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The Impact of Media on the Public's Perception of Texas Foster Care

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ABSTRACT

This study explores if valid information can mitigate stereotypes of foster care as reflected in popular media, specifically in the context of the State of Texas. A quasi-experimental, post-test only design assessed the role that media plays in the public's perception of foster care in the state of Texas. Results indicate that media, in the form of a professional presentation, made statistically significant differences between treatment and control groups in regard to the overall perception and general attitudes towards the foster care system in the State of Texas. Results indicate the need for further research in the area of media's impact on the public's perception of foster care.

The Impact of Media on the Public's Perception of Texas Foster Care

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Social Work

By

Hannah Sims

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
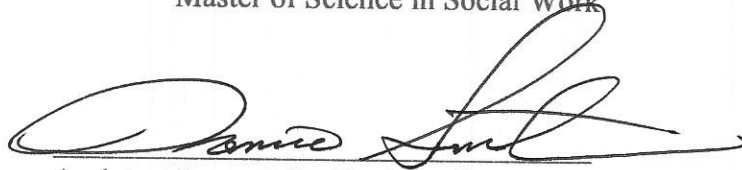
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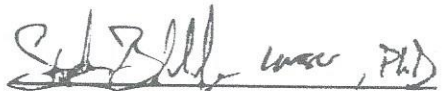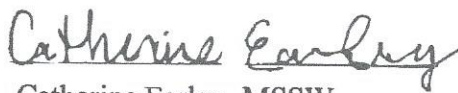Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs

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This study is dedicated to the thousands of youth in the Texas foster care system.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Most recent statistics reveal that 427,910 children are in the United States foster

care system (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Fiscal year 2015

statistics, the most recently available data, reveal that there are a total of 27,895 children

in the Texas foster care system (Department of Family Protective Services [DFPS],

2015). This number includes children in all forms of substitute care including kinship

care, child placing agency foster homes, residential treatment centers, state foster homes,

and emergency shelters (DFPS, 2015).

Removing a child from the biological family requires proof of maltreatment such

as neglect or sexual, physical, or emotional abuse (Pew Commission on Children in

Foster Care, 2004). The majority of children in the foster system have been through

incredibly traumatic circumstances. Their past, however, does not dictate the level of care

they experience once placed in foster care. It must be noted that of the 27,895 children in

state custody, 99.9% of them remained safe while in foster care (Texas DFPS, 2015).

Damaging stories are, however, often highlighted in various forms of media, leaving the

public with a negative view of the foster system (Alvarez, 2017).

Fostering Brighter Futures is a program of the Texas Council of Child Welfare

Boards that aims to tell positive and uplifting stories about the foster care system. The

program exists to connect individuals who might be interested in foster care or adoption to resources within their communities. According to Fostering Brighter Futures,

> Public perception is strongly influenced by popular culture and that as a result of the prevalence of negative stories and images in popular media including news, television, and movies…This negative image stigmatizes both foster children and foster parents, and severely undercuts efforts to recruit qualified foster parents. (Texas Council on Child Welfare Boards, 2017, para. 2)

An overarching goal of Fostering Brighter Futures is to promote the positive stories that happen every day within the foster care system, rather than focusing on the negative ones that end up on the news.

Foster care is oftentimes portrayed through films and media as an institutional system that ignores the true needs of children, instead perpetuating stereotypes rather than challenging societal beliefs. Members of the public have very little interaction with the foster system unless they have been directly involved. Therefore, many perceptions are gained from the stories in films, literature, and the news (Alvarez, 2017; Leber & LeCroy 2012).

The committee that oversees the Fostering Brighter Futures program believes that popular culture negatively impacts how the public perceives the foster care system and operates based on the assumption that the public's perception is tainted as a result (TCCWB, 2017). A fundamental problem at this point in time is an apparent lack of research on the public's perception and knowledge of the foster care system (Leber & LeCroy, 2012). Despite a gap in literature, some existing literature suggests that media

plays a large role in the public's perception and knowledge of the foster care system (Alvarez, 2017; Meese, 2012).

Taymans et al. (2008) argue that increasing awareness through effective dissemination of information has the ability to change an individual's perception of foster and adopted children and their families if that perception has been misinformed as a result of film, literature, or media. This aligns closely with the goal of Fostering Brighter Futures.

The goal of this research is to closely examine how popular culture impacts the public's perception of the foster care system in the state of Texas. The results of the research will help to address the existing gap in literature on the topic of public perception as it relates to the foster care system. The primary research question of this study asks if valid information can mitigate stereotypes of foster care as reflected in popular media.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were developed by the primary researcher for the purpose of this study. Terms fall under three main categories: foster care terms, media terms, and other terms. Terms related directly to foster care include general definitions and specific types of care. Other terms were defined to allow consistency throughout the review of literature.

Foster Care Terms

Substitute Care, any out-of-home placement that is being directly supervised by the state or an appropriately licensed public or private licensed child placing agency.

Foster care, a form of substitute care in which a child who has been removed from the biological family is placed with an individual or couple who has been licensed by the state or a licensed child placing agency.

Kinship care, a form of substitute care in which a child, who has been removed from the biological parents, is placed with an extended family member or close friend who they share a significant emotional bond with.

Residential treatment center, a form of substitute care in which a child, who has been removed from the biological family, receives structured care while living at a facility due to needs that cannot be met through more traditional forms of substitute care.

Adoption, the legal decision to make a non-biological child part of one's permanent family through official legal proceedings.

Media Terms

Media, any material that is widely accessible by the general public such as television shows, movies, newspapers, magazines, or works of literature.

Social media, information gained through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Pinterest among any other platforms that would appropriately be deemed forms of social media.

Other Terms

Stereotype, "Societal beliefs and ideas about certain groups that exist without any objective evidence to back up their actual validity" (Calheiros, Garrido, Lopes, and Patrício, 2015).

Narrative Paradigm Theory, Walter Fisher's (1989) communication theory which offers insight into how humans develop and tell stories and the impact that those stories have on society as a whole.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Search Strategy

The majority of information obtained for the purpose of this literature review was found via the EBSCOhost database. The Encyclopedia of Social Work was also utilized in order to fulfill the requirements for this review of literature. Data specific to the Texas child welfare system was obtained through the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services website. There are two main criteria research must meet to be considered for this review of the literature. First, the work must have been published within 10 years of the search date unless the work is considered to be formative in the concepts covered. Second, work must be from a scholarly peer-reviewed academic journal. Both quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies were reviewed. Search terms included: public perception/s, child welfare, foster care, foster children, foster youth, foster care providers, media role in public perception/s, formation of perception, and formation of stereotype/s.

Introduction to the Foster Care System

Of the 427,910 children in the United States foster care system, 27,895 are in the State of Texas (Children's Bureau, 2017; U.S. DHHS, 2015). This number includes children in all forms of substitute care. Including kinship care, child placing agency foster homes, residential treatment centers, state foster homes, and emergency shelters (DFPS, 2015).

