The Need to Media-te:
Dissecting Media Representations of Teachers and the Profession

By

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Abstract

Teachers and the teaching profession are often portrayed in the media using a very specific lens. Whether in the news or for entertainment purposes, the reoccurrence of select teacher images in the media undoubtedly impact the way in which teachers and the profession are perceived by the public. This research study focuses on the consequences that ensue from the media’s portrayal of teachers and the profession. A comprehensive literature review discusses current academic research examining the media’s representation and the public’s opinion of teachers and the profession, as well as its effects on teachers’ efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with three in-service teachers in Canada resulting in three overarching themes: 1) Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession, 2) Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword, and 3) The Importance of Fostering Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations. This study concludes with a discussion of the findings in relation to the academic literature, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Key Words: Media, Media Representations, Teachers, Teaching Profession, Professionals, Public Perception, Extreme Portrayals, Consequences
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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................................... 3  

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................................. 7  
1.0 Introduction to the Research Study ......................................................................................... 7  
    1.0.1 The 2014 British Columbia Teachers’ Strike – A Case Study ..................................... 7  
    1.0.2 Research Context and Problem ....................................................................................... 8  
1.1 Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................... 9  
1.2 Research Questions .............................................................................................................. 10  
1.3 Background of the Researcher ............................................................................................. 10  
1.4 Preview ................................................................................................................................ 13  

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................................. 14  
2.0 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 14  
2.1 The Media’s Coverage and Representation of Teachers ....................................................... 14  
    2.1.1 Teachers in News Media ................................................................................................. 14  
    2.1.2 Teachers in Popular Culture ......................................................................................... 18  
    2.1.3 The Media Effect .......................................................................................................... 20  
2.2 Teachers and the Teaching Profession .................................................................................. 23  
    2.2.1 Defining the Teaching Profession ................................................................................ 23  
    2.2.2 The Public’s Perception of Teachers and the Profession ............................................. 24  
2.3 The Teachers’ Story .............................................................................................................. 26  
    2.3.1 Teachers’ Perception of Their Identity and Status ....................................................... 26  
    2.3.2 Effects on Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy, Motivation, and Instructional Practice .......... 27  
2.4 Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 28  

Chapter Three: Research Methodology ......................................................................................... 30  
3.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 30  
3.1 Research Approach and Procedures ...................................................................................... 30  
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection ............................................................................................. 31  
3.3 Participants ............................................................................................................................ 32  
    3.3.1 Sampling Criteria .......................................................................................................... 32
3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment .........................................................33
3.4 Participant Biographies ...........................................................................34
  3.4.1 Joanne .........................................................................................34
  3.4.2 Helen .........................................................................................34
  3.4.3 Michelle ......................................................................................35
3.5 Data Analysis ........................................................................................35
3.6 Ethical Review Procedures ..................................................................36
3.7 Methodological Limitations and Strengths ...........................................38
3.8 Conclusion .........................................................................................39

Chapter Four: Research Findings ...............................................................40
4.0 Introduction ........................................................................................40
4.1 Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession .....40
  4.1.1 Media’ Portrayals as Two Extremes .............................................40
  4.1.2 Uninformed Public Perception ......................................................44
  4.1.3 Teachers’ Understanding of Self and the Profession: Teaching as a Profession ......47
4.2 Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword ..................................49
  4.2.1 Negative Impact on Teachers’ Emotional Well-being .....................50
  4.2.2 Positive Outcomes in Instructional Practice ...................................53
  4.2.3 Mixed Effects on Teachers’ Motivation and Self-efficacy ...............55
  4.2.4 Evident Yet Mixed Consequences Beyond Teachers .................56
4.3 The Importance of Fostering Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations ....59
  4.3.1 The Community Has a Better Understanding of Teachers and the Profession ....59
  4.3.2 Media Representations as Barriers to Parent-teacher Relationships .....62
  4.3.3 The Value of Relationships Among Teachers ..................................63
  4.3.4 The Value of the Student-teacher Relationship ............................64
  4.3.5 Reflective Practices and Teachers’ Voices ......................................65
4.5 Conclusion .........................................................................................69

Chapter Five: Implications ..........................................................................70
5.0 Introduction ........................................................................................70
5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance ................................70
  5.1.1 Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession ....70
  5.1.2 Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword ....................72
Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

1.0.1 The 2014 British Columbia Teachers’ Strike – A Case Study

In the recent British Columbia (BC) teacher strike, what began as a series of negotiations between the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and the British Columbia Liberal government quickly progressed towards action taken by both sides. Teachers initially refrained from communicating with administrators in writing and refused to supervise students outside of class time, while the government made plans for a lockout in both elementary and high schools. Rotating strikes began in late May with accompanying pay cuts from the government, which then escalated to a full-scale strike which cut the school year short by over a week and delayed the start of school in September 2015 by over three weeks (BC Teachers’ Federation, 2015; Province of British Columbia, 2015).

Strikes and back-to-work legislation since the 1990s have contributed to the troubled relationship between the government of British Columbia and its teachers (Poole, 2007). BC teachers have not had a salary increase since 2010 and they continued to voice dissatisfaction over wages and benefits in this recent strike. Furthermore, teachers called for increased authority and autonomy over class sizes and composition, which was previously illegally stripped from their collective agreements as judged by two separate BC Supreme Court rulings (BC Teachers’ Federation, 2015). In response to teachers’ demands, the BC Liberal government negotiated with contract terms and pay hikes, but unfortunately, to unsatisfactory terms (Province of British Columbia, 2015).

Parents and students were inevitably gravely affected by this series of events, and the BC teacher strike garnered local, provincial and national attention. Media outlets, including
newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet, served as important platforms not only for each side to express their views and opinions, but also for the public to remain updated with news stories. Amidst the complications of the strike itself, however, teachers also faced pressure from the public. Parents and students pointed fingers and voiced being unfairly affected, and many news stories showed bias in their reporting. Headlines, such as *Smyth: If it’s really about the kids why are teachers making excessive demands?* (The Province, 2014) and *Christy Clark calls on teachers to end strike; BCTF stands firm* (The Vancouver Sun, 2014), unfairly portrayed teachers as unwilling to compromise and as culprits of the teacher strike. Postings on social media by news outlets, such as *BCTF ‘in their own orbit’ with contract demands, education minister says* (The Vancouver Sun, 2014), further rendered teachers in a negative light. Even more, bias was perpetuated in news metanarratives – that is, narratives about other narratives – as many media outlets omitted important information and focused on the demands sought out by the teachers without providing context (The Province, 2014; The Vancouver Sun, 2014).

### 1.0.2 Research Context and Problem

In the process of developing an informed opinion about social issues, individuals rely on second-hand accounts when not directly involved. These narratives and others’ opinions thus help to shape and guide individuals in making a judgement and participating in a public issue. For instance, media outlets served as important means to inform the public about events of the BC teacher strike. When it comes to the public opinion about teachers and their profession, individuals from the general public each have their own distinct relation with teachers based on personal experience. Whether having gone through the public schooling in Canada themselves or having sent their children there, it is a story that many people can relate to. The stakes are high
when it comes to media accounts of teachers because parents rely on teachers to support their children in educational, social, and personal development in a school environment. But despite direct experiences with public schooling teachers, individuals still rely on media accounts to remain informed about social issues related to teachers and the profession.

Given the degree to which people are exposed to media accounts and representations, the media undoubtedly will impact the public’s perception of teachers and their profession, whether positively or negatively (Gerbner, Gross, Eleey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977). The media commonly dictates the narrative of teachers and teaching as a profession and has the power to represent teachers in particularly harmful ways. Research indicates that misrepresentations of teachers and the profession in the media can sway the public’s perception (Ball, 1990; Elam, 1990; Wallace, 1993), and that these misrepresentations are understood and internalized by teachers (GTCE, 2002). As consumers of the media and responsible citizens of society, we must ask ourselves what the consequences are for teacher efficacy, motivation, and practice.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

In light of this problem, the goal of my research is to examine how the portrayal of teachers and the teaching profession in the media affects teachers’ sense of efficacy, their motivation to teach and stay in the profession, and their instructional practice. The social importance of teachers and their profession in society is a crucial factor in the education of young generations. By investigating the media’s portrayal of teachers and the teaching profession and its impact on a sample of teachers, we can better address the need for the public to be critical consumers of the media in their representation of teachers. Only then can teachers
and the rest of the education community work together to best support our students in the areas of academic, social, and personal development.

1.2 Research Questions

Through this research project, I explore the following central question: How do media representations of teachers and their profession affect the efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice of a sample of teachers?

Subsidiary questions include: How do teachers perceive they are being portrayed in the media and in the public and to what extent do they believe that the media’s portrayal is representative of teachers and their profession? What outcomes do these teachers believe media representations and the public’s perception of teachers and the teaching profession have for students?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

My interest in this project is not only based on my journey towards becoming a teacher, but also on the misperception of teachers and the teaching profession by my friends and family that I have observed over the years.

Throughout my schooling, I have had numerous elementary, high school, and post-secondary teachers who have guided and supported me in exploring and developing my interests and abilities. Growing up, I found teaching to be a prestigious and highly rewarding profession, and could often picture myself as a teacher. I hoped to be able to make the same impact on children and youth as many of my teachers had done for me. Although I have always been
interested in the profession, most of my family was never fully supportive of my aspiration in becoming a teacher and hoped that I would eventually pursue other career paths. While applying to teacher’s college, I experienced my family’s subtle disapproval; they questioned my decision to enter a profession that was deemed to be “too common” and “mostly unchallenging” for me. Furthermore, while currently in teachers’ college, I continue to find that my friends greatly misunderstand the responsibilities of teachers. My struggle to identify with the education community – previously as an aspiring applicant and currently as a teacher candidate – have provided setbacks in my goal of becoming a teacher. I am certain that these misunderstandings and prejudices regarding the teaching profession will continue to arise during my journey towards becoming a teacher.

In university, I had a professor who was both an instructor and a mentor to me. She was knowledgeable and passionate about her field, and she demonstrated a sincere interest in the well-being of her students. All in all, she embodied all the qualities that I hope to achieve as a teacher. Shortly before graduation, I discussed my career plans with her. I expressed my interest in teaching, yet at the same time, I voiced my concerns for entering a profession so largely different from my fellow peers, most of whom were pursuing medicine or research. As an education professional herself, she acknowledged misperceptions of the teaching profession that she had observed, but she emphasized the need for society to support passionate teachers who would ultimately be mentors to the children and youth of society. She felt that the public did not recognize the challenges that teachers face on an ongoing basis and that education deficiencies were largely assigned to teachers. However, because of this, she expressed an even greater need for passionate individuals to enter the profession. Through my discussion with her, I felt
empowered by her view of teaching, and a drive to dispel the misguided perceptions of the teaching profession.

My family resides in British Columbia, where the recent four-month long full-scale teachers strike was an issue of great concern to the general public. My 12-year-old sister is enrolled in the British Columbia public school system and was one of hundreds of thousands of students affected by the strike. Not only was grade 6 cut short by over a week for her, but the start of grade 7 was also delayed by three weeks. As her older sister, I became increasingly worried of the impact that the strike had on her attitude towards school and teachers, and the ways in which her learning opportunities were being compromised. It goes without saying that my sister was delighted by her prolonged summer vacation, and the daily monetary subsidy offered by the government provided yet another reason for her to wish to remain out of school. I witnessed the ways in which my sister’s understanding of her responsibilities as a student became slowly compromised, and each day out of school was a missed opportunity for her to develop academically, and socially, and personally. At such a young age, it was difficult for my sister to understand the reasons behind the teacher strike. Her opinion was greatly influenced by my family members who assigned the majority of the blame to the teachers, much like the way the issue was presented in the media. My sister had always viewed her teachers as authoritative figures and role models, but she was suddenly presented with a perspective of teachers in a position of lesser authority and as negotiators making demands from the government.

As someone entering the teaching profession, I am concerned with how teachers are represented in the media and the way they are perceived by the general public. The potential ramifications of the public’s perception on multiple levels can be detrimental to the success of the education system. I hope that this brief description of my experiences and my position in
relation to this research will provide readers with an understanding of the motivation and rationale behind the study’s purpose and design. This self-reflexive consciousness will allow me to continually reflect on my subjectivity, if present, at different stages of the study, with the goal of remaining as objective as possible in my research.

1.4 Preview

This introduction addresses the problem underlying the misrepresentation of teachers and the teaching profession in the media, and my personal and professional backgrounds that have motivated me to explore and uncover what consequences this may have for teachers. In Chapter Two, I review the literature in both the areas of the portrayal by different media outlets and the public’s perception of teachers and the profession. I also examine the research surrounding teachers’ efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice, in order to identify the relationship between media misrepresentations and these specific areas. Throughout Chapter Three, I will explain the design of the qualitative research study I conducted to respond to my research questions. Given that purposeful sampling was used to interview three teachers, my research study focuses on the experiences of a small sample of teachers, including their perception of the media’s portrayal of the teaching profession and teachers as a whole professional body, the public’s opinion, the media’s impact on the public’s perception, and the direct consequences they have identified in their own experience as a teacher. Next, I report on my research findings from my literature review and interviews with three specific teachers in Chapter Four. And lastly, a final chapter will discuss these findings, their significance, and the implications in relation to the literature, the education community, and myself as a researcher and professional.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the literature on the media’s coverage and representation of teachers, both in the news and in popular culture. Next, I consider the media’s effect on the public and from there, I explore the public’s perception of teachers and their profession. Finally, I review teachers’ perspectives on their identity and profession, and examine the consequences of the media and the public’s perception on teachers’ sense of efficacy, motivation and instructional practice.

