

Types of documentary essay sample

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Documentary is a factual program that presents facts and information. There are few different types of documentaries such as expository, observational, fly on the wall, interactive, reflective, poetic and dramatised.

There are debates within the documentaries. Are they telling the truth? Is it just the filmmakers' opinion? Does the film represent the argument fairly? While making a documentary we should think about issues like balance, impartiality, accuracy and representation.

Genres and modes of address

Expository documentary is considered as a classic form of documentary in which an unseen presenter gives a voice-over commentary that explains the images that we are seeing. Interviews in this mode of address tend to be subordinated to the argument within the film. Witnesses are made to contribute to the argument. Usually, the solution would be suggested to the problem. This is the most common type of documentary. One of the examples is a documentary I watched recently about the islands completely made by human in Dubai. The project is called The World. The documentary had a narrator, who never appeared in the film, and the only people who were shown were the interviewees- architects, scientists and builders.

Observational documentary is a fly on the wall type of documentary. They watch or follow events rather than construct narratives for the events to follow. There are no interviews and we cannot see the filmmakers or reporters. There is no voice-over telling us what to think. In this mode commentary or external music are avoided.

One of the examples of fly on the wall documentary is *Soldier Girls* (1981) directed and produced by Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill. They follow the girls around during their basic training in Fort Gordon in Georgia. Some of the girls were forced to join the army. The film shows how they become harder and colder through the course of basic training. The audience see their everyday life, the relationships between the girls, how they struggle to survive and help each other.

‘ Scene after scene in ‘ *Soldier Girls*’ shows the truth to be much much stranger than fiction.’ Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*.

”‘*Soldier Girls*’ is not just a feminist triumph; it is also a human triumph’
Amanda Spake, Editor, *Mother Jones*.

In interactive documentary a filmmaker is in the shot or his/her voice asks questions. The questions of the filmmaker may be left in or edited out.

‘ This may be a way that individuals in a film can make their own case, but it is also a mode that can act to undermine the interviewees, making them look foolish or deluded. Their interpretation of events or personal account may be rendered to seem trustworthy or untrustworthy depending on the context of surrounding shots or the nature of the statements being made in their own right.’ [[http://www. filmeducation. org/secondary/documentary2004/style. html](http://www.filmeducation.org/secondary/documentary2004/style.html), 10. 11. 08]

Night Mail (1936) is an example of a reflective and poetic documentary. Harry Watt and Basil Wright directed the film. It is about the mail train from London to Scotland. The poem by English poet W. H. Auden was especially

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written for the documentary. The poem's rhythm imitates the train's wheels. The train begins slowly but picks up the speed so is the narrator.

A dramatised documentary started off as television program, documented drama *Cathy Come Home* in 1966. This mode of documentary dramatises real events.

Cathy Come Home was broadcasted on BBC1, the story is about a young couple Cathy (Carol White) and Reg (Ray Brooks). Their life and relationship moved on, they have a child and moved to a bigger house. But when Reg is injured and loses his job they face poverty and unemployment.

Another example of dramatised documentaries are *Ghosts*(2006) and *Battle of Haditha* (2007).

Ghosts tells a story of Ai Qin, a young girl who borrows money to come illegally to UK, so she can support her son and family back in China. In UK she becomes another of 3 million migrants who struggle for food and money. She works 14 hours a day, 7 days a week just for £100. The film changes your view about immigrants and slavery in 21st century.

' It's a valuably tactless, steady, clear-eyed look at the tragedy and cruelty of the new globalised serfdom.' Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*

The film doesn't have a voice over and is mixed with an observational documentary genre. *Broomfield* is not getting involved into a narrative.

‘ This is a strong foray into features for Nick Broomfield, though it is maybe unusual to have a Broomfield film without his trademark voiceover’ Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

In the film there are no actors, they are real people and it is their real life story.

‘ The picture has a lot in common with Michael Winterbottom’s ‘ In this World’. Both use non- professional actors; both blend documentary filming techniques with fiction; both pictures crusade to raise awareness of the plight of illegal immigrants. The films even share the same editor. But while Winterbottom’s picture is predominantly concerned with the journey, Broomfield’s focuses on the treatment of Chinese immigrants once they arrive, without papers, without rights and saddled with an impossible debt to their traffickers.’ The Times

Debates

Are documentaries telling the truth? This is one of the common debates about factual programming. In my opinion the truth in documentaries is bias. What I mean by it is that the truth is based on the thoughts and opinions of the filmmaker. Therefore the documentary becomes their truth.

