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Whose Classroom is it, Anyway: A study of teacher films' influence on pre-service teachers' beliefs about education

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Whose Classroom is it, Anyway: A study of teacher films' influence on pre-service
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Abstract

This research is grounded in the phenomenon of teacher socialization: through both a personal and more general lens, this research examines how pre-service teachers view themselves, the role of the media in forming these narratives pre-service teachers tell about the profession, and how these narratives influenced (and will continue to influence) our lives as teachers. Four specific archetypes of teachers portrayed in the media were constructed (Teacher as Saint, Artist, Drone, and Villain). This research studies the lived, shared experiences of pre-service teachers through a qualitative methodology called phenomenology. The process of interpreting the words and experiences of participants also qualifies this research as hermeneutic. These archetypes were used as the tool for interpretation (heuristic) of the narratives which interview participants shared about their lives. Through interviews, surveys, and personal reflection, this research concludes that teachers' identities are greatly influenced by the media, and that it is the process of teacher socialization in pre-service education that unravels the preconceived notions of teaching, even if pre-service educators do not recognize this process as it occurs.

Keywords: teacher socialization, teacher identity, teacher images in media, teacher archetypes, pre-service teacher education

Whose Classroom is it, Anyway: A study of teacher films' influence on pre-service teachers' beliefs about education

Background

Prior to starting college, I assumed I knew what it meant to be a teacher. My family has always been deeply rooted in the world of education: my mother brought home stacks of math worksheets every week (to which I happily added stickers) and my father and I spent weekends watching documentaries about every major historical event there ever was. We spent family vacations going to museums and had weekly trips to the library each summer. Most of all, though, I lived in a home that loved inspirational stories of every kind: football movies, teacher films, and rags-to-riches stories were our preferred genres on movie nights. In this chorus of unending inspirational stories, I unconsciously shaped my story about what teaching was meant to be: from Mr. Keating's rousing speeches in *Dead Poets Society* to Mr. Escalante's demand for *ganans* in *Stand and Deliver* and Ms. Gruwell's ceaseless dedication to her students' stories in *Freedom Writers*. I relied on depictions of teachers in the media and my perceptions of my high school teachers to tell me what it meant to be an educator.

Though I knew before entering the classroom in the role of teacher that these depictions were inaccurate portrayals of education, I believed I could mimic the personalities of my favorite teachers—whether from film, high school, or the university classroom. It was not until I began looking more critically at myself in my pre-service education classes that I began to realize how much these inspirational stories had shaped my worldview. In my conscious decision to become a teacher, the unconscious narratives

I had formed about teachers and teaching came to the surface. When I began to articulate my teaching philosophy in my pre-service education classes, I also began to unravel how dangerous it can be to try to replicate Mr. Keating's style in the classroom. Surely, these stories of incredible educators deepened my passion for teaching, but I knew that I needed to move beyond these stories and into the real world if I wanted to become a good teacher. As my own unconscious thoughts about teaching became apparent to me, I wondered if I was alone in my discovery, or if my pre-service peers shared this disruptive experience. This research was generated through my desire to better understand the stories that influence myself, other pre-service teachers, and the field of education into which we are entering.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify, firstly, the different ways in which teachers are portrayed in the media. Teachers in the media have been studied in-depth by both researchers and educators. In order to fully explore these portrayals, I needed to first identify how I had seen teachers portrayed while also exploring the prior research which already classified such portrayals. The literature review of my thesis aims to explore how the profession of education has been shaped by the media throughout history. This was a personal as well as general exploration. I knew that my own perceptions of teachers had been skewed by the inspirational stories I watched. However, I also knew that not all educators viewed the same media; in other words, inspirational stories are not the only representations of teachers that exist in the world. This research explored the general as well as specific implications of the media's vast portrayal of educators and the

educational system. As an English major, I know that stories influence the world and individuals in a variety of complex ways. As an educator, I know the importance of examining the bias of these influences in order to clarify our understanding of the world in which we live. In short, the research I conducted aimed to uncover how my peers and I viewed ourselves as pre-service teachers, how we formed these narratives about ourselves and our profession, and how these narratives influenced (and will continue to influence) our lives as teachers.

Literature Review

Mirror Neurons and The Influence of Story

The search for how narratives influence us begins with an exploration of the brain. When we read, hear, or watch stories unfold, our brains respond in a complex way. As numerous marketing professionals, teachers, and brain researchers can attest, our brains are “wired” for stories, and can thus be shaped by the narratives around them. Marketing professionals know that “stories move [people] to action” because storytelling allows individuals to relate to one another in a unique way (Woodside et al., 2008). Teachers know that using narratives while teaching “engages well-established neural pathways in the brain,” which allows students to better internalize new ideas, make connections, and transfer information to their long-term memory (Ligget, 2016). Perhaps most significantly, there has been a recent focus from neuroscientists to study the specific influence storytelling has on the brain. This research explains why and how narratives are capable of changing how we see and process the world.

