

The Venereal Disease [VD] Radio Project: A Look at a 20th-Century Initiative on Sexually Transmitted Infection [STI] Prevention

Alan J. Sofalvi

Abstract

Awareness of the history of health education efforts is important for health educators. The VD Radio Project, developed in the middle of the 20th century, was a cooperative effort of the United States Public Health Service and Columbia University designed to encourage people to be tested for sexually transmitted infections. How the campaign came about is described and programs that were part of the campaign are summarized. While available radio programs indicate the focus of the effort was to reduce syphilis, news stories and books mentioning the campaign indicate both syphilis and gonorrhea were concerns. Performers were used to present the messages, a practice that is still used today. Differences and similarities between the VD Radio Project and a comparable campaign conducted today are noted.

Introduction

Radio has long been recognized as an important educational medium regarding health topics (Turner, Drenckhahn & Bates, 1935). In the 1940s Columbia University and health departments from around the United States cooperated with the United States Public Health Service to develop material designed to increase awareness that syphilis could be cured (“Anti-VD by radio”, 1948; Associated Press, 1948; Barnouw, 1948; “Broadcasts in health programs are listed”, 1949). The purpose of this study was to describe the radio portion of the campaign, utilizing Library of Congress resources, audio archives, newspaper articles and biographies of individuals involved.

Origins of the VD Radio Project

Several factors may have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the creation of the VD Radio Project. During and after the Second World War there came to be an increased awareness of the hazards of sexually transmitted infections and a lessened resistance to programs designed to reduce these problems, with an accompanying increase in resources for these programs (Cutler & Arnold, 1988).

Another factor that may be reflective of an increasing openness to discuss sexuality issues in mass media was the 1948 publication of Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. This book received radio and newspaper attention (Drucker, 2012; Kaempfert, 1948) and Kinsey’s book, released the same year reports about the VD Radio Project first appeared, was a starting point in his being recognized as “the major factor in changing attitudes about sex in the twentieth century” (Bullough, 1998, p. 131).

* Alan J. Sofalvi, SUNY Cortland, Kappa Chapter. Email: alan.sofalvi@cortland.edu; Phone: 607-753-2980; Fax: 607-753-4226

* Corresponding Author

Prior to the VD Radio Project the United States Public Health Service was involved in several endeavors designed to reduce the impact of sexually transmitted infections (Poirier, 1995). Due to these initiatives, which largely focused on military personnel during World War I and World War II, U.S. Public Health Service staff concluded it was time to expand these efforts to the entire population (Barnouw, 1996). One proposal predating the VD Radio Project was to use print advertisements to inform people about syphilis (Barnouw, 1996). Some advertisers associated with the Catholic Church objected and prepared a counter-advertising initiative “assailing ... [this] abhorrent and immoral plan” (Barnouw, 1996, p. 99). Therefore, the anti-VD advertising campaign never began; opposition to it may help explain why the Public Health Service turned to higher education institutions (ultimately, Columbia University) to sponsor the VD Radio Project (Barnouw, 1996).

An overview of the VD Radio Project

At the time the project was announced an estimated 3 million individuals had syphilis and 15 million people had gonorrhea in the United States (“Record drive on VD starts up 2 weeks”, 1948). While the initiative was referred to as the VD Radio Project, other media were used: a booklet, pamphlets, a comic book, educational films and a song intended for jukeboxes as well as radio were created (Barnouw, 1996; Marke, 1949; United Press, 1949). The programs were designed to encourage people to be tested and, if necessary, treated for a sexually transmitted infection (Associated Press, 1948; Barnouw, 1948; Szwed, 2010). Alan Lomax, a music historian, was a key contributor to the project, writing scripts for several programs (Szwed, 2010). The Alan Lomax Collection can be found at The Library of Congress website: included in the collection are some of these scripts (Library of Congress, n. d.). A second key contributor to the project was Erik Barnouw, a writer, producer and director of radio programs and ultimately a professor at Columbia University (Barnouw, 1996). Programs developed for the VD Radio Project were created in a cooperative effort of the United States Public Health Service and the Columbia University Communications Center (Barnouw, 1996).

