

STATE OF CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

MEDIA SOLUTIONS

FOCUS GROUPS ABOUT PROBLEM GAMBLING

FINAL REPORT

JD FRANZ RESEARCH, INC.
Public Opinion and Marketing Research



QUESTIONS. ANSWERS. RESULTS.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The research findings presented in this report derive from two focus groups that were commissioned by Media Solutions LLC on behalf of the State of California, Office of Problem Gambling conducted by JD Franz Research, Inc. of Sacramento. Group One was with individuals who have been affected by their relationships with problem gamblers, while Group Two was with problem gamblers themselves. Twelve people participated in each group.

Both groups were held at Opinions ... of Sacramento in the community's Arden Arcade area. Group One took place on July 12, and Group Two was held on July 14. Each group lasted two hours.

All of the participants in the groups were recruited by Opinions by using a outreach email to their database with telephone follow-up. Those in Group One were to fit one of the following criteria:

- Someone you care about has a gambling problem
- You are involved with a problem gambler
- Your relationship with your spouse or significant other has suffered because of his or her problem gambling

Participants in Group Two were to fall into one of the following categories:

- You are someone who has experienced problems in your life due to gambling
- You feel as if you cannot stop gambling
- You have lied about your gambling
- You have looked for help with a gambling problem
- You have been diagnosed as a compulsive gambler

Every effort was made to recruit a representative cross-section of people with the above characteristics as well as a mix of ages and ethnicities. Asian-Americans were excluded because they are targeted by a different program. Those working in the marketing professions, those who work for organizations that help problem gamblers, recent focus group participants, and those with uncaring or extreme opinions were screened out.

The primary purposes of the groups were to develop a more in-depth understanding of problem gamblers as well as those who are affected by them and to test the creative being used to target them. Specific areas of inquiry were as follows:

- Descriptions of gambling in participants' worlds

- Possible solutions to the challenges of problem gambling
- Barriers to the implementation of these solutions
- How the barriers might be overcome
- Barriers to getting treatment for problem gambling
- How these barriers might be overcome
- Reactions to various billboards and posters
- Reactions to various print ads
- Reactions to various television ads
- Reactions to selected Internet ads
- Additional comments
- Key messages from the group

Following this Introduction, the report is divided into two additional sections.

Section II contains a detailed discussion of the **Findings** from the group, while

Section III contains the research firm's **Conclusions and Recommendations**.

For reference, **Appendix A** contains a copy of the **Screening Questionnaire** that was used to recruit the group. **Appendix B** presents the **Moderator's Outline** that was utilized in guiding the group's discussions.

Because this research was qualitative rather than quantitative, it is not technically possible to generalize the results to the population from which

participants were selected. Thus although this report does contain conclusions and recommendations, they should ideally be viewed as being tentative rather than definitive.

II. FINDINGS

Findings from the focus groups are presented here in the order in which the inquiries were posed to participants. Readers who are interested in the structure of the questioning are invited to consult the copy of the moderator's outline that can be found in Appendix B.

How Would You Describe Gambling in Your World?

To initiate the discussions, the moderator asked participants to write down up to ten words that they would use to describe gambling in their world, their environment, or their life. After they had completed this task, she asked them to use the words in sentences, ideally employing every one of the words but if not, at least capturing the essence of all them.

The results of this exercise displayed extraordinary candor as well as a fascinating mix of positive and negative commentary. Almost no one had only positive or only negative things to say, and the blends tended to be quite dramatic, with negatives outnumbering but not necessarily overshadowing positives. The following illustrate the remarks in the Group One:

- Recreational, risky, addictive, problems, lying, debt, divorce. Gambling started as a recreational activity for my stepfather, however, it quickly became a problem; he began lying to my mother about what was going on and soon they found themselves in debt.

- I have fun, money, savings, chance, ATM and gamble. It is fun to gamble sometimes as long as it doesn't cost too much money and by chance take all of your savings from the ATM.
- Addictive, winning, losing, fun, money, and desperate. My sentences are kind of dull. They are: Having fun losing money. Desperate people like gambling and long-term winning is impossible.
- Hidden, doom, shadow, truth, happiness. And I did a sentence for each one. Hidden truths no one talks about. The knowledge that doom is on the horizon. A shadow that is always there. Truth, something that is never spoken. And happiness comes at times but not often.
- Painful, costly, pointless, and frustrating. Gambling in my life has been painful, it's been very costly to me and my family. It's a pointless endeavor and frustrating because I can't get my relative to understand the problems that it causes.
- Moderation, fun, exciting, playful, sad, depressing, challenging, recreational. It's fun and exciting to go gambling. If I lose a lot, it's sad and depressing. I have to remember to be moderate and see it as play or recreation.

In Group Two, the results seemed more personal, more poignant, and often more stark. The combination of positives and negatives, however, remained, as the following examples indicate:

- Exciting, scary, depressing, costly, selfish. It's exciting to play, and especially to win. It's scary when I exceed my limit, it's depressing to lose. It's costly because you most often lose. It's selfish because the money could do some good elsewhere; and it can damage relationships.
- Wish, money, hope, win, lotteries, slots, broke, job, bills. I wish I had more money. I hope I can win the lottery. I like to play the slots but I'm broke and I don't have a job, and I need to pay my bills.
- Exciting to win, upsetting to lose, sick, money. It excites me when I hear the bell going off, the feeling of winning; the upsetting is the feeling when I have spent all my money feeling like a loser again.

