

Entertainment-Education for the Prevention & Intervention of Eating Disorders in Adolescents

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Abstract : Eating disorders typically manifest in adolescence and are notoriously difficult to treat. There are two notable reasons for this. Firstly, research consistently demonstrates that early intervention is a critical mediator of prognosis, with early intervention leading to a better prognosis. However, because eating disorders do not originate as full-syndrome diagnoses but rather as prodromal cases, they often go undetected; by the time symptoms meet diagnostic criteria, they have become recalcitrant. Another interrelated issue is motivation to change. Research demonstrates that in the early stages of an eating disorder, adolescents are highly resistant to change, and motivation increases only once symptoms have shifted from egosyntonic to egodystonic in nature. The purpose of this project was to design a prevention model based on the social psychology paradigm of Entertainment-Education, which embeds messages within the genre of film as a means of affecting change. The resulting project was a narrative screenplay targeting teenagers/young adults from diverse backgrounds. The goals of the project were to create a film script that, if ultimately made into a film, could serve to: 1) interrupt symptom progression and improve prognosis through early intervention; 2) incorporate techniques from third-wave cognitive behavioral treatment models, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and rational recovery (RR), with a focus on the effects of mindfulness as a means of informing recovery; 3) target issues to do with motivation to change by shifting the perception of eating disorders from culturally specific psychiatric illnesses to habit-based brain wiring issues. Nine licensed clinicians were asked to evaluate two excerpts taken from the final script. They subsequently provided feedback on a Likert-scale, which assessed whether the script had achieved its goals. Overall, evaluators agreed that the project's etiological and intervention models have the potential to inspire change and serve as an effective means of prevention and treatment of eating disorders. However, one-third of the evaluators did not find the content developmentally appropriate. This is a notable limitation to the study and will need to be addressed in the larger script before the final project can potentially be targeted to a teenage and young adult audience.

Keywords : adolescents, eating disorders, pediatrics, entertainment-education, mindfulness-based intervention, prevention

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