

CHAPTER

3

Going Global With Social Cognitive
Theory: From Prospect to Paydirt

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The present chapter addresses the applications of social cognitive theory to some of the most urgent global problems. These macrosocial applications are rooted in the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001a). To be an agent, is to influence intentionally one's own functioning and life circumstances. In this view, people are producers of their life circumstances, not just products of them. Social cognitive theory rejects the duality of personal agency and social structure. People create social systems and their lives are, in turn, influenced by them. Human self-development, adaptation, and change thus involve a dynamic interplay between personal and social structural influences within the larger societal context.

Soaring population growth is the most urgent global problem. It is destroying the ecosystems that sustain life, degrading the quality of life, and draining resources needed for national development. The problem is especially severe in less developed nations which are doubling their populations at an accelerating rate. Impoverished populations struggle to survive under scarcities of food, fresh water, medical services, and other necessities of life. Another widespread problem is the pernicious gender inequality in familial, educational, health, occupational, and social life. In these societies women are subjugated and denied their liberty, dignity, and opportunities to develop their talents. The demands of this new information era favor intelligence over brawn. Given that women constitute approximately half the population, societies that marginalize or subjugate women undermine their nation's social, technological, and economic viability. Fostering the

talents and social rights of women provides nations with powerful leverage for national development and renewal. The same is true for ethnic minorities. The spreading AIDS epidemic is another mounting global problem with devastating societal consequences.

Long running serial dramas serve as the principal vehicle for addressing these life conditions. Storytelling, structured along enabling social cognitive lines, is an especially influential vehicle for effecting personal and social changes. It brings life to people's everyday struggles and the consequences of different social practices. It speaks ardently to people's fears, hopes, and aspirations for a better life.

These macrosocial applications inform, enable, motivate, and guide viewers for personal and social changes that can alter the course of their lives. The dramatic productions are not just fanciful stories. They dramatize people's own everyday lives and the problems they have to manage. The enabling dramas help viewers to see a better life and provide the strategies and incentives that enable them to take the steps to achieve it. The story lines model family planning, women's equality, degrading dowry systems, spouse abuse, environmental conservation, AIDS prevention, and a variety of life skills. Some societies present unique problems that require special social themes tailored to their cultural practices. Approximately 130 million women are subjected to the brutal genital mutilation procedure. In Mali, child traffickers trick impoverished parents with large families to give up children under the promise that they will receive good care and send money home. They are then sold for slave labor under inhumane conditions. Orphans of parents who died of AIDS are also sold for slave labor.

To change deeply held beliefs requires strong emotional bonding to enabling models who inspire viewers and provide them with a vision of a better future. Hundreds of episodes get people emotionally engaged in the evolving lives of the models and identify with them. A formerly illiterate college-bound teenager, who was inspired by a lead character to pursue her school, describes the depth and power of emotional bonding, "*There are moments when I feel that Taru is directly talking to me, usually at night. She is telling me, 'Usha, you can follow your dreams.' I feel she is like my elder sister . . . and giving me encouragement.*"

SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

A comprehensive theory of human behavior must explain how people acquire competencies, attitudes, values, styles of behavior, and how they motivate and regulate their level of functioning. The major principles of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997) provide ~~standlines~~ *guidelines* for constructing effective media productions. The theoretical principles that are especially relevant for this purpose are discussed briefly in this section.

Social Modeling

There are two basic modes of learning. People learn through the direct experience of rewarding and punishing effects of actions, and through the power of social modeling. Modeling enables people to shortcut the tedious and sometimes costly trial-and-error learning by profiting from the successes and mistakes of others. Another major advantage of modeling, especially through the media, is that it can reach vast populations simultaneously in widely dispersed locales. Symbolic modeling has, therefore, become the dominant vehicle for disseminating new ideas, values, and styles of conduct. Modeling influences serve diverse functions in promoting personal and social change. They include instructive, motivational, social prompting, and social construction functions. With regard to the instructive function, models serve as transmitters of knowledge, competencies, values, cognitive skills, and new styles of behavior. Observers also acquire emotional proclivities toward people, places, and things through modeled emotional experiences. Observers learn to fear what frightened or injured models; to dislike what repulsed them; and to like what gratified them. Self-debilitating fears and inhibitions can be eliminated by modeling that depicts effective coping strategies and instills a sense of coping efficacy.

