

## RESEARCH ARTICLES

### Stigma Consciousness in the case of Romanian Roma Activists

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**Abstract.** Roma people are often stigmatized by the members of the out-groups, the process of stigmatization being enforced through a selection of stereotypically assigned characteristics of the group. In the last two decades, the stigmatization of Roma was contributed by scientists, policy makers and mass media. Stigma is a basis for social exclusion of Roma people and it is transferred from the whole group to the individual level. The negative labelling of the entire Roma group affects identity and stigma consciousness for each individual Roma. This paper addresses ethnic stigma consciousness in a sample of 96 Roma activists, women and men. The results show that stigma consciousness is highly present among Roma participants from the sample, although there are not significant differences between Roma women and Roma men regarding ethnic stigma consciousness.

**Keywords:** *Romani identity, Roma activists, stigma consciousness, ethnic stereotypes*

Roma were acknowledged as a national minority in many European countries and are often defined as a transnational ethnic group both by academics and politicians. The size of the Roma population greatly differs across different estimators but the general consensus in academia and policy circles is that the current size of the Roma population in Europe is much higher than the censuses reveal. In this regard, Roma are considered an elusive, hidden population that avoid identification in census or other official contexts because of fear of stigmatization and discrimination. Historically, Roma have been and continue to be a highly discriminated population in relation to employment, housing, and access to education and health.

Romania is asserted to be the country with the highest number of Roma in Europe: while the 2011 census record 619,000 Roma people<sup>1</sup>, academic and policy estimation put their number to 1,5 - 2 million. Linguistic research starting in the XIX century has been asserting an Indian origin of Roma with subsequent migration waves in Europe some more than 1000 years ago. More recently, genetic research on Roma purports to strength of the linguistic Indian connexion of European Roma population (Kalaydjieva, Gresham, and Calafel, 2001, Mendizabal et al., 2011). After the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe a set of social policies targeted on Roma were introduced, policies which were to a certain extent already in place in Western Europe. Some of the policies may have benefits if we consider for instance the policy of affirmative action in Romania, introduced in the '90s, which reserved places to be granted to Roma in high schools and universities (Surdu and Szira, 2009). However, these measures also have the unfortunate potential to reinforce the stigmatization of the Roma people.

In the last two decades, the discourse about Roma flourished, being influenced by the academics and policymakers and strengthened by the mass-media. Roma is no doubt a marginalized and discriminated group, which often is stereotypically treated and stigmatized by the members of the out-groups (Lucassen, 1990, Bancroft, 2005, Cahn, 2007). Moreover, Roma is a political and socially constructed category that gets discussed in the mainstream discourse but Roma people themselves do not play a significant role in this discourse (Simhandl, 2006). Thus, Roma become a visible and "objective" category whose borders were settled mainly from the outside. The social scientists have their own contributions in creating a homogeneous and negative image of Roma based on the biased perception of the majority (Csepeli and Simon, 2004). This paper does not address how the stigmatization of Roma came out but rather how Roma themselves are dealing with their associated stigma.

The stigma related to an individual or a group has negative consequences that affect beliefs, self-perceptions, self-confidence, self-esteem, identification with the group, and social interactions (Levin and Van Laar, 2006). Social psychological research (Pinel and Paulin, 2005, Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005, Schmader and Lickel, 2006, Salvatore and Shelton, 2007) points out that the effects of stigma on

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<sup>1</sup>According with 2011 Romania census, provisional results, Roma people represent 3,2% from the total population - source in Romanian language accessed on April,25, 2013, [http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Comunicat DATE PROVIZORII RPL 2011 .pdf](http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Comunicat_DATE_PROVIZORII_RPL_2011_.pdf)

individuals depend of the type of stigma<sup>2</sup>, the individual characteristics of those who experience stigma, and the group characteristics. Not all individuals or all members of a specific group experience in the same way that “spoiled identity” of which Goffman (1963) made us aware. There are individuals who adapt easier to a stigmatized identity and sometimes successfully so, whereas for others self-consciousness about their stigmatized status becomes chronic and detrimental (Pinel&Bosson, 2013). Moreover, the members of a group bearing a stigma are affected not only by their own personal encounters with stigma, but also anticipate and are influenced by the stigma suffered by the members of their in-group (Schmader and Lickel, 2006).