When it is deemed unsafe for children under the age of 18 to remain in the custody of their family of origin, they often will enter foster care if a relative or friend is unable or unwilling to care for them. In these cases, Child Protective Services (CPS) is granted temporary custody of the child. Foster care is intended to be a temporary solution in which foster children reside in foster family homes, kinship placements, foster group homes, or residential care facilities (DFPS, 2015). Foster care providers aim to protect foster youth, ensure permanency within placements, and preserve families.

Family reunification is the initial goal for children in the foster system (Everett, 2013; Freundlich, Avery, Gerstenzang, & Munson, 2006). Once a child enters substitute care, a variety of services are provided by the case worker who is in charge of the foster youth's case. Case workers provide consistent case management and are closely involved in the substitute care process. Case management is provided by case workers through intake, investigation, assessment, case planning, evaluation of progress, and closure of the case (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Thompson, Wojciak, & Cooley, 2017).

Types of Substitute Care

In the Child Welfare Outcomes Report compiled between the years 2010-2014, the US Department of Health and Human Services reports that the state of Texas had the second largest population of children under the age of 18 at 7,115,614. It comes as no surprise that the State of Texas also has the second largest number of children in foster care. In 2014, there were estimated to be 29,478 children in substitute care (Children's Bureau, 2017). Children in Texas foster care are placed in a variety of settings including traditional family foster homes, kinship placements, and residential group care facilities. Foster youth are assessed and assigned to levels of care which determines what level of

intervention the foster parents and care providers will provide (Everett, 2013; Texas DFPS, 2017).

Service Levels

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (2017) created a resource guide in October of 2017 detailing the five levels of service that foster care offers. These levels include: basic, moderate, specialized, intense, and intense-plus (Texas DFPS, 2017). These levels can best be described as tiers of service, with basic being the lowest form of intervention and intense-plus being the highest form of intervention.

Basic level services aim to provide general support, occurring within the context of a traditional foster family home, kinship placements, and even group homes. Basic services are best fit for children with general case management needs. Moderate services are more structured and are most appropriate for youth with developmental delays who require more specialized care plans and interventions. The majority of youth receiving these services, however, have behavioral needs. Specialized services are offered to youth who present with unpredictable behavior, abuse substances, have developmental or intellectual delays, or have consistent medical needs. For these levels of care, it is preferable that youth be placed in traditional foster homes, kinship, or group home settings (Texas DFPS, 2017).

Intense service levels are assigned to youth with severe behavioral, social, or emotional difficulties that could result in harming self or others. Care providers are expected to provide a highly structured environment for the child. Intense service level youth are either placed in specially trained foster homes or in residential group care. The

intense-plus service level is only offered at residential treatment centers. Youth receiving this level of care often have debilitating conditions and are not suited for traditional foster home settings (Pecora, 2013; Texas DFPS, 2017). Youth that require intense-plus services are under 24-hour supervision and receive therapeutic interventions and support. All caregivers within a treatment center have most likely received some level of graduate or professional licensure as well as specialized training to contribute to the child's safety and care (Texas DFPS, 2017).

Traditional Foster Homes

Traditional family foster home care occurs when a child is placed with a family or individual not related to them. The foster parents in these cases have been licensed through the state or a licensed child placing agency. Traditional foster care aims to meet the basic needs of the child by providing a stable support system until long term permanent placement can be arranged (Pecora, 2013).

Adults interested in becoming foster parents must meet the criteria set by the state in which they reside. The state of Texas has a set of basic requirements applicants must meet in order to become a licensed foster parent. In Texas, potential parents must be 21 years of age or older, have a stable income, provide information on their background and lifestyle, complete a home study with the state or a child placing agency, and attend any required trainings (Texas Adoption Resource Exchange, 2017). While the process to become a foster parent may seem involved, child placing agencies assist prospective foster parents in meeting all necessary requirements to become a licensed foster parent.

Kinship Placements

Kinship care occurs when a child is placed with an extended family member or close friend other than the biological parents. While it is common for foster youth to be placed with grandparents, aunts, or uncles, the main requirement for a kin placement is that the adult has a strong emotional connection with the child (Cox, 2016). Kinship foster care placements are the second most common type of foster placement behind traditional family foster homes (Pecora, 2013).

At the end of the 2015 fiscal year, 37 percent of Texas foster youth were in formal kinship placements (Texas DFPS, 2015). Kinship placements allow children to remain connected to their biological families and provides a sense of stability that other forms of substitute care cannot (Pecora, 2013). The number of children in kinship care doubled between 2005 and 2015. Kinship placements often result in formal adoption when it is determined unsafe for a child to return home to birth parents. Kinship adoptions account for 49 percent of all DFPS adoptions in the state of Texas (Texas DFPS, 2015).

Residential Treatment Centers

Children with emotional or behavioral needs that make them poor candidates for family foster care or kinship placements will be placed within a residential treatment facility or group home where case management and mental health support services are implemented daily. The group settings are typically composed of children who have been severely abused, neglected, or are considered to be at risk of emotional or behavioral problems. These facilities aim to provide a more structured setting than a traditional foster home or kinship placement would by providing around-the-clock case management and therapeutic interventions as appropriate (Pecora, 2013; Texas DFPS, 2015). Youth

placed in group care settings comprised approximately 9% of placements nationwide as of September 30, 2015, the end of the 2015 fiscal year (US DHHS, 2015). In relation to the previously discussed levels of care, children who qualify at the intense-plus service level are the primary benefactors of residential treatment centers (Texas DFPS, 2017).

Snapshot of Care

On August 31, 2016, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (2016) published what can best be described as a snapshot of the youth in state care. On August 31, 2016, there were a total of 28,732 children in Texas substitute care. 11,209 of those children were in formal kinship placements, and 12,595 children were in traditional family foster homes licensed through the state or a licensed child placing agency. The total population of children in residential treatment centers totaled 1,631. The remaining 3,297 children were categorized by the state as being in other foster care, other substitute care, emergency shelters, or adoptive homes (Texas DFPS, 2016).

Portrayal in the Media

There is an existing gap in literature in regard to the American public's perception of the foster care system (Alvarez, 2017; Leber & LeCroy, 2012). What little research that has been conducted on the topic of foster care perception took place many years ago. Therefore, there is a pressing need for updated research to take place in order to account for changes and shifts in previously collected data. In 2003, the Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care (2004) conducted extensive research on the general public's impressions and opinions of the foster care system. The findings of this study indicated that while the majority of respondents might not have overtly negative views of the foster

care system, there was a consistent belief that the system as a whole was broken (Pew, 2004).

In 2007, the Dave Thomas Foundation conducted similar research that aimed to better understand the American public's attitudes about foster care adoption and foster care in general. This research reports that individuals of the public learn about foster care in three main ways: the Internet, television, and through conversations with others in their personal network of friends and family (Dave Thomas Foundation, 2007). Alvarez (2017) argued that these are still primary sources of the public's knowledge of foster care.

Foster care is oftentimes portrayed through films and media in a way that perpetuates stereotypes and can potentially misinform the public. Television shows and films frequently negatively portray foster parents and case workers (Alvarez, 2017). Movies have the ability to leave impressions on public audiences and shape public opinions as an outcome (Adkins & Castle, 2014).