The motivational function operates through the depicted benefits and detriments of modeled courses of action. Seeing others gain desired outcomes by their actions can create outcome expectancies that serve as positive motivators. Observed punishing outcomes can create negative outcome expectancies that function as disincentives for similar courses of action. The behavior of others also serves as social prompts that activate, channel, and support modeled styles of behavior. The types of models who predominate in a social milieu determine which human qualities are promoted from among many alternatives.

Televised portrayals of human nature, social roles, power relations, and the norms and structure of society shape the public consciousness (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002) and people's social construction of their reality. It is one thing to learn new styles of behavior. It is another to put them into practice, especially in the face of impediments. Several motivators provide support for adopting new forms of behavior.

Perceived Self-Efficacy

Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more central or pervasive than beliefs of personal efficacy (Bandura, 1997, 2000). This core belief is the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and

motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by personal and collective action.

Human well-being and attainments require an optimistic and resilient sense of efficacy. This is because the usual daily realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of frustrations, conflicts, impediments, inequities, adversities, failures, and setbacks. These are the price of progress. People must have a strong belief in their efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed. The functional belief system combines realism about tough odds, but optimism that one can beat those odds through self-development and perseverant effort.

Efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional. Such beliefs influence whether people think pessimistically or optimistically, self-enhancingly or self-hinderingly. Efficacy beliefs play a central role in the self-regulation of motivation through goal challenges and outcome expectations. It is partly on the basis of efficacy beliefs that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavor, how long to persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are motivating or demoralizing. The likelihood that people will act on the outcomes they expect prospective behaviors to produce depends on their beliefs about whether or not they can produce the required performances. A strong sense of coping efficacy reduces vulnerability to stress and depression in taxing situations and strengthens resiliency to adversity.

Efficacy beliefs also play a key role in shaping the courses lives take by influencing the types of activities and environments people choose. Social influences operating in the chosen environments continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests. Thus, by choosing and shaping their environments, people can have a hand in what they become.

People's beliefs in their efficacy can be developed in four ways. The most effective way of instilling a strong sense of efficacy is through mastery experiences. Successes build a robust efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially in early phases of efficacy development. If people experience only easy successes, they come to expect quick results, and are easily discouraged by failure. Resilient efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles, through perseverant effort. Resilience is also built by training in how to manage failure so it becomes informative rather than demoralizing.

The second way of developing self-efficacy is by social modeling. Models are sources of aspiration, competencies, and motivation. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by perseverant effort, raises observers' beliefs in their own abilities.

Social Persuasion is the third mode of influence. Realistic boosts in efficacy can lead people to exert greater effort. This increases their chances of success. But effective efficacy builders do more than convey positive

appraisals. They structure situations for others in ways that bring success, and avoid placing them, prematurely, in situations where they are likely to fail.

People also rely partly on their physical and emotional states, in judging their efficacy. They read their emotional arousal, and tension, as signs of personal vulnerability. In activities involving strength and stamina, people interpret their fatigue, aches, and pains, as indicators of low physical efficacy. The fourth way of modifying efficacy beliefs is to reduce people's stress and depression, and build their physical strength. Many of the challenges of life involve common problems that require people to work together with a collective voice to change their lives for the better. People's shared belief in their collective power to realize the futures they seek through collective effort is a key ingredient of collective agency.

Goals and Aspirations

People motivate themselves and guide their behavior by the goals, aspirations, and challenges they set for themselves (Bandura, 1986; Locke & Latham, 1990). Long-term goals set the course of personal change but they are too far removed to overrule competing current influences on behavior. Short-term goals motivate and provide direction for one's efforts in the here and now for incremental change. Goals have little impact unless they are translated into explicit plans and strategies for realizing them. Media productions, therefore, model how to translate a vision of a desired future into a set of achievable subgoals.

Outcome Expectations

Human motivation and behavior are also affected by the outcomes people expect their actions to produce (Bandura, 1986). Outcome expectations can take three major forms. One set of outcomes includes the material pleasurable and aversive effects the behavior produces. Behavior is also partly regulated by the social reactions it evokes. The social approval and disapproval the behavior produces is the second major class of outcomes. People adopt personal standards and regulate their behavior by their self-evaluative reactions. They do things that give them self-satisfaction and self-worth, and refrain from behaving in ways that breed self-dissatisfaction.

