

## EFFICACY IN LETTER-WRITING TO AN ENTERTAINMENT–EDUCATION RADIO SERIAL

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**Abstract** / The influence of efficacy, both self and collective, in the adoption of prosocial behaviors has not been examined in the context of large-scale communication campaigns that use mass media interventions. Our purpose is to identify efficacious dimensions in letter-writers' communication to an entertainment–education radio drama serial in India. An entertainment–education program can influence audience members' sense of efficacy, an effect that can lead them to reconsider their values and behavior. We argue that audience letters represent a possible approach to measuring efficacy. Letters written by listeners can help us understand how they know what they hear and with what psychosocial consequences.

**Keywords** / collective efficacy / entertainment–education / letter-writing / self-efficacy / soap operas

Radio and television have long been considered as agents of social advancement and national integration. Several decades ago, Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964) and Rogers (1962) began advocating the use of the mass media as tools for fostering social change. But they and others (including Bandura, 1997; Hornik, 1988; Melkote, 1991; Rogers, 1976) also admitted that the social effects of the mass media are contingent upon other factors. Most past research on the effects of mass media programs in promoting prosocial behavior change has focused on measuring knowledge, attitudinal and behavioral changes related to the adoption of family planning methods, mother and child health, gender equality and other prosocial topics (Brown and Cody, 1991; Mody, 1991; Singhal and Rogers, 1999). These results are mostly compiled from data collected during or following the broadcast of the mass media program, from audience ratings, knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) surveys and the records of public health clinics. An important but scarcely investigated data source is the direct feedback provided by listeners (the actual consumers themselves), in their own words. This feedback is communicated through letters written in response to questions raised in, or as a reaction to, the mass media program (Fraser and Brown, 1997; Singhal and Rogers, 1989; Sood and Rogers, 1996).

The present article investigates the communication of letter-writers to an entertainment–education radio drama serial, *Tinka Tinka Sukh* ('Happiness Lies in Small Things') broadcast in India in 1996–7. Entertainment–education

media programming consciously incorporates educational content in entertainment formats (such as drama serials, rock music, comic books, etc.) to bring about prosocial change among a large number of audience individuals (Church and Geller, 1989; Nariman, 1993; Rogers et al., 1997; Singhal et al., 1993; Singhal and Rogers, 1999). We seek to understand how an entertainment–education radio drama serial can influence audience members’ sense of efficacy, an effect that can lead them to reconsider their values and behavior or to act. *Self-efficacy* is the beliefs that individuals hold concerning their capability to organize and execute valued courses of action (Bandura, 1995; Maibach and Murphy, 1995). The predictive power of self-efficacy with respect to the adoption of prosocial behaviors has not been examined in the context of large-scale health information campaigns that use mass media interventions (Maibach et al., 1991).

While several different approaches<sup>1</sup> exist to measure self-efficacy (Gecas, 1989), we argue that audience letters represent a possible and promising approach. Letters written in response to an entertainment–education radio drama serial by listeners can help us understand how they know what they heard, and with what psychosocial consequences. We begin by explaining our conceptualization of efficacy, its several dimensions, and pose specific research questions centering on efficacy and letter-writing. Then our methodology of analysis and data-collection procedures, including a description of the radio serial, are provided. Finally, various dimensions of efficacy are presented in the letter-writers’ own words and narratives, and conclusions drawn. Note that our purpose is to identify efficacious dimensions in the letter-writers’ communications to an entertainment–education radio drama serial, and *not* to draw conclusions about the large-scale effects of the radio program on its audience.

## Communication and Efficacy

Campaigns for social change frequently employ mass media communication channels. Prosocial media campaigns that enhance self-efficacy, in turn, can foster the practice of desired behaviors (Desharnais et al., 1986; Kaplan et al., 1984; Maibach and Murphy, 1995). Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1992) and its cornerstone construct of self-efficacy have gained prominence as an explanatory model of behavior change in the social sciences, especially in health education interventions. Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1992, 1995) argues that individuals will act in accordance with their perceived abilities to achieve what they desire. In recent years, Bandura (1995, 1997) expanded the scope of self-efficacy functioning to include a self-reflective capability that regulates individual’s motivations, thought processes and emotional states, as well as behavioral modifications. Self-reflective capability involves self-regulatory skills that include planning, organizing, regulating one’s motivation, and applying metacognitive skills to evaluate the adequacy of one’s knowledge and strategies. Thus self-efficacy, including self-reflection, viewed from a psychologist’s lens is a cognitive activity involving assessing and planning, or a perceptual apprehension of predicting one’s behavior to achieve a desired outcome. For example, a young adult

from an Indian village may decide not to accept dowry at his marriage because he believes it is wrong. He may have previously learned about the injustice and harmful consequences of this social practice. So, when proposals for his marriage are made, he would need to evaluate each situation where dowry is offered by the bride's parents, or demanded by his parents, in order to effectively say 'no'.

