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ABSTRACT

Defining "taboos" as laws, norms, or personal beliefs specifying situations in which behaviors or topics should not be performed or communicated about, this paper provides a conceptual and theoretical communication perspective governing the movement of taboos in social change situations. Applying Joseph Woelfel's message-oriented linear force aggregation theory to taboos, the paper provides a theoretical rationale for five methods of taboo removal: relabeling the taboo, offering "diffuser" incentives, legalizing it, promoting the idea of popular approval of it, and creating a festive atmosphere around it. The paper also discusses ways in which mass media antitaboo campaigns can overcome the barriers that seem to mitigate media effects, and it concludes with a list of five hypotheses to test the role of the media in taboo-reducing campaigns. (Author/FL)

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Theory and Methodology Division

# THE MOVEMENT OF TABOOS: A MESSAGE-ORIENTED APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This paper provides a conceptual and theoretic communication perspective governing the movement of taboos in social change situations. Taboos are defined as laws, norms, or personal beliefs specifying situations in which behaviors or topics should not be performed and/or communicated about. The perspective applied to taboos is Woelfel's Message-oriented Linear Force Aggregation Theory. The paper demonstrates how the application of this theory to taboos provides a theoretic rationale for the recommendations and methods, offered by other researchers, for the removal of taboos. The paper also specifies how mass media anti-taboo campaigns can overcome the barriers which some media researchers believe serve to mitigate media effects. Hypotheses testing the role of the media in campaigns designed to reduce taboos are offered.

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# THE MOVEMENT OF TABOOS: A MESSAGE-ORIENTED APPROACH

## INTRODUCTION

Taboos can protect but can also destroy. They can help maintain a society's stability or can break down its social fabric. When backward-oriented, they retard social change and development as well as individual growth and psychological comfort. Given the need for often rapid changes in (e.g., procreative) behaviors, attitudes, and values, an understanding of this impediment has much practical utility. An attempt will be made here to come to grips with taboos so that ultimately control over them will be possible. The perspective taken will be communication-oriented as it is assumed that (1) messages move minds and (2) through communication, taboos are eliminated and change made possible. Further, emphasis will be on mass communications because such media offer rapid and efficient access to societies and their peoples.

This paper will provide a framework for the concept by defining it and offering a typology of situations involving it. Following this general orientation, emphasis will be placed on social change situations in which taboos are present. Methods of dealing with societal taboos will be discussed and analyzed, with the role of the media in this process examined. Based on the perspective developed throughout the paper, predictions about the relationship between taboos, messages, and attitudinal and behavioral changes will be offered.

## DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT

Definitions not only set boundaries delineating concepts but also serve as guidelines suggesting operationalizations and relationships with other concepts. What one looks for, and how one goes about looking for it, is at least somewhat determined by the concept's constitutive definition. Given this dual function, one's selection or development of a concept's definition is an extremely important task in the research process.

Earlier formulations of taboo were found to be either reflections of di ferent disciplines stimulating non-communication-oriented research or too narrow in scope, eliminating much of what might be considered taboo.

Freud's statement (1913/1946) that taboos are prohibitions "for which there exists a strong inclination in the unconscious" (p. 44) is indicative of his interest in man's psychological states. The definition pushes one to think about drives and desires which either have been repressed, sublimated or otherwise manipulated within one's psyche. While Freud often talks about societal taboos, his unit of analysis clearly is the individual. Further, given the unconscious ambivalence toward taboo behaviors, ascertaining valid responses from individuals would seem to require a substantial period of time and effort-something akin to therapeutic sessions. While this researcher believes that the ambivalence argument is at least an interesting one, the overall perspective does not lend itself well to societal change situations.

More behaviorally-oriented is Hutton Webster's definition of taboo as a "specific series of thou-shalt-nots . . . which, when violated, produce automatically in the offender a state of ritual disability - "taboo sickness" -

only relieved, when relief is possible, by a ceremony of purification" (Webster, 1942, pp. vii-viii). Here, results of such transgressions are observable--one gets hurt, ill, dies or offers repentance. While the term "ceremony of purification" seems out of place in today's society, it can be interpreted to refer to apologies, e.g., "Oh, excuse me! I didn't mean to offend you. I assure you it won't happen again!" However, the types of disabilities (occurring in primitive societies) covered by Webster do not seem applicable today; embarrassment is probably the modal reaction upon realization that one has committed (or is caught committing) such a faux pax. In short, while Webster's definition fits well when looking at norms in primitive societies, it is less useful when related to codified laws and to more developed, rational, knowledge-oriented cultures.

An approach that explicitly deals with communication is offered by Rogers (1973). He defines taboo communication as "that category of message transfer in which the messages are perceived as extremely private and personal in nature" (p. 62). While the focus is on the transfer of messages, the thrust of research determining taboo situations would deal with internal cognitive and affect states of the source and the receiver. Thus, the criterion for taboo is not what is done or not done but how the participants feel about the discussion of certain topics. This leads directly to the first limitation of this definition. Rogers' specification that "it is the <u>perceptions</u> of the source and receiver which determine whether a message is taboo or not" (p. 62) implies congruence of beliefs and attitudes as a necessary condition for the existence of taboos. This not only excludes situations where only the source or receiver perceives the message as private but also raises the issue of what "agreement" equals. The second shortcoming deals

with Rogers' deliberate restriction to only communicative taboos, thus ignoring behaviors that one can talk about yet should not perform. Such a restriction is seen as undesirable in any general definition of taboo. Although Rogers' definition can be modified to include behavioral taboos (taboos would then be those categories of behaviors and message transfers which are perceived as extremely personal and private in nature), the emphasis would still be on states that are not directly observable. Further, while such a definition allows taboos to be situationally specific, it excludes behaviors that one wouldn't or shouldn't perform which make no sense when related to a privacy dimension, e.g., laughing at a funeral.

The final definition offered is one that comes closest to satisfying this researcher's perspective and interests. Faherty (1972) states that "tabu" usually refers to "actions barred by rules of manners or morals rather than law; i.e., by social convention in which there are nonrational elements" (p. 598). Here, we are dealing with behaviors and their attitudinal counterparts. The definition suggests that the lists of taboos in one society or subculture need not be identical with their counterparts in other such collectivities. Further, there is no sense of rigidity here; one can think about movements in the attitudes and ultimately in the taboos. This assumption is what a change-oriented social scientist would begin with. Finally, unlike Webster's definition, this is not bound by time or type of society. However, Faherty's conceptualization is limited by its exclusion of actions barred by laws. Under this definition, abortion, killing, rape, polygamy, etc., would not be considered taboo in societies where formal laws prohibit such actions.

Before proceeding with the definition to be used throughout the rest of this paper, the reader should be familiarized with this researcher's

perspective of the concept and the correpsonding criteria that he feels the definition should meet. What follows is an attempt to provide such information.

Taboos are seen as (1) behavioral and/or communicative, (2) societal, group, or person specific, and (3) bound by situation, time, and the referent of the message. Assuming for the moment that taboos are some form of "thou-shalt-nots" let us explore what is meant by the previous statement.