Neuroscientist Paul Zak has observed that watching a film with a compelling narrative arc can cause the release of oxytocin—a neurochemical that stimulates feelings of trust—within the brain (Zak, 2015). This research indicates that stories have a measurable effect on the brain. Additionally, a research group at the University of Parma in Italy identified a tendency of viewers to empathize with the stories they see. They discovered something they call “mirror neurons” within an observer’s brain: as the observer watches a story unfold, the neurons replicate the neural activity of an observed action. As described by the researchers, “the pattern of neuron activity associated with the observed action was a true representation in the brain of the act itself, regardless of who was performing it” (Rizzolatti et al., 2008, pg. 13). In other words, when the observer watches someone else perform an action—even if this performer is in a film or book—the observer’s brain will experience identical neural activity as if they themselves are the one performing the action. Viewers, it turns out, are rarely only viewers. This means that stories are not only something for observers to enjoy, but something that observers’ brains replicate as if they, too, are experiencing the story.

As Dr. Marshall Gregory, a professor and former head of the Butler University English department, explains, the power of storytelling is consistent whether one is living the story or only reading or hearing the story. In his article “Real Teaching and Real Learning vs Narrative Myths about Education,” he writes, “in the second-hand realm of story [that is, as an observer] we experience an immediacy of feeling, a rush of emotion, and a flow of sensations that frequently match the intensity and flow of first-hand experience” (Gregory, 2007, p. 9). Whether the effects of story on our lives are

immediately apparent or not, we cannot say that the stories and media we consume do not dramatically influence our thinking, feelings, and responses to situations. As Nadine Dolby writes in the Harvard Educational Review, “popular culture is a central force in the United States: it reaches into our homes, cars, and classrooms, and it influences what we buy, wear, listen to, watch and think about... in many instances, it is tricky to draw a line between popular culture and the rest of our lives, so embedded is it in our daily patterns” (2003, p. 258). As this central force embedded in our daily patterns, we know that the stories we absorb deeply influence our understanding of the world. Often, the stories we absorb can influence us just as much as—if not more—than real life experiences. Because we know that the stories we hear deeply influence us—whether by allowing us to experience a story firsthand, increasing our understanding of a situation, or by expanding our capacity to remember a situation, it is impossible to go through life without being influenced by the narratives we hear about people, products, and experiences. Both the prevalence of stories and the influence of stories on our neurology demand that we examine the narratives we absorb from the culture around us, because it is these narratives that influence the stories we tell about ourselves.

Teacher Archetypes

The narratives told about professions—whether they be police officers, politicians, office workers, or doctors—might be some of the most influential and subtle stories present in our culture. These stories or “texts of popular culture” are the primary media explored in this research, because these are the texts which are absorbed and

internalized by all: popular television shows and movies are uniquely accessible in a way other media (drama, academic research, canonized works, etc.) are not.

One of the most pervasive occupations portrayed in the media throughout history is that of teaching. As articulated by Gregory (2007), education is one of the great unifiers of our world, and the experience of school is one of the most familiar. Examine the history of education narratives popular in the United States, and you examine the history of our country: there are myths of education as a rural frontier (*The Little House on the Prairie*), an urban jungle (*Stand and Deliver*), a suburban nightmare (*Mean Girls*), a restrictive prep-school (*Dead Poets Society*, *School of Rock*), and a magical escape (*Harry Potter*). Though education has changed much since its first portrayal on the rural frontier, the images of teaching today are “layered with images of the past” (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 6). Archetypes and teacher stereotypes from early depictions of teachers continue to infiltrate our media today. It is these “memories of... fictional teachers [that] are often more vivid than real life experiences,” (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 4). Education researchers like Sandra Weber, Claudia Mitchell, Pamela Joseph, and Gail Burnaford recognize the pervasiveness of images of teachers in the media throughout history, and they, along with many other researchers, have explored popular media’s depiction of educators in depth. In every narrative, there are certain archetypes—specific patterns, symbols, or images—mimicked in each story of teaching we hear. Generations of teachers and children have been influenced by the vast array of films featuring students, schools, and educators, and these images congeal to create “the teacher as an image...where the image [as with all stereotypes] predetermines what the

person means to us” (Polan, 1993 cited by Weber & Mitchell, 2000, p.8). For the purposes of this study, I have identified and interpreted four primary archetypes into which teachers portrayed in the media can be categorized, supported by the similar archetypes which other researchers have identified throughout history.

The **Teacher as Saint** is one of the most common and endearing archetypes in literature. This teacher is found in a struggling school serving “difficult” students. This archetype is a raggedy but inspiring individual who entered the profession of teaching simply to serve students, often saving his students from poverty, violence, or other difficult life situations and giving them hope for a future when all others have given up. This teacher is a dynamic, emotional individual who causes dramatic changes in the school, often going against school authority figures as a representative of his students. He offers his whole self for the sake of his students’ learning, sacrificing relationships with his family to spend more time with his students. In many instances, this archetype can also be called the Teacher as White Savior, as this educator is often portrayed as a white individual entering a low-income school, who “rescues” the troubled minority students, perpetuating dominant cultural norms in his teaching (See Erin Gruwell (Hilary Swank) in *Freedom Writers* and Mrs. Johnson (Michelle Pfeiffer) in *Dangerous Minds*).