The mere self-ascription to a specific minority group (ethnic, religious, occupational, sexual etc.) generates stigma. Leo Lucassen (1990) argues that stigma can stimulate the formation of a group itself and with this, the formation of ethnic consciousness. Lucassen calls this process of a group ethnic formation *minoritisation*, and argues that it characterizes the Gypsies, but also other minorities all over the world. As Lucassen (1999) described, the phenomenon of *minoritisation* has two phases: “Two aspects of ‘stigmatisation’ are distinguished for analytical purposes: a) the dissemination of negative ideas about a specific group (stigma) by an authoritative body; and b) the attachment of this stigma on specific groups (labelling).” (p.1) The author proved with examples from the history of Netherland and other neighbouring countries that Gypsies, as a group with an ethnic and powerful negative stigma attached to it, are the result of social construction of the authorities from XIX century. Nowadays, the name of the group was changed from Gypsy to Roma, but the stigma continues to be attached to the group by the authorities (policymakers, academics, police, and politicians) and, consequently, continues to be reinforced by the majority.

To demonstrate that stigma depends on social power asymmetries of different groups, Link and Phelan (2011) bring examples from history which highlight the difference in terms of power between those who stigmatize and those who are stigmatized and argue that the power is always with the first. Kurzban and Leary (2001) see stigma as a basis for social exclusion of a group as a whole. This

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<sup>2</sup> E. Goffman (1963) identifies three types of stigma: 1. due to physical deformities, 2. due to weaknesses of the individual character (such as mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour) and 3. tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion which can be hereditary transmitted.

process of stigmatization is arbitrarily assigned throughout history. Individuals ascribe negative and positive characteristics to different groups and with time they begin to have beliefs that members of some groups are inferior in some aspects to others in order to rationalise their beliefs and to justify social status inequalities. This way, the negative image of a group become naturalised and legitimized together with the stereotypes associated to that group. Moreover, the members of stigmatized groups even themselves start to believe that the stereotyping of their group is natural and legitimate (stereotype internalisation). The individuals who are part of the stigmatized groups even they do not possess the negative characteristics which are the subject of stigma are also considered as sharing the stigma. For instance, a common stereotype is that Roma are stealing. From here is derived the stereotyped and the <legitimate>judgement that (all) Roma are stealing (or that Roma are thieves). While the ethnic group is a socio-political construction and, consequently, it is just an abstract concept, the individuals are real in their individualities and life circumstances and could be affected by the group stereotypes. But nevertheless, they suffer from the transfer of stigma from the group to the individual level: the greatest harm on individual Roma is that of the *negative labelling of the entire Roma group*.

People who experience the stereotypes allocated to a whole stigmatize group can be self-conscious or not about their associated stigma. The intensity of consciousness fluctuates from one individual to another, depending on the type of stigma and of personal factors (age, education, race, religion, gender etc.). The consciousness of stigma is accompanied by what Steele (1999) found as being the *threat of stereotype*, which is threat of being treated as having a stigma. Empirical studies (Steele and Quinn, 1999, Steele and Aronson, 1995, Brown and Pinel, 2003) show that a stereotype which is negatively acknowledged affects the performance in tasks' accomplishment. Pinel (1999) introduced the concept of *stigma consciousness* to refer to differences in the extent to which people concentrate on their stigmatized status. Individuals with higher levels of stigma consciousness tend to believe that negative stereotypes about their group are emerging when they interact with members of the out-group and, generally, their stigmatized status is always on their mind. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of stigma consciousness, although they aware of the negative stereotypes of their group, tend not to allocate an important role to their stigmatized status in their interactions with members of the out-group. Importantly, people who are high in stigma consciousness do not necessarily endorse the stigma ascribed to them and their fellow group members. Pinel (1999) documented a series of studies that

illustrate cognitive and interpersonal implications of stigma consciousness. Participants high in stigma consciousness perceive more discrimination directed toward them personally than do participants low in stigma consciousness. Moreover, people high in stigma consciousness seem more vulnerable to the effects of stereotype threat. Consider Brown and Pinel (2003), who observed that women skilled in mathematics demonstrated poorer results on a mathematic test when they were told that the results of the test vary by gender (conformity to gender roles), but only if they were also high in stigma consciousness. The following empirical research on Roma uses the concept of *stigma consciousness* advanced by Pinel (1999). We started with the assumption that Roma women have higher stigma consciousness levels than men, presumably because Roma women are the targets of discrimination toward the Roma as well as targets of the discrimination directed toward women.

### ***Methodological aspects***

The current research uses an adapted version of Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire (SCQ) developed by Pinel (1999). The ten items of the questionnaire asked participants to state their agreement or disagreement (on a 7-point Likert scale) with statements that describe the degree to which the stereotypes about their reference group affect them and influence their interactions with members of the out-group (majority population). I created two versions of the questionnaire, one for Roma men and the other for Roma women, with the only difference between the two questionnaires being the gender reference. In addition to the 10 stigma consciousness items, I included five supplementary items: age, education level, the knowledge of Romani language and a question about whether the subjects consider themselves or not as being Roma activists. The data were collected online through a specialized surveys website (eSurveysPro) from October – December, 2011. The respondents were been assured of the anonymity of their answers.

