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Abigail Spear
Bless Your Heart but Hide the
Children: The Effect of
Entertainment Media Depictions of
Social Workers on Public Opinions
About Social Work as a Profession

ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of entertainment media depictions of social workers on public opinions of social work as a profession. Specifically, this study focused on the power of short clips depicting a social work character to influence participants' views of social work as positive or negative and the social desirability of social work as a profession. One hundred and nineteen participants viewed a short video clip, which included a positive, negative, or no depiction of a social worker. Participants then completed a survey assessing positive or negative attitudes towards social workers and the desirability of social work as a profession. The video clips were found to have no significant influence on participants' responses to the survey. Participant responses on the positive/negative subscale were found to be significantly more negative than neutral, and participants aged 18-40 years were found to be significantly less likely to see a social worker if they wanted therapy

Bless Your Heart but Hide the Children:
The Effect of Entertainment Media Depictions of Social Workers on Public Opinions
About Social Work as a Profession

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work

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2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Debra Hull for her excellent research class, guidance, and encouragement. Her genuine enthusiasm for my topic and enjoyable research class enabled me to enter the thesis writing process with a positive attitude.

I also wish to thank Susan Winston for her mentorship, guidance, and continued encouragement throughout, not only the thesis process, but my graduate education as a whole. She went far above and beyond the responsibilities of a first year supervisor in her support, interest, and lunches.

My gratitude also extends to my thesis advisor Mary Beth Averill, for guiding me through the thesis process, improving my academic writing, and reminding me that it is ok to be human.

I wish to thank my friends and family, especially my fiancé Michael Erickson whose unwavering support and willingness to feed me contributed greatly to my survival. To my roommates at 3734, thank you for putting up with my piles of articles and endless discussions about my topic. Thank you to my parents for their enthusiastic support, especially my father who reads what I write and always thinks it is great.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Social work has an image problem. The literature describes the public's perception of social work as confused and uninformed, while those who work in the field balk at defining, limiting, or clarifying the parameters of the profession (Olin, 2013). Although Zugazaga, Surette, Mendez, and Otto (2006) determined that the public held a relatively positive view of social workers, they also found that, since most people had no direct experience with social work, the media heavily informed their perception of the field. The public's reliance on media to inform them about social work is particularly troubling because that same study found that media depictions of social work were predominately negative (Zugazaga et al., 2006). This study explored whether current entertainment media portrayals of social workers, either negative or positive, influenced public attitudes towards social work and/or the social desirability of social work as a profession.

Social work professionals as referenced in this study are defined as social workers that are licensed to practice in the United States. Though licensure is granted to individuals at a state level, general national requirements include graduation from an accredited social work program and successfully passing a national examination (Karger, 2012). Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) are not differentiated in this study. For this study professional social work refers to both social work professionals and national professional social work organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

Most literature on social work and public perception has focused on how the news media portrays social work and the stereotypes those portrayals perpetuate (Condie, Hanson, Lang, Moss, & Kane, 1978; Jabeen, 2014; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Reid & Misener, 2001; Saint-Jacques, Villeneuve, Turcotte, Drapeau, & Ivers, 2012). These studies include some analysis of how the news media influence the public's opinion of child welfare workers. In these sensationalized reports, social workers are seen as either unable to protect innocent children, or as taking distressed children away from innocent parents (Gough, 1996). In either case, the social worker is almost always portrayed negatively.

Testing the possible influence of current entertainment media depictions of social workers is important because currently there is little research into the impact of entertainment media and fictionalized portrayals of social workers on the public's perception of the profession. One exception is an analysis of social work characters in movies from 1938 to 1999 by Valentine and Freeman (2002) who found that social workers were most commonly represented as white, middle-class women, who worked in child welfare, and were likely incompetent. Negative portrayals of social work are extremely problematic for social work as a profession, as the media influence worker retention, funding, policy, and recruitment. Additionally, studies of the social work profession tend to overlook the influence that the media have on public opinion (Henderson & Franklin, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, *news media* is defined as any type of media story representing itself as factual. Differentiating types and legitimacy of news media is irrelevant to this study. *Entertainment media* refers to entirely fictional media.

For social work practice, knowing that the media might have influenced how first time clients view social work as a profession, and what assumptions they might hold about the social

worker themselves, would be helpful when beginning to form a therapeutic alliance. An understanding of possible biases held by potential clients is especially salient as MSW graduates face competition in the job market from marriage and family therapists, counseling psychologists, and other human service and mental health providers (Karger, 2012). A saturated job market where social workers are undifferentiated from possibly less qualified social service workers is part of why social work professionals need to change their public image.

Expecting a boom in social work jobs, there has been a significant increase in the number of social work education programs. Unfortunately enrollment in social work programs is failing to meet up with program growth (Karger, 2012). The extent to which media portrayal of the social work profession might impact enrollment is unknown, however current MSW students' perceptions are that media coverage is mostly negative and misrepresentative of the wide range of opportunities the profession offers (Zugazaga et al., 2006). The literature does indicate that common stereotypes about social work have remained prevalent over decades, but does not address how they are being reinforced and what can be done to alter that narrative (Condie et al., 1978; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004).

My study asks if viewing a fictional depiction of a social worker influences the participant's view of the social work profession, and if the current representations of social workers in entertainment media are strong enough to influence public opinion. A significant difference in participants' opinions based on which clip they view would suggest that current portrayals of social workers in entertainment media have the power to change social work's image problem. No significant difference in participants' responses based on which clip they view would indicate that the typical depiction of a social worker in entertainment media is not powerful enough to influence public opinion. Should the clips have no significant influence, an

increased awareness of, and participation in, the creation and portrayal of social work characters could be warranted.

This study uses one common episode of a network television show and manipulates the depiction of the social work character for each study condition. The ability of this depiction to influence public attitudes and perceptions of social work as a profession might determine how drastic a proactive use of entertainment media would need to be in order to influence public perception. One hundred and nineteen participants viewed one of three video clips: video A showed a typical social work character depiction, video B depicted the social work character negatively, and video C depicted no social worker and acted as a control. Participants then completed a survey assessing attitudes about social work and opinions of social work's social desirability as a profession.

For this study, *attitude towards social work* was defined using common stereotypes about social workers. *Professional/Social desirability* was defined as how socially desirable the public views a career in social work or social work as a profession. Questions assessing participants' opinions were compiled into scales for each variable.