- Expensive, broke, secret, jackpot, shame, lie, addictive. My habit is expensive. I always seem to be broke. My habit is my secret. I won two big jackpots. I'm ashamed, I lie to everyone. It's addictive.
- Everyday, sports, enjoy, hate, nervous. Every day I play I check scores every second almost. I love to bet sports but I hate it when I bet crazy sports. I enjoy betting and I hate to get ahead and lose it all. I get nervous when I have several thousand on a game and I cannot enjoy the game and I get sick.
- Happy, sad, disappointed. I'm happy when I'm on my way to bingo. And now I'm sad because I just got home and I can't get off, and now it's over and I'm disappointed because I didn't win.
- Cards, bingo, casino, borrowing, expecting bills, getting deeper in debt. I love playing cards. I love going to bingo, it gives me a rush. When I go to the casino I have a blast, only if I'm winning. I hate to have to borrow money for gambling. Since the gambling started I'm behind on bills.

How Can These Challenges Be Addressed?

Responses to this question were quite concrete, and also fairly limited. In Group One, participants mentioned setting a personal maximum to wager, having casinos monitor gamblers the way bars monitor drinkers, and limiting the number of times one permits oneself to lose before leaving. Participants also noted that the gambler has to recognize there is a problem before any change will occur:

- Moderation. By not going overboard and having a certain amount of money that you're going to spend and not going beyond that.
- Maybe a maximum amount of spending.
- It would be nice if there was like somebody who monitored the casinos. Like bartenders, they say, you've had enough to drink, you're done, or they make them call somebody to come and get them. But they can't do that at casinos because they continue to want your money, so you have

to be your own guide, your own disciplinarian, and that's hard for some people.

- I have a three losses and I'm out. If I lose three times I'm out.
- I think actually the person who has the problem has to recognize that themselves... They have to recognize what they're destroying and the consequences.

Those in Group Two mentioned placing smaller bets, playing on free Web sites so one can experience the excitement of gambling and winning without risking the corresponding losses, avoiding friends who are problem gamblers, and cultivating friends who are responsible gamblers:

- Yes. I quit betting thousands, I'm down to five dollars a bet. I mean I've got several games going right now but they're five dollars. So I still get the excitement but I don't get sick.
- I enter a lot of free contests on the computer, so at least I'm doing it free and not spending money as much. But I still ... Every time I go to the grocery store I see the lottery machine and I always go by there and spend a few dollars, but it adds up and it's hard.
- I switched over to I play games on the computer because I still want to win but at least I'm not paying money. So I play a lot of games on the computer all the time, but that seems to really help.
- I have a good friend and also family members and that's all we do, we get together and we gamble and we go to the casino. And I have avoided them, I try to stay away from them because I know that, especially around payday, they're calling me up, come on, let's go to the casino, and I just say I'm not available. And that seems to help me a little bit.
- Yeah, I have kind of that same general feeling as one of the ways, but I was able to reduce ... mine was just by hanging around with people who ... I mean maybe they still gamble but they gamble responsibly, not the

ones who go and take out loans and stuff to go to the slots. So that was a way to keep it under the grip.

- I don't fool myself into thinking that I don't have a gambling problem, I have a problem, I just have managed to, as you said, play games. I play video poker on the computer for nothing, there's no money involved, it's just the fun of playing the game; that's helped to replace some of the desire.
- I wish it was that easy. I think I want the money so sitting there playing the game is not appeasing me. If I'm going to have some of that bingo I want to have this much of my money. And people think ... you know, you say bingo and they think small pots. No. We travel long distances where the pots are often five and ten thousand dollars a pot. So playing on a machine would just drive me crazy because I would constantly think about the money that I could be making.

When the moderator asked those in Group Two about getting help for their problem, only three offered answers. One said they had looked for Gamblers Anonymous in Sacramento and hadn't been able to find it, one said they had tried GA but found it unappealing, and one noted that she wouldn't seek help because she didn't want her husband to find out she had a problem:

- I actually looked in Sacramento, it was a long time ago, about six years ago, they were starting a Gamblers Anonymous in Sacramento, and I couldn't find them anywhere.
- I went to Gamblers Anonymous in Sacramento. I tried that but when I entered there and heard people talk it was like my mind was still thinking about gambling, and I'm like, what are they saying for me not to want to go and gamble? I thought it wasn't helping me because it really wasn't giving me no good insight on why I should.
- I just don't want anybody knowing. It's hard to get there probably and I don't really want my husband to know. I don't spend a lot of money but I spend more money than I should be spending on gambling.

How Do You Feel About the Poster and Billboard Advertisements?

During this segment of the groups, the moderator showed participants a total of nine advertisements that are designed to be billboards or posters. For each ad, she first asked for comments and then requested a consensus about whether the ad should be saved for further consideration by the group or set aside.