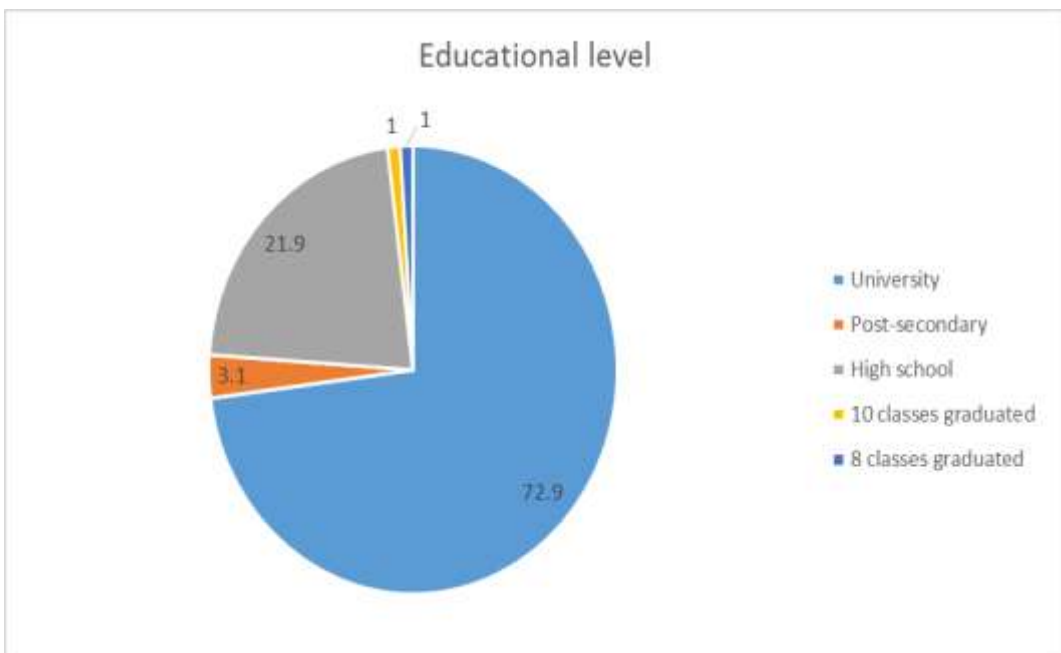
The limits of the research are given by the characteristics of the sample which is relatively small as number of cases, but also by the online application of the questionnaire which inevitably lack the benefits of face-to-face application where the interview operator can provide feedback and clarifications. On the other hand, the online application which brings a higher level of trust in the sincerity of the given answers had increased the guaranty of anonymity.

### ***Characteristics of the sample***

The research sample was one of convenience and thus may not be representative of the entire population of Roma activists from Romania. The sample consists of 96 participants, 50 Roma men and 46 Roma women. The participants were most likely active in virtual group discussions on Roma topics, because the questionnaire was advertised through a network of Roma activists. All persons self-identifying as Roma were eligible to participate.

The largest number of the subjects (72.9%) has degrees in higher education. The education level of the respondents is presented in Graph 1 below.

