a part of the issue, in that the expectations and assumptions imposed on one's extended kin (fellow members of the "self" category) in the same way those assumptions and expectations are imposed on "Othered" people.

For now, I am primarily concerned with the general idea of extended kinship as a working structure in the separation of groups and framing of differences. With Schneider's support, I'd like extended kinship to function such that an individual builds bonds with members of his or her various groups. It is not necessary for all group members to occupy specific family roles (a non-cosanguinal person that is "like a mother") for extended kinship to exist. The individual knows who is and who is *not* a part of her group *because* she either does or does not share an important extended kinship bond with them.

The production of extended kinship bonds functions as a foundational process to in-group/out-group determinations, to the separation of self and other. For an individual, members of the "self" category have reproduced the appropriate kinship bonds to one another. Anyone

¹⁶ The question of a person's "quality" will become important in Chapter 3, as we consider the effects (and aims) of the negatives stories circulating in North Augusta about Travelers.

who does not reproduce those kinship bonds is “other.” An important meaning behind the bond reproduction is Schneider’s “diffuse and enduring solidarity”. Group members share solidarity because they are subject to the same meanings attached to the same category. With non-members, difference is produced in the space where that solidarity is absent. From not sharing these important bonds of extended kinship, the inference to the Other is, “You move in the world strangely and differently from I”. That inference would be less consequential if it was historically neutral, but the ramifications of an absent extended kinship bond-of differences produced as negative and true-are grave.

Section 3: A Local Denunciation of White Privilege

I believe such a process is underway between Travelers and white non-Travelers specifically. An important extended kinship bond for the “white” category is unmarked privilege. A person who physically presents as “white” is expected to occupy a dominant position in the social strata-it is a category high on the grid’s hierarchy to which the enjoyment of privilege is attached. Travelers share that physical presentation with mainstream whites in North Augusta, so they are expected to reproduce the bond of unmarked privilege. Instead, Travelers present themselves in a distinctly marked fashion (in hairstyle, speech, and other behaviors), which vacates them from the important bond. Mainstream whites experience this as a not an absence, but a rejection of kinship, and the bond is replaced with difference produced as a category named “gypsy”.

It is important to place a reminder here that most Traveler children end their formal schooling around the 6th grade, and that practice is considered highly important to Travelers themselves. Up until this point, many had attended school with non-Travelers and friendships

were formed, as Heather did at her elementary school. In my fieldwork, I detected a sense of loss from non-Traveler teenagers and young adults who once shared several schoolday-filled years with Traveler children, only for it to come to an abrupt end around age 12, when group bonds are likely at an important stage of solidification. It is rejection in the rawest sense. Consequentially, (and more as the properly socialized response than retaliation), Travelers are more certainly assigned the separateness of their own category. That categorization gives the label “gypsy” or “Traveler” the form of a visible minority that requires marking and differentiation rather than the invisible, unmarked privileged majority to which they could be bonded.

If we accept the idea that people *must* categorize each other (via the order sustained through a grid of intelligibility), and that an important process of that categorization is the reproduction or lack of extended kinship bonds, we may use these ideas to trace the emergence of Irish Travelers as a distinct category in Georgia-lina. Indeed, it is because the Travelers presented differently *enough* that they merited their own category, both for themselves and for the mainstream whites and nonwhites. In his 1977 dissertation at the University of Georgia, Jared Harper details terms of Traveler identity held by the Travelers themselves. Using his evidence, though, we can trace the Travelers’ construction of the majority’s difference *against them*, i.e. the terms of their group membership. Indeed, today, that mutual constitution of difference maintains the categories of “Traveler” and “non-Traveler”. Also, Harper’s linguistic focus on the Travelers’ Shelta or Cant could provide a basis for hypothesizing how a non-Traveler in 1955 identified this new kind of person called “Traveler” (an act necessary to designate the category), if both groups physically present as white. On pages 34-35, Harper writes:

“[The name Irish Traveler] also serves to identify the Travelers *as opposed to* other groups they encounter or interact with from time-to-time. To an Irish Traveler, other

Travelers are people who *share his historical traditions*. They have family names like O'Hara, Riley, Mack or McNamara, Carroll, McNally, Gorman, Faurly, Burke, Donahue, or Sherlock. They are people who speak, or at least have some knowledge of, Cant, the Traveler's secret language. They are Catholic and they traditionally marry only those persons who *possess the aforementioned traits* or at least most of them. Those who do *not* possess these qualities in one way or another are considered outsiders" (1977, emphasis added).

As the separation of self from other must occur (to maintain the need for order), an Irish Traveler in mid-twentieth century Georgia needs to figure out who is a part of their group and who is not. This is achieved by the reproduction of the following extended kinship bonds: "shared historical traditions" (code of conduct, a sort of "law"?), surname (birthright), use of Cant, and Catholicism (morality). The sharing of *each* of these bonds produces "diffuse and enduring solidarity", the cumulative effect of which is extended kinship and shared category membership. Non-Travelers are "outsiders" because they do not share these important bonds of kinship. The lack of the bonds indicates a different kind of being-in-the-world, one subject to different assumptions and expectations and therefore also lacking in the solidarity of the category. A specific example from 2013 helps concretize, as I ask Julie what's different about "country people":

"They're just not as protective as we are. We keep very close watch over our children. If my child wants to go to his aunt's house next door, I watch from the window to make sure he gets inside okay. If another Traveler [parent] isn't going on a field trip, I do not let my child go. I'm sure the country people do a fine job with their kids, but I'm more comfortable if a member of *my community* is there" (emphasis added).

It sounds like Julie shares kinship with other Traveler parents through their level of protection over their children, something I would liken most to the morality aspect of their shared code of conduct. A Catholic individual surnamed Sherlock who speaks Cant is trusted as a Traveler because those three features signify the code of conduct they expect of one another, as solidary membership in the same category.

This level of protection over the children is also connected to the Traveler tradition of ending formal schooling (with non-Travelers) at 6th grade. It seems like that point of adolescence is a crucial turning point for everyone. Travelers safeguard their children from adopting non-Traveler practices (i.e. adhering to a different code of conduct) by minimizing interaction with country people. No longer sharing eight-hour school days in “mixed company”, the adolescents are perceived as more likely to uphold Traveler tradition with the decreased outside influence. Typically, the girls begin learning how to run the home, and the boys learn the trades of their fathers.

Section 4: How the Travelers were Received: Context in Two Eras

It is important to discuss the backdrop of the Irish narrative entered into by the Travelers, both at their 1865 move to the South in general and their 1960s settlement in the CSRA. Much of the narrative of Irish immigration to America is centered on those who settled in the Northern states--fair enough, considering only 10% of Irish immigrants settled in the South (Gleeson 2). However, the Irish experience in the South needs to be told, and David Gleeson accomplishes this deftly in his work, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877*. In it, he offers a compelling conclusion: primarily through steadfast support of the institution of slavery, from which Irishmen also gloriously benefited, the Irish in the South cemented their place as “faithful members of the

Solid South” (Gleeson 4). At a time when the South was reconfiguring its relationship to the rest of the country, it was the dedication of the Irish to a decidedly Southern identity, rather than an American one, that supported their integrated position (Gleeson 3). To that effect, the Repeal Association of Charleston disbanded and issued the official statement that “...as we must choose between Ireland and South Carolina, we say South Carolina forever!” (quoted in Ignatiev 32).

