



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Entertainment-Education Behind the Scenes

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I sat down and turned on the television. I was excited to watch a suspenseful drama called *How to Get Away with Murder*. As I watched, one character learned that he had tested positive for HIV. As the story unfolded, he and his provider had a frank conversation about HIV testing, transmission, and prevention. Since I am in the field of entertainment-education (EE), my first question was not about HIV. Instead, I wondered whether the inclusion of this storyline in a popular broadcast television drama was an intentional effort to educate the public. I went online to search whether my hunch was correct; in this case, the Office of Hollywood, Health, & Society at the University of Southern California Norman Lear Center had hosted a roundtable with the show’s writing team and advocacy groups.—Lauren

When we visited the village four years earlier, the only television screen anyone had access to was in a petrol generator powered “video hall” (or *kibanda*). For a few cents, fishermen sat on benches within the mud and

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wattle structure, whiling away the hours between casting and collecting their nets watching DVDs of American action movies dubbed into the local language of Luganda by VJ Jingo, who did all the voices and made jokes about the action onscreen. But as our little boat pulled up this time, I could immediately see that things had changed. Atop the palm frond roofs of many homes were single solar panels with aerial antennae tied to wooden poles above them. For better or for worse, television had come to the Sese Islands. Those screens would now be a window into a larger world for the young people of Lake Victoria. I asked myself how entertainment-education could be used to play a positive role in their lives.—Paul

THE FIELD OF ENTERTAINMENT-EDUCATION

Since before media existed, stories have been used as a tool to change the world. But the first conference establishing entertainment-education as a field only dates back to 1989 in Los Angeles, California; this First International Conference on Entertainment Education and Social Change (EE1) was hosted by the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication and Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs (Storey & Sood, 2013). Definitions have become more nuanced over time, but essentially, entertainment-education is a “theory-based communication strategy for purposefully embedding educational and social issues in the creation, production, processing, and dissemination process of an entertainment program, in order to achieve desired individual, community, institutional, and societal changes among the intended media user populations” (Wang & Singhal, 2009, pp. 272–273).

Miguel Sabido (2004; 2021), a director, screenwriter, and telenovela producer, was a pioneer in realizing the social benefit that his shows could have. Drawing from theories about drama and Bandura’s (2004) social cognitive theory, he developed the Sabido methodology for producing entertainment-education programs in the 1970s. For example, his telenovela *Ven Conmigo* (Come with me) in Mexico promoted adult education and literacy by having the primary character be a literate woman who encouraged others to overcome barriers to reading. Sabido’s work provides crucial recommendations for how EE campaigns should be implemented. Educational content is incorporated into the main storylines of entertaining dramas. To encourage social change, the dramas feature positive characters whom audiences can aspire to be like, transitional characters who overcome obstacles and serve as role models for how to change

behavior, and negative characters who demonstrate the consequences of unfavorable lifestyles. After each episode, a respected actor provides an epilogue that repeats the primary messages incorporated that day. More information on the Sabido methodology and its application is included in multiple chapters within this volume, most notably, Sabido (2021), Ryerson and Negussie (2021), and Wang and Singhal (2021).

The process of entertainment-education in the United States, and similarly media-saturated environments, has long looked different from more traditional versions of EE based on the Sabido methodology. Rather than creating entire shows with the goal of promoting social change, shorter facts and storylines are inserted into already popular television programs. The storyline on *How to Get Away with Murder* is one example of this. Occasionally referred to as “consultative social merchandising” (Singhal, Wang, Rogers, Rice, & Atkin, 2013), this technique relies on media producers working with social change and communication experts such as the Office of Hollywood, Health & Society in the University of Southern California Norman Lear Center in the United States and the Centrum Media and Gezondheid in the Netherlands (see Borum Chattoo, 2021; Bouman, 2021; Rosenthal & Folb, 2021). Perhaps because of pushback against the goal of educating viewers, many media producers in the United States don’t like the term “entertainment-education.” Instead, they have established initiatives for “social impact television.”

Embedded within the field of communication, entertainment-education is a rich subfield “that finds itself on the cutting edge of technological development and social change” (Storey & Sood, 2013, p. 11). Although fairly young, EE has grown rapidly and become mature in the broad array of interventions, theoretical perspectives, and research methods employed. For instance, though the term EE originated with long-running serial dramas, typically broadcast on radio or television, it’s also long included a variety of other media and formats, such as photonovelas, community plays, and music.

In recent years, EE has become intertwined with other academic fields, including narrative persuasion. Although social and cognitive theories have long contributed to the development of EE programs, there is now more emphasis on theories about how narratives are processed and can influence social and behavior change. Melanie Green’s (2021b; Green & Brock, 2000) work on transportation shows that a key element of being persuaded by stories stems from being absorbed within the story world. In her entertainment overcoming resistance model, Moyer-Gusé (2008)

posits that transportation, along with involvement with characters and enjoyment, can reduce counterarguing and resistance to persuasion. These processes explain how narrative EE interventions can affect audiences. In this volume, see Ophir, Sangalang, and Cappella (2021) for a thorough review of theories used to develop EE programming. As they note, more work must be done to fully translate these theories into practical advice to craft better EE programs.

