

**How Entertainment-Education Programs Promote Dialogue in Support of
Social Change**

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Various theories of mass media effects and group dynamics have wrestled over understanding and describing exactly how the mass media influence audience members' thinking and action at the individual and collective levels. Up until the 1940s, the mass media were primarily viewed as being magic multipliers of invariant messages, leading to direct, immediate, and power effects on audience members (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Such conclusions about the media's omnipotence in disseminating messages were derived from the highly influential role played by the Hearst newspapers in arousing public support for the U.S. in the Spanish-American War; and in the powerful impact of Nazi propaganda before and during World War II (Rogers, 2003). This early view of media effects, commonly referred to as the hypodermic needle model, viewed the audience as a group of passive, atomized, and disconnected individuals.

Several studies conducted after World War II showed that the hypodermic needle model of mass media effects was problematic, and that media effects were better explained by what came to known as the two-step flow model (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Rogers, 1962). In the first step, the mass media influenced only a limited number of individuals in a social system (often called opinion leaders), mostly through a process of information transmission (Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006; Rogers, 2003). Media effects, however, were more pronounced in the second step--from opinion leaders to other individuals in the social system, connected through existing social networks. Here interpersonal communication, discussion, and dialogue were the key vehicles of influence.

The role of the media in promoting dialogue among viewers and the impact of such dialogue is illustrated in the radio farm forum experiments. In 1956, India was the site of the famous Pune Radio Farm Forum project, which was a field experiment to evaluate the effects of radio farm forums, each consisting of several dozen villagers who gathered weekly to listen to a half-hour radio program (broadcast by All India Radio) and then to discuss its contents (Kivlin, Roy, Fliegel, & Sen, 1968). The theme of the radio forums was "Listen, Discuss, Act!" One of the radio programs might deal with rodents as a problem. Following discussion of this topic in a radio forum, villagers may decide to mount a rat-control campaign in their community (Singhal & Rogers, 2001).

The research evaluation showed that the Pune radio farm forums helped "unify villagers around common decisions and common actions," widening "the influence of the *gram panchayat* [village government] and broadening the scope of its action" (Mathur & Neurath, 1959, p. 101). The farm forums spurred discussions among villagers, often leading to decisions about digging well, adopting pure bred bulls and Leghorn chickens, and establishing *balwadis* [children's enrichment centers] (Singhal & Rogers, 2001). At the village level, the radio forums acted like voluntary organizations "whose members were neither appointed by authority nor elected to represent specific group interests" signifying an important experiment in village democracy (Mathur & Neurath, 1959, p. 101). Influenced by the media-sparked group discussion, radio listeners voluntarily engaged in village clean-up drives, planting papaya trees, and building pit latrines.

If the dialogue resulting from viewing or listening to a mass media program is central to understanding media effects, what forms does this dialogue take, when does it emerge, and

how does it influence people to change their thinking and actions? These questions form the basis of the present investigation.

Specifically, we examine four entertainment-education programs in India, Peru, and South Africa that were developed with the intention of promoting pro-social change. In order to prepare the reader for our description of this specific media approach to sparking interpersonal and community dialogue for social change, we first describe the general attributes of entertainment-education media programming and our perspective of dialogue. Then, we explain our data collection methods including a description of the storylines and the main characters of each entertainment-education program. Next, we present our analysis and interpretation of data by describing the various forms of dialogue that contributed to social change in various communities. Finally, we conclude by focusing on the various roles that dialogue can play with regard to mass media campaigns and the conditions under which we can expect those roles.

Entertainment-Education and Social Change

Entertainment-education (E-E) is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal & Rogers, 2002). The general purpose of E-E interventions, such as a radio serial, is to spark intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group conversations, contributing to the process of directed social change, which occurs at the level of an individual, community, or society.

The entertainment-education strategy contributes to social change in multiple ways. E-E can influence audience members' awareness, attitudes, and behavior toward a socially

desirable end. Here the anticipated effects are located in an individual or a collective of which an individual is a part. Often E-E programs spark conversations among audience members about the social issues that are addressed, leading to dialogue, decisions, and individual or collective actions. An illustration is provided by a radio soap opera, *Twende na Wakati* (Let's Go with the Times), in Tanzania that convinced several hundred thousand sexually-active adults to adopt HIV prevention behaviors (like using condoms and reducing their number of sexual partners) (Rogers et al., 1999; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). E-E interventions can also influence the audience's external environment to help create the necessary conditions for social change at the system level (Singhal & Rogers, 2002; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). Here the major effects are located in the social-political sphere of the audiences' external environment. E-E can serve as a social mobilizer, an advocate or agenda-setter, influencing public and policy initiatives in a socially desirable direction (Wallack, 1990; Usdin, Singhal, Shongwe, & Shabalala, 2004).