The next chapter reviews the relevant literature and expands on the importance of this study. Chapter III describes the method used to test these hypotheses and Chapter IV outlines my findings. Finally, Chapter V discusses the implications of the findings and presents a practical next step in this area of research.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

In this literature review I will explore the ways in which the media influence the public's professional esteem of social work, and why, as a profession, social work should attempt to change the way it is portrayed. In the first section I will examine what the previous literature has identified as the public's perception and social desirability of professional social work. Next I will identify ways in which the media have contributed to how social work is perceived. Third, I will use Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to explain why the media might be so influential when it comes to public perception.

Public Perception of Social Work

Social work as a profession is still relatively young, and the many roles that a social worker might fulfill continue to grow (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004). Social work has never been seen as a particularly desirable profession by the general public, despite its status as one of the helping professions (Fall, Levitov, Jennings, & Eberts, 2000; Kaufman & Raymond, 1996). The public has rarely, if ever, embraced the field of social work (Kaufman & Raymond, 1996). Even with the establishment of NASW in 1955, social work has struggled to increase its desirability as a career and find professional esteem among the public (Olin, 2013).

Attempts to explain the difficulty social work has in establishing itself as prominent profession emphasize the broad roles of social workers and the dual commitment of the field to service delivery and social reform (Andrews, 1987). The range of professional roles under the

title of social worker makes it difficult to create a unified definition of who exactly a social worker is (Olin, 2013). NASW has defined social workers as

Graduates of schools of social work (in the U.S.A. with either bachelor's, master's or doctoral degrees), who use their knowledge and skills to provide social services for clients (who may be individuals, families, groups, communities, organizations, or society in general). Social workers help people increase their capacities for problem solving and coping, and they help them obtain needed resources, facilitate interactions between individuals and between people and their environments, make organizations responsible to people, and influence social policies. Social workers may work directly with clients addressing individual, family and community issues, or they may work at a systems level on regulations and policy development, or as administrators and planners of large social service systems (p. 32).

This definition does little to establish parameters around which a professional social image can be truly promoted. The profession is also conflicted over its commitment to both social service and social reform. Committing to preserving the status quo, and therefore securing prestige and resources, is in direct opposition to the commitment of social change, which risks the loss of prestige and resources (Andrews, 1987). This internal struggle corresponds with how the public image of social work is viewed.

How the public perceives social work and what constitutes general knowledge about the profession has been of interest to social workers since the creation of NASW and social work's transition from friendly visitor to professional worker (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004). Condie et al. (1978) used multiple choice and true/false questions in their survey of 250 respondents from

Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. Their questions combined facts about the social work profession as well as common stereotypes associated with social work to assess how the public viewed social work. After conducting their analysis, Condie et al. compared their findings to similar studies from the 1950s and found an increase in the public's awareness of social work roles.

Kaufman and Raymond (1996) collected data from 452 adult residents of Alabama on public knowledge and perception of social work. Respondents were generally knowledgeable about basic social work practice, but were far less knowledgeable about the education and credentialing necessary to become a social worker. Though Kaufman and Raymond's research is often cited in the study of public perception of social work, it is important to note that the authors acknowledged the low visibility and professionalization of social work in Alabama at the time and recommended a more geographically diverse follow-up study.

LeCroy and Stinson (2004) continued and expanded the work of Condie et al. (1978) and Kaufman and Raymond (1996), repeating many of their measures regarding public knowledge and perception of social work, as well as adding a dimension assessing the source of respondents' attitudes and how those attitudes and beliefs impacted their valuation of social work as a profession. Similar to the studies they emulated, LeCroy and Stinson (2004) found that the public had a general understanding of what a social worker might do, but lacked specific detail. None of the participants in these studies were able to accurately identify the variety of social work roles, indicating a concerning gap in the public's knowledge of the field.

LeCroy and Stinson (2004) also compared their results to those of Condie et al. (1978). Many of their findings were similar, showing that the public's knowledge about social work has remained relatively stagnant despite the growth and expansion of the field (Condie et al., 1978; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004). Both studies also concluded that the public's view on social work was

generally positive, contradicting Kaufman and Raymond (1996) who concluded that attitudes towards social work were overall somewhat negative. A review of the literature indicated a split in findings between generally positive and mildly negative public attitudes towards social work, resulting in the conclusion that public opinion was fairly neutral and far from definitive on either side (Condie et al., 1978; Fall et al., 2000; Kaufman & Raymond, 1996; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Zugazaga et al., 2006). Ultimately, views of professional social work as either negative or positive matter far less than the public's confidence that social workers are able and qualified to help with mental health and social issues. This confidence is dependent on public understanding of social work as a professional field, what level of education a social worker must attain, and what the credentialing process is to become a social worker.

LeCroy and Stinson (2004) and Condie et al. (1978) compared their results to previous studies and found an increase in respondents' endorsement of many common stereotypes about social work. Statements such as "social workers take advantage of the government" and "social workers have the right to take children from their parents" had significant increases in the number of respondents who believed them (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004, p. 169). Despite the increases in stereotypes, LeCroy and Stinson (2004), and Condie et al. (1978) found public perception to be more positive than negative.

LeCroy and Stinson (2004) found that social work does not share the same level of esteem as other helping professions. Despite most respondents' recognition that social workers were trained in psychotherapy, less than one half said that they would choose to see a social worker, even if the fees were lower than those of a psychologist (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004). These findings echo those of Condie et al. (1978), who reported that 94 percent of the sample stated they would be reluctant to seek help from a social worker. In the case of social work's

status as a profession, the lukewarm attitude represented in these studies is not helpful. Though the public might associate social work with helping and therefore view it as generally positive, the literature indicates that public esteem for social work as a profession is as lacking now as it was in 1978.

The social work profession's lack of social desirability is evident as schools of social work struggle to recruit students (Dennison, Poole, & Qaqish, 2007). Coupled with the increase in negative stereotypes found by LeCroy and Stinson (2004), the conclusion must be that a vaguely positive association is not good enough for social work to increase its social desirability as a profession. In a study comparing public confidence between different mental health professions, Fall et al. (2000) found that social work was consistently ranked lowest in each scenario. The low ranking of the social work profession is particularly concerning as Fall et al. also found that social work was the mental health profession most frequently sought out and utilized by participants who had previous mental health services. One explanation for the discrepancy between rank and utilization is the presentation of social work compared to the other mental health professions. Participants were asked to compare licensed clinical psychologists, master's-level licensed professional counselors, doctoral-level licensed professional counselors, psychiatrists, and social workers. Other than psychiatrists, who are widely known to be medical doctors, social work was the only profession presented that had no specification of the level of education or credentialing the worker obtained. The lack of education or degree specification for social workers is an indication that even other mental health professionals lack respect for, and knowledge about professional social work. A lack of public confidence in social work lessens its professional credibility in the eyes of other professionals and limits increases in social desirability (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004).