Pamela Joseph and Gail Burnaford (2001), widely recognized for their work in education research, identified a similar archetype in their book *Images of Schoolteachers in America*. In one chapter (“The Ideal Teacher”), Joseph examines the images and archetypes of teachers that were perpetuated in 20th-century teacher education textbooks. She, too, identifies “The Noble Teacher” as a key typology. This teacher is a “selfless

altruist, dedicated soldier, patriot, saint, or redeemer” (2001, p. 136). The Noble Teacher is portrayed as one who finds intrinsic rewards at the center of all teaching. Rather than monetary compensation, The Noble Teacher finds reward in spending time with the young, creating a better world through their work (2000, p. 137). In the same book, William Ayers recognizes an almost-identical trope in teacher films. Ayers, too, calls this archetype of teacher the “saint,” and writes, “[the teacher] is anointed...he must figure out who can be saved before it’s too late” (2001, p. 201-202).

The **Teacher as Artist** is often found in affluent or gifted classrooms, and is praised by students for his creative ingenuity — students and the audience believe this teacher is teaching what “really” matters. The Teacher as Artist questions the structured curriculum and replaces it with passion, emotion, and a call for new eyes to see the world differently. Students are not challenged to learn concepts of poetic form or think critically about the scientific process. Rather, they are encouraged to “seize the day:” to live the life of a poet or of a rockstar, chasing the thread of passion wherever it may lead, disrupting traditional systems of power to achieve whatever their goals may be. The teacher tells students he cares about the world outside the walls of the classroom, which undoubtedly upsets administrators and parents who simply want their students to pass tests and show measurable academic growth, though by the end of the film, both parents and administrators see that the students have been learning important life lessons all along (See Mr. Keating (Robin Williams) in *Dead Poets Society* and Mr. Finn (Jack Black) in *School of Rock*).

Again, Pamela Joseph reinforces this typology, which she calls “The Scholar” (2001, p. 139). This teacher, she writes, is “a role model to students—of scholarship and analytical thinking” (2001, p. 139). This teacher must be “powerful, dynamic, and fluid;” where the Teacher as Saint serves his students, this teacher serves, primarily, his content (2001, p. 139). Joseph highlights this archetype which was encouraged by 20th century education textbooks: it is most important that this kind of teacher does not experience “mental crystallization [or] the inability to act on new ideas,” because new knowledge is what is most important to this teacher (2001, p. 139). Though the 20th century education textbooks did not encourage teachers to rip apart curriculum materials as Mr. Keating does in *Dead Poets Society*, Joseph records that this trope rarely uses the textbook in the classroom, because that makes students dependent on the text—this type of teacher believes no real thinking about life outside the classroom can occur with a textbook (2001, p. 140).

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the **Teacher as Drone**. This teacher is not interested in the least in teaching, leaving no room for excitement or passion. Immediately upon viewing this teacher’s classroom, it is apparent that all students have been rendered comatose by the drone of the teacher’s voice. In different iterations of any adult from *Charlie Brown*, the Teacher as Drone teaches only for the test. Often, this teacher’s content area is not expounded upon in a narrative—all that viewers need to know is that students in this class produce nothing more than puddles of drool and a few promising doodles. (See Coach Carr (Dwayne Hill) in *Mean Girls* and the unnamed economics teacher (Benjamin Jeremy Stein) in *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*).

Pamela Joseph and Gail Burnaford, too, recognize this “deplorable stereotype” about which many education textbooks of the 20th century warned. Though this particular teacher stereotype is unnamed in her book, Joseph and Burnaford say this image is one of teachers as “inhuman, unattractive, asexual prudes” (2000, p. 151). Pedagogy has changed dramatically since the 20th century, but the fear of falling into this archetype remains strong among pre-service and in-service teachers alike.

The **Teacher as Villain** is arguably the most popular in movies and shows directed toward children or teenagers. Somehow more awful than the Drone, this teacher exists to ruin his students’ lives. Often seen chasing students down, refusing to re-explain material, or giving students detention for no discernable reason, this teacher clearly hates his job and hates children more. As with the other archetypes, this teacher’s personal life is of little to no significance; they exist only to prevent the students from doing something meaningful or fun. (See Principal Vernon (Paul Gleason) in *The Breakfast Club* and Ms. Trunchbull (Pam Ferris) in *Matilda*).

