

Sample Independent Study Proposal #1

Independent Study Proposal The Representation of Housewives in the media, in the 1950's

1. A Statement of the purpose/goals of the project
The purpose of my project is to study how films contributed to the images of married women and observe if these images reflect the ones found on other 50's media.
2. A description of the subject matter
My subject matter will include films that were nominated for awards from 1950-1959. For a second media to contrast my findings in the films I will research magazine articles written in the 50's, intended for married women. To gain a different perspective I will use *Life* or *Look* magazines and *Time* or *Newsweek* magazines. I will observe the characters of the married women and their roles both in society and the family unit. I will compare the images I find to the advice in the magazine articles.
3. An explanation of its relevance to my interests and major area of study
This subject is relevant to my life in several ways. As a communication major I have studied both film and other forms of media throughout my college career. I enjoy studying films from all decades and am very interested in the portrayal of women in the mediums of film and music. As a woman this subject is interesting to me, in seeing how far the images of married women have come in fifty years.
4. A Description of my proposed research methodology
For my research I will be viewing the movies nominated for academy awards from 1950-1959. These movies will represent films thought of as the best of their year by the academy and will be available on video for me to find. I will also look up old reviews written about the movies during their time period. I will look in archives to find the magazine articles from the 50's.
I will conduct a textual analysis of the films and watch for images that female stars create as the perfect wives. This analysis will also include advertisements. In the magazines I will also be looking for advertisements directed towards women and the images these convey and will continue the textual analysis to advise articles written specifically for women.
5. A preliminary working bibliography
1950: *All About Eve, Born Yesterday, Father of the Bride, Kings Solomon's Mines, and Sunset Blvd*
1951: *An American in Paris, Decision before Dawn, A Place in the Sun, Quo Vadis?, A Street Car Named Desire*
1952: *The Greatest Show in Earth, High noon, Ivanhoe, Moulin Rouge, and The Quiet Man*
1953: *From Here to Eternity, Julius Caesar, The Robe, Roman Holiday, and Shane*
1954: *On the Waterfront, The Caine Mutiny, The country Girl, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers, Three coins in a fountain*
1955: *Marty, Love is a many splendored thing, Mister Roberts, Picnic, and The Rose Tattoo*
1956: *Around the World in Eighty Days, Friendly Persuasion, Giant, The King and I, The Ten Commandments*
1957: *The Bridge on the Rive Kwai, Twelve Angry Men, Peyton Place, Sayonara, Witness for the Persecution*
1958: *GiGi, Auntie Mame, Cat on a hot tin roof, Defiant Ones, and Separate Tables*
1959: *Ben Hur, Anatomy of a murder, Diary of Anne Frank, A Nun's story, A room at the Top*
Amber, George. *The New York Times Film Reviews*. Arno Press Inc; New York, 1971
Bohn, Thomas and Stromgren, Richard. *Light and Shadows, A History of Motion Pictures*. Mayfield Publishing Co.; California, 1987.
Powdermaker, Hortense. *Hollywood the Dream Factory*. Little, Brown and Company; Boston, 1950
Time magazine, Newsweek, and Life Magazine will be used for my research as well.
6. Information on the form and Length of the final report:
I would like to do a fifteen page paper on my research. The paper will include my findings, and the evidence with which I came to my conclusions.

Sample #2, Independent Study Proposal

A Content Analysis of Time and Newsweek

1. Purpose/Goals

This proposed study is about the media coverage of America's "war on terror." Since the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, news coverage has been both lengthy and intense. The consequent war in Afghanistan has been the subject of long periods of saturation coverage. To the extent that the average U.S. citizen knows anything about the Middle East, it is from information provided by the news media. Consequently, the news media play a major role within our democracy; the decisions voters and policy makers formulate are based upon information gathered and packaged by news organizations. It is therefore crucial to the health of our democracy that American citizens continuously evaluate and re-evaluate the news.

2. Subject Matter

I began my critique by looking at two content analyses of the news. In *Is Anyone Responsible: How Television Frames Political Issues*, Shanto Iyengar found that "during the 1980's, network newscasts showed hundreds of reports of particular acts of terrorism, but virtually no reports on the socioeconomic or political antecedents of terrorism" (Iyengar 2). In other words, information about underlying historical, economic, or social circumstances of terrorism, did not accompany news about specific terrorist acts. He described news as being framed "episodically," rather than "thematically." The episodic news frame focuses on specific events into some general context. The essential difference between episodic and thematic framing is that episodic framing depicts specific, what Amherst College Professor Barry O'Connell refers to as, "illustrations of the already known." Thematic framing presents collective or general evidence to put the "already known" into a broader context. Terrorism stories framed episodically are event-oriented reports that depict terrorism issues in terms of particular instances. The thematic frame, by contrast, places terrorism issues in some more general abstract context and report historical conditions and/or general outcomes.

Iyengar used content analysis to expose the degree in which news was framed episodically as opposed to thematically. He defined content analysis as "a systematic effort to classify textual material" (Iyengar 18). Iyengar used the abstracts of daily network newscasts as his "texts." His sample consisted of every story aired by ABC, CBS, and NBC from January 1981 to December 1986. Using a keyword search, Iyengar specified his sample to stories about crime, terrorism, poverty, unemployment, and racial inequality. He then put each story into either the episodic or thematic category in order to assess the degree of thematic or episodic framing in television news. "The episodic category (which proved most frequent) consisted of stories that depicted issues predominantly as concrete instances or events, while the thematic category included stories that depicted issues more generally either in terms of collective outcomes, public policy debates, or historical trends" (Iyengar 18).

