

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/63460>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-06-14 and may be subject to change.

tact the scene, exploratory methods and sampling techniques. Both chapters are extremely useful for those communication students who would like to conduct a qualitative study but do not know where or how to begin, and are interested in some ‘rules of thumb’ (for instance with regard to sampling size).

The following chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) focus on two important qualitative data gathering methods – observation and interviews. Again the writings display a high practical value. That is why it is a pity that the authors have chosen not to treat specific methodologies associated with discourse analysis in this book. A similar approach to these ‘complex’ matters, would certainly be appreciated. Their inclusion would also create a more representative picture of activities that are labeled as ‘qualitative communication research’.

Chapters 7 and 9 – ‘Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation’ and ‘Authoring and Writing’ – proceed with the same élan as the previous texts. The chapter on ‘qualitative research in computer-mediated communication’ (Chapter 8), on the other hand, seems to interrupt the natural pace of the methodological part, by suddenly giving special attention to this ‘rapidly growing field of qualitative research’. Although this excursion is interesting, one feels a little bit ‘off track’. And so we end up with the travel metaphor – which is also used by the authors – again ...

I would like to conclude this review with the following caution for future ‘travelers’; because of the many practical tips and good ideas it contains, reading this book might take a little bit longer than you initially would expect. At least that’s what participant observation taught me. It seems very difficult for people – like myself – who are planning a qualitative project in the near future, not to have creative thoughts while reading the suggestions of Lindlof and Taylor. This experience results in a personal diary of the journey, some kind of outline for future qualitative research. I suppose that’s what this trip was all about.

*Department of Communication
University of Leuven*

Heidi Vandebosch

Potter, W. J. (2003). *The 11 Myths of Media Violence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. ISBN: 0-7619-2735-2 (259 pp.)

The 11 Myths of Media Violence facilitates a transfer between academic research and the knowledge of the public. The presence of violence in the media is one of the most frequently mentioned issues when it comes to discussions about the media. W. James Potter, author of books on

media violence and media literacy asserts that much of what is 'generally known' about media violence rests on misunderstanding the phenomenon. By labeling these misunderstandings myths, Potter makes implicitly clear that the misunderstandings have deep roots in society, and that the misunderstandings serve as ways to get to grips with the phenomenon, albeit false ways.

Potter structures his book by identifying the 11 myths in 11 chapters. The first one, *violence in the media does not affect me, but others are at high risk* serves as an example for the rest of the discussion in the book. Potter states that most people think that violence in the media has negative effects on others, but not on themselves. He challenges this view by stating that people have a too narrow view on effects. Copying violent behavior as seen on television is not the only effect, and even not the most common. Disinhibition, temporary fear and desensitization are other short term effects. Cultivation of fear, emotional habituation and moving the mean of society toward more of a fight-flight mentality are long term effects. Directly or indirectly, everyone is affected by one or more of these influences.

In this first chapter Potter gives ample evidence from communication studies, and most of them are rooted firmly in empirical research. However, some of the evidence is purely speculative. The citation from Grossman and DeGaetano's book *Stop teaching your kids to kill* reads: "Media violence weakens our ability to react properly to violent messages, rather like AIDS weakens a person's physical immune system".

Similarly, Potter challenges the other myths; that the media are not responsible for the negative effects of their violent messages, and that violence in the media reflects violence in society. Every chapter starts off by stating that some specific thought about media violence is very common, or that it has a long history. He does not spend too many words on the question where this myth has its origins, but challenges it with an abundance of literature.

After stripping away ten of the eleven myths a gloomy picture remains. The media are ruled by much, and brutal violence. People who are confronted with violence experience negative effects. Neither a reduction of violence in the media, or even the use of V-chips and regulations will help the watching people. Potter's major complaint is that the media companies do not act responsible although they are responsible for the violence in the media and thus for the negative effects it generates. The media industry hides itself behind the shield of the first amendment. Potter cannot totally undermine this argument that media companies use against what they call censorship. In Potter's view the media industry should be less duplicitous and defend itself on something more honest, such as an economic argument.

Throughout the book it emerges that Potter thinks violence in the media to be threatening. In the chapter containing the final conclusion he labels it a public health problem, and asserts that it should be treated as such. This means that we should not focus on effects, but on levels of risk, and the factors that influence those levels. It could even convince us that there are things we can do to reduce our risk, presuming a good deal of shared responsibility. People watching television take part in this responsibility, but so do the media business. Potter finally asks for some independent discussion forum for discussing and eventually counteracting this detrimental aspect of the media.

Finally, the eleventh myth gives some room for optimism. This eleventh myth reads: *There is nothing I can do to make an effect on reducing the problem.* According to Potter, personal action as well as societal action may help to reduce the problem. People are recommended to become more media literate or to contact one of 32 organization mentioned in the book that provide information on media violence.

Although Potter challenges some popular misconceptions in a profound way, and succeeds to write in a very readable manner, some flaws do exist. The major one being the abundant use of analogies Potter applies. Some of the analogies are appropriate but others are rather far fetched. In the concluding chapter called *Prognosis for improvement*, the author compares the presence of violence in the media with the presence of a soothing but harmful ingredient in pharmaceutical products. He then describes the regulation that are provided for the media industry in a mocking way. PG-13 is like a medicine for teenagers that has to be taken under adult supervision. Although it may be fun to read, the argument is rather weak, just like the aforementioned analogy with AIDS.

The 11 myths of media violence is written in a pleasant tone. In spite of the blurb, communication scholars may not be the most proper audience. They should turn themselves to '*On Media Violence*' (1999) in which Potter examines the body of research on media violence of the past 40 years and proposes re-conceptions of these theories, leading to a specific theoretical outlook, the concept of lineation theory. Or they should wait for the *Dictionary of Media Violence* that is forthcoming. The 11 myths of media violence may be interesting reading material for parents, or school teachers who want to challenge the thought that media violence is harmless or even fun. For such an audience the book can be an eye-opener and it may turn the reader into a vigilant media user.