Perceived Facilitators and Impediments

Personal and social change would be easy if there were no impediments to surmount. The facilitators and obstacles people see to changing their behavior is another influential determinant. Some of the impediments are personal ones that undermine efforts at change, such as profound self-doubts

that one's efforts would make a difference. Others are situational and structural impediments. Beliefs of personal efficacy affect how formidable the impediments appear.

People who have a resilient sense of efficacy figure out ways to overcome obstacles to change. Those who distrust their efficacy view impediments as insurmountable and are easily convinced of the futility of effort. They quickly abort their effort when they run into difficulties, should they even try. Efforts at socially oriented changes are designed to enhance the enabling aspects of social systems and reduce the impeding aspects.

COMPONENTS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL MODELS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

There are three major components to this social cognitive approach to fostering society-wide changes (Bandura, 2001b). The first component is a theoretical model. It specifies the determinants of psychosocial change and the mechanisms through which they produce their effects. This knowledge provides the guiding principles. The second component is a translational and implementational model. It converts theoretical principles into an innovative operational model. It specifies the content, strategies of change, and their mode of implementation. The third component is a social diffusion model on how to promote adoption of psychosocial programs in diverse cultural milieus.

Effective psychosocial models of change usually have limited social impact because of inadequate systems for their social diffusion. As a result, we do not profit from our successes. Lack of expertise and resources in host countries further undermine perceived efficacy to produce long-running serials that can capture and hold public attention and change behavior.

Population Communications International (PCI) and the Population Media Center (PMC) remove this impediment by serving as the global diffusion mechanisms (Poindexter, 2004; Ryerson, 1999). These two nonprofit organizations raise funds from various sources to cover production costs. They provide the nations' media personnel with the enabling guidance and technical assistance to create serial dramas tailored to the particular cultural milieus. This creative process involves a close collaborative partnership with the host country's production teams. Funds to cover the production costs are sought from the UN population fund, private foundations, and donors.

PCI and PMC also promote cooperation and collaboration among non-governmental organizations worldwide concerned with population growth, environmental and health problems, and human rights. Such alliances increase the chances of success by mobilizing and focusing people's efforts

to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children. In addition, PCI and PMC work with professionals in the entertainment industry to heighten their sensitivity to ethnic stereotyping, human rights, health, population growth, and environmental degradation in their media productions. They are encouraged to include themes related to these issues in the story lines they create for their fictional dramas.

Major scientific progress and achievement of widespread social changes require pooling the knowledge and innovative expertise of diverse disciplines. In the macrosocial approach under discussion, social cognitive theory provided the theoretical model (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Miguel Sabido, a creative dramatist, devised the generic translational and implemental model (Sabido, 1981, 2002), and Poindexter (2004) and Ryerson (1994) designed the social diffusion model.

CULTURAL AND VALUE ANALYSES

As is true of any intervention, the use of mass communications to foster personal and social change raises ethical issues. Ethical evaluations will depend on who selects the types of changes to be promoted, the agents of change, the means used, and the choice and voluntariness of exposure to the influence. These are not programs foisted on nations by outsiders in pursuit of their self-interest. The dramatic serials are created only on invitation by countries seeking help with intractable problems. The host production team, drawing on a wide variety of sources, including public health systems, religious organizations, women's groups, and other constituencies identify unique cultural life conditions, values, and itemize the types of changes the dramatizations should encourage. Once a program is aired, producers monitor how viewers perceive the characters, with whom they are identifying, how they view the obstacles and the dramatized options, and the types of futures they envision.

Extensive cultural and value analyses are conducted before serial dramas are developed and implemented. In this formative phase, focus groups, representing the various constituencies in the society, identify problems of major concern to them and the obstacles they face. These interviews provide the culturally relevant information for developing realistic characters and engrossing functional plot lines.