One issue not discussed by Dennison et al. (2007) is how the influx of social work programs has influenced admission statistics. Though common stereotypes and misinformation about social work job opportunities are likely the major contributors to the decrease in enrollment, the substantial jump in credentialed social work programs in the last 30 years must also be considered. The number of credentialed MSW programs in the United States has increased 98% since 1985 (Karger, 2012). Enrollment in social work programs has not kept pace with their creation. Karger (2012) attributed the increase of social work programs to universities viewing social work programs as a cost effective way to expand their course offerings, since social work programs don't require expensive laboratories, equipment, or research grants. Following Karger's logic, increasing interest in pursuing a career in social work is not a major contributing factor to the creation of these programs. Low student interest in social work programs could be a symptom of how internalized negative social work stereotypes are and the public perception of social worker competence.

Increasing public knowledge about social work education and credentialing standards, as well as the many professional avenues social work offers, could increase public confidence in social workers' ability to treat even severe mental health issues (Kaufman & Raymond, 1996). Currently, the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), requires social workers to have at least a bachelor's degree. Clinical social workers must have a master's degree and be credentialed in the state in which they practice (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Condie et al. (1978), Kaufman and Raymond (1996), and LeCroy and Stinson (2004) all showed that public knowledge and valuation of social workers has not increased with the level of education, credentialing, and licensing, required as a social worker. One factor that contributes to

the public's lack of knowledge about the social work profession is confusion about education and credentialing standards. The BLS definition of a professional social worker was not provided until 1994 (Hodge, 2004). Confusion and a lack of a clear definition of what constitutes professional social work leads to the public lumping all social services workers under the title social worker, perpetuating misinformation and low public esteem (Olin, 2013).

NASW, as a cohesive national association, is the logical organization to take an active role in changing the social status of social work. Social work depends on professional organizations such as NASW to define and regulate the educational standards and ethical commitments social workers must obtain and exhibit. An extension of this responsibility is informing the public of these standards and commitments. Additionally, because requirements and responsibility for licensure are dictated at a state level, social work professionals lack an important national cohesiveness and reciprocity that other helping professions enjoy (Karger, 2012).

Concern for the public image of a profession is not purely cosmetic or ego based. Professional prestige affects financial support of programs, recruitment of talented workers, policy decisions, and worker morale and efficacy (Dennison et al., 2007; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Olin, 2013). Dennison et al. (2007) found that stereotypes about limited social worker roles and low salaries were the most common reasons college students were not interested in majoring in social work. The common stereotype of the over-worked, under-paid social worker undermines personal interest in the profession. Ruth, Wyatt, Chiasson, Geron, and Bachman (2006) found that participants with a MSW earned a comparable wage to others with similar credentials in helping professions and high rates of employment post graduation. Additionally, participants reported high levels of career satisfaction. Hodge (2004) found that social workers

were more likely than the general public to report improvement in their financial situation.

Though social work is listed as one of the twenty lowest paying professions in the United States, this only perpetuates the stereotype that social workers can only pursue one type of job (Karger, 2012). An average salary, by definition, does not outline what jobs in the field pay what salary or how high or low a wage is possible depending on what area an individual is employed in.

The influence of negative stereotypes about social workers is not limited to professional recruitment; misinformation and lack of confidence or knowledge about professional social work might lead to underutilization of social work programs or services (Kaufman & Raymond, 1996). Participation in services directly impacts the budgets these programs receive, resulting in policies that adversely impact social work practice and a failure to provide services to clients (Olin, 2013). As the public is the main consumer of social work services, raising confidence in professional social work is vital to the success of programs and policies (LeCroy & Stinson, 2004).

Social Work in the Media

In my review of the available literature regarding the public's view of social work, the most commonly cited reason for social work's low public esteem is the depiction of social work in the media (Condie et al., 1978; Dennison et. al., 2007; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Murdach, 2006; Reid & Misener, 2001; Valentine & Freeman, 2002). Yet, research into how the social work profession is depicted in the media is limited, with most studies focusing on the position of public attitudes rather than image content, and an emphasis on news rather than entertainment media (Condie et al., 1978; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004; Olin, 2013; Reid & Misener, 2001; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). Concern over the issue of media representation is unavoidable, given the dominant place of media in everyday life, especially if the representation is inaccurate, or if it

is damaging to vulnerable members of society (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). The literature's focus on news media images is also reasonable, given the media's propensity for sensationalism (Chenot, 2011).

The news media have a long history of influencing social awareness and policy. As early as 1874 news media have been reporting child abuse cases, and these reports have played a significant role in raising awareness of child maltreatment (Gough, 1996; Saint-Jacques et al., 2012). Consequently, the media have had a major impact on the public's perception of what social workers do, as social work is strongly associated with child welfare (Olin, 2013, Zugazaga et al., 2006). News media stories about social work and child welfare have tended to be negative, based on limited or biased information, and can have unintended consequences (Chenot, 2011). Reid and Misener's (2001) analysis of social worker portrayal in news articles found that negative articles were most frequently about social workers in child welfare jobs. Negative articles about social workers in other areas of the profession were far less frequent.

Negative news stories reduce the public's trust in social workers and undermine their confidence in the ability of social workers to help vulnerable people (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). In turn, media coverage often influence how social service agencies allocate resources, and the prioritization of child welfare services over other social concerns, might result from the agency's desire to avoid becoming the next sensationalized negative news story (Zugazaga et al., 2006).

Child welfare is also the most common area of social work depicted by entertainment media. Negative stereotypes promoted by the news are mirrored in and reinforced by the depictions of social workers in entertainment media (Freeman & Valentine, 2004). Valentine and Freeman (2002) identified "the ways in which social workers and social work practice arenas,

such as child welfare, are portrayed in popular culture contribute to the shaping of the public's images of social workers, social work clients, and social problems" (pp. 455-456).

The pervasiveness of an association between social work and child welfare is represented in social work academic literature. Most of the literature exploring how social work is portrayed to and perceived by the public focuses on news media reports and child welfare stories (Chenot, 2011; Gough, 1996; Reid & Misener, 2001; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013; Zugazaga et al., 2006). One result of the literature's focus on child welfare and news media is the amplification of the belief among current social workers that public opinion of social work as a profession is negative, and that news media depicts social workers as predominantly working in the area of child welfare (Zugazaga et al., 2006). The perception that social work is viewed as negative is also common in the few studies analyzing social work characters in entertainment media.