The Simpsons show is examined closely in *Images of Schoolteachers in America*, as it portrays two teachers who both fall into this archetype of Teacher as Villain. The authors of this chapter recognize “the historical spinster teacher,” who is “condescending toward students and especially intolerant of Bart,” (one of the main characters in the show) (Joseph & Burnaford, 2001, p. 189). She seems to exist to make her students’ lives difficult because she, herself, is unhappy. Similarly, the other teacher given screen time in this show also acts as the Villain: the principal is a war veteran who “has brought his military style to his role” (Joseph & Burnaford, 2001, p. 189). This authority figure, too,

takes advantage of the power he is given and aims to make school as much like a military base as possible. As the authors recognize, these teachers “are the enemies,” and this portrayal is especially relevant because *The Simpsons* is a show that has “skillfully and thoroughly mined the commonplaces of school life” more than any other (Joseph & Burnaford, 2001, p. 191).

Role of Archetypes in the Classroom

These four archetypes are especially important for educators to recognize, as these are the pervasive stereotypes associated with our field. These portrayals of teachers in the media shape the world’s understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Students come into the classroom carrying preconceived notions of what school is and who teachers are, based on the media they consume. Teachers, too, enter the classroom with their own perceptions of what classrooms should look like and who they should be. These expectations are created through the “cumulative cultural text” of popular media and personal experiences (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). By entering into and exploring the “lives of their fictional counterparts, teachers can better understand themselves and others, and the nature of their practice” (Mitchell & Weber, 1995, p. 12).

Despite the fact that all teachers are individuals, pre-service teachers (for better or for worse) often imagine themselves fitting into one of these archetypes. Students identify their teachers’ similarities and differences to what they observe in the media. Adults who have not returned to the classroom since graduation look to the media to remind them of what their classroom experiences were like. The mirror neurons described by Paul Zak and Rizzolatti and his colleagues tell us that these stories influence

our brain activity a unique way: as we watch these teacher narratives unfold, our brains react as if we are experiencing these narratives in real time. For those of us who are studying to become teachers, such brain activity is an important component of which we must be aware: not only are we learning to imagine who will be in our classrooms, we must also intentionally unlearn who we have been influenced to believe we are already. These teacher archetypes are a familiar structure, even if they are not flattering. Articulating specific archetypes present in popular culture urged me to wonder how my own story and personality fit into these predetermined structures of teaching. Upon beginning my pre-service teaching education, however, I recognized that my desire to fit into these archetypes was problematic, as none of them are an accurate portrayal of teaching. Once again, I wondered if other pre-service teachers shared the experience of having their understanding of education disrupted when they began their pre-service teaching education.

Methodology

It is these stories that we hear and tell about ourselves that are the focus of this research. To explore the phenomenon of teacher socialization (the process by which individuals acquire the skills, values, and attitudes of teachers), I designed a hermeneutic phenomenological study. At the most basic level, I wanted to interpret the lived, shared experience of how pre-service teachers are developing their identities within the context of both their unique individual story of becoming a teacher and the shared stories that already exist about teachers' identities.

Research Design

Brené Brown calls stories “data with a soul,” and stories are the soul of my research (2015). I began my research simply desiring to study the stories my pre-service teaching peers told about themselves. As I clarified my research question, I came to understand that I really desired to study the complex phenomenon of teacher socialization, and explore what role the media plays in this phenomenon. Because my research focuses on the lived stories of pre-service teachers’ experiences, my research is inherently qualitative. As an active participant in this lived experience of identity formation as a pre-service teacher, I am an instrument within my own study. I am studying both myself and my peers in the “natural environment” of our shared university classrooms and student teaching experiences. These qualities of the study occurring in a natural environment and the researcher herself as a key instrument of a study also characterize my research as qualitative (Creswell, 2007).

Furthermore, because my research is focused on interpreting these lived, shared experiences, the context and focus of this study is phenomenological. This style of research circles a particular phenomenon through interviews and surveys to create the most true and accurate representation of the experience as possible. Not only am I researching the phenomenon of teacher socialization, but I am also “interpreting the ‘texts’ of life” which pre-service teachers experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 4 cited by Creswell, 2007 p. 59). These texts of life are the teacher narratives found in film and television. They are also the stories that the news media presents about teachers, the stories pre-service educators have heard from their family members, and lived

experiences with teachers throughout one's life. Because the interpretation of these "texts of life" is a primary component of my research, this study is also classified as hermeneutic.

Data Sources

Hermeneutic phenomenology falls under the umbrella of qualitative research, so the kinds of data I collected for this research were ones that would allow me to interpret the words and experiences of my participants. In order to interpret the lived, shared experiences of my fellow pre-service teachers, I distributed surveys, conducted interviews, and dove into prior research on teacher socialization as influenced by the media. In order to identify who best to survey and interview, I identified and contacted students who had declared a Middle-Secondary Education major at Butler University (a total of 80 students), requesting that all complete a brief survey (for complete survey, see Appendix A). After collecting survey responses, I contacted the same students and requested that they sign up for a more in-depth interview, where we discussed the interviewees' perceptions of teachers in the media and their perceptions of themselves as teachers (for interview questions, see Appendix B). For both the survey and interviews, participants were selected via convenience sampling: any student who had the time and interest to be included in the study was included.

