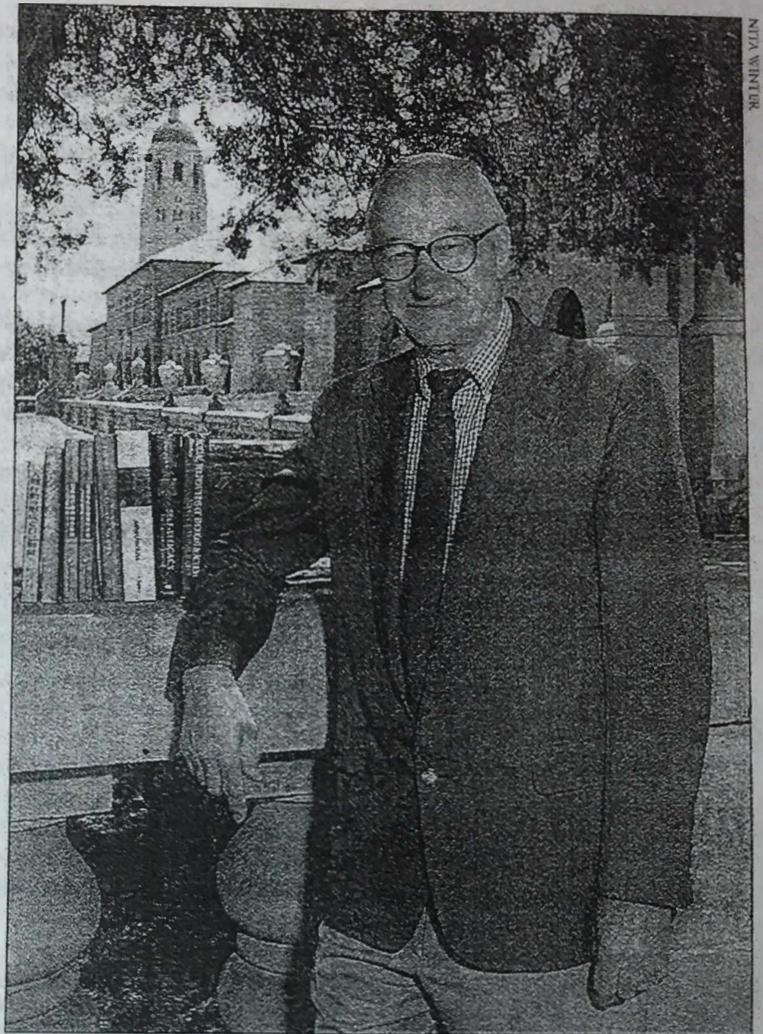


The theory heard 'round the world

Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory is the foundation of television and radio shows that have changed the lives of millions.



"We study extensively how media affect attitudes and values," says Dr. Albert Bandura. "We need to expand the analysis of media effects and use the media to connect people to social networks and social settings that provide powerful continuing support and guidance."

BY DEBORAH SMITH
Monitor staff

When the radio drama "Twende na Wakati," or "Let's Go with the Times," began airing in 1993 in parts of Tanzania, myths about HIV and AIDS abounded, including that HIV was transmitted through mosquitoes and having sex with a condom could cause the virus.

Two years later, Tanzanians were more likely to believe that unprotected sex could result in HIV infection, talked more about AIDS, reduced their number of sexual partners and increased condom use. Moreover, they reported a decreased desired number of children, a higher ideal age of marriage for women and increased approval of family plan-

ning methods—all this while those in other parts of Tanzania without the drama showed no changes.

Did "Twende na Wakati" cause the changes? Most definitely, says University of New Mexico communications researcher Everett Rogers, PhD, who studied the drama's effects. While the radio program featured a compelling story line, its underlying purpose was to encourage HIV prevention and reduce soaring population growth. And "Twende na Wakati" did just that, thanks to the theories of Stanford University psychologist Albert Bandura, PhD.

Entertainment education

Bandura's social cognitive theory—that people learn from role models whose

behavior they wish to emulate—is at the center of a genre of such television and radio dramas, which aim to prevent unwanted pregnancies, reduce the spread of HIV, promote literacy, empower women in third-world countries and increase viewers' self-efficacy.

These "entertainment-education" programs reach millions around the world, from Mexico to China, to Tanzania; and feature characters who model ways to improve their lives. They also connect viewers with real-life services in their communities, all with the ultimate goal of fostering viewers' self-efficacy to, for example, promote the value of girls in China or encourage environmental responsibility in the Caribbean.

And scientific studies show that they

work: When "Twende na Wakati" was broadcast in the former control areas of Tanzania in 1996, researchers again found increases in safe sex, women's status and family planning. Moreover, entertainment-education programs are often more popular than regular dramas.

"Here's an example of a theory that has been utilized in a practical context to address problems that national governments face—serious problems such as population size, issues of gender, literacy—and addresses them in a way that you can get the most mileage out of these programs," says Arvind Singhal, Ph.D., a Ohio University professor and communications researcher who examines the dramas' effects.