Dialogue

Dialogue involves mutuality and reciprocity in information exchange between two or more individuals. In this sense, dialogue involves not just a channel of information-exchange but is also embodied in the relationship between participants. Dialogue, by its very nature, is recurring and iterative. Through dialogue, human relationships are co-created, co-regulated, and co-modified; that is, something new is created in the interaction. Also, unlike mass-mediated dissemination messages, dialogue is oral, live, immediate, and spatially-bound to a physical context (Peters, 1999).

Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of dialogue in social change processes (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2003; Gergen, Gergen, & Barrett, 2004; Hammond,

Anderson, & Cissna, 2003; Papa Singhal, Law, Pant, Sood, Rogers, & Shefner-Rogers, 2000; Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006; Stewart & Zediker, 2000; Zoller, 2000; 2004). Zoller (2000) argues "dialogic relations involve risking one's position in order to arrive at a new understanding" (p. 193). This observation highlights the fact that risk is always part of any substantive change in a community. Dialogue may also focus on the tensions that surface when social changes are debated. For example, how do we balance the need to arrive at consensus for change while still respecting voices of opposition (Stewart & Zediker, 2000)? Zoller (2004) extends this position by explaining that "dialogue requires collaboration that does not rule out disagreement and debate but presumes a focus on joint sense making and a willingness to be vulnerable to be changed through interaction" (p. 214). Dialogue thus represents a primary resource for transforming how we understand ourselves and others and the organizational worlds we inhabit.

Given the preceding descriptions of E-E media programs and dialogue, the following questions guide the present inquiry:

In what ways do E-E programs generate dialogue among listeners that helps to produce social change at the community level? What forms does this dialogue take, when does it emerge, and how does it influence people to change their thinking and actions?

Analyzing Data from Four E-E Projects

Data from four research projects, carried out between 1996 and 2005, were examined in the present investigation, two from India, and one each from South Africa and Peru. The present author(s), with other colleagues, served as principal research investigators/research

advisors on these four E-E projects, leading aspects of research design, data collection and analysis, and reporting of results.

The first project focused on the effects of a radio soap opera, *Tinka Tinka Sukh* (Happiness Lies in Small Things), in the Indian village of Lutsaan. This radio soap opera is set in the village of Navgaon (literally "new village"), a farming community struggling to understand the value of modern traditions while moving in progressive directions. Chaudhri (literally "elder leader"), his wife Chaudhrian, and son Suraj represent a model family. They promote women's causes (anti-dowry, gender equality, and women's empowerment) and the importance of creating a self-sufficient, harmonious village.

Chacha (literally "Uncle"), his wife Chachi, and their children Ramlal, Champa, Sundar, Suman, and Pappu, represent the antithesis of Chaudhri's family. Chacha believes he is absolved of all family responsibilities since he is the family's breadwinner. Chachi is domineering, blindly traditional, and very vocal. The village gossip, she is overly indulgent of her eldest son Ramlal, a delinquent youth, critical of her daughters, and negligent of her younger children.

A tragedy occurs when a newly married woman, Poonam, is abused by her husband and his parents for bringing inadequate dowry and, in desperation, commits suicide. Another woman, Sushma, is abandoned by her husband for inadequate dowry. However, Sushma, with support from her parents and friends, rises over her tribulations, establishing a village sewing school. Finally, Kusum (Sushma's sister-in-law) is married as a child bride and dies in childbirth, providing a poignant twist to the storyline.

In order to study the effects of this radio soap opera on the residents of one village community, three members of our research team traveled to village Lutsaan in August, 1997.

This team spent four days establishing contact with villagers who had listened to *Tinka Tinka Sukh*. They collected demographic and archival data about the village and its residents. The present authors joined the research team on a two-day field visit to the village in August, 1997. We conducted 25 individual in-depth interviews and four focus group interviews with 20 individuals. We gathered data on how exposure to the broadcasts of *Tinka Tinka Sukh* sparked social changes in Lutsaan, including data on the steep rise in new enrollments of girl children in the village school, and the like.

The second research project focused on the effects of the hit South African E-E television program *Soul City IV*, in South Africa. This television series, broadcast in 1999, is set in Soul City, a fictional Black township in South Africa. A domestic violence storyline centers around Matlakala, a worker at Masakhane clinic. Matlakala is married to Thabang Seriti, a respected school teacher in the Soul City High School. Thabang has two children from a previous marriage, Bheki and Thembi, and a little girl, Mapaseka, with Matlakala. In the first few episodes the Seritis seem like a happy family. However, that changes one day when Matlakala returns home late from work, and Thabang is furious with her for neglecting family chores. The situation escalates and Thabang knocks Matlakala to the ground.

