CHAPTER 4

Entertainment-Education as Social Justice Activism in the United States: Narrative Strategy in the Participatory Media Era

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Mateo, a character on NBC's hit sitcom *Superstore*, had an unexpected problem. In the fictional world of a popular scripted episodic comedy—a story that gleefully finds the absurdity in the daily mundanity at a large retail store—employee Mateo is drawn as a funny, energetic young person. As the series' creator Justin Spitzer wrote him, Mateo is a gay Filipino immigrant on an ambitious path at the Cloud 9 megastore, part of a quirky ensemble of diverse co-workers whose only evident commonality is a shared workplace ("Superstore," n.d.; "'Superstore' Actor Relishes," 2019).

But in the show's second season premiere in 2016, Mateo learns a shocking truth. He realizes that a childhood visit with his grandma to what he calls "the green card store"—a place that sells "you know, green cards and knock-off handbags," as he relays to his colleague—was not the formal path to presumed US citizenship (Conti, 2016; "Olympics," 2016). He is undocumented and was brought to the United States as a young child. Mateo's discovery established an ongoing episodic storyline

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that would prove rich with opportunities to build awareness and empathy about the lives of undocumented immigrants in the United States, particularly the experience of DREAM-ers, named for the DREAM Act that would allow many such young people to remain in the country (National Immigration Law Center, 2017).

Often vilified and dehumanized in news coverage (Farris & Mohamed, 2018) and partisan politics (Romero, 2018), undocumented immigrants are rarely depicted in the US entertainment marketplace as fully embodied individuals, much less as aspirational primary recurring characters who visit viewers' living rooms week after week. In the season that follows, Mateo's life takes a complicating turn when he needs to produce a Social Security card; in a panic, he asks his co-workers to beat him up. As the episode's storyline reveals, Mateo has learned about an obscure policy that allows undocumented immigrants to apply for a "U Visa" if they are victims of violent assault ("Mateo's Last Day Transcript," n.d.). Directed by actress America Ferrera, a vocal immigration activist (Betancourt, 2019) who also plays a character on the show, the episode spotlights the complexities of undocumented life in a hilariously accessible way, humanizing Mateo's plight and demonstrating the care and solidarity of his workplace friends, who ultimately aren't able to fulfill his request but look for other ways to help.

Mateo's undocumented storyline and pivotal 2017 episode were not simply dramatic creative ideas set in motion by the show's creator and writers, but instead were shaped behind the scenes in large part through ideation and consultation with Define American (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2020, p. 165), a social justice activism group deemed by *Fast Company* in 2019 and 2020 as one of the "World's Most Innovative Companies" for its work to soften hardened political and public perspectives about undocumented immigrants in the United States (Darwish, 2016; Define American, 2020). The Define American team sees its "narrative change" efforts—working with Hollywood to shape storylines and produce original entertainment content—as core to advancing equitable public policy bolstered by supportive public opinion (Define American, 2020). Define American takes real-life immigrant experiences and counsels Hollywood about how to incorporate them into mainstream entertainment storytelling, across scripted drama, comedy, and reality genres. The 2017 U Visa episode, "Mateo's Last Day," is a prime example of this collaboration.

Define American exemplifies the practices of contemporary creative nonprofit organizations in the United States that consider entertainment-based *narrative strategy* as mission-critical to their work in equity and justice, alongside policy advocacy efforts. The work is constructed and led by leading social justice groups whose origins were shaped in the networked participatory era of YouTube, social media, and streaming entertainment—a juncture that has conferred new creative power to traditionally marginalized voices. Not only are Define American and other cultural strategy organizations effective, trusted allies to Hollywood's creators—working to shape humanizing, sympathetic empowering portrayals of social issues that span from immigration to racial justice—but they also act as high-level creative entertainment producers through original web series and other entertainment programming of their own.