(1) Behavioral taboos are those actions which should not be performed but can be communicated about. For example, if one walked around nude in New York City for a period of time long enough for a policeman to spot him or her, that person would be arrested for indecent exposure. On the other hand, nudity often is an acceptable topic of conversation at cocktail parties, bars, and probably on the very same streets that the nudist would be arrested.

Communicative taboos are those where legal and/or moral actions are regarded as illegal or improper topics of conversation. One is allowed, indeed, encouraged to make love with one's spouse. Should the spouse find out however that his or her lovemaking has been graphically depicted to others, there is likely to be much ado in that household when the two subsequently meet!

The third type of taboo is both behavioral and communicative; one neither performs the act nor talks about it. It would, for instance, be considered in poor taste either to flatulate in public or talk about flatulation. One with more serious implications and widespread ramifications is the practice of family planning. In some countries, it is not only ethically wrong to try to control one's procreative behaviors but also improper to talk about such controls. It is reported that in some villages, punishment resulting from the discussion of such "indelicate" topics could take the form of hostility, and physical beatings. (Marshall, 1971)

(2) Taboos can exist on universal, societal or subsocietal levels. This researcher would be hard pressed if asked which taboos are universal. Freud might say incest. Perhaps sexual intercourse is taboo on the communicative level. The question is an empirical one. Those who have traveled abroad undoubtedly have had experiences which illustrate the notion of a topic or behavior perceived as taboo in one land and not in another. For example, while most of us in American are hesitant to talk about our finances, in India, a stranger is very quickly asked what his or her salary is. On the individual level, almost anything could be taboo.

(3) During the discussion of the preceding two points, the reader might have felt the need for qualifiers when specific taboos were mentioned. One might have said that nudity is acceptable at nudist camps, that swingers might enjoy hearing about how they or their spouse performed with others, or that with same sex friends in certain environments (e.g., the locker room) flatulation, while not necessarily encouraged, is acceptable. These qualifiers are valid and acknowledged as such when it is stated that taboos are bound by certain dimensions. The examples just mentioned illustrate the situational specificity of taboos; what is acceptable in one situation is not in another. Behaviors or communications can be defined or redefined as taboo based on the participants or the setting. Such boundedness not only holds for taboos involving personal morality but also for legislated ones as well. Sex education is illegal in the classrooms in Michigan but encouraged within the home environment. All that is being altered are the participants (parents instead of teachers) and the setting (the living room instead of the classroom).

Over time, morality and legislation change. As they change, so do taboos. What was risque in the 1950's is passé in the 1970's--witness the diminishing size of women's bathing suits, the increasing range of topics dealt with on prime-time television, and the shift to the legalization of abortion.

The last point to be covered at this juncture deals with the relationship between the referent and the tabooness of the message. Rogers classifies messages in terms of the personalness of the referent; messages either disclose a general interest or a personal involvement in a topic. It is posited that when certain topics are discussed on a general level, they are perceived as less taboo than when the source discloses personal experiences in relation to the topic. Talking about suicide, homosexuality, mental illness or drug addiction often becomes much more delicate when the source begins to talk about his or her own addiction or homosexual encounters.

Given the perspective outlined above, a definition of taboo should

(1) encompass behavioral and communicative restrictions, be they based on moral or legal foundations

(2) have no temporal or situational restrictions, allowing for movement and situational specificity

(3) be generalizable in terms of the unit of analysis, permitting focus on societies, cultures, groups, or individuals

(4) allow for the analysis of historical or contemporary prohibitions

(5) methodologically, allow for direct and indirect (e.g., paper and pencil attitude questionnaires) measurement.

With all this in mind, taboo is defined here as a law, norm, or personal belief specifying situations in which a behavior or topic should not be performed and/or communicated about. What follows is an examination of the relationship between this definition and the criteria suggested.

The definition, by fiat, encompasses behavioral and communicative proscriptions, be they formal (e.g., laws) or informal (e.g., folkways). This satisfies the first criterion. Turning to criterion two, we can see that there has been no mention of permanence. While the definition does not specify that taboos can be created or destroyed, there is no sense of inflexibility once they exist. The definition allows for process, crucial for anyone interested in developing theories of social change. As such, criterion two appears to be met.

In stating that taboos can be laws, norms, or personal beliefs, we permit the acceptance of sanctions which are normative or individual in origin. This allows a flexible focal point of analysis and permits the various disciplines in the social sciences to study their particular interests yet still proceed from the same point of origin. Thus, the psychologist can look at the effects of taboos on the individual, the sociologist can look at how cultures develop, adapt to, and remove taboos, the anthropologist can look at the ethnology of taboos, and the communicologist can look at the role of messages in defining and redefining taboo situations. Criteria three and four appear to be satisfied.

Finally, to empirically test any propositions generated, the concept must be conducive to operationalization. While cognitive and attitude scaling are two important indicators of individual and group perceptions of concepts, given (1) the lack of isomorphism between knowledge, attitudes and practices (the "KAP-Gap") so prevalent in the diffusion research, and (2) the interest

in behavioral changes, behavioral measures are seen as essential in the testing of the hypotheses developed. This conceptualization of taboo allows for measures tapping changes in attitudes as well as in behaviors.

It can be seen that the definition satisfies the criteria employed.

## A SITUATIONAL TYPOLOGY OF TABOOS

While the notion of taboo might be further classified into subcategories of taboo, such distinctions in general vary with the intentions of the investigator who makes them, and are not inherent to the character of taboo. (Brown, 1972) Consequently, no such generic classification scheme is presented here. It is useful for our purposes, however, to consider distinctions in terms of the interaction settings that taboos are found in.

TABLE I

SITUATIONS INVOLVING TABOOS

| Participant | Participant's Perceptions of the Behavior or Topic | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV |
| A | Taboo | Not Taboo | Not Taboo | Taboo |
| B | Taboo | Not Taboo | Taboo | Not Taboo |

First, it should be noted that the typology reflects this researcher's perspective of communication as a phenomenon occurring between people; self-reflective activities fall outside the locus of concern. Emphasis is placed on the message component (if present) between A and B, and the resulting alterations in cognitive states and behaviors. Second, a clarification of the terms "Taboo" and "Not Taboo" is needed. The paradigm suggests a dichotomy of behaviors and topics into those prohibited or not prohibited. On a

situation specific level (e.g., with a friend, an acquaintance, a stranger, in one's home, etc.) this is the case. Acts are either permitted or proscribed. The paradigm offered, while not specifying any particular situation, is dealing with two parties in any one given situation. If we were to go beyond individual situations, certain behaviors could be seen as more taboo than others (e.g., they are taboo in more situations), thus allowing such behaviors to be placed on a taboo continuum. Third, columns III and IV are seen as substitutable. Finally, A and B are labels for the participants in the interaction. As such, they each can refer to an individual, group, organization (e.g., change agency or government), or society. A and B do not have to be on the same level. Let us now examine the columns in the typology.