2.1 The Media’s Coverage and Representation of Teachers

2.1.1 Teachers in News Media

Whether in broadcasting or in the press, we are perhaps all too familiar with news reports staging teachers and the teaching profession in the limelight of sensational issues such as sex, violence, crime, and punishment. We often read reports about teacher union strikes and teachers at the centre of educational crises, and headlines such as Teacher loses licence after sex with students (CBC News Ottawa, 2012) and Bad teachers: Ontario’s secret list (The Toronto Star, 2011) are not uncommon. The media plays a key role in the relaying of events, but are their accounts more metanarratives than narratives? Are we, as readers, biased towards the media’s profile of teachers? Or is the media’s portrayal in fact an accurate representation of the themes and images that the media is assigning to teachers and their profession?

A detailed review of studies analysing the media coverage of teachers and the teaching profession sheds light on the types of themes and images that dominate in our society. Research
suggests that newspaper reports on teachers are frequently unfair and question teachers’ professionalism. Cunningham (1992), for example, studied the treatment of teachers and their professional image in the British press from the period of 1950-1990. Though distinct stories were heavily reported on in each decade, many issues persisted. Continuously pervasive issues included a decline in the quality of teachers and unfair working conditions, as well as low pay indicative of teachers’ status in society. Differentiation within the profession was also a widely contested issue; this initially began as a debate of the gender and secondary/primary divides that existed, but then later shifted to the variation in quality and standards among teachers. Macmillan (2002) reviewed MacMillan & McLachlan’s (1998) detailed yearlong audit of education coverage in British tabloid press beginning in September 1996. She noted a large increase in education coverage in that year, both in tabloids and front-page cover stories. With respect to teachers specifically, there was a persistent focus in stories characterizing teachers as incompetent, metanarratives assigning the blame of failing schools to teachers, and stories highlighting incidences of misconduct (MacMillan, 2002). This aligns with findings from Ball (2008) who extensively analysed the media and government initiatives and policies over the last 20 years and found that teachers are too often recipients of the blame and burden for poor student performance and poor educational outcomes.

Research has not only examined the predominance of news stories that are published, but also the discourse and metanarratives that exist within these stories. In a recent study, Cohen (2010) studied the coverage of education in the Chicago Tribune newspaper from 2006 to 2007. Though this major newspaper is only one of many in the United States, the Chicago-based Tribune Company owns over 50 media outlets all across the country. Examination of this newspaper thus provides insight into the role of corporate media in shaping the professional
identity of teachers. By employing a critical discourse analysis, Cohen (2010) demonstrated how syntactical, lexical, stylistic and rhetorical strategies used in the media’s narrative directed readers to associate certain identities to the teachers in the stories. Though a social language of ‘caring’ could be identified in media stories – focusing on the importance of professional identities and teachers’ knowledge and practice – it was only minimally present (Cohen, 2010). On the other hand, Cohen (2010) noted that 75% of education stories were framed by a social language of ‘accountability’, such that knowledge and authority on education were assigned to institutions external to the schools themselves. Words such as ‘failed’, ‘failure’, ‘fail’, ‘failing’, and ‘chronically underperforming schools’ were commonly used (Cohen, 2010; Thomas, 2011), thus contributing to the construction of a discourse of educational crisis and failing schools and teachers. This prevalence of poor teacher quality and an overall negative image of teachers in the media were also supported by Keogh & Garrick’s (2011) research. Their study of a particular news article in the Australian press also demonstrated that the media text forced certain moral and professional identities onto subpopulations of teachers. For instance, the text contrasted ‘highly motivated graduated teachers’ against ‘experienced but disenchanted teachers’ (Keogh & Garrick, 2011).

Similar to Cohen (2010), Hansen (2009) studied the portrayal of teachers in British news headline coverage using a lexical and syntactic approach. Applying quantitative content analysis, he found a significant lexical and syntactic shift from 1991 to 2005 in the ways teachers were represented. Headlines, which previously presented teachers as targets and puppets of the government and other actions, shifted its representation of teachers as a whole towards a more professional working body. Nonetheless, Hansen (2009) noted that coverage of sensational
issues were still prominently featured, many of which covered stories on teacher involved in misconduct cases, court cases, violence, and disputes between teachers and other parties.

A myriad of positive teacher stories are also prominently featured in the news (Hansen, 2009). Teacher awards in news headlines, such as *Peterborough teacher named Canada’s best* (Our Windsor, 2014) and *Toronto Star Teacher of the Year* (Toronto Star, 2014), are by far the predominant focus of positive narratives (Hansen, 2009). Such stories celebrate teachers’ achievements and are indicative of quality teaching (Blackmore & Thomson, 2011; Hansen, 2009; Keogh & Garrick, 2011). When positive headlines of teachers in the news were analysed lexically and syntactically, the key words ‘teacher’ and ‘teachers’ were collocated with words and phrases with positive connotations (Cohen, 2010; Hansen, 2009). However, despite accounts of the media portraying teachers in a positive light, such reports often only concentrate on individual achievements. Furthermore, a concern lies in the fact that such extreme news stories predominate the news. Accounts of teachers engaging in misconduct or unprofessionalism are continually contrasted against news on teacher awards. This juxtaposition, whether intentional or not, does little to represent teachers as a whole professional body (Blackmore & Thomson, 2011; Keogh & Garrick, 2011).

The very selection of certain stories over others, the images included, the style and angle of reporting, and the choice of commentators, all shape the type of narrative that the news presents. Our examination of teachers and education in the news reinforces the fact that media reports are not simply the relaying of events (Tuchman, 1972). Taken together, we see in the news a prevalence of representations of educators in extreme positions or situations, the majority of which challenge or problematize dominant teacher practices and society’s views on education issues.
2.1.2 Teachers in Popular Culture

Media misrepresentation of the teacher image is not just limited to the news and the press. In his review of teachers in fictional television programs and films, Swetnam (1992) found the portrayal of teachers to be unrealistic and embracing either extremely negative or positive characteristics. On one hand, the teacher is portrayed in a negative light as an incompetent and irresponsible educator. Whether it be the alcoholic and sarcastic Otis Drexell in the television program *Drexell’s Class* (1991-1992), the autocratic ‘my way or the highway’ Miss Grant in the series *Fame* (1982), or the immoral and superficial Miss Halsey in the film *Bad Teacher* (2011), a common denominator of these fictional teachers drawn up over the years are the flaws in character, behaviour, and at the very least, instructional methods. Several other films, including but not limited to *Teachers* (1984), *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (1986), and *Summer School* (1987), contribute to this image of incompetence and frivolity. Negative portrayals of teachers not only disrespect and demean teachers, but may even go so far as to deterring individuals from pursuing a career in teaching and demotivating those already in the profession (Burbach & Higgins, 1993; Swetnam, 1992).

On the opposite side of the spectrum, unrealistically positive portrayals can be equally unfair. In the television program *Good Morning, Miss Bliss* (1987-1989), Miss Bliss embraces all the qualities not only of a perfect teacher, but those of a super human. She is cheerful, caring and positive, and at the same time has the ability to solve all of her students’ problems – whether they be social, family, or academic. The charismatic Ken Reeves in the series *The White Shadow* (1978-1981) acts simultaneously as a coach, teacher, counselor, father and big brother to a group of troubled high school adolescents. These television programs as well as other films (e.g. *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), *Up the Down Staircase* (1967), *Conrack* (1974), and *Stand and
Deliver (1988)) portray teachers as flawless individuals who not only manage the class effortlessly but are also able to provide the solutions to all of their students’ problems, even those beyond the scope of the classroom (Burbach & Higgins, 1993; Swetnam 1992). These impossibly perfect media portrayals set up unrealistic expectations of teachers for students, parents, and the public. Furthermore, teachers “who internalize these unrealistic expectations are being set up for disappointment. They start making demands upon themselves which they cannot possibly achieve. Unsuccessful, they become frustrated and they tend to blame themselves for failing to attain impossible goals” (Raphael, 1985, p. 9). The contrast in the reality of the teaching profession and the idealistic expectations impinged upon teachers by society may contribute to the large rate of teacher burnout and dissatisfaction (Swetnam, 1992).

Delving deeper into the analysis of teachers and their profession in popular culture, subliminal messages and images of omission also promote misrepresentations and misimpressions. Rarely in popular media do we observe teachers involved in classroom instruction, let alone depictions of various other teacher responsibilities such as assessment, lesson planning, and staff meetings (Burbach & Higgins, 1993; Swetnam, 1992). Until the release of the movies Stand and Deliver (1988) and Dead Poets Society (1989), little to no screen time actually showed classroom scenes and teachers teaching (Burbach & Higgins, 1993). Furthermore, a powerlessness theme is pervasive across many television series and movies where the teacher is seen as a passive individual with very little control over their professional lives. The notion that ‘anybody can teach’ is a dangerous misperception that is reinforced by fictional characters in television programs and films. Examples include, amongst others, a former professional basketball player in The White Shadow (1978-1981) and an undercover cop in
Kindergarten Cop (1990) who take on the teaching profession (Swetnam, 1992; Burbach & Higgins, 1993).

While other professions are also subjected to misrepresentations in popular culture, storylines depict such fictional characters actually doing the work of their profession (Burbach & Higgins, 1993; Kaplan, 1990). On screen, we see depictions of police officers meticulously investigating the evidence of a crime scene, lawyers articulately defending their clients in the courtroom, and surgeons dramatically saving lives in the operating room. Unlike the portrayal of teachers, fictional depictions of other professions show characters who are effective at their work but who also have a fallible side in character development (Swetnam, 1992).

2.1.3 The Media Effect

There is clear evidence that media sources portray teachers and their profession in an unrealistic and unreasonable light. But to what degree does the media influence the public’s construction of reality? If the public was not swayed by the media’s accounts, whether they be explicit or subliminal, then biases or unrealistic portrayals of teachers in the media would simply be taken as amusing reports. However, the research presents a compelling case for the media’s role in influencing and shaping the public image of teachers (Hunter, 1991; Schickel, 1991; Wallace, 1993).

In 1977, Gerbner and his research team proposed what is now widely known as the “cultivation theory”. Though their research began as a series of large-scale research projects to explore the “cultivated effects” of television on viewers, this relationship has since been extended to mass media. Proponents of the cultivation theory argue that the more people are exposed to mass media, the more likely they are to believe that the social reality depicted reflects
The effects occur only after long-term and cumulative exposure to mass media (Cohen, 2010; Gerbner et al., 1977). However, this theory is disconcerting when we consider that news channels and the press continue to be the public’s most common sources for news and that the average individual in Canada spends 30 hours a week watching television (BBM Canada, 2013). A survey of nearly 1500 adults established that individuals identify television and newspapers as the top most important influences on people’s thinking about public issues (Jacobs & Worcester, 1990), thus indicating that the public is aware of the media’s influence on their attitudes.

Whether for better or for worse, much of popular media and the news business thrive on accounts of controversial issues and extreme reports (Baker, 1994). It is important to recognize that a reciprocal relationship exists between the media and the public. The public relies on the media to provide accounts of important issues, but the media looks to the public for issues that are deemed important enough to be reported. Mass media is thus responding to a certain demand set out by the public. However, when news channels and the press are free to decide on the angle from which to report and the images they wish to convey, the media’s articulation of news is concerning because of their power to influence the public. As such, misrepresentations of teachers and the teaching profession can sway the public’s perception (Ball, 1990; Wallace, 1993). In addition to its impact on the public’s opinion, mass media can also influence an individual’s perception of what others think. In a study examining participants’ responses to news stories on current issues, Gunther (1998) suggests that individuals make inferences about the general public’s opinion based on their perception of the content in media coverage and its persuasive impact on others.

In popular media, images and portrayals in television and in film need at least an element of reality in order to provide a degree of authenticity to the storyline (Bormann, 1972; Potter &
Chang, 1990). What the research indicates is that the choice of themes in popular media sends influential messages to its audience regarding what is important, thereby shaping the social perceptions (Bormann 1982a; Bormann 1982b; Hawkins, Pingree, & Adler, 1987). Whether by reinforcing existing beliefs, perpetuating negative stereotypes, or introducing unrealistic though convincing depictions, mass media is capable of contributing, or at the very least reinforcing, the public’s perception of teachers and the profession (Hunter, 1991; Potter & Chang, 1990; Schickel, 1991; Thomsen, 1993).