This chapter introduces the practices of an expanding cadre of leading post-millennial US-based nonprofit social justice organizations that leverage narrative strategy and entertainment storytelling projects to advance social change in key topical areas. The ideas and analysis presented here are informed directly by my contemporary work as a producer and engaged scholar who actively collaborates with, and studies, this professional network, alongside my parallel research and creative production projects in documentary and comedy as social change strategy (Borum Chattoo, 2020; Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2020), two narrative genres that show promising evidence of persuasive influence and audience mobilization beyond entertainment-education's frequent focus on scripted drama. This vantage point also is informed by my formative professional background and expertise—in the late 1990s, as a researcher and program manager in formalized US-based Entertainment-Education (EE) initiatives with the Kaiser Family Foundation and its efforts with MTV and BET around HIV and reproductive health; and in the 2000s, as a media producer and philanthropy executive with TV legend Norman Lear, focused on leveraging entertainment to encourage youth voting.

From my perspective, molded by experience with multiple narrative genres in entertainment storytelling for social change—scripted and non-scripted, dramatic and comedic—contemporary narrative strategy efforts unquestionably evolve from, and incorporate, original EE principles and theoretical underpinnings, even while they deviate in meaningful ways explored here. Alongside the continued progression of the digital participatory media era and rise of creative activism, these social justice organizations shape and distribute persuasive, enlightening mediated storytelling

through approaches that depart from the precision of producer and researcher Miguel Sabido's original EE model of entertainment for social change (Sabido, 2004), and yet, they function with the shared understanding of stories' uniquely persuasive, engaging, emotional characteristics. We can see in their efforts the broad mission and goal of Entertainment-Education as a narrative production approach to foster positive societal outcomes, and yet, this contemporary community of practice uses divergent semantics to reference social change through entertainment—"narrative strategy" and/or "cultural strategy," alternately used—and philosophies, facilitated in part by their network collaborations with one another.

This contingent of post-millennial organizations has developed distinct norms and ways of collaborating with entertainment media producers to create influential stories, deeply grounded within a multi-platform media system that has changed dramatically over the decades since Miguel Sabido first pioneered his formal EE model. At the same time, these groups are creating their own entertainment media, empowered by the participatory production tools and distribution platforms of the social media age, employing high-level production practices to engage audiences with stories they might not see elsewhere on the mainstream entertainment menu. This chapter introduces this dynamic evolution of EE in the United States at a time of media transition, social upheaval, and creatively empowered civil society.

Narrative Strategy in the Participatory Media Age: Evolution and Community of Practice

The entertainment media industry in the United States (and indeed, the world) is undergoing a seismic revolution in business practices and audience behavior. As the new millennium's early years progressed, platforms for generating and sharing self-produced media—Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006—radically opened the playing field for creative expression outside the ranks of professional entertainment and information media gatekeepers, blurring the lines of amusement and information, and between self-produced and professionally made content (Borum Chattoo, 2020, pp. 56–58).

In 2007, Netflix, the ultimate entertainment industry upstart, offered streaming programming for the first time, followed by its first original

dramatic episodic series in 2013 (Hosch, 2020). It was followed by a new cohort of streaming networks—Amazon Prime, Apple TV, and others. The amount and range of content now produced by a converged entertainment media system—that is, media makers outside the confines of the legacy entertainment companies that make and distribute material alongside big-budget programming for multiple platforms—is staggering (Bridge, 2020; Cunningham & Craig, 2019). With the introduction of short-form narrative storytelling on social platforms like Instagram, quality entertainment content that appeals to diverse audiences is in demand and available anytime and everywhere.

The ability for grassroots organizations to fully engage in this converged, networked entertainment environment is powerful. As scholar Henry Jenkins and his co-authors write, "new hybrid systems of media-content circulation can bring unprecedented power to the voices of individuals and groups without access to mainstream forms of distribution" (Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016, p. 17). Jenkins' thoughtful presentation and analysis of "participatory culture" is meaningful here in the context of a radically changing entertainment media business. Audiences are able to interact with media creators and one another in the streaming, social media age, engaging in civic and entertainment audience behaviors with increasing efficacy (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2020, p. 156).

