

Example of how to do a frame analysis of news media essay

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



Frames are “ principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.”

(Frames are not “ bias.”) I. Identify repeated patterns in news coverage, using various techniques

- A. Read a lot of news coverage of a particular story and/or theme
- B. Look for broad forms of emphasis or selection, such as
 - 1. headlines
 - 2. what is put first and what left for later in a story
 - 3. placement of stories in the news (front page vs. page 20; top of the newscast vs. bottom)
- C. Look for master narratives or themes
 - 1. who are the villains and who are the good guys?
 - 2. what is assumed to be the source of conflict?
 - 3. what stories or aspects of stories are not being covered?
- D. Look for stylistic clues such as:
 - 1. Language choices (“ gunned down” vs “ accidentally hit by stray fire”)
 - 2. Modes of reference (“ Castro” vs “ Fidel”)
 - 3. Use of quotes and attribution (“ avowed socialist Bernie Sanders”; “ so-called Peace Movement”)
- E. Think about other ways the relevant facts could be turned into stories
 - 1. Look at news coming from a different point of view (e. g., Arab media on middle eastern politics; right- or left-wing news outlets, etc.)
 - 2. Think about possible other ways of telling the story

II. Explain the underlying assumptions of the frames you discover

- A. What do these frames imply is important (e. g., fund raising success in political campaigns.)? What do they take for granted? (E. g., if the stock market goes up it is good for the country)
- B. What do these frames exclude from discussion?
- C. What world views or “ tacit little theories about what matters” are these frames reinforcing?
- D. Would different frames lead to a better society?

Examples (from http://www.uwosh.edu/faculty_staff/palmeri/commentary/frames.htm):

Version 1: Rats Bite Infant

Version 2: Rats Bite Infant: Landlord, Tenants Dispute Blame

Version 3: Rat Bites Rising in City's " Zone of Death"

Notice how the first version of the story finds relevance in the fact that the child's mother is a teenager on welfare. As with much reporting about poverty in the United States, the story implies that ignorance and lack of personal responsibility are at the root of America's urban problems. The second version of the story is another typical way of discussing poverty in the United States, as a kind of " contractual dispute" between parties. The implication of such stories is that " if we had better landlords" (or better teachers, doctors, etc.) and " more responsible tenants" (or more responsible students, patients, etc.), then horrible things like children getting bitten by rats would not happen. Stories like this often lead to calls for " more effective communication" between the parties.

The third version of the story frames the rat bites as a symptom of a broader public health crisis facing a poor community. This story assumes a relationship between public policy choices (e. g. cutbacks in housing inspection programs) and human behavior. Unlike the first two versions, version 3 implies that the reader must share some responsibility for this state of affairs; after all, anti-poverty programs would not be cut if the people would put pressure on politicians to fund them.

A final important point to remember is that rarely if ever is the dominant story frame obvious and/or explicitly identified by the reporter or speaker. Clark Kent and Lois Lane never come out and say " we are framing our stories about street-widening in Metropolis as a contest between

bureaucratic city planners and neighborhood activists concerned with urban sprawl." Many times news reporters are not even themselves aware of how a story is framed; for some it simply feels " natural" to cover stories in a certain way. Often news reporters learn " that there are certain ways to cover stories around here and certain ways not to cover them." Regardless of how or why a story gets framed in a particular way, critical readers, watchers, and/or listeners are good at identifying news frames and making an assessment as to their appropriateness for the topic under discussion.

Source:

http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/Courses/sociology_of_news/page25/page25.html