Author’s response to reviews

Title: It's all about the children: a participant-driven photo-elicitation study of Mexican-origin mothers’ food choices

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Author's response to reviews: see over
EDITOR’S REQUESTS

1. We reviewed the RATS guidelines and believe the manuscript meets guidelines.

2. Regarding Figure 2, this figure was deleted and the legend was integrated into the text. This revised manuscript has a different set of figures, some of which are the same (e.g., map of Hidalgo County and photographs) and some new ones (e.g., conceptual framework and photograph). None of the current figures/photographs show participants.

3. We appreciate the reviewers’ comments and assistance in improving this manuscript. We have addressed the reviewers’ comments below.

4. The manuscript was revised using Track Changes in Word. There were many revisions made to the original submission (more than 700) and we accepted deletions and left tracking to show new text and other important modifications. We believe this format will be easier to review.

5. We checked the journal style and believe the manuscript meets guidelines.

REVIEWER #1

Overall:

6. Modify title and abstract. “Title – I think the title is too long and could be more succinct while reflecting the major theme emerging from this qualitative work. Abstract – could be improved with minor editing. The results section may require some editing (what’s represented as ‘themes’ are really coded concepts). I think what is described as a ‘salient characteristic’ is probably one of the themes emerging from this work that pulls together the 3 areas identified in the coding.”

    Response: Title and abstract were revised to reflect content in this updated manuscript.

Discretionary Revisions: none

Minor Essential Revisions:

7. The title is a bit long and could be made more succinct to reflect the major theme(s) of this qualitative study.

    Response: The title was changed to be shorter and better reflect themes of paper. The new title is: It’s all about the children: a participant-driven photo-elicitation study of Mexican-origin mothers’ food choices.
8. **Abstract** – (Background, line 2): This sentence may need editing for clarity. The word ‘for’ in line 4 should probably be replaced with ‘in’.

Response: The abstract was rewritten per suggestions.

9. **Methods** - Page 10, 2nd paragraph: ‘SHOWeD’ needs to be spelled-out and described in general terms.

Response: The following sentences were added: “For each photograph, the *promotoras* used prompts based on the SHOWeD technique. The SHOWeD acronym represents a set of prompts often used in photovoice and PDPE studies to facilitate critical thinking, reflection, and empowerment; prompts include: ‘What do you see in this picture?’; ‘What is happening in this picture?’; ‘How does this relate to our lives?’, ‘Why does this problem, concern or strength exist?’ and ‘What can we do about it?’ [40, 41, 43, 53]. Interview guide items included two prompts from the SHOWeD technique (e.g., “What do you see in this picture??” and “What is happening in this picture?”) and others such as “When was this picture taken?”, “What is happening in this picture?”, “What did you select this photograph?”, “Is this a typical activity/food for your family?” and “How does this picture make you feel?” Probes such as, “Tell me more about [what’s shown in] this picture” and “Explain that further”, were used to explore topics in depth.”

10. **Results** – Page 16, 4th line from bottom: delete the word ‘the’ from “…because I am the in charge...”.

Response: Quote in sentence was revised to: “…Because I am the one that makes it… because I am the [one] in charge in the kitchen.”

**Major Compulsory Revisions:**

11. **Introduction**: This section is rather long; some of the information could be ‘relocated’ to the discussion section. In general, the introduction should be formatted to begin with a brief summary of what we know about the issue (the background), describe the significance of the research (why we should care), and end with the research purpose (gaps this research will fill). A 4-page introduction is too long.

Response: Per suggestions, the introduction was rewritten and shortened from 4 pages to 2 pages.

12. On page 4 (Introduction, 2nd paragraph, lines 4-6) the statement describing MA and Non-Hispanic working class white women as having strong food-related family roles/values could be misinterpreted as being particular to these groups when in fact they are generally held by women of most, if not all, cultural backgrounds in the US.

Response: We agree. The introduction was revised and this section was rewritten.
13. Page 8 (Methods): For the pre-test, please make clear whether or not the 2 ‘participants’ were consented participants or just community members who agreed to be interviewed (outside of the research proper).

Response: The two women who participated in the pre-test were consented participants, but this was not clear. This part was revised to read: “In addition to the promotora training, promotoras pre-tested the protocols with two women recruited from the study area, who had similar characteristics as the participants. The women provided informed consent, completed the photography activity, and an audio-recorded in-depth interview with their photographs. They were compensated for their participation in the pre-test activities.”