In columns I and II, there are no internal forces for change. However, whereas in column I the attitudinal congruity either stabilizes or reinforces the taboo, the congruity in column II either stabilizes or reinforces the non-tabooness of the behavior or topic.

In columns III and IV, there are internal forces for change. It is here that change is possible, often takes place, and always involves communication. Focusing on column III, let us assume that A attempts to communicate or do something which A perceives as permissible. Given B's attitudes, when this occurs, B will verbally and/or non-verbally rebuff A. Such resistance informs A of the discrepancy between the participants' attitudes about the behavior or topic. While there are a number of options A can pursue, this researcher is interested in those cases where A attempts to persuade B that X is not taboo.

A's persuasion strategy would vary according to whether A and B both were individuals or representative of some collection of individuals.

For example, if A and B both were individuals, A only would have to convince one person to get the desired change and could tailor his or her strategy to B's idiosyncratic self. On the other hand, if A was an individual and B represented a group, A would be forced to deal not only with the individuals within the group and their individual values but also the norms established by the group as a whole. The task is seen as increasingly difficult as one tries to redefine a taboo for larger and larger collectivities. A could also represent a government or change agency. In this case, we have a collection of individuals with the potential power and resources to move its B counterpart.

The remainder of this paper will focus on situations in which A represents a government or change agency and B represents the peoples of that country. (The hypotheses developed should be applicable to all units of A's and B's.) Such situations are explored in part because of this researcher's interest in social progress as well as his belief that for many of the backward-oriented, harmful taboos existing today, top-down change appears to be the only way in which the taboos can be eliminated. Given this perspective, a good deal of the recent research in the area of the diffusion of innovations will be embraced. It should be noted however that while there is an overlap between governmental or change agency attempts to remove taboos and the diffusion of certain types of innovations (e.g., taboos associated with family planning and birth controls), the two areas are not isomorphic with each other. Figure 1 should serve to illustrate this point.

In a subsequent section of this paper, methods of reducing societal taboos will be examined. Because the movement of taboos falls within the area of persuasion and attitude change, a general theory of attitude change

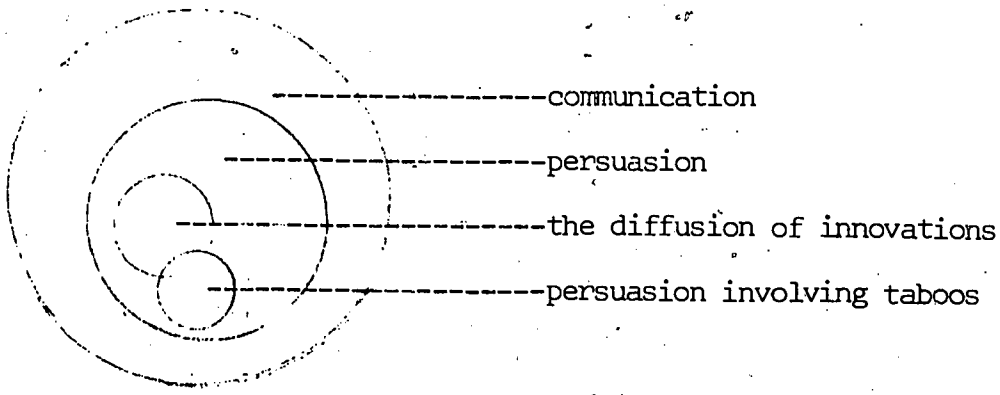


FIGURE I. LOCATING PERSUASION INVOLVING TABOOS

will form the underlying framework for this analysis. Since any theory selected will have a temendous impact on the perceptions and interpretations of the information to be analyzed, the choice of theory should be based on its ability to deal with the issues confronting the researcher. What follows is the selection of the theoretical perspective to be taken.

## SELECTION OF A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

When trying to induce attitudinal or behavioral changes, the change agent must deal with two issues: (1) what sorts of messages are needed to create the changes? and (2) how many messages are needed? The agent must decide on the type of persuasive appeal to use; those perceived (or determined) to most effectively initiate the desired change will be chosen. However, the selection of arguments and message formation is only part of the strategy that must be developed. While the messages chosen must be appropriate, if they are not presented often enough, and over a long enough period of time, their impact might be minimal. For this reason, the <u>intensity</u> and <u>duration</u> of a persuasive campaign are seen as equally crucial.

Given the argument leveled above, the model of attitude/behavior change which will be used to predict movements of taboos must be one which can

adequately deal the type and number of messages issued. One message-oriented theory of attitude/behavior change appears to meet these criteria.

Taking an essentially mechanistic view of man, Woelfel's Linear Force Aggregation Theory (Saltiel and Woelfel, 1975) posits that one's attitude tends to converge on the arithmetic mean of the positions represented in the messages a person receives about the object, concept, idea or behavior under consideration. It further posits that attitude change occurs when there is a shift in the mean of the messages received. Thus, in order for attitude change to take place, one must receive additional, divergent messages.

While this theory is not concerned with cognitions as causes of attitudinal changes, it is able to suggest to the manipulator the types of arguments needed to create changes in cognitive states. Stated simply, the strategy is to introduce messages which state the position desired by the persuader.

Turning to the second criterion, we need to focus on a key element in Woelfel's theory--the concept "mass." Woelfel posits that the rate of attitude change is inversely proportional to the inertial mass of the object under consideration, with inertial mass defined in terms of the number of messages previously received about the object. If one were to have already received many messages about an object, attempts to change that attitude would require more new messages than if the attitude was based on only a few messages received in the past. Thus, in response to the "how many messages" question, the theory suggests that the number of messages needed will be proportionate to the number previously received which formed the foundation of the existing attitude.

While this message approach appears to satisfy criterion two, one serious confounding factor must be considered. Taboo behaviors and communications are by definition those which are not performed or discussed. While this does not mean that they are never done or talked about (recall the discussion of their person and situation specificity), they are often not the sort of actions that one engages in daily, or even sporadically. Thus, when trying to determine an inertial mass, one might come up with responses indicating little or no performance or discussion of the object in the specified time period. (For example, this researcher, in attempting to ascertain the foundations of attitudes about birth planning, found that a majority of the respondents had no recollection of birth planning mentioned on the media or discussed with family or friends.) From such findings, one is likely to conclude that the inertial mass of the respondents' attitudes toward object was very small, suggesting rapid movement of the attitude when several new messages are introduced. While this might be the case for some taboos, based on the lack of success many family planning efforts are having in moving people's perceptions of the tabooness of the behavior and communications about it, this researcher feels such a conclusion unwarrented. It may be that messages about taboos take a different form than non-taboos, e.g., constantly not doing or saying certain things in specific situations could serve to reinforce one's perception of the prohibition of these (non) acts.