I targeted Middle-Secondary Education majors for this research because the vast majority of media portrays middle and high school teachers. As a result, I expected that it would likely be Middle-Secondary Education majors who were most influenced (rather directly or indirectly) by the films upon which my research was founded. Additionally, I

chose these Middle-Secondary Education majors because I have shared the same classes and professors as they have throughout our time at Butler. Though I interviewed individuals from various stages in their teacher preparation, we have experienced the same coursework, and so share common language and understandings of the field of education.

Data Analysis & Procedures

My interpretation of these interviews was grounded in heuristics, as I used pre-existing typologies as the tool for my interpretation of the interviews I conducted. These pre-existing typologies (outlined in the literature review and supported by other research in the field) include the Teacher as Saint, Artist, Drone, and Villian. After interviewing participants, I reviewed my notes, transcripts, and video recordings from each interview, comparing the participants' responses to the survey responses I had collected previously, then comparing these responses with the descriptions of teacher archetypes I created. It was important during this process to remind myself of the objectives with which I began this research. Through this review and reflection on objectives, I focused on interview participants' discussions of how they had seen teachers portrayed in the media. Specifically, I used predetermined categories as the lens through which to view and interpret this data. After categorizing participants' narratives using the language of teacher archetypes, indicating how participants described similar archetypes, I developed themes for how these pre-service teachers viewed the world. I combined the methods of narrative analysis and heuristics in my analysis of this research, using my archetypes as a lens through which to view the participants' understanding of the world.

In the process of analyzing this data and looking through the lens of predetermined archetypes, I also recognized the importance of reexamining my role within this research. At the time when I began analyzing my data, I had not yet explicitly articulated my own beliefs and perceptions about these teacher archetypes. It became necessary to evaluate my personal experiences even as I dug into others' experiences through interviews. My analysis of my own growth and understanding of these teacher archetypes occurred through conversations and writing. Because I interviewed my peers, I had the unique ability to engage in conversation about our shared experiences, which allowed me to inhabit the roles of interviewer and interviewee; as I listened to and analyzed my participants' narratives about their pre-service teaching experiences, I recorded and listened to my own narratives, as well. During each interview, I jotted brief reflections or notes to myself about interviewee's statements I had agreed with or wondered about, creating an informal research journal to which I returned as I wrote my literature review. As I began the process of writing this thesis, I continued exploring the narratives I told about myself, watching as new themes arose around the categories I had identified. My reflection and analysis of narratives and the heuristic method of analyzing interviews through the lens of predetermined teacher archetypes led me to deeper understandings of myself, pre-service teachers in general, and the field of education.

Findings

I began this research with two key questions in mind. The first was whether my pre-service education peers identified similar typologies of teachers in the media of which I had become aware. The second was whether they, too, were attempting to

“unbecome” their favorite teachers—be they real or fictional—while in the midst of our teacher preparation program. Or, more broadly, if they were also redefining the meaning of what it meant to be a teacher as they learned more about the profession of education. My interviews, surveys, and personal reflection have led me to conclude that teachers’ identities are greatly influenced by the media, and that it is the process of teacher socialization in pre-service education that unravels the preconceived notions of teaching, which were formed through the media, even if my peers do not recognize this process as it occurs.

Self

As a participant who has asked these questions about teacher socialization and the role of story, I have realized the enormous role media has played in my own life as I conceptualized the profession and personality of teachers. Though I had always known I wanted to be a Teacher as Artist (even if I did not have the language to describe this desire), I did not realize the depth to which this imagined teacher self had become a part of my identity. This imagined teacher identity was formed, in part, by the numerous inspiring teachers I had seen portrayed in film: specifically Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society* and Mr. Escalante in *Stand & Deliver*. I continued to develop this identity throughout high school and my first two years of college. I imagined myself lecturing to classrooms full of rapt students, delivering rousing calls to action and inspiring my students to think outside the box. It was not until my junior year of college, when I began learning how to plan relevant lessons and spent time with real students, that my understanding of who I was as a teacher began to change and develop. I expect that my

understanding of myself as a teacher will continue to evolve throughout my career. In delivering lessons to groups of students, especially this semester in my student teaching placement, I found that my initial imagined identity as a rousing public speaker was more fantasy than an attainable style of teaching. More than that, I have learned that my personality is simply incongruous with the Teacher as Artist. Not only have I realized that the teachers and students portrayed in the media are gross oversimplifications of the complexities of education, I have also realized that I no longer desire to be the Teacher as Artist, which seems like a more important realization. Perhaps because I am student teaching while conducting this research, I feel much less pressure from myself and my surroundings to try to become one of my favorite teachers. I feel more inspired to continue developing my own style of teaching—imbued with my personality rather than an archetype I attempt to replicate. However, this is a difficult habit to foster. The process of becoming oneself—and, equally as important, becoming confident in sharing that self with others—only happens with time. I realized during this research process that it is only through the practice of actually interacting with students—that is, *being* a teacher—that I have begun to see myself as a teacher, separate from the typologies to which I clung in my early years of my pre-service education.