African-American Man With His Head in His Hands: Don't Let Gambling Take Control of Your Life

The general feeling in Group One was that this ad needs to be more stark. The person should be depicted as homeless or losing his home or car. Here, he looks as if he just has a headache:

- The picture is what bothers me. I wish that there was like maybe a homeless man, and they would go, wait a minute, I'm on my way to homelessness if I keep gambling. Or I'm taking away from children, or something that's...
- I was going to say the same thing, his car getting repossessed.
- Yeah, or his house being repossessed.
- Something that shows an action of something being taken away because I'm spending the money, instead of just sitting there like I have a headache.

In Group Two, feelings about this ad were mixed. Some said it represents them, that its elements tie together, and that it is as depressing as gambling is. Others, however, said the ad isn't compelling or that it is too dark:

- That's me. That's how I feel when I lose. Not even when I lose but when I spent money that I had no business spending.
- Just like stressed out.
- I don't find it compelling. Just the idea. Not a strong statement.
- The words and the photo both connected because the look, the hands, and the message are very well tied together.
- Yes. (Several agree.)
- The background is kind of too dark for me.
- **Moderator:** Is this one you'd like to save as a possibly good motivating ad?
- I would. (Several agree.)
- I mean when you see the word gambling it puts you in a depressive moment, that picture right there, it's dark, like a depressive moment.

This ad was **set aside** in Group One and **saved** in Group Two.

Ripped Cards: Gambling Problem?

Those in Group One felt this ad looks like too much fun or a quick fix; it isn't desperate enough. Also, the phrase "We Can Help" should be added:

- It looks too fun to me.
- Yeah. (Several agree.)
- It doesn't show desperation at all. Got a problem?
- I would like a sentence underneath it saying we can help. You've got a gambling problem, we can help.
- It looks like a quick fix.

- Yeah, it does. Because they might think, oh, there's a quick solution to this.

In Group Two, participants found this attractive to card players and bright.

People can relate to poker, they said, and the ad goes straight to the point:

- I like that one.
- I like that one too.
- Like for card players.
- I think there are quite a few people that can identify with poker right now.
- It's bright.
- I'm answering yes in my head. I'm reading it and going, yes.
- Yes. Gambling Problem? Yes.
- That goes just straight to the point. You don't have to read a sentence, it will catch your eye right away.

This ad was **set aside** in Group One and **saved** in Group Two.

Card Suits and Eyes: Gambling Problem?

Neither group liked this ad; both called it creepy. Other descriptions in the groups were equally unkind, although one person in Group Two did note that they had seen the ad:

Group 1

- And the mysterious eyes.
- Someone looking at you.
- The eyes are kind of...
- Creepy.
- I think a gambling problem, like a person with a true problem is kind of an inner issue, a secretive issue and in denial, so it's kind of ... I don't know, I like that.
- The picture takes away from the message. You're looking at the eyes; you're not reading what's underneath.
- To me it looks like Big Brother is looking over you.

Group 2

- No.
- No, I don't like that.
- No, it doesn't have my vote at all.
- Too esoteric.
- It's kind of creepy.
- I think I've seen that before around town.

This ad was **set aside** in both groups.

Cards: If Poker Becomes a Problem ...

The initial reaction to this ad in Group One was to like it. Although there were questions about whether those who do not play poker would use the graphic to rationalize that it didn't apply to them, others noted that they do play the game. The picture is clearly evocative of someone who needs help. There is also a Web site, which some thought was the first evidence of this and others pointed out had appeared elsewhere. This clearly identifies the ad with the government rather than a casino, which is good. However, the ad is not serious or hard-hitting enough:

- I kind of like that one.
- It's probably one of the better ones we've seen.
- I wonder what the percentage of people is that play poker. This doesn't address the people who are addicted to slots and all the other games. So it's a subset of the gamblers.
- I play poker.
- Oh yeah, I play poker.
- I said it will become a rationalization. Oh I don't play poker, I just go to the slots instead.
- Or I play blackjack.
- **Moderator:** Why do you like it? Why do you think it's better than the previous ones?
- Artsy in a way.

- It puts the game on the table and then puts words to the problem, and then has the picture of somebody there. But it creates the picture, a visual, for somebody that needs help.
- Is this the first one that the website ... I mean I didn't notice the others had the website.
- They all were there.
- Yeah, they're all there.
- And your comment about the website, it does identify who is doing it with the ca.gov, so it shows that it's not the casinos, it's the government, California's program, so to me, that jumps out as being an official support thing.
- **Moderator:** So it sounds to me that there's a general sense that it's important that it be identified with the government.
- And not the casinos. (Several agree.)
- It still doesn't show me... It still doesn't come across as the serious life-threatening problem. The man should almost be falling over more, the cards a little bit tilted more, coming down more.
- I think what I would like to see is what you're thinking, Name, like you know the anti-smoking campaign where they have the woman who hits the hole and she's smoking, and that just resonates where's the problem, and the problem is the aftermath, not so much the cards.
- I think the picture needs to show that your action is causing what -- you're losing your home, being homeless, food coming out of the children's mouths. It's sort of a card game; it's not showing what's going to happen if you just keep throwing your money to gambling.