Gleeson also notes that the Irish felt a parallel alliance to the South, that Ireland’s situation with Britain—in which a central government threatened an integral way of life—mirrored the demands of the North on the South (140). This, combined with the economic rewards the Irish reaped from the “way of life” in the South, fueled high numbers of Irish men to volunteer for the Confederacy in the Civil War (Gleeson 141). And of those rewards:

“Slavery provided economic opportunity for Irish immigrants, but more important, it made them members of the ‘ruling race.’ Their *white skin* and their acceptance of slavery automatically elevated them from the bottom of southern society. Thus, *they did not have to ‘become white’ but immediately exploited the advantages their race afforded them* (Gleeson 121, italics added).

In terms of extended kinship bonds, this is crucial. Participation in and defense of slavery, one of the seminal institutions of white privilege, served as a strong bond between American Southerners and the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century South. Abiding by this shared code of conduct, provided to them *because* of their white skin, the Irish were regarded as members of the same group of dominant whites rather than positioned in their own category.

Were the Irish Travelers, who made their way down South at this pivotal time, included in this group? Gleeson unfortunately neglects the Travelers in his exploration of the Irish as the “forgotten people of the Old South” (1), and Harper does not position Travelers with respect to

Irish non-Travelers in the South in his 1977 dissertation. However, the oral history the latter scholar collected about Travelers coming to America is useful. We have used Harper's work to establish that Travelers came down South around the time of the Civil War. The first to come was "Old Man Tom Carroll". Tom took up horse trading after one happenstance transaction: he came across a Jewish man looking to get rid of a lame horse, and knowing that the horse would get better, Tom traded his horse with the lame one, plus a \$35 profit. He saved enough money to send for his friend Peter Sherlock and his family, and eventually the two men set up headquarters in Nashville and Atlanta. Similar stories apply to patriarchs of Traveler families named O'Hara, Riley, Gorman, and O'Neill (Harper 30-33). These Traveler families made a successful living through the mule and horse trade begun by Tom Carroll, now expanded to many towns and cities in the region.

From Gleeson, we see that Irish non-Travelers ingratiated themselves into Southern white privilege through the practice and support of slavery. It does not appear that the Travelers owned plantations or slaves, and there is not a direct statement of a general Traveler anti- or pro-slavery stance, only that "towards blacks the Irish Travelers generally retain some of the prejudices southern whites have traditionally had" (Harper 38) and that Traveler children were sent to Catholic schools in the hopes of having to interact with fewer blacks. Plantation owners likely needed a supplier of mules and horses to turn their profits, so arguably, the Travelers benefited from slavery without directly participating in it. I would argue that, from the Civil War era to the 1960s, perhaps the difference between an Irish Traveler and an Irish non-Traveler was not fully understood or established on a larger social scale. Throughout this period, the Travelers were largely itinerant and may not have stayed in one place long enough to establish a reputation.

Interestingly, Harper does not discuss the perception of Traveler business practices in this timeframe.

If the Travelers were identified as Irish through their speech, as all the Irish immigrants were (Gleeson 4)¹⁷, but not as Irish *Travelers*, that would have been helpful to their daily lives, business, and overall position in the South. Considering the Travelers as just Irishmen placed them in a favorable group for the southerners, who embraced the Irish in their efforts against the Union to maintain a slavery-based way of life. Any further features of difference from the mainstream white population would not have been demonstrated in their passing business transactions (the Travelers did not focus on building a customer base with the same patrons (Harper 63)). Perhaps with the passage of time, through their dedication to a southerner identity, the Irish non-Travelers eventually lost the accent once used to identify them. Irish Travelers, as a group, appear to have been at least *less* dedicated to the southern cause—neither Gleeson nor Harper mention Travelers’ acting on the same level of involvement in the Civil War itself or in the Reconstruction period as Irish non-Travelers—so they may have retained both their accent and usage of Cant (a form of Shelta Gaelic) for a longer period of time. Those features of speech signified a difference that other Irish southerners did not have. I hypothesize that, at the point when Irish non-Travelers lost their accent and no longer used Gaelic, Travelers were most sharply and reliably distinguished by their language (Cant). Today’s set of visual clues may not have been identified, developed, or significant yet (“big hair” like bouffants and beehives were a trend in the 50s and 60s). The Travelers also spoke English, but utilized their “secret language to... protect themselves in various social and economic contexts” (Harper i). Harper further emphasizes the inability of non-Travelers to understand the Cant:

¹⁷ “They [Irish Protestants] were still Irish, and when they opened their mouths to speak, every native southerner knew that they were strangers.”

“In 1968 [just a few years after permanent settlement] [while] doing fieldwork among the Travelers at Murphy Village some Traveler children approached me and plied me with the question, ‘Hey mister, do you know the Cant?’ and then proceeded to spout strange words.” (98)

An anthropologist receives strange words warmly, but it would have been a breeding ground for Georgians and South Carolinians to perceive and produce difference between themselves and the speaker of Cant. By the 1920s, the Travelers were a recognizable group, as this 1927 Georgia law demonstrates:

“Upon each company of traveling horse-traders; or traveling gypsies, or traveling companies or other transients...engaged in trading or selling merchandise of any kind, or clairvoyant, or persons engaged in fortune-telling, phrenology, or palmistry¹⁸, \$250 to be collected by the tax collector in each county” (quoted in Harper 64).

As the law was designed to favor “settled mule barn owners” (65), it may have also been their itinerant ways that set the Travelers apart, as was the case in Ireland (3). Indeed, drawing on memories of the Old Country, Irish non-Travelers may have been the original storytellers of the Traveler narrative of thievery and criminality.

Travelers (or to use the European spelling, Travellers), were a distinctly separate and oppressed group within Ireland, prior to their immigration to the U.S. In *Irish Travellers: Racism and Politics of Culture*, anthropologist Jane Helleiner takes the task of tracing the origins of Travellers in Ireland (and, as we will see in Chapter 3, the overall emergence of the “gypsy” category, to which the Travellers are also attributed). Though mentions of “tinkers” (another name for Travellers) did not appear in Irish public records until the nineteenth century,

¹⁸ These activities are generally attributed to Romani gypsies, a separate group from the Travelers, but categorized together in this crippling law.

Travellers themselves assert the existence of their group at “the times of St. Patrick,” which would place them as native to Ireland since the 5th century (Helleiner 29, 33, 50; Dumville 1). In either case, there is convergence on the idea of Travellers as an “indigenous minority”, that in contrast to the Roma Gypsies, Travellers *of* Ireland, therefore Irish, and not “racially ‘Other’ “ (Helleiner 29). However, like their relatives in the American South:

“[with the] general consensus on the Irishness of Travellers (a construction that has resulted in the absence of ‘race’ in the construction of difference), attributions of...moral transgression...have served to naturalize and inferiorize Traveller identity and have *justified anti-Traveller action in racist ways*” (Helleiner 50, italics added).

From Helleiner’s account, the two hallmarks of the Traveller label in Ireland were their itinerancy (which was how they were identified as Travellers) and immorality (44). The immorality came from stories circulated about the Travellers that bear striking semblance to the stories now circulated about North Augusta Travelers: dishonest business practices (though the Irish versions have them swindling St Patrick and Jesus rather than the everyman) and (the sacrilege of) marriage among close relatives (44-45). The shared themes in the storytelling could be further evidence that, upon their immigration, Irish non-Travelers in the South originated the negative perceptions of the Travelers. Again, it may be that some Travellers did commit such deeds. It is the overarching assumption that criminality defines the Travellers (in both countries) as inherently immoral people, and the oppressive consequences that ensue, that requires contestation. Examples of that oppression in Ireland include removal by police force, the crafting and passing of laws specifically targeted at Travellers (framing them as threats to public health), and other “evictions, prosecutions, [the] denial of housing [which were measures taken] at the urging of propertied classes” (57-58).

