

JORDAN

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Dear Amy:

George shared with me the material from your dissertation that you gave him as a prospective book manuscript. Since there was no cover letter, I am assuming that you are requesting advice vis-a-vis its potential publication; I do not know whether or not you were specifically interested in either of our book series. I can say at the outset, however, that the book does not fit the profile of either of the series, so I will make the response to the materials more general.

As you know, considerations for a publishable book are different than for a successful dissertation. Obviously, as a dissertation this material is successful. As a book it raises a number of questions. Some of these might be answered by a different presentation, which I will discuss first. But others run perhaps more deeply.

Even if you know someone, as you do George and myself, it is still important to include a cover letter describing the overall contribution of the book. What is missing in either the prospectus or the sample chapters is a consideration in more detail of how this book compares with other ethnographic studies of families and television, from David Morley to James Lull (who has a new book from Sage, by the way). It is not enough to assert that a systems approach is needed to family studies; this is not a new idea, even in the communications literature. The ethnographic approach has been advocated for some time by these researchers along with others. With no bibliography I cannot tell whether you have differentiated your material from the other

ethnographies of television viewing. Also relevant would be to compare ethnographies of other media audiences (see the work of Lindlof, for example) with what is distinct about families--with different aged children--and television. Much of what is described could be expected, even from studies of television viewing of the seventies which did not use ethnographic approaches.

For a book, I fear that the limitations of the sample and the behavior studied will become more pronounced. Without comparative samples, it is not clear whether cultural, geographical, ethnic, socioeconomic, or other factors might change some of the issues of gender, etc. Twenty-one families from one area do not seem sufficient from which to generalize for a book-length manuscript, unless the material is more unusual than this seems to be.

It is also not clear that the extended discussion of ethnographic methods is called for in a book. They are now in the vanguard and the recitation of problems and the "personal view" will not be new to most people who have read in the area.

Finally, in reading the sample materials one could not help but feel that the chapters were over-written for an audience of scholars. There were many assumptions that would be shared, not offered as discoveries; there seemed to be repetition of ideas that needed only one statement; there seemed to be a projection of newness to using ethnography to counter effects studies when it is not clear that this is a battle one needs to fight. Again, without a bibliography and a more precise and detailed examination of what is known about television viewing in the home, it is difficult to judge the original contribution, but the emphasis on method in the face of current scholarship seems more a straw man/woman argument.

All in all, I am not sure that your wisest course at this time is to try to publish this material as a book. I don't know if the level of discovery and the two ideas underlined in the last chapter can support a book-length treatment. As you say yourself, the sample is small and homogeneous. My

advice would be to write a couple of articles. However, if you decide to pursue the book idea, perhaps the Ablex or Erlbaum series would offer some possibility.

I hope that this response is helpful in your contemplating your next steps. I trust that all is well with you and your family and that you are looking forward to a good summer.

Sincerely yours,

Marsha Siefert
Editor

cc: George Gerbner