Positioned squarely within participatory culture and the backdrop of a disrupted entertainment industry, grassroots social justice organizations have quickly recognized and embraced their new creative power. They have diligently honed their ability to shape mainstream entertainment media stories by working with Hollywood producers and writers—and crafting and distributing their own—to include lived experiences and social challenges often still invisible or overlooked in TV and film. Given their cultural muscle and access to media-making in the participatory media age, along with collaboration with entertainment industry players who require insatiable amounts of fresh content to compete in the discombobulated new media industry world order (Bridge, 2020), new professional practices have evolved.

"Narrative strategy" or "cultural strategy" (often used interchangeably by the professional groups that employ this approach) is increasingly codified in terms of normative values, practices, and a growing community of practice. The concept is articulated in influential practitioner white papers, bolstered by robust investment from leading foundations and

collaborative support from facets of the US entertainment industry. In the absence of one existing shared definition, despite many expressions about the underlying ideas, I offer this one: *Narrative strategy* is a cultural and communication practice by which social justice practitioners collaborate with entertainment industry executives, writers, and producers to shape positive portrayals of marginalized communities and social issues in scripted and non-scripted entertaining narratives, critique negative portrayals, and produce and disseminate their own entertainment storytelling content. This practice is directly enabled by the post-millennial participatory media age. The core belief embedded in narrative strategy holds that entertainment storytelling is meaningful to foster social change by shifting public opinion and perceptions—and fostering cultural conversation and public participation—all of which is necessary, ultimately, for supportive policy that expands equity and justice.

Contemporary narrative strategy practitioners diligently strive to enable a wide-ranging cultural shift in how particular social justice challenges and traditionally marginalized communities are portrayed through entertainment, and thus understood by those communities and broader audiences. In this way, narrative strategists focus well beyond shaping one singular story (or episodic series, as the case may be) as a site of intervention, as in an EE model, but instead value a wide constellation of entertainment narratives that accumulate to create composite pluralistic cultural portraits of people and their lived experiences.

As articulated in a position paper created and shared by leading practitioners within this expanding community of practice:

> Cultural strategy is a field of practice that centers artists, storytellers, media makers and cultural influencers as agents of social change. Cultural strategy speaks to our broadest visions and highest hopes. In the realm of social justice, this means forging and preserving equitable, inclusive and just societies. Over the long term, cultural strategy cracks open, reimagines and rewrites fiercely-held narratives, transforming the shared spaces and norms that make up culture. (Chang, Manne, & Potts, 2018)

Entertainment narratives are seen as stories that can reinforce or disrupt troubling social norms or portrayals—and thus, narrative strategists work to create enlightening and diverse portrayals, and to dismantle damaging ones. Indeed, the narrative strategy approach is a contemporary practitioner- and activism-led evolution that is parallel—and yet not precisely the same in its implementation and practices—to the original definition of EE provided by Singhal and Rogers (2004) as the "process of purposely

designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior" (p. 9).

Several seminal public reports and convenings have helped to solidify professional semantics and build a network of narrative change practitioners who leverage entertainment for social change. Activist Tracy Van Slyke published the pathbreaking *Spoiler Alert* report in 2014, funded by social justice group Opportunity Agenda (Van Slyke, 2014), which called for producers and social change strategists to center entertainment and pop culture in social justice work. Two years later, the extensive multi-part *#PopJustice* research report series and convening in 2016, commissioned by two philanthropies—Nathan Cummings Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy—explored evidence for entertainment's persuasive, mobilizing characteristics to help launch a contemporary practice of entertainment for social change (Liz Manne Strategy, 2016). In 2016, following the ideas advanced in the *#PopJustice* research report series, the Pop Culture Collaborative launched as an unprecedented new grant-giving and network-building organization devoted to funding narrative change initiatives, combining millions of funding dollars from a consortium of global foundations (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2020, p. 158). Several years later, the group hosts network convenings, *Entertain Change*, where dozens of practitioners share experiences and case studies, and forge ways to collaborate. In 2018, the MacArthur Foundation awarded its inaugural Participatory Civic Storytelling grantees, creating a cohesive cohort of organizations across research, production, and social justice who leverage storytelling for social influence and civic empowerment.[1]