The Travellers were considered white in Ireland, much the same way the Travelers are considered white in North Augusta. But in both locales, that consideration belies the manner in which both groups actually functioned: The majority may not see the Travelers/Travellers as nonwhite, but it regards and treats this minority group in the same ways it handles nonwhite minorities: immediate identification (racial compass points to “gypsy/Traveler”) paired with accompanying assumptions about the morality of all group members, and resulting in instances of oppression (structural or otherwise) by the institutions of the privileged. It is white-on-white racism, but racism nonetheless.

Returning to the southern United States, enforcement of the 1927 “gypsy tax” (Boundy 50) was successful in its structural oppression of the Travelers’ economic livelihood (it is an instance of the “faded” marginality to be explored in Chapter 4). In the 1950s, the advent of farm mechanization completed the damage begun by the 1927 law, and by 1955, the horse and mule trading days came to a halt for the Travelers (ii).

The men still traveled around the country to make a living (selling linoleum, which they also do today), but shortly thereafter, a permanent physical “base” was settled for the group. Murphy Village—the North Augusta neighborhood on Highway 25 where the Travelers currently live—was established in the early 1960s by Father Joseph Murphy (107-108). From this point on, the Travelers would call North Augusta home: they would shop in its grocery stores, play in its recreational sports leagues, and attend its schools.

To further contextualize, Georgia and South Carolina (Deep South indeed) in the 1950s and 60s was a heavily tense racial environment with formal Jim Crow *Laws* (consider the connection to kinship) institutionally advantaging whites over blacks. The legacy of slavery was no relic, as acts of violence (police beatings, Klu Klux Klan burnings) maintained the standards

of blacks as the lesser race—it was a good time to have white skin. Indeed, racial/ethnic categories did provide justification for these inhumane mistreatments (and consider the discussion in Chapter 1 of the category of Traveler functioning as an ethnic designation). The beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement of the next decade were perhaps at rumble, but much ground was still to be trod. Mainstream whites in America historically aligned the Irish with blacks (Ignatiev 65), so that legacy may have heightened an expectation of allegiance to normative white behavior, to avoid slippage into the “other” category. Desegregation was met with resistance in mid-nineteenth century Georgia and South Carolina, both in the general citizenry and publically in the words of elected officials (Sokol 47, 51). White southerners clung tightly to, and continued the practice of, Jim Crow laws well beyond the rulings of *Brown vs the Board of Education*, the 1954 Supreme Court case that required racial integration in schools, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. As John Hope Franklin put it, whites in the South fought “characteristically by the remarkable combination of praising things as they were and resisting the change they abhorred” (quoted in Sokol 53). In the midst of events like Rosa Parks’ 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery and 1960 student sit-ins in fifty-two cities, formal entities like Citizens’ Councils were erected to counteract the movement that appeared to rob whites of their social position (Sokol 10-11, 191). Sokol deftly unpacks this resistance:

“...the facts of whiteness and blackness had sat so baldly on the surface of southern life for so long...Though theoretically unstable, that racial system defined social reality...whites were always cognizant of their ‘whiteness’, and knew that skin color *gave them authority* and spelled oppression for blacks...the Civil Rights Act did not so much heighten awareness of ‘whiteness’ as spur fears that ‘whiteness’ would stop paying wages...whites were much more concerned with the *power whiteness gave them* than the apparent facts

of race and color. After all, these were facts that they had by turns constructed, twisted, overlooked, and suppressed for many years” (224, italics added).

White southerners very much enjoyed the authority and power of their relative position on the grid of intelligibility to blacks; the categories of “white” and “black” had been built for centuries to maintain that order, an order the Civil Rights movement sought to dismantle. For the Irish Travelers, physically presenting as white was an advantage they *could* enjoy upon their settlement, and they did try to position themselves as “nonblack” (Harper 38). However, their sustained difference from majority whites (identified initially through their speech, and then perhaps compounded by other actions), merited a gap wide enough to develop a new category for these people who “talked funny”. White southerners felt their position of privilege palpably at risk. The severity of this threat may have deeply widened the line between self and other. If the Travelers formed the allegiance to the “southern way of life” that the Irish non-Travelers forged in the Civil War era, that assimilation would have similarly placed them inside the exalted category of the mainstream whites. It would have comprised the all-important kinship bond of white privilege. It doesn’t seem like the Travelers outright supported integration and civil rights, but entering an atmosphere electrified by calls for white solidarity while *not joining the cause and still being different* was enough to give rise to great consequence for the Travelers.

Categorization is a powerful social impulse that serves to keep other individuals as intelligible to the self. New persons have to be positioned relative to the self, as either inside or outside the self’s category. Constructions of difference between categories help maintain an orderly grid by which to comprehend others. An unfortunate consequence of the lines between categories is that singular assumptions are expected to apply to every member. This confines the

complexity of the individual in a harmful way, when physical identification is equated to a typecast of a person.

One force that could underlie difference construction is the reproduction of extended kinship bonds, or lack thereof. Members of the same category are extended kin, in that they are bonded by “diffuse, enduring solidarity”, a shared code of conduct and the same weighted expectation from members of other categories. An important bond of constructed whiteness is unmarked, invisible privilege. By virtue of their white skin, Travelers are initially expected to share that dominant position with mainstream whites, but inasmuch as they present as visibly and behaviorally different, their position is rather constructed as marked, visible, and without white privilege. The white privilege bond does not exist between white non-Travelers and Travelers. With the potential for Travelers to simply *be* invisible (abandon actions that mark them), the absence of the bond is read as a rejection of kinship by the mainstream whites. In the face of that rejection, white non-Travelers vindicate the propagation of racist attitudes and actions to a confusing group of nonwhite whites.

The confusion is of particular significance in the South because 19th century Irish immigrants were quick to demonstrate kinship by supporting the South’s efforts to maintain slavery, an institution that built the white privilege some Southerners and Irishmen richly enjoyed. However, Travelers were also a distinct and repressed group in Ireland, so the dynamic between Irish non-Travelers and Irish Travelers may have set up Travelers for unfavorable receptions. That possible set-up would only be solidified by the Travelers’ ongoing marked status upon more permanent settlement in the early 1960s. This period was also a turbulent one in the South, as the terms of white privilege were being threatened by the Civil Rights movement. White Southerners clung tightly to the affordances of Jim Crow, and Travelers, white

people who were not a part of majority invisibility, may not have been any better received those with darker skin tones: to be different, sufficiently so from mainstream whites to merit a separate category, was to be likened with the enemy. Such was the discursive environment entered into by the Travelers when they settled permanently in Murphy Village: pre-positioned for negative interpretations of difference.

Chapter 3

Storytelling as Representation: Difference Produced

Section 1: Difference Constituted by Storytelling

After a recent visit to his grandmother's, my fiancé and I found out that he was related to my half-sisters on their mother's side, but not to me (talk about kinship charts!). My half-sisters and I only share the same father, and my fiancé is related to their mother's family—third cousins once removed or something. We were sharing the discovery at my home in North Augusta when my cousin cupped her hand and slyly whispered to me, "I know you're doing a research project on the gypsies, but that doesn't mean you have to marry like them", even though she understood that my fiancé and I were not actually blood-related. It *sounded* enough like we were to merit the teenager's jab. "What? They do marry their cousins and stuff!" was her response to my admonishing look. How dare I question the facts and certitude of what she *knows* to be true?