Response: The transcripts were coded initially and in a round of focused coding by the lead author. Observations based on the coding were directly interpreted by the lead author and indirectly interpreted by the coauthors throughout the analytical process. The observations were discussed at team meetings with other research team members of which some were women of Mexican- or Latino-origin. The lead promotora served as a cultural broker, protecting the interests of the colonia mothers and speaking on their behalf, and she was able to represent their perspective to an extent. Her interview was used as a member check of the authors’ interpretations of results. Details were added to the data analysis regarding who was involved in coding and interpretation of results.

15. Page 12 (Methods): Who exactly was involved in the ‘peer debriefing’?

Response: The peer debriefing involved the coauthors.

16. Pages 12-13 (Methods): In describing the methods used for analysis, there are many instances where ‘results or findings are inserted. Please describe the process of interpreting your data in general terms and move the specifics to the appropriate (results) section.

Response: The methods section was modified to remove specific findings and focus on the analytical process and different stages (e.g., moving from initial observations and coding to more focused coding and in-depth analysis of the data), which resulted in theme identification and development.

17. Page 12-13 (Methods): I believe the 3 major ‘themes’ described are better defined as ‘codes’ or ‘concepts stemming from defined codes’ that emerged from the data. They are not really themes, which are more relational ideas. If the authors want to describe
how they generated codes from the data (in general) that’s perfectly fine for the ‘Methods’ section. The specific codes, concepts, and themes should be described in the ‘Results’ section. It would actually be good to show how these concepts relate in a graphic presentation (diagram or figure).

Response: We agree and appreciate the guidance. The themes were not clearly identified and in the text of the results the themes were not discussed. Rather, the results presented the coded concepts in isolation (without discussing how these concepts were related). Based on this comments and others from Reviewer #2, the results section has been reorganized to better incorporate and highlight the analysis and the themes that emerged from the data, which synthesized code concepts. The methods section also has been modified.

18. Results (pages 13-22): The authors did a great job of describing the ‘concepts’ identified in the coded transcripts. What’s missing is how these ‘concepts’ may be related (the themes that represent how these concepts relate to each other). What does it mean that these 3 concepts emerge and what theme(s) bring them all together? In all the discussion about feeding family, why was there no mention of the husband or male partner’s ‘satisfaction’ with the foods prepared? Is a woman’s value found in how happy her children are? Do women have a sense of worth and ‘self’ that is not linked to their role as mothers? These are but some of the questions that one could ask so as to find the underlying theme. As mentioned above, it would be good to show these relationships with a diagram or figure.

Response: Please see comment above.

19. Discussion (pages 23-29):

a. Always start the discussion with what’s new. Once you’ve done that, you may discuss how your data are similar to what others have published. I’ve not seen where you describe what was new. I think if more attention is paid to linking or relating the concepts, then the themes that emerge could be what’s ‘new’. Some of these concepts are mentioned in the conclusions, but they should begin the...

Response: We agree that the new contributions were not clear and have rewritten the discussion.

b. There is some repetition of information already presented in the introduction.

Response: We agree and rewrote the introduction, which included moving some of the literature review into the discussion section. We believe that this eliminated some of the repetition in the discussion section.
c. I’m still not convinced that what is described as unique to poor Latina women is truly that. The same issues are described for poor. The same issues are described for poor, rural women of almost every ethnicity.

Response: We agree that creative food practices are not unique to Latina women but common in most families, regardless of ethnocultural background. We intended to communicate that our paper is unique in its representation of the women and their practices, based on the reporting in the literature and the negative, de-valuing perspective that is often used for describing women and mothers.

d. Strengths: well done!

Response: Thank you.

20. Conclusions: What are the implications of these behaviors on the health of the mothers themselves?

Response: The most important implication for the mothers’ health is the potential for stress (associated with providing for their children in a challenging environment) to negatively influence their physical and mental health status and that mothers do not consider their health as important for taking care of their children. This was missing before and has been added into the implications section. Thank you, this was overlooked.
Discretionary Revisions:

Results:

21. Perhaps the usage of additional subheads in the Results section would increase readability.

Response: The results section was reorganized with subheadings to assist with readability.