In Group Two, in contrast, this ad was rejected. People didn't like it because it is too busy and it focuses on poker:

- I don't like that.

- I don't like poker.
- It's too busy. Too much.
- It's just not speaking to me.
- And then to me it seems like it's talking about poker, it's focusing on poker.

This ad was **saved** in Group One and **set aside** in Group Two.

Hispanic Man With His Head in His Hands: Gambling Took Control of My Life ...

To participants in Group One, this ad simply represents another headache. The wording is stronger, but the picture is still weak. Also, this doesn't have the Web site on it; when the ads have the Web information in green it really stands out.

Information about Web access is important for those who don't want to talk to a person:

- This is the same thing as the first one.
- Another headache.
- I like the wording better than the first one.
- I do too.
- Much better.
- I can hear someone say, okay, I've gone off the cliff.
- Yeah, the wording is good; the picture is weak.
- I notice this doesn't have the website on it.

- Yeah, and when they put the website in green it stands out a whole lot more too.
- And I think as far as for whatever reason, you may have some who if the website is there that they can go and I don't have to talk to somebody, I can go and look online and at least take a look and see what it's about as opposed to having to call and talk to somebody.
- He's got a good point. If you're in that kind of a situation, you're not very proud of the fact in the first place; you don't want to call and talk to somebody.
- **Moderator:** [Name], you said the design was weak, what do you mean by that?
- Well it's the same as the first one, it's just that whole dark picture; I think that takes away from any modern advertising. It's got to be bright and catching to your eye. The wording is right but the dark theme of it, people aren't going to look at it.
- It would have to be a different picture other than just having him hold his head like he has a headache.
- But he still just looks sad. It doesn't look like his life is coming to an end.

In Group Two, participants said the previous ad with a man holding his head in his hands was simpler. They also thought the words in this ad are corny. Finally, they thought the ad should depict a woman, because women talk more about their feelings:

- It's more like the first one.
- I think one is enough.
- That's simpler.

- I liked the first one better than that one. It's simpler, it's cleaner, it's just making a statement. I'm looking at (this) one thinking it's kind of corny.
- That one, gambling took control over my life, don't let it take control over your life. I mean, come on.
- Well people gamble so I don't want to tell anybody else what to do.
- Exactly.
- And some people gamble really responsibly; we just happen to be some people that don't.
- Not to be sexist but that should be a woman, not a man. A woman would say something like that.
- Because we talk a lot.
- It's more about the feeling.

This ad was **set aside** in both groups.

African-American Man With His Head in His Hands: Is Gambling Taking Over?

To those in Group One, this ad makes it look as if the person is thinking. There needs to be a clearer showing of loss, including cash, the house, and children:

- It looks like he's thinking.
- That's the same guy that's on the first one.
- Yeah.
- On the table I would put cash lost instead of the cards.
- All the cash.

- All the cash. Show the house, show the kids. The cash, the house, the kids, pictures of everything he lost. I want to see that.
- That's excellent.
- And the website needs to be more prominent.
- And he just needs to be like in dire pain. He just looks like, oh gosh.
- What about a tag line of: Have You Lost Everything Yet?, and then all the pictures of family.
- Or Is Gambling Ruining Your Life?

Those in Group Two were inclined to like this ad, which they viewed as being to the point and easy to read. They also commended it for including the word "confidential" and for making the 800 number stand out. When one participant commented that the ad only focuses on card players, another said they didn't even notice that. Participants then proceeded to contend that "gambling is gambling," with a variety of individual preferences. This would also be a good ad even without the cards:

- Yes. I'll say yes to that one.
- I kind of like that one.
- I like that one too.
- It gets to the point.
- Yes.
- The confidential.

- Yeah. (Several agree.)
- I like that too.
- None of the colors seem to obscure any of the text, which I think in a couple of the other ones we may have seen that; so in this one it's very easy to read.
- Because he's sitting there and it's like the question is Has Gambling Taken Over You, and just by his sitting there and listening that it's like, yeah, it's taken over me.
- I like that the number is prominent too, the number is very prominent on that.
- That one is just cards.
- Well I disagree because if you're focusing on the cards, yeah, maybe, but I didn't even notice the cards when I looked at it, all I saw was the statement, the question is it taking over and then the phone number.
- I think when somebody says gambling, you may have a favorite game but everybody knows what gambling is, it's dice, it's cards, it's roulette, it's bingo, it's all of those things.
- Correct.
- Personal preference.
- Exactly.
- **Moderator:** So would you say it ought to have multiple games on it?
- No. (Several agree.)
- It doesn't necessarily need the symbol.
- And the wording.
- Yeah, that's a really good point: It doesn't need the symbol.
- Take the cards away and it's still a great ad.

- Because it's preference and there are so many different preferences. Gambling is gambling.

This ad was **set aside** in Group One and **saved** in Group Two.

Red Sevens and Eye: Gambling Problem?