Barnouw (1996) described the programs as “ballad dramas or ‘hillbilly operas’” (p. 98; see also Szwed, 2010, p. 240). Types of songs included were spirituals, country and folk (Szwed; Wald, 2007; Nowlin, 2013). Nowlin points out that the names of some of the performers that participated may be less recognizable today than they were in the middle of the twentieth century. A standard message at the end of the programs was that listeners should be tested or get a checkup. That detail is omitted from the program descriptions below. Also omitted from the synopsis is a description of the programs featuring George Hicks, a news reporter of the era, who interviewed people with syphilis and used those interviews as a way to encourage listeners to be tested. These interviews are available at the WNYC Radio website: <http://www.wnyc.org/series/vd-radio-project/1> Another omission is a description of

short spots (a minute or less) featuring celebrities of the time discussing the importance of being tested, also available at the WNYC Radio website.

Synopsis of the radio programs

Looking for Lester was written for country music singer Roy Acuff (Szwed, 2010). In the script available from the Alan Lomax Collection, the character was named Leroy, not Lester (Lomax, 1949a). A recording of *Looking for Lester* is available online in two places: one site lists an incorrect year for the creation of the program (“Venereal Disease Drama: Looking for Lester”, 1945 [sic]). On the WNYC site, *Looking for Lester* is mistakenly referred to as *Wait for the Light to Shine*, which is the song that opens the program; another error on the site is that most of the programs are listed with a date of 1899, well before the programs were developed (“Wait for the Light to Shine”, 1899 [sic]) and even before radio was established as a commercial medium (Hilmes, 2002).

The story is about a married couple, Lester and Anne: Lester contracts syphilis but does not see a physician. Instead he visits “Friendly Wilson” (“Venereal Disease Drama: Looking for Lester”) who provides Lester with a salve. Lester’s symptoms disappear and he believes he is cured. But Anne learns she has contracted syphilis after a visit to a physician where she also learned she was pregnant. After being informed of this by Anne, Lester leaves and his whereabouts are unknown (thus the title *Looking for Lester*). Anne was cured of the disease and the baby was healthy (“Venereal Disease Drama: Looking for Lester”).

The Prodigal Son is a drama based on the biblical story (Lomax, 1949b). It featured Reverend Jackson, father of Zack and Ollie. Zack was described as “a solid citizen”, Ollie as “wild and disobedient” (Lomax, 1949b, image 2). Ollie moves to New Orleans but decides to return home after running out of money. Reverend Jackson took Ollie to see a physician after Ollie noticed a syphilitic rash. The narrator (who for purposes of the story was a physician) assured the father that his son’s condition could be cured. The physician asked the preacher to share the story of his son’s infection with his congregation as part of an effort to locate individuals who had contracted the disease (Lomax, 1949b). The Dixieaires sang the ballad portions of the drama, which was also known as *Seek and Ye Shall Find* (Seek and Ye Shall Find, 1899 [sic]; Szwed, 2010).

Born on Friday is a story, told in flashback, about congenital syphilis, midwifery and the importance of being tested for syphilis (Lomax, 1950a). It centered around a midwife who originally did not have clients tested for syphilis. The midwife’s son seeks her out to attend a birth. The child (the grandson of the midwife) develops normally until the age of six, when cognitive problems begin due to congenital syphilis. This led to the midwife changing her perspective and becoming an advocate for testing (Lomax, 1950a). Another character is a physician/county health official, who serves as a narrator (Lomax, 1950a). At the beginning of the episode the physician describes the midwife as an enemy who resented medical progress but whose attitude changed due to her grandson’s congenital syphilis (Lomax, 1950a).

The Lonesome Traveler featured Woody Guthrie as Rusty and is the story of a couple, Rusty and Alvy; Rusty is referred to as Tim in much of the script available on the Library of Congress website (Lomax, 1950b). Rusty learns in a conversation

with Alvy that Alvy has syphilis. Later in the program Rusty says that he should have told Alvy to seek medical care after spending the night in jail and being attacked by a cellmate who had paresis due to untreated syphilis (Lomax, 1950b). At the end of the program Rusty encourages a different man to be tested for syphilis and then Guthrie sings *The Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done*, referring to eliminating syphilis as one of these things (Lomax, 1950b; “The Lonesome Traveler”, 1949; “V.D. on the radio”, 2014).

Trouble is My Middle Name featured Merle Travis, a country singer, who between songs tells a story about a man who contracted syphilis, ignored the symptoms, was not treated and died from the condition as a result. This man had a daughter who was later given syphilis by a man who ended up leaving her. Before he left he impregnated this woman, the infant contracted syphilis and died due to the disease (Lomax, 1950c; “Trouble is my middle name”, 1899[sic]).

Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a gospel singer and is considered influential in what was to become rock-and-roll (Wald, 2007). As with *Trouble is my Middle Name*, this episode is a combination of song and narration. Tharpe told the story of a woman who unknowingly passed syphilis onto three children, all of whom passed away because of the congenital condition (Wald; “VD on the radio”, 2014).

