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Focus Groups (2015)

The moderator guide for focus groups was developed by Noel Brewer, Beth Moracco, Seth Noar, and colleagues at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. Focus groups were conducted in person with a convenience sample of adults and adolescents (smokers and nonsmokers). Data collection occurred in 2015.

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Moderator Guide for 2015 Focus Groups “Communicating the Risks of Harmful Cigarette Smoke Constituents” (Brewer, PI)

Note for the moderators

The main goal of these focus groups is **to provide data to inform the decision to drop 1-3 of the 9 messages before we evaluate them in an online survey.** We seek to:

- 1) learn what meaning participants assign to the messages, including any misunderstandings.
 - 2) identify why some of the messages may not discourage people from wanting to smoke; and
 - 3) identify any wording changes we may need to make.
- If it appears that smokers think that we are trying to get them to quit, please clarify that this is not a smoking cessation study; we just want to know what they think about these disclosure messages.
 - If participants want to talk about graphic warning messages, remind them that we are discussing text-only messages—words, not pictures.
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Greeting

Hello. Welcome and thank you for being here today. We really appreciate you taking the time to participate in this discussion. My name is _____ and I will be the moderator for our discussion today.

Roles

My role today will be to ask questions and to keep the conversation going. We have a lot to cover, so I may need to change the subject or move ahead with the discussion at certain points. But please stop me if you want to add anything or if you have any questions. Our discussion will last about an hour and a half, and we want to respect everyone’s time.

I am fortunate to have some help today. I’d like to introduce our co-moderator, _____. S/he may ask some clarifying questions as they come up, or jump in to expand on something that you said.

The note taker for today is _____. His/her job will be to take notes during the discussion. We want to be sure to get all of the important things you say during the discussion.

Purpose

Just to remind you all of why we are here, we are part of a research team at UNC learning about cigarette pack messages. The main thing we are interested in today is hearing from you about your ideas, opinions, and concerns about messages that might someday appear on cigarette packs. These messages are about the chemicals in cigarette smoke. Your participation in today's focus group will help us select messages about cigarette smoke that could be put on cigarette packs.

Our conversation is being audio-recorded to help us remember what you said. You may ask me to turn off the recorder at any time, or just say you do not want to answer a question. Everything said here today will be kept confidential. What you say will be used only to help us develop cigarette pack messages. Nothing you say will be connected with your name. We would also like everyone in this group to keep things confidential, so whatever you say and whatever you hear someone say should not leave this room. I hope you will speak openly, but of course there are limits to what we can do to protect your confidentiality.

How to Participate

Today you will be participating in a group discussion. It's not an interview where I ask a question and each person answers the question and then we move on to the next one. Instead, we'll be putting topics and questions out there and the idea is for everyone to chime in and participate.

In this discussion we'll ask you to read and rate some messages on your own and then we'll talk about them as a group.

We are interested in everyone's opinions, even if you are in the minority—especially if you are in the minority! If somebody says something and you're sitting here thinking, "Yeah, that's sort of the way I think about it or feel about it" then go ahead and share that. We also want to hear from you if you are thinking, "NO, that's not the way I see it at all. That's not how I think about it." We want to hear both similarities and differences within the group--there are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Ground Rules

Before we get going, I want to go over a few ground rules so everything goes smoothly:

1. Please talk one at a time in a voice that can be heard by everyone.
2. Please don't have side conversations with your neighbor. What you have to say is very important to us.
3. You do not need to talk directly to me. You can respond directly to the person who has made a point, or address the whole group.
4. When you respond to someone's statement or idea, please do so respectfully.
5. You do not have to be called on in order to talk. Just speak up.
6. We ask that no tobacco products be used during the focus group session. You are welcome to use nicotine gum. [*for adult smokers groups only*]
7. Please check now to make sure your phones are on silent. Also, please do not use them to look up information. We want to know what you know and think.

Any questions before we begin?

I. Establishing a context for discussing cigarette smoke constituent disclosures (10 minutes)

FOR ADOLESCENT OR YOUNG ADULT GROUPS:

As you know, we're talking about messages on cigarette packs. If I recall correctly, some of you may currently smoke or have tried a cigarette and some of you might not have. Let's go around the room and have you share the story of the first time you smoked a cigarette. Or if you've never tried a cigarette, tell us about the most recent time you were around someone who was smoking. Again, we're not here to tell on you, we just want to let people share their experiences. Who'd like to start?

FOR ADULT 26+ SMOKER GROUPS:

As you know, we invited you here because you currently smoke cigarettes, or previously did. So let's start with some common ground. Let's go around the room and have you share the story of the first time you smoked a cigarette. Who'd like to start?

II. Rating cigarette smoke disclosures (20 minutes)

Great—now that we have gotten to know each other a little, the next thing we would like to do is have you look at some cigarette pack messages that we have been testing. We are going to pass out a sheet that has 9 cigarette pack messages on it. Take a few moments to read each message closely by yourself. Once everyone is done, we'll talk about the messages.

[Pass around the 11 X 17 overview sheet that contains the 9 messages. Give people 3-5 minutes to read independently.]

Next we want to see which messages would most discourage you from wanting to smoke and which messages would least discourage you from wanting to smoke. *[Pass out ½ sheet instructions to each participant for sticker rating that has three orange and three blue stickers paper clipped. Direct participants to review the instructions sheet and independently pick the three most and three least discouraging messages and place the stickers as applicable on their overview document. Give participants 3-5 minutes to complete this task. While people are reading the messages, tape the 9 large sheets on the walls around the room, in numerical order. Each will have 1 of the 9 messages on it.]*

OK, now we are going to see what the group as a whole thought about the most and least effective messages. *[Pass out three more orange and three more blue stickers to each participant.]* Taking your sheet with you for a reference, please put the orange stickers on the three messages that you thought (put an orange sticker) would most discourage you from wanting to smoke and the blue stickers on the three messages that you thought (put a blue sticker) would least discourage you from wanting to smoke.