As the storyline evolved over several weeks, Thabang and Matlakala have a number of disputes that erupt into physical violence. As the abuser, Thabang feels increasingly in control, while Matlakala feels more and more helpless. Their neighbors are distraught and wish to help but do nothing as the community norm is to treat domestic violence as a private matter between husband and wife. However, with her father by her side, when Matlakala openly asks for the neighbors' help, they are goaded into action. The next time when Thabang is about to beat Matlakala, the neighbors come out of their homes and start beating

pots and pans. By making loud noises, they make it clear to Thabang that they disapprove of his violent behavior, and visibly and audibly assure Matlakala that they collectively support her.

The effects of *Soul City IV*'s domestic violence storyline were independently assessed through a community-based study of two sentinel sites, ethnographic observations (30 person days), semi-structured interviews (N=55), focus group and in-depth interviews (N=85), and local and national media monitoring, plus archival reviews.

The third research project focused on the effects of an E-E radio soap opera, *Taru*, on several villages in the state of Bihar, India. The *Taru* storyline promoted gender equality, small family size, reproductive health, and caste and communal harmony. The story revolved around Taru, a young, educated woman who works in Suhagpur village's Sheetal Center, an organization that provided reproductive health services, carried out village self-help activities, and fought social injustices through collective action. Taru is an idealistic, intelligent, and polite woman who works with a network of friends to empower rural women. Taru is a close friend of Shashikant, an educated and intelligent man, who is a social worker at the Sheetal Center. Shashikant, a *dalit*, faces caste discrimination in the village. While community members in Suhagpur deride Taru's friendship with a *dalit*, Taru likes Shashikant, and he, in turn, likes her. An undercurrent of romance characterizes their relationship, although it is not explicitly expressed (especially as Shashikant is highly mindful of his lower caste status relative to Taru's upper caste family). Their friendship represents a call to caste and community harmony.

Overall, *Taru*'s characters modeled several new behavior, challenging existing social norms: a friendship between a high-caste girl and a *dalit* social worker; the stopping of a child

marriage; a high-caste *bahu* (daughter-in-law) stepping out of the home to start a school for *dalit* children; a first time celebration of a girl's birthday, and others. These modeled messages were reinforced repeatedly over the one year of *Taru's* broadcasts.

Our research on *Taru* draws on various types of qualitative data collected over a period of 30 months from four villages in Bihar: Abirpur, Kamtaul, Madhopur, and Chandrahatti. Our data sources from these villages included: (1) 75 transcripts of in-depth and focus group interviews with listeners of *Taru*; (2) transcripts of 18 *Taru* listeners' club diaries (each with weekly entries); (3) 22 transcripts of audio-taped listeners' club discussions; (4) 14 hours of videotaped testimony provided by listeners of *Taru* and their community members; and (5) extensive field notes of the present authors who made a total of five visits to these villages between 2002 and 2004.

The fourth research project focused on the effects of *Bienvenida Salud*, a half-hour entertainment-education radio program produced by Minga Peru in the Peruvian Amazon. Broadcast three times a week, *Bienvenida Salud* is purposely designed to both entertain and educate to increase audience members' knowledge about reproductive health, sexual rights and gender equality, spur conversations among community members about such topics, including shifting social norms and behavior (Sypher et al., 2002; Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006).

The mainstay of *Bienvenida Salud* is the lively banter between its two hosts: Pashuca, who is a community health promotora, and Dona Rosa, her mother-in-law. Throughout the program, Pashuca and Dona Rosa have a conflict-laden, intergenerational dialogue: Pashuca promotes gender equality, preventive health, family planning, and rejects all forms of domestic violence. Dona Rosa, however, resists such changes. In a typical episode of

Bienvenida Salud, these popular characters might discuss how pregnancy happens; how to prevent it; how to manage an abusive relationship; or what to do when your child has diarrhea. The stories developed on air are based on real-life events, and sent as letters to Minga by audience members on ferries that ply the Amazonian riverine communities. Many letters are written on cloth, hand-sewn, and some are painted on tree bark.

A participatory pencil sketching exercise was conducted with eight children of community promotoras to understand the children's view on the salient aspects of their community life. Blank sheets of paper and colored pencils were handed to the children. They produced about a dozen highly colorful and detailed drawings. Once the children had finished their drawing, their explanations were noted. A participatory photography exercise was also undertaken with seven community promotoras to gauge their perception of Minga Peru's influence on their lives, including the effects of *Bienvenida Salud*. A total of 107 photographs were taken. The promotoras then narrated what the picture was depicting, what it meant to them, why they took it and so on. The insights gleaned from both of these participatory research activities were contextualized through a larger repertoire of data collected in the Peruvian Amazon over a three-year period (2002-2005) by the present authors and their colleagues, including field-based participant-observation (comprising a total of 75 person days).

We draw upon data-collected over a decade (1996 to 2005) from these four E-E projects to answer our research question.

Analysis and Interpretation

We posed the questions: *In what ways do E-E programs generate dialogue among listeners that helps to produce social change at the community level? What forms does this*

dialogue take, when does it emerge, and how does it influence people to change their thinking and actions?

