

European Union Research Project :

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**“Interaction with Fictional Media as Means of Understanding and Preventing
Adolescent Violence and Political/ Religious Extremism”**

(Acronym: Media/Anti-Violence)

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The key issue ‘Fictional Media Interaction and Violence-Prevention’ raises the question of whether and in what ways aesthetic interaction – comprising various media (text, film etc.) and modes of media use – may or may not contribute to developmental processes in which individuals mentally and interactively work through experiences of violence and destructiveness – be they experiences of perpetration or of victimization. The project thus probes the generally held assumption that art, literature, and fictional media narratives are valuable cultural resources for achieving sustainable individual and societal development in the face of personal and collective challenges. The project will specifically focus on high-risk adolescents who are prone to violent forms of acting-out and to (self-)destructive behavior – which mostly concurs with xenophobic attitudes and/or extremist political or religious ideologies.

The eventual purpose of the project and its particular methodological approach is: to inspire the development of methods for literature and media teaching which effectively prevent and respond to patterns of violent and self-destructive action among young adults.

There will be two methodologically separate dimensions: (A) the study of persons (readers/ viewers), their biographies, and their particular media interaction with one personally chosen fictional narrative and (B) the study of this very fictional narrative itself: (A) In the first dimension, employing reconstructive reader/viewer-interaction research, the core questions are: How do individuals from the endangered (and dangerous) group of young violence-prone citizens – while consuming and thus mentally interacting with fictional media narratives of their liking – unwittingly tackle or avoid tackling the challenges of biographical identity formation which were brought about by their individual life histories – and resulted, among other things, in violent and (self-)destructive behavior? (B) In the dimension of fiction text analysis we ask: How is the fictional narrative (text, film, or other media) structured in inter-actional terms? What are the narrative’s specific ‘textual inter-action potentials’, given its content and form (regardless of how any empirical person actually interacted with it)?

In epistemological terms, the question is: How may we, while studying persons and their aesthetic interaction, not lose sight of the media narrative as text – and vice versa? How may we bring together two areas of scientific inquiry which have hitherto been largely kept apart: the research on the ‘world of fictional narratives’ (humanities/ philologies) and the research on the

‘world of real-life experience’ of empirical persons and social groups (social and psychological research).

The multi-method research design of Literary and Media Interaction Research (LIR) combines scientific resources from literary and culture studies on the one hand (especially narratology, text-linguistics, and film studies) and from qualitative-empirical and psychological research on the other (especially biography studies, social and developmental psychology, and criminological research). Theoretically, the underlying notion of ‘interaction’ is understood to comprise both the dimension of social and of mental interaction; and it refers to processes which are conceived of as biographically embedded in principal. Accordingly, ‘interaction’ does comprise occurrences/ experiences both of a person’s real-life interaction and of her/his mental interaction processes which occur, among other instances, during her/his encounter with fiction narratives. The underlying notion of ‘destructiveness’ and ‘violence’ – or conversely: of ‘individual and societal sustainability’ – are conceptualized with the assistance of psychotherapy research and developmental psychology. The qualitative LIR-approach owes its high standard of methodical process-control and inter-subjective validation to recent biography research and engages in further developing its tools.

(A) As to the methodology of media interaction research: Each interviewee first undergoes a state-of-the-art ‘biographical narrative interview’ (BNI). There, the novel method of ‘Interdisciplinary Transcript Analysis’ (ITA) is employed, which at first uses biography studies’ standard procedures, i.e. it proceeds by ‘sequential hypothesis building’ aiming at the reconstruction of the person’s individual processing of life-time experience. Secondly, resources from clinical and social psychology are integrated in a systematic manner. Hence, what biography research usually described in generic terms as a person’s ‘guiding principle(s)’ of life-history development, is now also specified psychologically as ‘the individual’s psychodynamic principle(s)’. From there the person’s biographical ‘challenge of personality development’ is formulated which will then serve as a methodological element in the reconstruction of the person’s modes of media interaction.

After the biographical interview each person gives a narrative ‘Media-Experience Interview’ (MEI) after having reread/ reviewed the fiction narrative s/he had picked in the BNI. Here a novel technique of ‘MEI internal narrative follow-up questioning’ is applied which goes both top-down into the media narratives’ world as is subjectively perceived by the interviewee, and bottom-up into her/his personal biographical memories triggered by the media narrative. The final reconstructive case study on both interviews gives a picture of how the person has subjectively appropriated the media narrative and whether and how s/he unwittingly used it as a tool for mentally working on her/his ‘biographical challenge(s)’. Producing several case studies within a particular sector of social life – as for instance violence-prone adolescents – enables us to formulate a certain number of main types and their interactional and psychological structure of media interaction. From there one may then proceed to deduce appropriate guidelines and methods of pedagogical and/or therapeutic intervention via culture and media teaching.

(B) As to studying the media narratives: Here the LIR-approach applies a novel method of Narratological Fiction Text Analysis (NTA) which draws on linguistic, narratological, and psychological resources. Firstly, NTA employs a systematic linguistic assessment of the narrative’s ‘informational choice and completeness’ as well as of its ‘narrative incoherence’ according to parameters of the story’s *internal* and *external* logic. Secondly, a psychologically based assessment of the ‘textual inter-actional potentials’ is conducted, which the narrative

contains vis-à-vis its readers as a result of its content and form, i.e. of its 'incoherences' and '(in)completeness'.

In the eventual integration of text analysis and reader interaction analysis an 'actual variant of reader-text-interaction' is reconstructed which spells out the specific interactional constellation of the reader's subjective '(mis-)understandings' of the narrative and of the psycho-biographical reasons for them. Hence, a particular piece of 'social reality' or rather 'societal (media) interaction' is reconstructed also in its psychodynamic and psycho-biographical underpinnings. The synopsis of several 'variants' and types, and finally of the most frequent types of personal media interaction, which can be found in the demographic sector of violence-prone adolescents, will produce a reliable picture of this area of social life. This then serves as indispensable orientation for finding ways of social intervention and developing modules for media teaching in school, education, and social work.

The second, overarching benefit of the project is a more strategic one. It lies in the support which the LIR-methodology may contribute to the humanities' out-reach towards a trans-philological interdisciplinarity which also succeeds in collaborating with the interactional disciplines of academic inquiry.