To sum up this section, Woelfel's Linear Force Aggregation Theory appears to meet the two criteria dealing with predictive utility specified by this researcher. While some doubt was cast about the applicability of the operationalization of "inertial mass" to the study of taboos, pre-testing with a sample from whatever population is under consideration ought to determine

the number of messages needed to move that population to the desired attitudinal or behavioral position.

## STRATEGIES FOR THE MOVEMENT OF TABOOS

While there has been little empirical research dealing with the movement of taboos, methods for their removal have been suggested. Rogers recommends a number of techniques based on historical and field observations.[1] Five of these will be reviewed as well as analyzed in terms of Woelfel's theory. The strategies to be dealt with are: (1) re-labeling the taboo, (2) offering "diffuser" incentives, (3) legalizing the taboo, (4) promoting the idea that everyone's doing it, and (5) creating a festive spirit surrounding the behavior.

### Re-labeling the Taboo

Here, the basic premise is that message symbols used in describing an action or concept play a role in one's perception of the object. If the words depicting the object have a negative connotation, then the object itself will be perceived negatively. Given this relationship, Rogers (1973a) states that "taboo communication can be facilitated by re-labeling the taboo topic with different word-symbols" (p. 250). The following two examples should illustrate both the relationship and the strategy.

Reportedly named after Dr. Condom, the court physician to Charles II, the condom is perceived by many as "repulsive." The result of that, and similar connotations is an aversion to their usage by many segments of various

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[1]These recommendations were offered in personal discussions and class handouts on the issue.

societies. In an effort to obtain more extensive use of this type of contraceptive, the government of India in 1968 began to promote the condom under the empirically determined more neutral term "Nirodh." It was hoped that the new term would be able to evoke a more favorable image of the product. Apparently it did as purchases of "Nirodhs" increased from 1.5 to 6.0 million per month from 1970 to 1971. While such a switch in behavior occurred simultaneously with a massive campaign pushing the "new" product in particular and family planning in general, at least some of the increase appears to be attributable to the re-labeling of the term condom to one more socially acceptable.

The second example is more speculative, focusing on the amnesty dilemma facing the United States. At stake are the lives of thousands of men who either refused induction into the armed services in the 1960's and 1970's or left the service before their required period of servitude expired. There are four terms for these men, two for each of the opposing camps on the issue. For those who feel that the war in Vietnam was illegal and/or immoral, the men who refused to represent our nation are "conscientious objectors" or "draft resistors." For those who feel that every fit man should serve, those who refused induction are "draft dodgers" or "draft evaders." One's definition of the situation appears to be related to one's view of the men and the term most suitable for them. There is a stigma attached to "dodger" or "evader"; in this land, the evasion of responsibilities is a normative (and oftentimes legal) taboo. If re-labeling helps diminish a taboo, then it is hypothesized that the usage of either the "conscientious objector" or "draft resister" label will result in an increased acceptance of the actions these men took and a call for their repatriation without punishment.

The above illustrations deal with attitudes toward behaviors, not communications. As such, it would appear that Rogers' generalization is applicable to behaviors as well as communicative acts. Thus, we have the following generalization: Taboos can be reduced or removed by re-labeling the behavior or communication about some action with word-symbols which have neutral or positive connotations. (For those who doubt the effects of re-labeling communicative acts, ask yourself how you would react if you heard that your spouse spent the day engaged in theraputic communication when all he or she did was gossip!)

An integral part of Linear Force Aggregation Theory is the notion of mass, with each object's massiveness (1) equal to the amount of information received about it, and (2) inversely related to its movability. When one re-labels an object with word-symbols not often used (e.g., Nirodh), the mass of the attitude toward these new symbols will be minimal. Therefore, a small(er) number of messages will be needed to move the attitude toward these symbols (and the object itself) in a positive or non-taboo direction. If one re-labeled the object with symbols used often and carrying a positive loading, then no new messages would be needed to reduce the taboo. In this sense, the theory fits. Left unanswered however is the question of the number of messages needed to re-label the taboo. In the Nirodh effort, thousands of messages were broadcast. What is not indicated is the number needed to re-label that taboo and the number which remained and served to propel people to buy the re-labeled product.

Offering "Diffuser" Incentives

Incentives, defined as "those objects of financial value that are given by an organization to an individual, couple, or group, in order to

encourage some overt behavioral change" (Rogers, 1971a, p. 241) have been the focus of study for experimentally-oriented attitude change theorists as well as field-oriented diffusion of innovation experts. Be the interest theoretical or pragmatic (e.g., getting an innovation diffused), incentives are offered to encourage behaviors that ordinarily would not take place. In the case of diffuser incentives, the goal is the opening of restricted communication channels.

Much of the diffusion research dealing with this type of incentive has focused on the spread of family planning ideas and methods. The slope of the diffusion curve for these innovations is very slight; despite many years pushing family planning, a majority of the target populations have not been moved. The innovation's behavioral and communicative taboos are regarded as a major factor influencing this slow rate of adoption. Diffusion requires free, unrestricted information flows; the nature of family planning innovations restricts the networks which can carry such messages.

Change agencies have attempted to overcome this communication barrier by offering people (preferably those who already adopted) cash or "in kind" rewards for diffusing the innovation. While the quality of the decision to adopt is often low (due to pressures applied to potential adopters by those paid agents), analysis of family planning adoption rates in India, as well as several other countries, points to a positive correlation between the use of diffuser incentives and the rate of adoption of the innovation.

Given such findings, one is tempted to generalize that the use of diffuser incentives is directly related to a decrease in the tabooness of the communicative act under study. However, other findings by the same researchers yield a note of caution. For example, a state in India, Tamilnadu, offered diffuser incentives for a period of years and found them to be successful in

promoting the diffusion of vasectomies. The government then dropped the incentive "on the assumption that by that time a sufficient number of people were informed of the innovation and so its diffusion would continue without the incentive payments. However, the rate of vasectomy adoption dropped so alarmingly that within six months the state government reinstated the diffusion incentive" (Rogers, 1971a, p. 245). The attitude toward the tabooness of vasectomies or communicating about them apparently never changed.

A reasonable explanation of the phenomenon is that attitude change did take place but that subsequent to the removal of the incentives, attitudes toward vasectomies and communication about them reverted to their original positions. This position is consistent with Woelfel's point that attitudes are always moving based on the messages impinging on the individual. When incentives are offered, individuals are receiving the message "It's OK to talk about family planning. In fact, it's so desirable that we're encouraging it by offering you money to talk about it." When this message was constantly received, the topic's tabooness was reduced. However, when the incentive offer was discontinued, the "Don't talk about it or practice it!" messages again were predominant, thus moving the attitude back to a more taboo position. Given that the attitudes of those paid diffusers were not measured at several points in time, the argument presented above is speculative. However, it does seem reasonable and could be empirically tested in the future.

Legalizing the Taboo

The idea that legalization leads to loss of taboo while elegant in its simplicity is in some cases also simply inaccurate. If a prohibition is based solely on its illegality, removal of the restrictions outlawing the

behavior should remove the taboo. When the law is altered, those initially afraid to engage in a behavior because of its illegality will no longer be under such a threat and should begin to perform the behavior. However, if the taboo has both legal and moral foundations, removal of the legal barrier need not necessarily, either immediately or ever, reduce the normative sanction.