Others

These realizations which I made—which have only become clear through conducting this research and experiencing student teaching—are very much reflected in the interviews which I conducted. The ten individuals whom I interviewed included sophomores, junior, and seniors whose content areas were English (3), Math (4),

Chemistry (1), and Social Studies (1). The participants discussed two primary “types” of teachers portrayed in the media, both of which aligned with the typologies I predetermined, which were also supported by prior research (Joseph & Brunaford, 2000 and Weber & Mitchell, 1995). One of these teachers was an inspiring, self-sacrificing “superhero” (a term used by multiple interviewees), which I defined as the Teacher as Saint. Interviewees described this teacher as one who “rarely fails,” one who is “larger than life,” and “the one who saves the day.” Universally, this teacher is deemed simply “good.”

The second type identified by interviewees was the negative foil of the first, and combined my predetermined typologies of the Teacher as Drone and Villian. The “bad” teacher, the interviewees said, is often found in childrens’ television shows. This teacher might act as comedic relief. He might be overwhelmingly lazy, or hate his students, dealing out detention after detention without any discernible cause. There is no mistake, though: the “bad” teacher never teaches, unless to punish his students. Whatever terminology is used to classify the archetype, interviewees universally voiced the idea that the humanity of teachers is not explored in the media: the perspective of media “focuses more on whether the students are good or bad, and the teachers... simply respond to them.”

Problematic Nature of Teacher-as-Saint

In addition to the unanimous agreement that these archetypes existed, participants agreed that there was a problematic over-glorification of educators. They voiced the worry that teachers in the media are often over-involved with their students’ personal

lives, blurring the line between the teacher's personal and professional world. Participants explained that, based on portrayals in the media, real teachers are expected to be available to their students at all hours of the day, which can create unhealthy boundaries for both teachers and their students. One participant summarized the idea: "Teachers [portrayed in media] don't have a life outside the school. If they do, it only matters when it's relevant to students."

Additionally, narratives of this teacher archetype rarely include depictions of content teaching. Though this archetype is praised for ceaseless dedication to students, media portrayals convey the message that an educator's primary role is for emotional support, rather than a guide to the path of knowledge. Similarly, interviewees whose content areas existed outside of the humanities (English, Social Studies) recognized a lack of representation in those teachers who are portrayed in the media. Both Math and Chemistry pre-service educators voiced that such a lack of representation of their chosen field creates the stereotype that it is only humanities teachers who can make an impact on students' lives.

Influence of Media and Personal History

Despite their ability to passionately describe the problematic nature of the Teacher as Saint archetype and the lack of representation, participants feel that this archetype is problematic primarily because it influences society's view of educators. Given the detailed literature and the ability of all participants to identify teacher archetypes, I was surprised that none of the participants voiced being influenced by portrayals of teachers in the media. Participants believed that the media influences parents, children, and people

outside the education field, but not themselves. This was apparent, they said, in the expectations society places on teachers to be “superheroes” for children. One participant said “people outside the realm of education have no idea what teachers do.” Another said “movie portrayals are how other people see teachers, not how teachers see themselves.” Such responses indicate that these pre-service educators believe teachers—including themselves—are somehow unaffected by portrayals of teachers in the media.

However, participants’ perceptions of teaching are not only influenced by the media, but also by personal history. Five out of the ten participants cited one of their own teachers as the “ideal” mold into which they hoped to fit upon becoming a teacher. When pre-service teachers say they want to “be like” their favorite teacher, they are glorifying their teachers in the same way the media glorifies the Teacher as Saint or Artist. They imagine—consciously or not—that they must become like their favorite teacher in order to fit the mold of the “good” teacher. Though participants did not believe they were influenced by the media, the teachers which inspired them were, in fact, an archetype of their own. I began this research believing that everyone would be influenced by similar archetypes, and they are. For some, this archetype might be called the Teacher as Saint. For others, Mr. Keating. For still others, this archetype is a caricature of their fifth grade teacher, Mr. G. This belief encourages the misunderstanding that one cannot be oneself in the classroom, but rather must learn how to fit into the idealized image of a teacher they hold in their minds.

Role of Pre-Service Teacher Education

The place where this idealized image can be broken down is the realm of pre-service teacher education. Participants unanimously agreed that their understanding of teaching and learning changed when they began studying education, specifically citing an exposure to theory and terminology as that which helped them understand the nuances of teaching more clearly. Upperclassmen, in particular, recognized that their prior views of educators (outside of the media) had been warped and unrealistic. They see that idealized images of teachers neglect to realize some of the most basic parts of teaching: the planning that goes into theory-informed instruction and the intentionality one must have in creating lessons for diverse groups of students. Most interviewees recognized, as I did, that their understanding of teaching was not what they first believed. They recognized that, through glorifying positive teacher role models they were unable to understand the real work of teaching. However, it was the terminology and theory-informed instruction that participants discussed, not teacher socialization.