Freeman and Valentine (2004) concluded that

If people believe what they see in the movies, social workers are mostly women, mostly white, middle-class, heterosexual; they mostly work in child welfare, are likely to be incompetent, have a tendency to engage in sexual relationships with clients, mostly work with people living in poverty, and mostly function to maintain the societal status quo. (p. 159)

Contrary to social workers' perceptions and Hollywood depictions, Reid and Misener (2001) found that the single most common news story about social work in the U.S. has to do with direct-service practitioners engaged in some sort of positive helping activity, not a negative report of a social worker engaged in child welfare work.

If the news media report positive social work activities more often than negative instances, than social work's image problem must be based on more than just the number of

stories about social work. All occupations have moments of bad press; the problem is that positive news reports about social work are far less likely to catch the public's attention than negative news reports (Reid & Misener, 2001). Additionally, positive articles about social work tend to be far more pedestrian than positive news articles in other professions.

Negative news about physicians' malpractice can be balanced by stories about successful organ transplants and saving lives in dire circumstances. Unfortunately, a news story about new foster care programs or the help a medical social worker gives to the family of a terminally ill cancer patient doesn't appear to have the same impact on readers that a story about a negligent social worker being tried for the death of a child does (Reid & Misener, 2001). The amount of news media coverage received by an anomalous event, such as social worker malfeasance, is far greater than what is given to less sensational events, influencing public perception (Saint-Jacques et al., 2012).

The impact of negative news media exposure on the image of professional social work is exacerbated by the fact that most information in these cases is confidential (Saint-Jacques et al., 2012). In 1996 the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) enacted the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), which increased privacy protections around individual medical records, including those related to an individual's mental health (United States Department of Health and Human Services, *n.d.*). These protections, in addition to previous patient confidentiality codes, make it illegal for social workers to discuss their clients. Should social workers be involved in situations that lead to negative news media coverage, they are still bound by confidentiality. The other parties involved do not have to adhere to those laws and are therefore allowed to tell their sides of the story to anyone who will listen. This lack of balanced information can skew news media coverage of such events, with the

personal ideologies of the journalists and information provided by the opposing parties being presented as factual (Gough, 1996). The limits of confidentiality can also increase the impression that the social worker has something to hide (Chenot, 2011).

The literature on social work and the media does offer solutions to the profession's image problem. The most common solution is that social workers need to educate either journalists, the public, or both, about the profession by correcting stereotypes, and providing information about education and credentialing policies (Chenot, 2011; Gough, 1996; Reid & Misener, 2001; Saint-Jacques et al., 2012; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013; Zugazaga et al., 2006). Tower (2000) took the education solution a step farther, recommending that social work take its image out of the hands of others by creating its own media products. She introduced a media creation curriculum for social work education programs. Though innovative, her curriculum reiterates the common solution of social worker lead education of the public, focusing on providing information about social worker education and credentialing requirements.

The problem with social worker lead education as a solution is the same as the reason why social workers believe that they are more often depicted negatively; negative news stories create a lasting impact in a way that positive stories cannot (Reid & Misener, 2001). The accuracy of the report or the use of scientific facts is less influential than whether or not it is a human-interest story. NASW has tried to act on the recommendation that social workers need to get accurate information to the public. The NASW public education campaign, including public service announcements, consumer websites, advertising, press conferences, and other attempts to make social work more accessible, did not have the power to counteract the negative stories (Zugazaga et al., 2006).

What has been shown to influence perceptions of social work is personal contact with a social worker (Dennison et al., 2007). Unfortunately, the majority of the public, including those who make important policy and funding decisions, will never interact directly with a social worker (Olin, 2013). The continued gap between the reality of social work and how the public perceives social work indicates that it is time for NASW and other professional social work organizations to change their method of counteracting media effects on the perception of social work.

Currently, the majority of research on media effects has been focused on topics where the public has multiple influences and sources of information, both personal and from the media, such as attitudes towards sex, violence, and drug use (Morgan, King, Smith & Ivic, 2010). Though less available, studies assessing topics where the most prevalent, if not only, exposure the public receives is through the media have indicated that media influence on public perception can be powerful (Morgan et al., 2010). Bandura (2001) deconstructed where that power comes from:

During the course of their daily lives, people have direct contact with only a small sector of the physical and social environment. They work in the same setting, travel the same routes, visit the same places, and see the same set of friends and associates.

Consequently, their conceptions of social reality are greatly influenced by vicarious experiences- by what they see, hear, and read- without direct experiential correctives. (p. 271)

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) offers an explanation as to why a public who will never interact with a social worker has an opinion about the social desirability and professionalism of social work at all.

Social Cognitive Theory

In Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), first developed in 1986, Bandura (2001) asserted that, in addition to direct experiential learning, people also learn through a process of vicarious observation of behavioral models. Through the observation of these models, including media figures and fictional characters, people develop rules that guide their own subsequent behaviors. Media consumers are not passive viewers of content; they are active observers, reflecting on and learning from the behavioral models they observe (Zhang & Haller, 2013).

In SCT, observational learning is governed by four sequential processes—attention, retention, production, and motivation—which are further guided by an individual observer's cognitive development and skills (Bandura, 2001; Nabi & Clark, 2008). Cognitive processes of individual observers influence which modeled events will be observed, what meaning will be given to them, and what lasting emotional or motivational impact they will have (Bandura, 2001). Important to note, SCT theorists have not asserted that all observed behaviors would be imitated; personal choice is ultimately the final factor in imitation of learned behavior (Nabi & Clark, 2008). If the observational processes occur, the result is learned information that may or may not be utilized (Johnson, 2013). Observers use their own attitudes, values, and beliefs to interpret observed behaviors as much as they learn from them (Bandura, 2001).

Attention, the first process in the sequence emphasizes the importance of the social and contextual factors surrounding the modeled behavior (Bandura, 2001). Perceptions of the model's attractiveness, relevance, functional need, and affective valence, must be strong enough to capture the observer's attention. Similar to the brain's organization of sensory input, attention is dependent on the strength of the stimulus and how important it is to the observer. In media

depictions of social work, this may indicate why sensationalized negative news reports have more of an impact than pedestrian positive ones.