The source of that certitude and knowledge is storytelling. It comprises a remembered history that is a past "constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth" (Hall 213). A set of stories-passed down as truth, coming from trusted sources-is a significant contributor to the widespread productions of difference between Travelers and non-Travelers. These stories are

powerful, moralizing, and in high circulation, as demonstrated in Joe's similar account of Traveler reproductive patterns:

“They [North Augusta Travelers] have to bring in outsiders, just to make sure they don't get so inbred, to where like the kids are retarded and stuff like that. I've had offers myself, I've had friends offered, to have sex with the females. As long as the boy has blonde hair, blue eyes, they'll choose 'em, and that'll be it. They'll pay you for it and that's it... They want a certain...like Hitler, whenever he wanted Germany to be nothing but blonde hair blue eyes, the gypsies are the same way...[It's] the only reason they go to the outside. Just like mutts are smarter than fullbred dogs, 'cause full-blooded dogs are inbred and mutts go to the outside, as far as different breed...it's the same way when it comes to humans, pretty much...If they'd have paid me a little more, I might have done it, I ain't gone lie.”

Likening a Traveler activity to the goals of Hitler is almost unmistakably an effort in producing knowledge about them as “mal-humanized” (more on that in Chapter 4). There are a variety of negative perceptions permeating the North Augusta community about Travelers, but for our purposes we will look closely at notions of inbreeding, criminality (through dishonest business practices in particular), and materialism (attachment to things you can buy) for their specific cogence in constructing a moral barometer of the quality of Travelers as people.

The following exchange between my uncle and me (in the context of the recorded interview for this thesis, whereas his daughter's comment above was not) is salient:

Uncle: “A guy I work with-now this has been 20 years ago-he used to work for the paramedics in Aiken County. He got called in to the Travelers over here in North

Augusta and went inside to help this woman. [He] come back inside and he said the ambulance was empty.

Me: Your daughter told me this story.

Uncle: *And I probably told it to her.* There was nothing in there. And they put the woman on the ground, they told the people if they didn't bring [the items in the ambulance] out they were gonna leave her there so they brought everything out.

(emphasis added)

I didn't mention it to my uncle at the time, but if I recall correctly (and the notion of recalling correctly is a bristly one), my cousin said it was an EMT friend of *hers* that went to Murphy Village and had this experience. It may or may not have been a separate, similar incident but the change in details points to the flexibility of the narrative. Its form and content can mutate according to the whims and intent of the teller. And the teller *will* tell. By that I mean that the story will be spread (somebody told my uncle, my uncle told my cousin, my cousin told me) to significant effect in a town of 20,000. I also mean the teller will infuse their telling with certitude and posture as an expert on the topic or incident. My cousin told me this story last year, when I was describing the general topic of my research project. To her, the otherness of Travelers seemed unquestionable and my inquiry was naive: "They inbreed and steal things all the time. My friend was an EMT and he caught them stealing equipment out of his truck one time." Her words were certain and matter-of-fact. She delivered the anecdote with the force of a hammer, expecting it to be received as irrefutable, as these stories and their morals often are.

Herein lies the role of the stories as producers of difference. The extended kinship system proposed in Chapter 2 could also underlie the circulation of these stories as truth and as producers of difference. When the stories are passed among members of the same group or

category-that is, an extended kinship bond has been reproduced-they are encased in trust and certitude. The shared bond of “enduring solidarity” is activated at the moment of storytelling, particularly when the story depicts actions of people who decidedly lack that solidarity. The actions in the story and the accompanying value judgments present other ways in which that group is not like us, is different. Difference is produced.

The truth of the narrative is also enhanced in its form as news and media representations. A story told by many a kinsman that is then printed in the newspaper or aired on the nightly newscast (both outlets also run by kinsmen) only escalates in its certitude. In the 1996 article “Traveler sentenced to 5 years”, the *Augusta Chronicle* reported that, “An Irish Traveler from Murphy Village pleaded guilty Thursday in a Georgia court to doing phony roof repairs, and handed over more than \$46,000 in cash to repay his victims, most of whom were elderly women in the Atlanta area.” The article went on to share other arrests and warrants for more Travelers (perhaps to comfort readers?). Now, the facts of the *individual* case may very well be accurate. However, when this article lives in an environment predisposed to regard *all* Travelers as *most likely to be* untrustworthy or criminal, it acquires a dangerous force of ratification and generalization. The cycle then repeats as statements like “I read it in the paper!” are added for authoritative flair; the story simply has more vehicles for its transmission.

In addition to the verifying boost of kinned transmission, Stuart Hall presents further evidence by which to consider the impact of media re-presentation. Here, we will consider oral storytelling a form of media (and media a form of storytelling) that functions the same way in the argument.

Section 2: The Problem with Representation

The core of the truth of the above representations comes from the productive power of the stories to create that truth (its meanings). In the collection *Black British Cultural Studies*, Stuart Hall's chapter "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation" provides groundwork for this claim. If Travelerness is a "cultural identity" then it is "constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists." If "personal communication is the medium by which meaning is circulated" (Hall, recorded lecture), then the Traveler identity as inbred criminals is *constituted through* the storytelling. The story does not reflect the identity because the identity does not exist until the story is told. This production of meaning conceals itself in its effectiveness; therein lies my cousin's certitude that the Travelers *did* steal things from the ambulance *because* they are thieves. Narrative that represents Travelers as criminals "silence[s] [them] in that process" and the non-Traveler majority has the "power to circulate" (Hall, recorded lecture) (the existence of that power differential also bears weight in the upcoming discussion of Travelers as marginalized). When asked if he saw the relationship between the two groups changing in the future, Uncle Kevin inadvertently acknowledged his power in shaping the Traveler identity:

"Unless they change their...[pause]...attitudes and ethics that I see around here, yeah it's gon be the same. Because they set themselves apart from everyone else. To me it was like intentionally. If you see when their kid turns however old, they buy him a brand new truck or a brand new car. Well they put the car out on the side of the four lane [highway] and put lights on it to show everybody that their kid's got a brand new car. So they're always showing off and trying to outdo each other. You hear parties and all that such going on-which is fine-but it always seems to be who can outdo someone else. Then you

still hear shady businesses, shady deals through the newspaper, in the news and as long as that happens, yeah they're going to keep their same reputation.”

The production of the Traveler identity through these personal communications (stories) masks itself as an issue of reputation rather creating the meaning and conditions of existence for a minority group. Cinematically, the recent surge in popular interest in American “gypsies” is also productive to the Traveler experience in this way. In May 2012, the cable network TLC aired a summer series entitled *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*. Most of the episodes featured Romani or Roma families in West Virginia, but about half of one 44 –minute episode (“Murphy’s Secret Village”) did feature an Irish Traveler family from North Augusta. Being featured in a series of that title is misleading, however, as the Irish Travelers are a separate group from Romani gypsies. Travelers prefer not to be referred to as “gypsies”, though the term is still prevalently used by non-Travelers. The narrator even points to this distinction early in the episode, but only in that passing moment does the clarification seem necessary. Surely for a string of complicated reasons, the network chooses to keep it simple at all other opportunities. Throughout the frequently-running promotions for the episode, the Travelers are as surely packaged as opulent American gypsies as the Romani clans—flashy typeface, salesman-like voiceovers, and all.

Bill and Tamara McKown, the young couple featured, were filmed by the TLC crew from May to December 2011. Three local newspaper articles (*The Augusta Chronicle*) about the episode point to a greater complexity of the McKowns’ situation than is revealed in the 20 minutes of cable programming. Revealing facts include that: Tamara is interested in launching a singing career via the exposure, TLC paid for the couple’s wedding ceremony, and the network also required that she get an “over-the-top” wedding dress hand-made by their primary

connection to American gypsy culture, Boston dressmaker Sondra Celli, (Tamara wore “her own dress” in a different, unfiled ceremony). The goals of the program seem to be clearly stated here: “TLC General Manager Amy Winter said the new show is ‘a remarkable look at a way of life that is extremely hidden from mainstream America, despite customs and celebrations that can be extravagantly elaborate – this is a culture where bigger is always better’” (*The Augusta Chronicle* 2012). I fear that pointing out these exclusions and motivation sends the message that factual accuracy is crucial to my project, but I am more interested in the process of oversimplification (ease of classification?) that such exclusions serve.

