

Guidos and Guidettes: Exploring Editorial News Media Frames of Italian-Americans on Jersey Shore

Steven S. Giannino

Associate Adjunct Professor

Department of Liberal Arts

Mercer County Community College

Mass Media and Society

1200 Old Trenton Rd, West Windsor Township, NJ 08550, USA.

Abstract

This article explores the ways in which newspaper editorials frame the Italian-American cast of MTV's popular reality television, Jersey Shore. Jersey Shore debuted amid large amounts of controversy regarding the ways in which the show represents Italian-Americans. Previous researchers (Gamson, 1989; Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993, 2004, 2007) have approached framing analysis from a variety of perspectives. This article uses a qualitative analysis based on Entman's (1993) approach to media framing, with the goal of understanding how editorial writers reacted to and subsequently framed the Italian-American stars of the reality show. Findings show that the frames that emerged in this study do not represent an evolution from the historical popular culture stereotypes of Italian Americans. Hence, familiar stereotypical and distorted depictions of Italian Americans (re)emerged and dominated the majority of the editorials.

Keywords: *Framing, Italian-American, Jersey Shore, Reality Television, Stereotype*

"I was born and raised a guido. It's a life style. It's about representing- family, Italian, tanning, gel. I got a f*cking tanning bed in my place. That's how serious I am about being a guido"- Pauly D (cast member of the MTV reality show, *Jersey Shore*). MTV is an American cable channel based in New York City that launched on August 1, 1981 (McGrath, 1999). MTV's presence in popular culture for almost 30 years has led the channel to be in the center of the ongoing debate over the cultural and moral influence of music and television on young people and society. The channel is often a target of criticism by various groups about programming choices, social issues, political correctness, sensitivity, censorship, and a perceived negative moral influence on young people. The Christian right organization, American Family Association, has criticized MTV for promoting a pro-sex, anti-family, pro-choice, drug culture (McGrath, 1999). MTV is not only credited as the innovator of music in the late 20th century, but also for the creation of modern day reality television (McGrath, 1999).

Jersey Shore, the newest reality television craze, has catapulted MTV back into "water cooler conversation" and gave the cable station the top prime-time show broadcast on Thursday nights during its regular season (Top Ten, 2010). The season one finale of *Jersey Shore* broke series records with 4.8 million viewers, drawing a 4.8 rating among the 12-34 demographic, making it the number one telecast on cable the night it aired. The premier of season two brought in 5.3 million viewers which was a 300 percent increase over the premier of season one (Top Ten, 2010). *Jersey shore* is analogous to another popular, and the longest running, MTV reality show, *The Real World*. Like *The Real World*, *Jersey Shore* follows between six to eight housemates while they live, work, and party in a rent- free house.

Unlike *The Real World*, which represents a cast that is ethnically/racially/sexually diverse, the *Jersey Shore* cast is promoted as being comprised entirely of heterosexual Italian Americans.

Jersey Shore debuted amid large amounts of controversy regarding the use of the words "Guido" and "Guidette," slang terms for a working-class urban Italian American, which is widely perceived by Italian Americans as a pejorative word. The contemporary visual representations of Guidos/Guidettes are exploitative images that present Italian Americans as lazy, promiscuous, narcissistic, violent, unthinking, vapid members of society whose main concern is the gym, tanning, and doing laundry (GTL)¹. For many viewers the appeal of the show is getting a glimpse inside the "real life" of a culture that has received, until recently, very little attention from the producers of reality television programming.

Shugart (2006) argues, "media programming is reflective of, and contributes to, preserving conventional discourses of power and privilege" and therefore, does not objectively reflect the world (p.79). Instead, producers and editors create socially meaningful and powerful narratives by framing the programs and information they present. This allows media to shape and manipulate information and influence how people understand others and perceive themselves (McQuail, 1994).

As television programs currently represent some of the most pervasive agents of socialization, they also appear to represent a ubiquitous means for dissemination and maintenance of ruling class ideologies that value men's power over women and white sensibilities over marginalized ways of knowing. Television is primarily "a storyteller—it tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time. As such, television is the wholesale distributor of images and forms the mainstream of our popular culture" (Weimann, 2000, p.8). Hence, mediated depictions represent a means for members of different social, cultural, and ethnic groups to learn about each other.