Retention is the active process of transforming and restructuring information that has been attained into rules and conceptions, which can then be encoded in memory (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2001) stated "People cannot be much influenced by observed events if they don't remember them" (p. 272). The way in which the modeled information is translated into symbolic representations and the cognitive rehearsal of coded information influences how well the individual retains it. The individual's preconceptions and affective states are biasing influences on how the information gets represented. For social work, the influence of preconceptions is especially problematic as the public lacks general knowledge of social work education and credentialing practices (Kaufman & Raymond, 1996). Often the media lumps together many different types of social service workers under the label of social worker. The public then retains whoever had been identified as their symbolic representation of what social work is, accurate or not, likely perpetuating misinformation (Olin, 2013). Entertainment media uses common symbolic conceptions as templates for character portrayal, reinforcing problematic perceptions (Gibelman, 2004).

Production continues the sequence, translating symbolic conceptions into appropriate courses of action (Bandura, 2001). A process of creation and attunement, production occurs when the individual constructs a behavior pattern based on the conceptual model, then, after executing the behavior, compares it to the conception. The pattern is then modified based on the individual's perception of its accurate correspondence with the conception. The pattern of comparison and modification repeats until the individual is satisfied that the pattern adequately

compares to the concept model, and the pattern becomes an acquired course of action (Bandura, 2001).

SCT theorists differentiate between acquisition of a course of action and the performance of that action because people do not perform everything they learn (Bandura, 2001; Nabi & Clark, 2008). Motivation, the last process in the sequence, directly influences performance of observationally learned behavior. People are more likely to exhibit modeled behavior if the result is positive and rewarding. Benefits and detriments experienced by others are observed and influence the performance of a modeled pattern (Bandura, 2001). Relevant to social work, people are motivated by the actions of others who they perceive as similar to them.

A person observing the success of someone he or she views as similar to them will increasingly believe that his or her own actions can produce a similar desired effect and prevent an undesired effect in his or her own life (Bandura, 2001). For example, if an alcoholic is watching a news story about a successful member of Alcoholics Anonymous [AA] and views themselves as similar to the successful member, their belief that they too could be successful in the program will increase, as will their motivation to join. Conversely, if the alcoholic does not personally identify with the AA member, they are less likely to be motivated to join the program.

SCT offers a theoretical explanation for how a person with no direct contact with anyone in the social work profession can have an opinion about it, as well as why positive, professional depictions of social workers cannot undo or neutralize the pervasive negative, less socially desirable representations. Neither a positive news story about social work nor a professionally representative movie character is enough to create a new symbolic representation of what professional social work is. If the viewer experiences repetitive inaccurate representations of

social work, his or her internalization of those representations creates a reality for that individual where that depiction becomes authentic (Lee, Bichard, Irely, Walt, & Carlson, 2009).

Though SCT is useful for understanding why stereotypical depictions of the social work profession are so resistant to change, it is limited in its ability to offer a solution to social work's image problem. Historically, social work has been reactive, rather than proactive, waiting until the media has created a negative image then reacting to that image (Zugazaga et al., 2006). The new negative image reinforces the already present symbolic conception and offers no motivation to change the established behavior pattern. The commonly proposed proactive solution is the education of the public through social worker directed and produced information media. Though important, education and information solutions do not address the fact that media viewers are self-selecting and have a propensity to choose human-interest stories over facts, nor does it address the need for repetition as a catalyst for changing perceptions (Bandura, 2001; Reid & Misener, 2001; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013).

Despite a propensity for sensationalism, the news media play an important role in the development of public policies and protections (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). Unfortunately the majority of media induced policy changes occur in the aftermath of a crisis. Chenot (2011) proposed that the time in between crises could be utilized by proactive reform and collaboration of social workers and the media. The reality of the news media world, where output is regulated by money, time, competition, and politics, creates a challenge for those who want to augment social work's approach to their less than desirable professional image (Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013). Zugazaga et al. (2006) acknowledged that for social work "to not promote itself in the media is to run the risk of becoming stereotyped and irrelevant" (p. 633). The current focus on

utilizing news media and information campaigns as the proactive solution to social work's public relations issues does not take into account the nature of news media or media consumers.

News and information are not effective motivations for the public to change their retained symbolic conceptions and production of devaluing behavior patterns, therefore social work professionals trying to influence public perception must change the way they use the media.

Summary

As this review has shown, the majority of the research into social work and the media have focused on news media effects and information based solutions. Public opinion is that social work is fairly neutral and its low professional status makes it undesirable as a career option, resulting in falling program enrollment numbers. A dramatic change in how the public perceives social work is necessary and it is time for professional social work organizations to refocus their public relation efforts. Entertainment media, specifically television, might offer a solution salient enough to change the public's observational learning experience.

Entertainment media has not been researched as a possible platform to inform and educate the public. The omission of entertainment media from previous research is problematic, as entertainment television has often been often cited as the most powerful media platform (Gibelman, 2004). The messages and images entertainment television portrays, especially those repeated week after week, tend to have a lasting influence on public perception (Gibelman, 2004). Primetime television is full of series that center on professionals such as law enforcement, teachers, hospital workers, and firemen, yet social workers are absent from the spotlight. Many shows are set in facilities, such as hospitals or police stations, where social workers are actively employed. Omissions of regular social work characters reinforce the public perception that social work jobs are limited to child welfare or agency work.

Currently there is a gap in the literature around how social work is depicted in entertainment media and how those depictions influence public perception. This study is a first step in determining the efficacy of this direction. Before an organized effort to increase representations of social workers in entertainment media can begin, it is necessary to review the few available representations and determine if and how they are influencing public perception of social work.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The following chapter describes the purpose of this quantitative study and the methodology used to conduct this research. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine how an entertainment media depiction of a social work character might influence the public's positive or negative opinions about social workers and the social desirability of the social work profession. This study built upon and expanded findings from previous studies such as Kaufman and Raymond (1996) and LeCroy and Stinson (2004). These studies had contradictory findings in regard to the public's positive or negative opinions; LeCroy and Stinson (2004) found that public perceptions of social work tended to be mildly positive, while Kaufman and Raymond (1996) found public perception was mildly negative. Both studies found the social desirability of social work as a career was low. The present study expanded on the previous research on positive or negative opinions by introducing entertainment media as a possible influential variable. Beyond furthering the research into valence, this study emphasized social desirability as an equally important factor influencing public perception of social work.

Research into how public attitudes and beliefs about social work are formed found that personal contact with a social worker is the most influential factor (Dennison et al., 2007). Unfortunately, the majority of the public will never interact directly with a social worker (Olin, 2013). Thus, the media have the widest sphere of influence on public knowledge and perception of social work (Tower, 2000).

