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ARTICLE

Development of *fotonovelas* to raise awareness of eating disorders in Latinos in the United States



Mae Lynn Reyes-Rodríguez^{a,*}, Marissa García^b, Yormeri Silva^d, Margarita Sala^c,
Michela Quaranta^e, Cynthia Marie Bulik^{a,f,g}

^a Department of Psychiatry, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, United States

^b Department of Health Policy and Management, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, United States

^c Department of Psychology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, United States

^d Department of Psychology, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, United States

^e Department of Neuroscience, AOU San Giovanni Battista, Turin, Italy

^f Department of Nutrition, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, United States

^g Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

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Awareness

Abstract The aim of this study was to develop *fotonovelas*, a popular type of graphic novel in the Latino population, to raise awareness and educate about eating disorders (EDs). Four illustrated cartoons and scripts tailored for adults and adolescents of both sexes were presented in focus groups and an in-depth interview. Seventeen Latino adults (14 females; 3 males) and 10 adolescents (9 females; 1 male) participated in the study. Participants found the *fotonovelas* interesting, and eye-catching than traditional brochures. The use of Spanglish and clarification of differences across EDs were suggested by adolescent females. Male adults suggested changing the title to focus on the health consequences of EDs in order to catch the male attention in reading the story. Based on the receptivity we found in this study, *fotonovela* could be a promising avenue to raise awareness and to educate the Latino community in the United States about EDs.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: maelynn.reyes@med.unc.edu (M.L. Reyes-Rodríguez).

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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Desarrollo de fotonovelas para concienciar sobre trastornos de la conducta alimentaria en latinos en los Estados Unidos

Resumen El objetivo de este estudio fue desarrollar fotonovelas, un tipo de novela gráfica popular en la población latina, para crear conciencia y educar sobre los trastornos de la conducta alimentaria (TCA). Cuatro caricaturas ilustradas y guiones adaptados para adultos y adolescentes de ambos sexos fueron presentados en discusiones focales y en una entrevista de profundidad. Diecisiete latinos adultos (14 mujeres; 3 hombres) y 10 adolescentes (9 féminas; 1 varón) participaron en el estudio. Los participantes encontraron las fotonovelas interesantes y que captaban más la atención que los folletos tradicionales. El uso del español y la clarificación de las diferencias entre los TCA fueron sugeridos por las adolescentes femeninas. Los adultos varones sugirieron cambiar el título, que se enfocara en las consecuencias en la salud de los TCA para que llame la atención en los hombres a leer la historia. Basado en la aceptación encontrada en este estudio, la fotonovela pudiera ser una avenida prometedora para crear conciencia y educar a la comunidad latina sobre los TCA en los Estados Unidos.

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Introduction

Creative approaches are required to enhance early recognition of eating disorders (EDs) and reduce mental health care disparities in the Latino population. Latinos/as with a history of EDs are less likely to use mental health services (Marques et al., 2011) and to be referred for further evaluation by physicians (Becker, Franko, Speck, & Herzog, 2003; Franko, Becker, Thomas, & Herzog, 2007) than non-Latino whites. Several barriers to seeking treatment for mental health problems generally and EDs specifically have been identified in the Latino population, including lack of knowledge (Britigan, Murnan, & Rojas-Guylar, 2009), financial and language barriers, lack of information about EDs, shame, not knowing where to go for treatment, believing that one can get better on their own, believing that eating problems are not serious enough to seek help (Cachelin & Striegel-Moore, 2006; Reyes-Rodríguez, Ramírez, Davis, Patrice, & Bulik, 2013), family privacy, and not being ready to change (Cachelin & Striegel-Moore, 2006; Reyes-Rodríguez et al., 2013). Barriers to treatment are further exacerbated by the stigma associated with seeking care for EDs (Becker, Hadley Arrindell, Perloe, Fay, & Striegel-Moore, 2010).

The estimated lifetime prevalence in the United States of anorexia nervosa among Latinos is .08% in women and .03% in men, of bulimia nervosa 1.9% in women and 1.3% in men, and of binge eating disorder 2.3% in women and 1.6% in men (Alegria et al., 2007). It is concerning that, despite similar prevalence estimates with whites, Latino/as are less likely to use mental health services and be referred for further evaluation because EDs are serious medical conditions and a major cause of psychiatric and medical morbidity, often impairing several areas of functioning (Kessler, Berglund, et al., 2013; Kessler, Shahly, et al., 2013).

Critical questions remain regarding how we can best raise awareness, engage, and retain Latinos in treatment. Psychoeducation about EDs was identified as one of the areas that should be addressed in Latinas living in the

United States as part of a multilevel and culturally sensitive intervention model (Reyes-Rodríguez et al., 2013). The integration of culture and context has been recommended as a standard practice in clinical intervention, research, and education (see the American Psychological Association guidelines) to inform psychologists about issues of diversity (APA, 2003). Culturally sensitive psychoeducational materials focusing on topics such as identification of symptoms, destigmatization, the importance of seeking help and available resources for treatment would help educate Latinos about EDs. Therefore, the use of *fotonovelas*, a popular type of graphic novel in the Latino population, could be a promising avenue to raise awareness and to educate the community about EDs.

Fotonovelas have been widely used to raise awareness about depression (Cabassa, Contreras, Aragon, Molina, & Baron, 2011; Cabassa, Molina, & Baron, 2012; Hernandez & Organista, 2013) and dementia (Valle, Yamada, & Matiella, 2006), to promote healthy eating habits in Latino communities (Hinojosa et al., 2011; Sberna Hinojosa et al., 2011), and as a research tool in image-based participatory research with immigrant children (Kirova & Emme, 2008). Research conducted by Cabassa et al. (2011) found that the use of a *fotonovela* was useful in combating mental health stigma and in educating patients about their condition; however, some rooted misconceptions (e.g., fears about medication) were not successfully changed by this approach. On the other hand, there is evidence that the knowledge gained from reading *fotonovelas* is significantly greater than the knowledge gained from informational pamphlets (Hernandez & Organista, 2015; Unger, Cabassa, Molina, Contreras, & Baron, 2013). Psychoeducation through the use of *fotonovelas* could be useful in developing a culturally sensitive approach to educate Latinos about EDs, the medical and emotional consequences of EDs, and the resources available in the community. *Fotonovelas* may also be helpful in educating the families of patients by providing them with basic information about healthy ways to support a family member with an ED.

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