The Worst Enemy is the story of Mary Drummond and her son (nicknamed Pepper) who was born with syphilis. At birth Pepper had a lesion on his lip; the lesion disappeared and Pepper was asymptomatic until he was in high school. Pepper had become a star football player; during a game he experiences difficulty seeing and leaves the game. He is diagnosed with keratitis and learns that the condition is due to congenital syphilis. Learning the diagnosis causes Pepper’s attitude to change: he is less cordial with friends and refers to his mother as his worst enemy (Lomax, 1949/1950b). During an argument with his mother, she has a heart attack. At first Pepper feels responsible for the heart attack, but his doctor (who serves as a narrator for the program) explains that it was not Pepper’s fault. Pepper’s attitude changes again and he refers to syphilis as the worst enemy (Lomax, 1949-1950b).

Stars in Her Eyes, with Hank Williams, is about a woman named Lena who works in a manufacturing plant. She meets a man named Joe and they end up marrying. Joe leaves on a business trip and during this time Lena meets a friend of Joe’s named Leo. They see each other socially while Joe is away. During one such meeting, after several drinks Leo and Lena have intercourse and Lena contracts syphilis. When Lena informs Joe about contracting syphilis, he leaves her for a short time but returns and the couple ends up reconciling (Kagan, n. d.; “Stars in Her Eyes”, 1949; “VD on the radio”, 2014).

Eddy Arnold was the featured performer in *Born to Lose*, another program with a character named Pepper and about congenital syphilis. In the story Pepper is romantically involved with several women but learns toward the end of the episode that he is not feeling well due to syphilis he contracted from his mother. Pepper ends up dying alone on the street to conclude the episode (Lomax, 1949/1950a).

Henry Fonda narrated *The Campaign*, a story about a radio/television repairman named Jack and his wife Betty, who had decided she is bored with her life and leaves Jack. A couple of weeks later Jack notices a sore that goes away on its own, followed by a rash that also goes away. Jack lives his life as if

nothing is wrong until he hears and sees messages that are part of a campaign encouraging people to get tested. He visits his physician, who informs him that his wife has been hospitalized due to syphilis and that he has the condition as well. Jack receives penicillin and is cured (“The campaign, starring Henry Fonda”, 1949).

Ballad of the Man of Steel, performed by country singer Red Foley, is about a young man named Joe Bullard, who is referred to in the song as a giant and as The Man of Steel. When he left home his father warned him to stay away “from liquor and the wrong kind of women” (“Ballad of the Man of Steel”, 1949). Joe agreed and only drank milk and lime juice. A man named Pete Harkins spiked the juice in an effort to keep Joe out of a weightlifting contest. Pete arranged for Rosie, a woman who “liked all kinds of men” (“Ballad of the Man of Steel”), to spend time with Joe. As a result of this encounter Joe contracted syphilis, from which he would die fifteen years later. Listeners were told that this had happened decades ago before there were good treatments for syphilis (“Ballad of the Man of Steel”).

Crossroads Ballad is a story, told mostly in song, of Jim Stark, a World War II veteran who returned from the war, got a job, and married Ruby. Jim met a friend from the military that Ruby did not like. Ruby told Jim to not see the friend again: she says that if he sees the friend again, Ruby would leave. Jim decides to leave first and later meets a woman named Chris, from whom he contracts syphilis. He realizes that he has the disease without seeing a physician, ends up losing his job and is depressed. Later Ruby tracks down her husband, takes responsibility for what happened and convinces Jim to get treatment (“Crossroads Ballad”, 1899[sic]).

A Story of Our Town is about a woman (Marge) who leaves her husband (Jim) because of his drinking. Marge goes to see her mother and Jim arrives. After he leaves, he is hit by a car and killed. After her husband’s death, Marge moves to another town and resumes her teaching career. Later she detects a sore, which disappears, and also notices a rash. Marge reads the book used for the school’s health course and concludes that she has syphilis. Marge is reluctant to see a physician (the only one in her small community) because he is the head of the school board and Marge is concerned she will lose her teaching job. She sees another individual, who has lost his medical license, and he confirms the diagnosis. When Marge is seeing this practitioner, the sheriff conducts a raid and arrests the practitioner for practicing medicine without a license and suspicion of murder. Then Marge sees the physician/head of the school board, who assures Marge that she can be cured, her condition will be kept confidential and she can keep her job (“A Story of Our Own”[sic], 1899[sic]).