Value disputes are often fueled by wrangling over stereotypes with emotive surplus meanings rather than deliberating about changes in real-life terms. The value issues are, therefore, cast in concrete terms of detriments and benefits of particular lifestyles. The tangible values embody respect for human dignity and equitable familial, social, health, and educational opportunities that support common human aspirations. The drama-

tizations are thus grounded in the internationally endorsed human values codified in United Nations covenants and resolutions. The dramatized options and consequences enable people to make informed choices to improve their lives.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMATIC SERIALS

Social Modeling

There are four basic principles guiding the construction of the dramatic serials. The first principle enlists the power of social modeling for personal and social change. Culturally admired television models exhibit the beneficial styles of behavior. Social attraction increases the impact of modeling influences. Characters representing different segments of the population are shown adopting the beneficial attitudes and behavior patterns. Seeing people similar to themselves change their lives for the better not only conveys strategies for how to do it, but raises viewers' sense of efficacy that they too can succeed. Viewers come to admire and are inspired by characters in their likenesses who struggle with difficult obstacles and eventually overcome them.

Three types of contrasting models are used to highlight the personal and social effects of different patterns of behavior. The episodes include positive models portraying beneficial lifestyles. Other characters personify negative models exhibiting detrimental views and lifestyles. Transitional models are shown transforming their lives by discarding adverse styles of behavior in favor of beneficial ones. Viewers are especially prone to draw inspiration from, and identify with, transforming models by seeing them surmount similar adverse life circumstances.

Vicarious Motivators

The second feature of the dramatic productions enlists vicarious motivators as the incentive for change. Unless people see the modeled lifestyle as improving their welfare they have little incentive to adopt it. The personal and social benefits of the favorable practices, and the costs of the detrimental ones are vividly portrayed. Depicted beneficial outcomes instill outcome expectations that serve as positive incentives for change.

Showing models discarding subservient roles and challenging inequitable dated norms requires depiction of some negative reactions to reflect the social reality. These discordant episodes serve to model strategies for managing such events successfully. Viewers come to believe they can improve the quality of their lives by similar means used perseveringly. Many

efficacy-enhancing elements are incorporated in the transactional episodes. For example, in reducing gender inequities, some of the story lines depict women who struggle for more opportunities and rights for women in ways that improve their life conditions. Occasional references to accomplished women worldwide working to raise the status of women provide also a source of inspiration and support.

Efforts at social change typically challenge power relations and entrenched societal practices. Successes do not come easy. To change their lives for the better, people have to contest dated traditions and normative constraints. For example, managing sexual and reproductive life requires managing emotionally charged relationships embedded in power relations (Bandura, 1994). In societies with gendered power imbalances, women who want to limit childbearing have difficulty talking to their husbands about contraceptive methods. The challenge is to enable women to discuss family planning and to provide them with the social supports to do so. However, the major burden for contraception should not fall solely on women.

Efforts at change must address sociocultural norms and practices at the social system level. Because of the centrality of perceived efficacy in people's lives, media productions help to raise people's beliefs that they can have a hand in bringing about changes in their lives. For example, in a radio serial drama in Tanzania, many women believed they had no control over family size. It was predetermined divinely, by fate or by forces beyond their control. The drama raised viewers' perceived efficacy to manage their reproductive life through family planning (Rogers, Vaughan, Swalehe, Rao, Svenkerud, & Sood, 1999).

People must be prepared for the obstacles they will encounter by modeling prototypic problem situations and effective ways of overcoming them. There are several ways of building resilience to impediments through social modeling. People are taught how to manage setbacks by modeling how to recover from failed attempts. They are shown how to enlist guidance and social support for personal change from self-help groups and other agencies in their localities. Seeing others similar to themselves succeed through perseverant effort also boosts staying power in the face of obstacles.

Attentional and Emotional Engagement

To effect changes serial dramas have to attract and maintain regular viewership. A third principle guiding the creation of the dramatic productions concerns the attentional and emotional engagement of viewers. There are several elements that serve this purpose. The most powerful one is functional relevance. The dramas mirror the realities of people's everyday lives, the impediments with which they struggle, and model ways by which they can enhance their personal development and improve their life conditions. Per-

sonally relevant story lines with functional modeling command attention and high interest. Melodramatic embellishments of engrossing plot lines with emotive musical accompaniments give further dramatic intensity to the episodes. Ongoing engagement in the evolving lives of the models provide numerous opportunities to learn from them and to be inspired by them.

Unlike brief exposures to media presentations, that typically leave most viewers untouched, extended dramatizations that reflect viewers' life experiences, get people deeply involved in the lives of the models and attached to them. In India, 400,000 viewers sent letters supporting, advising, or criticizing the various models in the drama. In a serial in Tanzania, women spotted a negative model at a market and drove him out under a rain of tomatoes and mangos. In Brazil, 10,000 people showed up for a virtual filming of a marriage of two of the characters in a serial drama.

