

Implications of Media Representation of Social Work and Social Workers (films and novels)

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This paper aims to present reflections based on empirical evidence coming from a study on social representations of social workers in the films and novels. This fictional material is an ideal and natural habitat for observing construction and re-construction mechanisms not only of representations, but also of inequalities and stereotypes present in welfare policies, especially in this period characterized by economic and social crisis. The findings of the empirical research highlight that films and novels produce reciprocal images between a profession, which plays the role of taking care of "Others", and the rest of society. The research is focused on media representations of social care professional identities, especially social workers, in a sample of 22 films and 20 novels. Applying a content thematic analysis, analytical categories included the significance of figures within the plot, professional capability, degree of empathy, and attributes of social workers. Categories related to the style and format of presentation also formed part of the analysis. A purposeful sampling procedure was followed, focused on the significance of the material for social work. The conclusions of research led to the construction of three ideal types of social workers represented, highlighted social work activities which did not attract media representation, and the possible steps that could enable the production of a more accurate reflection of the profession and its clients. These results can be utilised to actively influence the improvement of public perceptions of social workers and of their clients.