Meese (2012) found that most educators are unaware of specific training methods to help promote inclusiveness towards foster youth in the classroom. Educators should feel empowered to discuss similarities among portrayals of children in literature and films. These forms of storytelling reflect society's values and views at the time in which they are created. It is important that the messages taken away from these forms of media do not perpetuate stereotypes (Alvarez, 2017; Meese, 2012; Taymans et al., 2008).

Many members of the public have very little interaction with the foster system unless they have been directly involved. Therefore, perceptions are gained from the stories in films, literature, and the news (Leber & LeCroy 2012). Taymans et al. (2008) argued that increasing awareness through effective dissemination of information has the

ability to change an individual's perception of adopted children and their families if that perception has been misinformed as a result of film, literature, or media.

Engaging the public, especially those who will work with adopted and foster children, with accurate facts about the system is important to ensure that perceptions are accurate. A fundamental aspect of this is recognizing biases and stereotypes that are portrayed in the storytelling of films and literature. Stereotypes that are prevalent in films and literature include siblings being separated within the foster system, abuse from foster caretakers, and foster children running away. These aspects are dramatically overrated in films when compared to accurate statistics (Alvarez, 2017; Meese, 2012).

The Detriment of Stereotypes

Similar to perceptions of foster care, little research exists on the topic of social image and stereotype formation of the foster system. Stereotypes can be defined as societal beliefs and ideas about certain groups that exist without any objective evidence to back up their actual validity (Calheiros et al., 2015). Stereotype formation sets the basis for establishing core principles and beliefs among individuals and people groups (Le Pelley, Reimers, Calvini, Spears, Beesley, & Murphy, 2010). Fostering Brighter Futures believes that existing stereotypes impact how the public views the foster care system, therefore, it is necessary to review how stereotypes impact the public's perception.

When considering the most prevalent images regarding the foster care system, foster youth are depicted as being damaged, lonely, rebellious, and traumatized (Alvarez, 2017; Calheiros et al., 2015). Many foster youth do indeed experience trauma that leads to many social, emotional, and behavioral deficiencies (Unrau, Font, & Murphy, 2011).

Many members of the general public believe that the foster system is generally a beneficial service that the government provides, but the system as a whole requires a lot of work to become effective (Dave Thomas Foundation, 2007; Leber & LeCroy, 2012; Pew, 2004). While these feelings are valid, Thompson et al. (2017) point out that unless an individual has personal experience working within or being a part of the child welfare system, the system can be difficult to understand.

Loeb, Hessel, and Allen (2016) report that negative social expectations or assumptions about children have the ability to create adverse actions that affirm the negative expectations of society. When children interact in social settings, they often come with a set of expectations for how they will be viewed and treated (Allen, Chango, & Szwedo, 2014); for example, adolescents who perceive low expectations in social settings might act unfavorably to meet those expectations (Loeb et al., 2016). Though the work of Loeb et al. (2016) did not specifically deal with adolescents in the child welfare system, their findings highlight the need to consider how societal expectations have the ability to impact positive social functioning throughout one's life.

Portrayal of Stakeholders within the System

In order to understand common stereotypes and misconceptions often portrayed about the foster care system, it is necessary to discuss the roles of key stakeholders within the complex system. In the following sections, the values and roles of case workers, foster caregivers, and foster youth are discussed.

Case Workers

Case workers, often referred to as case managers, collaborate closely with foster youths, biological parents, foster parents, and foster agencies to ensure quality care is

provide to all parties (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008). This is no small task due to the complexities of cases in the foster system. Multitudes of diverse cases oftentimes require case managers to adapt and learn new aspects of the child welfare system at a fast pace. The case worker is involved in the progression of a case through intake, assessment, planning, providing services, evaluation, and closure. This role is fulfilled as case workers aim to broker and coordinate a variety of resources on behalf of the foster youth and families (Miller & Collins-Camargo 2016; Thompson et al., 2017).

Foster youth who age out of the system report that their relationship with their foster care case worker was one of the essential relationships they had during their time in foster care (Robles, 2016). Foster youth perceive case workers as individuals who have the ability to enact change in circumstances and potentially reunite them with their families. In addition to this, foster youth alumni report that case workers were seen as dependable individuals who offered emotional support (Augsberger & Swenson, 2015; Robles, 2016; Selwyn, Saunders, & Farmer, 2010).

Values of Foster Youth

Miller and Collins-Camargo (2016) found that foster youth identify four major stakeholders in their success: foster agencies, foster parents, social workers, and the foster youths themselves. One of the highest values of foster youth is permanency, meaning that once foster youth are placed in a foster home, they prefer to stay there and not be uprooted. While this might seem obvious, it has been found that foster children with fewer placement disruptions have fewer negative behaviors reported (Cooley, Wojciak, Farineau, & Mullis, 2015; Miller & Collins-Camargo 2016).

In addition to permanency, adolescents value being treated as normal teenagers and not as part of the institution of foster care, both in school and by society as a whole (Alvarez, 2017; Meese, 2012; Miller & Collins-Camargo 2016). When considering the relationship between foster caregivers and foster youth, it is important to note that if youth perceive their relationship with their foster caregiver as positive, they are more likely to have positive behaviors. Foster children with stable foster environments lead to positive behaviors and feelings towards foster care (Cooley et al., 2015). The needs of foster youth are not severely complicated when it comes to relationships with their foster caregivers. Having an engaged parental figure, genuine support and love, and a sense of normalcy are fundamental ways to better the lives of foster youth (Storer, Barkan, Sherman, Haggerty, & Mattos, 2012).

Narrative Paradigm Theory

Walter Fisher's (1989) narrative paradigm theory offers insight into how humans develop and tell stories and the impact that those stories have on society as a whole. Griffin (2012) describes Fisher's theory by saying:

> As narrative beings, we experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends. If this is true, then all forms of human communication that appeal to our reason need to be seen fundamentally as stories. (p. 308)

Until Fisher's proposed theory, rhetoric had been analyzed in terms of reason and logic. Fisher argues that rather than reason and logic, humans interpret life through a narrative lens, one that is made up of symbolic actions and stories. The assumption of Fisher's work is that human beings are storytellers, and as a result, humans have an

instinctual desire to communicate in an effective way that appeals to our desire to tell stories. Individuals will critique the consistency of a compelling narrative by comparing it with other narratives that have similar themes (Griffin, 2012).

In relation to foster care, Fisher would argue that the way in which foster care is portrayed in the media tells the public a story. Therefore, if the majority of narratives that are told are primarily negative, members of the public will begin to associate foster care with a negative narrative. Griffin (2012) sums up Fisher's paradigm in five main assumptions:

1. People are essentially storytellers.

2. We make decisions on the basis of good reasons which vary depending on the communication situation, media, and genre.

3. History, biography, culture, and character determine what we consider good reasons.

4. Narrative rationality is determined by the coherence and fidelity of our stories.

5. The world is a set of stories from which we choose, and thus constantly re-create, our lives. (p. 312)

The Fostering Brighter Futures program was created based on the assumption that media portrays a disproportionately negative image of foster care and foster care providers. Fisher's work emphasizes the need for transparent stories of the foster care system to be told. This theory provides a lens for the ways that Fostering Brighter Futures aims to tell stories of the foster system. Zeitzoff (2017) argues that social media is an important resource to the general public and can be utilized as a tool to disseminate information and shape conflict. Likewise, Taymans et al. (2008) push for greater

distribution of information regarding the foster care system to take place in order to effectively share ideas with the general public.