A recurring theme in a number of films released in the period leading up to the 1980s reinforce Hollywood’s “Great Teacher” myth where the teacher is seen as the protagonist fighting against all evils (Heilman, 1991; Thomsen, 1993). These enduring challenges and hardships are often related to the profession, whereby other teachers, the school, and the education system itself represent the ‘evils’. This fantasy myth is seen in many films including but limited to Goodbye, Mr Chips (1939), The Corn is Green (1945), Blackboard Jungle (1955), The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1968), To Sir With Love (1967), Teachers (1984), Dead Poets Society (1989), Summer School (1989), Lean On Me (1988), and Stand and Deliver (1988). In a comparative study examining emergent themes in American films about teachers and schools to trends in public opinion, Thomsen (1993) argues that the rhetorical images in these films are reflected, at least to some extent, in society’s perception. Certainly, production of these films happened amidst an environment where criticism and public scrutiny of teachers and schools already existed. But results from the annual American Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa polls parallel closely to the images of teachers and schools as apathetic and incompetent that are exacerbated in film. From 1969 to 1988, ‘difficulty in finding good teachers’ and ‘teachers’ lack of interest’ consistently ranked among the top ten biggest problems faced by schools (Elam, 1989; Elam,
1990). Of noteworthy mention, local schools and teachers performed significantly better than at the national level when respondents were asked to grade public schools both locally and nationally. The contrast between the ratings suggest that “the more firsthand knowledge one has about the public schools (i.e., knowledge that doesn’t come from the media), the better one likes and respects them” (Elam, 1990, p. 51). In 1969, 75% of respondents were in favour of their children taking up teaching in public schools as a career. However, by 1988, this percentage had declined to 38% (Elam, 1989; Elam, 1990). When viewed collectively, the teaching profession became increasingly more negative through the 1980s, paralleling emergent images of teachers as incompetent and the profession as one lacking respect from society (Elam, 1990).

As we can see, the media have a definite impact the public, and the two are undoubtedly linked. Therefore, it is important to examine not only the effects of media representations, but also the public’s perception of teachers and the teaching profession.

2.2 Teachers and the Teaching Profession

2.2.1 Defining the Teaching Profession

Despite having referred to the profession of teaching in layman’s terms (as an occupation) in my review here, teaching as a profession in technical terms is still widely debated. Over the years, the accordance of a professional status to teaching has gained momentum, but it still not widely accepted. This very fact raises concerns about the status of teachers and teaching in society (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008). Critics argue that professionalism is based upon individual authority and autonomy, but power still currently lies in the hands of educational bureaucracies (DeYoung, 1980). Furthermore, opponents believe that admission standards, teacher training, and licensing of teachers need to be more rigorous (Bulger, 1972; Robards, 2008). But in fact,
teachers do undergo specialized educational training and they emerge from schools of education with a distinct knowledge base tailored to understanding the nature of their work. Much like other professions such as medicine or law, teachers are members of a professional association that represents the occupation and they adhere to an explicit code of conduct (Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986; The Holmes Group, 1986). However, the notion of teaching as a profession is still not universally accepted. Recognition of teaching as a profession remains ambiguous, and professionalization has been a largely fruitless endeavour for teachers (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008).

Why does it matter if teaching is recognized beyond merely a job or an occupation? It matters because along with the professionalization of teaching comes social status, respect and prestige – that is, the public’s perception of the relative status of an occupation in a hierarchy of all occupations (Hoyle, 2001). Additionally, because the public’s opinion informs us on the values in society and has the potential for longitudinal effects in areas such as policy making and teacher practice, this is a phenomenon worth examining.

2.2.2 The Public’s Perception of Teachers and the Profession

There have been many public surveys examining the status of teachers in different countries. In China, Greece, Turkey and South Korea, the teacher status index as reported in the 2013 Global Teacher Status Index suggests a high level of respect for teachers (Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013). This comprehensive study, which surveyed 1000 individuals in each of 21 countries, indicated that teaching as a profession in these four countries ranked high against other professions, and teachers received a high level of respect from their pupils. Similarly in Taiwan, secondary and primary school teachers rank 9th and 11th respectively out of an occupation
hierarchy consisting of 26 occupations (Fwu, 2002). Such rankings surpass certain occupations deemed to be professions, such as dentistry and accounting.

Unfortunately, the public’s perception of teachers in most countries does not follow this trend. Research indicates that the predominant trend is a low ranking for teachers when compared against other professions, and an overall low perception of the teachers by the public. In the 2013 Global Teacher Status Index report, the majority of surveyed countries ranked teachers 7th or lower from a list of 14 professions (Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013). When the results from the study in Taiwan were compared against an international study conducted three years prior, secondary and primary school teachers ranked 15th and 16th respectively out of 26 occupations (Fwu, 2002; Treiman, 1977). In England, a comparative analysis of the public’s perception of teachers’ status revealed a steep decline from 4.4 in 1967 to 3.2 in 1997 based on a five-point scale (Hargreaves, Cunningham, Hansen, McIntyre, & Oliver, 2007). Hoyle’s (1995) analysis of Treiman’s (1977) surveys conducted in 53 countries conclude that teaching ranks near the bottom when compared to professions such as medicine, law and accounting.

In the 2013 Global Teacher Status Index report, a comparative analysis also examined the percentage of respondents who indicated that they would support their children in pursuing a career in teaching. The results parallel responses on teacher status, and a positive relationship exists between the average teacher ranking in a given country and the percentage of respondents who would encourage their children to become teachers. Surprisingly though, the percentage of respondents who answered ‘definitely encourage’ or ‘probably encourage’ in the Teacher Status Index survey did not surpass 50% in any country, and was mostly in the 25% to 35% range (Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013). Though not a direct indicator, the extent to which parents would encourage their child to pursue a career in teaching suggests the level of respect attributed
to teachers and the profession. Interestingly, there was no correlation when responses were plotted against teacher wage for each country, indicating an absence of cross-country association between teacher wages and support from a parent for their child to enter the profession (Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013).

When considered collectively, the overall status of teachers remains low in relation to other professions. Parents express limited support for their children in pursuing a career in teaching and the public consistently ranks teachers on the medium to lower end of the spectrum in relation to other professions.

### 2.3 The Teachers’ Story

#### 2.3.1 Teachers’ Perception of Their Identity and Status

The social psychological concept of the looking-glass self can be examined in order to understand the significance of the public’s perception and the media’s misrepresentations of teachers and the profession. The looking-glass self proposes that a person’s self-concept emerges from society’s interpersonal interactions and from the perceptions of others. When the media and the public construct a certain image of teachers and the profession, these perceptions are internalized by teachers and incorporated into their understanding of self (Cooley, 1902).

Research shows that teachers are aware of the preconceptions and images that others hold of them (GTCE, 2002). As individual professionals, teachers indicate that they feel a great deal of respect from their students, their students’ parents, and most notably their colleagues (Chistolini, 2010; GTCE, 2002). Collectively however, they feel that perceptions of their profession and teachers in general amongst other stakeholders are much more negative (GTCE, 2002). Such stakeholders include employers, students and parents generally, and the public; the least respect
was perceived to come from the media and the government. In a survey of over 70,000 teachers in England, 78% and 86% of teachers indicated that they felt little to no respect from the government and the media respectively (GTCE, 2002).

2.3.2 Effects on Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy, Motivation and Instructional Practice

When teachers consistently report ‘high workload’ as the greatest demotivating factor of the profession, it is clear that the teaching profession is misunderstood by both the media and the public who continue to place increased responsibilities and expectations on teachers (GTCE, 2002; Rhodes, 2003). However, the narrative as presented from teachers’ accounts presents a very different perspective from that of the public and the media. In the study conducted by the GTCE (2002), 74% of teachers agreed that ‘most members of the public don’t understand the nature and complexity of the teacher’s job’. The media and the public play huge roles in shaping education discourse, yet they do not comprehend the impact that their opinions can have on teachers both individually and as a whole professional body. For example, while state-mandated standardized testing can inform us of our nation’s education standing, the majority of teachers report negative emotions surrounding both the administration and publication of standardized tests (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Smith, 1991). Teachers feel that such testing programs not only substantially reduce the time available for instruction, but they also narrow the curriculum. As a result of pressures from education stakeholders for students to perform well, teachers devote class time to helping students prepare for such tests and reduce instruction in areas that are otherwise incompatible with standardized testing formats (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Smith, 1991). However, their practices as teachers, even if effective, are
questioned by education stakeholders – be it the government, the public, parents, or the media – when students achieve low or less than anticipated scores (Smith, 1991).

The majority of teachers cite ‘working with children’ and ‘helping children learn’ as main motivators of their profession (Chistolini, 2010; GTCE, 2002). On the other hand, major sources of dissatisfaction, which in turn contribute to discouragement and demotivation, were factors extrinsic to teaching. The majority of experienced teachers indicate that their morale and motivation are lower as compared to when they first entered the profession (GTCE, 2002; Hoy, 2005). ‘Target-driven culture’, ‘perceived low professional status/image’, and ‘low pay’ continually rank at the top of a list of demotivating factors (GTCE, 2002; Mackenzie, 2007; Rhodes, 2003). Such factors were also among the top factors affecting pursuit of the teaching profession and teacher retention.

2.4 Conclusion

By looking at the portrayal of teachers and the teaching profession both in the news and in popular culture, I have demonstrated that pervasive themes and images exist in the media profile of teachers. Pulling on social science theories, I have shown that a link exists between the media’s accounts and the public’s opinion on teachers. The public’s perception of teachers and their profession is important not only to teachers as a professional body, but also to teachers individually because it contributes to their sense of professional identity. When the media and the public continue to construct a certain image of what teachers and the teaching profession look like and should look like, their perceptions are internalized by teachers and incorporated into their identities and subsequently their teaching. The issue of the social importance of teachers and their profession in society is thus a crucial factor in the education of young
generations. By acknowledging that a reciprocal relationship between teacher morale and practices and student learning exists, we can imagine that the media and the public’s perception may have even more far-reaching implications. This review has examined the research in the areas of the media’s profile, the public’s perception, and teachers’ perspectives on teacher identities and the profession, but the literature points to a need for further research to clarify the links that exist between these issues. In the next chapter, I describe methods employed in my research to study the consequences that media representations of teachers and the profession have on teacher efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology that I employed for this project. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments, before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. I explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. Relatedly, I identify a range of methodological limitations, but I also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with three in-service teachers. Through interviews, I engaged educators who have recognized an effect of media representations of teachers and the teaching profession on their identity and practice as teachers. As “qualitative research seeks depth over breadth and attempts to learn subtle nuances of life experience” (Chase, 2001, p. 524), a qualitative approach felt most appropriate as it allowed me to explore the complexity of the interrelated relationships between the media, the public, and teachers (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, such qualitative research methods generated a deeper understanding of resulting responses in both teachers’ instructional practice and emotional well-being.


3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

A thorough literature review was conducted prior to data collection in areas related to media representations of teachers and the teaching professions, public perceptions, and teachers’ self-evaluation of their identities and the profession. The literature review presented an in-depth examination of the current understanding surrounding media representations of teachers and the teaching profession and its effects, and also served to inform the breadth and depth of research and questions.

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study was the semi-structured interview protocol. Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to hear about participants’ lived experiences (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Creswell, 2013). This format allows for the interviewer to design and plan an interview that attends to their research focus and questions, while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to areas previously unforeseen by the interviewer (Drever, 1995; Dumay & Qu, 2011). Using this format, the interviewer can “modify the style, pace and ordering of questions to evoke the fullest responses from the interviewee” (Dumay & Qu, 2011, p. 246). In this study, the semi-structured interviews provided participants with the opportunity to share their perspectives and experiences on their own terms and in their own language, and to personally reflect on media representations and the effects on their practice, identity, and well-being as teachers (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Brenner, Brown, & Canter 1985; Dumay & Qu, 2011).

My interview questions were grouped into five clear categories: background information, teacher understandings, teacher identity and practices, influencing factors, and next steps. The interview questions were written in accordance with my research goal and questions to ensure that they cover both the breadth and depth of my research topic. Careful consideration was taken
to ensure that the questions were clear and open-ended. In order to minimize power relationships between myself as the researcher and the participants of my study, preventative measures were taken: participants were invited to choose a date and time that was convenient for them and they were reminded at the beginning of the interview of their right to decline to answer any questions and/or to withdraw from the study. Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder, after which they were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then coded according to themes arising from the survey of literature on the topic, interview and research questions, and participants’ responses. Ultimately the data collected enhanced the current understanding of my research topic and explored in-depth the meaning of participants’ lived experiences (Brenner et al., 1985).

3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established and the avenues I explored for participant recruitment. I have also included a section wherein I introduced each of the three participants I interviewed for my research study.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The participants were selected upon meeting the following criteria:

- Participating teachers must have identified a detectable level of influence from media representation and the public’s perception of teachers and their profession on their level of efficacy, motivation, and/or instructional practice as a teacher. This was important as I am interested in learning if and how the media impact various aspects of teaching.
• Participating teachers will have had a minimum of five years of teaching experience because I am interested in learning about teachers’ perspectives on the effect of media on the development of their identities throughout various stages of their careers.

