

COURSE:

Communication Research Methods

INSTRUCTOR:

Mr. Jeffrey Bolt

COURSE COMPLETED:

Fall 2009

ASSIGNMENT TITLE:

Research Proposal

ASSIGNMENT PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This assignment was designed to allow students to show what we have learned throughout the semester. We had to create a communication study and propose the necessary steps we would take if we were actually performing the study. We had to develop a proposed study, defend the study, create a hypothesis, and finally have a methods and a data analysis section.

REFLECTIONS:

This class, and specifically this paper, was not of huge interest to me. My personality did not really fit with the researching and data aspect of the communication field that this class was trying to convey. Although there was not any serious math required, I found myself often lost when there was talk of numbers and data. I enjoyed my topic for this paper, the mean world syndrome, but other than that I found this to be a joyless labor. I came up with my topic after there was a string of violence-related crimes at the Kent campus, so I felt that it was a relevant topic that needed to be investigated. I would liked to have seen the results of my survey, and perhaps that is something I should have done to go above and beyond for this assignment.

Research Proposal:
Mean World Syndrome

Renee Elliott

Kent State University

12/06/2009

Given the recent spike in crime in the Kent State University area, I felt the need to propose a research idea that would analyze female students who are experiencing mean world syndrome and if they feel that they are in more danger due to recent events. The purpose of this study would be to examine how much the media has a role on female students and their actions in response to the reports of the crime happening on and near campus. If there shows to be a rise in action that is being taken compared to the recent events, then my research will show that the media has an effect on female students and their increased concern for their safety. Considering that these events have happened so close to all of us, I feel that it is a relevant topic to study. We have all invested some time and energy into finding the facts of what happened and possibly taking steps to ensure our own safety. In this research proposal I will define and examine what mean world syndrome is and how its effects can lead to heightened fear. My sample will be female Kent State University undergraduate students ranging from the typical ages of 18-22. I hope to show, through my research, that the heightened media surrounding safety issues on and around campus has instilled more fear and awareness of danger in female students at Kent State, and further relating that awareness to the mean world syndrome.

This study will be of great interest to the university because it directly examines the female students who attend. We can all learn that the amount of details the media and the university expose about crime concerning the university greatly affects the mental and emotional feelings that female students have. What I really want to come out of my research is if the media should monitor the amount of facts it releases concerning crime or if it is better to have all the details out, no matter what the effect is on female students. I am choosing to focus on female students because it has been proven that females are more emotionally sensitive compared to males. Fischer (2000) stated that women tend to express more sadness and fear where men are

more prone to express anger. This expressive fear, and what its root is from, is what I want to examine. My exact research question that I am looking to answer is: Are female Kent State University undergraduates, ranging from ages 18-22, experiencing heightened fear due to the excessive media portrayal of violence near the university, and does it relate to the mean world syndrome?

To properly answer my research question, I need to develop a way to study female undergraduates and the link of their emotions to fear relating to the mean world syndrome. I feel the best way to approach this study would be to send out a mass e-mail to registered university undergraduate females. E-mail would be chosen because it is a fairly inexpensive way to conduct a questionnaire. Although this method shows to have a low response rate, I feel that it will grab more attention because it is an issue that currently surrounds the students and the university. In the e-mail I would make sure to define mean world syndrome to the female students so they could properly answer my questionnaire and Likert scale questions. I would define mean world syndrome just as its creator George Gerbner did. Gerbner coined and defined mean world syndrome as, “a phenomenon in which people who watch large amounts of television are more likely to believe that the world is an unforgiving and frightening place” (Gerbner 1968). I would also explain in the mass e-mail that newspapers, websites, and radio can be included in the category with television concerning media that affects its consumers. All of this information would be provided in a title page in the e-mail. Next, the respondents would be asked to click “reply” and answer my questions.