The conceptualization of self-efficacy in contemporary literature is influenced by two streams of thought which are distinct but yet overlap in certain ways. On the one hand are cognitive theories, which conceptualize self-efficacy in terms of beliefs, expectancies and perceptions of control. An inherent assumption in the cognitive view is that causal analysis by way of different cognitions has the function of making the social world more predictable and controllable. On the other hand are motivational theories, which conceptualize self-efficacy in motivational terms and include theories of empowerment. Motivational theories emphasize the experience of causal agency. According to Gecas (1989), this perspective mainly explains motivation from the vantage point of 'creativity, exploration, and playful activity' (White, 1959) and the *experience* of, and motivation to be in, control. The distinctions between the cognitive and motivational frameworks are a matter of relative emphasis since beliefs, expectancies and perceptions of control can have motivational implications and vice versa.

Both cognitive and motivational theories are framed by a belief or cognition perspective of efficacy. We advocate the view that self-efficacy is *both* a belief and a behavioral experience. When individuals wish to attain a goal, their beliefs in their personal capabilities greatly determine the goal-setting and actuation processes. Additionally, the processes are influenced by the individual's assessment of the environment's 'system responsiveness' and other contingent factors such as past experience and emotional states. Efficacy, we propose, is more akin to actuation. Actuation may be defined as an experiential process that is both behavioral as well as belief centered. In the duality of its progression, the goal-attaining motive is as much also influenced by risk-taking or conservatism as it competes with other coterminous goals, objectivities and contingencies. Such internal and external assessments, varying on a continuum of intensity and accuracy, generate a sequence of activities that cause the individual to self-regulate their efforts, which may ultimately lead them to attain their goal. The individual, in this case, can be efficacious or may demonstrate efficacious behavior, which might otherwise have remained efficacy beliefs. In this article, we attempt to demonstrate certain dimensions of these processes of efficacy – the origination of beliefs and their potential signification in behavior – as they are conveyed in writing a letter.

### *Self-Efficacy*

What are the effects of self-efficacy? The prevalent view of efficacy is cognitive by definition and derivation. It mainly draws upon Bandura's (1995) four major efficacy effects: (1) cognitive, (2) affective, (3) motivational and (4) selection processes. *Cognitive* processes are the functions of thought, such as being able

to predict events and to develop ways to control those events. An example of this effect is offered by a male listener, Pradip Kumar Goutom of Badayun village in the state of Uttar Pradesh, who wrote: 'I have been provoked to think a lot about the practice of dowry in our country. Why is this practice still rampant? Will it continue to thrive and grow? Those who take dowry are a burden and in fact rob the country.' The radio drama serial provoked these pertinent questions about dowry and offered some solutions to its problems.

Efficacy enables coping with ruminative or disturbing thoughts and feelings. A variety of stressors in an individual's psychosocial environment can restrict attainment of valued goals. Efficacy beliefs can regulate stress and anxiety by influencing coping behavior. Many letters expressed *affective* states ranging from disappointment and disgust with antisocial practices, to fervent entreaties for recognition and change, to a renewed sense of confidence or assurance at having learned new ideas. Strong, deep feelings had been stirred regarding both personal and social issues and the individual's capabilities in coping with these issues.

People *motivate* themselves by anticipating valued outcomes. Many letters display motivational effects through both goal-setting and renewed confidence to plan courses of action. The results of motivation are definable but the affective and motivational springs are difficult to categorize because they often overlap, may contradict, or are comprehensible mainly by implication. *Selection* processes are only evident as choices determining the activities and environments that people choose. This efficacy effect is clearly demonstrated in the case of one young listener who had given up her studies. However, after listening to the radio drama, she decided to return to school. In our view, efficacy encompasses intent or choice as well as a behavioral aspect that actuates beliefs, goals and expectancies.

To further understand how efficacy is both a belief and a behavior, one might conceptually distinguish between efficacy and empowerment. These two concepts are often used synonymously. Frequently it is held that an empowered person is an efficacious individual, and vice versa. Efficacy as a construct of belief or perception concerns one's confidence to produce the desired behavior based on an assessment of one's capabilities and one's expectations (Bandura, 1995; Maibach and Murphy, 1995). It is an individual's confidence about being able to use certain skills to achieve desired outcomes, not necessarily a direct measure of skill itself. *Empowerment* is a multi-level process in which people create or are given opportunities to control their own destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives (Albrecht, 1988; Zimmerman, 1995).

