Creating Effective Mexican-American Narratives of Foodborne Illness to Increase Perceptions of Risk

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Why Mexican Americans?

This research was supported by the USDA Hatch (131-7472 & 131-7416) and Smith Lever (131-7601 & 1317603) awards. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USDA.
Demographic Characteristics

Hispanics account for 50.7 million of the Total US population

What are the special Food Safety issues among Hispanics?

• Hispanics appear to have a higher incidence of listeriosis, salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis (Lay, et al.; 2002).

• Hispanics and other minorities, particularly immigrant populations were found to have less food safety knowledge than other Americans (Chung-Tung, et al., 2005)

• Mexican Style Cheese made with raw milk
What are some of the special Food Safety issues among Mexican-Americans?

• Worrisome eating practices among Hispanics, and particularly Mexican-Americans
  – Outbreaks of *listeriosis* due to consumption of Mexican-style fresh cheese made from raw milk
  – Consumption of raw milk and raw eggs
• Lack of research on home food safety practices
Home food safety knowledge, risk perception, and practices among Mexican-Americans

**Mixed method approach**

- **Qualitative:**
  - Focus groups
    - Results informed the survey instrument
- **Quantitative:**
  - A national random sample of Mexican ancestry & Mexican origin was selected

**Data Collection**

- 10 focus groups of Mexican American in Texas and New York.
  - N=78 participants
- National web-based panel of 468 Mexican-American participants in 2011
- Over 18, cook for family

Some problems

- Unsafe handling and poor knowledge of safe thawing practices or safe handling of leftovers
- Mistaken beliefs and poor knowledge of avoiding contamination
- Poor knowledge of safe microwaving
- Little awareness of dangers of raw milk cheese
- Generally perceived the risk of foodborne illness as low
- Washing hands perceived as important, but often only rinsed or wiped
Some Good News

- Two thirds cooled leftovers outside the refrigerator two hours or less
- Most knew about risks of cross contamination
- Often cook meat until it falls apart or in stews
- Vegetables usually washed and cutting boards washed
- Commonly used diluted bleach to disinfect.
Salmonella and Raw Eggs

Risk Awareness

- Eighty-seven percent acknowledge that eating raw eggs can cause salmonellosis

Practice

- However, 50% reported they consumed eggs with runny yolks, soft scrambled eggs or homemade frosting made with raw eggs
Why autobiographical stories told by victims?
Are autobiographical accounts of Illness better than other kinds of messages?

• Seem to be easier to understand, evaluated positively, better recalled
• May promote a sense of personal risk without defensive processing
• May be effective in increasing behavioral intentions and perceived efficacy
• Encourage connection with the Victim

De Wit et al., 2008; Houston et al., 2011; Kreuter et al., 2010; McQueen & Kreuter, 2010; Miller-Day & Hecht, 2013
Perceived risk is higher if

- The audience perceives the character as having similar experience (in this case risk)
- The story is in first person
- The story is read as a story and not as persuasion.
- Activating the self reduces resistance to threatening messages


Audience Connection to the Victim: Perspective Taking

- What would it be like to be the victim
  - Two Views
    - Actor Perspective: Imagine environment from character’s point of view
    - Observer Perspective: Outside observer focused on character’s action.
Actor Perspective (compared to Observer)

- Better comprehension and recall  
  Rall and Harris, 2000
- Intensifies emotions/emotional reaction  
  Berntsen, 2006; Brunyé et al., 2011
- Imitate actions faster  
  Jackson et al., 2006
Self Vulnerability

1st Person

3rd Person

Zhou and Shapiro, 2017
Policy Support

Provide food safety grants for
• Education
• Information
• Communication
• Surveillance systems
• consumer alerts.

Zhou and Shapiro, 2017
I am Santiago Flores and I’m 28 years old. My family immigrated to the United States from Mexico when I was 15 years old. ….

It turns out we had all contracted salmonella from the raw chicken. Three of us were hospitalized and had to stay in bed for 3-4 days doing nothing. There was nothing to calm us down. We had very severe and constant stomach pain…it was so painful and just wouldn’t go away. Finally, after 3-4 days, my father and I felt better and started to recover. We had strength to recover, but my grandmother didn’t. …I know everybody dies; but it wasn’t her time. It was very hard for us to accept her death. It is still hard now.
Ethnicity, perceived similarity and intention to handle food safely—Lee and Shapiro, 2017

- Males (but not females) perceived same ethnicity characters more similar (shared values/self).
- Similarity did predict behavioral intention \( r (162) = .32, p < .001 \)
- Raises issues about what elements of similarity matter. Is it ethnicity or shared values and emotions.
What’s next

• Use national panel of Mexican-American’s
• Vulnerability of victim
• What’s better: If Grandma tells own story or son tells story about Abuela. (Self-Other)
• Interview more victims
Why vary Self/Other and Vulnerability

• Character talking about self as victim— the greater the audience- character similarity and the greater the vulnerability the more likely the audience will resist the message.

• Character talking about other as victim—a highly vulnerable victim (child/elderly) is likely to increase perception of risk and behavioral intention.
If you have contact with Mexican-American victims of foodborne illness we would like to talk to them.

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Questions?