This study presented entertainment media representation as a possible new solution to address the discrepancy between personal contact with a social worker and news media influence on the public's perception of social work and social work's professional desirability. The present study explored the following questions: Does an entertainment media clip influence the viewer's qualitative assessment of the valence of professional social work? Does an entertainment media clip influence the viewer's perception of the profession's social desirability?

Participants

This study was conducted using a quantitative method and participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Issues of diversity in responded location and demographic diversity were addressed through the use of social media sites such as facebook and reddit (see Appendix A). Additionally, cards with information about the survey were distributed throughout the city of Seattle on community message boards, at coffee shops, and at public libraries (see Appendix A). Participation was open to any individual over the age of 18 who was not a social worker or a social work student and had been born in or currently lived in the United States. Data collection commenced upon approval from the Smith College School for Social Work's Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix B) after on review request (see Appendix C). One hundred and nineteen individuals participated in this study. Text box demographic questions were included to assess the diversity of the sample, including age, gender identity, racial or ethnic identifications, and current city (see Appendix D). All participants gave informed consent (see Appendix E).

Method

Data was collected using the research website Qualtrics. Before beginning the study, participants were guided through qualification and informed consent pages. If potential

participants did not qualify or consent, they were thanked for their time and their participation was terminated. If they qualified and consented to participate, they were then asked for demographics. Following the demographics page, each participant was randomly presented with a link to one of three privately hosted youtube videos. Each video was an edited version of an episode of the television show Flashpoint. Video A contained a social worker character in a role typical to entertainment media, a short, basically positive depiction. Video B contained the same social worker character, but he was shown to be the villain of the episode. Video C had the social work character edited out completely and was the control video.

Which video was presented to whom was assigned by the Qualtrics randomization logic embedded in the website. After viewing the video, the participant proceeded to the survey questions (See Appendix D). The survey questions were combined into two subscales. The positive/negative perception scale consisted of 15 questions ($\alpha = .73$) based on questions used by Kaufman and Raymond (1996) and LeCroy and Stinson (2004). The professional/social desirability scale consisted of 13 questions ($\alpha = .74$) based on literature outlining what makes a career attractive to potential members (Laura, 2013; LeCroy & Stinson, 2004). Survey questions were presented to the participant in an order randomized by Qualtrics logics. After finishing the survey participants were thanked for their time and their participation was concluded.

Data Analysis

The research questions presented above were tested using inferential statistics. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run for each subscale as the dependent variable and the video watched as the independent variable. A one-sample t-test was conducted for the positive/negative perception scale with the neutral answer “neither agree nor disagree” as the

dependent variable. An independent samples t-test was run with the question “I would see a social worker if I wanted therapy” as a dependent variable.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

This study evaluated how effective current depictions of social workers in entertainment media are at influencing public opinion about social work and the social work profession's social desirability. Participants viewed one of three entertainment media video clips representing a typical depiction of a social worker, a negative depiction of a social worker or a control video clip with no social worker depicted. Participants' then answered a 28 question survey designed to assess how positive or negative their views of social work are as well as how socially desirable they believe the profession of social work to be.

First, participant demographics, including age and gender identity, are presented. Next, findings from analyzing which video watched impacted survey responses are organized into two categories, positive/negative attitudes towards social work, and social desirability of social work as a profession. Third, the two personal opinion questions are examined more closely. Last, results indicating a correlation between participants' answers for the positive/negative attitudes scale and the professional social desirability scale are reported.

Participant Demographics

The data from 119 participants (31 male, 88 female) were used for this study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 74 ($M=41.69$, $SD=15.28$). Thirty-nine point nine percent of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 30. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three testing conditions with 34 viewing video A, 42 viewing video B, and 43 viewing video C.

Positive/Negative Attitudes Scale

This scale was created by grouping questions related to how positive or negative the participant's view of social work was. Questions created from stereotypes and information about social work, i.e., "Social workers intrude in private family issues" and "Social workers follow a code of ethics" were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree). Negatively phrased questions, i.e., "Social workers are incompetent," were later reverse coded. There was no statistically significant difference between video condition groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(2,116) = .424$, $p = .655$). See table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Positive/Negative Attitudes Scale

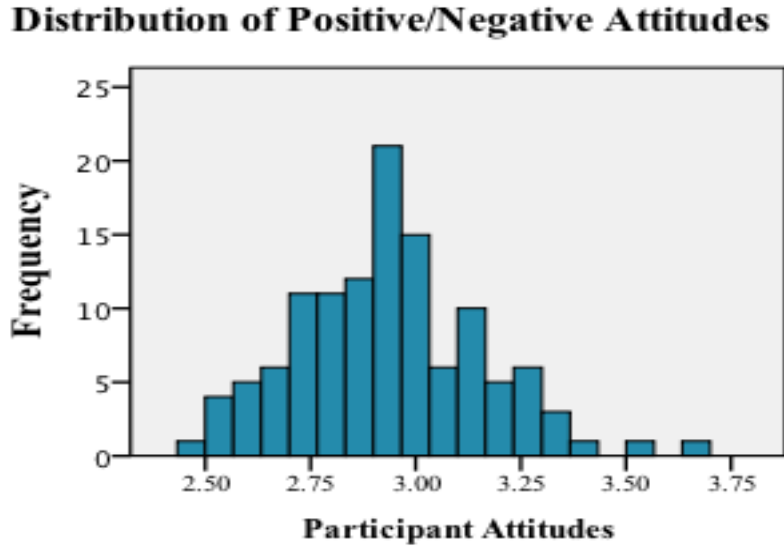
Condition	N	M	SD
Typical	34	2.96	.24
Negative	42	2.92	.21
Control	43	2.93	.22
Total	119	2.94	.22

Note. Typical=Video A; Negative=Video B; Control=Video C

A one-sample t-test was conducted to determine if participants' positive/negative attitudes towards social work were significantly different than the neutral value of 3 on the likert-type scale. Participants' positive/negative attitudes ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .22$) were significantly lower than the neutral answer, $t(118) = -3.17$, $p = .002$. See figure 1.

Figure 1

Distribution of Positive/Negative Attitudes



Professional Social Desirability Scale

This scale was created by grouping questions assessing how socially desirable the participants believed professional social work to be. Questions were created from information about what makes a career desirable, and the social desirability of social work i.e., “Creativity is encouraged in social work jobs”, and “Social work is a positive career choice.” Participants answered the questions using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree). Negatively phrased questions, i.e. “Social workers are not valued by society” were later reverse coded. There was no statistically significant difference between video condition groups as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F(2,116) = .782, p = .460$). See table 2.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Professional/Social Desirability Scale

Condition	N	M	SD
Typical	34	3.26	.42
Negative	42	3.34	.25
Control	43	3.34	.29
Total	119	3.32	.32

Note. Typical=Video A; Negative=Video B; Control=Video C

Personal Opinion Questions

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the independent variable question “I would see a social worker if I wanted therapy” for participants ages 18-40 and 41-74. There was a significant difference in the mean score for the age group 18-40 (M= 2.33, SD=1.02) and the age group 40-74 (M= 2.75, SD= 1.06); $t(117) = 2.18, p = .031$ indicating that participants aged 18-40 were significantly less likely to see a social worker if they wanted therapy.