Utilizing a multiple method research approach, Iyengar found that "exposure to episodic news makes viewers less likely to hold public officials accountable for the existence of some problem (i.e. terrorism) and also less likely to hold them responsible for alleviating it" (Iyengar 2). Iyengar surveyed residents of the Three Village Area of Suffolk county (Eastern Long Island, New York). The sample was gathered through newspaper and other advertisements, which offered ten dollars in exchange for participation in "television research" (Iyengar, 20). Part of the sample viewed news reports framed episodically, while the other part viewed reports framed thematically. Sample members were then each required to answer a series of open-ended questions about the issues that had been reported to each of them via the news. In regards to terrorism, those being surveyed were asked what causes terrorism and what is the best way to reduce terrorism.

Iyengar found that the attribution of responsibility is a function of how the news story frames the issue. As defined by Iyengar, "casual responsibility focuses on the origin of a problem, while treatment responsibility focuses on who or what has the power to alleviate (or forestall alleviation of) the problem" (Iyengar 8). By presenting the news in either thematic or episodic form, the news story influences attributions of responsibility both for the creation of terrorism (casual responsibility) and for the resolution of terrorism (treatment responsibility) (Iyengar 3).

The other content analysis that I studied is Herbert Gans' *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. Like Iyengar, Gans' text, or unit, is the individual news story. His observations come from six-month samples of "stories appearing in alternate months during 1967, 1971, and 1975" (Gans, 6). Gans' classified stories by which "actor" or "activity" dominated each. He further classified the actor category into three sub-categories: "Types of People in the News," "Knows in the News," and "Unknowns in the News" (Gans 9, 10, 13).

(continued)

Sample #2, Independent Study Proposal

3. Explanation of Relevance

This independent study will afford me the opportunity to learn a valuable media analysis technique, to work with print media, and to apply what I have learned to the discourse analysis component of my thesis. I am currently working on an evaluation of television news coverage of the Middle East using an audience research method for my honors thesis.

4. Research Methodology

I will conduct a content analysis of Time and Newsweek to determine the degree to which they cover the war on terror in episodic or thematic frames. I would also like to break down the episodic news frames into actors (“knows and unknowns”) in order to get a sense of “who speaks?” I’ve chosen Time and Newsweek because they have a large general readership.

5. Bibliography

Berger, Arthur Asu, (1982) Media Analysis Techniques
Sage Publications, Beverly Hills

Gans, Herbert (1980) Deciding What’s News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time, Random House Inc, New York

Gerges, Fawaz A. (1999) America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom

Humphreys, R. Stephen (2001) Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age, University of California Press, Berkeley

Iyengar, Shanto (1991) Is Anyone Responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago

McCombs, M., Danielian, and Wanta, W. (1995), ‘Issues in the News and the Public Agenda’ in Salmon, C. and Glasser, T. (eds.) Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent, New York: Guilford Press, pages 281-300.

6. Form

At the end of this independent study, I will submit a paper with five sections: introduction, theory, methodology, results, and discussion.

Sample #3, Independent Study Proposal

Independent Study Proposal Independent Study: The Media's Role in the 2004 Battle for the White House

1. Statement of purpose and goals of project –

The research project I propose will track and compare the presidential campaigns of both the democratic nominee and George W. Bush by executing daily log, analysis and collection of various media. I will examine the imagery and rhetoric the media use while reporting on the presidential race by keeping a daily journal, and create a scrapbook of stories and images that appear in specified newspapers and weekly magazines. The log and scrapbook I create (in addition to various readings) will ultimately serve to inform my final paper, which will attempt to prove that the media will play a vital role in the 2004 presidential election.

2. Description of the subject matter –

The subject of this project is political communication. I will study how media report on and frame stories about the candidates through the first quarter of their campaigns, as well as how media frame the candidates themselves.

3. Explanation of relevance to interests or major area of study –

This project is very relevant to both my interests and major area of study. As a communication major, one of the topics I have enjoyed most is political communication. I am very interested in the role media play in everyday American society and culture, but fascinated by the very significant role it can play in the governance of the country – especially in a presidential election.

4. Description of proposed research methodology –

I will on a daily basis read and keep clippings of stories about the democratic nominee (or leading nominee until he is chosen) and George W. Bush from three newspapers: the New York Times, the Boston Globe, and the Washington Post. I will also read and keep articles and pictures from two weekly magazines, including News Weekly. Also, I will watch two to three news programs each day (preferably Fox, MSNBC, and CNN), taking notes on the stories about and images of the candidates. I will write daily journal entries summarizing my observations and read the texts I have specified in part 5.

5. Preliminary working bibliography –

Public politics: how political advertising tells the stories of American Politics by Glenn W. Richardson

Press bias and politics: how the media frame controversial issues by Jim Kuypers

Bad news: where the press goes wrong in the making of a president by Robert Shogun

It's show time! Media, politics, and pop culture by David Schultz

What liberal media? The truth about bias and the news by Eric Alterman

6. Form and length of final project –

My final project will consist of a final paper that is 30 to 45 pages in length, as well as my daily journal entries and the scrapbook of news clippings I will create.