• Participating teachers must have an active interest and awareness of media representations of teachers and the teaching profession because my research study focuses on their impact on teachers. This may be in the form of news reports, media reports, and popular culture representations.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

To seek out participants, I engaged in purposeful sampling by selecting individuals who could speak to media representations of teachers and the profession and its effects. I sent out my information and details of my research study to a number of school boards and teacher unions across Canada. I provided my information to these organizations rather than having asked these organizations to provide me with the names and contact information of people they think would be suitable. This helped ensure that teachers were volunteering to participate rather than feeling pressure or obligation to participate. Furthermore, voluntary participation also helped establish a certain level of interest on the participants’ part to contribute to the given area of research interest.

As a Master of Teaching candidate at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, I am immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers. As such, I also relied on my existing contacts and networks to recruit participants. Though such convenient sampling may have limited the breadth of my research data in terms of participants chosen, I ultimately did not find suitable participants through this avenue. In any case, I strive to gain an understanding of a
sample of teachers’ lived experiences and thus any teachers who would have met the aforementioned established criteria would have provided insight into my research topic.

### 3.4 Participant Biographies

In accordance with the ethical procedures of my research study, pseudonyms have been assigned to each of the three participants.

#### 3.4.1 Joanne

My first participant, Joanne, has eleven years of experience teaching grades one to nine in the general education classroom. She remains updated with stories about teachers and the profession by engaging with a variety of media outlets including the radio, the newspaper, and books. She subscribes to *Today’s Parent*, *Chatelaine*, and *Maclean’s*, and reads education-related articles and discussions posted on Facebook. She has also watched a number of television programs and movies focusing on teachers and/or education, including *School of Rock*, *Boston Public*, *Rita*, *Stand and Deliver*, and *Dead Poets Society*. Joanne noted that media representations and the public’s perception of teachers and the profession have affected her in one or more of the following areas: self-efficacy, motivation, and/or instructional practice.

#### 3.4.2 Helen

My second participant, Helen, has been teaching for a total of 37 years. For the past three years, she has been working as an instructional coach in a school that covers kindergarten to grade three. Her current position includes working with both teachers on instructional practice
and students in a normal classroom setting. Prior to this, she taught grades three to nine in the general classroom setting. Helen remains informed on news stories about teachers and the teaching profession by reading the local paper, *The Globe & Mail*, and *National Post*. She is active on Facebook where she also reads education-related articles and discussions. With respect to entertainment media, Helen has watched *Bad Teacher*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Stand and Deliver*, and *Rita*. Prior to interview, Helen indicated a detectable level of influence from media representation and the public’s perception on her level of efficacy, motivation, and/or instructional practice as a teacher.

### 3.4.3 Michelle

My last participant, Michelle, has six years of experience teaching primarily English at the middle school and high school levels. She cited the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* as her main news source and she also seeks out teaching and education-related updates on Twitter. She supplements news stories about teachers and the profession with entertainment media outlets including books, television programs, and movies. Examples include *Mr. D*, *Freedom Writers*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Bad Teacher*, *Alone In The Classroom*, *The Hangover*, *Le fils de Caleb*, and *Dangerous Minds*. Michelle noted that media representations and the public’s perception of teachers and the profession have affected her self-efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Audio recordings from interviews were first transcribed verbatim into text data, after which participants were provided the chance to review the transcripts prior to analysis of the
data. I then read the transcripts numerous times and individually coded them using my research questions as an interpretive tool. I completed both preliminary and second cycle coding for all of my interviews by marking up my interviews. I used descriptive coding, which “assigns basic labels to data to provide an inventory of their topics” (Saldana, 2008, p. 6), in-vivo coding, which retains “the data rooted in the participant’s own language” (Saldana, 2008, p. 6), and value coding, which “capture[s] and label[s] subjective perspective” (Saldana, 2008, p. 7). Categories of data and themes within categories were then identified using the codes across all transcripts, and additional themes were synthesized where appropriate (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

Themes emerging from the interview data were analyzed alongside the existing understanding surrounding my research topic as presented in the literature review. I analyzed both how themes converged and diverged with the literature and with my research questions in order to make meaning of the data. Furthermore, I tried to fit the text data and its meanings within the literature in order to help develop an understanding of media representations of teachers and the profession and their effects (Creswell, 2007; Denscombe, 1998). Because what is left out far exceeds what is discussed, I also searched the data for topics that participants did not address. Silence with respect to particular topics were analyzed based on their multiple meanings, including but not limited to what was not discussed as something that is taken for granted, something that was overlooked, or that it represented that which could not be said (Poland & Pederson, 1998).

3.6 Ethical Review Procedures

The ethical review procedures are in accordance with the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The three participants were provided with my
contact information and were presented with a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, specified expectations of participation, and participants’ rights. Participants’ identities will remain confidential and any details that could compromise the anonymity of a participant, such as the name of his or her school board, school and/or students, were excluded. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and were used in lieu of participants’ names.

The semi-structured interview protocol was only carried out once participants had agreed to and signed the consent letter. Interviews were conducted at a time negotiated by both parties using Skype, as per all of my participants’ choosing. There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Given the research topic, it was possible that particular questions could have triggered an emotional response from a participant. I minimized this risk by addressing the sensitivity of my research topic with participants ahead of time. I also assured participants in the consent letter and throughout the interview that they have the right to refrain from answering any question with which they do not feel comfortable, as well as re-stating their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. Participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I conducted data analysis. The raw data will be stored on my password protected laptop for up to five years after publication, after which it will be destroyed. My research supervisor and I are the sole people who have access to the data. Every effort was made to ensure participants’ comfort and to confirm their willingness to participate voluntarily in the research study.
3.7 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Though my research study aims to examine media representations of teachers and the profession and their effects on teachers, the sample size of my study was limited to three participants. Therefore, while my findings can inform the topic at hand, I understand that they cannot generalize the experience of teachers more broadly speaking. Furthermore, given the ethical parameters for the Master of Teaching Research Project, this research study could only involve interviews with teachers, and consequently it was not neither possible to include additional procedures nor to interview students, parents, the public, and various media outlets. A mixed methods approach, as well as additional participants, may have be worthwhile as they could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the topic by broadening the breadth and depth of the research study (Creswell, 2013; De Lisle, 2011). Given the scope of this research project, articles included in the literature review and questions included in the semi-structured interview protocol were carefully chosen to highlight the most relevant aspects of my topic.

Nonetheless, the semi-structured interview protocol remained appropriate for my goal to explore the understandings and personal experiences of a sample of teachers. The intention of this research is not to identify beliefs about media representations and effects that are generalizable across teachers, but rather to make meaning of participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity for participants to speak to what matters to them most regarding media representations of teachers and the profession, and to validate their voices and experiences. Furthermore, interviews allowed me to dissect the complex relationships at play and to explore the depth of the effects of media representations.
3.8 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the research methodology used in my qualitative research. I employed a literature review and a semi-structured interview protocol to examine the understandings and to explore the meanings of media representations of teachers and the profession and its effects. The sample of participants included in my study were teachers 1) who have been personally impacted by media representations of teachers and the profession, 2) who have a minimum of five years of teaching experience, and 3) who have an active interest and awareness of such representations. I discussed the multiple aspects of my methodology, specifically the protocol itself, my participants, data analysis procedures, ethical review procedures, and methodological limitations and strengths. Next, in Chapter Four, I report on research findings from my three semi-structured interviews.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings from interviews with three in-service teachers in Canada: Joanne, Helen, and Michelle. In these interviews, participants shared their understandings of media representations, the effects that follow, and the ways in which they responded. Upon analyzing the data, I identified three overarching themes (with accompanying subthemes) which subsequently form the headers of this chapter: 1) Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession, 2) Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword, and 3) The Importance of Fostering Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations.

4.1 Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession

In conceptualizing teachers’ identity and the teaching profession, the media, the public, and teachers all have significantly different understandings. Within this theme I identified three sub-themes, including: Media’s Portrayals as Two Extremes, Uninformed Public Perception, and Teachers’ Understanding of Self and the Profession: Teaching as a Profession. Here I explore answers to the following subsidiary question: How do teachers perceive they are being portrayed in the media and the public, and to what extent do they believe these portrayals to be representative of teachers and their profession?

4.1.1 Media’s Portrayals as Two Extremes

All of the teachers I interviewed engage with a number of media outlets including print media, broadcast media, and social media. From this diverse range of media outlets, all three
participants highlighted the prevalence of extreme representations of teachers and the teaching profession: extremely positive and extremely negative stories dominate. Using television programs and films as examples, Michelle remarked,

I think it’s two extremes. I honestly do. I think that there’s one extreme where you’re looking at Dead Poets Society, Freedom Writers…Dangerous Minds, where teachers come in and they sacrifice everything and they do it all for the kids. And they change lives, and look at how amazing they are. …And then there’s the other extreme, of, “Oh there’s a teacher…” Like Mr. D’s. Like you have some of the characters in there that are just, like, sloughing off. And even in Bad Teacher… Sitting with her legs kicked up, watching movies.

This conceptualization of what is portrayed in the media is consistent with both Swetnam (1992) and Burbach & Higgins (1993) who indicate that teachers in television programs and films embrace either extremely negative or positive characteristics.

Extreme portrayals prevail in media not only in fictional depictions for entertainment, but also in the news. Helen discussed a news story that landed on national television reporting on the attendance of teachers in New Brunswick for Subject Council Day in Moncton. A carnival event was located near the conference for professional development, and teachers had gone there in the evening, following workshops. She shared in her interview: “Well when the media portrayed it, they made it look like we had gone down to Moncton and spent the entire day on roller coasters. And really slammed teachers. And that was on national television.” Michelle reported a similar experience where she and a group of colleagues met up at a local bar during the lunch hour at Teachers’ Convention that took place in Calgary, Alberta. In light of the 2010 Winter Olympics, the media was present and coincidently stumbled upon Michelle and her colleagues:
And so the group of us at a table ended up on the evening news, with our faces blurred. And they ended up doing an entire story about how teachers do not show up to Teachers’ Convention. So at the end of the day, they filmed the convention hall, when there was maybe only 100 people there. So it looked dead. …And so they did an entire expose on naughty teachers skipping Teachers’ Convention. And how it’s our professional duty.

In misreporting the facts of these two news stories, the media portrayed teachers as incompetent, unprofessional, and irresponsible, thus reinforcing an extreme negative image. Similar if not identical discourses or characteristics can be identified in the news stories studied by MacMillan & McLachlan (1998), Macmillan (2002), Cohen (2010), Keogh & Garrick (2011), and Thomas (2011). Moreover, Hansen (2009) discussed the prominent coverage of teachers involved in misconduct cases, court cases, violence, and disputes between teachers and other parties. Interestingly, none of the teachers mentioned the reporting of such sensational issues that are heavily featured in news media.

Helen and Michelle indicated how teachers undoubtedly enter the media spotlight during bargaining and negotiation periods. Helen noted,

And if you listen to the negotiations [in the media], it’s almost always, uh, money. And it’s so often, that’s just a small part of it, of what teachers are looking for. …And so, so the media tends to portray teachers as, uh, money-hungry, that sort of thing.

Similarly, Michelle indicated, “In the media, there’s all this negative, ‘Oh teachers make so much money, and they should get a pay cut and oh blah blah blah blah blah.’ Especially in Ontario with the strike, and in BC.” The media’s discussion of money as the main focus in teacher union negotiations depict teachers as money-hungry and self-centered, which again contributes to the extreme negative image of teachers that can be found in the media.
On the other hand, Cohen (2010) and Hansen (2009) indicate the presence of extreme positive teacher images in news media. Such stories predominantly report on teacher awards indicative of quality teaching, and are prominently featured in the news though to a much lesser extent than negative stories. Michelle echoed this idea, identifying “Teacher of the Year” and “teacher recognition” awards as positive media stories but also pointing out that she does not “know if there’s as much positive”.

In his research, Baker (1994) indicated that much of popular media and the news business thrive on accounts of extreme reports. All three participants agreed that the media intentionally creates a certain discourse in its portrayals of teachers and the profession. Helen remarked, “…the media know what they’re doing when they get a story like that. …[I]t isn’t about portraying the truth – it’s about creating a story.” Whether to instill “comedy or drama” (Joanne) for entertainment purposes or to boost viewership in news, such extreme representations advertently captivate the audience – but at an expense. Media representations create a polar picture of the profession – either an “idealized or…villainized view of what a teacher is” (Michelle). Of course, “no one wants to see the life of a mediocre teacher” (Michelle) and there certainly are teachers in real-life who may embody qualities of either extreme. However, the majority of teachers do fall somewhere in the middle of this competency and professionalism spectrum. As indicated by Blackmore & Thomson (2011) and Keogh & Garrick (2011), the prevalence of such extreme portrayals do not accurately represent teachers as a collective body.

Interestingly – and an issue that is not explored in the literature – Joanne emphasized the lack of education experts in news reports: media “often don’t feel like it’s necessary to have an education expert speaking to the story.” She contrasted this trend to the presence of doctors and lawyers speaking to medical and law stories respectively in order to highlight the importance of
including commentaries from experts. Applying the same rigour to education stories as in other fields would more accurately represent teachers and the profession.