On the following page I would include some basic questions as well as questions using the Likert scale. The beginning questions I would ask would include:

- A) What year were you born?
- B) What year are you at the university (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)?
- C) Where do you live in relation to the university (on campus, within 10 miles, further than 10 miles)?

Next, I would move on to asking questions concerning mean world syndrome and the students' feelings concerning the recent rise in crime in the area using the Likert scale:

Please answer the following questions using the scale provided: 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. Circle the number that represents your answer.

- A) I observe and actively participate in media (watching TV, reading the newspaper, visiting websites, listening to news broadcasts on the radio) often (more than 20 hours per week).

1 2 3 4 5

- B) I am fully aware of the recent crime spike (violent and non-violent) happening around campus.

1 2 3 4 5

- C) I have taken recent steps to ensure my safety on and off campus.

1 2 3 4 5

- D) I feel that there may be more crime on campus due to recent events.

1 2 3 4 5

E) I want to be informed of any new crime developments happening on or near campus.

1 2 3 4 5

F) I feel that the world is a dangerous place and that I am susceptible to violent and non-violent crimes on a daily basis.

1 2 3 4 5

After conducting the survey questions and the Likert scale questions, the respondents would just have to click “send” to submit the information to my computer analysis software that would provide me with the overall findings of my study and provide me with the margin of error. I would allow a time frame of two weeks for all of the respondents to reply to the mass e-mail. Also, I would like to permit no more than a margin of error of +/- 1.5%, which would leave us with approximately 95% accuracy in our findings.

The questions that I chose for the mass e-mail are relatively straightforward. I feel that any female student should be able to answer these questions with ease. I avoided any ambiguous questions, and the questions were asked in a way to encourage honesty (asking what year the respondents were born, rather than their age). Depending on the statistical findings, I would be able to determine whether my findings supported my thoughts of the relation between mean world syndrome and the recent events happening at Kent. An ideal finding would include showing a clear link between the time the female students involved themselves with the media, their feelings of security after recent events, and if they had taken recent steps to ensure their own safety. Obviously, if a female student is unaware of the recent crime on and near campus,

then they would not be as involved with the media and not feel any heightened fear. The American Psychology Association (APA) has provided many statistics that they have collected relating to school and violence. Some of those statistics include:

- Homicide is the leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds. (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control)
- 40% of youth have been concerned about a potentially violent classmate. (APA, Warning Signs of Youth Violence, 1998)
- A child will have viewed 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of television violence by the time they are 11 years old. (National Television violence study)
- Young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 face the greatest risk of being a victim of violence. (Warning Signs of Youth Violence, APA, 1999)

Given these statistics, this shows that my research is very relevant. Not only has crime recently risen in Kent, these numbers show that it is a common issue around the nation. I feel, to a certain extent, that I suffer from mean world syndrome. I am overly involved in the media, and I have taken recent steps to provide myself with a more secure plan in case of a violent attack. I know that if I am experiencing these feelings, that I am not alone. If my research shows that the extent of coverage concerning crime in Kent State is affecting the emotional wellbeing of female students, that there are steps we can provide to prevent any serious anxiety disorders to develop.

I feel that this research is meaningful to our university, and the results can help us decide whether further steps need to be taken to ensure that the emotional states of female students do not escalate. My research will be able to answer my research question and shed light on the

number of female students who suffer from mean world syndrome, allowing important questions concerning the need for safety in Kent to be answered.

Works Cited

- "Emotional Expression." 04 Dec. 2009. *Emotional processing site*. Web. Retrieved from
<<http://www.emotionalprocessing.org.uk/Emotional%20Processing%20&%20Gender/Emotional%20expression%20in%20men%20&%20women.htm>>.
- "Facts & Statistics." 04 Dec. 2009. *APA Help Center*. Web. Retrieved from
<<http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/topic.php?id=6>>.
- "The New York Times Log In." 04 Dec. 2009. *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia*. Web. Retrieved from
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/03/obituaries/03gerbner.html>>.