With these investments and convenings, organizational networks continue to expand, fueling opportunities for new research and exploration. The contemporary community of practice in narrative and culture change includes social impact executives at major media companies and entertainment industry organizations, including MTV, Univision, Comedy Central, and Participant Media; specialized for-profit consulting agencies like Propper Daley, or nonprofit research-based consulting entities like the Hollywood, Health & Society program based at the USC Annenberg

[1] The innovation lab and research center I direct, the Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI), is a member of this inaugural grantee cohort for Participatory Civic Storytelling at the MacArthur Foundation. CMSI also has received funding from the Pop Culture Collaborative.

School's Norman Lear Center (see the chapter by Rosenthal and Folb in this book); and philanthropic networks like the Pop Culture Collaborative and its grantees.

The nucleus of this contemporary entertainment-based social change work, however, and a focused area of innovation at the heart of this chapter, resides in the stand-alone social justice advocacy organizations that have honed this practice within their broader missions, which are largely focused on advocating for traditionally marginalized groups on the basis of race, ethnicity, religious practice, socioeconomic status, physical ability, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identification. A growing cadre of practitioners uses the "cultural strategist" or "narrative strategist" title, in departments within some of the most effective, award-winning contemporary social justice groups. Notably, with only a few exceptions, these organizations launched within the new millennium, which helps to explain their innate embrace of entertainment collaboration and creativity in the participatory digital era. This network includes Define American, Color of Change, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Pillars Fund, Caring Across Generations, National Domestic Workers Alliance, IllumiNative, the Storyline Partners collective (representing many groups in this list), Wise Entertainment, and Harness, to name exemplars that are particularly active, visible and successful, critically recognized in press coverage, and respected in entertainment ranks. They work individually and collectively, shaping and sharing norms, ideas, and experiences with one another, thus evolving their efforts to respond to each new enterprise or development that arises in the shifting realities of the streaming entertainment industry and attention economy of the contemporary mediascape. Four of these organizations are profiled later in this chapter.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Practices in Entertainment-Based Narrative Strategy

In contemporary narrative change practice in the participatory media era, we see EE's seminal foundations, theoretical underpinnings, and values, even if narrative change practitioners are not traditional scholars trained in the Sabido model with its explicit theoretical foundations—that is, social cognitive theory, emotional appeals, parasocial relationships with characters, and a call to action of some kind (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, pp. 58, 70–71). The *#PopJustice* public research and strategy report series

references Entertainment-Education as a contributing model, along with shared theoretical underpinnings, broadly focused on emotional response, relationship with characters, and entertainment value over didactic messaging. Narrative transportation, a widely adopted academic theory developed, tested, and published first by scholars Melanie Green and Timothy Brock (2000), holds that narrative storytelling is persuasive as viewers are deeply absorbed into a story world, often forgetting the real world around them. This theory also is known in this space. Even though narrative transportation was not yet identified in the Sabido model of the early 1970s, it has been incorporated in many peer-reviewed studies about narrative persuasion. Evidence of EE's focus on interpersonal and cultural conversations—sparked by storytelling—is apparent in narrative strategy by social justice organizations, which amplify and share messages and stories through social media networks to millions of followers, inviting their participation.