Efficacy can also be differentiated from empowerment in other ways. According to Zimmerman (1995), self-efficacy is one of the causal mechanisms of psychological empowerment. We articulate that self-efficacy could also be an outcome of empowerment; efficacious behavior might be considered the observable behavioral outcome of empowerment. For instance, when a high school teenager voluntarily says 'no' to unprotected sex, health educators will have attained the goals of their communication and empowerment program. Further, the process of empowerment has the potential to change or create efficacy beliefs. For instance, when an after-school program effectively persuades a

dropout to re-educate himself or herself, confidence may be created and other beliefs reaffirmed. Maibach et al. (1991) reported a strong negative correlation between baseline self-efficacy and changes in self-efficacy in their study of the Healthy Living Program (HLP) in the Stanford Five Cities Project. HLP was a year-long effort to encourage residents of the intervention communities to reduce their risk of heart disease by increasing exercise, losing weight, modifying diets, quitting smoking and taking measures to control their blood pressure. Those participants with low perceptions of self-efficacy enjoyed a larger increase in self-efficacy than did those who began with higher levels of self-efficacy. Thus, interventions on influencing efficacy beliefs do not always result in empowerment and behavior change. Self-efficacy judgments may be specific to behaviors and the situations in which they occur, but it is difficult to say that they are only a causal factor for psychological empowerment. Empowerment is also a perception (Albrecht, 1988; Chiles and Zorn, 1995; Papa et al., 1997); and to the extent that one feels confident and competent but does not organize and execute the required course of action, one is not efficacious because the desired goal is not attained. Thus, efficacy may be viewed primarily as a behavioral construct in that it is a function of a person's beliefs about being able to use skills and being capable of performing and regulating the particular behavior.

### *Collective Efficacy*

The study of efficacy in the past has centered around goals of personal interest and achievement such as desirable health behaviors. The nature of efficacy beliefs and efficacious behaviors at the level of the collectivity can take different forms. According to Bandura (1995) and Earley (1993, 1994), collective achievements are also rooted in self-efficacy. Bandura (1995) described *collective efficacy* as a united effort required to dislodge entrenched detrimental practices. It is concerned with people's beliefs in their joint capabilities in getting things done collectively. This perspective echoes much of the community empowerment literature whose emphasis is on organizing (Speer and Hughey, 1995) and *requiring* individuals to consciously act as a collective community.

We articulate that collective efficacy is more than organizing individual efforts directed at behavioral change. Collective efficacy is a belief that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is embedded in the beliefs, knowledge and behaviors of members of certain societies (Earley, 1993, 1994; Oettingen, 1995; Singhelis and Brown, 1995), and is not always activity based. In some societies, personal efficacy is valued inasmuch as it contributes to both self-directedness as well as group directedness. Before any organizing for community empowerment can take place, individuals must have a two-fold awareness: the need for (1) individual action for social good and (2) personal change for social reasons. Rationally speaking, transformation of consciousness must precede any structural transformation. On the flip side, collective efficacy beliefs are a component of the social mind-set, which precedes any rational effort at creating beliefs about collective efficacy.

Self-efficacy can also be an individual decisional act directed toward collective efficacy. In certain ecological matters, such as air pollution, that impinge

on personal interests directly, self-efficacy beliefs may be related to social persuasion, defined as situational and relational influences that shape people's responses and behavior. In some societies, 'social persuasion' has a significant place in the communicative practices, and consequently for efficacy beliefs. The influence of social persuasion can be seen particularly in the observance of social norms and rituals. Further, people's efficacy beliefs concerning altruistic matters are not tempered only by reactive situations. For example, an individual could personally wish to volunteer at the local homeless shelter because of personal inspiration or because other community members do so. Thus, collective efficacy can be enabled both at the individual level as well as the collective level.

In some situations, collective efficacy beliefs override self-efficacy beliefs as the primary influence in one's assessment of capability to achieve a desired outcome. Where adoption of new health behavior concerns making a personal choice, the influence of self-efficacy would be high. Behavioral concerns such as condom use would be ideally addressed by targeting the individual or couple. However, for social practices that involve many participants, emphasizing individual self-efficacy might not be very effective. The practice of dowry giving and taking during marriages in India is an example. An individual's decision to take or not to take dowry during marriage can be mediated strongly by prevailing custom and other contingencies. Advocating the change in a well-entrenched norm of social conduct involves opposing people's existing social beliefs and attitudes. Not only do initiatives like the abolition of dowry invite opposition from the community, the claimed benefit accrues only when large numbers of the target community accept the proposed change. In these circumstances, it would not be appropriate to address self-efficacy separately from collective efficacy.

As the preceding discussion suggests, efficacy as a concept has dimensions of both belief and behavior and is enacted at both the individual and the collective levels, depending on the task, goals, cultural context and actions required. By focusing attention on the communication of letter-writers, who comprise a highly involved group of listeners of a popular entertainment-education radio drama serial in India, we attempted to gain an understanding of the forms efficacy can take.

## **Letter-Writing as Communication**

Letters, we argue, are both a medium of communication as well as the message. They can provide rich insights on the effects of entertainment-education media programs (Singhal and Rogers, 1999). In particular, they can describe in highly individualized detail how the listeners' sense of efficacy was influenced and with what consequences. The act of writing is a communicative act, and from that perspective is an indicator of efficacious behavior that expresses efficacious beliefs. Our analysis demonstrates the many facets of efficacy that are expressed in the listeners' own words.