Both groups reacted immediately and strongly to this ad as being for a casino and making people want to gamble. The following remarks from Group One are illustrative:

- How many people want to go to the casino with those three sevens?
- That looks like an advertisement for a casino.
- Yeah. (Several agree.)
- All you have to do is take the word problem out and it's an ad for a casino.
- Yeah. (Several agree.)

This ad was **set aside** in both groups.

Caucasian Man With His Head in His Hands: Does Gambling Have a Hold on You?

To those in Group One, this ad shows yet another headache. They did, however, like the speeding look, as if the situation is out of control. Ads should nevertheless show the police, "Guido," and "the fires of hell." They need stronger language, using words like "destroyed." When the moderator probed

whether the word “destroyed” is too strong to others, they said no – that is what is taking place:

- It's another headache.
- It like Excedrin Headache Number 3.
- And I like the way they made it seem like everything was going fast; it's like something is speeding, like at least his room is spinning or he's out of control, that blurry background.
- I see that perception too.
- I think it would be better if you had like a policeman coming after him, like he was in trouble because of trying to get money or whatever.
- Like have the policeman following with Guido.
- Or just homeless and desperate and desolate and not just with a headache.
- The fires of hell.
- It just seems it needs to be stronger language -- Has Gambling Destroyed Your Life?, or something. It would be great for a Tylenol commercial.
- You have to put them in the equation.
- So they identify.
- Because that is an actual... that's what's happening.
- When they've done that they've destroyed pretty much everything.
- You can't sugar-coat it.

In Group Two, participants said this ad didn't grab them. They also found it fake and busy; too many words make an ad “not grabby”:

- It doesn't grab me.
- It doesn't grab me either.
- I don't know what about it does it, but it's a fake.
- I feel like the fellow just crunched together. It's not right.
- It's busy.
- Yeah, busy.
- I think the ones with the complete sentences are kind of less grabby, so we both really like these Gambling Problem or Is Gambling Taking Over. But Does Gambling Have a Hold on You, it's almost like there are too many words.

This ad was **set aside** in both groups.

Cards, Money, and Family Picture: Are You Gambling Away More Than Just Your Money?

In Group One, participants said they liked this ad: it personalizes the situation.

Although one suggested the ad should show \$100 bills, others countered that

the \$10 bills show the gambler down to his last ten dollars. They then added that

the ad should include the Web site:

- That one I like more.
- Ah, there you go. Yeah.
- It personalizes it.
- That's a keeper.
- Yeah.

- But add the website.
- Yeah, the website needs to be on there.
- The money needs to be one hundred dollar bills though, not ten dollar bills.
- Well they're using their last ten in their wallet, that's when they're starting to get into a problem.
- And you feel the picture on there; that's good.
- Yeah.
- That's going to hit some people.
- That's by far the best frame.
- We have a winner.

The first reaction to this ad in Group Two was having seen it in the community. One concern was that it appears positive, as if the family is winning. Others noted, however, that they related to the ad and thought "uh-oh." Yet others initially missed the point, and the discussion of this ad remained divided:

- I think that one is over there by Alhambra Boulevard.
- Yeah, and I passed right by it and I saw it and I said, oh; so it made me think because I saw my wife and children there.
- I'm not focusing on the question, I'm focusing on the pictures, and I almost think that, that I feel that too, because I'm not reading, I'm looking at the graphics on the picture thinking they're in a casino, they're out playing, they're winning.
- That one worked on me; I'm like uh-oh.

- Well, yeah, but when I'm gambling I'm sitting there going, okay, if I win I can take my kids blah, blah, blah, we can go here blah, blah, blah, and as I'm losing I'm going, we didn't go anywhere with that money I had anyway when I first started. Because I have some children and that money comes out really easy.
- I was going to say, like we were talking about the attention pull; I think that picture kind of makes up for it in you put yourself in that situation and are you gambling away only money, or like some people said relationships, not just money but your financial stability. I mean some part of it is mine but like your life, things you value. I think all that is kind of just thrown at you when I see that.
- That's a good point.
- Yeah.
- I just got it when he said it.

This ad was **saved** in both groups.

How Can We Get the Best Ad?

After all of the ads had been viewed and discussed individually, the moderator asked both groups how they could take what they had saved and create the best possible ad. Those in Group One selected the ad with the cards, money family picture and recommended that the Web address be added, that We Can Help be bolded, and that pictures of more things be included. They then suggested that "We Can Help" be changed to "For Help Call." Finally, they said they liked the green from the other ad they had saved:

- Add the website. (Several agree.)

- Big and bold.
- Big and bold, like, **We Can Help**.
- Even some more pictures in there wouldn't hurt.
- I'd like the kids inside of their home.
- I don't think you need to add anything like We Can Help or anything like that, I think they're going to see that and they're going to know if they have a problem they know where to go for help already with the website and the phone number.
- Well right there at the end it says, For Help Call, with the website in green.
- Yeah, I think that's a good idea.
- **Moderator:** So this one, the one that specifically mentions poker says, For Help Call.
- Yeah, right there on the bottom. I like that color.
- **Moderator:** You like the green?
- Yeah. (Several agree.)
- Money. Green.
- Does anyone else think there should be more money in the wallet or not?
- If he has lots of money in his wallet it means he's winning.
- It's conveying the wrong idea.
- **Moderator:** Anything else you want to do to make this the perfect ad?
- This is simple, to the point.
- Yes.
- **Moderator:** And you like this wording?
- Yeah.
- Yeah.
- **Moderator:** Better than (another) wording?
- Yeah.
- Yeah.