Research on mediated representation of marginalized groups is plentiful in social science research (Gray, 1995; hooks, 1992, 1994; Orbe, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2008; Shugart, 2006). However, most of this research has focused exclusively on African Americans and Hispanics (Weston, 1996). And, while media no longer excludes marginalized others from programming and news stories, stereotypical representations of these groups are still prevalent.

Despite the media's recognition of some minority groups, "there is significant cross-disciplinary evidence that Italian Americans have occupied an ambiguous identity in American media as stigmatized marginalized whites" (Messina, 2004 p.88). Historically, fictional films, advertising, television, and popular images have limited Italian American culture to finite spaces. Unfortunately, research examining the ethnic racism, prejudice, and stereotyping related to Italian Americans in the media is virtually nonexistent. Italian Americans remain conceptually invisible in many areas of research, including in social science and media studies literature (Messina, 2004).

This work steps into this relative void by studying the ways in which *Jersey Shore* has been framed in the mass media by exploring how US news media, specifically editorial and opinion writers react to and frame *Jersey Shore*. Through a close reading of the frames found in articles over an eight-month period, this study begins to build a baseline for understanding editorial news articles place in continuing these stereotypes of Italian Americans in contemporary society.

¹ Made notorious by Italian American Mike "The Situation" from MTV's 1st season of *Jersey Shore*. He suggests that the gym, tanning and laundry are the most important aspects in the everyday life of a Guido.

Because much of the one-dimensional representations of Italian Americans stems from film and television, referencing film and TV helps place the stereotypes created and perpetuated in the editorial news frames under review in proper context. In addition, it aids in making clear the continuum of stigmatizing mediated texts of Italian Americans currently in the media.

Guido's, Godfathers, and Grease Monkeys

Italian Americans have not enjoyed much growth in terms of mediated depictions over the last century. Early representations date back to the silent film era. During this time the images of Italians gave American audiences their first glimpse of characters that were dangerous and menacing (Bondeanella, 2006). By the middle of the 20th century, more fascination with Italian American culture became widespread. After World War II, the lives of Italian Americans captured the attention of the American public with the production of countless numbers of books and films about them (Paoli, 2003). Within these early texts, the most prevalent stories told were of Italian Americans as comical, menacing, and terrorizing (Iorizzo & Mondello, 1980).

In the last half of the 20th century as depictions of Italians moved to television, they evolved from encompassing characters that were just criminals by introducing characters that were intellectually unsophisticated, and in the case of Italian American women, sexually promiscuous tramps, and the men as sex-crazed womanizers or Casanovas (LaGumina, 1999). On prime-time television during the 70's and 80's, these characters became a mainstay on popular programs. In *Welcome Back, Kotter* (1975-1979), Vinnie Barbarino is portrayed as a cocky slow-witted academic failure who is more concerned about his sexual appeal to women than his performance in school. Similarly, Arthur "The Fonz" Fonzarelli, on the hit show *Happy Days* (1974-1984), is a high school dropout who is irresistible to women and often seen walking around with multiple "ladies" under his arm. Because of his rough street life upbringing, most men fear him, and he is willing to intimidate others and resort to violence to maintain his "cool" perception. Other popular depictions include the immoral, unethical, crude head dispatcher for the Sunshine Cab Company, Louie DePalma in *Taxi* (1978-1983), the wise-cracking, mean-spirited, sexually loose waitress Carla Tortelli in *Cheers* (1982-1993), and Tony Micelli, the uneducated boxer turned domestic worker who is employed by a college-educated WASP female executive in *Who's the Boss?* (1984-1992). During the 90's, and leading into the new millennium, the most popular televised image of an Italian American in primetime was the oversexed, laughable, and unemployed Joey Tribbiani in *Friends* (1994-2004).