Ultimately, however, EE's focus on the unit of one individual entertainment story (or even a storyline carried over multiple episodes), attuned to shifting attitudes and behaviors of audiences that are explicitly targeted for intervention, is not the full focus of narrative strategy work. Instead, narrative strategists aim to create and distribute many entertainment narratives, through both formalized storytelling collaborations with Hollywood decision-makers along with self-produced and -distributed material, with the aim of shifting over time the balance of public perception and social norms about traditionally marginalized groups and social issues toward the goal of equity. The community of practice ultimately sees power in representation and positive portrayals of marginalized communities, in my own analysis advancing the concept that scholars William Flores and Rina Benmayor call "cultural citizenship," partially enabled through the pathways of media and culture: "Culture provides, then, a sense of belonging to a community, a feeling of entitlement, the energy to face everyday adversaries, and a rationale for resistance to a larger world in which members of minority groups feel like aliens in spite of being citizens" (Flores & Benmayor, 1997, p. 43).

Notably, the commercial nature and political economy of the US entertainment industry influences EE-like content and approaches in this country. Unlike present-day international EE programs, by which entertainment designed for social change often arises through funded relationships between government agencies or civil society organizations and media networks, the narrative strategy social justice organizations in the United

States operate from an understanding of their country's commercial entertainment system business model. They know that collaborations with the Hollywood community must be based on voluntary goodwill and relationships, a process that takes place through shared motivations of producers and activists, not through financial arrangements for compulsory content. What results is not entertainment storytelling produced within the explicit boundaries of the original Sabido EE model and its requirements for role-model protagonists and villains to be drawn in precise ways, but rather, broad opportunities to shape characters and stories that can promote positive new narratives and disrupt negative portrayals of people and social issues. Indeed, in their chapter within this volume, Erica Rosenthal and Kate Langrall Folb detail the processes by which this reality manifests in their work at Hollywood, Health & Society, a successful EE consultancy in the United States (Rosenthal & Folb, 2021).

Narrative strategy centers particular norms and values, some of which correspond with EE's underlying premises as a formalized methodology, while some are areas of expansion in the hands of practitioners leveraging the digital participatory media era, such as "shifting the power dynamics to ensure that members of traditionally marginalized communities are able to find seats at the decision-making table in the business of entertainment and culture; and the practice of social justice organizations self-producing and distributing original entertainment products" (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2020, pp. 157–158). Guiding values and principles of contemporary narrative strategy include the following: (1) embracing multiple genres of entertainment narrative, working across scripted drama, comedy, and reality programming; (2) working in multiple formats and media platforms, from short-form to formal entertainment vehicles of hour-long dramas or half-hour comedies, from webisodes and social media content to mainstream entertainment outlets; (3) serving multiple audiences for different purposes, from targeting broad audiences to shift views of traditionally marginalized people and issues, but also making media to build representation and solidarity for in-group marginalized populations; (4) expanding beyond individual and explicit attitude and behavior change from targeted viewers, toward broad cultural norm shifts that undergird supportive public policy; (5) centering ethics strongly around representation and the accuracy of lived experiences, favoring story creators who come from the diverse communities we see on screen; and (6) valuing the role of participatory culture, publics, and entertainment fans.

Social justice organizations that practice narrative strategy carry out one or more—sometimes all—of the following activities. They endeavor to:

Change the pipeline of culture creators. Contemporary cultural-change organizations aim to change the composition of entertainment industry storytellers to reflect a diverse group of makers and creators, understanding that the stories from these creators will be distinct from the reflections from white, male creatives who still dominate Hollywood. This activity also manifests in the form of diversity-based research reports used as industry advocacy, described below.

Influence existing storylines in big entertainment industry programming. Narrative and culture strategists work collaboratively in partnership with Hollywood writers, producers, and executives to positively shape storylines about marginalized people and social issues, from immigration to police procedure as it applies to African Americans to stereotypes of Muslims in entertainment. Groups like Color of Change, Define American, National Domestic Workers Alliance, Caring Across Generations, Muslim Public Affairs Council, and Storyline Partners all work in this fashion, with both dramatic series and comedies.