Communicating with the Public through Social Media

It has been reported that government use of social media has the ability to increase the public's overall trust in the government (Morgeson, VanAmburg, & Mithas, 2011; Song & Lee, 2016). While the opposite might also be true, when information is easily accessible, especially through social media platforms, members of the public are able to gather information about current events or policies making the government more transparent and accessible (Morgeson, VanAmburg, & Mithas, 2011; Song & Lee, 2016). Song and Lee (2016) state,

> Citizens' trust in government, as enabled by social media in government...can be understood as their attitude toward government agencies or officials as shaped by their evaluations of the outcomes they expect to occur from the use of social media in government. (p. 438)

In relation to foster care, this suggests that information about the foster care system, a publicly funded system, should be easily accessible to the general public. It is possible that public perceptions and feelings of transparency towards the foster care system might be impacted as a result.

Fostering Brighter Futures

As stated previously, Fostering Brighter Futures aims to connect individuals who might be interested in foster care, either by becoming a licensed parent or by volunteering, to resources within local communities. It is assumed that public perception of the foster care system can be influenced by negative stories in the media. While there

is a gap in literature on the topic of public perception of the foster care system, the literature analyzed for the purpose of this study reveals that public perception has the ability to be influenced by the media and stories that are told (Alvarez, 2017; Fisher, 1989; Griffin, 2012).

As a result of these findings, Fostering Brighter Futures functions to promote positive personal testimonies and accurate statistics of the Texas foster care system. To clarify, Fostering Brighter Futures does not dismiss stories of abuse or neglect within the Texas foster care system. The goal rather is to offer a holistic vantage point that asks the public to consider all stories within the system, not just the negative ones. This is influenced by the findings of Morgeson et al. (2011) as well as Song and Lee (2016) which suggest the use of social media by government entities has the ability to significantly improve the transparency of the government as a whole. Fostering Brighter Futures creates a platform in the state of Texas for transparent information to be displayed about the foster care system.

Summary

While there continues to be a significant gap in literature, the ambiguity that exists within understanding the child welfare system remains apparent. There are various service levels and types of foster care placements (Texas DFPS, 2015; Texas DFPS, 2017). Unless one dedicates a significant amount of time to become familiar with the nuances that exist within foster care, it is difficult to come to a complete understanding of it (Thompson et al., 2017).

Prior research shows that the general public believes the foster care system is broken, but most information that leads to this conclusion is from the Internet, television,

films, and conversations with others (Alvarez, 2017; The Dave Thomas Foundation, 2007; Pew, 2004). In today's social climate it is difficult to dispute the idea that media largely impacts the ways members of the public gather and understand information.

It was previously noted that social media influences how members of the public perceive transparency within bureaucratic institutions (Morgeson, et al., 2011; Song & Lee, 2016). Therefore, Fisher's (1989) narrative paradigm theory continues to influence the ways in which narratives about fundamental social issues are told. Fostering Brighter Futures operates through the lens that Fisher (1989) describes by choosing to tell a fundamentally different narrative about the foster care system.

Hypotheses

It is necessary that researchers continue to question how media impacts public perception. More research on this topic should be completed in order to fully understand what impacts the public's perception of the foster care system. This study at hand has the opportunity to effectively add to the body of literature regarding public perception of the foster care system.

The following are the primary researcher's hypotheses for this study:

- The results of this study will yield that media, in the form of a professional presentation, does indeed impact public perception of foster care.

- The treatment group will elicit more accurate feelings about the foster care system than the control group as a result of exposure to the Fostering Brighter Futures content.

- Persons who obtain more information on national and local news will have more accurate perceptions of the foster care system.

- Persons with prior experience within the foster care system will have more positive perceptions of the foster care system when compared to those with no prior experience.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study utilized a quasi-experimental, post-test only design to assess the role that media plays in the public's perception of foster care. A quasi-experimental method was chosen to fully investigate the causal impact that media has on the public's overall understanding and perceptions of the foster care system. The reasoning behind a post-test only design was to control for the testing effect of the questionnaire. Groups were purposively selected to have similar attributes and experiences. A non-equivalent group design was utilized in order to gain a post-test of the control group. A post-test was administered to the treated group for the purpose of comparison.

Population and Sampling

The State of Texas has been divided into 11 total regions in which the Department of Family and Protective Services operates. A purposive sample was gathered from Region 2 in the City of Abilene, Texas. Abilene operates as the headquarters for the entire region, which is made up of 30 counties in total. The ideal sample size for the control group and the non-equivalent group would be composed of 25-30 individuals with a total sample size of 50-60 participants. The sample aimed to be made up of individuals who are the target age for becoming foster parents, are diverse in age and gender, and had a variety of experiences within the foster care system. Individuals were part of a religious institution in Abilene simply for the sake of convenience. It was a

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noted limitation that the available sample may under represent the ethnic diversity of the Texas foster care system as a whole.

Instrumentation

Quantitative data was collected through a survey (See Appendix B) adapted from the work of Leber and LeCroy (2012). The original 55-question structured survey was developed and adapted from the survey questionnaires of previous studies (Beeman & Boisen, 1999; The Dave Thomas Foundation, 2007; Pew, 2004). The final survey used in this study is comprised of four sections. Although the survey was adapted by the primary researcher from the work of Leber and LeCroy (2012), the first two sections remained the same.

Section one was a series of 15 true/false questions to measure the participant's general knowledge of the Texas foster care system. All questions in this section derived from Leber and LeCroy's (2012) adapted survey. The answers for each question have been assigned and confirmed by the primary researcher with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services' 2016 fiscal year data.

Section two measured the perceptions of foster care through a sequence of 27 Likert-style questions. There are six subscales within this section that measure: 1) general attitudes towards the foster system, 2) specific factors of care and aging out, 3) the responsibility that society and government has to the foster care system, 4) attitudes towards preparedness of case workers and foster parents, 5) attitudes towards compensation to foster parents, and 6) attitudes towards the motives of foster parents. The 27 questions in this section came from Leber and LeCroy's (2012) original survey,

although the six subscales have been created by the primary researcher for the study at hand and were not specified in the original survey by Leber and LeCroy (2012).

Section three consists of six multiple choice questions that measured and compared the participant's personal use of news outlets and social media. This section was added by the primary researcher for the research question being considered in this study. All questions in the third section were developed by the primary researcher for the study at hand.

Lastly, the fourth section exists to collect demographic data about all participants through eight multiple choice questions. While some of these questions were included in Leber and LeCroy's (2012) survey, many of the questions had been tailored to gather applicable data of the available sample.