Entering the 21st century, depictions of Italian American characters remained virtually unchanged. What did change, however, was that creators of primetime television programs began creating series in which the entire cast consisted of Italian American characters (Bondeanella, 2006). The debut of the *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) took the mediated lives of Italian Americans to a popularity that had not existed since the cinematic release of *The Godfather* in 1972. The Series revolved around a New Jersey-based mobster, Tony Soprano, and chronicled his "families" crimes, infidelities, and violent behavior. The show became the most financially successful series in the history of cable television. As a result, *The Sopranos* spawned books, a video game, high-charting soundtrack albums, and a large amount of assorted merchandise.

While this list of characters is just a few examples, and is not exhaustive, it does represent and confirm media's history of portraying Italian Americans in one-dimensional ways. In sum, Italian Americans are "ghettoized" in mostly negative portrayals and few, if any, Italian American characters are portrayed (as a result from something other than illegal activity) as prosperous, successful, and well educated.

It is indeed difficult to find examples of Italian American characters on network or cable television that are complex and self-determining. In fact, the perpetuation of hyperbolic representation of Italian Americans has become more problematic with the popularity of new television genres and programming like reality-based TV shows *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, *Jerseylicious*, and *Jersey Shore*.

Reality TV

While the reality realm represents television's newest genre, it also exemplifies the old adage 'the more things change the more they stay the same.' As previously mentioned, reality television is not the first genre to exploit Italian Americans, it simply represents the latest incarnation of ethnic stereotyping in television programming (Holtzmann, 2000). While social, economic, and political struggles continue to take place within the boundaries of reality television, it presents a new and more dangerous threat to viewers because it claims to represent authentic social interaction with truly authentic representations of people (Patton, 2006).

The reality television genre started in the 1950s with shows like *Candid Camera*, *The Miss America Pageant*, and *Children of the UN* however, the first modern day documentary form of reality programming was offered in 1972 in the show *An American Family* (Murry & Ouellette, 2009). Reality documentary shows that film real people as they live out events, contrived or otherwise, in their lives grew and reemerged in the 1990's with MTV's *The Real World*. Today reality programming continues to be wildly popular. Poniewozik (2010) suggested, "In 1992, reality TV was a novelty. In 2000, it was a fad. In 2010, it's a way of life" (p. 95). In a typical week, reality programming fills four of the top ten slots of most watched shows (Top Ten, 2010). Moreover, reality shows on FOX, CBS, ABC, and WB beat each network's average ratings in the 18 to 34-year-old demographic (Adalian, 2004).

Reality shows, however, are anything but "real." They employ writers and directors who "construct" the most provocative "realities" at the lowest cost for networks. Dubrofsy (2006) states, "what occurs on reality television shows is a constructed fiction with the twist that real people create the fiction of the series" (p. 41). Thus, the narrative that reaches viewers is one that has been constructed, manipulated, manufactured, and edited to project the beliefs and ideologies of the storyteller. In terms of documentary shows like *The Real World*, *Road Rules*, *Temptation Island*, and *Big Brother*, the construction begins in the casting process of the show. Though the show may not be scripted, the producers cast the show with people who come from specific geographical locations and with the personalities, attitudes, ideologies, and perspectives to create the most provocative show possible, and *Jersey Shore* is no exception. Once the show airs, these program constructions help to create media frames and project to viewers what aspects of the show are important and how to think about them.

Framing

Framing studies attempt to highlight the ways in which texts serve as mechanisms of cultural definition and control, and focus on how the construction of meaning from the information presented affects public perceptions (Miller & Ross, 2004). The framing of information has important implications for individuals' opinions and attitudes. Frames ultimately work to organize information into central themes and supply a context for understanding its meaning.

Framing research is somewhat problematic in that there is no clearly defined definition across scholarly boundaries. On the most basic level, framing is "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman, 2007, p. 164).

Framing works to alter audience interpretation of a given concept, thus leading them to feel or think in a particular way. The critical paradigm of framing suggests that frames act as tools for media to promote hegemonic values, or the ideologies of the dominant culture (McQuail, 2005).