The shortcoming of the legislation strategy can be readily demonstrated. Until recently, abortions were legally proscribed. For many, such actions were also regarded as immoral. When abortion was legalized, the number of (reported) abortions increased. However, for many subsets of our society, e.g., representatives and followers of the Catholic church, abortions were still proscribed. For those who perceived legality and morality to be out of synch, the legal permissibility of the action resulted in increased vocal opposition to the behavior. It is hypothesized that such reactions are generalizable: legalization of a behavior that is normatively or morally proscribed will result in the increased occurrence of the behavior (or more openness about it) for those predisposed toward it, and continued opposition to it from those who view the behavior as violating normative values.

Despite the relationship posited above, this researcher is not ready to casually cast aside this method of reducing taboos. It is felt that legalization can have immediate boomerang effects (e.g., protests and demonstrations). However, unless such protests result in modification of a country's constitution such that the new law is rescinded, <u>over time</u>, attitudes should bend toward acceptance of the laws of the land. Further, generations born under the revised law will not experience the change and will grow up viewing the one-time controversial behavior as not controversial--and as permissible. In the socialization process, we are taught what is "right" and what is "wrong."

For those socialized after the initial furor, (in this case) abortions will be seen as just another reason why people like "mommy" go to the doctor or the hospital.

In summary, legalization of taboos can serve as a vehicle in reducing the tabooness of proscribed behaviors in a limited number of situations. However, if one is not concerned with rapid and dramatic decreases in tabooness, such a strategy is viable.

Woelfel's perspective seems capable of explaining the changes described above. It was stated that legalization of a taboo which also had normative foundations would successfully reduce or remove a taboo only (1) if viewed over a long period of time or (2) if one was concerned with the attitudes of future generations of people in the society. Woelfel posits an inverse relationship between inertial mass and attitudinal change. For those who have lived many years and received many messages about the taboo, many new messages will be needed before significant shifts in attitudes can be detected. With legalization, these messages will come, and over time, as the number of these new messages mount, the attitudes of those who receive them will change. Socialization involves the formation of attitudes. With future generations, there is no inertial mass the change agent must battle with. The young will grow up believing that the one-time taboo is not taboo because they will have received a different set of messages than their elders did when they were socialized.

Promoting the Idea that Everyone's Doing it

Whether one re-labels a taboo, offers diffuser incentives or attempts to create a festive spirit surrounding the behavior, one is taking a general approach to reducing taboos. Within each of these courses of action, specific

message strategies must be developed and implemented. While Rogers does not distinguish between the approaches taken and the messages utilized within them, the "strategy" of "promoting the idea that everyone's doing it" is seen here as the message component applicable to each of the other strategies proposed. A quick look at one of these strategies should demonstrate this.

When one re-labels a taboo, one is reducing the stigma that only certain kinds of people would perform the behavior, use the object, or talk about the topic under consideration. Returning to the Nirodh campaign, it must have been apparent to Indian officials that many men were not using condoms because they associated its usage with sexual intercourse on a payment basis. In selecting the neutral word Nirodh, it was hoped that such associations would be reduced and replaced by the associations that (1) everyone, e.g., people like the potential buyer, uses condoms during sexual intercourse, and (2) the use of condoms is an appropriate method of birth control for one's relations with one's spouse.

In each of the strategies Rogers recommends, individuals move from the reception of "No, don't!" or "You shouldn't do it" messages to those which say "Everyone's doing it so why not you?" Messages divergent from those previously impacted are being received. Linear Force Aggregation Theory posits that divergent messages move attitudes. For the change agent who wishes to reduce a taboo, new messages must be input into the system which in some way call for the reduction of the taboo. Messages that say "Everyone's doing it" serve that function.

While we talk about messages, it should be noted at this time that in cases of pluralistic ignorance, one such message might suffice. As Scheff (1967) states, pluralistic ignorance exists when a "majority agrees but thinks

that they do not agree" (p. 39). Here, a behavior is privately regarded as not taboo by many individuals but at the same time is perceived by these people as something everyone else wouldn't do or talk about. Because of the nature of taboos, we have a double bind situation. One can't "step outside" the situation and talk about it because it would be taboo to do so. However, as soon as the message comes across that everyone feels the same way, the pluralistic ignorance is shattered, people engage in the behavior, and it is no longer taboo.

Creating a Festive Spirit Surrounding the Behavior

Taboo behaviors are performed. Taboo topics are communicated about. What distinguishes them from non-taboo behaviors and topics are the relatively limited number of situations in which they are appropriate and the at least semi-secrecy/privacy which surrounds them. People make love with each other. However, there are restrictions with whom, when and where sexual intercourse is acceptable. One of the dimensions of the "when" and "where" is privacy. Similar restrictions are applicable to taboo topics. While we talk about masturbation, extra-marital affairs, and finances, we are fairly selective in our choice of discussion partners or listening ears. Moreover, such topics are not the sort of issues we raise our voices about; they're confidential. When a festive spirit surrounds a behavior, the behavior becomes public, open, acceptable for all to see and hear. In creating this spirit, the elements that encompass the taboo are removed.

This strategy is closely associated with family planning efforts in many of the developing, overpopulated countries of the world. The Indian government often has made use of this technique during its vasectomy drives; the 1971 drive in the Ernakulum district in Kerala is the classic example

of this approach. The planners of the campaign effectively and radically altered the image of family planning as a clinical program and a private decision/action process. The town hall in the center of the town served as the campaign's center--under the full public eye. A public address system filling the air, government and private jeeps clogging traffic, decorations, banners, exhibitions, theater for puppet shows, films, dances, dramas and leading literary figures, baby shows with prizes for the healthiest baby of sterilized parents, lotteries and gifts all helped "to create the aura of a typical Indian festival" (Krishnakumar, 1972, p. 181). Couples were motivated in groups, transported together, and participated in mass demonstrations. This "reinforced the individual's sense that what he was doing was socially acceptable" (p. 181). During this one month effort, over 63,000 sterilizations were performed, a number reported as 24 times the number of sterilizations performed during the same span of time in any other district in India since their vasectomy program originated in 1957 (Rogers, 1972). While there were a host of other factors accounting for the success of the drive (e.g., dedicated and dynamic leadership, better service, high incentives, efficient staff, prompt attention to complaints . . .) the power of the festive spirit created is underscored by those who have chronicled the event.

With family planning, the festive spirit serves two functions. First, it helps reduce the secrecy of the behavior by emitting messages which state that the behavior doesn't have to be regarded as private and hidden from all. In the Ernakulum effort, the hospital was set up right in the middle of the festive area. Second, it helps reduce the fear that many have about operations and sterilization. Returning to Ernakulum again, many of the perceived dire consequences of being operated on were dramatically shown to be erroneous

as those operated on were then fed and entertained and apparently able to enjoy both. It appears then that the creation of a festive spirit surrounding a taboo functions as an element in the reduction of much of the apprehension which serves as a cornerstone in the foundation of any taboo.