The Voice from the Jukebox is about a bus driver (Bill Nelson) who meets a woman on a bus going to Salt Lake City and implied in their conversation is that they have a sexual encounter. Later in the program he meets another woman, Annie, and begins to see her on a regular basis. He asks Annie to marry him and she agrees. Mentioned in the program is a song created for the VD Radio Project, The Ignorant, Ignorant Cowboy. Bill had heard the song and it is credited with making him aware of the symptoms of syphilis and seeking medical treatment. Bill is told by his physician that his wife needs to be tested and Bill is convinced that his wife will want to leave him upon hearing this. However, the couple is cured and she assures him that she will stay as the program ends (“The Voice from the

Jukebox”, 1899[sic]).

The Secret Enemy is about a train engineer (Casey Smith) who is concerned that his wife, Myra, is unfaithful. The engineer and a coworker go to Casey’s home and find Myra is not there. When Myra returns home, she tells Casey that she is having fun when he is not there and that she is leaving him. The narrator states that while Casey does not know it, he has contracted syphilis. Casey continues to work as an engineer while the narrator describes what can happen if the syphilis is not cured and the condition affects Casey’s ability to operate the train. Casey goes on another train trip: when it ends and he arrives home, a health department employee is there. Casey is informed that his wife has been hospitalized due to syphilis and that he should be tested. He is asked by the health department employee about symptoms he may have had, and Casey describes those symptoms. Casey is assured that the condition can be cured. The narrator concludes the program by referring to syphilis as the secret enemy (“The secret enemy”, 1899[sic]).

Big Deal Jackson is the story of a steelworker, Al Jackson, and his wife, Jeanie. The story, told mostly in song, centers around Al becoming a boxer; he dreams of earning enough in boxing to leave the steel mill. Thanks to boxing, Al is on the road a great deal and he rarely sees his wife. On one trip home his wife discusses Al’s trips and his relations with other women. Jeanie asks Al to leave and the couple separates. Months later Jeanie notices a rash. She sees a physician and is diagnosed with syphilis. The doctor tells her that her husband needs to come in to the office but Jeanie is reluctant to contact him. Jeanie then reports having a dream about Al’s future; in the dream he is in the boxing ring and is unable to get up from a stool during a fight. This is because of the effects of syphilis on his spinal cord. The dream convinces Jeanie to see Al and inform him that he has syphilis. Al asks Jeanie to take him back and she agrees but only if Al promises to be faithful to her (“Big Deal Jackson”, 1899[sic]).

I Love You, Joe featured songwriter Hy Zaret’s composition V. D. Blues. It is a lead-in to a story, told in song with occasional narration, about Joe and Ann, who marry and have a son. Joe had too much to drink at one time, engaged in unsafe sex and later noticed a rash. Joe begins to spend more time away from home and contemplates suicide as he is upset about what happened. Ann hears the song V. D. Blues and comes to realize that Joe may have syphilis. Ann tells Joe that she heard the song and wanted Joe to know both that she suspected the condition and that she still loved him. Joe tells her that he did not mean to contract syphilis; he seeks medical help and is cured (“V. D. Blues”, 1899[sic]).

One Million People featured narrator Robert St. John, a news reporter for NBC Radio during World War II (Horowitz, 2014), telling a story about Ed and Connie, a married couple. Ed receives a promotion at work which requires him to be on the road for weeks at a time. Ed is in Chicago and is invited to a party by a work colleague. He meets a woman at the party and that night they have sex. Weeks later he has a sore throat and body aches. He informs his wife about the symptoms and says he is getting rid of them easily. The narrator says Ed also had a rash that he overlooked. Later Connie notices that she has a rash and her body aches as well. Connie goes to see a physician, who asks her to make a return visit. At the second visit Connie is informed that she has syphilis. The physician asks Connie to have Ed come in to be tested. He does so, and both individuals

are cured. The physician assures them that they can have children if they plan to do so (“Robert St. John”, 1899[sic]).

The Lips of a Strange Woman featured a clergyman. Mr. Collins, a man unknown to the clergyman, visits the church and tells the clergyman that he left his family and planned to rob a gas station with another man. The clergyman invites the man to his home where his wife will make dinner. The stranger is invited to stay at the clergyman’s home. The clergyman speaks with the owner of the gas station and arranges for the stranger to work at the station. The clergyman also obtains the address of Collins’ wife and speaks with her: she agrees to return to her husband. While the clergyman is making these arrangements, Collins visits a clinic and learns that he has syphilis. Downhearted, the man tells the clergyman that this has ruined his chance to be reunited with his wife. The clergyman refuses to accept this and takes the man back to the clinic. The clergyman informs Collins that there is now a way to cure syphilis. The narrator concludes the program by explaining that religious leaders around the country are working with the medical community to cure syphilis (“Lips of a Strange Woman”, 1899[sic]).