Media framing examines the manner in which an issue is presented and provides the context for the conflict frame, which emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a way to capture audience interest (Smetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Through the analysis of media frames, researchers can gain a better understanding of how media discourse, as a set of organizational voices, works to promote specific interests that support the dominance of particular groups and ideas in society. While there may be more than one frame operating within the media discourse about a specific issue, a dominant frame usually is fixed within the discourse to become the preferred reading of an issue, event, or character (Eagleton, 1991; Fiske, 1987; Gamson, 1992).

Frames are very much like schemas, except they reside within media texts and public discourse; they highlight and link data selectively to tell more or less coherent stories. For example, when a news report frames a drive-by shooting as a gang war story, it selects certain aspects of the event that summons a stored schematic understanding that the audience may have about gang members (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Lacking much opportunity for repeated close contact with a wide variety of marginalized groups, mainstream society depends heavily on cultural material, especially media images, for cataloging members of marginalized groups (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). Ultimately, media framing is both a process and an effect in which a common stock of key words, phrases, images, sources, and themes highlight and promote specific facts, interpretations and judgments, making them more salient (Entman, 2007; Gamson, 1992). Those who create frames and make issues more salient must ultimately diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe (Gamson, 1992). As Entman (1993) explains,

Frames, then, *define* problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes* – identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments* – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggest remedies* – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. (p. 52)

The type of media frame Entman describes is common in newspaper editorials. Editorials are a newspaper's official stance or opinion on specific social or cultural issues. Editorial writers frame actors, personalities, events, and issues in the same ways that reporters and editors do, although they are largely free of the constraints of objective journalism (Ryan, 2001). In this way, editorial journalism not only reflects "the images and stereotypes prevalent in the popular culture. But it has done more. The very conventions and practices of journalism have worked to reinforce that popular and often inaccurate imagery" (Weston, 1996, p.163)

Previous researchers (Goffman, 1974; Gamson, 1989; Iyengar, 1991; Schuefele, 1999; Entman, 1993, 2004, 2007) have approached framing analysis from a variety of perspectives.

This article uses a qualitative analysis based on Entman's approach to media framing, with the goal of understanding how editorial writers reacted to and subsequently framed the *Jersey Shore*, and the Italian American stars in the show. Though Entman conceptualized his framing approach within a political context, applying his schema of media frames to events, issues, and actors outside of a political context is applicable (Dahmen, 2010).

As previously mentioned, there is an abundance of research examining the relationship between media and minority groups. This research hopes to add to that body of work by highlighting the cultural stigmas that media places on Italian Americans. Hence, a framing analysis of newspaper editorials of the *Jersey Shore* will help uncover the ways in which editorial newspaper articles stereotype and frame the Italian American cast of the show.

Method

Data were collected through a qualitative framing analysis. A LexisNexis search with the phrase “Jersey Shore” and “Editorial” as the search parameters were used to find the articles. Because the show was filmed and originally debuted in the United States, only US newspaper articles were analyzed. Since the researcher was looking for specific data, articles for this study were selected from a purposive sample, in a deliberative fashion. The time frame searched was from December 4, 2009 through August 23, 2010. This period begins the day after the first season of *Jersey Shore* premiered on MTV and one week after the second season premiered. The search yielded 31 results. Of the 31 articles, only 12 were specifically related to the reality television show, *Jersey Shore*. The remaining 19 articles were excluded because they referred exclusively to the geographical cities along the New Jersey coastline. The 12 articles under review came from six different newspapers in the Northeastern United States.² This area of the country is known for having a high population of Italian Americans and is historically a politically liberal leaning section of the country.

Data analysis was done by using the constant comparison technique. This type of analysis allows the researcher to take one piece of data (E.g. one article, one statement, or one theme) and compare it to all other pieces of data that were similar or different and assign them to categories (Wimmer & Dominick, 2002). This style of data organization provided the researcher the ability to integrate the entire data set into one coherent theoretical structure (Dahmen, 2010). The number of articles in the sample does not permit statistically reliable generalizations. Moreover, nor was that the goal of this research. This sample however, allows the researcher to achieve the ultimate goal of completing a comprehensive analysis of newspaper editorials framing of the Italian American cast of *Jersey Shore* and highlighting the implications of those frames (McQuail, 1994; Scheufele, 1999; Van Dijk, 1991).