Julie considers the episode another case of misrepresentation. “They weren’t us,” she says, referring to the individuals featured on the show, included a “village disc jockey”. “We’ve never seen them before. She [Tamara] thought she was gone fit in [by participating in the show] but what she didn’t realize is that we do not want that public attention. We know about selective editing, what they want to show about is and what they don’t. She would have been accepted a lot easier without filming that show.”

In addition to a spin-off show for Sondra Celli (*Bling it On*), on February 10, 2013, TLC premiered *Gypsy Sisters*, a follow-up series dedicated to one of the group Romani families filmed in West Virginia for *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*. Though TLC seems to have the most vested interest in representing gypsies in America, the National Geographic Channel also airs a docu-series called *American Gypsies* that follows the lives of a Romani family in New York City¹⁹. Again, it is important to note that the Travelers in North Augusta actually consider “gypsy” an inaccurate term, as they are a separate group from the Romani, Roma, or Romanichal

¹⁹ Home and Garden Television (HGTV) also airs a show called *Junk Gypsies*, in which two sisters collect discarded items and re-purpose them in their interior decorating business. I do not believe that the sisters culturally identify as gypsies or Travelers. In the “our story” section of their website, Ami describes her desire to leave the corporate world and “release her inner gypsy.” It isn’t quite clear, but it seems that the sisters use the term “gypsy” to connote their “wandering” across the country in search of vintage pieces.

peoples the term designates. However, non-Travelers continue to frequently use “gypsy” to refer to Travelers, so we should consider a bit the relationship between the two groups of wandering peoples. Gypsies and Travelers are also often grouped together even in scholarly literature, if titles like *Travelers, Gypsies, Roma: The Demonisation of Difference*²⁰ are any indication. At this juncture, we will briefly explore the emergence of the global gypsy narrative.

The term “gypsy” (or gipsy) came from the Middle English “gypcian”, as in Egyptian, to indicate a speculated country of origin of the people. It appears that the modern verbs “gyp” or “gip” meaning “to swindle, cheat, or fraud” are derived from this root word, certainly linguistic expressions of the assumptions of thievery tightly-attached to peoples who bear the gypsy label. As for the speculation about Egypt, Helleiner shares that, alongside the governmental measure to curtail the gypsy population, British scholars founded a Gypsy Lore Society in 1888 to preserve the cultural details of the people (35). The Society’s first journal presented three possibilities for the gypsy migration pattern: “(1) that the Gypsies had entered Europe in 1417 shortly after leaving India, (2) that the Gypsies had left Persia in approximately A.D. 430 and had entered Western Europe at a later period, or (3) that the Gypsies had been in Europe for two thousand years as metal workers” (37). Roma origins in India or Persia are more widely accepted and are used to distinguish them as a separate race from non-Roma Travellers, who are believed to only have European roots. The threads shared by both groups seem to be their itinerancy and reputations for thievery, which leads Roma gypsies and Irish Travelers to generally be lumped together in the mass consciousness. Media representations like *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding* serve only to satisfy and perpetuate that lumping together: both groups are constructed

²⁰ Full citation is in the Works Cited section.

to have the same meanings. This leads to the treatment of very diverse groups of people as a convenient monolith.

Youtube viewer comments of episodes of Britain's *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (the predecessor to the American version) point to such a treatment: "gypsies have dark skin and hair, like indian people...but these are white people. Only their way of life and their ancestors make them "gypsies"" (from user [jajajah86](#)). This comment incited a lengthy discussion with various contributors claiming factual expertise on the names "Traveler" and "gypsy" and to which groups the names could be accurately applied. The argument has become necessary because in traditional racial classification, these gypsies do not seem to *have* a race. As jajajah86 has demonstrated, an initial survey of physical attributes leads viewers to identify the Travelers as white. Because Travelers do not have the dark skin and hair that would necessitate a label ("like indians"), their cultural identity appears at first to be empty and invisible. In such a case of invisibility, codes of racial classification dictate an accompanying structural advantage, but that is not the position enjoyed by the gypsies. Rather, they are marginalized by systems of dominance in England, a treatment typically afforded to peoples with physically visible markers of otherness. Because the Travellers look white but do not have the accompanying set of privileges, it leads to a "source of discomfort and a crisis of racial meaning" (Omi and Winant 4) for the viewers, the same crisis experienced by white North Augustans when white Travelers do not reproduce the bond of invisible privilege with them.

Viewers attempt to reconcile that discomfort by determining a locus for the racial meaning these white people are being given. A reliance on current systems of racial classification has directed users to find that locus through non-white ancestry: "Yes the gypsies...did move across Europe, but originally they were ethnically Indian" (from user

MissJessyeNorman). Though no longer apparent in their current appearance, ethnic origins in India point to a nonwhite phenotype that dissolves the discomfort with the gypsies' current social position. The mindset of this "all gypsies are the same" monolith is that centuries of removal from the subcontinent have erased visible clues to Indian heritage, but the fact that such ancestry existed *at any point* in Traveler history gives them a race, a cultural identity that places them at a structural disadvantage by the codes of racial classification and meaning. There may very well have been mixing between Romani and Irish Traveler groups, and MissJessyeNorman's statement could be of some factuality. The takeaway point is that her and jajajah86's comments are outfitted by a constructed grid of intelligibility and meaning, and that grid likes to keep things simple and orderly. It is only *more* simple to confine *more* people to the same set of meanings, the complexities of individual experiences having been further diminished and devalued. Such is the ease, satisfaction and assertion of power in oversimplifying statements like "a gypsy is a gypsy is a gypsy"²¹.

In terms of the real-world purchase of such act, Hall connects the power to create meanings about others with a concrete impact in the world: "My own view is that events, relations, structures do have...real effects outside the sphere of the discursive, but only within the discursive...do they have or can they be constructed within meaning (165). Media representations (storytelling included) are significant because they create and sustain discursive environments that "naturalize the meanings of the images" without regard to "who is silenced in that process" (Hall, recorded lecture). Therefore, the discursive environment creates the meanings used to legitimate the real effects.

²¹ Overheard over the years, attributed to no one in particular.

If the rejected bond of privilege underlies production of difference, storytelling gives that production form as truth. Great certitude is applied to the stories circulated between trusted extended kinsmen. For the North Augusta Travelers, stories about thievery and being “in-bred” construct and essentialize the value of their personhood. Media representations are broader forms of storytelling that reach a wider audience. The media as an institution also further formalizes and verifies the truth of the stories, as figures like policemen and news reporters retell a tired narrative. The process of storytelling is also a process of creating meaning, an instance of the majority exercising its privilege to silence a minority in the creation of its identity. Televised representations place the narratives on a national scale and support further oversimplification of diverse groups into a monolith confined to the same set of meanings. These stories and their created meanings are not inconsequential: a harsh discursive environment that circulates negative ideas about a group’s identity as innate facts of the category is an environment conducive to the ensuing set of concrete discriminatory, marginalizing actions that undoubtedly occur.