Minor Essential Revisions:

Background/Introduction:

22. The meaning of the end of the sentence that states “Using their own photographs... in a meaningful way that was not separate from the daily lived experience” is not clear.

Response: This sentence was deleted.

23. Typo on page 3 “including the lack immigration...”

Response: This section was revised to better reflect the range of challenges and stressors associated with life in a colonia.

Methods:

24.

a. Is there any potential bias from the participants having been part of the 2008 Colonia Household Food Inventory?

Response: We are unsure how being a prior participant would bias the participants towards a certain outcome. However, this project was based around the participants’ subjectivity and we do not consider this an issue. We did carefully consider the importance of maintaining objectivity and sensitivity throughout the research process.

Furthermore, the HFI’s purpose was to inventory food in the home; it was an objective assessment of food availability, not participatory and had nothing to do with participants’ perspectives on being a mother or food choices in their family. Recruiting a subsample of HFI participants allowed us to begin this project with the participants’ trust and interest. We found that the participants were comfortable allowing the promotoras into their homes and sharing experiences about food in their families. These participants are
considered a hard-to-reach population because of their social location and relevant because they are a growing population in the U.S. Having an existing relationship was essential in a participatory project of a personal nature and used “new” methods (from the participants’ point-of-view); if anything, this was critical to generating quality data to answer the research questions.

b. All the participants were part of the SNAP program and WIC. Was there any potential bias in how they responded as a result of these programs? For example, have they received nutrition education about the importance of family meals or not eating fast food?

Response: No, not all of the participants received SNAP or WIC benefits. We added a column in Table 1 to describe participation in food assistance programs. We did not evaluate the influence of program-based nutrition education on their food practices or on eating behaviors and did not measure nutrition education/knowledge.

The importance of “family meals”, an important topic in nutrition and also in sociology, was something that the participants emphasized on their own, both through their photographs and in their discussion. They were not instructed to take photographs of family meals, but we did encourage them to show us their perspectives on food in their families and to emphasize what they do with food on a regular basis. Regarding “not eating fast food”, this observation has been supported by our team’s separate, quantitative analysis of Mexican-origin adults who were born in Mexico and the U.S. and living in nearby colonias to this study area (Sharkey et al. manuscript is under review). We do not believe that their fast food intake, or other food practice/behavior, is biased based on their participation (or lack of) in SNAP or WIC.

c. Are any of the project promotoras affiliated with any of these programs which might influence the participants’ responses?

No, the promotoras are full-time with our research team and have been for a number years and are in no way affiliated with SNAP, WIC, or School Nutrition Programs. Additional details were added to the methods to describe the promotoras’ backgrounds and reinforce for the reader their value in this project.

25. Did the lead promotora take part in the interviews? She was viewed as a key informant in interpreting the results. Was she from one of the two colonias or similar SES? Also were the other four from those specific areas and if so for how long? Were their ages similar to the other women?

Response: Yes, the lead promotora was one of the four interviewers for this study. She was considered a key informant for discussing preliminary findings and checking later interpretations. She is from a nearby colonia, which is very similar in terms of socioeconomic and environmental characteristics, including culture. All four of the
promotoras, including the lead promotora, are from nearby colonias (within 20 minutes drive) or colonias in the study area and have lived in the area for at least 15 years. They are considered part of the community by residents. At the time of the study, the four promotoras age ranged from late 30’s to 50’s, which is similar to the participants’ age range (31 years-54 years). This information was added to the methods section to bolster our description of the promotoras’ role in this project.

26. A statement is made that the “The balance of photographs was to be used for personal photographs.” Was that what was stated or was it just stated that they should use 15 to document the food experience and whatever they wanted for the rest? How that was phrased helps provide context for the interpretation of the non-food related photos.

Response: Participants were asked to take 15 photographs of their food experience (for the study) and use the rest of the exposures to photograph anything else. The sentence was revised to read as follows: “Each of the participants were asked to take at least 15 food-related photographs to illustrate their “food experience”, defined by day-to-day food choices and activities. Participants were free to photograph anything else with remaining exposures.”

27. Clarify if the promotoras had guidelines on what additional pictures to pick or was it up to their discretion.

Response: The promotoras had some guidance on selecting additional pictures, as outlined in the methods. They were instructed to select different photographs that stood out to them or seemed different from the types of photographs the mother had selected. However, the promotoras selected photographs in order to better understand the mother’s food experience, not based on their personal curiosity.