For the purpose of this research, all survey questions were disseminated in paper format for ease of dissemination and timely collection of survey responses. It was unknown if Internet access will be available at the times the survey will be given to the sample of participants. The paper surveys contained no identifying information about the participants and were submitted anonymously upon completion. Paper surveys were input into Microsoft Excel for organization of data and were kept in a locked room and cabinet to prioritize the safety and anonymity of all participants.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from one or more local churches in Abilene, Texas. This was the most convenient way to gather a representative sample of participants in the time allotted for research to be conducted. Research was conducted at local churches and participants were assigned to either a treatment group or a comparison group. Participants

had to be over the age of 18 to participate in the study and were asked to review and sign an informed consent prior to taking part in the research.

In separate classrooms within the church facilities, the comparison group was asked to complete the survey adapted from Leber and LeCroy's (2012) research. This survey was disseminated through paper copies. The treatment group was shown a short presentation of content that has been previously developed by Fostering Brighter Futures. This content included testimonial videos, social media postings, and the Fostering Brighter Futures website. After all content was shown to participants, the treatment group was given access to the paper survey. All individuals were asked to place their completed survey in a centralized collection bin to increase the anonymity of data collection.

Data Analysis

Appropriate statistical measures were employed in order to gain a clear representation between the treatment and comparison groups. Comparison of means were measured using a *t* test or ANOVA, as appropriate. As appropriate, post-hoc comparisons were utilized. The primary goal of data analysis was to compare the differences in means between the treatment and control group. Data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis to be conducted. This type of analysis allowed hypotheses to be tested using appropriate statistical tools.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter will discuss the findings specific to the sample of this study. First, descriptive statistics from the sample of participants will be provided. Next, the findings from each of the four hypotheses will be presented. Data analysis strategies and statistically significant findings will be noted throughout the chapter as well.

Demographics of Sample

The overall demographics of the sample will be discussed in this section. Descriptive statistics were utilized to gain a holistic picture of the makeup of respondents. Specific demographics relate to section four within the instrumentation and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Demographic Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-24	34	53.1
25-34	10	15.4
35-44	6	9.2
45-54	7	10.8
55-64	6	9.2
65 or older	1	1.5
Gender		
Female	39	60.0
Male	25	38.5
Ethnicity		
White	57	87.7
Non-White	5	7.7
Prefer not to answer	1	1.5
Marital Status		
Single (Never married)	57	81.5
Married	5	13.8
Divorced	1	1.5
Widowed	1	1.5
Yearly Household Income		
Prefer not to answer	9	13.8
< $30,000	16	24.6
$30,000 to $70,000	11	16.9
$70,000 to $100,000	14	21.5
Over $100,000	13	20.0
Political Alignment		
Republican	35	53.8
Democrat	7	10.8
Independent	16	24.6
Prefer not to answer	3	4.6
Education Level		
High School graduate	9	13.8
Completed some college/no degree	23	35.4
Associate degree	2	3.1
Bachelor' degree	13	20.0
Completed some post-graduate	6	9.2
Master's degree	10	15.4
Other doctorate	1	1.5
Personal Experience with Foster Care		
No	36	55.4
Yes	28	43.0

Note: Only 64 total participants answered demographic questions regarding themselves.

The total sample (*N*=65) consisted of a similarly sized control (*N*=35) and treatment (*N*=30) groups. Descriptive statistics (Table 1) reveal that of the 65 participants within the sample, 64 answered demographic information regarding themselves. Thirty-four respondents were between the ages of 18-24, making up over half of the sample. The remaining ages included ten individuals who were 25-34, six who were 35-44, seven marked that they were 45-54, five were 55-64, and one was 65 or older. In regard to gender, there were 39 females and 25 males.

Of the 64 individuals who provided demographic information, 57 identified their race as Caucasian/White. Five participants were Non-White and one individual selected "Prefer not to answer." It should be noted that only 63 respondents exist due to the fact that two individuals did not provide information on the instrument regarding their ethnicity (Table 1). It is a noted limitation that the overwhelming majority of this sample is made up of only one race, and does not fully represent the general public or those involved in the foster care system.

Demographics collected on marital status reveal that 53 of the respondents indicated that they are single (never married). Nine noted that they were married, one was divorced, and one widowed. Again, the descriptive statistics related to marital status might not fully represent that of the general public, or those involved within the foster care system. It is a clear limitation of the data provided within the context of this study.

Yearly household income is made up of 16 respondents indicating they earn less than $30,000 per year. Eleven noted they earn between $30,000 and $70,00, 14 earn between $70,000 and $100,000, and 13 noted their household income as over $100,000.

A total of nine individuals selected "Prefer not to answer." Two respondents chose not to provide demographic information on their yearly household income.

Education levels are dispersed across the provided scale. Nine participants graduated high school, 23 completed some college/no degree, two have earned an associate degree, 13 have completed a bachelor's degree, six have completed post-graduate work, 10 earned a master's degree, and one individual received a doctorate degree.

Lastly, the final demographic question asked respondents to indicate if they had prior experience within the foster care system. Thirty-six indicated that they had no prior experiences with the foster care system. Twenty-eight participants (43%) stated they had some level of experience with the foster care system.

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis stated that media information, in the form of a professional presentation, does indeed impact public perception of foster care. An Independent Samples *t* Test was run to compare the treatment and control group's summative scores of section one within the instrumentation. This section within the instrument consists of a series of 17 statements regarding Texas foster care. Participants were asked to answer whether they believed the statements to be true or false. There was space to indicate "not sure" if the participant did not know the answer to the question. Points were totaled for each question that was correctly answered. Answers indicating "not sure" did not count against the participant's total section one score. The summative means of each group's section one scores reveal that the treatment group (8.6) reports a higher score than the control group (7.3). This hypothesis was verified (t= 2.97; df=63; p=0.004).

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis stated the treatment group will elicit more accurate

feelings about the foster care system than the control group as a result of exposure to the

Fostering Brighter Futures content. Section two of the instrument consisted of 27 Likert-

style questions, each question corresponding to one of six subscales, intended to measure

public perception towards the foster care system. Section two consisted of five total

answer options for each question. The options were: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree,

Strongly Disagree, or Not Sure. Numbers were then assigned to each answer option and

coded to give a total composite score as well as a summative score for each section.

Treatment and control groups were then compared.

Using the composite total as an indicator of overall "knowledge," an Independent

Samples *t* Test was calculated. The treatment group had a score of 64.26; the control

group scored a mean total of 55.73. The mean difference was significant (*t*=3.28; df=58;

p=0.002).

Table 2
Hypothesis 2 Independent Samples t Test Results

Composite Score	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Subscales			
In Care Specifics/Aging Out	-2.594	59	0.012*
Societal/Governmental Responsibility	-0.756	62	.453
Attitudes Toward Training	-1.656	62	0.103
Compensation	-1.439	61	0.155
Motives of Foster Parents	-3.321	62	0.002*
General Attitudes	-1.216	62	0.228

Note: Asterisk indicates significance

Section two of the instrumentation is comprised of six subscales. To better identify the nuances of respondent's knowledge, this hypothesis was also tested for each subscale. When comparing the treatment and control groups against the individual subscale scores, two out of the six scales are significantly impacted within the treatment group. The treatment group shows greater understanding specifically in the areas of "In Care Specifics/Aging Out" and "Motives of Foster Parents" (Table 2). It also noted that those in the treatment group exposed to media, in the form of a professional presentation, scored higher in all other areas except general attitudes where there is virtually no difference.