Our analysis revealed several components of dialogue that are central to the relationship between the media stimulus provided by E-E programs and their audience effects. The first is *stakeholder dialogue* between the producers/writers of E-E programs, researchers and subject matter specialists, and potential audience members to develop storylines and characters. Then, once programs are broadcast, the following forms of dialogue are linked to audience effects: *internal dialogue* (a function of parasocial interaction with favorite characters), *interpersonal family dialogue*, and *community dialogue*. We also observed a reflexive turn from community dialogue to mass dissemination of socially-relevant information. Finally, we found dialogue supportive of social change often must confront forces or power, resistance, and paradoxical behavior.

Stakeholder Dialogue

The ability of E-E programs to produce audience effects is facilitated by the development of characters and storylines that resonate with audience members. Although professional writers are highly skilled in such tasks, when they dialogue with researchers, subject matter specialists, and prospective audience members, a more effective E-E intervention often results (Bouman, 2002; 2004). Consider how this was accomplished in the *Soul City IV* series (Usdin et al, 2004).

The National Network on Violence Against Women (NNVAW) is a coalition of over 1,500 activists and community organizers in South Africa. Three members of NNVAW, Mpho Thekiso, Lisa Vetten, and David Bohlale, worked closely with *Soul City* writers in developing the domestic violence series. In fact, Vetten's extensive experience working with

abused women, and Bohlale's experience as a male gender activist brought important perspectives to the project, while Thekiso was critical in mobilizing NNVAW members. In addition, since incorporating the "male" perspective was essential to engage men in the audience, as opposed to alienating them, Mmatshilo Motsei, an outspoken survivor of domestic violence in South Africa, also worked closely with the team, providing invaluable inputs in developing the series. The storyline was also extensively workshopped with a group of men (many ex-abusers) working in an organization aimed at transforming other male abusers.

Another type of stakeholder dialogue involved in-depth conversations with government and civil society officials who were involved in addressing gender-based violence in South Africa. These officials were concerned that when the *Soul City IV* series motivated women to take action, it could place them at increased risk for harm. So the need to establish a "safety net" to assist abused women was discussed, leading to the idea to establish a toll-free telephone helpline for women experiencing domestic violence. This helpline was advertised in all campaign materials and activities.

The final form of stakeholder dialogue involved NNVAW members and twelve abused women from South Africa, and four focus group discussions with an additional 20 women. The narratives emerging from these discussions brought realism to the storyline.

The ability of media messages to have an impact on audience members is enhanced when viewers or listeners recognize connections between their personal lives and the experiences of characters in E-E programs. The construction of characters and storylines having the potential to resonate with audience members would certainly seem to be enhanced by initiating dialogue between program writers, researchers, and target audience members

and/or those linked closely to target audience members. Indeed, previous research has identified this form of dialogue as critical to the development of high quality E-E programs (Bouman, 2002, 2004; Piotrow, Rimon, Winnard, Kincaid, Huntington, & Convisser, 1990; Singhal & Rogers, 1999, 2002).

Internal Dialogue (Parasocial Interaction)

Parasocial relationships are the seemingly face-to-face interpersonal relationships that can develop between a viewer and a mass media personality (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The media consumer forms a relationship with a performer that is analogous to the real interpersonal relationships that people have in a primary face-to-face group (Papa et al., 2000; Perse & Rubin, 1989; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Horton and Wohl (1956) argued that when a parasocial relationship is established, the media consumer appreciates the values and motives of the media character, often viewing him or her as a counselor, comforter, and model. Rubin and Perse (1987) argued that parasocial interaction consists of three audience dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. In this section, we consider the emergence of parasocial interaction among listeners of the E-E program *Taru* broadcast in India in 2003.

Cognitively-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which audience members pay careful attention to the characters in a media message and think about its educational content after their exposure (Papa et al., 2000; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Such reflection on the educational themes can help media consumers recognize that they could make different behavioral choices in their personal lives. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) is linked to behavior change that a person considers and/or enacts. *Self-efficacy* is an individual's perceptions of his/her capacity to deal effectively with a situation, and to control

this situation (Bandura, 1995). For example, after watching a role model in an entertainment-education program, is a person persuaded that they have the ability to change their behavior in a socially desirable way?

In Village Kamtaul, RHP Shailendra Singh noted how listening to *Taru* motivated him to intervene in a delicate situation: “We have applied the learnings of *Taru* in real life. Just as Taru and Shashikant prevent a girl child marriage in the radio serial, we also stopped a child marriage from occurring in Kamtaul. We politely said that this was wrong, and concerned people came around and changed their decision” (personal interview, August 19, 2002).