Each article acted as a unit of analysis and was closely read and assigned by two readers (the author and an outside reader) to the framing categories: *Jersey Shore* cast as **violent**, *Jersey Shore* cast as **sexually promiscuous**, *Jersey Shore* cast as **stigmatized other**, and **moral judgments** about cast members of *Jersey Shore*. The framing categories were created by the author based on emergent information from the articles. Readers assigned the articles to frames based on the readers’ perception of several framing indicators that included the use of “quotations... adjectives, catchphrases, descriptors, and other semantic devices” to describe Italian Americans (Miller & Ross, 2004, p. 250).

The violent frame used language that is suggestive of *Jersey Shore* cast members as angry, full of rage, uncontrollable, and engaging in verbal and physical altercations/assaults. The sexual promiscuous frame used language that describes or is suggestive of lewd, gratuitous, voracious sexual behavior (e.g., sexual intercourse, touching, kissing with multiple partners). The stigmatized other frame reflects the use language that is meant to place social disapproval of personal identity, lifestyle, characteristics, or beliefs outside of the normativity of dominant culture (e.g., “Guido/Guidette,” “bennies,” “steakheads”).

² The Philadelphia Inquirer (2), Providence Journal-Bulletin (1), The Washington Post (1), The Record (1), The Times-Union (1), The Star- Ledger (6).

The last frame, moral judgment, imposes writer's evaluations or opinions formed as to whether some action or inaction, intention, motive, or character traits of the Italian Americans on the show as a whole are good or bad.

Two readers (the author and an outside reader) read the articles multiple times to identify the dominant frame, and because several non-dominant frames were also present, the readers recognized secondary frames. The dominant frame was identified as the most frequent frame that appeared in the article. The next most frequent frame identified was considered the secondary frame. In addition, it was possible for the emergent frames to exist within the articles and neither be identified as dominant or secondary. If a disagreement arose as to the fit of the articles within the frame(s), readers reread, reviewed, and discussed the article and ultimately came to a consensus.

Findings

When analyzing the aggregate sample, the three most prevalent frames of the Italian American cast on *Jersey Shore* were moral judgments about them, violent, and stigmatized other. Of those, the most frequent single frame was moral judgments of the cast of the show. This frame appeared in every article within the sample. The stigmatized other and violent frames were the next most reoccurring frames found, while the sexually promiscuous frame appeared the fewest times in the articles.

When identifying the dominant frames and secondary frames, moral judgments was the dominant frame in half of the articles, stigmatized other was the next most dominant, while the violent and sexually promiscuous frames each appeared as the dominant frame in one article (Table 1). The most frequent secondary frames that appeared in the articles were the violent frame and the stigmatized. The moral judgment frame was the next recurrent, and the sexually promiscuous frame did not account for any secondary frames (Table 1).

Table 1- Dominant (DF) and Secondary Frames (SF) in Each Article

Article #	<i>Jersey Shore</i> cast as violent	<i>Jersey Shore</i> cast as Sexually Pro-miscuous	<i>Jersey Shore</i> cast as stigmatized other	Moral judgments about cast members of <i>Jersey Shore</i>
Article 1	SF			DF
Article 2			SF	DF
Article 3	DF			SF
Article 4		DF		SF
Article 5			SF	DF
Article 6			SF	DF
Article 7	SF		DF	
Article 8*				DF
Article 9	DF			SF
Article 10	SF		DF	
Article 11			SF	DF
Article 12	SF		DF	

Note: Blank spaces denote that particular frame was neither a dominant nor a secondary frame.

*Article 8 did not have a secondary frame.

Framing the cast of Jersey Shore

Jersey Shore cast as violent

The cast members of the Jersey shore were often framed by the editorials as being the instigators and participants of both physical and verbal aggressive acts. When writing about Italian Americans as violent, several articles suggested that. One editorialist wrote “the cast seems constantly on the verge of violence” and that “*Jersey Shore's* producers have engaged in a pattern of profiting from crimes - namely, the violent assaults carried out by its cast” (“Gangsters of love,” 2010, p. A08). The author continued this thought by stating, “Recent lawsuits count at least five *Jersey Shore* assaults [by the cast], often in or near bars” (“Gangsters of love,” 2010, p. A08).