In Group Two, this conversation was started with the same ad (the cards, money, and family picture) and the same initial recommendation: to add the Web address. The children and family theme really hits home. When the moderator probed for reactions to the money, one participant said they hadn't even noticed the bills; they were focused on the picture. Another suggestion was to change the "pleasing green" background to black and then put the text in white. Once again, the need for the Web address was emphasized.

Finally, the moderator polled the group on "Is Gambling Taking Over?" versus "Are You Gambling Away More Than Just Your Money?," and the former actually outpolled the latter. It seemed clear from the content of the discussion, however, that the latter was most attractive to the group:

- Oh it should have the website on there, that's a help.
- Yes.
- That has the children and the family, it hits home and you feel the guilt when you look at the family photo. There's the guilt of, oh I did it again, that if the money went to my kids, my grandkids, or what have you, and the guilt that's associated with it. Which everybody I'm sure carries at one point or another. That hits home.
- Looking at the four that the group liked, to me it's the most powerful.
- I agree.
- I agree that the one that Are You Gambling More Than Just Your Money.
- **Moderator:** Did anybody have any reaction to the two ten dollar bills one way or the other?
- What ten dollar bills?

- I don't even see that because I see the picture.
- You can kind of tell it's a wallet.
- I mean you can tell it's a wallet but the main focus that stands out to me is the kids. I mean of course we're gambling our money away but besides the money what else are we gambling away -- our children, our family.
- **Moderator:** I'm hearing more and more comments about this ad. Is it the picture that's drawing you into it?
- Yes.
- I see that it affects not just us, ourselves; we're talking about our outside family.
- If the background were different on the third one instead of that pleasing green background. Is that lawn, is that grass or something? I can't tell. Whatever it is, if they changed the color on the type and did that black/white on the third one, you might have a really good graphic.
- It might stand out better.
- Yeah.
- I would agree with that; if the colors were a little bit different, to me, it would be more of a stronger message.
- Is Gambling Taking Over is more to the point.
- I still like that one.
- I think I like the colors on it because it's just like out there, you can just really see it; I guess it might be just the white background and the way the lettering is written. I don't know what it is, but I really think all of them should have the website on it.

How Do You Feel About the Print Advertisements?

Following the discussion of the billboards and posters, the moderator showed the groups four print ads. This section of the group was handled in the same manner as the previous discussion.

Homeless Man: Gambling Doesn't Get My Life Back ...

Reactions to this ad in Group One were generally but not completely positive. The words were viewed as blending in too much, and some didn't like them to begin with. They also debated whether the ad depicts the end of the line or a situation that is simply too late to correct:

- There's the homeless guy!
- It's too light on the words that I see.
- As in it blends in with the background.
- I think the words are good.
- Maybe they could be in black or something so they stand out more, they kind of blend a little bit with the background.
- I don't like the words.
- I like the visual, I'm not much for the wording.
- It seems grammatically weird.
- You have to read into it.
- See the problem is this guy is in a state of poverty or whatever but he's saying that he is currently getting his life back but he's in poverty right now; so it's got a mixed message.
- Like he's at rock bottom, so at this point is he going to get help?
- But if you look at this, he doesn't have any more money to gamble, so why does he need help?
- I think it's showing you where you could end up.

In Group Two, participants thought the man being depicted had more problems than just gambling. To them, the ad is “over the top.” They did, however, like the wording, for which they saved it.

- He's got a lot more problems than gambling.
- I was thinking the same thing, probably on drugs.
- That's over the top.
- **Moderator:** Anybody disagree?
- Now wait, I just want to say, if you had a different figure in there I might like it.
- **Moderator:** You like the wording?
- Yeah.
- **Moderator:** What about the wording?
- Well the wording is okay.
- The wording is good.
- The wording is good on it but the homeless man...
- Yes. I need to gamble.
- Exactly.
- It's too far away from where I am right now. To put myself in that position, it's like too many steps.

This ad was **saved** in both groups.

Pair of Dice: Gambling... Is It Out of Control?

One thing those in Group One noticed about this ad right away and liked was the phrase “free confidential help.” They were, however, concerned about the

phrasing of the headline: a gambling problem is “yours,” not an “it”; the latter sounds as if one were proposing legislation:

- Free Confidential Help.
- That's pretty good.
- Yeah, that's generic; it's black and white.
- Free Confidential Help I think is a good sentence to put on your advertisement.
- Let's think about our billboard, should we be saying free and confidential on that also?
- Yes. (Several.)
- I think it's a good idea.
- But that one I would say: Is Yours Out of Control? Because Is It Out ... When I first looked at that it looks almost like we're going to write a law.