Sunita, Singh's wife, greatly admired Neha, a friend of Taru in the radio serial, who establishes a school to educate *dalit* (low-caste) children. Sunita launched adult literacy classes for 20 lower caste women in Kamtaul's Harijan Tola (the lower-caste settlement). It is highly uncommon in an Indian rural setting for a high-caste woman to interact with women of lower castes. “If Neha could do it, so could I,” Sunita noted.

Ratneshwar, the younger brother of the RHP in Village Madhopur, also wished to start a school but did not feel efficacious to do so. After listening to *Taru* and particularly being influenced by characters like Shashikant, Taru, and Neha, he was able to realize his dreams: “I really enjoy teaching children. After listening to *Taru*, I turned this dream into reality.” Ratneshwar's School, which meets in front of the Titly Center, is attended by 25 to 30 children aged 10 to 12 years. Ratneshwar charges a minimum admission fee.

Affectively-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which an audience member identifies with a particular media character, and believes that his/her interests are joined (Burke, 1945). The stronger this identification, the more likely that character's behavior will

affect the audience member. Soni in Village Abirpur exemplified this identification: "I love Taru. She is so nice. I also like Shashikant. When Taru is sad, Shashikant makes her laugh. When Taru is sad, I am sad. When Mangla asks her to not see Shashikant, and Taru feels bad, I feel bad." Audience members view their favorite characters as close personal friends, and become emotionally upset when certain characters face difficult personal situations.

The affective identification may be so strong that audience members adjust their daily schedules to listen to the radio program to maintain an ongoing relationship with their favorite characters. As Dhurandhar Maharaj, a male listener in Abirpur Village, noted: "Every Friday at 8 p.m. I have to be close to my radio. It's like meeting friends."

For some audience members, the identification with a character is so high that they cannot distinguish the fictional character from the actor. For instance, Kumari Neha, a member of the young women's listener group in Abirpur said: "I wish Taru could come to our village. She is so sweet and polite. If I learn so much from hearing her voice, what will she do to me when I see her in person." Neha identifies so strongly with Taru that she cannot make the distinction between the "reel" Taru and the real Taru.

Behaviorally-oriented parasocial interaction is the degree to which individuals overtly react to media characters, for instance, by "talking" to these characters, or by conversing with other audience members about them. Such conversations may influence audience members' thinking about an educational issue and motivate them to change their behavior in a specific way. The centrality of interpersonal or group interaction to behavior change has been documented by various researchers (Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995, 1997; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981; Papa et al., 2000).

Katz, Liebes, and Berko (1992) argued that parasocial interaction can prompt referential involvement on the part of audience members. *Referential involvement* is the degree to which an individual relates a media message to his/her personal experiences (Papa et al., 2000; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Before audience members consider behavior change as a result of observing or listening to a media character, they must be able to relate the experiences of the character to their own personal lives. If a connection cannot be made between the lives of a character and the experiences of an audience member, behavior change would certainly seem less likely for that individual.

Usha Kumari, a college student from Abirpur is indebted to *Taru* for making her strong and inspiring her to implement her dreams: "There are many moments when I feel that Taru is directly talking to me at night. She is telling me 'Usha you can follow your dreams.' I feel she [Taru] is like my elder sister....and giving me encouragement. I thank her for being with me" (personal conversation, September 4, 2002). Usha's uncle, Manoj Maharaj, is Abirpur's village RHP. He frequently treats villagers for minor ailments. Usha was fascinated by the sight of her uncle giving injections and dreamed that one day she would be able to serve her people's health needs. However, it was difficult to implement, as the movement of young, unmarried women is considered inappropriate in her village. Impressed with the boldness of Taru to fight social obstacles, Usha went through an important change in her personal life: "Previously I lacked in self-confidence, but I have slowly gotten out of my shell. I am learning how to administer medication, including injections and saline drips from my uncle" (personal communication, September 4, 2002). Usha estimated that between June to August, 2002 (a three-month time-period), she administered over 200 injections.

Many young women listeners of *Taru* say they are “transformed”. Meenakshi, a member of a 16-year-old listeners group in Madhopur talked "on camera", in front of her parents, about the importance of using a condom to protect oneself from HIV infection. She also mentioned that she would encourage her partner to use condoms when appropriate. Meenakshi noted: "I learned this information about HIV/AIDS from the episodes of *Taru*. After listening to these episodes, I took a decision that I will discuss how to protect oneself from AIDS with my friends and family members." Meenakshi's desire to openly discuss information on sex-related topics in Madhopur Village is remarkable, given such topics are taboo.

In sum, exposure to *Taru's* disseminated content led to parasocial interaction, a form of internal dialogue, between certain audience members and characters in the soap opera. Audience members also modeled certain newly disseminated behaviors in *Taru*, for example, Sunita Singh in Kamtaul Village established a school for *dalit* women, modeling her behavior after Neha who implemented a similar practice in the radio serial. These examples provide support for the Elaboration Likelihood Model, a psychological model of entertainment-education. As Sood (2004) explains:

When people are both motivated to process a message *and* able to process that message, they will process it centrally, which means they will carefully think about the arguments in the message, elaborate on them, and critically evaluate them. Central processing of messages leads to stable and sustained attitude and behavioral changes (pp. 158).