Work on narrative persuasion is rooted within the media psychology field, and it often takes an individual-centered approach to how media enact change. The original conception of EE always implied a social change approach, and there have long been calls to move from theorizing at the individual level to theorizing at a social and structural level (Singhal & Rogers, 2004). Some of that theorizing lies in goals to promote collective efficacy in addition to self-efficacy and expand theorizing on social norms (Riley, Rodrigues, & Sood, 2021).

CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

To understand the recent history of entertainment-education and to begin to assess in which direction it is headed, it is essential to understand the evolution of media technology in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. While technology is always evolving, filmmaking, radio, print, and other mass media were largely the preserve of professional producers until the year 2000. Since then, barriers of entry for media producers have largely disappeared, as digital technology has democratized the production, distribution, and reception of media. Each one of these in itself is a revolution, but together they represent an entirely new media landscape. When the floodwaters of technology broke, they broke quickly and across media. Although basic blogging has existed since the late twentieth century, broadband internet at scale is a twenty-first century innovation. Affordable, accessible cameras, microphones, and editing interfaces became available, and the launch of YouTube in 2005 kickstarted the revolution in shared video and democratized distribution of video media. The launch of the iPod in 2001 helped podcasting emerge as a powerful medium for new voices to reach mass audiences. While social media have existed since the 1990s, Facebook was the company that would make it ubiquitous in our lives when it opened its platform to the general public in mid-2006. The launch of the first iPhone in 2007 heralded the revolution in mobile computing and converged many of the gadgets (audio

recording, video, camera, etc.) that empowered the first wave of twenty-first century content creators.

These technological changes have created new avenues for a variety of EE media, including the use of serious digital games and transmedia (Singhal et al., 2013; Wang & Singhal, 2009). Opportunities provided by streaming platforms decrease barriers to entry, and proliferation of media makes the entertainment and enjoyment aspects all the more important to cut through the noise that emerges when content creation scales.

Communication campaigns (including many EE programs) have often used more than a single mode of communication. However, the mind-set behind transmedia storytelling is centered on art, play, experimentation, cocreation, and collective action. Compared to traditional campaigns, it is rather open-ended, exploratory, nonlinear, process-oriented and fun! (Singhal et al., 2013, p. 330)

The downside of the digital revolution is a deepening digital divide in which marginalized people are left further and further behind, particularly in developing contexts where access to technology that is taken for granted in the West is confined to an expanding but ever divergent middle and upper class. Age, gender, geography, literacy, familiarity with the dominant language, electrification, mobile coverage, and, above all, access to capital are what determine those who have a voice and those who do not, or those who can receive a message and those who are left in the dark.

CURRENT QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Recent review articles summarizing EE have highlighted ongoing questions and challenges within the field including: working with funding organizations and documenting cost-effective impact, negotiating the relationship between research and theory and their implementation, focusing on the art and creativity required for EE to truly be entertaining (Storey & Sood, 2013); incorporating more levels of effect beyond the individual level, taking advantage of interactive digital technologies, and working to create and measure long-term sustainable change (Sood, Riley, & Alarcon, 2017). Our goal is not to provide a single correct answer to any of these questions. Rather, our goal in this volume is to invite leaders in the field to struggle with these questions and suggest possible answers. By doing so, we can move the whole field forward. Thus, we posed the following questions to the authors of each chapter.

What Are the Boundaries of Entertainment-Education, and How Much Do They Need to Focus on Narrative Drama Versus Other Forms of Storytelling?

As we noted above, the EE field has not been confined to television or radio dramas alone. Many innovations have occurred within the field, as new technologies allow opportunities for serious video games that combine entertainment and education (Wang & Singhal, 2009). With the focus on narrative persuasion, the boundaries of the concept of entertainment-education can become blurred. In this volume, we take an expansive approach to EE genres by inviting scholars and practitioners from a variety of backgrounds to participate in the conversation. Thus, we include work that uses music (Chirinos-Espin, 2021), performance (Jahn, 2021) radio dramas (Ryerson & Negussie, 2021), transmedia (Chatterjee, Pasricha, Mitra, & Frank, 2021; Wang & Singhal, 2021), and more.

We also choose an expansive approach in terms of intended audience. In their encyclopedia review of entertainment-education, Sood et al. (2017) suggest, “a classic successful example of EE is the children’s television program *Sesame Street*” (p. 1). However, in an encyclopedia entry from the same year, Chatterjee, Sangalang, and Cody (2017) question whether *Sesame Street* should count. In this volume, Sabido (2021) highlights *Sesame Street* as an example of an effective intervention worthy of dissemination. This confusion in whether educational media for children and youth count as EE can also be seen in the separate divisions within communication associations and the lack of citations across fields. In this volume, Cole and Piotrowski (2021) trace the theoretical foundations that underlie entertaining media for children and suggest how applying those theories in more traditional EE programming for adults could improve them.