One of the key components of a teacher preparation program is the process of becoming a teacher—coming to see oneself as an educator, not a reflection of one's favorite teacher. One of my key questions entering this research was how teacher narratives influence our lives as teachers. Prior to studying education (and studying oneself as an educator), pre-service educators did not question the narratives in the media. After coming to college, participants recognized the problematic nature of teacher narratives, which shows that they intrinsically recognize the value of teacher socialization, and see the problem of not recognizing themselves in the educators they see

portrayed. Teacher socialization is the “heart work” that must occur for teachers to see themselves as educators, and it is indeed the heart that forms the groundwork of all great educators. Whether participants realize it or not, pre-service education has broken down the archetypes of our favorite teachers to which we clung. Teacher education introduces a new archetype which we must find ourselves: the Teacher as Self-Author.

Teacher as Self-Author

In his book, *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes, “the entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life” (1998, p. 2). Palmer “explores the inner landscape of a teacher’s life” in this book, which I read in the weeks before I began student teaching. Palmer’s words resonated with all I have learned about teaching and much of what I have learned about myself and how I understand the world. A senior associate of the American Association for Higher Education, Dr. Palmer presents the idea that, as we teach, we are graphing our souls onto our students, our subjects, and our way of being with both (1998, p. 2). In short, he says, “teaching holds a mirror to the soul” (1998, p. 2). This image of teaching demonstrates the importance of courageously peering into that mirror and examining closely the self that peers back at us, rather than looking to glorified portraits of teachers in the media or our own classrooms and wishing ourselves to become more like them. If we want to know our students well, be intentional scholars of our subject, and be good teachers, we must be willing and ready to do the hard work of examining our own inner lives. Just as we must know our students intimately to be able to teach them well, so must we know ourselves if we want to form connections with our students, our colleagues, and our

discipline. One way that we can examine our souls is by examining the roles that we play as teachers and understand how we came to learn what it means to be a teacher.

Palmer's book speaks candidly on this idea of trying to become our idealized version mentors (those we see in movies, television, or our own memories). He writes, "when we try to shape our teaching or lives after those teachers who shaped us... [we'll] end up cheap, flimsy, and unimpressive" (1998, p. 23). If we spend our time trying to replicate those teachers we admire—especially when those teachers are created by Hollywood—the less likely we are to know who we are and what our intellectual gifts may be. The key to good teaching is to learn the techniques that allow us to reveal who we are.

Palmer's book clarifies the importance of recognizing the media's influence on pre-service teacher's identity formation. Though we cannot "undo" the unrealistic portrayals of teachers and erase the archetypes present in the media, we must recognize their influence (McRobbie, 1992, cited by Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 8). We must recognize how our perceptions of ourselves and our profession have been shaped by these outside sources, and how we have imagined ourselves fitting into the archetypes of Saint, Artist, Drone, or Villain. We must do the hard work of looking within ourselves to understand who *we* are as teachers, rather than trying to replicate someone else's portrayal of our profession, no matter how good that portrayal may be. As teachers, we cannot separate our identities from our work. The process of teacher socialization is a process of realizing oneself as a teacher: not one who can fit into the mold of their

favorite teacher from television or their fifth grade classroom, but one who brings their own identity into their life as an educator.

Future Research Needs

This process of recognizing and becoming a teacher who is wholly themselves is a complex one, and the journey looks different for everyone. My research focuses on the role the media plays in a pre-service teacher forming her identity. Though this concept of teacher socialization is widely studied, it is important to recognize that this study looks only at the process of teacher socialization at Butler University—I could not explore the vast process of identity formation that occurs in the university setting, though my research did bring up this question for me. Additionally, the topic of teacher socialization is equally vast, so this research provided me an entry point into a field that is much more complex than I could feasibly study in my undergraduate career.

There was a great divide in my interviews between those who appreciated the portrayal of Teacher as Saint and those who found it a problematic distortion of educators. Significantly, the majority of those who questioned this portrayal were upperclassmen—those who have had more time in the classroom developing their teacher identity. This leads to the question: what specifically occurs in the teacher education program that causes teachers to begin to question the narratives they see? At what point do pre-service teachers begin the shift away from relying on archetypes to dictate their understanding of teaching, or how does this gradual process occur?

Conclusion

This research began with my desire to understand my identity as a teacher. For years, I have wrapped myself in the stories of educators like Mr. Keating (*Dead Poets Society*), Ms. Gruwell (*Freedom Writers*), and Mrs. Hackett (my fifth grade teacher). Throughout my pre-service education, I have slowly begun to untangle my belief that, because these are good teachers, I must be like them. My peers, too, have spent their education undoing the belief or desire that they can or should become their favorite teachers. Asking and answering these questions about teacher socialization is important for me personally and professionally, as my identity is deeply intertwined with my profession. This is one of the reasons I love teaching. The process of this research has encouraged me to continue the work of being and becoming an educator who is curious about the big questions of my life and my work. These big questions, of course, lead to big answers, and larger questions for further reflection and study. This research has reminded me of one of the largest reasons I entered into the field of education: because teachers are in the business of asking and answering the big questions of life.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Questions included in Survey

Undergraduate Thesis Research on Teacher Films

This is a brief survey of Middle-Secondary majors to see if films have influenced their views on teaching.