Group Two also commented that the “it” in this ad is impersonal. They would be more supportive if the word were changed to “you”:

- It's so very impersonal. I think it should start Are You Out of Control?
- Yeah, I agree.
- This sounds like you're asking do you think they should have gambling on an Indian reservation.
- Good point.
- **Moderator:** If we changed it to Are You Out of Control as opposed to Is It Out of Control?
- That would be better
- You have my vote.

This ad was **set aside** in both groups.

Green Circle With Money Around It: Gambling Problem?

In Group One, this ad elicited mixed reactions. Some felt it portrayed all the money lost, while others felt it made them want to gamble or offered a green light for gambling. The words, however, seemed to tie things together; the ad is simple, and it should make someone who knows they have a problem call. They then suggested this wording should be added to the picture of the homeless man:

- No, it's another page turner.
- But this is what you're seeing in the magazine, right? So it's a visual, like there's all my money that I lost.
- I like it.
- I mean even that wording would be better there with the image.
- Have that money in the background.
- It's more of a positive than it's a negative.
- Gambling.
- If you take out Gambling Problem and put a picture of a Vegas skyline, it's an ad for casinos.
- It's a green light. It means let's go.
- It's actually addictive.
- The question though, it kind of reminds me of a Got Milk ad, so just a pure question Gambling Problem?, I think if somebody knows for sure they have one and doesn't know where to look, that's great and simple, and they'll call in. Who that person is, I don't know. But I like the wording of just the question.

- **Moderator:** If you put these words with our homeless guy?
- Yes. (Several agree.)
- That would probably be better.

Participants in Group Two liked this ad; to them, money is attention-getting:

- I like it.
- I like it.
- All the money.
- It grabs your attention.
- The money.
- That would certainly catch a gambler's eye.

Pair of Dice: Think Twice Before Rolling the Dice!

This ad appealed to neither group. Group One felt it encouraged gambling, while Group Two laughed at the rhyming and declared it bad:

Group 1

- It's making gambling look fun.
- Yeah.
- That's what I was thinking, it doesn't really mean that you're going to stop, it just means, okay, let me just give a little extra thought.
- And blow on it next time.
- Daddy needs a new pair of shoes.

Group 2

- I'm not in for the rhyming.
- No, I'm not either.
- I mean if you're rhyming you shouldn't be gambling.
- That's horrible. I'm sorry.
- That's bad.

A modified version of the “Think Twice” ad with a green accent was also shown in Group One. This ad engendered a debate about the color itself. Some said green means “go” and should be replaced by red; others said they liked it because it stands out:

- And I wonder why the green. I mean just like the money, but I would think why not red? You put something like red, like stop, as opposed to green it's like...
- It would have more impact.
- **Moderator:** When we were doing the billboards we got a lot of positive thinking about green.
- Well it stands out more and it's not as offensive, and it will cover even if you're colorblind or not. I don't know, it's more subtle.
- I think green with the number and the website would be like a go sign for that; whereas for this, it's a gambling advertisement and it's green as in go versus help.
- It's like go gambling, not go get help. And it's like think twice, that's like should I bet five or ten.
- Well I think the green makes you want to read it more. Just black and white just seems dull to me when I'm flipping through a magazine.
- But not a green light as in go.

- I still think the circle should be red.
- The money has to go.

Which Print Ad Would You Choose?

Participants in Group One said they would choose the homeless man with the text “Gambling Problem?” The color should be green. When the moderator probed about the starkness of the picture, people said there is no picture too harsh – one cannot be too harsh. Also, they said, the wording is simple and to the point:

- **Moderator:** So what I think so far is the homeless guy maybe?
- Yea. (Many agree.)
- **Moderator:** With gambling problems?
- Yes.
- No. It's too simple.
- Well see I like the simple in an advertisement.
- You should put the words with the guy.
- **Moderator:** And with no money?
- Yeah.
- No money.
- **Moderator:** And the color is green?
- **Moderator:** Do you feel that's too harsh a picture?
- No. (Several agree.)
- You can't have too harsh of a picture.

- But if it showed him with like a wonderful car and a nice house and everything and then it shows him afterwards.
- **Moderator:** How many think gambling problem, call for help is enough? Almost everybody.
- With almost every poster we had a problem with the wording, so to me that's like gambling problem just kind of sums it up, and nobody picks apart what the wording is.
- And to the point is its allure.
- Simple is the point.

In Group Two, participants said they would choose the green circle with the money around it, making the money green and using white text. Their second choice was a modification of the "out of control" message: **Are You Out of Control?**" This they recommended be in black and white. They can put themselves in this situation. They also recommended that the picture on the ad be changed to reflect the type of gambling being pursued near the ad's location. Finally, when the moderator brought up the issue of sponsorship of the ads, which this group had not yet mentioned, participants agreed that naming the sponsor gave the ads credibility:

- The one that talked to me is the gambling problem with the money.
- That's the one I liked too.
- Everybody likes this one.
- Yeah.
- I think a different green would be better.
- You want the money green?