Summary

In short, which video clip was viewed had no significant influence on participants’ attitude towards social work or views on social work’s social desirability as a profession. Participant’s attitudes towards social work were significantly more negative than neutral. Additionally, participants aged 18-40 years were significantly less likely to see a social worker if they wanted therapy. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study sought to examine the influence of entertainment media on the public's perceptions of social workers. Specifically, this study tested if a short clip of a social worker from entertainment television would influence how participants answered questions about how positively or negatively they thought social workers are and how socially desirable they found social work as a career to be. This study found that the video clips had no significant influence on participants' answers in either category.

In this section I will review and discuss my findings and how they relate to the current literature. Next I will consider the limitations of my study. The third section will explore this study's implications for social work practice. Last I will make recommendations for future research.

Major Findings

This study did find that participants' attitudes towards social work were significantly negative, replicating the findings of Kaufman and Raymond (1996), but contradicting the findings of LeCroy and Stinson (2004) and Condie et al. (1978). My results are unsurprising as all three studies concluded that attitudes towards social workers were generally neutral, and whatever directionality occurred was influenced by the public narrative about social work at the time as well as how educated participants were about social work. The common trend of neutrality is reflected in my lack of significant effects from media clips.

I focused on the question “I would see a social worker if I wanted therapy” as it compared to the age of the participants to evaluate what demographic might benefit from the introduction of social work characters in entertainment media. I found that participants aged 18-40 years were significantly less likely than other participants to see a social worker if they were in need of therapy. This query was in response to Fall et al.’s (2000) finding that participants consistently ranked their confidence in social work lowest among mental health professions, despite being the most commonly utilized mental health profession. My finding that participants under forty were significantly less likely to see a social worker if they wanted therapy indicates that there is more to Fall et al.’s findings that social workers were the lowest ranked helping professional, than simply professional definition. Determining why the 18-40 year old demographic is less likely to choose a social worker if they wanted therapy is one step in determining how to improve public perception of social work.

The main focus of my study was whether the entertainment media clips viewed by participants could influence their perceptions of social work. My results indicated that current depictions of social work in entertainment media are not salient enough to significantly change public opinion about social work. These results can be examined through many different lenses.

Freeman and Valentine (2004) found that the majority of entertainment media depictions of social workers followed a familiar stereotype, depicting a middle class woman working in the area of child protection. My study deviated from this stereotype, by using a clip of a male social worker working with an adult with psychosis as my typical depiction. Though I chose to use this depiction to avoid evoking a stereotypical response, possibly the deviance of this particular social worker from what participants might have expected caused confusion or increased neutrality in the participants.

My lack of significant results could also corroborate Reid and Misener (2001)'s finding that depictions of social workers need to be sensational to influence public perception. The short clips did not have the salience to influence participants' perceptions, either positively or negatively. A deeper examination of the influence of sensationalism on the public's perception of social work would need to incorporate clips that are much more emotionally powerful than those I used.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) offers other explanations as to why my findings had no significance. SCT is based on the participants' repetitive observations and internal valuations of the media depictions. The media clips presented were not sufficient to begin or perpetuate the process of challenging existing perceptual models of social work. A true test of the ability of SCT to influence public perception of social work would need to be longitudinal.

My study explored a way entertainment media might influence public opinions about social work. The lack of significance indicates that clips of social workers in entertainment media do not have the power to influence public opinion, negatively or positively.

Study Limitations

Sample. Though the sample size (n=119) was large, 87% (n=109) participants identified as white and 64% (n=76) listed the Seattle, Washington, area as their current area of residence. Similar to Kaufman and Raymond (1996), whose participants were mostly white and from specific parts of Alabama, the demographics of my study limit the generalizability of my findings. My study's skewed racial and geographic representation is most likely due to the use of snowball sampling to find participants.

Media Clips. One of the major limitations of this study was the lack of entertainment media depictions of social workers to use for media clips. In researching depictions of social

work in entertainment media for this study, I found very few depictions to choose from and that most social work characters are peripheral, one episode characters, used as either a foil or an obstacle for a main character. The uniformity of social work character depictions were not unexpected as Henderson and Franklin (2007) found similar patterns when analyzing the occurrence of social work characters in soap operas. These one-dimensional, stereotypical characters, in addition to subjects of sensationalized news reports are who public consumers of entertainment media use when forming opinions about social work.

The lack of available social work depictions influenced how I constructed the clips used in my study. Possibly the clips themselves were weak and more salient clips could have had an influence on participants' responses. I also chose to avoid using clips depicting particular stereotypes about social work. Had I chosen to use a more stereotypical representation of a social worker, participants might have connected to that depiction faster and been more readily influenced. The choice to avoid a stereotypical depiction was intended to reduce possible confounding effects created by those stereotypes.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The finding that participants 18-40 years old were significantly less likely to agree for the question "I would see a social worker if I wanted therapy" has negative implications for social work practice. Participants under the age of forty were significantly less likely to choose to see a social worker for therapy. If the results for participants under forty are expanded to a general assessment of public inclination to choose social workers as therapists, it could indicate a downturn in preferential utilization of social work trained therapists. It is now important to determine why this under forty demographic was less inclined to choose a social work trained

therapist and how professional social work organizations can work to address the issues determined.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was only the beginning of a necessary exploration of how entertainment media depictions of social workers influence public perception of social work. This study found that current entertainment media depictions of social work are not going to change public opinion about social work and deeper investigation into the effects of entertainment media on public perception of social work is necessary. The next step should be an investigation into the influence of long-term social work characters on public perception. This would also offer researchers an opportunity to test the effect of parasocial interaction theory in relation to public opinions of social work. The introduction of a long-term social work character on a popular television show would be the ideal way to test these theories. The creation of a relationship between professional social work organizations and entertainment media conglomerates would be necessary for any significant study to occur.