Unborn Child featured a wife (last name of Jaye) who is expecting a baby but refuses to seek prenatal care until encouraged to do so by a friend approximately 1/3 of the way through the pregnancy. The doctor does a blood test and calls Mrs. Jaye, informing her that she needs to see the doctor immediately. During the visit she learns that she has syphilis and that treatment is needed to protect the baby. The physician contacts the husband before notifying the wife of the disease. The husband believed that he had been cured but he had not because he had seen a quack. The woman had known of her husband’s condition but believed he had been cured. Mrs. Jaye was upset at first and mentions that she would rather lose the baby than have an infant born with syphilis. The physician convinces her that syphilis can be prevented in the baby thanks to penicillin being administered early enough in the pregnancy. The baby is born healthy (“Unborn child”, 1899[sic]).

Baby and Me is about Laura, a woman who meets a member of the Merchant Marine named Bill. Bill proposes, Laura accepts and the couple marries. Soon after Bill ships out with the Merchant Marine. Laura (pregnant and with syphilis, though unaware of the disease) learns that a ship on which Bill was believed to be working sinks and none of the crew survives, so she assumes Bill is dead. But prior to the sinking Bill had been prohibited from boarding the ship because he had syphilis. Blood tests were given to crew members; anyone who tested positive was not permitted onboard. Bill returned home and informed Laura of the syphilis. Bill was cured with penicillin and recommended that Laura seek care for the disease. Laura asks Bill to leave, then sees a physician and is given penicillin early enough in the pregnancy to prevent damage to the fetus. Laura gives birth to a healthy boy. Bill returns to his wife as the story ends (“Baby and Me”, 1949).

The Telephone Call featured a character named Ann who was about to be married. At the wedding rehearsal the prospective groom (named Alex) receives a phone call from his physician, and Alex abruptly leaves the rehearsal. Ann finds him and demands an explanation. Alex explains that his blood test was positive for syphilis and Ann asks him to leave. Afterwards she becomes depressed and continually asks to see Alex. Ann’s father learns from Alex’s doctor that Alex has been cured. Alex returns, Ann’s mood improves and the wedding is

rescheduled (“The Telephone Call – Roger Prior”, 1899[sic]).

Impact of the V.D. Radio Project

Apparently no formal evaluations of the VD Radio Project were conducted, so improvements cannot be directly attributed to the effort. However, the campaign appeared to be beneficial. Szwed (2010) reported (perhaps with some hyperbole) “the programs were completely successful” (p. 240). Barnouw (1996) reported a drop in reported syphilis cases: admission of individuals whose minds were affected by late-stage syphilis declined to 2.1 per 100,000 in 1951, down from 6.6 per 100,000 in 1939; fatalities declined to 3.7 per 100,000 in 1952, down from 11.1 per 100,000 in 1939 (Barnouw, 1996). In addition, the New York Times reported that in 1949 the number of reported gonorrhea cases increased and that this increase was attributed to the campaign: the campaign made individuals more aware of the symptoms, leading to more people being diagnosed, leading to an increase in number of cases being recorded (“Philadelphia drive cuts syphilis cases”, 1950). The number of primary and secondary syphilis cases among civilians dropped from 55.9 per 100,000 in 1948 to 12.1 in 1951 (Cutler & Arnold, 1988).

Relevance of the VD Radio Project

As radio is a less important medium than it was in the middle of the 20th century and radio programming has changed greatly since that time, (Hilmes, 2002), it seems unlikely that radio would be the medium of choice for a similar project today. Even so, the VD Radio Project can be seen as a precursor to later federal efforts to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections. A focus of the project was for individuals to be tested for syphilis or gonorrhea, using celebrities of the era as attention-getters (Barnouw, 1996). This emphasis on testing continues, with the focus more on individuals being tested for HIV, also using celebrities to get the word out. A recent federal initiative featuring performers Jamar Rogers, Ludacris and Jamie Foxx focused upon the value of talking about HIV and the importance of being tested for the virus. These videos (available at the Centers for Disease Control website and on YouTube) are much shorter than the programs that ran for nearly 15 minutes as part of the VD Radio Project, a common length for radio programs at the time (Barnouw, 1996). The Jamie Foxx (Centers for Disease Control, 2012a) and Ludacris (Centers for Disease Control, 2012c) spots are less than a minute, the Jamar Rogers spot is approximately 2 ½ minutes long (Centers for Disease Control, 2012b). In addition, none of these artists sing in the recently produced endeavors. Despite these differences, the connection to the VD Radio Project seems clear: well-known individuals get the word out about a sexually transmitted infection. Celebrities have been and are used in health promotion efforts because of their appeal to a variety of people, they are easily recognized and are considered credible (Cooper, Gelb & Lobb, 2015). Using celebrities is also beneficial because they can generate support in efforts against a disease (Krim, 2011).