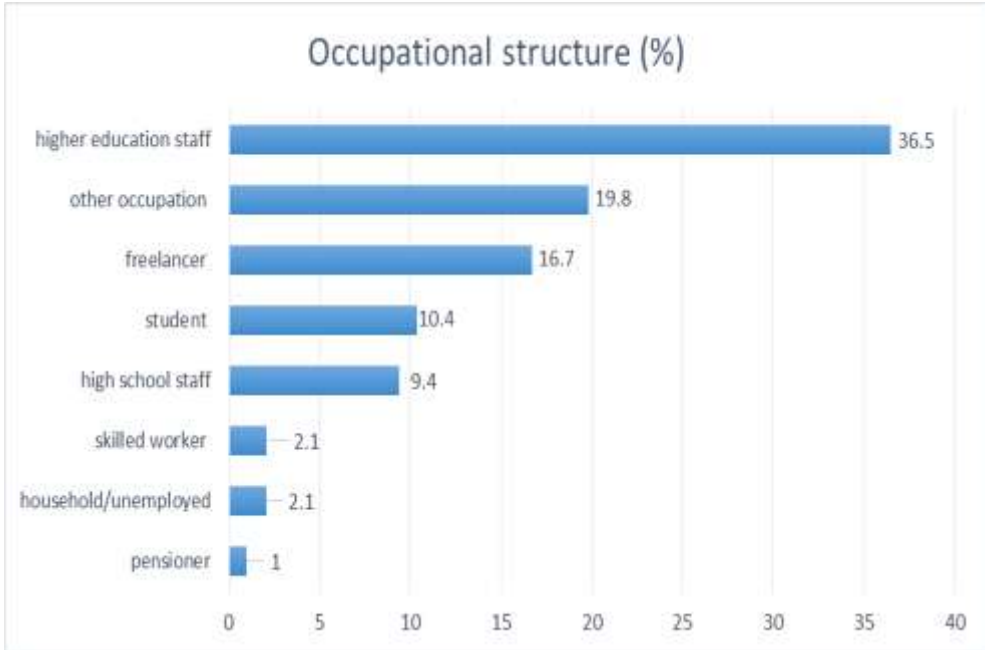
Graph 1: *The education level*



The occupational structure of the respondents, as can be seen Graph 2 below, has the main category of public servants with higher education (36.5%) while 19.8% of the subjects choose the answer <other occupation>, 16.7% are freelancers or self-employed, 10.4% are students and 9.4% are public servants graduates of secondary education.

Graph2: *Occupational structure*

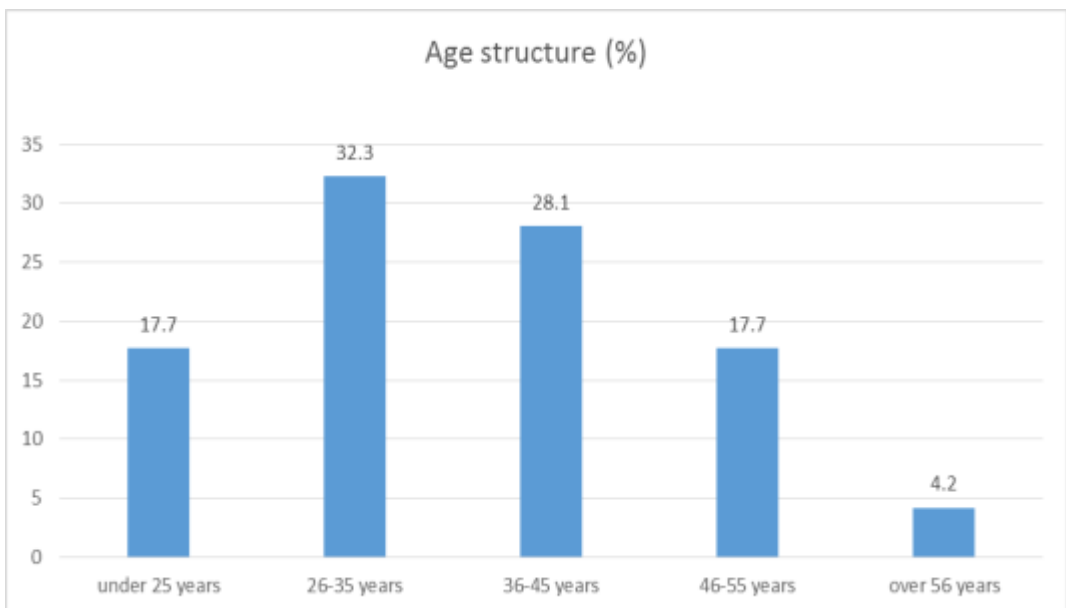
The age structure presented in Graph 3 below shows that subjects aged



between 26 - 45 years represent 60.4% from the total of the sample.

Graph 3: *Age structure*

In regard with the knowledge of Romani language, the sample is almost



split in half: 53.1% of the participants know or speak Romani language, while 46.9% of them do not know or do not speak this language.

Most of the participants (83.3%) are considering themselves Roma activists (84% men and 82.6% women), while 16.7% of the respondents decline such a quality.

## **Findings and discussion**

### ***The positioning of the participants to the questionnaire' items***

The first statement from the questionnaire (1. *Stereotypes about Roma / Roma women affect me personally*) has an average value of 4.79, being placed in the relative agreement zone of the scale. More than half of the subjects (56.3%) are considered themselves affected by the stereotypes about Roma. In the disagreement zone of the scale there are only 20.8% of the respondents that have rather negative answers in regard with the statement 1.

The second statement (2. *I always worry that my behaviours will be viewed as stereotypically as being specific for a Roma / Roma woman*) has a mean of 3.30, being placed in the area of relative disagreement of the scale. 56.3% of the subjects are in disagreement with this statement (in various degrees), while 35.5% agree with the enunciation. This placement of the participants in regard with the second statement indicates a tendency among the majority of them not to consider an issue that their behaviour could be interpreted particularly in ethnic terms.