Environmental Supports

It is of limited value to motivate people to change if they are not provided with appropriate resources and environmental supports to realize those changes. Enlisting and creating environmental supports is an additional and especially helpful feature for promoting personal and social change. To foster large-scale changes, the dramatic productions are designed to operate through two pathways (Fig. 3.1). In the direct pathway, the serials promote changes by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding viewers. In the socially mediated pathway, media influences are used to connect viewers to social networks and community settings. These places provide continued personalized guidance, as well as natural incentives and social supports for desired changes. The major share of behavioral and valuational changes are promoted within these social milieus.

People are socially situated in interpersonal networks. When media influences lead viewers to discuss and negotiate matters of import with others

DUAL PATH OF INFLUENCE

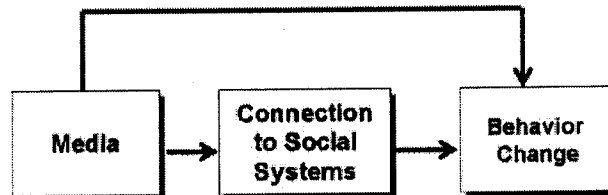


FIG. 3.1. Paths of influences through which communications affect psychosocial changes both directly and via a socially mediated pathway by linking viewers to social networks and community settings. From Bandura (2002a).

in their lives, the media set in motion transactional experiences that further shape the course of change. The socially mediated influences can have a stronger impact than the direct media influence.

Epilogues, often presented by culturally celebrated figures, provide contact information to relevant community services and support groups. For example, women who are challenging stifling traditions are provided with information about service centers and organizations that can help support their efforts. A serial drama in Mexico to promote enrollment in a national literacy program enlisted a popular actor to inform viewers about the program and to encourage them to take advantage of it. On the day after the epilogue about 25,000 people descended on the distribution center in downtown Mexico City to obtain the primers.

These socially enabling dramas are not soap operas in which arrays of characters are endlessly entangled in unseemly conflicts and moral predicaments laced with interpersonal treachery. Nor are they superficial media campaigns marketing quick fixes to intractable social problems. Rather, the sociocognitive genre dramatizes the everyday social problems with which people struggle, models realistic solutions, and provides people with incentives, support, and strategies for bettering their lives. In audience surveys, viewers report the many ways in which the characters in the dramas touch their personal lives. As an Ethiopian viewer explained the relevance and functional value of the realistic dramatizations, "I'm seeing my life in this story. My behavior really changed because of information which is helpful for my life." Functional relevance makes these serials immensely popular. In short, both genres involve storytelling but they tell entirely different types of stories serving markedly different purposes.

The sociocognitive dramatizations are not aimed at simply changing attitudes, which often bear weak relation to behavior. When self-interest conflicts with personal attitudes, people readily find reasons not to act on their attitudes that justify exemptions to them. As previously noted, the dramatizations serve more powerful functions. They inform, enable, guide, and motivate people to effect changes in their lives. The dramatizations further assist people in their efforts at personal and social change by linking them to enabling and supportive subcommunities and beneficial human services.

These serial dramas are also not "family planning" programs foisted on the women of poor nations by powerful outsiders. This communications approach addresses the problem of mounting population growth and possible solutions in broader human terms. In many societies women are treated more like property than persons, denied equitable access to education, forced into prearranged marriages, and granted little say in their reproductive lives. Therefore, one of the central themes in the dramatizations is aimed at raising the status of women so they have equitable access to educational and social opportunities, have a voice in family decisions about

child bearing, and serve as active partners in their familial and social lives. This involves raising men's understanding of the legitimacy of women making decisions regarding their reproductive health and family life. Moreover, the engrossing programs serve as an excellent vehicle for modeling a variety of functional life skills woven into the familial and social transactions.

Model

GLOBAL APPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIOCOGNITIVE

Many worldwide applications of the sociocognitive model in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are promoting personal and society-wide changes that better the lives of millions of people (Bandura, 2002; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). Some of these applications and formal evaluations of their effects are presented in the section that follows.