Table 3
Hypothesis 2 Mean Scores

Mean Score	Control Group	Treatment Group
Subscales		
In Care Specifics/Aging Out	5.9091*	7.1429*
Societal/Governmental Responsibility	12.1176	12.5333
Attitudes Toward Training	8.9706	10.4667
Compensation	7.1471	8.0345
Motives of Foster Parents	9.6176*	12.6667*
General Attitudes	11.9118	12.6333

Note: Asterisk indicates that mean differences are statistically significant.

Table 3 presents the mean scores for each subscale. These results reveal that the treatment and control were relatively equivalent groups in regard to general attitudes toward the foster care system prior to taking part in this study.

The sixth subscale measures general attitudes toward the foster care system. While not a hypothesis to be tested, this measure offers a mechanism to evaluate the

general comparability of the experimental and control groups. Consistent with a null

hypothesis prediction, there is hardly a difference between the experimental and control

groups with respect to general attitudes (x= 2.63; c=11.91; t=-3.283; df=58; p=0.002).

This lends credibility to the equivalence of the two groups. In this purposive non-

equivalent controlled sample, the similar results in this subscale indicate that one sample

is not more biased than the other.

The changes within the treatment group are specifically related to aspects of the

foster care system in the subscales of Aging Out and Motives. The media presentation

that the treatment group watched prior to taking the survey gives evidence of altering

perception and attitudes (Table 3).

Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis asserts that persons who obtain more information on national

and local news will have more accurate perceptions of the foster care system. This

hypothesis was tested using three specific variables from the instrument all related to the

consumption of news sources. First is section three question one which asks, "What

percentage of your news comes from social media?" Other variables included are section

three question two and three which ask, "What is your primary source of national news?"

and "What is your primary source of local news?" respectively.

Table 4
Relation of Source of News to Overall Knowledge of Foster Care System

Section 2 Total	Number of Total News Sources	Number of National News Sources	Number of Local News Sources		
Pearson Correlation	0.265*	0.289*	0.193		
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.040	0.025	0.139		
N	60	60	60		
ANOVA Sec2 Total	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	1650.044	4	412.511	4.32 3	0.004
Within Groups	5248.689	55	95.431		
Total	6898.733	59			

Note: * indicates significance at the 0.05 level

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) strategy was used to test the third hypothesis (Table 4). With regard to the second strategy for testing the hypothesis, the number of news sources, which included number of national and local sources used, was correlated with the subject's factual knowledge of the foster care system. There was a significant correlation between number of sources and the section two total which represents overall knowledge of the foster care system (r= 0.265; p= 0.040).

Another way of testing this data was accomplished by correlating the number of national, local, and overall total of news sources to the section two total and running an Independent Samples *t* Test between the two groups and number of news sources utilized. This does not deal directly with the impact of media, but it provides information on how equal the experimental and control groups are within this sample.

The instrument asked respondents a series of questions in section three to identify how many news sources they used from a provided list. This included national and local news outlets. The collected data was then summed for total number of different sources used in order for correlation analysis to be utilized. There was no significant difference

between the treatment and control groups in terms of overall number of both national and local news sources used (t= -0.391; df= 63; p= 0.697).

The section two total score is significantly correlated to the total number of news sources and to the number of national news sources (Table 4). Though the correlation between the section two total and the number of local news sources used is positively correlated, it does not approach statistical significance (Table 4). Results reveal that the higher number of total and national news sources utilized significantly correlates with accurate perceptions of the foster care system. Therefore, the presented hypothesis that persons who obtain more information on national and local news will have more accurate perceptions of the foster care system is supported.

Hypothesis Four

The final hypothesis states that individuals with prior experience within the foster care system will have more positive perceptions of the foster care system when compared to those with no prior experience. Using the composite total on section two, those with experience in foster care displayed no significant difference from those lacking experience (t=0.617). Curiously, when measured against section one of the instrument, which measures accuracy of beliefs about the system, a significant difference was noted (t=-2.335; df=63; p=0.023). Persons who had some experience with foster care had a higher score on this measure than those with no experience, 8.48 and 7.444 respectively.

Table 5
Hypothesis 4 Independent Samples t Test

Instrumentation Section Two	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Subscales				
In Care Specifics/Aging Out	-0.0221	59	0.983	-0.01089
Societal/Governmental Responsibility	0.200	62	0.842	0.11111
Attitudes Toward Training	-0.013	62	0.990	-0.01190
Compensation	2.127	61	0.037	1.29630
Motives of Foster Parents	-0.616	62	0.540	-0.61508
General Attitudes	0.316	62	0.753	0.19048

To test this hypothesis more closely, each of the six subscales were examined based on previous experience with foster care. In five of the six subscales, no significance was found (Table 5). However, with regard to the subscale on compensation, those with no experience with the system had significantly higher scores on this measure than those with experience (*t*=2.127; df=61; p=0.037; MD=1.2963). While the subscale score should not be discounted, the overall public perception scores of individuals with prior experience within the foster care system were not statistically significant.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis One Discussion

Again, the first hypothesis within this study proposes that media, in the form of a professional presentation, does impact public perception of foster care. As stated previously in the review of literature, members of the public have little interaction with the foster system unless they have been directly involved. Therefore, many perceptions are gained from the stories in films, literature, and the news (Alvarez, 2017; Leber & LeCroy 2012). When developing the professional presentation of Fostering Brighter Futures content to be shown to the treatment group these findings were taken into consideration.

The context of the professional presentation shown to the treatment group consisted of several features of the review of literature. The presentation attempted to provide a platform similar to the three primary ways the Dave Thomas Foundation (2007) reported that individuals of the public learn about foster care: the Internet, television, and through conversations with others in their personal network of friends and family. The presentation included videos of real foster parents discussing their experiences in contrast to those depicted in movies and television. Furthermore, it contained information on how Fostering Brighter Futures utilizes the Internet and social media platforms as a means of information dissemination and conversation starters amongst the public.

It was seen in the results that the summative means of section two of the treatment group was higher than that of the control group. Despite the fact that the sample within the current study is not completely representative of the State of Texas or Region 2, were the study was conducted, it must be taken into account that the support of hypothesis one warrants more research on how portrayal of foster care in the media impacts the public's perception of the system.

Hypothesis Two Discussion

Walter Fisher's (1989) narrative paradigm theory can be related to hypothesis two, as both focus on the how humans develop and tell stories and the impact that those stories have on society as a whole. The support of hypothesis two discussed the proposition that the treatment group will elicit more accurate feelings about the foster care system than the control group as a result of exposure to the Fostering Brighter Futures content.

The treatment and the control group scored nearly the same on the "General Attitudes" subscale. In the case of this non-equivalent purposive sample the treatment group, who scored relatively at the same level of attitude as the control group, was positively impacted by the intervention of the presentation and discussion about foster care statistics and success stories. As a result, it is possible to make the inference that the motivation of the treatment group may increase the likelihood of getting involved in the foster care system, or at the very least learn more about what the Texas foster care system entails.