For the third item (3. *When interacting with others, I feel like they interpret all my behaviours in terms of the fact that I am a Roma men / Roma women*) the average value is 3.68, the answers being placed in the relatively disagreement zone of the scale. 46.9% of the subjects consider that other people are interacting with them without judging their behaviours as being caused by their ethnicity. In other words, for these subjects the interethnic exchanges are not necessarily seen as being the results of the ethnic identity. If we eliminate from the analysis the neutral cases (16 subjects who choose the answer *neither yes, nor no*) it results that 56.25% of the subjects are rather in disagreement with this third statement.

The fourth statement (4. *Most people are judging Roma / Roma women on the basis of their ethnicity*) registered a mean of 5.48, being thus in a relatively strong agreement zone. The most of the participants (82.4%) believe that the majority of the population are primarily evaluating Roma by their ethnic characteristics.

The fifth item (5. *The fact that I am Roma / Roma woman does influence how women / men act with me*) underlines the interaction with the persons from



the opposite gender. The mean of 4.25 places the answers to this item rather in the neutral part of the scale. 44.7% of the subjects are in the agreement part of the scale, while 29.2% of the respondents are in the disagreement zone.

A percentage of 55.2 of the participants are in disagreement with the sixth item (*6. I almost think about the fact that I am Roma / Roma woman when I interact with others*), which show that they do not take into consideration their ethnicity when interact with others. The average for the entire sample is 3.35, which points out a disagreement tendency with this statement.

For the seventh statement (*7. The fact that I am Roma / Roma woman does influence how people act with me*) the average for the entire sample is 4.11, so the item is placed in the neutral part of the scale: 49% of the subjects are rather in agreement with the content of this item, while 47% of the respondents rather disagree that ethnicity influences the way others interact with Roma.

The eighth statement (*8. Most people have a lot more stereotypes towards Roma / Roma women than they actually express*) has an average of 5.66 being in the relatively strong agreement part of the scale. Thus, 84.4% of the participants believe that most of the people have more Roma related stereotypes than they currently express.

The average of the sample for ninth item (*9. I often think that people are unfairly accused of being prejudiced towards Roma / Roma women*) is 3.31, most of the answers being placed rather in the disagreement zone of the scale. Thus, 61.5% of the participants consider that people are often unfairly accused of having prejudices against Roma, which show that these respondents believe that people have real biases in regard with Roma.

The tenth item (*10. Most people have problems viewing Roma / Roma women as equals with them*) recorded the highest percentage (88.5%) of subjects in agreement with it. A percentage of 68.7% of the respondents <agree> or <strongly agree> with the content of the tenth item, that majority of the people are not seeing Roma as their equals.

To resume the most important findings from the analysis of the averages for the ten items of the questionnaire, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- 88.5% of the subjects believe that majority of the people are perceiving Roma as not being equals with them
- 84.4% consider that majority of the people have in fact more prejudices against Roma than express
- 82.4% of the respondents acknowledge that majority of the people are assessing Roma based on their ethnic characteristics

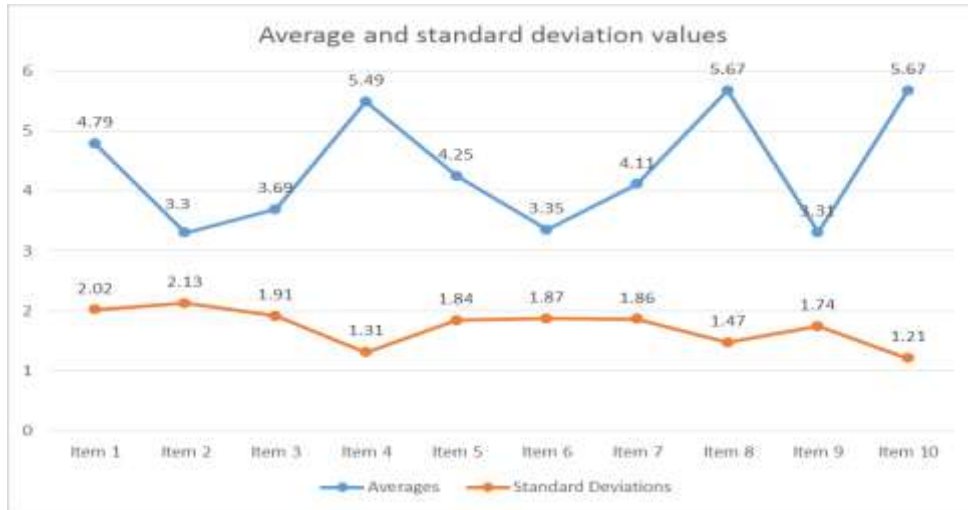
- 61.5% of the participants think that, generally, people have real prejudices against Roma
- 56.3% of the respondents admit that the stereotypes about Roma are affecting them personally
- 56.3% of the subjects are not worry that their behaviours could be interpreted as being specific for Roma, and
- 55.2% are not thinking frequently to their ethnic appurtenance when interacting with the others