The importance of letter-writing as a domain of studying mass media effects is especially pertinent in developing countries such as India. Unlike the USA, or any developed country, where listeners can easily call in to a radio show,

in India, which has only one telephone per 100 people, letter-writing is often the main mode of listener feedback. When listeners write on their own initiative, they display 'agency', that is, self-directed activity. Human agency is central to the causal processes governing change (Bandura, 1989). This display of agency is an important fact of efficacy expressed at the belief as well as behavioral levels. Of all beliefs, self-efficacy is the most influential arbiter of self-directed change (Bandura, 1986). According to Chafe and Danielwicz (1987), letter-writers are more involved with themselves and with concrete reality than are conversationalists or academicians. This involvement exhibited by letter-writers makes the letters an important testimonial of efficacy.

The motivations for writing letters are varied. Some individuals write because they are 'registered listeners'<sup>2</sup> of the radio program, although they need not. Some individuals simply wish to hear their names broadcast, although there is no guarantee or set policy for that on the part of All India Radio (AIR). Certain people are interested in gaining access to the radio actors and producers for themselves. Many write to celebrate and identify with a favorite radio program or with certain actors. Thus, letter-writing, whether voluntary or prompted, is an important activity by listeners and can be a key to an enhanced understanding of the extension of issues central to their lives that the mass media intervention seeks to mediate and change.

We identified four types of efficacy effects – cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioral – in analyzing the letters. Further, we identified efficacy effects at two levels: the self and the collectivity. *Collective efficacy* is identified from an individual's point of view; in what ways and at what levels do an individual's efficacy beliefs and behaviors enact or operationalize the collectivity or community of which the individual is a member.

## Research Questions

Based on our review of the concept of efficacy and the communicative significance of letter-writing in India, we pose the following three research questions:

1. *What specific dimensions of efficacy emerged in the letters that were written by listeners in response to the entertainment–education radio drama serial in India?*
2. *In what ways is self-efficacy displayed as belief and as behavior in the letters that were written by the listeners in response to the entertainment–education radio drama serial in India?*
3. *In what ways is collective efficacy expressed as belief and as behavior in the letters written by the listeners in response to the entertainment–education radio drama serial in India?*

## Methodology and Data Sources

We collected multiple types of data in a methodological triangulation, including a random sample survey of about 1500 respondents (comprising both listeners and non-listeners) and an in-depth case study of the effects of the radio

drama serial in a village in the state of Uttar Pradesh. However, for the present study, we only draw upon *three* data sources that are relevant to the research questions posed previously: (1) personal interviews with key officials involved in the production of *Tinka Tinka Sukh*, including its executive producer-director, writers and actors; (2) a content analysis of the educational themes in the 104 episodes of *Tinka Tinka Sukh*; and (3) a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of a sample of 237 listeners' letters written in response to *Tinka Tinka Sukh*.

From our interviews with key officials of AIR, the Indian national radio network, we gathered that *Tinka Tinka Sukh* was a 104-episode entertainment-education radio drama serial broadcast twice weekly, from 19 February 1996 to 15 February 1997, over 27 radio stations of AIR, covering seven Indian states in the population-dense Hindi-speaking area of northern India: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi. Some 600 million people comprising some 100 million households live in these seven Indian states. From our random sample survey conducted in Gonda district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, we estimated that *Tinka Tinka Sukh* had a regular listenership of 36–40 million people in this region of India, perhaps the largest listenership for any radio drama serial program worldwide.

The radio serial centered on issues of gender empowerment and small family size. The drama is set in a village ('Navgaon') agricultural community, where the protagonist Suraj, his father and mother symbolize the ideal family. All three members of this family represent women's causes – anti-dowry, marriage and divorce, women's empowerment – and the importance of creating an integrated harmonious community based on cooperation and self-sufficiency. Chacha, his wife and their children are the antithesis of the ideal family. His wife is blindly traditional and indulgent of her eldest son, Ramlal, harshly critical of her daughters and negligent of her younger children. The eldest daughter quietly grows out of the family's shadows to become, with the help of friends, a famous singer. The lives of a widow, Garebo, and her three daughters narrate the trials of being a woman in a tradition-bound society. Garebo feels societal pressure to get her daughters married since they have come of age. The eldest daughter wants to be a teacher and will not marry until she becomes independent. The second daughter gets married early and dies in child birth. Another tragedy occurs in Navgaon when the character Poonam is beaten to death by her husband and his parents for not bringing an adequate dowry. On the other hand, Sushma (abandoned by her husband for dowry) overcomes her trials and establishes a sewing school with support from her family and friends. The delinquent Ramlal is transformed and when he becomes a block development officer, he opts to be located in Navgaon so that he too can contribute to his village. His sister starts an adult night-school, while Sushma's school expands and creates economic opportunities for more women.

### *The Educational Content of Tinka Tinka Sukh*

An analysis of the educational content of *Tinka Tinka Sukh* is necessary to understand how the radio drama serial influenced listeners' sense of efficacy.