Ultimately, Wang and Singhal (2021) suggest four key features that define the boundaries for the field of entertainment-education: (1) that it is a social and behavioral change communication (SBCC) strategy, (2) that it *intentionally* combines education with entertainment, (3) that it is grounded in theory, and (4) that it aims for long-term change not just at the individual level, but also at the higher levels of community and society.

*How Do Academic Theories in the Field
of Entertainment-Education Relate to Theories of Change That
Practitioners Can Apply in the Field?*

In their systematic review of EE literature published from 2005 through 2016, Sood et al. (2017) found fifty six different explicitly named theories. While many of the theories worked solely at the individual level (e.g. audience reception), others combined individual and social change. Although it is certainly a strength of the field that theory is deeply embedded in its roots, the diverse array of theories can make the field inaccessible to newcomers and suggest that the field has not matured to a point of coherence. Sood et al. (2017) suggest that an overarching “theory of everything” might be called for (p. 25).

Have we reached a point wherein we are ready to consolidate, or are we missing crucial elements that suggest practical implications? In this volume, M. Green (2021b) elaborates on her transportation theory, and Ophir et al. (2021) report their lessons learned from stories designed to create specific sequences of emotions. More such specific recommendations for what story elements actually create effects are crucial.

Importantly, many of the EE theories in the academic literature stem from Western societies and are based on lab studies disconnected from the environment within which EE programs are implemented (Wang & Singhal, 2021). Unsurprisingly, when moved into practice, EE program designers often instead refer to their “theory of change” that employs the concepts that resonate most strongly with local audiences. Gowland, Colquhoun, Nyoï, and Thawng (2021) detail their process in using audience research to iteratively create campaigns; while starting with a theoretical framework, they diverge from it to instead be responsive to what they learn on the ground. Likewise, Chirinos-Espin (2021) uses a critical theory approach to highlight the importance of participatory EE interventions. Chatterjee et al. (2021) apply the critical media effects framework to reconsider the constraints within which EE scholars and practitioners work.

*In the New Media Landscape with Multiple Screens, How Can
Entertainment-Education Reach Audiences and Keep
Them Engaged?*

In earlier eras of EE, there was a divide such that developing countries had more consolidated media, and campaigns could better reach a greater

percentage of the population. However, media are now diverging and audiences fragmenting, resulting in smaller audiences for different media types on a global scale. It may be that smaller interventions with more narrowly defined intended audiences are better able to engage those audiences (Sood et al., 2017). Or it may be that the global village and transnational medias facilitate a new focus on stories that cut across culture and connect to something essentially human. But what matters most for engaging audiences? A key theme throughout the chapters is the importance of EE leading with the entertaining aspects. Notably, Falzone and Lukomska (2021) and Bernard and Francis (2021) highlight the importance of creating content that the audience values and would seek out on its own.

Transmedia interventions integrate a variety of media types that incorporate the same storyline and characters in different ways and provide a variety of touchpoints for audiences to engage and interact. Ryerson and Negussie (2021) suggest that transmedia is the new Hollywood term for an approach that EE has taken for a long time: using multiple different media channels that are selected because they are the best ways to reach the intended audience. But do digital media and transmedia go beyond multi-channel campaigns? Chatterjee et al. (2021) argue that the level of coordination among the differing types is more complicated. These kinds of interventions can be particularly complex to create and coordinate (Bouman, 2021).

In the face of these new media trends and the promise of interactivity, we must not forget that disparities in access to media continue. Falzone and Lukomska (2021) and Jahn (2021) highlight the importance of interventions that don't require digital technologies or literacy.

What Works and What Doesn't Work in the Field of Entertainment-Education?

One key difficulty in the progress of entertainment-education as a field is what information scholars and practitioners can access about existing efforts. "For example, evaluations, project reports, and other nonscholarly sources may have been published or reported locally but not made in the academic literature. Thus, the universe of knowledge about EE is not fully represented in peer-reviewed publications" (Sood et al., 2017, p. 5). This book serves in part as an answer to that critique. The primary question that we asked each author to consider is what works in crafting effective EE:

From its inception, research has been crucial to EE programming. Murphy (2021) highlights the importance of planning ahead and being prepared to adjust research designed for when things go wrong in the field. Don Green (2021a) suggests a model for how to do research in EE and suggests that overall effects are small. Some mass media campaigns deliberately trade small effects for large exposure. But are EE campaigns worth the cost if only small effects can be achieved? Single campaigns may not be sufficient to change strongly held social norms and cultural beliefs. Instead, many campaigns may need to work together to promote social change.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Entertainment-education is expanding and facing a lot of new opportunities, including new digital formats and transmedia. However, making media campaigns can be a chaotic process. Add to that the realities of working in the field and the rigid structures of scholarly evaluation, and you have a recipe for truths half told. This book aspires to tell it like it is through a collection of readable essays in which some of the top names in the entertainment-education field relate how entertainment-education works and tell true accounts about when it didn't. Read along to learn from their successes and mistakes, and get a behind-the-scenes look at entertainment-education.

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