Statement of Informed Consent * Required

Research Project: Those Who Can, Teach: A phenomenological study of teacher films' influence on pre-service teachers' perceptions and beliefs about education.

You are invited to participate in a survey exploring teacher films' influence on pre-service middle-secondary teachers. I ask that you read the following information and reach out with any questions you may have.

Background Information

The survey is being conducted by Erin Morrisey, a senior Middle-Secondary English Education major. The purpose of this survey is, firstly, to explore if "teacher films" have influenced middle-secondary pre-service teachers and, secondly, how these films have influenced students' beliefs about teaching.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, click the "I consent" button and complete an anonymous questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes. At a later date, you may be invited to participate in an interview (conducted via Zoom) related to this study. Your questionnaire answers and the potential interview questions will be in no way linked.

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study

This study has no foreseeable risks. There are no immediate benefits for participation. Participants may experience an increased level of awareness related to educational influences that may be helpful in future coursework.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. Questionnaires and any potential interview responses will be kept anonymous. In any report that may be published, an information that will make it possible to identify you will not be included. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation is voluntary and will not affect current or future relations with the College of Education, faculty, or Butler University. You are free to not answer any question or withdraw from this study at any time without affecting relationships. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from the University.

Contacts and Questions

Erin Morrisey is the primary researcher and contact for the project, and Dr. Furuness is the thesis advisor for this project. If you have questions at any time, you are encouraged to contact Erin at emorrise@butler.edu. For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information, or offer input, contact the Butler Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) at (317) 940-9766 or by emailing IRB@butler.edu.

1. By clicking the "yes, I accept" box below, you are confirming that you have read the above information and that you consent to participate in this study, conducted by Erin

Morrisey at Butler University. You are also confirming that your consent is given of your own free choice without undue inducement. Do you consent to take this study? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes, I consent

No, I do not consent *Skip to section 5 (No Consent)*

Background

2. What year are you? *Mark only one oval.*

First-Year (graduating December 2023-May 2024)

Sophomore (graduating December 2022-May 2023)

Junior (graduating December 2021-May 2022)

Senior (graduating December 2020-May 2021)

3. What is your primary content area? *Mark only one oval.*

English

World language (French, German, Spanish)

Mathematics

Science (biology, chemistry, physics)

Social studies

Special Education

4. Which, if any, of these films have you seen? (Select all that you have seen) *Check all that apply.*

Dead Poets Society (1989)

Stand and Deliver (1988)

Freedom Writers (2007)

School of Rock (2003)

Dangerous Minds (1995)

Mr. Holland's Opus (1995)

Other:

5. Please list any additional films/ media about teachers that have influenced your beliefs about teaching.

Personal Beliefs Part I

Please rank the extent to which you agree with a statement, 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree."

6. I believe that the right teacher can save troubled children. *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

7. I believe that some people are born "good teachers." *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

8. I believe that good teachers are deeply involved in the personal lives of their students. *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

9. I believe that it is inevitable I will, at some point, have to choose between my students and my friends/ family. *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

10. I believe that good teachers will, at some point, have to go against their school's authority. *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

11. My viewing of "teacher movies" is one of the reasons why I want to become a teacher. *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

12. I felt/feel called to work among inner city/ underserved youth populations after watching the "teacher movies." *Mark only one oval.*

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Personal Beliefs Part II

Please describe in a few sentences your core belief statements about teachers, learners, and schools.

13. Please write a brief 1-2 sentence statement describing your beliefs about teachers/ teaching.

14. Do you believe that teacher movies have impacted your view of what it means to be a teacher? *Mark only one oval.*

Yes

No

15. In what ways, if at all, have teacher movies impacted your view of what it means to be a teacher?

Appendix B. Interview Questions

1. What narratives have you been told about teachers?
2. Where did you hear these narratives?
 - a. What, if any, teacher films (TV shows, too) have you seen throughout your life that have influenced your beliefs about teaching (ex: Dead Poets Society, Stand & Deliver, Dangerous Minds, etc.)
 - i. Which film did you feel you related to most? Least?
3. When you saw these films, how did they make you feel?
 - a. How do you think these films do at portraying teachers? (are they accurate? Complementary? overdramatized?)
 - b. Have these films impacted your desire to be a teacher? How so?
 - c. Finish this sentence: Based on what I have seen in teacher films, I imagine teachers are... (Ex: saviors, superheros, saints, poor, etc.)
4. How do you think these films impact what teachers think of themselves?
5. How have these films impacted what you think of yourself as a teacher?
6. How do you think these films impact what society thinks of teachers? Is this a good or bad thing?
7. Have any components of these films spilled over into your understanding of what it means to be a teacher? How so?
8. Has your teacher preparation at Butler complicated your prior beliefs about teaching (influenced by films/ media)