### ***Ethnic stigma - zones of comfort, discomfort and neutrality***

I used the *alpha* coefficient (Cronbach) for measuring the internal consistency for the 10 items that operationalize the concept of stigma consciousness. In the case of our sample the value of *alpha* coefficient for the 10 items is 0.84, which points out to a good internal consistency of the set of tested items. For checking the unidimensionality of the stigma consciousness construct I have done a factor analysis which shows that the first factor has an initial eigen value considerable higher (4.36) than the other items (between 0.27 and 1.17). The first item has 44% of the total variance, which suggests that the scale of the 10 items is unidimensional.

The below Graph 4 presents the sample averages for the 10 items for the 96 participants (Roma men and Roma women). The agreement level of the 10 items was measured on a 7-point Likert scale which takes values ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). As the average values for the answers to the 10 statements are distanced from the value 4 (*Neither agree, nor disagree*), which is the middle neutral point of the scale, it results that the participants have a well-defined position (being in agreement or in disagreement) in regard with the items of the questionnaire. It could be identified three classes of enouncements, depending on their position based on the average value of the answers: 1. Agreement zone; 2. Neutral zone, and 3. Disagreement zone.

Graph 4: Average and standard deviation values for the 10 items



A first class of statements is composed by the three items (4, 8 and 10) which recorded highest values in the agreement zone. What this class of high value items has in common is the fact that in all the three statements the reference is to a majority which is viewed in opposition with Roma minority. The subjects agree that the majority (non Roma population) have stereotypes towards Roma, have problems viewing Roma as their equals, and are judging Roma based on their ethnicity. In general, Roma participants in the survey are thinking that non Roma people are placed in a confrontational position toward them, have prejudices against Roma, and treat them discriminatory in every day interactions. All these attitudes and behaviours seems to be the result of perceiving Roma as a group placed entirely on an inferior position in the societal hierarchy. The positioning of this class of the three statements on the agreement zone of Likert scale indicates a high ethnic stigma consciousness of the subjects of the sample.

The items 5 and 7 are placed in the neutral part of the Likert scale, the subjects being neither in agreement nor disagreement with them. The two statements in the neutral category have in common the fact of being descriptors of the interactions among people. In the item 5 is taken into consideration the interaction between Roma men and Roma women and their non Roma counterparts, while in the item 7 are considered people in general. This placing of the two items in the neutral zone of the scale shows that for the respondents, the interactions with other people are directed by neutrality and not by stigma consciousness. In other words, stigma consciousness of Roma activists from our

sample is not spontaneously updated in their interactions with non Roma (men and women). This result should be carefully treated given our particular sample structure which consists on Roma people who usually are acquainted in social interactions with non Roma, inclusive in the working environments.

Three items (2, 6 and 9) recorded highest values in the disagreement zone. Items 2 and 6 are strengthening the idea that Roma subjects from the sample have a good self-presentation and self-esteem in their interactions with others. For Roma activists from our sample stigma consciousness is not freely actualised in the relationships with non Roma people. The score obtained for the item 9 is confirming the first class of utterances (agreement zone) and more precisely the idea that our participants are seeing the non Roma majority having prejudices against Roma.

### ***Differences in the sample due to the age and Romani language knowledge***

The percentage of Romani language speakers who are in an agreement with the statement 1 (*Stereotypes about Roma / Roma women affect me personally*) is 15.6%, being two times less than the percentage of the subjects who do not speak Romani language (29.4%). The statement 1 also records different results depending on the subjects' age. Thus, 37.5% of the young subjects (under 35 years) <agree> and <strongly agree> with the statement no.1, while 66.6% of the respondents from the age group 36-45 years are giving the similar answers. In the age group of over 46 years, 57.1% of the subjects also <agree> and <strongly agree> with the first statement. The opinion differences among the age groups suggest that in the age interval of 36-45 years are, comparatively, more persons that felt themselves affected by Roma related stereotypes.

I analyse next the statements 4, 8 and 10, which have averages placed in the agreement zone of the Likert scale. Thus, for the item 4 (*Most people are judging Roma / Roma women on the basis of their ethnicity*) there are no significant differences when the item is cross tabulated with the variables of *Romani language knowledge, age* and having the quality of *Roma activist*.