Chapter 4

The Danger Here: Marginality Re-Examined

Section 1: The Danger in the Narrative

The essential truth of the stories is also the locus of their danger. By “truth” or “essence”, I might as well say “facts” or “science”: the incontrovertibility of a notion (“all gypsies are criminals”) is historically grounds for the justification of all manner of mistreatment. It’s a destructive road, dangerous territory, the steps of which should be departed from rather than replicated. In his book, *Less than Human*, David Livingstone Smith specifically declares that people are not dehumanized when “they are treated as...exemplars of racial, national, or ethnic stereotypes, rather than as unique individuals” (27). Such is the situation for Irish Travelers in

North Augusta, and I would agree that the current state of things is not quite “dehumanization” per se. It is also not harmless. It could be called “mal-humanization” (crafting them as bad people, but still people). That process is well underway, and the foundational steps of mal-humanization are the same as dehumanization. This is evident in the function of the category of “gypsy” much like an ethnic group, a classification that has undeniable roots in dehumanization.²² Like members of certain races, gypsies are first identified by physical features, then stereotypes are mobilized as truths of their personhood, then concrete consequences of discrimination occur (denial of employment, targeted as criminals). Therefore, I say the structure of the difference production in North Augusta overlaps too much with bona fide dehumanization to dismiss. Further, as marginality exists both inside and outside of dehumanization, there are also important implications for the concept of suffering and marginality.

Because “gypsy” functions like an essential racial category, and that functioning *is* the basis for processes of dehumanization, the differences produced between a Traveler and a non-Traveler bear a noteworthy extent of potential danger and elevated mistreatment. Despite the ostensible rejection, Smith’s chapter on “race” adds to the arsenal for a consideration of the danger of stories that produce essential difference. In his terms, the Travelers would be an “ethnorace...a population [that] is imagined as a natural human kind with a common essence” (201). The significant difference is that as of today, that common essence of Travelers is *not* considered to be subhuman-perhaps “badly human” (mal-humanized?), but still human. Whether or not the gypsy essence mutates to a form that *is* considered subhuman in the future, the

²² Smith also supports this idea: “...the notion of race, *as it actually functions in human cognition and discourse*, is sometimes indistinguishable from notions of ethnicity, nationality, or even religious and political affiliation. Populations are often conceived as races even though they aren’t labeled as such...(185, his emphasis).

rationale of its current state is structured along the same terms as processes of dehumanization. This is reason enough for recognition, exploration, and intervention.

Section 2: Re-examining Marginality

A reconsideration of the concept of “marginality” is helpful in positioning the consequences of the production of Traveler difference in North Augusta. In Chapter 1 of *Pathologies of Power*, a text which is framed as a guide to an analysis of suffering that is a “geographically broad...historically deep....and simultaneous consideration of various social axes” (42-43), Paul Farmer poses the pressing question, “How to define [suffering, violence, and misery]?...Are certain forms of insidious discrimination demonstrably more noxious than others?” (29, 30). Farmer’s emphasis is on indisputable suffering (rape, poverty, malnourishment, torture, premature death) and unraveling the tightly-wound web of structured conditions and events that inflect individual experiences of that suffering. “Structured” is an important concept here. When paired with words like “violence” and “oppression”, the “structure” referred to is that of the institutional realities: state, politics, and economy intertwine to correspond levels of human worth and quality with opportunities and fair treatment. The levels are entrenched by history and habit to restrict choice and potential for flourishing, reaffirming conditions that keep the marginalized suffering in the margins (40).

By the nature of his argument, and within it, Farmer beckons for a reconsideration of the terms surrounding suffering.²³ He doesn’t use the exact term “marginality”, but Farmer is inviting a selfsame examination of the concept. Particularly in his use of the “axis of gender” (43), “axis of ‘race’ or ethnicity” (44), consideration of “other axes of oppression” (46), and

²³ “The women I interviewed were straightforward about the nonvoluntary aspect of their sexual activity: in their opinions, poverty had forced them into unfavorable unions. Under such conditions, one wonders what to make of the notion of ‘consensual sex’” (39).

overall emphasis on the multiplicatively exacerbating faculty of poverty along each and every axis, Farmer sets out identifiers most people would agree upon as constitutive of typical marginality. That is, members of a marginalized population are generally thought to be structurally oppressed by virtue of their gender identity (women worldwide, individuals who do not fit into the male/female binary), ethnic identity (people of color living in a world dominated by white privilege), and/or low socioeconomic status. Therefore, where Farmer uses the term “suffering”, I think the word “marginality” can be effectively substituted without damage to the integrity of his argument or the meanings of either word.

In summoning these features of the marginalized, Farmer’s mission is to end the isolated study of a single axis’ effect on an individual or population and to begin steep evaluation of the multiple effects of multiple axes of oppression on a given individual or population at any one time (46). Within that evaluation, Farmer would also refute the dismissal of outright suffering in the name of cultural relativism, in which practices like female circumcision are deflated as nonviolent in the name of respect for the longstanding traditions of other lands (47). Whereas his search for a definition of suffering seeks to unconditionally include the clearly heinous, I’d like to look at suffering (and marginality) from the other end to include less visible forms.

Fortunately, the goals of Farmer’s overall project are supportive of an expanded definition of marginality: “Any distinguishing characteristic, whether social or biological, can serve as a pretext for discrimination and thus a cause for suffering” (46). The list of possibilities is long and varies according to a variety of factors, likely boiling down to the specific set of norms put forth by the empowered majority in a given time and place (43). Further, in discussing homosexuality as another axis of oppression, as manifested in homophobia, Farmer points out that “[t]he point is rather to call for more fine-grained, more systemic analyses of power and

privilege in discussions about who is likely to have their rights violated and in what ways. *We did not need the AIDS pandemic to teach us this*” (47, emphasis added). Considering also the “predictive power” (42) he would have, I think Farmer uses this language to point out the preventative possibilities in the analytical model he is proposing. That, through thorough understanding of the forces and climate that lead to catastrophes like the AIDS pandemic, perhaps preventative steps can be taken to stop a snowball of disdain from developing into an avalanche of suffering. I would like to propose the same possibility for the Irish Travelers in North Augusta. Though certainly not harmless, the current state of things does not generally trigger alarm as grotesquely harsh, undeniable violations of human rights. I argue, though, that the Travelers experience daily two scarcely identified forms of marginality: circumvented and discursive. These types would not register in the indisputable forms of suffering Farmer highlights. By understanding the form and structure of circumvented and discursive marginalities as produced by the same ideology and forces as clearer instances of human rights violations, the argument can be made to smash the snowball—that is, to apply a Farmer-like analytical model of understanding suffering to predict and prevent development into more heinous forms, because history shows that the avalanche is coming.

Section 3: The Case for Traveler Marginality

Save for the women who likely suffer their own version of gender rights of violation (not explored in this work but imperative ground for further research), the Travelers do not appear to fall along any of these common axes—and yet they do. The current snapshot of conditions for Travelers in North Augusta would not lead most to a conclusion of marginality. However, the concept merits expansion, as there are some hidden yet measurable structured forms of

oppression, though lower along the gradient they may be. Ethnographic evidence of the area to date points to three lesser-explored forms of marginality: “faded”, “circumvented”, and “discursive”.

By “faded” marginality, I point (paradoxically?) to the improvement of conditions from about 17 years ago. That is, around 1996, there existed visible structures and practices that would likely qualify as traditional forms of marginality. Those structures appear to have been disbanded and the “fuss” has since died down, but their existence is significant enough to bear consideration in the case for Traveler marginality.

In a 1997 newspaper article entitled “Irish Travelers raided on fraud, other charges”, a writer at the *Augusta Chronicle* details the actions of the South Carolina Traveler Task Force, a police collective formed specifically by the state attorney general “in response to *public outcry* following an expose on the Traveler community *by the television show Dateline NBC*” (emphasis added). Here we have an instance of a named policing/disciplinary structure, formed according to the demand of the majority, to expressly focus on a single group of people.