Several steps were involved in conducting a content analysis of the educational themes promoted in *Tinka Tinka Sukh*. First, we procured the scripts and audio tapes of the 104 episodes of the radio drama serial. Also, we examined archival documents from AIR which specified the educational themes that were consciously incorporated into the plot. We then listened to a sample of 20 episodes taped by a historian friend – the radio drama as it was received by any listener – to derive a comprehensive list of thematic content categories, and validating them with the scripts that we read. Once we generated a list of themes based on these first two research steps, we met with the executive producer-director of the radio drama serial and refined our content analysis categories further.

Consistent with the storyline, the most emphasized educational themes dealt with issues of community harmony and cooperation, gender equality, women's empowerment, small family size, family harmony, the ills of dowry, and youth delinquency. These main themes provided a contextual guideline to identify the various dimensions of efficacy.

### *Listeners' Letters to AIR about Tinka Tinka Sukh*

An estimated 125,000–150,000 letters were received by AIR in response to *Tinka Tinka Sukh* during its one year of broadcast. Clearly, audience members who wrote letters to *Tinka Tinka Sukh* represent a highly involved audience group, and are atypical of the total audience. We obtained a sample of approximately 5000 letters from AIR, from which we randomly selected 260 letters. These 260 letters were then quantitatively and qualitatively content analyzed (23 had to be discarded due to illegibility). The quantitative analysis was intended to uncover the extent and levels of audience involvement. As Katz and Liebes (1986: 163) emphasized, letters as artifacts of audience involvement represent 'empirical data on how they [audience individuals] decode what they see and hear; how they help each other to do so; whether and how they weave the experiences of viewing into their social and political roles; and whether they have categories for criticism, and if so, what are these'. The content analysis process proceeded in the following manner. First of all, 10 percent of the letters were randomly selected and read to give us a sense of what themes were most prominent in the minds of the listeners. Next, a draft content analysis code sheet was generated from this subset of listeners' letters.

Among the results of our quantitative analysis of the 237 letters, we learned that some 60 percent of the letters were shorter than 100 words in length, 30 percent were between 100 and 250 words and 10 percent were over 250 words. Some letters were as long as 16 single-spaced pages; and three letters from Lutsaan village in the state of Uttar Pradesh were poster sized (21 inches by 24 inches), and signed by 184 members of the village community, including men and women, youth and elders. Some 90 percent of the 237 letters were written by individuals, and the remaining 10 percent were written by groups and organizations.

The qualitative content analysis of the 237 listeners' letters that we

conducted was intended to identify dimensions of efficacy in the narratives of the listeners. In addition to identifying dimensions of efficacy, one of our goals was to examine in what ways the educational themes of the radio drama serial were applied in reassessing beliefs or initiating change. That is, whereas our quantitative analysis aimed to measure audience involvement, our qualitative study aimed to assess some of the consequences of that involvement.

The first level of analysis for the present study involved developing a framework for evaluating the various efficacy dimensions: (1) belief/behavioral and (2) individual/collective. The next level of analysis centered around examining the specific factual and linguistic evidences as well as the overall tone of the letters.

## Results and Interpretation

### *Dimensions of Efficacy*

Research question 1 asked: *What specific dimensions of efficacy emerged in the letters that were written by listeners in response to the entertainment–education radio drama serial in India?*

It was difficult to categorize the evidence of efficacy effects in the communication of letter-writers into ‘cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioral’ (Bandura, 1986) dimensions. On more than one occasion, the distinction between self-efficacy and collective efficacy for social change was blurred along both belief and behavioral levels. Perhaps the source for this indistinction lay in the fact that the letter-writers were either/both chronicling what they were perceiving as efficacious dimensions external to themselves and/or describing and articulating the experiential changes they were undergoing as causal agency in their own participation.

Second, the letters’ narratives reveal not only cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioral levels of efficacy but also strength, magnitude and generality facets of efficacy. Strength is the degree to which letter-writers are confident or how certain people are that they can perform a particular behavior. For example, a male listener of Antarsuma village in the state of Madhya Pradesh wrote how *Tinka Tinka Sukh* inspired him and ‘drove out any self-doubts and anxiety’ that he harbored and ‘gave new meaning and purpose’ to his life. Clearly, this individual’s sense of efficacy was strengthened in significant ways. Magnitude is the degree to which a task is simple or difficult. A female listener from Samastipur district in the state of Bihar, wrote: ‘Even if I do not win the listener letter-writer competitions, *Tinka Tinka Sukh* has taught me to win the battles of life.’ This comment indicates an overall enhancement of the sense of efficacy for undertaking any task whether simple or difficult. Generality is the degree to which the sense of mastery is specific or general. A male listener of Maner Khurd village in the state of Uttar Pradesh noted ‘Our village seems to have moved from darkness to light on the issue of dowry mainly because of what Suraj says.’ In this case, generality of the sense of mastery extended to an entire village!