Many of the articles write about the infamous cast members and their affinity for fighting by going “out of their way to pick fights with anyone they came across on the boardwalk” (Mulshine, 2010, p. 017). The biggest reference to violence was regarding the episode (“One Shot”) in which a female cast member, Snooki, was “punched in the face [by a man] at a bar” (Goldberg, 2010, p. 017). One writer said, “Snooki... has been seen starting a fight and then lamenting that her face was f-d up again” (“New Jersey Beach Bums,” 2010, p. A14). Other editorialists commented on cast members Ronni and Sammi by describing how “Sammi and Ronny... spend half of each episode fighting” (Weiss, 2010, p. 07). Mulshine (2010) writes that Ronnie, who is described as “the most thuggish of the cast members,” was allowed by security to knock a man unconscious on the boardwalk for disrespecting his girlfriend (p. 017). Finally, Mulshine reflects on her time at the Jersey shore as a young person and states, “I never saw quite the level of thuggery the *Jersey Shore*... brought to town” (p. 017).

Sexually Promiscuous Frame

A few editorials referred to the sexual behaviors viewed by the *Jersey Shore* cast members while watching the show. Weiss states that the cast is comprised of “for people whose belief system holds... women are interchangeable and cheating on your man is fine as long as there s house music in the background. Another editorial said that, “The 15 minutes I watched showed women making out with women in a hot tub and then men making out with the women. Everyone looked liked a (vulgar Italian word for prostitute), both the men and the women” (Doblin, 2010, p. A11) and seemed to only be worried about “intoxication and unplanned parenthood” (“New Jersey Beach Bums,” 2010, p. A14).

One of the cast members was described as calling himself "the Situation" because, “it gives him the excuse to ask women, ‘Do you love the Situation?’ as he lifts his shirt to show off his washboard abs” (Goldberg, 2010, p. 017). Female cast members engaged in equally obnoxious sexual behavior with random men and in one case, a character called “Snooki” sees a man at a club and "walks up to him and within seven seconds she's kissing him and grabbing his crotch” (Mulshine, 2010, 017).

Stigmatized Other Frame

Several editorial writers made references to the cast members with words or phrases that are stigmatizing and highlight the otherness of Italian Americans both on and off the show. Goldberg (2010) described *Jersey Shore* as a show that follows “a gaggle of barely literate bridge-and-tunnel steakheads and slatterns as they spend their summer at the greatest meat market in the world” (p. 017). Another article stated that “Those Manhattan ‘bennies’ recruited other ‘bennies’ from places like the Bronx and Staten Island to live in a house in Seaside Heights over the summer and be videotaped.”³

³ “Bennies” are what Jersey shore locals call the Italian tourists from New York City.

Besides “steakheads” and “bennies,” the most derogatory descriptors used to define the cast identity are “Guido” and “Guidette”. Though MTV, and the *Jersey Shore*, have been criticized for the use of those words, several editorialists used those terms to label the cast in negative ways. Doblin (2010) said, “As I understand it, being a “Guido” is a matter of taste (or lack thereof)...Young men with big hair, no shirts and gold chains and women with big hair, no bras and no modesty.” The writer went on to say that “by wanting to be ‘Guidos....’ They [the cast] are cheapening themselves.”

Further stigmatization of the cast occurs by writers comparing the cast to animals. Writers described them as “absurdly tanned gibbons” (Goldberg, 2010, p.017) that left New York City because their “natural habitat seems to be New Jersey” (Weiss, 2010, p.7). One writer even suggested that it’s “doubtful they [the cast] could beat a carnival chicken at tic-tac-toe.

Moral Judgment Frame

Negative generalities and stereotypes were more explicit in stories with the moral judgment frame. Also, some of the previous frames discussed were found within the moral judgment frame further reflecting negative stereotypes. Therefore, in this section, many of the moral judgment frames examined overlap to include the other frames identified.