The fact that parasocial interaction reflects a type of internal dialogue does not minimize its ability to influence audience member thinking and behavior. In fact, the genesis of change often resides in how messages influence our thinking about possible alternative courses of

action. Having considered the role of parasocial interaction in promoting social change, let us now consider different forms of interpersonal and community dialogue.

Interpersonal Family Dialogue

Sensitive subjects are often difficult to broach. This is especially the case when the negative behaviors of another person must be discussed. In such instances media messages may provide the stimulus for dialogue that may otherwise not surface. Consider the following statement by a viewer of the *Soul City IV* series who was a victim of domestic violence.

I used to suffer just like Matlakala. He would come home drunk and I would be harassed, kicked out of the house... Then one-day *Soul City* came along... I liked that they were talking about woman abuse... I called my husband in while it was on the air. He listened the first time and said nothing. The second time he asked me why they are having a program like this? I said to him it's because they know that men are abusing their wives... I am tired of you coming home drunk and beating me, so I want you to hear for yourself what you are doing to me. I want you to listen very well so that when we go to the authorities you should remember that I have tried to make you understand what you are doing to me. He then asked if it is truly like this, and I said yes. He thought about that for quite some time... Then one day he came home and told me that he wanted to change. Today he talks to me freely and my child knows his father, before he did not because he knew the one who used to only fight. I really never thought it could be like this (personal interview, 2001).

In the preceding narrative the abused woman used an episode of *Soul City* to raise a subject of discussion with her husband that she had not been able to address at any prior point in their relationship. One may only imagine how she thought events would unfold once he viewed the abuse depicted in the E-E program. Apparently, he needed to reflect on his observations of the characters and the storyline before he was ready to dialogue with his wife on his abusive behavioral tendencies. She used his curiosity about the E-E program as an opportunity to open dialogue between them and it resulted, eventually, in his commitment to change his behavior.

Tufte's (2004) study of a Brazilian telenovela offers insight into our example of *Soul City IV* prompting family dialogue about domestic abuse. He found that media programs might be particularly effective at increasing dialogue and debate and breaking the silence about controversial or taboo issues. As Tufte's (2004) explains, "When embedded in identifiable settings and with realistic characters in a *telenovela*, these issues are not normally rejected but instead get debated by the public" (p. x). So, if I see media characters successfully debating a controversial issue, why can't I do the same?

Importantly, several research studies over the past fifteen years have also reported examples of E-E programs sparking interpersonal discussions within the family. For example, Valente, Kim, Lettenmaier, Glass, and Dibba (1994) described a radio program in The Gambia (*Fakube Jarra*) that encouraged family discussions about family planning and motivated viewers to visit family planning clinics. Sharan and Valente (2002) and Storey, Boulay, Karki, Heckert, and Karmacharya (1999) examined a radio program in Nepal (*Cut Your Coat According to Your Cloth*) that promoted spousal discussions about family planning and decision-making. Yoder, Hornik and Chirwa (1996) focused on a radio program in Zambia (*Nshilakamona*) that resulted in increased family discussions about AIDS. Kim and Marangwanda (1997) reported an increase in family planning discussions among spouses listening to a radio program in Zimbabwe (*Forewarned is Foretold*). Vaughan and Rogers (2000) and Vaughan, Rogers, Singhal, and Swalehe (2000) examined the highly popular Tanzanian radio series, *Twende na Wakati*, that spurred interspousal and community conversations about the adoption of family planning and HIV-prevention behaviors.

Community Dialogue

E-E effects at the community level require dialogue because of the collective inputs necessary to generate agreement for specific systemic change and the orchestration of activities across various social actors supportive of such change. Consider, for example, *Bienvenida Salud's* storyline promoting the manufacturing of handicrafts by women to enhance their self and collective efficacy. One of the local women from the Peruvian Amazon shared a photograph with us of a dozen community women making handicrafts out of *chambira*, a locally available fiber, while listening to an audiotaped episode of *Bienvenida Salud*. Mercedita, the locally based community promotora, who organized this group listening-cum-work session, noted: "These are women who are making handicrafts. We called a meeting in the afternoon with all of the community women so we could practice making crafts and listen to *Bienvenida Salud*." After the episode ended, women discussed the content of the episode, and how it related to their lives.