Conclusion

Social work's image problem is not going away. The availability of sensational news media and stereotypical entertainment media characters will only perpetuate problematic public opinions. As this study found, people under forty are unlikely to choose a social worker if they want therapy. The most common depictions of social workers in entertainment media are similar to the clips used in this study and were found to have no significant influence on participants' opinions. These facts all indicate that it is time for a change in the way that social workers and professional social work organizations address their professional image. The development of positive social work characters on entertainment television shows might be a solution.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Materials

Public appeal to be distributed on business size cards and on different media platforms:

LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS!

Are you interested in helping a student complete her smith college school for social work master's thesis?

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED for a study looking at how **TELEVISION** might influence perception of the social work profession

Study involves viewing a short video clip and then answering questions.

Takes approximately 10 minutes.

To participate go to **<http://tinyurl.com/gotrct>**

*Participants must be at least 18 years old and NOT a social worker or a social work student
This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

Personal appeal to be distributed to friends through social media and email:

Hello Friends!

Are you interested in helping me complete my master's thesis?

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED for a study looking at **TELEVISION** and public opinion.

Study involves viewing a short video clip and then answering survey questions.

Takes approximately 10 minutes.

To participate go to **<http://tinyurl.com/gotrct>**

Please share this appeal with anyone and everyone you think might participate
(and encourage them to do the same.)

*Participants must be at least 18 years old and NOT a social worker or a social work student
This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

Appendix B
Smith College Human Subjects Committee Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 3, 2016

Abbie Spear

Dear Abbie,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mary Beth Averill, Research Advisor

Appendix C

Smith College Human Subjects Committee Revision Request Letter



School for Social Work

Smith College

Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

January 3, 2016

Dear Abbie,

Thank you for the effort you have put into your Human Subjects Review (HSR) application. Our job as a federally mandated human subjects review committee is to make sure that all research projects which we approve follow federal guidelines for research with humans, including informed consent, protection of vulnerable participants, the ability to withdraw from projects, appropriate storage and collection of data, and other items discussed in the HSR manual. Part of our job is to ensure that the research results are worth the risks and costs to the participants. The actual benefits to the researcher, participants, and the field of social work, must be worth the time and energy participants will put into being a part of the study. Projects that are unclear in their questions and methods may lead to results that are not beneficial to the participants or to the field.

Attached you will find your proposal with our required changes in **MS Word Track Changes** and our requests for revisions marked as *New Comments* in the margins. These comments will provide guidance to make substantive changes in accord with HSR federal guidelines for research.

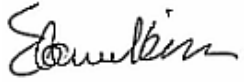
Please make all changes to your research proposal with **MS Word track changes** or indicate changes in another way (e.g. bold type or highlighted type) so they are easily read in order to speed the return of your revision. If you feel we have misunderstood your study and there are changes you do not wish to make, please explain in the margins with a *Comment/s*. Sometimes we ask for changes that do not make sense to applicants because something was unclear to us and your explanation can clarify these issues.

Please understand that we function with a collaborative model- we want to help all applicants learn from their research while protecting all human subjects. Should you have any concerns about committee comments, please review with your thesis advisor, who may follow up with a contact to the Chair, HSR Committee.

Please return your application to Laura Wyman at lwyman@smith.edu. Please label each document you send with **your name, the term "HSR," the term "Revision", and the number of the revision**. As an example, if your name is Sara Jones, we should receive an application revision document like this: "SaraJones HSR Revision1.docx".

Please label the subject line of your email as HSR Revision.

Please note that most of your correspondence will come from me through Laura.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elaine Kersten". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "K".

Elaine Kersten, EdD
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mary Beth Averill, Research Advisor

Appendix D

Survey Questions

Demographic questions:

1. Age
2. Gender Identity
3. Race or Ethnic Identifications
4. Current City

Professional/social desirability questions:

1. Social work jobs are not intellectually stimulating
2. Social workers are encouraged to succeed
3. Social work jobs encourage positive colleague relationships
4. Throughout their careers social workers can have autonomy and flexibility
5. Social workers are not valued by society
6. Social work incorporates professional growth and continued learning
7. Social workers are recognized for their professional successes
8. Success in social work jobs is based on merit
9. Creativity is encouraged in social work jobs
10. Social work is a positive career choice
11. Social workers make very little money
12. I would approve if a friend or family member wanted to become a social worker
13. Social work offers a wide range of career opportunities

Positive and Negative attitude questions:

1. Social workers intrude in private family issues
2. Social workers only work with people who cant afford psychologists
3. Social workers control the lives of their clients
4. Social work jobs are all in bureaucratic settings
5. Social workers can provide help in times of need
6. Social workers can perform the same therapy as psychologists
7. Social workers don't make a difference in our country
8. I would see a social worker if I wanted therapy
9. Social workers help change social policies
10. Social workers care about their clients
11. Social workers are unhappy with their careers
12. Social workers behave in a professional manner
13. Social workers are good people
14. Social workers follow a code of ethics
15. Social workers are incompetent

Appendix E

Informed Consent



2015-2016

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA**

.....

Title of Study: Bless Your Heart but Hide the Children: The Effect of Entertainment Media Depictions of Social Workers on Public Opinions About Social Work as a Profession

Investigator(s): Abigail Spear (smithtvstudy@gmail.com)

.....

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of how Entertainment television influences the public’s perception of social work as a profession. .
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are over the age of 18 and are not a social worker or social work student.
- We ask that you read this form before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to examine if entertainment television depictions of social workers influences the public’s opinions of social work as a profession .
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master’s in social work degree
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: you will be asked to watch a short video edited from a television episode. After watching the video, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions about a profession. The entire study should take approximately 10 minutes and can be accessed from any computer connected to the Internet.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

- The video clips do include depictions of gun use. If you find yourself in need of support, please visit:
http://www.allaboutcounseling.com/crisis_hotlines.htm
for a list of resources.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefit of participation is the opportunity to think about social work as a profession and the opportunity to add your voice to a study of public opinion.
- The benefits to social work/society are: Expansion of knowledge about public perception about the field of social work and how entertainment media might be a way to begin increasing the social desirability of pursuing social work as a profession, leading to increased enrollment in social work programs and increased public knowledge about social work.

Confidentiality

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may exit the survey at any time if you do not wish to continue without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw without finishing, data in the survey will remain, I will not be able to remove it from the collected data. This is because, as the survey is anonymous, once you have submitted your answers this researcher will be unable to locate and remove them, completion of the survey automatically includes your information as part of the thesis data. However, I will not use incomplete surveys in my analysis.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me Abbie at smithtvstudy@gmail.com. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

Choosing the Continue button below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, you are over the age of 18, and that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Form updated