Promoting National Literacy

Literacy is vital for personal and national development. To reduce widespread illiteracy, the Mexican government launched a national self-study program. People who were skilled at reading were urged to organize small self-study groups in which they would teach others how to read with primers specifically developed for this purpose. So Sabido created a year-long serial with daily episodes to reach, enable, and motivate people with problems of illiteracy. The main story line in the dramatic series centered on the engaging and informative experiences of a self-study group. The implementation model involved creative translation of social cognitive theory into practice. A popular soap opera performer was cast in the role of the literate model, to take advantage of prestigious modeling. To enhance the impact of modeling through perceived similarity, she recruits a cast of characters who represent the different segments of the population with problems of illiteracy. Showing people similar to themselves mastering linguistic skills helps to persuade viewers that they too possess the capabilities to master the skills that were being modeled. The serial portrayed collective mastery of competencies and the accompanying benefits.

A prior interview survey revealed several personal demotivating barriers that dissuaded people from enrolling in the national literacy program. These impeding beliefs centered on perceived self-efficacy, critical period constraints, and personal worthiness. Many believed that they lacked the capabilities to master such a complex skill. Others believed that reading skills could be acquired only when one is young. Still others felt that they were unworthy of having an educated person devote their time to help them. These self-handicapping misbeliefs were modeled by the various ac-

tors and corrected by the instructor as she persuaded them they possessed the capabilities to succeed. The televised episodes included humor, conflicts, and engrossing discussions of the subjects being read. They portrayed the characters struggling in the initial phases of learning, and then gaining progressive mastery with self-pride in their accomplishments.

To provide vicarious motivators to pursue the self-education program, the dramatic series depicted the substantial benefits of literacy both for personal development and for national efficacy and pride. Melodramatic embellishments and emotive music gave dramatic intensity to the episodes to ensure high viewer involvement.

Epilogues were used to increase memorability of the modeled messages. To facilitate media-promoted changes, the educational agency made the primers easily available. In addition, the series often used real-life settings showing the actors obtaining the primers from an actual distribution center and eventually partaking in a graduation ceremony for actual enrollees. Epilogues also informed the viewers of the national self-study program and encouraged them to take advantage of it. As previously noted, what a powerful motivator it turned out to be.

Millions of viewers watched this series faithfully. Compared to non-viewers, viewers of the dramatic series were much more informed about the national literacy program and expressed more positive attitudes about helping one another to learn. As shown in Fig. 3.2, enrollment in the literacy program was relatively low in the year before the televised series, but rose abruptly during the year of the series.

As people develop a sense of efficacy and competencies that enable them to exercise control over their lives, they serve as models, inspiration, and even tutors for others in the circles in which they travel. This concomitant socially mediated influence can vastly multiply the impact of televised modeling. In the year following the televised series, another 400,000 people enrolled in the self-study literacy program. Through the socially mediated path of influence, televised modeling can set in motion an ever-widening, reverberating process of social change.

The lead model had difficulty getting movie roles because she was considered insufficiently attractive. The serial drama brought her national fame, movie roles, and political power. She became a leading political figure in the more liberally oriented party.

Environmental Sustainability by Stemming Population Growth

Soaring population growth is wreaking havoc with the global environment, depleting natural resources, degrading the quality of life, and overwhelming efforts at social and economic development. The current world

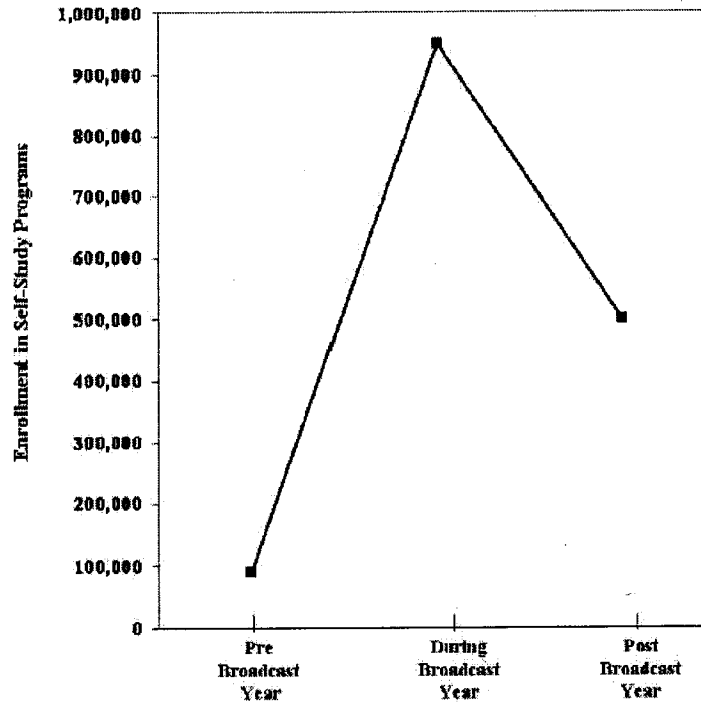


FIG. 3.2. Enrollments in the national literacy program in the year prior to, during, and following the televised serial drama. Drawn from data in Sabido (1981).