The treatment group showed greater understanding of the areas of "In Care Specifics/Aging Out" and "Motives of Foster Parents." Fisher's theory establishes the

idea that, "As narrative beings experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends" (Griffin, 2012, p. 308). This theory provides a lens for the ways that Fostering Brighter Futures aims to tell stories of the foster system. Zeitzoff (2017) argues that social media is an important resource to the general public and can be utilized as a tool to disseminate information and shape conflict.

The success of the treatment group continues to highlight one of Fisher's original points that culture and history determine what individuals consider to be good reasoning (Griffin, 2012). The treatment group was exposed to Fisher's lens as the importance of portraying a holistic narrative of foster care was a primary aspect in the intervention of the presentation.

Hypothesis Three Discussion

The third hypothesis within this study theorized that persons who obtain more information on national and local news will have more accurate perceptions of the foster care system. Results indicate statistically significant correlations between total public perception score and the number of national news sources used, and the total number of news sources used.

The findings of the third hypothesis indicate that for a better understanding of the foster care system one should engage in more news from national news outlets. Literature suggests that most information informing the public's views on foster care comes from the Internet, television, films, and conversations with others (Alvarez, 2017; The Dave Thomas Foundation, 2007; Pew, 2004).

Major implications exist within these findings and the results of the literature. A prominent theme in the review of literature is that foster care is oftentimes portrayed through films and media in a way that perpetuates stereotypes and can potentially misinform the public (Adkins & Castle, 2014; Alvarez, 2017). Findings, however, suggest that the more educated an individual is in multiple news platforms, the more positively they perceive the foster care system as a whole.

Hypothesis Four Discussion

The final hypothesis states that individuals with prior experience within the foster care system will have more positive perceptions of the foster care system when compared to those with no prior experience. It was highlighted in the review of literature that members of the public have very little interaction with the foster system unless they have been directly involved (Leber & LeCroy, 20120; Taymans et al., 2008)

This is to be expected, as the foster care system does not demand the immediate interaction of members of the public unless they are foster parents, former or current foster youth, biological parents of a foster youth, or have had an occupation that interacted with the child welfare system. As a result of this, the system might appear rather isolated to those outside of it. It was because of this point that Leber and LeCroy's (2012) study emphasized that perceptions are gained from the stories in films, literature, and the news.

The findings indicate no statistically significant difference, between those with experience and those lacking experience, on the section two composite scores. There continues to be a need to engage the public with accurate facts about the system is to ensure that perceptions are accurate (Alvarez, 2017; Meese, 2012). Taymans et al. (2008)

continue to make the point that increasing awareness through effective dissemination of information has the ability to change an individual's perception of adopted and fostered children and their families.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Implications

This chapter will discuss the implications that this study has on practice, policy, and future research. This research contributes to an existing gap in literature in regard to how media impacts the public's perception of foster care in the State of Texas. There are, however, limitations that will also be considered.

Practice

In order to effectively relate the findings of this study to social work practice and policy it is necessary to the review the current intentions of the Texas foster care system. While foster care is intended to be a temporary solution in which foster children reside in foster family homes, kinship placements, foster group homes, or residential care facilities (DFPS, 2015), children often require long term plans of care. Foster care providers aim to protect foster youth, ensure permanency within placements, and preserve families. Social workers play a pivotal role in this process as they are the primary professional practitioner who provide services to youth in care and respective parties involved in each case.

Public perception of foster care is a topic that is lacking in current research within the social sciences. Understanding public perception might allow for practitioners and policy makers to understand how to better serve all parties involved in the Texas foster care system. Social work practice can be influenced by this study's review of literature

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and data collection as social workers are being relied upon to broker services for foster

youth. on behalf of child placing agencies throughout the state. It is necessary for

practitioners to understand how vulnerable populations are perceived by individuals

outside of those respective populations, especially in the realm of macro social work

practice in foster care. An important aspect of macro level social work is community

engagement and advocacy. When macro level practitioners engage community members

in innovative solutions for foster youth, those practitioners must understand the values

and preexisting perceptions of members of the public.

Policy

From a policy perspective, there is an increasing need to understand how social

media, movies, television, and other forms of media impact the public's perception of

foster care. Policies and funding for programs like Fostering Brighter Futures will allow

for wider audiences to be educated about Texas foster care. Creating more readily

available public service campaigns and educational tools can equip members of the

public to get involved in local agencies within the child welfare system. Increased

involvement and awareness can have noteworthy impact on the Texas foster care system

if this along with further research, and Fostering Brighter Futures content were to be

implemented and funded through state policies

Implications for policy are perhaps most seen in findings of hypothesis three.

Within the context of the sample results indicated that number of national news sources

utilized positively correlates with perception of the foster care system. From a national

perspective, foster care recruiting policies can be most impacted. If these findings

continue to be reliable in future research, more inferences may be made about how to

recruit and retain foster parents. When child placing agencies converse with potential foster parents, it should be considered that individuals with a higher utilization of national news, and overall news sources, might indicate a stronger understanding of the foster care system. Perhaps obtaining information relating to consumption of news would be best implemented within the processes of home studies and social histories of prospective foster parents. In the long run, the more foster parents understand the system, the more satisfied they might be with their experience fostering. This would ultimately lead to a high retention of foster parents.

Future Research

This study is a new addition to the body of knowledge that already exists on public perceptions in regard to the foster care system. There is a large gap in the literature when it comes to how public perception is impacted by the media. In order to gather more information on how public perception of Texas foster care is impacted by media, more research must first be conducted on the topic.

While the findings of this study are telling of the given sample, there is a need for further research to be conducted on this topic and others. This study just begins to inquire into other aspects of foster care and public perception as well. The non-representativeness of the given sample is cause for further research. Conducting similar research with a reflective and comprehensive range of potential foster parents would be a valuable thing to do. For a holistic body of research to exist there must be extensive research that looks into how stereotype formation and public trust in governmental and bureaucratic entities impacts vulnerable groups, such as foster youth. These areas could not be addressed within the scope of this study, therefore further research should be conducted.

Limitations

As with any research, there are limitations that exist and must be discussed. First, it is difficult to discern how a testing effect impacted participants in the treatment and control group. It was disclosed that their participation might benefit a field of study, and as a result their answers may have been impacted if a participant felt pressured to answer in a more positive way than what one might truly feel or believe.

Second, while the instrumentation tool was developed for Leber and LeCroy's 2012 study, many of the questions had to be tailored for the current study. Sections three and four were designed by the primary researcher for this project, and therefore lack reliability if it is to be used in further research projects. The previously published measure had not been adequately tested for consistency prior to its use in this study. While testing the measure was not part of the study, the lack of proven reliability of the instrumentation is a potential limitation. Before it is used again it should be evaluated more comprehensively for internal consistency and adjusted as appropriate

For future studies, researchers should attempt to have a larger and more representative sample size, if possible. Larger sample sizes allow for more generalizable data collection which has the ability to further this particular field of research altogether. Lastly, a number of external factors could have impacted the individual responses of each social worker that participated in the study. If the surveys had been administered on a different day, results might not be consistent with the original data that was collected.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

January 23, 2018

Hannah Sims
Department of Social Work
ACU Box 27866
Abilene Christian University

Dear Ms. Sims,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled **Impact of the Media on the Public's Perception of Texas Foster Care**

was approved by expedited review (46.110(b)(1) category 7) on 01/22/2018 for a period of **one year** (IRB # 17-110). The expiration date for this study is 01/22/2019 . If you intend to continue the study beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review Form at least 30 days, but no more than 45 days, prior to the expiration date. Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make **any** changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Our Promise: ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.