In almost every letter, the various dimensions (cognitive, affective,

motivational and behavioral) of efficacy effects emerged, either separately as a salient characteristic of efficacious effects or interrelated with other efficacious dimensions. Foremost, the strongest efficacy effects were cognitive and cognitive-affective. One may describe this phenomenon as a kind of consciousness-raising through increased information and emotional stirring. Many letters also describe new plans and goals and new-found self-confidence. Our study of the listeners' letters reveal that motivational effects, such as planning, draw upon beliefs and are also affective in nature. With respect to behavioral effects, the letters indicate behavioral change for both personal as well as collective goals.

### *Self-Efficacy as a Belief and Behavioral Construct*

Research question 2 asked: *In what ways is self-efficacy displayed as belief and as behavior in the letters that were written by the listeners in response to the entertainment–education radio drama serial in India?*

Perhaps the most direct observable impact on changes in self-efficacy beliefs is at the cognitive level. An increase in knowledge makes an individual better informed. This fact is easily perceived by the participants themselves, who consequently feel more competent. For instance, a male listener from Bhagalpur village in the state of Bihar, wrote: '*Tinka Tinka Sukh* has explored family and social issues quite thoroughly. I find every episode informative and highly educative.' Another male listener from Raisen village in the state of Madhya Pradesh, wrote: 'I enjoyed learning about child-marriage and the consequences of young motherhood from the scientific perspective.' Both of these statements are belief statements of personal competence, effected by enhanced knowledge.

At a general level, 'control ideology' (Gurin et al., 1978), or the degree to which one's judgment of how much control people in general have over their situations, is reflected in the following observations made by a male listener of Khirja Khas village in the state of Rajasthan. He points to the role of the family in mediating an individual's sense of efficacy:

*I was compelled to think about all women who are restrained by their families from pursuing their ambitions – such as Champa was discouraged by her family from auditioning for All India Radio. Many women are discouraged by family resistances. However, Champa persuades her family and overcomes the obstacles. In my opinion, education is key to women's progress especially in facilitating and overcoming obstacles.*

Bandura (1986) emphasized that what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave. The behavioral dimension of efficacy is manifested in explicit revelations of changes in efficacy such as these personal narratives show. Anupam Ushni, a listener from Bhanulipur village in Hardoi district, wrote: 'Champa's family situation is exactly like mine . . . I had given up studies but after listening to *Tinka Tinka Sukh*, I started to study again.' Motivation theories in social psychology tend to emphasize the experience of causal agency and control, which is apparent in the statements of a highly involved male listener, Birendra Singh Kushwaha of Lutsaan village.

*I've learned a lot from listening to this radio drama serial. For the past ten years I had lost my way but Tinka Tinka Sukh showed a new path of life. In this letter, I am going to share with you what I learned and how Tinka Tinka Sukh changed my life.*

*I quit drug use, which had poisoned my life and was ruining me. Often times I would initiate fights and quarrels, sometimes as a way of gambling or as a challenge. Also, I would gossip and carry tales, and add my own two pennies to everything. All that has been changed by Tinka Tinka Sukh as I now promise not to be mean-spirited.*

*I was quite a delinquent, aimless and a bully. Particularly I would harass the girls. I was sent to prison for five years. I came home unreformed. After listening [to the radio], my life underwent a change. That day onward I stopped stealing. I went and bought myself a radio and started to listen regularly.*

*Once I started listening [to Tinka Tinka Sukh], all my other drawbacks and negative values were transformed. I saw myself, in fact many of my antisocial ways, reflected in Ramlal [one of the main characters in Tinka Tinka Sukh] who is also reformed.*

This narrative of personal change embodies an enhanced sense of efficacy that is evoked at multiple levels. Overlapping efficacy effects in the cognitive, affective and motivational realms are further exemplified in these comments by a female listener, Firdaus Saifi of Mathura in the state of Uttar Pradesh:

*Nandini has inspired me with her firm determination and courage to deal with life's struggles. Champa has shown how to persist in fulfilling one's wish and individuality. Suraj showed how it is necessary to fight superstition sometimes. . . . Having listened to 94 episodes has encouraged me and given me directions by opening up new perspectives so much that now I have become more self-assured.*

Given the tone and choice of words used above by letter-writer Saifi, – 'inspired', 'encouraged', 'self-assured' – one can perceive the sense of efficacy most strongly on the affective level. The comments of a male listener of Antarsuma village in the state of Madhya Pradesh demonstrate the ultimate level in self-efficacy leading to collective efficacy through cognitive, behavioral, affective and social pathways of belief and action.

*I particularly remember Junman's remark to Suraj, who expressed his concern that often times he is misunderstood for trying to do good for his community: 'Is it possible to climb mountains and reach the top without soiling your shoes?' This idea has inspired me and given me new strength. . . . In the 58th episode, Nandini advises Ramlal how the village needs a Ram<sup>3</sup> who would make the village proud. Simply, one can do something useful for the community in a small individual way for example by planting a tree that could provide shade for any traveler. Do something that will bring good name to your family and community. These words inspired me and drove out any self-doubts and anxiety I harbored and gave new meaning and purpose to my life.*

The most direct observable impact on changes in self-efficacy beliefs are at the cognitive level by way of new knowledge. Most of the 237 letters expressed how they had learned new information on family and social issues such as the importance of education and being a good citizen. Many wrote to say that the radio program had caused them to think and see personal issues differently. As the examples demonstrated earlier, changes in self-efficacy beliefs with regard to motivational, affective and behavioral aspects also emerged.