Dialogue occurs in a number of ways to motivate local women to come together to make their handicrafts. First, representatives of Minga Peru, the organization responsible for the production of *Bienvenida Salud*, must meet with local promotoras to discuss how various themes covered in an episode may be discussed with local women. Second, the women themselves must then orchestrate a meeting time for them to work together, what specific activity they will perform, and how they will acquire raw materials. Finally, during their time together, as they produce their handicrafts, they engage in further dialogue and reflection as they consider future actions to perform.

Similarly, the radio serial *Tinka Tinka Sukh* helped to generate community level dialogue to enact significant social change in Lutsaan, a village in the Uttar Pradesh state of India. Consider the following two statements from villagers:

In the radio program Chaudri starts a school. We started a Montessori school because we do not have that much money. We spoke to Masterji (the village school teacher) and invited him to teach here so that our children might be educated. Chaudri started a school in the radio program because he had the funds. All of us here cooperated to start this Montessori school and our children are now being educated.

Inspired by *Tinka Tinka Sukh*, we have established a youth self-help association for the sole purpose of tackling and eradicating social evils. Superstition and dowry are some of the problems we aim to tackle. We have also started to educate all children in our village about these social behaviors.

The new organizations created by these listeners required deliberate and extensive dialogue. Listeners needed to select from among many possible initiatives discussed in the radio serial. The timing of meetings and the generation of human and physical resources (money, equipment, meeting place) also needed to be negotiated. Finally, continuing these organizations over time requires continued meetings and discussions to sustain the commitment and energy needed to continue the programs.

Habermas' (1989) theory of social change provides insight into the type of dialogue necessary to produce substantive change in communities. Specifically, dialogue is necessary to create de-centered identities capable of participating in democratic ethics (Habermas, 1987). De-centered identities are important because they allow actors to focus objectively on the quality of arguments supporting new ideas rather than on personally derived meanings based on traditions historically opposed to such ideas. Furthermore, in periods of rapid cultural change it is important that changes being considered be thematized in the public sphere and interpreted by the public. As Storey and Jacobson (2004) explain, "Decisions to abandon, or to retain, traditions need to be made collectively if they are to continue providing

normative frameworks within which social integration and identity formation can be achieved. Thus, community dialogue is absolutely essential for any substantive social changes to occur in a locality (Jacobson, 2000).

Reflexive Turn from Community Dialogue to Dissemination

One of the collectively generated responses prompted by listening to the E-E radio series, *Taru*, was a series of participatory theatre performances in India's Bihar State. By examining the process of how these performances emerged we gain insight into how media sparked community dialogue may take a reflexive turn producing new forms of mass dissemination of information and ideas.

Based on a high level of listenership (including group listening) and interest in the *Taru* program, a number of community members in our four research villages of Bihar expressed interest in extending their involvement in promoting the messages highlighted in the program. In July 2003, fifty members of *Taru* listener groups from these four villages (Abiripur, Kamtaul, Madhopur, and Chandrahatti) took part in a participatory theatre workshop over a three-day period. The workshop was led by professional folk artists who helped the participants develop skills in script writing, character development, costume and set design, voice projection, body movement, acting, and singing (Harter, Sharma, Pant, Singhal, and Sharma, 2007).

At the beginning of the workshop the participants were asked to introduce themselves to the group by telling a story about their personal lives. These stories were situated in the context of the participants' families and communities. As the stories were told a rich collage of narratives surfaced that held the potential for public performances focusing on the social issues at the center of the *Taru* storyline. The facilitators then helped the participants to

identify common themes among the various stories so they could create a "meta-story" from which the performance script could emerge.

Facilitators encouraged the workshop participants to create performances that addressed important social issues in their communities. These personal stories were told in the participants' own vernacular and were woven together to create a master narrative to be performed publicly. Importantly, every aspect of the production of the performance (from character development, dialogues, and technical aspects of stage preparation) were co-created by the workshop participants. Thus, it was their dialogue with one another in story creation and in problem solving that made the productions possible.

The three-day participatory theatre workshop was followed by two days of public performances in July 2003, which were widely promoted through word-of-mouth. The participants served as cast members, directors, stage managers, and technical staff. Four performances, each about 90 minutes in length, were staged in each of the four villages for audiences that ranged in size from 300 to 500. Through engaging plots, songs, and poetry, these performances advocated for social justice in rural communities, including gender equality, empowerment of *dalits*, and small family size.

The dialogue between the 50 workshop participants, all avid listeners of *Taru*, shaped the public performances that were directly disseminated to some 1,500 audience members in the four village communities. So, what started as information dissemination in the form of a mass media message (*Taru*), became dialogue as listeners discussed the content of the program among themselves. This dialogue, over a period of time, led to several instances of collective organizing and action at the village level such as the production of theatrical performances in the four villages of Bihar state. Importantly, every aspect of this staged

performance required dialogue to negotiate the development of characters, storylines, and outcomes. Dialogue then became mass dissemination as the plays were performed before large audiences in each of the four villages where the participants lived.