The analysis of the eight statement (*Most people have a lot more stereotypes towards Roma / Roma women than they actually express*) by the variable *age* shows that in the segment of 36-45 years most of the persons (81.4 %) <agree> and <strongly agree> with the item. In the age interval of up to 35 years, 71.1% of the respondents are placed in the agreement zone and for the age over 46 years, 52.3% of the subjects are in the same situation of agreement. It could be concluded that for the middle age group the ethnic marker is more heavily felt in

shaping the stigma consciousness. The Romani language knowledge and the Roma ethnic activism did not produce significant differences in the case of the eight statement.

### ***The presence of stigma consciousness***

For testing the null hypothesis (that of no relation between ethnic stigma and the subjects from our sample) we have used the *t* test of statistical significance. Therefore, we used the *t* test for comparing the averages for the 10 items with a neutral value (value 4, *neither agree nor disagree*) which would be equivalent with an average of a population which is neutral in relation with stigma consciousness. The aim of *t* test application is to check whether the averages resulted from the sample are statistical significant in relation with the averages of a population that is stigma consciousness neutral. In the Table 1 below we provide the *t* test values for each of the 10 items.

**Table 1**

COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE AVERAGES OF THE 10 ITEMS AND THE NEUTRAL VALUE (value 4, *neither agree nor disagree*) (n=96)

	T	df	P
Item 1	3.839	95	.000
Item 2	-3.198	95	.002
Item 3	-1.603	95	.112
Item 4	11.108	95	.000
Item 5	1.330	95	.187
Item 6	-3.375	95	.001
Item 7	.603	95	.548
Item 8	11.108	95	.000
Item 9	-3.865	95	.000
Item 10	13.484	95	.000

The sample average is statistically significant for the following 7 items from the questionnaire: 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10. For the seven of the tenth items of the questionnaire, at a statistical significance level  $p < 0.05$ , the average of each of them is statistical significantly different in comparison with the average of a population which is hypothetically neutral in regard with the ethnic stigma consciousness. In other words, for the seven of the ten items it could be stated that

there is a relationship between the ethnic stigma consciousness and the respondents from our sample.

For 3 items (3, 5 and 7) the average of the sample is not statistically significant. At a statistical significance level of  $p < 0.05$  for these 3 items the average of the sample is not significantly different from the average of a neutral population in regard with ethnic stigma.

In conclusion, for 7 items (1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10) we can reject the null hypothesis and we can accept the alternative hypothesis, namely that there is a relationship between the ethnic stigma and the sample population of subjects who self-identify themselves as Roma.

***The lack of gender differences in stigma consciousness***

In what follows we will test the main assumption of our research, that the level of ethnic stigma consciousness is higher for Roma women than for Roma men. The null hypothesis assumes that there is no gender differences in regard with ethnic stigma consciousness for the population in our sample. For testing the null hypothesis we choose to apply the *t* test for comparing the averages of the 10 items for the two samples (women and men). The Table 2 below provides the results of applying the *t* test for the independent samples of women and men. I defined with 0 male gender (n=50) and with 1 the female gender (n=46).

I checked the assumption of equal variances in the two samples (women and men) by using the Levene test. As it can be seen in the Table 6 below, for the all 10 items, the test F Levene is not statistically significant for a chosen significance level of  $p < 0.05$ , which implies that the assumption of equal variances is not violated and therefore the equal variances condition is assumed for the *t* test and other associated statistics.

**Table 2**

COMPARISON BETWEEN ROMA MEN AND WOMEN FOR 10 ITEMS WHICH MEASURE THE ETHNIC STIGMA CONSCIOUSNESS (n=50 men and n=46 women)

Item	Average	Dev. std.	<i>t</i>	Df	P
Item 1			.143	94	.887
Men	4.82	2.15			
Women	4.76	1.88			
Item 2			-.581	94	.562
Men	3.18	2.06			

Women	3.43	2.22			
Item 3			-.680	94	.498
Men	3.56	2.01			
Women	3.82	1.80			
Item 4			.390	94	.697
Men	5.54	1.19			
Women	5.43	1.43			
Item 5			-.497	94	.620
Men	4.16	1.82			
Women	4.34	1.87			
Item 6			.684	94	.496
Men	3.48	1.87			
Women	3.21	1.88			
Item 7			1.577	94	.118
Men	4.40	1.86			
Women	3.80	1.83			
Item 8			-.046	94	.963
Men	5.66	1.58			
Women	5.67	1.35			
Item 9			.628	94	.532
Men	3.42	1.77			
Women	3.19	1.72			
Item 10			-.560	94	.577
Men	5.60	1.26			
Women	5.73	1.16			

For all of the 10 items, the *t* test of independence between the averages of the two samples (Roma men and women) is not statistically significant for a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  (Sig. 2-tailed). Consequently, there are no significant differences between the averages of the Roma men and Roma women samples for the checked 10 items. We can therefore reject the main assumption of our research, that of Roma women would have a stigma consciousness higher than Roma men and we have to accept the null hypothesis which state that there are no gender differences in regard with the stigma consciousness of Roma activists from our sample.