[Give people a few minutes to post their stickers on the sheets.]

III. *Perceptions of cigarette smoke disclosures (30 minutes)*

[Co-leader organizes the posters based on ratings. The 3 messages with the most orange stickers go in one group. The three with the most blue stickers go in a second group. The rest can go together in a third group. Try to put the group with the most orange stickers close to the group with the most blue stickers]

For the “Most Effective” messages (Orange stickers)

Thanks. Now let’s look at these messages. You can look at your sheet as a reference as we now talk more about the messages. Let’s start with the three that got the most orange stickers. These are the messages you thought were “best,” meaning they would do the best job discouraging you from wanting to smoke.” *[identify which three they are for the group]*

Let’s talk a bit more about this one *[point to message that has elicited the most comments]*

What does this message mean to you?

What did you like about this message?

How could we improve this message? *[Remember, if participants want to talk about graphic warning messages, remind them that we are discussing text-only messages—words, not pictures.]*

What other comments do you have about this message?

[Go through the same questions for the remaining 2 questions in this group.]

For the “Least Effective” messages (Blue stickers)

Now let’s look at the messages with the most blue stickers—the messages that you thought were the worst, and would least discourage you from wanting to smoke. *[identify which three they are for the group]*

What is it about these messages that makes them less effective at discouraging smoking?

What, if anything, about these messages would discourage you from wanting to smoke?

Let’s talk a bit more about this one *[point to message that has elicited the most comments]*

What does this message mean to you?

How could we improve this message? *[Remember, if participants want to talk about graphic warning messages, remind them that we are discussing text-only messages—words, not pictures.]*

[If there are a few orange stickers] It looks like some people thought that this message would be discouraging. What did you like about this message?

What other comments do you have about this message?

[Go through the same questions for the remaining 2 questions in this group.]

For the Messages in the Middle

Now let's talk about these messages that were kind of in the middle.

What is it about these messages that would discourage you from wanting to smoke?

What is it about these messages that makes them less discouraging?

Probe: What, if anything, about these messages would make smokers want to quit smoking?

Let's talk a bit more about this one [*point to message that has elicited the most comments*]

What do you think this message is trying to tell you?

What does this message mean to you?

How could we improve this message, to make it more effective at discouraging you from wanting to smoke?

[Remember, if participants want to talk about graphic warning messages, remind them that we are discussing text-only messages—words, not pictures.]

What other comments do you have about these messages?

[Go through the same questions for the remaining 2 questions in this group.]

IV. Comparison of messages and message characteristics (10 minutes)

OK, now that we have talked about these different groups of messages, let's think about them all together.

All of the messages name one or more of the chemicals in cigarette smoke, like _____ [give examples of chemical names that are on the posters]. What do you think about that?

Some of the messages include health problems that chemicals in cigarette smoke cause like _____ [give examples of health effects that are on the posters]. What do you think about that?

Some of the messages list other products where cigarette smoke chemicals are “found” like _____ [give examples of found-ins that are on the posters]. What do you think about that?

How about messages that include both other things a chemical is found in and some of its health effects? [*point to an example*] What do think about that?

Now we'd like to get some advice from you. We have written these messages using the word *contains*, but the same messages could be written using different words. Here are two messages on one sheet [*show 8.5 X 11 sheet with 2 message examples, an original message and alternative wording example*].

On the left [*point*], the message titled ‘original’, shows a message you've seen before. It says “Cigarette smoke *contains* formaldehyde. This causes throat cancer.” What if the message said [*point to alternative message*] “Cigarette smoke *has* formaldehyde in it. This causes throat cancer.” The difference is it says *has* instead of *contains*. Which do you think is a better way of saying it?

Probe: The word ‘this’ here, in the alternative message--what do you think “this” is referring to?

V. Perceptions of messages on cigarette packs (20 minutes)

[Put mocked-up cigarette packs in the middle of the table.]

As we mentioned, these messages may go on cigarette packs. We have been testing these messages, but so far the testing has been with the messages on a computer screen, not on real cigarette packs. Take a minute or two to pick up the packs, read the messages, and get a general feel for them. Keep in mind that these are just mocked-up packs, so we have stuck labels on existing packs of cigarettes. In real life, the messages would be printed directly on cigarette packs, so the pack would open normally.

Now that you have these packs in your hands, do you feel differently about the messages? Why or why not?

How much would you notice these messages on cigarette packs? What makes them noticeable?

Now that you can see them in your hands, how do you think having these messages on cigarette packs would make people feel about smoking?

How much would having these messages on cigarette packs make you think about the health risks of smoking?

What would you do if you saw this message on a cigarette pack?

Now we’d like to get some advice from you. Imagine you’re in charge of designing written messages for cigarette packs to make people not smoke.

Where on the packs do you think the messages should be?

How big should the messages be?

Should the words be bigger or smaller? What about the font?

What colors should we use?

Where else, besides cigarette packs, should these go?

[Collect all 9 cigarette packs]

IV. Closing question (5 minutes)

Now that we have been discussing these messages for over an hour, and you have seen them on actual cigarette packs, has anything made you change your mind about your original rating? What is it?

Is there anything else we have not yet discussed that you would like to mention related to what we’ve been talking about?

Thank you again for your time and your lively participation. Your input will be really helpful as we move forward with developing messages for cigarette packs.