One common theme found throughout the articles was the harm the show and the cast have done to the State of New Jersey. An example of this is when an article suggested that, “MTV’s surreality show *Jersey Shore* is already one of the nastiest things a bunch of New Yorkers has done in New Jersey since Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in Weehawken” (“Ganster of Love”, 2010, p. A08). Other editorialists like Mulshine (2010) asked the question, “Why should the good name of the Jersey Shore be further debased by the antics of these New Yorkers” (p. 026). Finally, Mulshine (2010) contends, “People as far away as Europe and Asia will now get to see the reputation of the great state of New Jersey destroyed by a bunch of people who come almost entirely from New York” (p. 017).

Several writers referred to the *Jersey Shore* cast as a “subculture” or “subset” of Italian Americans that are only interested in “breasts, brawls and drunken amnesia.” One writer described the show as “a complex show about the nature of sin” (“Jersey Shore, 2010, p. A14). Doblin (2010) made several Sexual judgments about the cast with comments like “it’s a pretty safe bet that the men and women of *Jersey Shore* haven’t taken a vow of celibacy” (p. A11). Doblin went on to say, “I am appalled by how easily people trade their dignity for a moment in the sun or a hot tub with a video camera” (p. A11).

Many judgments involved personal experiences the editorialists have had in their own lives. Stapinski (2010) said that, watching it is like watching the life that could have unfolded for me had I not had a smart mother and a college education. Like watching the terrible road not taken. Like watching the car wreck that didn’t happen. It’s hard to look away Some nights, I feel like Snooki and her pals are the misguided little sisters I never had; I feel embarrassed and strangely protective of them. But some nights, when my Jersey gets the best of me, I feel like climbing into the television and slapping Snooki and her girlfriends. (p. 011)

Other references to writer’s personal experiences described their own summers at the Jersey shore. For example, “I saw truly saw some dreadful conduct by those ‘bennies’” and like all “bennies” the only reason the *Jersey Shore* cast will be back “is for their court appearances” (Mulshine, 2010, p. 017.)

All of the above mentioned judgments indicate clear, consistent, stereotypical frames; the *Jersey Shore* cast members are “degenerates” doing more harm to the public than good. Stapinski sums up her feelings (and those of the majority of the editorialists) when she says, “they [the cast] should really knock it off already. Everyone is laughing at them, not with them. Get a friggin' clue” (p. 011).

In sum, much like minority depictions of the past, these examples of editorial frames show the ways in which news papers and editorialists work to create and perpetuate caricatures that could have potential harmful real world implications not only for those being caricatured, but also for the readers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to uncover the ways in which editorial newspaper writers frame the Italian American cast of *Jersey Shore* and explore the possible implications of those frames. None of the editorials under review framed the Italian American cast of *Jersey Shore* in neutral, empowered, or balanced ways. Moreover, the frames that emerged in this study do not represent an evolution from the historical popular culture stereotypes of Italian Americans. Hence, familiar stereotypical and distorted depictions of Italian Americans (re)emerged and dominated the majority of the editorials. Given the inherent subjectivity of editorials, this finding may suggest that these are the most common and readily accessible societal and journalistic frames for Italian Americans.

Analyses of media frames and popular depictions, both in print and broadcast, of Italian Americans are critical because they can have a direct impact on their lives and livelihood. This is not to say that Italian Americans are going to subscribe and assimilate to the frames that are found in the editorials and act out what they read about. On the contrary, the real harm comes from the interpersonal interactions that Italian Americans have in their everyday lives. These interactions may be impacted by not only viewers of the reality show, but by non-viewers who rely on newspapers (and therefore journalists) to get information. Newspaper readers may create preconceived notions in the minds of readers surrounding Italian American identity that may be informed by exposure to the editorial frames. Media consumers transfer knowledge obtained from the media to other contexts because “the distorted appraisal of a subsequent stimulus induced by activation is unlikely to be consciously corrected” (Hansen & Hansen, 1988, p. 290).