From a theoretical perspective, the openness and gaiety of a festival are about as diametrically opposed to a secretive meeting or communication as is possible. Such divergent messages should serve to dramatically move the mean of the messages received about the object and thus affect the attitude toward the behavior or communication. The radical shift in messages appears to be a contributing factor in the equally radical increase in the number of vasectomies performed during that limited period of time.

## THE ROLE OF CAMPAIGNS IN THE REMOVAL OF TABOOS

T. S. Natarajan (1970) distinguishes between horizontal and vertical approaches to family planning movements. The former are seen as attempts to tackle a problem on a wide front and on a long term basis; the latter are viewed as efforts focusing on a particular aspect of the problem "through the application of specific measures by special machinery for a brief period" (p. 74). To Natarajan, a campaign is viewed as a vertical approach to a problem and is defined as "an intensive educational activity undertaken at an opportune moment for a brief period focusing attention in a concentrated manner towards a particular problem so as to stimulate the widest possible interest of the community" (p. 74).

Stated more succinctly, campaigns are periods of intensive propaganda. At least implicit in most of Rogers' strategies is the role of campaigns in removing taboos. This researcher takes the position that the crucial strategy in the removal of any societal taboo is the use of these (sometimes lengthy)

periods of intensive message bombardment. Such a position is supported by Woelfel's theory as it posits that attitudes are made up of numbers of messages and are moved by numbers of divergent messages. Thus, whatever the specific message strategy taken, a campaign of messages is going to be needed to move the Not Taboo/Taboo situation that exists in column III to the desired Not-Taboo consensus cell.

Returning to the Ernakulum vasectomy campaign, we find that it appears to be unique in terms of the amount of propaganda which was transmitted prior to and during the drive. As Rogers (1972) states, the "Ernakulum vasectomy campaigns were an all-out effort of all local government officials . . . with the campaign activities . . . concentrated entirely on one village or municipality during the day prior to its scheduled day for transportation of adopters . . ." (pp. 2-5 and 2-8). Krishnakumar (1973), in planning to achieve a family planning "consensus" within his district, focuses on the campaign approach and sees it as an intensive propaganda effort. Here is a portion of his message bombardment strategy:

> Extensive publicity and propaganda will be organized in support of the campaign through all available and possible media. Apart from the radio and the press such devices as street corner meetings, mike announcements, wall posters, bit notices, personal letters by post, banners, slides at theaters, variety entertainments and cultural performances will be used to flood the entire District with sustained Family Planning propaganda specially tailored for the total family planning campaign.
>
> The most important messages to be communicated to the target couples will be mutually reinforced through all the media (p. 8).

The Ernakulum effort was not the only family planning campaign subjected to researcher scrutiny. Raina, Blake and Weiss (1967) looked at a four month campaign in Meerut, India, and found that publicity efforts increased public knowledge about family planning. Freedman and Takeshita (1969) found that a

nine month massive information and service campaign in Taiwan increased acceptance and adoption of family planning practices. Further, in areas where the campaign was most heavily directed, the perception that "everyone's doing it" was cited by a number of respondents as influential in their decisions to adopt family planning practices. Lieberman et. al. (1973) reported that a six month campaign in Iran resulted in more favorable attitudes toward family planning and increased (1) knowledge, (2) acceptors, and (3) discussions of family planning.

In America, Kline, Miller and Morrison (1974), taking a uses and gratifications perspective, found that when contingent conditions were specified and controlled (e.g., whether an adolescent perceived him/herself to know more, or less, about family planning than the important persons surrounding him or her), significant knowledge effects became apparent.

Campaigns focusing on other topics have also been studied. Merton (1946) examined Kate Smith's 18 hour effort to generate pledges to buy war bonds; much of the thirty-nine million dollars pledged was attributed to the almost incessant repetition of the basic message, "Buy!" Douglas, Westley and Chaffee (1970) examined a local campaign about mental retardation and concluded that campaigns can bring about changes in community information levels and attitudes. Finally, Tichenor[2] reported on a field experiment examining the impact of the television series "Mulligan Stew." He found that children who were exposed to the program as well as to support materials (comics, books, and records) scored higher on an exam about nutrition and exhibited substantially different eating habits than those who only saw the program. Although

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[2] Informal presentation to Mass Communication Mini-Conference, Madison, Wisconsin.

Tichenor did not discuss this work in terms of campaigns, the program plus support materials can be seen as a more intensive effort to garner the desired effects; more messages were impacted during the same period of time.

In summary, while the literature just cited did not examine the role of campaigns in the removal of taboos, these studies suggest that the campaign approach is effective in providing information and changing attitudes and behaviors. However, a number of communication scholars (e.g., Hyman and Sheatsley [1947], Star and Hughes [1950], O'Keefe [1971]) are skeptical of the campaign approach, arguing that "increasing the flow" is not a sufficient condition to inform and move the multitudes. While this researcher posits that audience predispositions and the resulting psychological barriers can be overcome, he does recognize that the success of any campaign is also contingent on (1) the quality of the messages utilized, and (2) the information environment surrounding the effort.

(1) Atkin et. al. (1973) demonstrated that exposure to messages does not guarantee attention to them. Thus, the messages themselves must be attractive to the intended audience. As Star and Hughes (1950) state, "Information grows interesting when it is functional, that is when it is so presented that it is seen to impinge upon one's personal concerns" (pp. 398-399). Twenty-three years later, Mendelsohn (1973) said the same thing when he called for campaign planners to recognize that most of the public will be generally uninterested in the planners' messages and need to be stimulated. Woelfel's message theory calls for numbers but not at the expense of the message itself. (Applied to taboos, it is hypothesized that messages dealing with taboos will be inherently interesting because of the nature of the topic being dealt with.)

(2) Campaigns do not operate in an information vacuum; competing messages will mediate the success of any campaign. Focusing on the criteria needed for the media to produce "discernible" effects, Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948/1971) in essence stated that monopolization of the messages was required; "to the extent that opposing propaganda in the mass media are balanced, the net effect is negligible" (1971, p. 574). Woelfel's theory takes that position. In our society, there is no person or product covered in a singular way by the media; there is no monopolization of the messages aired. Whiteside (1971) reports that for every anti-smoking commercial broadcast, there were four pro-smoking commercials aired. When the ban was placed on televised cigarette advertising, the number of anti-smoking messages dramatically decreased.

The same perspective is applicable to political campaigns. One candidate's commercials say one thing and the commercials for the other say the opposite. They cancel out. Such nullification of opposing messages could account for the lack of substantial numbers of conversions in the early, and very influential, voting studies performed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) and Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954). The campaign propaganda appeared to reinforce a majority of those respondents interviewed. Such a finding is consistent with Woelfel's perspective in that while additional messages canceled each other out, the massiveness of the attitude increased, making it more resistant to change.

## THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE CAMPAIGN APPROACH TO REMOVAL OF TABOOS

There is little evidence available which can provide us with information about the media's role in campaigns designed to remove taboos. Based on the success of the Ernakulum campaign, inferences might be drawn about the

significant role the media can play in activating men to get vasectomies. However, given the simultaneous and extensive interpersonal activities during that campaign, the relative power of the mass media in influencing the desired behavioral changes is unclear. More clearcut is the media's role in the Nirodh campaign in that the effort was primarily a media bombardment approach. Unfortunately, to this researcher's knowledge, no data exist dealing with the relative impact of the media in that campaign.[3]

Weiss et. al. (1974) examined the knowledge function of the media in a family planning campaign and found that the number of messages seen in the media served as the best predictor of knowledge about family planning. However, while these researchers acknowledge the controversial/taboo nature of the topic, they provide no analysis on the relationship between the reception of messages and the perception of the topic's tabooness.

Placek (1974-1975) studied the role of direct mailing on the diffusion of specific family planning information; those who received the brochures talked to twice as many people about the topic than did their control group counterparts. One interpretation of this finding is that the brochure served to reduce the communicative tabooness of family planning.

Finally, Greenberg and Gantz (1975) examined the impact of the media on the perceived tabooness of venereal diseases and found that in the survey they conducted, those exposed to the stimulus (the program VD Blues) perceived VD as less communicatively taboo. However, in the experiment they conducted

[3]Interestingly, despite Rogers' discussions of the Nirodh effort, he notes that the role of media channels in the diffusion of taboo innovations is minimal. "Mass media channels can convey awareness, knowledge of family planning innovations, and of the small family norm, but they are almost totally unable to persuade individuals to adopt these ideas, partly because these beliefs are so strongly held" (Rogers, 1973b, p. 10).

utilizing the same stimulus, they found no causal relationship between exposure and perceived tabooness of the topic. Moreover, their study dealt with a one-shot stimulus and thus might not be applicable to the campaign approach which presents messages in many channels over a period of time.

Given the paucity of direct evidence about the role of the media in campaigns designed to remove taboos, we must turn to the abundance of data concerned with the role of the media in more generalized information and attitude change situations. From this, deductions will be drawn to our more specific area of interest.

The Mass Media and Cognitive Change

Of concern here is the ability of the media to (1) function as sources of significant amounts of information, and (2) influence what people think about.

As stated before, while some researchers have suggested that the media are unable to transmit information to large segments of any population, it was proposed that when ample numbers of messages are received, information gains will occur. For the hundreds of studies looking at the differential effectiveness of television versus in-person teaching, this ability to impart information is an assumption made by all.

It is hypothesized that the learning function of the media will be enhanced in situations where the media are airing information about a topic that is communicatively taboo. This prediction is primarily based on the general lack of knowledge people have about communication taboos. For example, a young, educated Indian woman told an American Peace Corps Volunteer that although she (the Indian woman) was never in any way intimate with a man, she was pregnant and expected her child to explode out of her stomach in two years!

The Volunteer reported that such misconceptions were common; given the taboo nature of the topic, many women apparently never received any formal education about human reproduction. This situation does not appear to be unique. In the Greenberg and Gantz (1975) study, respondents had misconceptions about the causes of VD and generally were unable to mention more than one or two consequences of the disease. Thus, given initial low knowledge levels, media messages should serve to dramatically increase the public's storehouse of information about the taboo.

The second locus of concern lies in the media's ability to structure the topics that people think about. The following proposition sums up the "agenda-setting" function of the media: "It [the press] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, p. 11).

Typical of this research are the efforts by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and Shaw and Bowers (1973). The former examined the issues during the 1968 presidential campaign and found extremely high correlations between major item emphasis on main campaign themes carried by the media and judgments by respondents as to what the important issues were. The latter focused on political advertisements and found that viewers of the ads more strongly adopted the political agenda set by the commercials than did those who were classified as non-viewers.

Should the "agenda-setting" function of the media hold for anti-taboo media campaigns, it is hypothesized that the taboo will be perceived as more salient, be more often talked about, and eventually lose some of its communicative (if not behavioral) tabooness.

In short, a good deal of research has been conducted which has demonstrated the ability of the media to impart information and move cognitions. While not directly affecting attitudes, this function of the media is seen as linked to the process of attitude change and the reduction of taboos.

The Mass Media and Attitude Change

The general perspective of mass communication researchers is that the media are relatively ineffective as agents of affective change. Instead, the media are seen as agents which serve to reinforce attitudes and beliefs previously held by receivers of the messages. Klapper (1960) generalized that "mediating factors are such that they typically render mass communication a contributory agent, but not the sole cause, in a process of reinforcing existing conditions" (p. 8). To this, he added that reinforcement was predominant, "regardless of the condition in question . . . and regardless of whether the effect in question be social or individual" (pp. 19-20). In many, the weight of the evidence since then makes these statements still viable. For example, Woelfel and Hernandez (1972) examined the relative impact of various communication channels on attitudes toward marajuana, and reported that while almost all of the media had "apparently higher masses per unit of information than words of friends . . . friends communications offset this lack of mass by greater relevance . . . such that the impact of friend's behavioral example is roughly 23 times as great as the impact of a television message" (p. 19).

An examination of the diffusion literature yields similar statements. In discussing the role of communication channels during the various stages of the adoption process, Rogers (1971b) generalizes that "Mass media channels are relatively more important at the persuasive function of the innovation-decision process" (p. 255). With his generalization based on a 90% confirmation

rate (18 studies supported this proposition, 2 did not), the evidence seems to point to the position that a campaign approach, relying on the media, will be relatively ineffective in causing the desired attitudinal or behavioral objectives.

Not all research--or researchers--paint such a pessimistic picture of the media's ability to cause changes in affect. There appear to be two perspectives within the "media can move attitudes" school of thought--those who feel that all messages, from all sources, have impact on attitudes, and those who advocate that only under special conditions can the media operate as an agent of change. First, both positions will be presented. Following that, this researcher will posit that campaigns designed to move taboos satisfy the conditions stated as required for the impact to occur.

A number of researchers in social psychology and communication have explored and developed the position that changes in affect occur simultaneously with increments in information. Studies by Zajonc (1968), Zajonc and Rajecki (1969), Crandell (1972), and Rajecki and Wolfson (1973) have demonstrated both correlational and experimental support for this relationship. While researchers are continuing to explore the type of relationship involved (e.g., is it positive and linear as Zajonc suggests?), they have not challenged the basic premise of simultaneous changes.

Woelfel's perspective is that all messages received have impact on attitudes. While the impact may be minimal--and often is when the object's inertial mass is high--the impact still takes place and can be measured with sensitive testing instruments. Although Woelfel has not empirically tested that proposition by repetition of a send-a-message-measure-the-attitude sequence, research guided by the theory has been able to account for substantial

amounts of the variance in the dependent attitudes, e.g., educational and occupational aspirations (Haller and Woelfel, 1972).