Develop and pitch new entertainment for mainstream entertainment industry distribution. Organizations including Color of Change and Define American develop and pitch new entertainment programming projects—like TV and web series—to be co-produced and distributed by mainstream entertainment industry companies and networks. These programs are developed with research produced inside the organizations themselves, or in collaboration with scholar researchers, with a keen eye toward ensuring the lived experiences of on-screen characters are deeply embedded and accurately reflected.

Create self-produced content for distribution on digital platforms, including social media. Creatively empowered social justice organizations also self-produce and distribute their own entertainment content as part of their narrative strategy work. Short-form web series, scripted and non-scripted, are made available to the organizations' wide-ranging constituents through their own YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook channels. Notably, these are explicitly produced as entertaining narratives, not didactic public service announcements.

Mobilize and pressure Hollywood to change damaging portrayals of people and social problems. Beyond their collaborative stance with the entertainment industry, many social justice organizations in the burgeoning narrative and culture change networks also shine a critical

spotlight on areas that need changing. Several groups—including IllumiNative, Color of Change, and Define American—have commissioned and produced high-level research projects to reveal underrepresented voices in entertainment, as well as damaging portrayals of issues that affect the real lives of diverse communities. They distribute these reports to entertainment industry executives and news media to generate reporting that amplifies their messages.

Act as visible thought-leaders in entertainment industry spaces. Narrative change strategy also means visibility in entertainment industry spaces, to talk publicly and privately about the need to showcase and hear underrepresented voices in entertainment. Industry showcases of diverse storytellers, as well as major industry gatherings like the Sundance Film Festival, serve as public sites of cultural intervention for narrative strategy as a practice. It's not enough, according to this premise, to change storylines one project at a time; rather, it's also vital to be part of the entertainment industry's ongoing conversations.

Four highlighted organizations, selected for inclusion here based on cultural recognition for their effective approach to social change, help to illustrate narrative change practices in greater depth: National Domestic Workers Alliance and Caring Across Generations, Color of Change, and Define American.

National Domestic Workers Alliance and Caring Across Generations

Activist Ai-jen Poo co-founded Caring Across Generations (CAG) as a campaign in 2011; by then, her steady vision and leadership had resulted in state-level policy protections for vulnerable domestic workers through the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), which she launched more than a decade ago and continues to direct (Borum Chattoo & Feldman, 2020, p. 167; Newton-Small, 2017). Poo openly places narrative and cultural strategy at the center of these efforts to provide legal rights and protections for paid and unpaid caregivers in the United States. As she relayed in a media interview, building "narrative power" is vitally important: "I think of it in terms of different forms of power to create social change. There is political power, organizing and voter engagement are part of it. There is also narrative power—the ability to tell the story of why things are the way they are and shape the public narrative," which

points a society to "a new way of being that we want to move forward" (Dubb, 2014).

Caring Across Generations and the National Domestic Workers Alliance both employ cultural strategists to direct their narrative strategy work in collaboration with Hollywood and as self-distributing entertainment producers. For instance, NDWA collaborated with Hollywood for a social change campaign focused on domestic workers as depicted through the 2018 Academy-Award-winning film "Roma" (Poo, 2019). Caring Across Generations produces entertainment programming about caregiving and caregivers, which it distributes on YouTube (Caring Across Generations, n.d.) and amplifies through social media. The team also actively pitches entertainment projects to Hollywood for full production and distribution. As a resource to Hollywood writers and producers, National Domestic Workers Alliance and Caring Across Generations participate as organizational members of Storyline Partners, a collaborative network that counsels the entertainment industry to help generate accurate, positive portrayals of marginalized groups or complex issues often rendered invisible or reduced to negative stereotypes in TV and film (Storyline Partners, n.d.).