Interestingly, we observed a form of call and response in all of the participatory theatre performances in Bihar. Call and response, a tradition in African music, occurs when a singer produces a word or phrase that is repeated by the chorus and/or the audience (Smitherman, 1977). During the plays in the villages of Bihar, message dissemination occurred as the actors performed and engaged in interaction with one another in front of the assembled audience. The actors, in this instance, produced the call. The response occurred when audience members responded either by shouting a response toward the stage or by talking to another audience member. Dialogue often emerged when a controversial issue was addressed by the actors and audience members talked among themselves about the message embedded in the play. So performers and audience members simultaneously engaged in both call and response and dialogue.

Dialogic Confrontation with Power, Resistance, and Paradoxical Behaviors

Despite engaging message dissemination through E-E programs such as *Taru* and compelling dialogue among audience members, our data provided numerous examples of how existing power structures in villages can serve as a barrier to social change. In fact, individuals or groups who wish to undertake a certain ameliorative action, often face resistance from social structures. For instance, in India, caste, gender, and class mediate the extent to which people can overcome restrictions and barriers to progress.

Both in Abirpur and Kamtaul villages, members of the young women's listeners' club criticized the caste bias of their elders, which prevented them from listening to *Taru* with

other friends, who belonged to another caste. Initially, the young girls felt powerless to oppose these parochial traditions; however, soon they devised ways to subvert them. In Kamtaul, the young women agreed to individually hear the *Taru* episodes at home, and then later discuss them during school break. By August 2002, six months after *Taru*'s broadcasts began, they felt efficacious enough to openly gather at the local RHP clinic, or at someone's home, to listen collectively.

Paradox and contradiction are also an integral part of the process of social change (Papa et al., 2000). Since established patterns of thought and behavior are difficult to change, people often engage in an adjustment process until the new behavior patterns are fully internalized. For instance, Manoj Maharaj, RHP of Abirpur Village, talked at great length about how caste-based discrimination was on the ebb in Abirpur. However, in a casual conversation, Maharaj strongly supported other kinds of discrimination. When one of us asked him if Abirpur Village had any people living with AIDS, he said: "There are two AIDS patients in the neighboring village. And he [despite being the sole health provider in the area], will not touch them."

Conclusion

The goal of the present article was to gain an understanding of how entertainment-education programming may spark listener/viewer dialogue that is supportive of pro-social change. The intention of entertainment-education programs is to foster desirable social effects among audience members. Here we examined four different entertainment-education programs (*Tinka Tinka Sukh* in India, *Soul City IV* in South Africa, *Taru* in India, and *Bienvenida Salud* in Peru), which promoted various forms of dialogue that led to socially desirable effects in a number of village communities.

The first form of dialogue that is helpful in fostering desirable effects among audience members is stakeholder dialogue between writers/producers of E-E programs, researchers and subject matter specialists, and potential audience members to aid in script and character development. Realistic storylines and characters are more likely to resonate with viewers in ways that may spark thinking and actions supportive of social change. Seeking inputs from potential audience members is one way to insure realism in the programs.

Behavior change in response to media exposure may also be facilitated through an internal dialogue (parasocial interaction) between listeners/viewers and media characters. Audience members then reflect on the educational content of an entertainment-education program. For some audience members behaviorally-oriented parasocial interaction can lead to conversations about the educational content of the media program, as seemed to occur in the villages of Bihar.

Interpersonal dialogue within families and dialogue at the group level among community members was also prompted by the E-E programs we examined. Within families we found that media messages may provide the stimulus and context to discuss sensitive or taboo subjects in ways that are supportive of change in family dynamics. At the community level, we found that dialogue was necessary to negotiate the complex dynamics of orchestrating social change activities and developing programs that impacted many community members. In these instances dialogue helped to mediate between ideas and people representing different views.

We also observed a reflexive turn from dialogue to mass dissemination of information when a number of *Taru* listeners from the four villages of Bihar staged participatory theatre performances for some 1,500 people. These performances helped to encourage further

dialogue among audience members about the substance of the storylines and the experiences of the characters. In addition, these performance show that mass dissemination of information is not controlled solely by large organizations. At the local level people may join together in ways that expose large numbers of people to messages supportive of pro-social change. Although the reach of media through the radio and television is much broader, the fact that 1,500 people were exposed to pro-social messages is not insignificant.

Finally, we recognized that individual and social change is rarely a simple, linear process. Despite extensive dialogue at the interpersonal and community levels, listeners and viewers of E-E programs may confront powerful forces of resistance as they attempt to change power dynamics in a community. In addition, attempts to change behavior are often fraught with paradoxes and contradictions that point to the difficulty of altering entrenched actions within complex communities. Despite these difficulties, our findings suggest that synergistic possibilities for social action emerge when E-E broadcasts disseminate pro-social models of behaviors that spark various forms of dialogue among audience members.

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