Music was a key component of programs in the VD Radio Project and the use of music to reach people continues in the 21st century. While Ludacris, Jamie Foxx and Jamar Rogers did not sing in their present-day videos, music is still used in endeavors created to address sexually transmitted infections. The CDC’s Act Against AIDS campaign includes a music video with Alex Newell, with the video portraying ways to prevent

the spread of HIV (Centers for Disease Control, 2017). While no evaluation of ACT Against AIDS was found in the literature, other initiatives using music as part of health promotion program exist. Boutin-Foster et al, (2010) describe Reducing HIV and AIDS through Prevention (RHAP) initiative. The program was designed to teach young people about HIV and to encourage participants to more carefully listen to lyrics in rap music. To date apparently it has not been evaluated in terms of its impact on behavior but it was found that attendees understood the purpose of the program and they claimed to more carefully listen to lyrics in music (Boutin-Foster et al., 2010). In addition to songs and videos providing information about HIV/AIDS, music has been used in other ways to promote the idea of young people being tested for HIV. Hill, Hallmark, McNeese, Blue and Ross (2014) describe an initiative in which people received a ticket to a hip-hop concert if they agreed to be tested for the virus. It was concluded that this initiative increased knowledge about HIV and boosted people's perceptions about themselves (Hill et al.).

Lips of a Strange Woman, The Prodigal Son and Born on Friday are among VD Radio Project episodes with a Christianity theme. Another difference between modern endeavors and the VD Radio Project is that today's government-sponsored efforts would likely omit the religious/spiritual component or expand it to be more inclusive. The American spiritual is a key component of the country's musical history and cannot be overlooked by educators (Small, 2009), as its presence in the VD Radio Project indicates; episodes with Sister Rosetta Tharpe, The Dixieaires and the Hall Johnson Singers (*Born on Friday*) are examples. However, as it is impossible to deny the religious diversity in the United States this century (Van Scotter, White, Hartoonian & Davis, 2007) it seems unlikely that a government-sponsored program with such a narrow religious focus would be developed, especially when several storylines (over and above the music) focused on religion to a large degree. If a modern-day program was developed to be more inclusive in terms of religious perspectives, the cultural humility concept would be beneficial (Abell, Manuel & Schoenman, 2015; Chang, Simon & Dong, 2012). Fostering cultural humility is a way to encourage self-knowledge, consideration of the perspectives of others and encouraging an affinity for these perspectives (Abell et al.; Chang et al.). It could be useful in the preparation of health educators as a way of encouraging the incorporation of various religious perspectives within health education programs.

One purpose of the VD Radio Project was to reduce people's reluctance to discuss syphilis and gonorrhea ("Anti-VD by radio", 1948; Barnouw, 1996). Efforts using various media to reduce the stigma associated with sexually transmitted infections continue in the 21st century (Kerr et al., 2015; Thainiyom & Elder, 2017). Individuals involved in planning media efforts to increase knowledge about STIs, reduce their prevalence or to reduce the stigma associated with them could use episodes from the VD Radio Project to learn how these issues were addressed in the middle of the 20th century.

Conclusion

The VD Radio Project is a forerunner to some educational initiatives of the present. Awareness of the project's programs is important, as the use of celebrities to present messages

continues in present-day educational efforts. Nobiling and Lyde (2015) point out the importance of understanding the worth of important documents in the history of health education, as they can provide perspective on contemporary issues. This applies to other artifacts as well, and the programs of the VD Radio Projects are an example. Programs could be replayed or recreated (Barber, 2016) and the situations and attitudes depicted in the programs could be used as starting points for discussions. Social media could be used as a way to express these viewpoints (Barber). Health educators are encouraged to utilize these programs in these ways (or in other ways they may devise) to learn how programs related to the prevention of sexually transmitted infections were developed in the 20th century.

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