Unfortunately, I was 8 years old when the show aired, likely frolicking in Aunt Crystal and Uncle Kevin’s swimming pool not 3 miles from the incident. Luckily, the show did come up during my interview with Ms. Carol and her daughter Carrie. When asked generally about the relationships between Travelers and non-Travelers, Ms. Carol responded optimistically, “I don’t think people judge them as much anymore. It was kinda new, and then nobody cared anymore. It was probably a bigger deal in 2000 when that 20/20 show was aired” (notice how *Dateline* becomes 20/20 and 1996 becomes 2000; small details but malleable nonetheless).

Amanda Kay Boundy, a 2007 graduate of Albion College, conducted fieldwork for her undergraduate thesis in anthropology with the same population of Irish Travelers in North

Augusta. Her comments on the raid are insightful: “[the Attorney general and task force] used an issue that people would be upset and opinionated about (underage marriage) to gain access to a community (Murphy Village) and arrest members of the community for things other than the issue at hand (tax evasion, writing bad checks, etc)” (75). Further, it appears that the Dateline NBC camera crew returned specifically to film the raid to acquire more “proof” of Traveler criminal activity.

The Dateline episode itself was a misrepresentation akin to the TLC episode discussed in the last chapter (the latter almost a strange scion of the former). Boundy reports that footage of 10 year-old girls in white (communion) dresses was manipulated to portray them as “child brides” in Murphy Village (73). The show ignited a fury of response by the mainstream, eventually leading to changes in state law (a raise in the minimum age for marriage from 12 to 14, with parental consent) in addition to the South Carolina Traveler Task Force (Boundy 73). It seems reasonable to conclude that scholars of marginality would perceive these institutional prejudices as a form of marginality and structured oppression (likely less in terms of the Travelers’ right to marry at young ages, more in terms of the concentrated efforts of the law to criminalize them). However, in the 16 or 17 years since these events, half a generation has passed, the dust has settled, and the visibility of the marginalizing acts has faded. Such an experience-quick burst that it was-continues to frame the marginalized party’s relationship to the majority. “Faded” is an adequate term, as the prominence of these acts is less marked, but has also not altogether disappeared. There does not appear to be any further writing on a formal Traveler Task Force, but officers of the law still roam the area promoting its mission. Uncle Kevin puts the sweeps in a media context:

“I’ve heard dozens of stories, from people to news media to newspapers, dozens. Same thing, plus policemen riding around the neighborhood telling us not to leave garage doors open because there were two Travelers that were pulling up into people driveways [with] garage doors open going and taking stuff out of em, whatever they can put their hands on in 30 seconds.”

Again, the truth of the narrative about Travelers is first established through the trusted kinship of the individual storyteller, then ratified by volume, appearance in the media, and police practices. Clearly, the impact of this “marginality burst” lingers and should be included in considerations of the Travelers’ present condition.

By “circumvented” marginality, I mean that a palpable potential exists to economically oppress Travelers in North Augusta, but that potential is circumvented by the Travelers’ finding employment outside of the town. As previously discussed, Travelers are white-skinned and should therefore enjoy that invisible privilege. Outside of the CSRA, where they blend into invisibility, the privilege is present. In the absence of the stories that construct the lowness of their personhood (which themselves are built on top of a gapingly rejected kinship bond), Travelers enjoy the basic agency of white privilege. Though “something different” may be detected about their look or speech, those features do not carry the same meaning and assumptions outside of North Augusta as they do within. With white agency and privilege, the Traveler men take advantage of employment opportunities they would likely be denied back home. By the following evidence, it is safe to project that if the Travelers depended on the local economy to generate a livelihood, obstructions tied to their identity would be significant, affluence would be less likely, and a more pronounced version of economic marginality would be present.

Apparently, while conceptualizing this project, I lived in a house untouchable by Travelers. My dear uncle confessed that he would not hire a Traveler to do contract work on his house, based solely on the fact of his Travelerness:

“Just like the guy that come by this house a dozen times wantin’ to fix the roof. I don’t know if the boy was a Traveler or not, but I’d be willing to guarantee you he was a Traveler and I would not let him touch anything on this house..

[Here he reads my wordless objection, and continues]

...Just because he’s a Traveler, I don’t want him to touch it. *That’s because of the stories I’ve heard* and I’m not gon’ pay anybody to deal with it” (emphasis added).

Stories and narrative lead to concrete actions of discrimination, and discrimination-particularly in the form of employment denial based on belonging to a category-is a clear attribute of marginality. Boundy offers another example:

“Marie is a nursing assistant. She was telling one of her clients about a friend of hers who *happened to have a Traveler name*. Her client told Marie’s boss that she should be drug tested and that ‘if she was an Irish Traveler she needed to be fired.’ Marie’s boss told her that if she was a Traveler she wouldn’t be working there” (75, emphasis added).

Marie’s job-a skilled job in high demand-is threatened simply through the possibility of her being a Traveler or through her associations with them. In this instance, both the client and her boss are activated by and subscribing to a prejudice against Travelers that *would* threaten their economic well-being *if* it was not circumvented by the Travelers’ fruitful employment outside of the CSRA. At this point, the logic shaped by non-Traveler perceptions and accounts of the Travelers themselves come to a fore. Working from the majority-produced knowledge of the Travelers as dishonest scammers, Uncle Kevin explains:

“The way I look at it is, if you look around the CSRA, there’s one or two businesses that are run by Travelers. And that’s it...stationed right over there...a carpet business. If you go around there [Murphy Village] you’re gonna see quarter million dollar houses, where does that money come from? They don’t work around here, they go off and do their business, and they come back. To me if they’re doin’ that good of business then why is it not here? Why aren’t they doin’ that business here? If they do, I don’t hear about ‘em.”

“Hearing about” something seems to be a key element of legitimacy. Uncle Kevin *has* heard about Travelers doing bad business, he has *not* heard about them doing good business, therefore they must only do bad business. On the other hand, Julie sets out a different way of reasoning the same idea: “If everybody here was thieves, they couldn’t keep going back to the same customers in all the other states.” Both perspectives are shaped by their positions along the Traveler/non-Traveler divide, shaped by the difference produced between the two groups and lack of extended kinship between them.

In cases where employment is threatened or outright denied, a “human decision” (Farmer 40) by the majority-that excludes a group from opportunity based solely on belonging to that group-has occurred and is an indicator of marginality. It is currently circumvented by the Travelers, but the potential is palpable and should therefore be named and recognized as destructive to human rights.

Again, by virtue of their white phenotype, the Travelers would not initially be considered as belonging to a marginalized ethnic group. However, as we showed in Chapter 1, the Traveler identity in North Augusta functions much like a racial category, particularly in the social construction of the category by the majority and the truth attributed to the assumptions. The denial of rights for brown-skinned peoples is based on the same structures.

The “discursive” marginality relates again to the function of “Traveler” as a racial or ethnic category. Hall states:

“...it is one of the predicates of racism that ‘you can’t tell the difference because they all look²⁴ the same...Racism, of course, operates by constructing impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories, and its typically binary system of representation constantly marks and attempts to fix and naturalize the difference between belongingness and otherness” (167)

As we have argued, “Traveler” is such a racially constituted category, built in binary opposition to (white) non-Traveler. The identity constructed through the narrative about innate Traveler personhood is a practice in in-group/out-group distinction, of separating self from other, of deciding who belongs and who does not. As such, the oppressed Traveler condition results from the operation of racism, even though it is a binary of the white-skinned against the white-skinned. Uncle Kevin demonstrates the binary:

Me: So let’s say your son is an adult, and he needs work on his house...

Uncle: Oh yeah, [I] definitely would not allow him to hire a Traveler. And no he don’t date one. [we laugh]

Me: Either one of ‘em [the two children]?