4.1.2 Uninformed Public Perception

My three participants spoke to the media’s impact on the public’s perception. In their research, Swetnam (1992) and Burbach & Higgins (1993) indicated that the notion that ‘anybody can teach’ is pervasive across many television programs and movies. According to Michelle, this idea that “ ‘Oh pfft, if you can’t do, teach.’ ” is pervasive even amongst the public. Regardless of whether the media informs such an idea amongst the public or the public encourages such depictions in the media, what is clear in both my interviews and the literature is that the media has a definite effect on the public. Joanne even went so far as to say that “the media is the public.” When asked if the media plays a role in shaping the public’s perception, Michelle answered, “Big time! ‘Why aren’t you freedom writing my kids? Why aren’t you standing on the desk telling my kids to think for themselves? Why aren’t you going to the ends of the world for my kid?’ ” Consistent with claims by Elam (1990) and Thomsen (1993), the extreme portrayals depicted in the media are perpetuated amongst the public. In addition to the narrowed discourse that the media chooses to communicate, the lack of rigour in news reports about teachers and the profession reinforce a negative loop between the media and the public. Joanne noted, “I feel like the media should have a role in helping the public to understand what is happening in education. And I think that… With not using professional sources as often as they do, they’re not fulfilling that responsibility.” Therefore, the lack of education experts in news media contributes to an uninformed public perception of teachers and the profession.
In the 2002 study conducted by the General Teaching Council for England, 74% of teachers stated that ‘most members of the public don’t understand the nature and complexity of the teacher’s job’. Consistent with this statistic, all three of my participants felt that the public does not have a good understanding of teachers and the profession. Misunderstandings arise from people’s distant memories as students and misleading narratives in the media. Joanne expressed her construal of the public’s perception:

There’s this, yes, they’re saying, we know that they work hard and I never want to do that job. But what they’re doing is not actually, um, cognitive work…it’s not actually academically strenuous. …And so I do feel that it’s, it’s just not accurate.

She further elaborated by saying, “the general public doesn’t see it as a profession. As the profession that it is, and more often sees it as another job.” This idea resonates with the literature, wherein proponents (Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986; The Holmes Group, 1986) and critics (Bulger, 1972; DeYoung, 1980; Robards, 2008) argue over the status of teaching as a profession (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008). In Letters to the Editor and comments on social media, Helen pointed out examples voiced by the public: “People would be complaining that teachers had too many days off, and yet another PD [Professional Development] Day.” She continued by saying, “I think people are always going to diss teachers, and think that we don’t work as hard as we are going to.” Though Helen and Joanne disagree on the public’s opinion regarding the amount of work that teachers contribute to their jobs, both teachers highlight the lack of understanding and low respect that the public has towards teachers and the profession. This is consistent with the literature wherein a number of studies highlight the predominant low ranking of teachers and overall low perception of teachers by the public (Hargreaves,
It is not surprising that people draw on their personal experiences as students to inform their understanding of teachers and the profession, given that everyone went through twelve years of schooling. Michelle noted,

I think that the public has a lot of, um… I don’t know if they actually know what happens. They have their memories from school. And I think that’s what drives it… I don’t know if they’ve actually been into a school or actually see what’s happening. And so they base it a lot on assumptions of what they thought their teachers did.

However, numerous years of experience as a student do not necessarily equate to a well-rounded understanding of the teaching profession. Joanne remarked,

I think that because people all have stood in front of, or sat in front of, twelve years of teachers. They feel that they know teachers very well. …But I don’t feel that there’s a real understanding of what it is we are actually doing.

She continued by saying, “…they think that, because they saw so many teachers, but only saw them for that one part of the day, that they understand exactly what their teachers – what all teachers – do. …And don’t see the entirety of it.” In conjunction with images portrayed in the media, the public draws on its firsthand experiences with teachers from their schooling years, thereby reinforcing a narrowed understanding of teachers and the profession. According to Michelle:

I think that, whether they’re conscious of it or not. What we observe, and what we see, and what we take in, we all filter in some way. And if your experiences at school were
really negative, then you’ll… Anytime a teacher is on a TV show, or on the news, and it’s really negative, then it’s like, ‘Yeah, see all those teachers are like that.’ Whereas if you had a really positive experience at school, where you did have an amazing teacher, then it’s like, ‘Yeah, teachers do change lives. We need to support teachers.’

As Michelle pointed out, the media and the public do in fact influence one another.

At the same time, however, Helen feels that the public is perceptive when making sense of media representations of teachers and the profession. She shared in her interview: “I think the silly movies, I think people mostly think that they’re silly movies. I think people mostly know that that’s not what it’s like.” In response to the news story about teachers’ attendance at Subject Council Day, she noted, “I do feel that the public didn’t go to town with it. I think that the public did realize what was going on.” However, when such extreme portrayals pervade the media, the extent to which the public may be affected is concerning. According to Gerbner and his research team (1977), the more people are exposed to mass media, the more likely they are to believe that the social reality depicted reflects reality. Furthermore, Helen indicated, “I think that’s what happens with the media – is that people lose their whole common sense.” All three teachers felt that the media should be held accountable for their depictions, but were unsure how accountability could be enforced. And so, “You have to trust that the public can be discerning and critical thinkers. And you hope they are” (Michelle).

4.1.3 Teachers’ Understanding of Self and the Profession: Teaching as a Profession

All three teachers have a significantly different understanding of their profession and their identity as compared to the media and the public. With respect to the media, they felt that the extreme representations both in fictional depictions and in the news were unfair and
inaccurate. Michelle noted, “There are a lot of the extremes but I don’t think it ever has, sort of, the reality.” She continued by saying,

I think there are facets of both [extreme positive and extreme negative representations] that are fair. Because just as in every workplace, you have people who are superstars, and for whatever reason they can just excel and do everything. And they can roll with it. And on the other hand, you also have teachers who just do the bare minimum. Barely do anything. And so I mean, is it a fair representation? Probably not accurate of the majority of teachers.

The participants also had similar sentiments towards the public’s perception. They lamented over the public’s lack of understanding and felt that the public’s perception was also not accurate. Joanne remarked, “I think I would like to see it more… Both outside the profession of teaching and within the profession of teaching, really taking it as something that… That it’s a profession.” Collectively, Joanne, Helen, and Michelle support GTCE’s (2002) findings that the common perception of teachers and the profession is negative.

As participants discussed their construal of media images and the public’s perception, their own understanding of teaching and their identities emerged. Helen said, “I really think teachers are super professionals.” Michelle echoed a similar idea: “…we are knowledgeable, we are professionals. We take our jobs seriously. We do try to improve our practice. We aren’t perfect but every teacher is willing to improve and take feedback.” She responded to the popular notion ‘anybody can teach’ by saying “There’s that phrase that goes around that is really devastating. Because those who are amazing teach!” As we can see, participants had a much more positive outlook about their colleagues and their profession.
When asked what aspects of teaching and the profession are important for the media and the public to understand, the three teachers mentioned a range of issues. Joanne cited the importance of “professional development and research and planning” in teaching, and the creativity aspect of the latter. She explained, “I think that that [creativity in planning] is one of the best parts of being a teacher. You really get to feel that you’re an artist. It’s so creative. And you get to play with that every day.” Helen mentioned class size, preparation time, and duty time, while Joanne stressed the importance of “the relationship that we [teachers] have with kids.” She explained, “…that’s why teachers become teachers. They either love kids or they love teenagers. And that’s why they’re there.” Though all participants mentioned different issues, the underlying problems – that is, the public’s skewed perception of teachers and the narrow media coverage – were the same.

4.2 Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword

Under this theme are subsumed many subthemes that emerged to demonstrate how media representations, and by extension the public’s perception, are a double-edged sword. Participants indicated how media representations and the public’s perception lead to both positive and negative outcomes in a variety of areas, including teachers’ emotional well-being, instructional practice, motivation, self-efficacy, and even areas beyond teachers. In this theme, I explore the outcomes that teachers believe media representations and the public’s perception of teachers and the teaching profession have in Canada.
4.2.1 Negative Impact on Teachers’ Emotional Well-being

As discussed in an earlier section, extreme representations in the media contribute to polar feelings about teachers and the profession amongst the public. Such extreme opinions are echoed in teachers’ responses towards what they see and hear in both the media and the public; overall, teachers’ emotional well-being is being negatively affected. When discussing the Subject Council Day and Teachers’ Convention incidents, Helen and Michelle respectively indicated feeling angry and disappointed. Michelle further explained her reaction towards her personal experience appearing in the news:

And I didn’t admit that that was me in the video. Cause it was all people from other schools. And so I didn’t confess that it was me. Because I didn’t want them to make assumptions about what I was doing during Convention.

Her reaction suggests feelings of shame and embarrassment despite being able to validate her actions. Examining the negativity prevalent in the media and the public, Joanne indicated feeling very offended by the discourse of published news stories and comments made by the public, and Helen indicated how stories can be “very very hurtful”.

On the other hand, extreme positive depictions celebrate and show recognition of teachers and the profession. However, such representations can also have a negative impact on teachers’ emotional well-being. According to Raphael (1985) and Swetnam (1992), the stark differences between the reality of teaching and the idealistic expectations imposed onto teachers contribute greatly to teacher burnout and self-reproach. Michelle spoke specifically to the consequences of both extremes; in response to extreme positive portrayals, she indicated:

I think new teachers coming in sort of have a rosy picture of what, um, a teacher is. And so you try to meet up to those media expectations. You try to change all the lives. You try
to do everything to impress everyone. Cause that’s what teachers do. And I know a lot of teachers in the first five years burn out. Because they try to be that super teacher.

Having been in the teaching profession for six years, Michelle held the least experience of all three participants and was most well-suited to speak to this issue. She indicated,

It’s extremely hard. Like I know parent-teacher interviews are the most stressful time of the year for me. Because I don’t know what the parents’ expectations are. …They could think teachers are lazy villains. Or they could be like, “Why aren’t you, like I said, the Freedom Writer teacher changing my son’s life?” And so for parent-teacher interviews – that – I think showcases the most where there’s that anxiety of what are these expectations that society has on me, that society brings on me.

As we can see, idealistic depictions in the media and idealistic expectations from society pose a source of stress and anxiety that both instigate and set a standard of unhealthy practices among teachers. Joanne indicated that she felt that the media portrays “teachers as saints” and further elaborated on the consequences:

And I would say that that’s positive… Except that it’s not realistic. …it comes with a double-edged sword of, teachers then should be able to…We’re saints and we should be able to do all this work. And I feel more and more that society is expecting teachers to do more and more. …and since they martyred us, we almost can’t say no.

Participants discussed the overwhelming amount of responsibilities bestowed onto teachers in comparison with the underwhelming amount of support and understanding from society. Joanne explained,
...it always comes down to just the teachers to be providing it, and not the wider community. And I find that that’s stress. At what point can teachers say, no, we actually, physically, logistically, can’t do it. And then is our sainthood going to be taken away?

…“Well if you’re saying no, if you’re putting limits on this, then you don’t actually want what’s best for kids. And we know what’s best for kids.” …So I find that stressful.

Therefore, as much as positive narratives can present teachers and the profession in a respectable manner, such narratives can also lead to negative effects by setting unrealistic standards for teachers.

The psychological concept of the ‘looking-glass self’ proposes that an individual’s self-concept transpires from interpersonal interactions in society and from the perceptions of others (Cooley, 1902). Helen and Michelle spoke to this concept by indicating how their self-perception of their role and their profession was affected by the media and the public. Following the Teachers’ Convention incident, Michelle indicated:

…to have the media tell me that I was, like, this crap teacher, cause here I am, goofing off at Teachers’ Convention. I just was like, “I quit.” …[L]ike at that point, it was like, “Well what’s the point of doing this?” So yeah sure, I definitely tried to cut back on what I was doing. Because it really did affect my perception of myself. Because if this is what people think, then why should I have this high standard for myself, when their standard is down here. Why am I trying to achieve something that they clearly think I’ll never achieve? …So it definitely affected, for quite a while, um, how I felt about my own profession.

Similarly, Helen touched upon the issue of external effects on self-perception when asked about the fairness of media representations:
I did have, uh, an epiphany a number of years ago. Someone said to me, they were all excited – they were a teacher – and they said, “Oh my son is going to go into education!” And I remember thinking to myself, “Oh my, why would he do that?!” And I thought to myself, “When did I start thinking like this?” Cause that’s not what I would have said when I first started teaching.

From these two personal examples, it is clear that the media and the public have a definite effect in shaping teachers’ understanding of their own identities and their own profession.