Color of Change

Launched in 2005 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina's disproportionate devastation of African American neighborhoods and families ("Rashad Robinson, President," 2018) Color of Change bills itself as "the nation's largest online racial justice organization…. As a national online force driven by 1.7 million members, we move decision-makers in corporations and government to create a more human and less hostile world for Black people in America" (Color of Change, n.d.). Notably, Color of Change centers "Culture Change and Media Justice" as a guiding premise that not only shapes its work as a Hollywood collaborator, critic, and media producer intent on changing lives through policy but also showcases and inspires "Black joy" through entertainment (Color of Change, n.d.). Color of Change was recognized, along with Define American, as one of *Fast Company*'s "50 Most Innovative Companies" in 2020 (Farley, 2020). As executive director Rashad Robinson wrote of the organization's guiding philosophy: "Narrative infrastructure is singularly about equipping a tight network of people organizing on the ground and working within various sectors to develop strategic and powerful narrative ideas, and then,

against the odds of the imbalanced resources stacked against us, immerse people in a sustained series of narrative experiences required to enduringly change hearts, minds, behaviors, and relationships" (Robinson, 2019).

As part of its efforts, Color of Change produces its own narrative programming through its filmed podcast, *#TellBlackStories*, also distributed on YouTube and Instagram (Color of Change YouTube Channel, n.d.), pitches original entertainment storytelling content for Hollywood distribution, and partners with Hollywood producers to create and direct social change campaigns around entertainment, such as Ava DuVernay's award-winning Netflix series, *When They See Us* (Farley, 2020). The organization's Hollywood-based team not only works with mainstream entertainment producers and writers to ensure positive and accurate portrayals of Black characters across narrative storylines, but also collaborates with scholars to produce research that reveals, most recently, systematic underrepresentation of Black writers in entertainment writers' rooms (Hunt, 2017), and negative portrayals of African American characters in the popular "crime shows" genre (e.g. *Law & Order: SVU* and *Blue Bloods*) ("Normalizing Injustice," 2020). By advocating for Black communities and amplifying critical messages through news coverage (Obenson, 2020) and social media channels, the Color of Change team works to implement social change through entertainment by acting as a force for advocacy and new entertainment narratives.

Define American

Define American's origin story as an immigrant rights advocacy group begins with its founder, journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, who revealed his undocumented status in 2011 through his writing in the *New York Times* (Vargas, 2011) and in a documentary called *Documented*, which aired on CNN as part of its documentary series, CNN Films ("Documented," n.d.). The organization notably positions entertainment media engagement as its core tactic, with narrative change positioned in its mission statement: "Define American is a narrative and culture change organization that uses media and the power of storytelling to transcend politics and shift the conversation about immigrants, identity, and citizenship in a changing America" (Define American, n.d.). As the organization's managing director of creative initiatives, Elizabeth Grizzle Voorhees, explained in an interview: "In order to create public policy change, you have to change the hearts and minds of people in our country first. You can't have

effective policy change without changing culture first" (Borum Chattoo and Feldman, p. 165).

Tactically, Define American is deeply engaged with Hollywood and entertainment narratives, not only through ongoing collaborations with writers and producers to create and shape immigrant storylines—and undocumented storylines—in top entertainment media outlets, but also by creating and distributing its own entertainment stories through YouTube and social media. With a robust in-house creative team, Define American's original short-form entertainment productions feature humanizing stories and portrayals of immigrants, including through comedy, with titles like "UndocuJoy," "The Good Immigrant," and "What Would L.A. Be Like Without Immigrants?" ("Original Productions," n.d.). Notably, Define American is represented by an entertainment industry talent agency, and thus truly works in the core engine of Hollywood. Like Color of Change, Define American also respects and leverages research in narrative strategy. Its "Immigration on Television" study, which examined immigrant storylines in top scripted entertainment TV programming, also serves as a conversation point with the industry ("Immigrant Nation," n.d.). Perhaps owed to its visible work, Define American has become a go-to group for media on all things immigration, which extends the group's narrative power far beyond the bounds of any one individual entertainment story.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