Uncle: Nope.

Me: Why?

Uncle: I don’t wanna socialize with ‘em. I don’t know enough about ‘em²⁵ and I don’t trust ‘em.

Me: Would you give em a chance?

²⁴ Hall doesn’t expressly clarify, but given the nature of the argument, I would consider “looking the same” to mean more than just shared physical appearance.

²⁵ Ironic, considering his participation in the very production of knowledge that leads to his mistrust.

Uncle: To date my kids? Hell no. You can quote me on that one, You can quote me on that one. To be my friend, that's different. Ain't nobody gon' date my kids...

Besides setting up the makings for a tragic love story, Uncle Kevin's goal here is clearly to establish that a Traveler does not belong in his non-Traveler family, potentially nor temporarily (as it goes with teenage beaux).

Another hallmark of racist actions is the slinging of slurs to create a harsh and unwelcoming space in which the group must strive to thrive. For Travelers, the prevailing epithet is (or was) "gypsy". Many non-Traveler informants were completely aware of the offensive nature of the term but persisted in using it, as Heather and Joe explained:

Heather: "Oh and they get mad if you call 'em a gypsy. They say 'I'm a Traveler'.

Joe: [It's] like disrespectful to 'em.

Heather: Yeah.

Joe: But that's all I've known 'em by my whole life, is the gypsies, so...

Heather: I call 'em gypsies."

The mentality seems to be that since Travelers are white, how can calling them "gypsies" be an act of racism? Julie's attitude toward the term seems conflicted. At first, the offensiveness is affirmed: "We don't roam. We own land. We're not homeless. I *have* a home." Then the approach gets more complicated:

"We'd rather not be called gypsies, but it's lost its sting, its meaning. It's not particularly offensive anymore. If a stranger asks me for directions, I'll say, 'You know where the gypsy camp is?' to help 'em out. Now, if someone is *trying* to be nasty and they attach it to other bad words, that's different. But overall, it's not even in the scope of things

anymore. It's done got old. Don't call me that instead of my name, but yes, I am a gypsy.”

Boundy echoes a broader discovery of this conflict in her account [taking place at the Catholic church on Highway 25]:

“According to a Traveler woman who noted my interest in the blessing [prayer to the blessed Cerefino] was nice enough to fill me in, the blessed Cerefino was a Spanish gypsy and is one miracle away from becoming a saint in the Catholic church. It is interesting that Travelers make a specific point to argue that they are not gypsies, yet they seem to see a gypsy saint as their second patron...a fountain with a status of Cerefino stands just outside the church and a small chapel area is devoted to him within the church” (35).

I would not consider it a requirement that the Travelers somehow “reconcile” their relationship to the term. The significance of its use by non-Travelers is more about the malice or disregard of the act (“We’ll call you just what we want to, minority people, whether it pains your or not” could describe the mentality). Further, the meaning and reception of an epithet will certainly shift and become more complex with time (consider the volumes written about the N word in the African American community, a similarity Julie also draws). Julie asserts that “gypsy” has mostly lost its sting in her community, but also prefers it not to be used, particularly if the goal is to be blatantly nasty. Much like the position of an Irish Traveler, the term is profuse with complexity.

The particular truth in the storytelling about Travelers houses its dangerous potential (and proven examples of) harsh mistreatments by the majority. While not entirely positioned as less than human (dehumanized), Travelers are built to be essentially “bad people”. A Traveler is a

bad (dishonest, immoral) person *because* they are a Traveler; that is mal-humanization at least. The processes of mal-humanization are structured too similarly to those of dehumanization, particularly for groups that function like racial designations or categories. Suffering and marginality are examples of the processes of both mal- and dehumanization, generally applied to people along one or more of the axes of race, gender, or poverty. We have shown that “Traveler/gypsy functions like a racial category, but as Travelers are ostensibly believed to not have a race. Combined with their relative affluence, the Travelers do not fit general expectations of a marginalized group. However, with consideration of less visible forms of marginality-faded, circumvented, and discursive-it is clear that a Traveler existence in North Augusta has, is, and will continue to be pushed to the margins, if its current conditions persist.

Conclusion

In North Augusta, SC, a Traveler is distinguished from a non-Traveler using primarily visual (big hair, “a look”) and aural cues (rapid speech, Irish lilt). The immediate assumptions attached to the label (criminality, in-breeding, materialism) construct negative perception of Travelerness. The negative perceptions contribute to the functioning of the Traveler category as an ethnic or racial group, despite informants’ denial of such a racialized status. Travelers themselves are aware of these assumptions and have complex reactions to them.

The designations of “Traveler” and “non-Traveler are not neutral. Differences among individuals could be understood as constructed to maintain order. Separation of self and other is process built along similar terms as kinship. Therefore, members of the same category can be understood to share extended kinship through their mutual reproduction of extended kinship bonds. In North Augusta, the absent bond between Travelers and white non-Travelers is

inhabited as a rejection or denunciation of white privilege. Also in the space left lacking by the non-produced kinship bond, difference is produced.

The circulation of a set of stories about Travelers is a strong productive force of this difference. Storytelling, between individuals who *do* share the kinship bond of privilege and ratified through institutions like media, creates the meaning that gives the foundational act of difference production form as essential truth. Concrete events result from the narrative, leading to newly considered gradients of marginality that could be termed faded, circumvented, and discursive. As the Traveler category functions as an ethnic group, the structures that oppress are agents of marginality. It is a surprising and anomalous notion to what a group of affluent whites considered marginalized, but I hope I have shown that to be the case for the Irish Travelers. From this I would encourage further exploration of the concept of marginality to include less visible forms manifested outside the axes of race, gender, and poverty.

One attribute the Traveler situation does lack is the entrenchment of centuries of history, though it is modeled by divisions that do have that entrenchment. Much has changed just in the 60 years since the Travelers settled permanently in North Augusta. While there has been enough time for the stories to take form and effect, there is also still room for reversal after only two generations, but media forces-including the continued storytelling-will make that difficult.

In this work, I did not pay great detail to the role of gender, religion, and education in the Traveler experience, and I would conduct or recommend future research to compensate. The interweaving issues of education and gender roles are particularly perplexing. I know not what to make of the Travelers' general choice to end formal education around age 11. Julie has expressed a desire to break from that particular tradition. Domestically and abroad, education is a strong force in the non-profit and development sphere. From Greg Mortenson's (*Three Cups of Tea*,

Stones into Schools) work with the Central Asia Institute across the Middle East to Wendy Kopp's stateside efforts with *Teach for America*, access to education has been demonstrated as a vital means by which marginalized populations can overcome the structural violence automatically posed against their success and well-being. A vast body of evidence indicates that greater education provides more opportunities for the generation of sufficient income, more choices for a woman to meet the material needs of herself and her family, and therefore more possibilities for a joyful life unbounded by structures of suffering. From this charged arena, in which the connection between educational access and well-being is sharply defined, it is difficult to imagine conditions in which denial of that access may be justified. With education seen as a great equalizer, as a resource to be strived for and taken advantage of rather than denied when offered, how do we make sense of the Travelers' dismissal of this important human right? Perhaps my biases are too strong to imagine a context in which a lack of education was positive grounds for flourishing. Or, is it "cultural relativism" to entertain the concept?

This question of education as a human right is yet another ideological problem brought forth by the North Augusta Travelers. These pages have (by no means exhaustively) explored their position vis-à-vis identity construction through difference production and storytelling and its impacts on considerations of marginality. In a similar thread of re-considering marginality, additional ethnographic research would benefit by locating both the gendered and educational contexts for the Travelers and situating them in broader narratives about undeniable human rights.

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