4.2.2 Positive Outcomes in Instructional Practice

Instructional practice is about specific teaching methods and strategies that teachers use to ensure effective teaching and learning. When participants discussed the effects of media representations and the public’s perception, Joanne and Helen were highly conscious of the importance of their role as educators and explicitly stated that they do not let what they see and hear in the media and in the public affect their instructional practice. However, Joanne lets on a little more when she indicated,

Sometimes I have felt that, um, when I’m doing a new kind of instructional strategy – like I’ve done in French, or math, or some of the things that I do differently from regular teachers. …I think that they would be more effective if the parents or the communities were more accepting of them. And that possibly that some of the things they’ve come across in the past or the fact that they’re new, makes them suspicious and therefore are not as easily accepted.
Though Joanne does not necessarily let the media and the public affect her instructional practice in the classroom, she suggested that her instructional methods may be more effective if the public were better informed about the profession. Michelle agrees with this idea and added that negative narratives in the media and the public may deride her effectiveness as well.

The literature sheds light on the effects of the media and the public, but does not discuss their impact on instructional practice specifically. In the interviews I conducted, Michelle was the only participant who identified a clear connection between media depictions and her instructional practice. She noted how positive teacher images in entertainment media highlight successes in teaching, which in turn have affected how she practices teaching. She highlighted the importance of her relationship with her students, which is also a key theme that is found in a number of positive depictions in television programs and movies:

Like for me, my relationship with my students is one of the most important things. And I know having seen representations of that in movies, really does encourage how I teach. And so a lot of these assignments that I do, I really make sure that kids are able to bring in their own experiences so I get to know them better. And sort of create more of that shared experience. And so I guess some of it is mimicking what’s happening in movies. And so I guess does it affect instructional practice? Yeah, I think for sure. Because we see, some of those things are based on true stories. So we see, “Yeah that’s how they did it.” And that’s what teachers are constantly trying to do: is see what works well – best practice – and bring it into their own classroom.

Altogether, we see that teachers avoid letting media representations and the public’s perception negatively impact their instructional practice. In fact, the media can even have a positive effect by encouraging teaching practices that develop the student-teacher relationship.
4.2.3 Mixed Effects on Teachers’ Motivation and Self-efficacy

The three teachers I interviewed had mixed responses when asked about the effects of media depictions and the public’s opinion on motivation and self-efficacy. Much like the effect on instructional practice, both Joanne and Helen indicated that they do not let the media and the public affect their motivation and self-efficacy in teaching. Helen stated, “And I think that’s true across the profession, is that I think teachers aren’t going to do any less because the media has portrayed us in a certain way.” As already mentioned in a previous section, participants were very self-aware of the importance of their role as teachers. It is clear that their students served as their primary motivation: “…you always know how important that is. And…you know how much it means to the kids. So you carry on and do it anyways” (Helen). This is consistent with Chistolini (2010) and GTCE’s (2002) findings that indicate that ‘working with children’ and ‘helping children learn’ are main motivators for the majority of teachers in the profession.

Joanne also added: “And I feel like, um, my knowledge and my own research guides my motivation, and how I teach.” Although teachers do feel negatively affected by the media and the public, other aspects of teaching, such as students’ learning, serve as greater motivations.

On the other hand, Michelle shared a different perspective and indicated both positive and negative effects on motivation levels and self-efficacy. When asked specifically about the effects of media and the public on her self-efficacy, she indicated,

I mean I’ve been pretty confident from the get-go. And I’m really grateful for where that confidence comes from. So I don’t know necessarily if it’s, like… I think the negative ones definitely deride, like, my confidence, and my effectiveness maybe.

Having been a personal target of a news story, she indicated how the Teachers’ Convention news story was extremely “disheartening”. She elaborated by saying:
So it definitely affected, for quite a while…How I felt about how much I wanted to do. And I really just, just wanted to give up. And like, “Fine, I’m doing nothing.” And then see. And it’s really hard to get out of that.

She also indicated that the negativity that is prevalent in both the news and fictional depictions can be less of a motivation. She explained:

And like, “Well why am I doing this?” And well give up and just fine. “I don’t have to teach your kid volleyball after school every day for three hours. So I’m going to go home and hang out with my own kids.” …And I think how people react and how the media portrays the teachers can either spur them on or encourage them to do too much, or it could just say, “You know what? Fine. This is how you think of me? Fine. I’ll show you how bad it can be.” And I mean, yeah, those are extremes but yeah, it definitely has an effect on teachers.

Michelle’s sentiments resonate with research in the literature: ‘target-driven culture’ and ‘perceived low professional status/image’ continually rank as the top demotivating factors in the teaching profession (GTCE, 2002; Mackenzie, 2007; Rhodes, 2003). At the same time, however, Michelle pointed out that positive narratives that emphasize the student-teacher relationship “really does encourage how” she teaches because she is motivated to establish that same connection with her students.

4.2.4 Evident Yet Mixed Consequences Beyond Teachers

Teachers are at the forefront of education and teaching and learning, so it is understandable that they are often the direct targets of both the media and the public. However,
the three teachers I interviewed indicated how the double-edged sword of the media and the public extends even beyond teachers.

All three participants noted that the media is a powerful tool and, when used effectively, can lead to extremely positive outcomes. They provided examples of successful initiatives led by their unions to help advocate for teachers and education. Helen shared in her interview:

The PR [public relations] people started actually putting ads out there. Like you know, “If you can read this, thank a teacher”. …They [those ads] were really important. I don’t know what they did for the public in general. But for someone like me, it was confirmation that we’re ok. …But before that, you just felt like you were always defending yourself.

All three teachers also indicated that various media outlets such as media signs, television ads, and social media campaigns, can be powerful platforms to help the public become better informed. Helen spoke specifically to the impact that the media has had on inclusion:

You know, inclusion is a wonderful thing, and when I think about kids with special needs when I was growing up. And you know, we’re talking about the 60s. I didn’t even know there were kids like that because they weren’t in our system. But then we started integrating them. …But I think we’ve gone so far in one direction without the support that’s needed, so the media helped get that going. And get those kids back in. So maybe we need the media to do something, and then we could change some things.

Because the media has the resources to raise issues to a wider audience, the media can be a powerful resource to discuss issues related to both teachers and education. Helen further stated, “…I think, we need to go to the media. Cause if the media knew, then something might happen
about it.” As we can see, the “media can start a conversation that maybe needs to be started” (Helen) and help stimulate positive changes in policy and education reform.

At the same time, however, the media “can also start a conversation that is a little out of sync.” (Helen) Joanne expressed concern over the impact that media representations has beyond teachers. She shared in her interview:

Yeah, I do worry. That… [t]he media representation of teachers, especially in the United States…[a]s being a work force that is maybe just looking for more money, or as being, um, people who want to do good but don’t actually know how. …And that is leading to more and more charter schools, and more and more corporate involvement in… In, um, education. …And I worry as well about…You know, guided programs. Programs given to teachers that they’re just follow the steps, and then, you know, that stuff, teaching programs. And I feel like that’s coming out of the perception that, um, there’s too many teachers to…To educate them properly, how to do this properly.

The portrayal of teachers in the media as ill-equipped or opportunistic creates mistrust and leads to external institutions, such as corporations, wanting to take over and “fix” what teachers apparently lack by instituting guided programs and charter schools. When discussing specifically the effects that the media and the public have on policy and educational reform, Michelle stated,

…I think that, uh, a lot of people that are making policies and who are making those decisions, haven’t been in a classroom for a long time. And some of them not even at all. And so I think they rely on second hand knowledge and the media.

Michelle further indicated that policy “is really shaped by what happens and things that slash the media.” Therefore, a narrow discourse about teachers and education issues in the media is
concerning because issues in education will not have the privilege of being explored in breadth and in depth by policy-makers in order to instigate constructive changes.

4.3 The Importance of Fostering Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations

The structure of my research did not explicitly seek to explore ways for teachers to deal with the media and the public. However, the idea of fostering relationships as a way to deal with media misrepresentations and public misunderstandings emerged when discussing potential outcomes. By building relationships with the community, parents, colleagues, and students, and engaging in reflective practices, teachers can be better equipped to overcome negative effects caused by the media and the public. Here, I explore the remaining outcomes that my three participants believe media representations and the public’s perception of teachers and the teaching profession have in Canada. Within this theme, I discuss the following subthemes: 1) The Community Has a Better Understanding of Teachers and the Profession, 2) Media Representations as Barriers to Parent-teacher Relationships, 3) The Value of Relationships Among Teachers, 4) The Value of the Student-teacher Relationship, and 5) Reflective Practices and Teachers’ Voices.

4.3.1 The Community Has a Better Understanding of Teachers and the Profession

All three teachers that I interviewed felt that their family and friends and the immediate community around them had a better understanding of teachers and the profession as compared to the general public. By extension, they also felt that they receive more respect from them. Both Helen and Michelle pointed out that “there’s more of an understanding from family and friends
and relatives” (Helen) because the people around them witness the time and effort that they invest into their jobs. Helen explained: “I think they observe the commitment… Whether it’s not getting resources they need – whether that’s people resources or monetary resources. Um, I think they see that, uh, how hard teachers work. And not everybody sees that.”

Moreover, Joanne teaches in a small town in Alberta and experiences a similar level of respect from her community: “…I would say within my small community, I get a lot of respect as a teacher. …And um it’s definitely a high standing within the community.” Likewise, Michelle previously taught at a high school that engaged heavily with the community. She provided specific examples when asked about the community’s perception of teachers:

And they had their 100th anniversary last year. And so we had a lot of people from the public coming in. And because the teams played so many sports and they won so many championships, and there were just so many kids involved. And just so many famous people who went to this school. It was, uh, I think people had a much more positive view in that neighbourhood, of that school, because of its lineage. And heritage.

The current school she teaches at conducts annual service projects in the community. She noted, …I think that through those service projects, it definitely makes a difference because, um, people are able to interact with the students and the teachers more so than they would in other schools where they don’t go out into the community.

The community has a better understanding and an overall more positive perception of teachers than the general public does. This supports Chistolini (2010) and GTCE’s (2002) finding that the perception of teachers and the profession is more positive from students, parents, and colleagues. Helen further explained, “…my feeling is that people send their kids to school and they trust that we know what we’re doing and that we’re doing the best that we can”. Participants felt that they
were perceived differently when judged personally as an individual teacher in their community as compared to a collective group of teachers. Michelle noted,

Anytime you can get people into a school or into a program, like a musical or a play. Or you go out into the community, like a nursing home, like with the community garden. Anytime there’s those connections with the community, it becomes real and it doesn’t just belong out in the media. Or in, you know, a fictional world. …And you know, for a lot of people who haven’t been in school since forever ago, it brings them back, “Oh that’s really different from when I was in school. That’s really neat.” And so I think those people who had negative experiences, if they have a positive experience with the current school and teachers, then it changes, I’m sure, their perspective.

As such, we can see how a connection or direct interaction with schools and teachers can improve individuals’ understanding of the profession. Though the research does highlight differences in the community and the general’s public perception of teachers, Michelle raises an interesting and novel suggestion: strategies that encourage the public to get involved with schools may be helpful in reconciling the public’s misunderstanding.

The student demographics at Joanne’s school include a population of 50% Aboriginal students. Though Joanne recognized that her community in general has a positive perception of teachers, she noted, “But then on the other hand, because we have a population of 50% Aboriginal, there is certainly an element of distrust of teachers. …There is almost a testing are you one of the good ones or bad ones.” Joanne indicated that the Aboriginal community and non-Aboriginal community’s perception of her as a teacher are starkly different. However, the literature lacks research that speaks to the perception that different ethnic groups have of teachers.
4.3.2 Media Representations as Barriers to Parent-teacher Relationships

In their interviews, Joanne and Michelle indicated that media representations and the public’s perception act as barriers for teachers when establishing relationships with parents. Joanne explained how the media and the public affect how she relates to parents:

…I know that as I’m meeting with parents, that I need to be aware of how they might… What ideas that they might be coming into the meeting with about me. And that I have to kind of stuff those out, and put their needs first. If they’re parents who are distrustful of teachers. …I need to try and, make sure that…they know that I have their students’ best interest at heart. And that I know that they have that best interest at heart as well. …And making sure that we make a relationship there – that I know that they know their children best.

Parents are both immediate members of a school community and individuals that make up the general public. Therefore, misrepresentations in the media and distrust among the public can affect parents’ perceptions of teachers which in turn may hinder their relationship with their children’s teachers. Joanne further indicated,

Um, with other parents, they might be unsure about the new teaching methods that we’re using. And so I work a lot with them on what can I do to better help you understand, or support, these new teaching methods. …And so, some of those things that they’re hearing in the media or out in the community might be affecting. Right? Their interaction with me, and then how they’re… you know.

Both parents and teachers play extremely important roles in children’s academic success, and a strain in the parent-teacher relationship can potentially impact a child’s success in the classroom. Teachers need to work past the misunderstandings and distrust that parents impinge onto their
children’s teachers and ensure not only that teaching is effective for students but also that parents understand the goals of new teaching approaches.

As mentioned in an earlier section, parent-teacher interviews cause a lot of anxiety and stress for Michelle because she is unsure of the expectations that parents have of her as a teacher. She elaborated on this point:

But I know that they would maybe see me a bit differently, like if I were to have their kid again as a student. Like I think that they would already have that respect, because they know, “Oh you’re a real person, you’re not a super human.” So maybe their expectations might be a little bit less at the very beginning. Whereas I think for parents that are new. I think that every parent wants their child to be number one priority in a classroom. But with 34 kids, that’s never going to happen.