28. Top of page 12, does the term reflection refer to photo quality or personal reflection?

Response: The term “reflection” refers to personal reflection. “Personal” was added to qualify the term.

29. There was a great deal of overlap/redundancy between the mother’s orientation towards her children and the food values section.

Response: We agree and have reorganized the results to better present this analysis.

30. Page 21 – top of page – For example, one mother explained her strategy... Seems like philosophy might be a better word than strategy in this context.

Response: We agree. The presentation of “strategies” has been reorganized as “food practices” and the cultural belief was re-framed as a belief that guided mothers’ food practices.
31. I found the Strategies section extremely interesting and applicable to health promotion activities.

Response: Thank you.

Discussion:

32. A lot of time was spent in the background section on the methodology. Given that this study seemed to reinforce a lot of previous studies, what exactly did the method of PDPE elicit that went beyond other qualitative approaches?

Response: The introduction was modified and no longer provides the details on methodology. The advantages that PDPE has to other qualitative approaches now are discussed in a paragraph in methods (that differentiates photovoice from PDPE) and later in strengths.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

Overall:

33. This paper is very lengthy and needs to be edited to be more concise. There is frequent repetition of several key points such as the discussion around the point of “donde come uno comen dos.” This is a good point but is discussed in four sections of the manuscript which is unnecessary. One mention in the results then discuss in the discussion. When highlighted in the strengths section there is not the need to restate the quote again but instead focus on the concept.

Response: We agree that the paper could be more concise and have modified the draft to remove redundancy and improve readability. The introduction was reduced from 4 pages to 2 pages and the discussion also was condensed. However, the length is necessary to explain the findings from this type of qualitative project and analysis, as well as to make necessary revisions.

Regarding the four mentions of the belief “donde come uno comen dos,” we respectfully disagree. This is an important point that has been overlooked in nutrition and public health research with Latino and Mexican-origin populations and to our knowledge, only mentioned by Stanley Brandes, a cultural anthropologist, in a paper published in 1990. Understanding this cultural belief has implications for researchers focused on addressing food security, nutrition, and obesity in this and similar populations. Furthermore, the Mexican-origin population will comprise a majority of the U.S. population soon and understanding cultural beliefs with dietary implications in individuals living in colonias and other new destination communities will be of significant concern to policy makers at a national level.
Background:

34. On page 4, the authors state that while there are quantitative studies related to food and nutrition along the US-Mexico border, there are few qualitative studies. The authors should state what they believe is missing. The absence of qualitative studies is not enough reason to do a qualitative study. The introduction would be strengthened by highlighting the areas that the quantitative data lack.

Response: There are gaps in the literature regarding food choices of Mexican-origin women/mothers and especially for those in this type of environment, and these gaps have not been addressed by either quantitative or qualitative studies. The introduction was rewritten in a way to better illustrate this.

35. The authors highlight PDPE as a key innovation in methodology. There needs to be a clearer delineation of the distinction between photo voice and PDPE.

Response: More information was provided to distinguish photovoice from PDPE.

Methods:

36. Please provide a more detailed description of the assignment given to the participants. Were examples provided? How that assignment was worded guided the types of photos taken which should be discussed in the limitation section. A more detailed description of the assignment may clarify the linkage between asking participants to document their “food experience” and the two specific concepts the authors were exploring as indicated on page 7.

Response: This was intended to be a creative assignment in-line with participatory research that would enable participants to show their perspective on food in their families. We did provide a few examples (e.g., spending time in your kitchen, running errands, anything related to food in your family), though not many because we wanted the participants to show us what they wanted us to see. During the interviews once we gave an example, participants almost always starting naming off possible photographs, and the promotoras reassured them that those photographs would be acceptable. A new sentence was added in the methods to clarify: “A few examples were provided (e.g., spending time in your kitchen), although the participants were instructed that there were no “right” or “wrong” photographs.” We believe this sentence when combined with existing text is sufficiently details the photography assignment.

We are unsure about the “two specific concepts” on page 7. We are extremely pleased with the wording of the photography assignment, the participants’ photographs, and our ability to accomplish the study’s purpose with the data generated from the study design.