population is 6 billion and projected to increase by 50% to 9 billion within the next 50 years. Population growth has stabilized in the more developed nations, but is soaring in the less developed ones (Fig. 3.3). The massive population encumbrance underscores the need to accelerate the types of psychosocial changes that are critical to the reduction of fertility rates and to the promotion of consummatory lifestyles that ensure the sustainability of the environment.

Unless people see family planning as improving their welfare, they have little incentive to adopt it. Sabido (1981) developed a series of serial dramas in Mexico to check the cycle of poverty exacerbated by a high rate of unplanned childbearing. Through modeling with accompanying outcomes, the dramas portrayed the process as well as the personal, social, and economic benefits of family planning. The positive family life of a small family, whose wife worked in a family planning clinic, was contrasted with that of a married sister overburdened with a huge family living in impoverishment and misery.

Much of the drama focused on the married daughter from the huge family, who was beginning to experience severe marital conflicts and distress

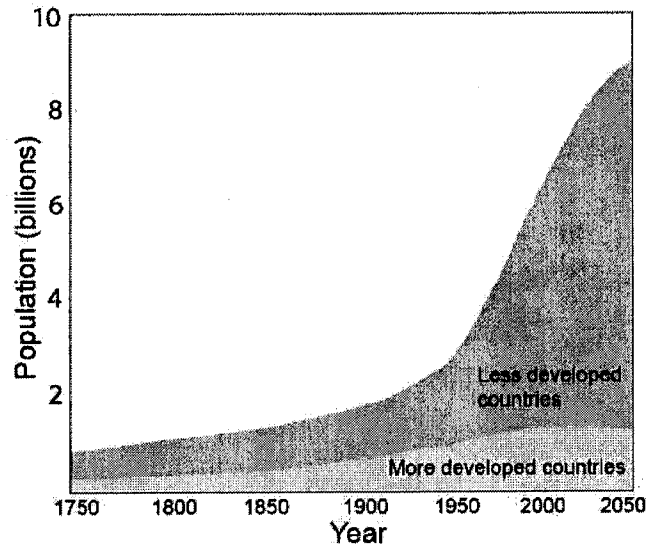


FIG. 3.3. Population growth in developed and less developed countries.

over a rapidly expanding family. She served as the transitional model, living in her parents' despairingly crowded and impoverished environment. In dramatic scenes she expresses emotionally her desire for a voice in her family life, to cease having more babies, and to break the cycle of poverty that will condemn her family to an inner-city slum without ability to care adequately for her children. She turns to her aunt for help, which serves as the vehicle for modeling a great deal of information about how to manage marital discord and machismo behavior, how to deal with male resistance to contraception and family planning, how to communicate openly in the family, and how to escape the many problems caused by a family overburdened with children.

As the drama unfolds, the young couple is shown gaining control over their family life and enjoying the accruing benefits with the help of a family planning center. A priest occasionally appeared in the dramas, emphasizing the need for responsible family planning by limiting the number of offspring to those the family can afford to raise adequately. At the end of some of the programs, viewers were informed in epilogues about existing family planning services to facilitate media-promoted changes.