In instances where a pre-existing parent-teacher relationship exists, parents are more understanding of teachers. However, unrealistic expectations from parents of new students make it difficult to establish a parent-teacher relationship with mutual respect and understanding.

4.3.3 The Value of Relationships Among Teachers

In discussing media representations and the public’s perception of teachers and the profession, participants also spoke about the demanding nature of the profession. Michelle mentioned that “teaching is a lonely profession” because the responsibilities are focused on students. Through the interviews I conducted, participants explored the value of relationships with colleagues. Specifically, they indicated that experienced mentor teachers can be a great support system for new teachers – not only in balancing teaching responsibilities but also in
dealing with media misrepresentations and the public’s distrust and lack of understanding. When asked what advice she would give to aspiring teachers and new teachers with regards to dealing with the media and the public, Helen said,

…match yourself with someone who’s been around for a long time, who might have a clearer picture of what it all means in the end. You know, if people are upset with the way or the program you’re teaching, then, you know, most of us have already been through that.

Veteran teachers have experienced the additional demands and pressure that both the media and the public place on teachers and know how to better cope with the stress and anxiety that they bring along. Similarly Michelle pointed out,

But I think we need those veteran teachers to come along and say, “Okay. You planned and supervised the dance. No way are you coaching the team. You’ve done too much. Let someone else step in and take that.” …So I really think the older, the veteran teachers to really need and butt in a little bit more and protect their fellow colleagues.

New teachers often feel that they are “supposed to do everything” (Joanne). On the other hand, experienced teachers have a better understanding of which expectations are manageable and which are unrealistic, and by extension, a better understanding of how to balance the responsibilities of a teacher and to avoid teacher burnout.

4.3.4 The Value of the Student-teacher Relationship

According to surveys conducted by Chistolini (2010) and the General Teaching Council for England (2002), the majority of teachers cite ‘working with children’ and ‘helping children
learn’ as main motivators of their profession. In their interviews, participants emphasized the importance of their relationship with students. Helen reported that her students are the main “motivation to overcome…hurtful feelings” arising from media misrepresentations and the public’s distrust. Similarly, Michelle indicated, “…at the end of the day, it’s about the kids.”

Thus, there is a positive interplay between the student-teacher relationship, and the media and the public. As we saw earlier, positive media representations can foster a deeper relationship between teachers and students by modeling and encouraging positive instructional practices. Also importantly, the relationship that teachers have with their students helps teachers overcome misrepresentations and misunderstandings that they see and hear. Meaningful student-teacher relationships can thus help to mitigate the negative effects that the media and the public may have on teachers.

**4.3.5 Reflective Practices and Teachers’ Voices**

While participants spoke about important and dynamic relationships with colleagues, parents and students, the idea of self-relation also emerged. Participants’ understanding of their identities and roles as teachers evolved in response to what they saw and heard in both the media and the public. They recounted engaging in reflective practices and actively voicing their understanding of the profession, and highlighted the importance and the value of these two strategies in dealing with media misrepresentations and the public’s misunderstandings. In response to stories about teachers and the profession in both the media and the public, Helen said, “I often wonder where they’re coming from – like what kind of lens are they looking through to see that kind of misunderstanding.” Much like how Helen felt that the public is perceptive when making sense of media representations of teachers and the profession, she
herself also applies critical thinking in order to understand “the whole story” (Helen). When asked how she deals with stress from the media and the public, Joanne shared,

…I guess trying to take a step back and trying to think, as a person, any person, you have to decide what you’re capable of doing. …And what I can actually have influence over. And um, I know that, I can have a really positive influence on my classes that are in front of me this year. I know that I know how to be a caring, compassionate, …problem-solver in my classroom. Um, but then there also has to be a point, where…Making sure that I was balancing that, and taking care of my other responsibilities.

By reflecting on one’s responsibilities and capabilities as a teacher, teachers can better establish boundaries within their work to prevent unrealistic expectations set by both the media and the public from influencing other areas of their lives – in particular their emotional well-being, motivation level, self-efficacy, and instructional practice. In her interview, Michelle returned to the idea of teaching as a professional practice and stated:

This is a practice. This is something that continues with time. So how do I cope with it? I know I’m trying to do the best that I can. And, um… Yeah if I’m not perfect, yeah that’s okay. And just constantly trying to improve my practice to get those best practices in to my classroom.

In striving to improve instructional practices, teachers actively engage in reflection. This in turn not only has positive outcomes for teachers’ classrooms, but it also builds teachers’ confidence in their skills which helps deal with pressures brought upon by the media and the public.

In their interviews, participants noted how teachers’ voices are present only minimally in both the media and the public. Joanne felt that teachers are reluctant to share information about the profession because the act of doing so is “contentious” and teachers avoid such situations.
Similarly Michelle remarked that the public has a “critical eye…towards teachers”, which thus makes it “really hard for teachers to toot their own horn” as the public may not “be receptive towards teachers rallying together to show who they are.” At the same time, however, participants emphasized the importance and the need for teachers to speak up. In order “to get the public to support” (Helen) teachers, Helen said, “I think teachers need to start speaking up. Because I think teachers tend to be, uh, a little bit used about some things, but we really should talk more often.” She shared in her interview,

Um, and then last week we had somebody come in and they were talking about bear safety. We need to publicize that kind of thing. This is the cool stuff we did, and you know it isn’t just the media’s side of it. You know, the teachers need to, you know, to kind of boast about the kinds of things they do too, and what’s going on in the classroom. People love to read about that kind of stuff. And they love to see some pictures of kids in the paper and that sort of thing. …I think we need to advertise what we do better. And I think we need to, uh… And I think the media needs to be there and see the whole picture of things.

By speaking up, teachers can provide a more well-rounded understanding of the profession in order to help the media and the public understand the many facets of teaching. Joanne remarked, “I think that media representations have… Had an effect on me personally in that it’s made me almost deliberately activist about getting that message out there.” She further noted,

And I have found that doing it has been beneficial. …Because I really do think that people, um, people want the information… And they want to know and see that it’s [the public education system] done well. And they’re hearing that teachers are unhappy with the way that things are going, or maybe that teachers aren’t, um, well-prepared for it.
…And I found that whenever I, I do that explaining – whether it’s in person or on Facebook – that it’s really well-received.

Therefore, teachers can ameliorate misrepresentations in the media and the public’s misunderstandings by speaking up about issues in education and their profession.

In addition to individual teacher voices, participants highlighted the role that unions can play in dealing with the media and the public. They felt that “the union can provide a role” (Helen) in helping the public become better informed on the realities that teachers face. Whether through social media campaigns, billboard signs, or television and newspaper advertisements, participants felt that the union has a big role in helping the media, the public, and teachers reconcile their understanding of the profession.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the results of my interviews with three in-service teachers, Joanne, Helen, and Michelle. They all actively engage with a number of media outlets that report on teachers and the teaching profession, and have felt personally affected by media representations of teachers and their profession.

The first theme that emerged from my interviews was Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession. Under this theme, I examined how the media, the public, and teachers all have different understandings of teachers and the profession. In the media, teachers and the profession are mostly portrayed either extremely positively or extremely negatively. Amongst the public, there lacks an accurate and well-rounded understanding of the
profession. Teachers, on the other hand, see themselves as professionals and understand teaching to be a profession.

The second theme I identified was Media Representation Are a Double-edged Sword. In this section, I examined how the media and the public can have both positive and negative outcomes for teachers and the profession. Specifically, I explored the consequences that media representations and the public’s perception have on teachers’ emotional well-being, instructional practice, motivation, self-efficacy, and areas beyond teachers.

The third and final theme was The Importance of Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations; the subthemes I explored were Community Has a Better Understanding of Teachers and the Profession, Media Representations as Barriers to Parent-teacher Relationships, The Value in Relationships Among Teachers, The Value of the Student-teacher Relationship, and Reflective Practices and Teachers’ Voices. The idea of building relationships with different education stakeholders underpinned all of these subthemes and proved to be valuable in helping teachers deal with media misrepresentations of their profession and the public’s lack of understanding.

In Chapter Five, I will speak to the significance and implications of my findings for education stakeholders. I will also identify areas for further research given my analysis, and make recommendations based on my findings to the Ministry of Education and teacher unions concerning the representation of teachers and the profession.
Chapter Five: Implications

5.0 Introduction

The present study was designed to learn more about media representations of teachers and the profession and the consequences they have on teachers’ self-efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I explored media representations of teachers and the profession, the public’s perception, and teachers’ identities as understood through the lived experiences of three in-service teachers. The findings serve to support the extant literature pertaining to the way teachers are portrayed in the media and the public and to specifically tell us more about the effects. This chapter summarizes the research findings, highlights the present study’s implications for various stakeholders, provides several recommendations, and suggests directions for future research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

Following interviews with three educators, a rigorous analysis revealed three important themes which subsequently form the subheadings of this section of Chapter Five: 1) Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession, 2) Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword, and 3) The Importance of Fostering Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations.

5.1.1 Disparate Understandings of Teachers and the Teaching Profession

In exploring teachers’ experiences and perceptions of media representations and the public’s opinion of teacher and their profession, I learned that the media, the public, and teachers
all have very different understandings of teachers and their profession. The three in-service teachers I interviewed – Joanne, Helen, and Michelle – saw themselves as professionals and understood teaching as a profession. They highlighted different aspects of teaching that are seldom discussed and/or fully understood outside their profession including planning, creativity, class size, research, and professional development. They also spoke very highly of the importance of their relationship with their students.

Upon reflecting on the ways in which the media portray teachers and the profession, Joanne, Helen, and Michelle highlighted the prevalence of extreme representations: both positive and negative images of teachers and the profession pervade. Such depictions not only are an inaccurate representation of the majority of teachers, but they also do little to represent teachers as a whole professional body. Furthermore, the prevalence of extreme media representations have dire consequences. On one hand, pervasive extreme negative representations perpetuate qualities of incompetency and unprofessionalism amongst the teaching profession. On the other hand, while extreme positive depictions do portray teachers in a positive light, such depictions are also harmful because they set up unrealistic expectations that the public perceives as normal, and that teachers may judge themselves against. Participant observations of extreme media representations of teachers are consistent with research that has considered portrayals of teachers on television and in film (Burbach & Higgins, 1993; Swetnam, 1992), as well as research that has examined dominant discourses of teachers and the profession in the news (Cohen, 2010; Keogh & Garrick, 2011; Macmillan, 2002; MacMillan & McLachlan, 1998; Thomas, 2011).

Society today is constantly exposed to the media, so it is concerning when extreme portrayals of teachers and the profession dominate the media. When discussing the public’s perception, my three participants felt that the public had a limited and uninformed understanding
of teachers and the profession. They felt that the public did not understand the breadth and depth of teachers’ responsibilities, and that the public’s understanding was largely shaped by their personal experiences from school and the extreme representations dominating the media.

Overall, Joanne, Helen, and Michelle feel that the public perception of teachers and the profession is largely negative. This is consistent with the research that documents the ranking and the public perception of teachers and the profession (Hargreaves, Cunningham, Hansen, McIntyre, & Oliver, 2007; Hoyle, 1995; Treiman, 1977; Varley GEMS Foundations, 2013).

5.1.2. Media Representations Are a Double-edged Sword

The second theme that emerged from my research findings was the idea that media representations of teachers and the teaching profession are a double-edged sword. Media discourse, which also directly affects the public’s perception, has both positive and negative consequences that warrant our close attention. The teachers I interviewed indicated how the high expectations and the negativity that comes from the media and the public place a great emotional toll on their overall well-being. This data supports Raphael (1985) and Swetnam’s (1992) research that indicates that the major differences between the reality of teaching and idealistic expectations imposed onto teachers are a major contributory factor to teacher burnout.

Concurrently, extreme positive portrayals in the media highlight successes in teaching and the importance of the teacher-student relationship, which in turn can be a great source of motivation and can positively affect instructional practice. This makes sense when we consider research that reports on children’s central role as a source of motivation for the majority of teachers in the profession (Chistolini, 2010; GTCE, 2002). The three participants reported mixed effects on their motivation levels and self-efficacy. On one hand, Joanne and Helen indicated that they were able
to overcome media misrepresentations and the public’s negative perception, and their motivation and self-efficacy were unaffected. On the other hand, Michelle, having been personally and negatively implicated in a news story, felt less motivated and less confident as a result of these negative portrayals. Michelle’s sentiments resonate with the GTCE (2002), Mackenzie (2007), and Rhodes (2003), who found that a target-driven culture and a perceived low professional status rank among top demotivating factors for teachers. When speaking about consequences beyond teachers, the three participants also indicated that the media has both positive and negative effects. Drawing on past media campaigns, they indicated that the media can be a powerful and effective tool in advocating for teachers and education. At the same time, however, they worry that media representations may inappropriately effect policy changes and educational reform.