The second position posits that only under special conditions can the media act as agents of change.

Klapper (1960) states that while the media "ordinarily" operate in conjunction with other forces influencing attitudes and "typically" are agents reinforcing the status quo, there are instances where the mass media do operate as agents of change. In such cases, he posits that one of two conditions would likely exist:

> a. the mediating factors will be found to be inoperative and the effect of the media will be found to be direct; or
> b. the mediating factors, which normally favor reinforcement, will be found to be themselves impelling toward change (p. 8).

Among those mediating factors are (1) audience predispositions and the resulting selectivity processes, and (2) the nature of the mass media in our society. These are seen as crucial in that they directly affect the type of messages aired and the reception of whatever gets broadcast. What follows is an examination of these factors in relation to a proposed mass media anti-taboo campaign.

Audience Predispositions and the Selecting Processes - The first hurdle that must be overcome is getting the audience exposed to the messages on the media. If the campaign strategy involved 30 and 60 minute programs, this barrier would be a formidable one. Research in the area of political communication indicates that those who watch full length political campaign programs (e.g., a telethon) tend to already be in favor of the candidate (Schramm and Carter, 1959). Few conversions take place because there are few potential converts watching. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that 10, 30, and 60 second spot political announcements have been effective in overcoming

such selective exposure obstacles (Atkin et. al., 1973). Thus, if the campaign utilizes short spots, people will be exposed to the messages.

Those supporting the selectivity processes would note that mere exposure does not guarantee movement--even if exposed, people will selectively perceive what they wish to hear in a message and then selectively retain those portions of the message most consistent with their original attitudes. It is hypothesized, however, that these processes occur most often when the message is ambiguous (e.g., political speeches during election campaigns), and least often when the message is straightforward. If communicatively taboo topics are heard on the media, it would seem that at least one portion of the message would be loud and clear--"This topic is OK to be discussed in this situation." Even if the specifics of the message were not picked up (e.g., symptoms of VD), the meta-message would be. This itself should serve to reduce the topic's communicative tabooness.

We are left with retention. With stimulus and respondent capability variables held constant, retention is seen as dependent on needs and interests (Gantz, 1975). If Freud is correct in stating that taboos or restrictions are set up so that our underlying desires are submerged, then messages about taboos ought to stimulate both our interest and our ability to recall the information at a later time.

This researcher takes the position that the nature of taboo topics and campaigns are such that campaign messages will impact a large segment of whatever population is under consideration and will be interpreted in ways consistent with those intended by the sponsors of the campaign.

The Nature of the Mass Media - Klapper (1960) makes the point that the media, being commercial operations, desperately try not to offend.

> Commercially competitive mass media in a free enterprise system depend for their life-blood on attracting and holding a vast and highly varied audience. To preclude alienating any significant portion of that audience--and among audiences of several million even a small minority is commercially significant--the media are forced to avoid espousing any point of view which any minority might find distasteful. . . . The media were restricted to echoing what was universally accepted, or to sanctifying the sanctioned (p. 38).

If the media strive and tend to reflect societal values, then programs which take a stance widely divergent from the general population's attitude on an issue probably won't get aired. This appears to have been the case with VD Blues; its message about that unspeakable disease was clear, to the point, and not broadcast on commercial television stations.

Should the media be as generally conservative in program selection as we are led to believe, their utility in any anti-taboo media campaign would be severely curtailed. There are two strategies for overcoming this. The first approach involves ignoring the commercial stations and placing the messages on "public" ones. However, in doing so, the impact will be minimized because few will be reached. For example, in the Greenberg and Gantz VD Blues study, fewer than 5% of those questioned reported seeing that program broadcast the previous evening on the local, educational, UHF station. Clearly, this alternative is not attractive. The second approach utilizes spot announcements for which time either will be purchased (the better and more expensive option) or acquired under station public service announcement requirements. If the messages could be linked to some well known and respected research/hospital/federal unit or agency, both paid and free time ought be more readily available.

(2) As stated before, one of the explanations for the general ineffectiveness of the media in converting receivers from one position to another

is the barrage of competing messages which serve to cancel each other out. When the referent is a taboo, a near monopoly situation exists--either the object/behavior/topic is avoided/omitted/bleeped out or is generally placed in a negative light. Thus, whether the message is explicit or implicit, the very effective monopoly-of-messages persuasive situation exists.

Given this situation, anti-taboo media campaigns are seen to have potential impact in either of two ways. First, the campaign messages can be seen as neutralizing the traditional messages which reinforce the taboo. Second, the campaign messages probably will be more explicit than those fostering the taboo (especially if the taboo is based on the omission of the behavior or the topic). In this case, the campaign would create for itself a monopoly-of-messages situation. Thus, the following analysis of the situation is offered: With competing messages, one's attitude, converging on the mean of the messages received, would fall between the extremes of the alternatives suggested and the campaign would move the attitude to a less taboo position. If during the campaign there are no competing messages, the mean of the messages (the dependent attitude) will move further and more swiftly toward the campaign's anti-taboo stance.

If the taboo were communicative, this researcher doubts that counter-campaign, pro-taboo messages would be created and broadcast. Even if such messages were aired, they might be defeating their purpose in that they would have to explicitly state on the air what they felt should not be stated on the air. Thus, it is predicted that anti-communicative taboo media campaigns will meet with little or no message opposition and will overcome the competing message barrier which mediates against media effects.

In summary, this section has attempted to deal with the impact of the media in campaigns designed to remove taboos. However, given the lack of evidence bearing directly on the issue of media campaigns and taboos, emphasis was placed on the ability of the media to provide information and move attitudes in a more generalized sense. Here, we found that the media (1) are able to impart knowledge, and (2) can serve as agents of attitude change. Finally, it was demonstrated how mass media anti-taboo campaigns can overcome the barriers which some media researchers believe serve to mitigate media effects.

## HYPOTHESES

Given the conceptual development of taboo and the research dealing with campaigns and mass media effects, this researcher takes the position that in campaigns designed to reduce taboos, the mass media will be effective agents of information gain and attitude change. The following hypotheses specify these relationships.

$H_1$: There is a positive relationship between the number of anti-taboo media messages received and the amount of knowledge one has about the taboo.

$H_2$: There is a positive relationship between the number of anti-taboo media messages received and the perceived salience of the taboo topic.

$H_3$: There is a positive relationship between the number of anti-taboo media messages received and the number of situations which are seen as appropriate for the behavior or communication.

$H_4$: There is an inverse relationship between the number of anti-taboo media messages received and the amount of discomfort felt in situations where the taboo behavior or topic is performed or discussed.

$H_5$: There is a positive relationship between the number of anti-taboo media messages received and the number of situations in which the heretofore taboo behavior or topic is performed or discussed.

Analysis of a researcher-controlled mass media anti-taboo campaign should demonstrate the validity and utility of this researcher's conceptualization of taboo and the hypotheses developed.

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