Shohat and Stam (1994) explain how “the mark of the plural” projects colonized people as all the same, any negative behavior by any member of the oppressed community is instantly generalized as typical, as pointing to a perpetual backsliding toward some negative essence (p. 198). Perhaps if media frames surrounding the Italian Americans on *Jersey Shore* existed in an environment where a plethora of frames and depictions existed, the negative stereotypes and frames found in the editorials reviewed in this study could possibly be considered one example of the Italian American experience. But, because there is a dearth of Italian Americans in the media presented as more than screaming, fighting, violent, sexually voracious, laughable idiots, these editorial frames yield an unnerving degree of power. This is especially true when taking into consideration the fact that newspapers serve as a window to the world for many people, and the editorials act as the voice of that world (Miller & Ross, 2004).

Since editorial writers are the voice of newspapers, by validating the “realness” of the cast members personalities and actions as commonplace may imply that all Italian Americans that visit the New Jersey coastline will (and are expected to) behave in boorish ways. For example, one editorialist stated that, “It must be said that part of the show's appeal is that it does reflect a small piece of Jersey Shore reality - one that most of us would rather gawk at than participate in” (New Jersey Beach Bumb, 2010, p. A14).

In other words, by not framing Italian Americans as empowered and successful members of society, newspaper editorials coalesce with other mediums to stigmatize Italian Americans and place salience on negative characteristics that may lead to representations being construed as literal. Bondanella (2006) argues that Italian Americans should not fear contemporary one-dimensional framing and stereotyping because of the enormity of the contributions made by Italian Americans to society. Unfortunately, media rarely (if ever) highlight the positive contributions, or contributors, of Italian Americans with the same vigor that it does with those who bring negative attention to the group. Consequently, those who do not fit into the negative and popular frames are considered unauthentic, made invisible, and ignored, while those recognized as obnoxious/deviant/whorish are “celebritized.” Creating frames and representations of Italian Americans as violent, sexually promiscuous, savage criminals obscures their variability because positive frames and images reflecting the diversity and depth of the Italian American community do not counter balance these portrayals.

With casts and characters from shows like *Jersey Shore*, *Real Housewives of New Jersey*, *Jersey-licious*, and *My Big Friggin’ Wedding* acting like out of control buffoons, there is little incentive for editorialists and other media outlet operators to portray Italian Americans as a diverse subgroup who are political leaders, scientists, writers, filmmakers, business leaders, physicians, attorneys, psychologists and psychiatrists. While some may argue there are characters in film and television that seemingly have “Italian-sounding” last names that play doctors, lawyers, and other prominent figures, the fact that their Italian ethnicity plays no part in their character development may lead audiences’ to make assumptions about the possible implied cultural background and thus being ineffective in furthering representations of Italian- Americans.

Conclusion

As the first study to conduct an analysis on the framing of Italian Americans in editorial newspaper articles, this project opens another door for understanding the role of mediated stereotypes. With the sudden burst of popularity of Italian Americans in media culture, this research becomes valuable and can act as an impetus for future research, both quantitative and qualitative, to further explore the spaces and time that Italian Americans inhabit in the media landscape. In addition, the multiplicity of imagery of Italian Americans is not necessarily a sign of progress for a group of people who have lacked a mass of visibility over the past 4 decades.

Like with other minority groups in the media greater visibility does not necessarily mean greater representation. It could simply perpetuate a greater level of exclusion if the representations remain static. As an identity group, Italian Americans do not have access to sufficient amounts of power and influences in the social hierarchy to change the ways institutions stereotype them in the media. Though Bondanella (2006) suggests that mediated depictions of Italian Americans have progressed and traveled a hard and long road to achieve empowered, successful, capable representation, the author of this text vehemently disagrees. The media storm brought on by the unprecedented popularity of the *Jersey Shore*, and other reality shows featuring Italian Americans exclusively, is not because the show or cast members are providing new and positive ideals and/or acting as role models. On the contrary, the way(s) that Italian Americans are continuously caricatured, stereotyped, and framed in negative ways is evidence to suggest that the road Bondanella (2006) describes is much longer than originally realized.

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