Compared to nonviewers, heavy viewers of the dramatic serial (Sabido, 1981) were more likely to link lower childbearing to social, economic, and psychological benefits. They also developed a more positive attitude toward helping others plan their family. Records of the family planning centers revealed a 32% increase in the number of new contraceptive users over

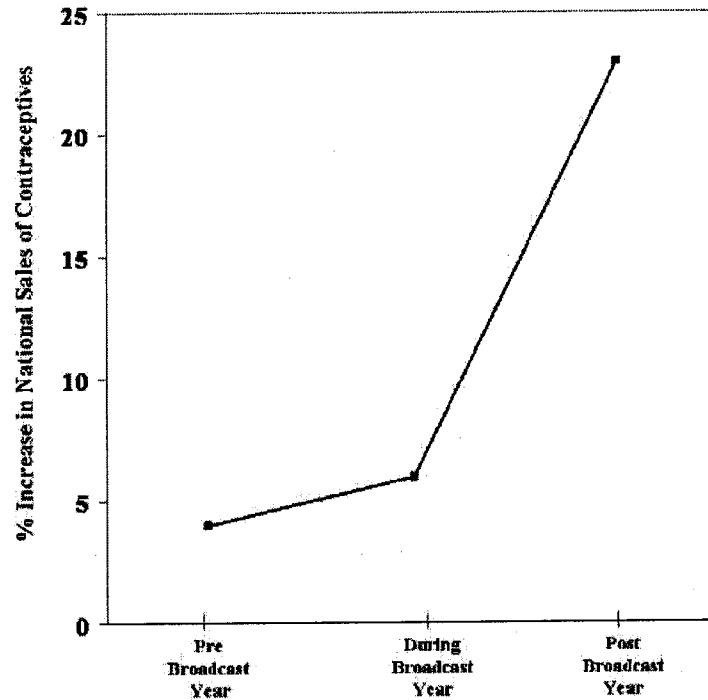


FIG. 3.4. National sales of contraceptives in the two years preceding the serial drama promoting family planning and during the year it was broadcast. Drawn from data in Sabido (1981).

the previous year before the series was televised. People reported that the television portrayal served as the impetus for consulting the health clinics. National sales of contraceptives rose from 4% and 7% in the preceding two baseline years to 23% in the year the program was aired (Fig. 3.4).

Generalization Through Functional Adaptation to Cultural Practices

Applications in India and Kenya illustrate its generalizability of the socio-cognitive model through functional tailoring to diverse cultural practices. Efforts to bring down the rate of population growth must address not only the strategies and benefits of family planning, but also the role and status of women in societies in which they are treated subserviently. In some societies, the equity problems stem from machismo dominance; in others, from marriage and pregnancy at the onset of puberty with no say in the choice of husband or the number and spacing of children; and in still others from dis-possession by polygamous marriages. In some societies, women are subju-

gated to the point where they are repeatedly beaten and are not even allowed to turn on a family radio.

The television program in India was designed to raise the status of women, as well as to promote a smaller family norm. It addressed a variety of themes about family life in the context of broader social norms and practices (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). The subthemes devoted particular attention to family harmony amidst differences among family members, elevation of the status of women in family, social, and economic life, educational opportunities, career options for women, son preference, gender bias in child rearing, the detriment of dowry requirement, choice in spouse selection, teenage marriage and parenthood, spousal abuse, family planning to limit family size, youth delinquency, and community development. Some of the characters personified positive role models for gender equality; others were proponents of the traditional subservient role for women. Still others were transitional models. A famous Indian film actor reinforced the modeled messages in epilogues.

The melodramatic series was immensely popular, enjoying top viewership on television and a massive outpouring of letters in the hundreds of thousands from viewers offering advice and support to the characters. A random sample of viewers reported they had learned from the program that women should have equal opportunities and a say in decisions that affect their lives, programs advancing the welfare of women should be encouraged, cultural diversity should be respected, and that family size should be limited. The more aware viewers were of the messages being modeled, the greater was their support of women's freedom of choice in matters that affect them and of planning for small families (Brown & Cody, 1991; Singhal & Rogers, 1999).

Intensive interviews with villagers revealed that dramatizations sparked serious public discussions about the broadcast themes concerning child marriages, dowry requirements, education of girls, the benefits of small families, and other social issues (Papa et al., 2000). These social transactions went beyond talk to collective community action aimed at changing inequitable normative practices and improving their social future. Indeed, one village sent to the broadcast center a large poster letter signed by its inhabitants stating that they will work to eradicate the practice of dowry, child marriages, and support the education of daughters. The enrollment of girls in elementary and junior high schools rose from 10% to 38% in one year of the broadcasts.

There are many impediments to sociocultural change, but their force weakens over time as new practices gain support and collective benefits outweigh the social costs of harmful traditional practices. In another village young boys and girls created a self-help action group to promote the changes modeled in the serial drama (Law & Singhal, 1999). The system-level effects il-