This now brings me to discuss objectivity within factual programming. It is very hard to make a documentary that isn’t biased to one opinion and is fair towards both sides of an argument. Even though filmmakers try to be objective they will always put across their opinion in their film.

Many documentaries address the audience politically, for instance factual programmes by Michael Moore. His documentaries represent only his opinion, especially in film *Sicko*.

Furthermore, I am going to use Micheal Moore to demonstrate how controversial issues can be used to attract the audience and how they become a unique selling point of a documentary. He uses a very controversial subject such as health care in U. S. due to he thinks it is in public interest to know the facts and stories that happened to characters in his film.

' *Sicko*' (2007) investigates American health care system and health insurance companies. According to *Sicko*, around fifty million Americans are uninsured and those who are covered are often victims of health insurance companies' fraud.

The documentary starts with couple U. S. citizens that are not insured and how they have to deal with the injuries themselves. Reg had an accident and he saw off the cups of two of his fingers. When he went to a hospital he had to choose which finger he can afford to be attached. But the film is not about the people who don't have a health insurance. Moore investigates the stories of people who have been denied health care even though they were insured.

The story is told from both sides of the argument. He interviews people who work for insurance companies and even doctors who have to deny treatments even for cancer, so the company they work for won't lose money.

(he is manipulating people)

Moore proves that the health system is really bad. He also compares it to other countries like Canada or United Kingdom.

According to Austan Goolsbee, a Professor of economics at University of Chicago, one of the cases would have the same ending whichever health system that would be.

‘ In one heart-wrenching case in the movie, a woman whose husband has kidney cancer is told by the insurance people that they won’t allow an experimental treatment that might save his life. But that scene would likely play out just the same way in a nationalized health system. In those systems, cost-effectiveness decisions get made all the time. Care is rationed. That’s what happens if you offer something for free-you have to make rules about who is allowed to get it.’

I don’t totally agree with him, because it was clearly explained in the film that not only that treatment was denied, all other treatments, which were not experimental were denied too.

Austan Goolsbee also says:

‘ So, to do as Moore wants in the United States, you would need to do more than just overcome the insurance industry. You would need to cut the salaries of doctors, reform the legal system, enrage our allies by causing their prescription drug costs to escalate, and accustom patients to a central decision-maker authorized to determine what procedures they are and are

not allowed to get. Unless every one of these changes comes together, Moore's new system would end up costing an enormous amount of money.'

In my opinion, Moore is aware of the costs of changing the system, but he also knows that it would be more beneficial for everybody. All these people who are insured and they are still scared to go ask for help in the hospital due to they know that insurance company will still make them pay for the treatment.

In his film, Moore is representing the U. S. government and governors from the bad side. I would say that in some scenes he tries to ruin their reputation, for instance Congressman Billy Tosen, who left the Congress to work for a health insurance company because they offered him \$2 million.

I think that even if he tried to put his message across without using example of Billy Tosen it wouldn't make such a big impact on the audience.

Roger Friedman of Fox News called the film a "brilliant and uplifting new documentary" and praised Moore for the way in which he lets "very articulate average Americans tell their personal horror stories at the hands of insurance companies" and "criticizes both Democrats and Republicans for their inaction and in some cases their willingness to be bribed by pharmaceutical companies and insurance carriers."

Film critic Stephen Schaefer of the Boston Globe described Sicko as "a very strong and very honest documentary about a health system that's totally corrupt and that is without any care for its patients."

Columnist and movie reviewer Michael Medved wrote “ In contrast to his previous films, Moore delivers no entertainment value in this dull, didactic downer; and, as an editorial it’s so completely one-sided that it’s useless with not the slightest mention that ‘ free’ medical care actually costs tax money or any conversation with people who disagree with Moore’s pro-socialized-medicine point of view.”

Issues

Some of the issues in factual programs are accuracy, balance and impartiality. Making documentaries we need to make sure that we are as accurate as possible. We have represent and show the real facts. We cannot twist no information or lie.

Being impartial within factual programming or keeping balance is slightly harder to do. Everyone has their opinion and before making the documentary, especially about controversial issues; we are already on one side of the argument. But it is important that we try to keep balance and show the another side of the argument as well.

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