APPENDIX B

Foster Care Public Perception Survey

Section 1:
In this first section answer whether you believe the statements to be True or False about the foster care system in the state of Texas.

Statement	True	False	Not Sure
Children are placed in foster care mostly because they were neglected by their parents.			
The foster care system has a higher number of children from minority groups than white children.			
The average foster child experiences at least three different foster placements before leaving the system.			
The majority of children who are removed from home are placed with relatives.			
Most children stay in foster care for six to twelve months.			
Foster parents are paid a salary for caring for foster children in addition to the money they receive to cover the children's daily needs.			
Foster parents can sometimes adopt a child after serving as temporary caregivers.			
There is training required in order to be a foster parent.			
Most children enter the foster care system because they experience physical or sexual abuse.			
Most children leave foster care because they turn 18 and can be considered legally independent.			
The foster care system is governed only by federal laws and states do not have any control over its rules and regulations.			
Children in foster care are sometimes placed in group homes rather than with families.			
Almost a quarter of foster children become homeless after they turn 18.			
Fifty percent of children in the foster care system are 5 years of age or younger.			
Children from minority groups remain in foster care longer than white children.			

Section 2:
In this second section please state whether you Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree with each of the statements about the foster care system in the state of Texas.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
Changes and improvements need to be made to the foster care system.					
The foster care system protects the children in its care.					
Foster care should extend beyond the age 18 because youth still need support as they transition to adulthood.					
Foster children get "lost" in the foster care system.					
We, as a society, should be doing more to support people who become foster parents.					
It is in society's best interest to provide quality care for foster children.					
Once a child is on foster care, he receives satisfactory case management from workers in the foster care system.					
The government does not need a foster care system.					
The foster care system deserves more national attention.					
People who work within the foster care system have the training and resources they need.					
18 is the right age for foster youth to transition out of the foster care system.					
The foster care system is fine the way it is and does not need to change.					
Churches and other private organizations should care for children which cannot stay in their homes rather than the foster care system.					

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
The foster care system does a good job recruiting and keeping quality foster parents.					
The funds that foster parents receive from the government are sufficient to provide for the children in their care.					
The government should spend more to support the foster care system.					
There should be stricter requirements for people wanting to become foster parents.					
Most people are in foster parenting for the money.					
Most people are competent at foster parenting.					
Foster parents sacrifice to help children in need.					
People who become foster parents do it to make a difference.					
People become foster parents because of the money they receive from the government.					
When children need to be removed from their homes it is better for them to be placed with relatives than in other types of foster care.					
Foster parents should not be paid.					
It is okay for financial compensation to play a role in why foster parents choose to foster.					
People who become foster parents because they care deeply about children.					
Foster parents should be paid for caring for foster children.					

Section 3:
In this third section please answer the following questions regarding your personal use of news outlets and social media.

What percentage of your news comes from social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
☐ I do not get any of my news from social media
☐ 0-25%
☐ 26-50%
☐ 51-75%
☐ 76-100%

What is your primary source of national news? Please select all that apply to you.

☐ Cable News (If so, please select the answer(s) that apply to you.)
   ☐CNN
   ☐Fox News
   ☐MSNBC
   ☐Other _____

☐Network TV (If so, please select the answer(s) that apply to you.)
   ☐ABC
   ☐CBS
   ☐NBC
   ☐Other _____

☐ Web Based Resources (If so, please select the answer(s) that apply to you.)
   ☐Phone Application(s)
      ☐CNN App
      ☐MSNBC App
      ☐Fox News App
      ☐NPR News App
      ☐HuffPost News App
      ☐Abilene Reporter News App
      ☐Other _____
   ☐Online Newspaper Subscription
      ☐USA Today
      ☐New York Times
      ☐The Washington Post
      ☐Other _____
   ☐Online News Outlet Website
      ☐CNN Website
      ☐MSNBC Website
      ☐Fox News Website
      ☐NPR Website

☐ Other _____
☐ Podcasts   If so which podcast(s)? _____
☐ Radio   If so which station(s)? _____

☐ Print Sources (If so, please select the answer(s) that apply to you.)
    ☐ Newspaper Subscription
      If so which paper? _____
    ☐ Other _____

☐ Other _____
☐ I do not obtain information about national news.

What is your primary source of local news? Please select all that apply to you.

☐ The Local Newspaper
    ☐ The Abilene Reporter News
    ☐ Other _____

☐ Television   If so which station(s)? _____
☐ Radio   If so which station(s)? _____

☐ I use social media to obtain information about local news.
    If so, which social media platform(s)?
        ☐ Facebook
        ☐ Twitter
        ☐ Instagram
        ☐ Other _____

☐ Other _____
☐ I do not obtain information about local news.

How many hours per day do you spend watching television?
☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1-3 hours ☐ 4-6 hours ☐ 7 or more hours
4.1 What percent is watching the news? ☐ 0-25% ☐ 26-50% ☐ 51-75% ☐ 76-100%
4.2 What percent is watching forms of entertainment (TV shows, movies, sporting events, etc.)? ☐ 0-25% ☐ 26-50% ☐ 51-75% ☐ 76-100%

How many hours per day do you spend on social media?
☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1-3 hours ☐ 4-6 hours ☐ 7 or more hours

In the last 3 months how many news stories, TV shows, movies, or social media posts did you see that dealt with the foster care system in some way?
☐ None that I recall ☐ 1-3 ☐ 3-5 ☐ 5-7 ☐ 8 or more

Section 4:
In this final section please answer the following demographic questions about yourself.

Gender
☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Prefer not to answer

Age
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ 65 or older
☐ Prefer not to answer

Ethnicity
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Hispanic
☐ Mixed Race
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Other _____
☐ Prefer not to answer

Marital Status
☐ Single (never married)
☐ Married
☐ Widowed
☐ Divorced
☐ Separated
☐ Prefer not to answer

Yearly household income
☐ Less than $30,000
☐ Between $30,000 and $70,000
☐ Between $70,000 and $100,000
☐ Over $100,000
☐ Prefer not to answer

In terms of the way you think about social and political issues in which way would you align yourself?
☐ Republican
☐ Democrat
☐ Independent
☐ Prefer not to answer

What is your education level?
☐ Completed some high school
☐ High school graduate
☐ Completed some college/no degree
☐ Associate degree
☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Completed some postgraduate
☐ Master's degree
☐ Ph.D.
☐ J.D.
☐ M.D.
☐ Other Doctorate _____
☐ Prefer not to answer

Do you have personal experience with the foster care system?
☐ No
☐ Yes (Select all that apply)
☐ I am a former foster youth
☐ I am/was a foster parent
☐ I am/was a foster sibling
☐ I have a close friend/relative that has been involved in the foster care system
☐ Other _____
☐ Prefer not to answer