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Fortuitous beginnings

Look no further for a powerful example of how psychology is making a difference in the world. These dramas capitalize on psychologists' knowledge of the powerful—and sometimes scary—influences television can have on children and adults. But instead of applying psychological principles to market hamburgers or video games, entertainment-education programs are promoting solutions to some of the world's most urgent problems. However, it's an idea that may never have been developed without some help from outside of the field.

In 1975, Mexican television executive Miguel Sabido created the soap opera "Ven Conmigo," or "Come with Me," to entertain and promote adult literacy. The plot centered around the lives of adults enrolled in a literacy class. "Ven Conmigo" was a huge success: Not only did the show draw large audiences, but new enrollments in adult literacy programs were nine times greater the year "Ven Conmigo" aired than the previous year. After one episode mentioned the national distribution center that provided free literacy booklets, 25,000 people showed up the next day to get their copies.

Sabido contacted Bandura, explaining that he was using Bandura's work on modeling and social learning to produce "Ven Conmigo," and then showed him episodes from the drama.

"I looked at the videotapes, and thought this is a remarkably creative implementation of theory into practice," Bandura remembers. "I was amazed at the ingenuity." With no psychology training, Sabido had figured out how to apply Bandura's theories to the real world: He had created a compelling TV drama that persuaded viewers and modeled concrete steps to literacy.

Over the next several years, Sabido refined his entertainment-education methodology and created several more dramas to address Mexico's most pressing social issues. He then linked with the nonprofit group Populations Communications International (PCI) to distribute his model worldwide.

"Since then, there have been hundreds of sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters of these original efforts," says Rogers, who is now studying HIV-prevention efforts in Africa, Thailand and India that also use Bandura's social cognitive theory, such as street theater and comic books.

PCI's method

"Bandura is the philosopher king of what we do," says Sonny Fox, senior vice president of PCI's U.S. branch, which runs workshops in the United States and around the world to show television executives and writers how to use Sabido and Bandura's strategies to create programs that model positive change. Those strategies include:



Scenes from the Chinese television drama "Bai Xing" ("Ordinary People"). "Bai Xing" promotes small family ideals, the value of girl children and women's empowerment. It has won several major Chinese television awards.

- **Extensive formative research.** The first step in developing a serial drama—before an actor is hired or a script is written—is to talk with a country's government officials, religious leaders, health providers, television or radio leaders, and the general public to determine the prosocial behaviors that should be modeled. The dramas use local script writers who speak the language and are aware of the sociocultural milieu, and the production team monitors a drama while it airs to see if any adjustments are needed.

- **Crafted characters.** The dramas feature ordinary people facing everyday challenges. Characters fall into one of three categories: Positive role models whose behavior results in good things,

negative role models whose behavior has adverse effects, and transitional models who start out negatively but turn into positive role models by the end. Characters don't preach about family planning or HIV-prevention methods. Instead, their actions and consequences speak for themselves.

For example, in "Twende na Wakati," Mkwaju, is a promiscuous long-distance truck driver whose wife, Tunu, tolerates her husband's unfaithfulness and alcoholism at first, but eventually leaves him and, with help from the community, starts her own business to support her children. Mkwaju contracts HIV and suffers from AIDS, while Tunu's hard work pays off, and she becomes a successful business woman.

• **Real-world connections.** At the end of each entertainment-education episode, the lessons learned are summarized in an epilogue, often given by a celebrity. For instance, the Indian television drama "Hum Log" featured 60-second epilogues by Ashok Kumar, a Hindi actor who once said that "Hum

Log" did more for his popularity than 50 years of film acting. The actor's explanation was followed by, for example, the names and addresses of health clinics where viewers could get help.

"We are using the media not only to inform, enable and motivate people, but also to link them to resources in the community that will provide them with continuing support and guidance," Bandura explains.

Lasting legacy

With an annual budget of \$4.6 million, PCJ continues to produce entertainment-education projects around the world, including in Bolivia, the Caribbean, China, Pakistan and the Philippines. The shows draw large, dedicated audiences who love their everyday heroes and heroines, and disapprove of the negative characters' actions. For instance, the actor who played Mkwaju on "Twende na Wakati" was once chased out of a vegetable market by a group of women who disapproved of his character's choices.

The nonprofit also continues to

evaluate the effects of its shows—and the numbers are still convincing. In India, an entire village signed a letter to the "Tinka Tinka Sukh" ("Happiness Lies in Small Things") broadcast center, saying that the drama had persuaded them to work to stop the practice of dowry and child marriages in their village. When PCI researchers visited the village, they found the enrollment of girls in elementary and junior high schools had risen from 10 to 38 percent, and, indeed, several marriages had taken place without dowry payments.

Such results, says Bandura, should teach psychology a lesson.

"The problem we have in psychology is that we don't profit from our successes," says Bandura. "We construct theories and clarify how they produce their effects, but we lack implementation models for translating theory into effective practice." There's also a lack of social diffusion models to promote the widespread adoption of those effective practices, he adds.

Sabido and PCI, Bandura says, provided those links between his work and the rest of the world. ♪

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