5.1.3 The Importance of Fostering Relationships in Dealing with Media Representations

In exploring the outcomes of the media on teachers and the profession, I discovered the importance of fostering relationships for teachers in dealing with media representations and the ensuing public attitudes. All three participants felt that their family, friends, and individual school communities – that is, students, parents, and colleagues – have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and an overall more positive perception of teachers as compared to the general public. As a result, they also felt more respected. These findings are consistent with Chistolini (2010) and the GTCE’s (2002) research that found that the perception of teachers and the profession is more positive from individuals in the same immediate community circle. However, Joanne and Michelle also indicated that media representations act as barriers when establishing relationships with their students’ parents because parents’ perceptions and
expectations may be affected by misrepresentations in the media and distrust among the public. All three participants mentioned that relationships with teacher mentors and fellow teachers were valuable support systems in learning to balance teaching responsibilities and to deal with media misrepresentations. Additionally, student-teacher relationships are a powerful source of motivation to overcome hurtful feelings and the stress arising from media misrepresentations. Furthermore, positive media images can even foster a deeper relationship between teachers and students by modeling and encouraging positive teaching practices. Lastly, participants also reported engaging in reflective practices, and they emphasized its importance and its value in dealing with media representations of teachers and the profession. They felt that active reflection of their work and their roles as teachers provided a means to better establish boundaries to prevent being negatively influenced by unrealistic expectations set up through the media and the public. The three participants also highlighted the importance of speaking up about teachers’ roles and responsibilities in order to help better inform the media and the public and challenge media misrepresentations. Altogether, fostering meaningful relationships with the community, parents, colleagues, and students, as well as reflecting on their own practices, are powerful ways to work past the effects of the media’s representations of teachers and the profession.

5.2 Implications

The present study has important implications for various stakeholders in the educational community as well as for myself as a teacher and a researcher. In this section, I discuss both the broad and narrow implications of my findings.
5.2.1 Broad: The Educational Community

In my research findings, I have explicitly highlighted the direct consequences of media representations of teachers and the profession on teachers. The present study provides novel insight into the specific ways in which the media positively and/or negatively affect teachers’ self-efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice. For example, extreme positive portrayals of teachers in the media that highlight successes in teaching can positively affect motivation and instructional practice, yet they can also place a great emotional toll on teachers’ well-being by setting up unrealistic expectations for teachers. Furthermore, the negative impact that media representations have on teachers may greatly contribute to teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction.

When teachers’ self-efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice are affected – whether positively or negatively – there are also important implications for students. First, students’ quality of education may be affected: either strengthened when teachers implement effective instructional practice inspired by successful teaching stories in the media, or weakened when teachers feel discouraged and demotivated by the media. Teachers’ self-efficacy and motivation levels may also impact students’ enthusiasm for learning in the classroom, as well as extracurricular opportunities offered outside of the academic curriculum.

This study should also serve as a reminder to policymakers and curriculum planners that the media may impact issues in education by shaping the discourse that is discussed by the public. When the media chooses to report only certain education issues and to portray only a narrow representation of teachers and the profession, policymakers and curriculum planners may be more compelled by the public and the media to address such issues. This in turn may lead to
policy and curriculum agendas that are driven more so by external pressures than by educational concerns and needs that demand immediate attention.

5.2.2 Narrow: My Professional Identity and Practice

As I move forward in my career in teaching, the process and content of this research study will stay with me in multiple ways. For one, I have witnessed the meaningful insight that can be gained from qualitative research, and I strive to continue to learn from the experiences and the stories of those around me. This research has also helped me to understand the ways in which teachers and the profession are portrayed in the media, perceived by the public, and understood by teachers, as detailed through the lived experiences of individuals. Having heard the stories of three in-service teachers, I have seen how they have asserted their roles and responsibilities amidst selective portrayals from the media. I have also been exposed to strategies that they use to work past these misunderstandings and misrepresentations from the media and the public. For example, the relationships that teachers build with their students are invaluable in supporting teachers’ instructional practice, motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being.

I entered the teaching profession because of my love for learning and my passion to help children develop the competencies they need to navigate the world. Since I began my teacher training at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, I have found much satisfaction through the relationships I have developed with my students, my associate teachers, and my colleagues. Still, however, I have continued to struggle with my identity as a teacher given the inaccurate understanding of the profession that my family and friends, the media, and the public continue to share. Speaking to in-service teachers has helped to validate my experience as I hear my sentiments resonated in their stories. Their personal experiences have helped me to grow as a
beginning teacher, and have also affirmed my commitment to this profession. I know that neither of the two extreme teacher images portrayed in the media accurately reflect my capabilities as a teacher, though I strive to embody the qualities reinforced through the more positive teacher portrayals. At the same time, however, I know that I will ultimately achieve more as a teacher by not imposing unrealistic expectations that the media and the public have onto myself. I understand that teaching is a profession and my competency as a teacher will continue to grow over the course of my career. I now feel better equipped to manage the stress and negativity that I feel from what I see and hear in the media and from the public, and I feel more focused in my role as a teacher and what I can achieve for my students. Overall, my research has instilled a newfound confidence and meaning to my work as both a teacher and researcher.

My research project has also reminded me of the valuable interactions that exist beyond my relationship with my students. The opportunity to speak to in-service teachers about their experiences has helped me to understand how parents and the community can also shape my teacher identity. In my practice, I hope not only to be successful in my role as a teacher to my students, but also in helping to reconcile people’s understanding of teachers’ roles and responsibilities. Misunderstandings by parents and the community may stem in large part by the media’s narrow depictions, and it is important for me not to internalize these depictions as reflections of my own competency but rather to shift my focus to helping the public better understand what it is I do as a teacher. By involving parents and the community in my classroom and in my school, I believe that I can showcase the realities of teaching which in turn can help overcome the media’s narrow depictions, and help parents, the community, and myself better support learning collaboratively.
5.3 Recommendations

The implications of the present study point specifically to several recommendations for ministries of education, school boards and schools, teacher unions, and the media. Recommendations are outlined below:

1) Ministries of education should seek ways to more actively involve teachers in policy-making and changes to the curriculum. As the very people who carry out the policies and implement the curriculum, teachers have a thorough understanding of the realities in schools and in classrooms, and as such are well-informed to be able to make recommendations for improvement. Policy and curriculum changes and implementation can thus be improved through actual teacher participation, rather than having only policy-makers who are not teachers make decision based upon their idea of who teachers are and what they do.

2) Ministries of education and teachers should seek to more actively include media literacy into the curriculum. Students should be provided with the tools to critically evaluate media stories in order to foster resilience in the face of extreme media portrayals.

3) School boards and schools should encourage programs and opportunities that welcome parents and the community into schools and classrooms. When individuals are involved with school life, they develop a personal rapport with teachers and by extension, a better understanding of teachers and their profession. I also recommend that school boards and schools set up professional development opportunities for teachers to share successes from their individual classrooms. Professional development usually emphasizes new research that teachers can incorporate into their practice, but often time teachers are also experimenting with new ways of teaching in their very own classrooms. However, my
findings suggest that there lacks formal opportunities for teachers to share their own experiences with one another. Much like how extreme positive teacher portrayals in the media can positively impact instructional practice, teachers can bring successes from their colleagues’ classrooms into their own.

4) School boards and schools should establish mentorship programs to pair up experienced teachers with beginning teachers. Veteran teachers can not only share their teaching expertise garnered from years of experience, but they also have a better understanding of how to manage the plethora of teacher responsibilities without burning out. The media and the public often impose unrealistic expectations onto teachers, and beginning teachers often feel compelled to do as much as possible. This can lead to much stress and anxiety, and is also a large contributory factor to teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction. New in-service teachers inherit a whole new level of independence and often lack the guidance needed to navigate the first years of teaching. The role of veteran teachers to new teachers can be seen to be akin to that of an associate teacher to a student teacher. Veteran teachers can be a great support system for new teachers, as well as helping them understand how to strike an appropriate and healthy work-life balance.

5) Teacher unions should capitalize on media platforms to promote awareness around the work that teachers do in order to help the public better understand the profession. Media platforms such as social media, billboards, and television and newspaper advertisements have a wide audience and are an effective means by which to reach out to the public.

6) I understand that sensational issues appeal to a large audience and hence are more heavily reported on in both news media and entertainment media. However, I caution the media in disproportionately emphasizing sensational issues and extreme portrayals that distort
the reality of the profession. Furthermore, I recommend that media outlets make an active effort to include educational experts in their stories – whether real or fictional reports – on teachers and education issues. Much like how the media consults doctors and medical experts for health stories, the addition of teachers and education experts can not only add authenticity to education stories, but would also serve to help the public better understand issues in education and the teaching profession.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Inasmuch as the present study has served to expand upon the extant literature, it has also highlighted the need for further study. In future research endeavours, it is recommended that a greater emphasis be placed on the consequences that media portrayals of teachers and the profession have on student learning. In addition to the findings from this study, such research may serve to highlight the importance and the need for accountability by the media. Furthermore, different ethnic, racial, and social groups’ perceptions of teachers and the profession, as well as factors that inform these perceptions, should be explored in order to better understand the public’s view as a whole. This in turn may also shed light onto strategies to help reconcile disparate understandings of teachers and the profession among the media, the public, and teachers.

5.5 Concluding Comments

While there are many important conclusions to this study, I believe that there is a key idea supported by both the literature and my research that deserves the final remark. The media’s selectively chosen extreme portrayals of teachers and the profession have important
consequences for teachers’ self-efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice that can ultimately affect effective teaching and learning. As Snyder (2008) points out, “it makes no sense to continually undermine those who are charged with the significant social responsibility of educating the next generation of citizens” (p. 222). As a society, we need to be more critical of the images we see and the stories we hear, and understand that the media’s extreme representations of teachers and the profession do not accurately depict the realities of the classroom. By providing teachers with the professional dignity and social respect that they deserve, we can better support teachers’ work in delivering meaningful and effective learning opportunities for children.
References


Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis, 1*, 1-17.


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date: _______________________________

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Amanda Lee and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the impact of the media on the public’s perception of teachers and its ramifications. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at research conference(s) or publication(s). You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be myself and my course instructor, Dr. Rodney Handelsman. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Amanda

Phone number: +1-647-985-0706

Email: a.leemankei@gmail.com
Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rodney Handelsman

Contact Info: rodney.handelsman@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Amanda Lee and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________

Date: ______________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Date:
Start time:
End time:
Location:
Participant name:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. The purpose of my research is to investigate the effect of media representation of teachers and their profession on the efficacy, motivation, and instructional practice of a sample of teachers. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time. You may also pass on any question you do not wish to answer and you will be assigned a pseudonym in my study. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes and consists of 22 questions. These questions focus on your background information, teacher understandings, teacher identity and practices, influencing factors, and next steps. Please let me know if you need clarification at any point during the interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. How long have you been teaching? What schools/provinces/countries have you taught in?
2. What grades and subjects do you teach? Have you always taught these grades and subjects?
3. Have you always taught at your current school? How many years have you been teaching at this school? Can you tell me a bit more about the school you currently teach at (e.g. school board, size, and student demographics)?

4. Are you or have you ever been involved with other extra-curricular responsibilities at school?

5. As you know, one criterion of participation was an active interest and awareness of media representations of teachers and the teaching profession. What media outlets do you regularly engage with? (e.g. news outlets, media reports, entertainment media, etc.)

Section 2: Teacher Understandings

6. How do you think various media outlets represent teachers and the teaching profession? Do you think their representations are fair?

7. What do you think is the public’s perception of teachers and the teaching profession? Do you think that the public’s perception is accurate and/or fair?

8. Do you think the media plays a role in shaping the public’s perception? Do you think that your family and friends are influenced by the same media representations?

9. What do you make of any media misrepresentations and public misunderstandings of teachers and the profession? Can you make sense of them?

10. Do you observe any discrepancies in the way you are personally treated as a teacher (e.g. by students, students’ families, and the community) and the way in which the public views your profession?
Section 3: Teacher Identity and Practices

11. Another criterion of participation was an identifiable level of influence from media representations of teachers and their profession. What effect have media representations have on you both personally and as a teacher?

12. How has media representations and the public’s perception influenced you as a teacher? Your level of efficacy? Your motivation? Your instructional practice?

13. How do you as a teacher cope with such media representations and the public’s perception?

14. Can you give me an example of a heavily reported or heavily discussed issue in the media that affected you personally?

Section 4: Influencing Factors

15. To what extent do you feel the media should be held accountable for the consequences of their portrayal of teachers and the profession?

16. Do you anticipate an effect of media representations and the public’s perception that is greater than that beyond teachers (e.g. policy and educational reform)? How do you feel about that?

17. How do you think the public can become better informed about the realities that teachers face? What do you think the public can do? Is there any part that teachers can play to help with such changes?

18. As an experienced teacher, do you now feel more or less affected by what you hear in the media?
Section 5: Next Steps

19. How do you think teachers and the media can reconcile the differences in their understanding of the job and the profession?

20. What aspects of teaching and the profession do you think are important for the media and the public to understand?

21. What advice would you give to aspiring teachers and teachers just entering the teaching profession?

22. What do you think is important for experienced teachers to keep in mind?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.