The Use of Social Media to Achieve Weight Loss Goals

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BACKGROUND
Obesity is a major health problem in the United States, particularly in minorities (Ogden et al., 2012). Few obesity interventions have been designed specifically for minority mothers, particularly targeting the reduction of adiposity in Hispanic women. Furthermore, limited research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of using social media, such as Myfitness.pal.com, as a vehicle to support healthy eating and exercise habits in Hispanic women.

METHODS
Hispanic mothers who have participated in the BOUNCE summer and fall programs were recruited to participate in this study. These participants owned a mobile device and had basic computer skills. After agreeing to participate in this study, mothers were asked to create a free account on www.myfitness.pal.com and to post their weekly exercise and nutrition goals and to monitor progress. The myfitness.pal.com platform allowed for daily progress reports as well as connection with BOUNCE facilitator and participants for social support. Every week for six weeks, the mothers were asked to post their foods/drinks consumed as well as exercise. BOUNCE facilitator provided them with feedback along with encouraging posts. The number of posts made on the site and the changes in adiposity were monitored throughout the intervention.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>42-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
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</tbody>
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Pre-intervention BMI ranged 24.7 - 40.5.

BMI Categories:
- Underweight = <18.5
- Normal Weight = 18.5–24.9
- Overweight = 25–29.9
- Obese = BMI of 30+

Pre-intervention %BF ranged from 36% - 50%. The average healthy range for women (ages 40-59) is 23%-33% body fat.

At week 3, clinical measures showed a decrease in adiposity. It is expected that at the end of the intervention, adiposity indicators would decrease further.

CONCLUSIONS
Social media platforms, such as myfitnesspal.com, can be an effective tool to monitor eating and exercise goals and reduce adiposity indicators in women. The combination of a convenient and supportive online environment contributes to the effectiveness of this study. The easy accessibility of this mobile application helped the participants to maintain their health-related goals.

REFERENCES
- http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/QAA53794