### ***Exploring alternative models of data analysis***

I verified whether among the independent variables there could be better predictors than the gender for stigma consciousness. In this regard, the variables

*gender* and *Romani language* were re-coded in dummy variables (0 male, 1 female for the *gender* and 0 speaker, 1 non-speaker for *Romani language*). It was further introduced the first statement (*Stereotypes about Roma / Roma women affect me personally*) as a dependent variable in a multiple regression model, while *gender*, *age*, and *Romani language* (speaking / knowing Romani language) were introduced as independent variables. It results not significant correlations between the dependent variable (statement 1) and the three independent variables. The multiple regression coefficient R was statistically non-significant (0.12), as well as  $RA^2$  (0.016). In the ANOVA model, the combination of the three independent variables (*gender*, *age*, and *Romani language* speaking) does not significantly ( $p=0.692$ ) predict the dependent variable. I performed multiple regression using the same three predictors for the other statements (as dependent variables) and the results were statistically not significant. To sum up, the independent variables from our questionnaire (*gender*, *age*, and *Romani language* speaking) are not appropriate predictors for stigma consciousness of the subjects from the studied sample.

### **Conclusions**

The aim of the research was to verify the existence of stigma consciousness in the specific case of the participants from the sample, which consist mainly from Roma activists. The second assumption of the research was that Roma women would have a higher stigma consciousness than Roma men due to the fact that women encounter the stigma of ethnicity, which is doubled by gender associated stigma. Data analysis shows that stigma consciousness is present among Roma participants from the sample, but there are not significant differences between Roma women and Roma men regarding ethnic stigma consciousness.

Conclusions of the research have to be seen with caution due to the relative small size of the sample (96 cases) and due to its specific characteristics, more precisely the homogeneity of socio-demographic attributes of the subjects (level of education, occupation, Internet access and level of usage, and status of Roma activist). Given the specific sample characteristics, the present empirical study may pave the way for future research to explore the extent to which acceding to higher statuses in the social hierarchy affects the Roma stigma consciousness.

Higher than average values for the questionnaire items are recorded when subjects report not to themselves (to their behaviour in interactions with other people) but to others, to a majority or to a generalized other. In this respect, there





is a high degree of agreement among Roma activists from the sample on the existence of a majority, who is perceived as hostile, discriminatory and prejudiced against Roma. Ethnic stigma is perceived as a failure of the majority to relate to Roma throughout their individual attributes (which are general attributes defining any person) and it is seen also as resulting from the majority' obstinacy to relate to and to consider Roma by the group characteristics rather than by their individual attributes. Most of the subjects consider that real prejudices against Roma advanced by the majority are more numerous than expressed. There is a belief among respondents that the real images of Roma people held by non-Roma majority are worse than those reflected in the public discourse or those which manifest in interactions with Roma.

In describing the Roma ethnic stigma it could be advanced two explanations that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the one hand, the deepness of the ethnic stigma could be explained as a result of the sometime racist attitudes of the majority population and, on the other hand, by the internalization of ethnic stigma by the Roma themselves. There are numerous empirical studies (in Romania, as well as in other European countries) which depict the prejudiced and general negative attitudes of the majority towards Roma. These studies provide evidence and confirm the discriminatory behaviour against Roma in areas such as education, access to public health services, housing and access to employment.

Beyond the high social status of the subjects, it is possible that the status of Roma activist implies a specific management of the ethnic stigma consciousness, which facilitates the interethnic relations. Although the subjects are conscious of the (negative) stereotypes of their own group, they may not consider relevant these stereotypes in their interaction with members of the out-group. Roma subjects from our sample tend to believe that their stigmatized ethnic status plays a relatively less important role when interacting with non-Roma. The level of stigma for our subjects is manageable and allow them to have unproblematic interethnic relationships. Although the subjects of our sample have relatively high expectations to be stereotypically treated and stigmatized when interact with members of the majority group, these expectations do not influence their behavior when initiate interactions or when respond to the interactions initiated by others.

The lack of differences in stigma consciousness between Roma women and men could be eventually explained by the high level of education among the women from the sample. The high level of education (university and post-graduate) of women counterbalances the influence of gender on ethnic stigma consciousness. It might be speculated that Roma women entering the field of Roma activism may

diminish as well the stigma associated with their Roma ethnicity. In other words, a good self-image of Roma women, which resulted from their high level of education and activism, put them into a position of equality with Roma men with the same level of education.

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