The primary mission of present-day narrative change strategy as employed in the United States shares EE's original premise—that is, the desire to engage audiences in positive, entertaining messages to which they might not otherwise be exposed. Entertainment-based narrative strategists empowered by the participatory media age approach this challenge through projects that endeavor to reach audiences and invite them to participate across many media platforms and types of screens, across formats from short-form programming on Facebook and Instagram to longer traditional Hollywood-distributed programming. They work in a range of genres, including comedy, reality, and drama. By determining—through research and practice—damaging cultural narratives to change, and creating positive narratives as corrective storytelling and representation, narrative strategists aim to immerse their own communities and broader audiences in storylines that gradually help contribute to social change on

issues that center justice and equity, from racial justice to immigration policy. For narrative change strategists, engaging audiences is not about one story or episode at a time, but a constellation of consistent stories—short and long—that can help drive a shifted, broader cultural shift through public opinion and supportive public policy, aided by participating publics.

Notably, while the original stalwart academic theories in Entertainment-Education are crucial and meaningful in this work, they may not be sufficient to provide evidence for narrative change strategy's effectiveness. Because cultural-change practitioners work so deeply to amplify messages and mobilize audiences through activism and social movement models as their theories of change, in addition to their innate understanding of, and belief in, story-based influence, an opportunity exists for expanded scholarship to work alongside this community of practice—indeed, perhaps in a similar fashion as Sabido's early work, which crossed and merged lines of professional production, community deliberation practices, and social science. Narrative change strategists posit that cultural narratives disseminated through popular culture help shape public opinion that can undergird structural social change, such as public policy and corporate practices. And yet, we do not yet know through rigorous scholarly research the extent to which this premise is fully realized, at least along the lines of these particular professional endeavors. However, given learnings from cultivation theory, a seminal body of work that helps us to understand the ways in which consistent media portrayals of people and issues can impact public perception over time—alongside studies in participatory culture—research directions are promising and exciting. Traditional EE theories alone, then, with an audience effects orientation at the unit of the individual story, do not necessarily account for this broader question, even as academic EE scholarship continues to provide evidence for the uniquely persuasive influence of entertainment stories. Tackling this complicated set of questions points to future innovation and collaboration between practitioners and researchers (and those of us who work across both arenas as engaged scholars).

In related fashion, additional research can help us to explore and develop new insights and evidence about the relative influence of particular narrative genres, and of stories produced outside the precise confines of a Sabido model approach. Ideally, scholarly journals and reviewers will more readily embrace a mix of qualitative and quantitative research about this kind of programming, accepting the limitations that naturally exist for

experimental design when two narrative approaches are not precisely equivalent. Otherwise, this dynamic body of contemporary entertainment strategy practice will be unexamined in academic research, and formal Entertainment-Education scholarship will continue in its original path while this promising area of social change activism continues, leaving many assumptions untested and questions unanswered.

As practices evolve in the continuing evolution of the participatory media age, entertainment-based narrative strategy in the United States points to imperatives about what works, and what is promising, in this body of work. Successful narrative strategy implementation requires ongoing, deep, strong collaborative relationships with entertainment industry decision-makers. Narrative strategists act as both creative producers and allies to entertainment industry executives who share their interest in reflecting diverse social change stories. This matters for developing individual storylines embedded in existing programs and also for having the ready access to co-create, distribute, and promote new programming together. For emerging professionals who hope to work in this arena, a sophisticated understanding of the transforming entertainment industry is crucial. Research and activism can be optimally put to work for social change through entertainment storytelling when narrative change practitioners understand the protocol and norms of the industry's creative development, production, distribution, and marketing practices, along with a willingness and ability to pay close attention to topic trends and leverage them opportunistically. True collaboration and a positive trajectory for narrative change strategy and research emerge through shared respect across disparate sectors with distinct missions and ways of doing business, building upon the foundation of Entertainment-Education while opening the space for necessary innovation and creativity in a wildly transforming networked media age.

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