### *Collective Efficacy as a Belief and Behavioral Construct*

Research question 3 asked: *In what ways is collective efficacy expressed as belief and as behavior in the letters written by the listeners in response to the entertainment–education radio drama serial in India?*

Collective efficacy, like individual self-efficacy, has several dimensions. While its cognitive and motivational dimensions can be easily perceived intellectually and behaviorally, it is the subconscious, socialized and cultural characteristics that beg definition and demonstration. The following excerpts characterize our definition that collective efficacy is both a belief as well as an organized activity. The latter position, indicating the unified effort produced by rational organizing of collective effort toward some deliberate goal, is the general view of collective efficacy. We advocate that collective efficacy beliefs may be also said to characterize nameless altruistic acts at the individual level. As a belief system, collective efficacy in certain cultures precedes any rational organizing for group goals. Communicatively, this holds significance for development organizers for they can make their entree in a society that has attained a certain threshold in group orientation.

The following accounts reveal some of the ways the radio program stimulated collective efficacy to deal with social issues such as dowry practice. There is a clear indication of change both in outlook as well as behavior in this letter describing how certain people who *contemplated* taking dowry eventually changed their minds. Social traditions such as wedding rituals, because they are well entrenched in value systems, are difficult to change unless there is a group orientation to change. In this case, the radio drama serial provided the impetus, acknowledges a writer-listener of Maner Khurd village in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

*There were two to three weddings in our village recently, but those who contemplated taking dowry were so influenced by Tinka Tinka Sukh that they did not even raise the issue. Even my elder brother's wedding took place without any dowry. Our village seems to have moved from darkness to light on the issue of dowry mainly because of what Suraj says.*

That the flipside of collective efficacy could also be negative in its impact in certain situations is borne out by this female letter-writer and listener of Lohagir village in the state of Bihar.

*Poonam<sup>4</sup> was driven to commit suicide not by her husband alone. He was assisted by his mother and so a woman is equally responsible for her death. In fact the shocking part is that a woman encouraged the wrongful mistreatment of another woman. . . . What is necessary today is for every woman to vow that they will not tolerate mistreatment and also that they will not mistreat others nor would they silently witness wrong deeds or mistreatment. Ultimately such an attitude would compel men to treat women with respect.*

Our argument for a cultural perspective on collective efficacy is especially evinced in these narratives. A male listener, Sayed Sayeed Hussain of Darbhanga district, described that:

*Listening to Tinka Tinka Sukh gives me a sense of satisfaction and inspiration. I am a student but I schedule my studies such that I can listen to every episode of Tinka Tinka Sukh and can*

*also share this inspiration with other people of my community. For this social work, I arranged for a loudspeaker so that Tinka Tinka Sukh can be broadcast to a larger audience. And my community members are very thankful to me for this service. Inspired by Tinka Tinka Sukh, many people vowed not to take drugs and similar intoxicating substances; many people also vowed not to take or give dowry in marriage.*

Not only has the radio program impacted individual listeners' sense of self-efficacy, they are also nudged to actuate prosocial behavior at the group or community level by individual initiatives. A male listener, Kanhaiya Tripathi of Maheshpur in the state of Uttar Pradesh, wrote:

*I have been listening to every episode of Tinka Tinka Sukh. And each and every episode has inspired us to do some good deed. And truly we have tried to do some good deed after every episode; and have been successful in some of those attempts. . . . Illiteracy is truly debilitating. Every parent should try to ensure that their children receive some education that is more than the mere 3Rs.*

In addition to individual listeners' reports of significant details of how the audience mind-set was affected as a group, the next few accounts take the change one step further. They record pledge ceremonies organized as a public ritual to change old rules and behavior or to adopt new ones. The same listener of Maheshpur writes:

*A meeting of women representatives from three leading associations in our district was organized at the local women's college to celebrate Human Rights Day and inspired by Tinka Tinka Sukh especially Episodes 83–85. Mrs Prema Tripathi (Chief of Women's Problem Operation Club, one of the invitees) advised that each and every woman would have to vow to awaken self-confidence, self-esteem, and other beliefs in self-efficacy so that once again Durga<sup>5</sup> and Sita<sup>6</sup> will emerge amongst women and we can solve not only our problems but also problems facing our society and country.*

A copy of this pledge letter, which was countersigned by ten attendees, was attached to the letter. In addition to cognitive and motivational enhancement at the level of collective efficacy, some listeners acted upon their renewed sense of confidence. From Birpur village in the state of Bihar, Sukumar Sahni wrote:

*I am a regular listener of Tinka Tinka Sukh and find it extremely educative, entertaining and informative. In fact, it is like a new life-guide for youth like me – for which I am very grateful. Inspired by Tinka Tinka Sukh, we have established a youth self-help association with 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 evils. In fact, Tinka Tinka Sukh has awakened a lot of people and provoked them to rethink their attitudes.*

A similar youth self-help action group was formed in another village, reported a female listener, Vibha Singh, from Jaunapur in the state of Bihar:

*Tinka Tinka Sukh has inspired a new confidence in everyone in our village. Ever since Tinka Tinka Sukh began, young girls and boys of our village, including myself, have organized many activities related to Tinka Tinka Sukh. Whenever someone commits even a small mistake, we refer to Tinka Tinka Sukh for counseling and on how to tackle the problem.*

These benchmark events of collective efficacy, a consequence of the radio program, are reported not from one state or district but from different villages in different states. They are voluntary efforts and initiated by private citizens, some of whom are very ordinary people, such as a village tailor.

## Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to tap the efficacious dimensions in the communication of letter-writers to an entertainment–education radio drama serial. Each letter we analyzed was a highly personalized narrative that reflected the ways in which the radio drama influenced the listener's efficacy at an individual as well as collective level, and at the belief and behavioral levels. The letters provide evidence of cognitive rehearsal on the part of the letter-writer, and, in some cases, the application of the educational content in their personal lives. One young adult listener had given up studies but after listening to the drama, started studying again. Another wrote how he learned about doing something useful for the community by planting a tree that could provide shade to others.

Every instance of personal change indicated efficacy effects in the positive directions of both strength as well as magnitude, at both the belief as well as the behavioral levels. Also, our study suggests that efficacy has many dimensions, each of whose strength, specificity and magnitude depends upon the task at hand, goals, cultural context and action required. As a construct, it has both a belief as well as a behavioral dimension, and can be individually engaged at both the personal as well as collective levels. At the belief level, the letter-writers describe strong knowledge enhancement, self-recognition and confidence-raising. Many letter-writers who report actuation and change, trace their efficacious behavior to efficacy beliefs. We are privy to these minute details of efficacy dimensions because of the intimate and personalized letter narratives.

A noteworthy event is the organization of community pledge-taking. Such efforts are not organized by agencies of development such as the state or local government. Their occurrence at several places and not in any single location is significant. While it is obviously an indication of collective efficacy, the linkages between belief and action and between modification of belief and organizing are more complex than rational organizing would suggest. Furthermore, the process from change in personal belief and behavior to pathways of collating group orientation and beliefs toward organizing for collective action draws upon interaction and communication at a variety of levels. Future research might consider examining the following questions: Did the individual start within the family first, or was the process initiated at work? Was it facilitated by many similar thinking individuals who were apprehensive to act on their own but felt more certain about group effort and efficacy? Or was it through serendipity that like-minded individuals came together on a discussion platform created by the radio program?

The letters written by listeners represent private unbiased research journals. In addition to the rich information and the personalized reaction to the radio drama, the descriptive accounts detail the program's impact that would

otherwise have been impossible to know. Many of the narratives bring new insights to our knowledge of efficacy as it is enacted and attained communicatively. A number of narratives reinforce what is generally known about self-efficacy and collective efficacy. This approach of understanding efficacy effects through letters was novel in certain ways. It raised for us many questions about efficacy, only some of which were answered in the letters themselves.

The letters examined for this article were written by a highly involved set of individuals and do not represent the characteristics of the general audience for *Tinka Tinka Sukh*. We are aware of this respondent bias; but in the absence of any reliable apparatus to assess the communicative dimensions of efficacy, these reports of the letter-writers are still significant for many reasons. They are informally written and the writers are not aware of a grand research design or motive. For this article, in our view, these listeners served as historians-at-large. What might have been lost or curtailed in translating the letters from Hindi to English are tone of the writing and the use of native idioms and metaphors that certainly contribute to a better sense of how efficacy was impacted. Also, these extrapolations from the letters quoted in this article are just excerpts. The emotional outpourings, the suggestions and the opinions not included here were also reflective of some impact on the listener/letter-writer's sense of efficacy. Many of them wrote letters running to several pages in length.

Most studies on self-efficacy are quantitative, quasi-experimental and conducted ex post facto or using hypothetical indices. Personal accounts in the form of letters, written by the consumers themselves (actual listeners/audience individuals), we argue represent an alternative and highly insightful approach to studying efficacy effects stimulated by a mass media program.

## Notes

1. According to Maibach and Murphy (1995), several problems exist in measuring efficacy, including the lack of a reliable standard instrument which can be applied across a variety of behaviors and situations.
2. Listeners who wrote to be included on AIR's mailing list.
3. Ram is the legendary king of Ayodhya, who was reputed to be a good king for his service and dedication to his subjects.
4. Poonam, a female character, is violently abused by her husband and his parents for not bringing adequate dowry.
5. A mother goddess, consort of Shiva; they are among deities widely worshipped by followers of the Hindu religion.
6. Wife of King Rama and widely considered to be a model of Indian womanhood.

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