- Yeah.
- Money green would be too dark for text.
- If you use black text, yes; you would have to use white text.
- What if they had a black circle and then white print?
- White lettering?
- Yeah, like that. That in the circle and green around the edge.
- That would be better.
- That's just what I was thinking.
- That little one is good though also. The middle one. (This is: Gambling, Is It Out of Control?)
- **Moderator:** And it should say Are You Out of Control?
- Yeah.
- I think Is Your Gambling Out of Control?
- I like the black and white.
- Black and white.
- Once again, it's like you think about it and you can place yourself in the situation, but I really like those.
- It needs some rearranging.
- Perhaps the dice may not even need to be there, that's a possibility.
- Yeah, you can take each of these signs and put them up in different areas. I mean you're not going to put this sign with the dice up in a bingo hall.
- Right.
- So you'd have a bingo card here in your bingo hall, and a slot machine near a casino, is that the idea?
- Yes. (Several agree.)
- **Moderator:** How do you feel about the fact that there is a sponsor listed here?
- I think it adds to the credibility.

- I like to see a sponsor on there.
- **Moderator:** Would you agree that having that there gives it credibility?
- Yes. (Several agree.)

How Do You Feel About the Television Advertisements?

Discussion of the print ads was followed by a viewing and discussion of seven television ads. These conversations proceeded as follows.

Foreclosure

Those in Group One found this ad hard to read. They also felt the character in the ad was too young to have lost everything. In addition, the ad appears to be targeted to Asians, as everyone in it is Asian:

- I think the words could have been a little bigger, but my eyes could be bad.
- Yeah, it's hard to read it.
- I like the end scene with the foreclosure sign and the 1-800- GAMBLER underneath.
- Yeah, I liked the foreclosure.
- I couldn't see really well. I wasn't sure if the people were like too young.
- I mean in like early twenties.
- In the beginning, at the table, that crowd that was playing, they looked young, like even high school.
- Yeah. Even their voices sound like kids.
- I noticed that everyone in there was Asian, so it's targeted.

- Yeah, everyone was Asian.
- It should be a mix.
- It can always be neutral or maybe do it in a mix of nationalities.

In Group Two, participants agreed that the person depicted in this ad is too young to get into serious trouble, although the apparently youngest person in the group pointed out that he had had a serious gambling problem in high school. Nonetheless, the person in the ad is too young for a foreclosure. For that age group, repossession of a vehicle is more appropriate. Also, the phone number in the ad needs to be slowed down – it's too hard to read.

Finally, one person said the ad doesn't depict his problem – it's too over the top. Another countered that all he had to do was wait and this kind of problem would come as well:

- I don't know.
- I mean the kids are too young for me. I don't know why, I mean my kids and the kids that I'm around, gambling doesn't really take hold until you have the money to support it, has been my experience, and you don't see a lot of young kids in casinos, you see more of the older ...
- I had a huge gambling problem in high school.
- Did you really?
- Yeah.
- I think there's a disconnect between showing the young people and the foreclosure.

- **Moderator:** Yeah, you probably didn't have a house when you were in high school, or a mortgage. So what if we kept younger people to appeal to people like about Name's age but for this one we put an older person in it?
- Yeah. (Several agree.)
- **Moderator:** If you were appealing to high school students or college students and foreclosure wasn't a reasonable scenario, what kind of a scenario would you put in there?
- Instead of foreclosure?
- Maybe vehicles.
- Car repossessions. (Several agree.)
- You have a number on the foreclosure sign; it was flashed up there so quickly that I almost missed it. It should have been up there a little longer or made bigger, or something.
- I think if you're attracting young people, definitely muscle cars, things that they also place value on. And like I said, it wouldn't be a house, it would be like an apartment or something like that with an eviction notice or the tow truck with the mustang being towed away.
- I thought it was way over the top because I'm not going to lose my house because of that. I might lose my house for something else but not because of my gambling.
- Everyone says that, that has a house, that I would never lose my house because of gambling. You're just not that far yet.

Don't Scratch

This ad was greeted by immediate laughter in both groups. Those in Group One also said that it is vague; the key point, they argued, is that gambling is illegal for young people. Participants in Group Two simply made a couple of derisive comments:

Group 1

- That's about as vague as vague could ever be.
- I was thinking he has a rash.
- I thought there was going to be a slot machine inside his locker.
- See I would have... Like if it was going to the younger generation who shouldn't be, because it's illegal, I would have said, you're breaking the law, or it's illegal, rather than don't scratch.
- I've never heard of any underage person having a problem with scratchers.

Group 2

- Don't itch, don't scratch, know the facts.
- Bart Simpson.

Chase

Those in Group One liked this ad, although they also thought it represented a bad drug deal. Nonetheless, they paid attention to see what was going on. The main issue is that the person is too young. Gambling at that age is illegal. Also, real problem gamblers aren't that young. Older people have more to lose, although there are certainly some young people who are problem gamblers. If it's illegal, however, are they likely to call? In addition, shouldn't this say "free and confidential"? This should be on all ads:

- I kind of liked that one.
- Yeah. I didn't realize what the end scene was going to be but it was still good.

- I thought it was a bad drug deal.
- Yeah, I did too.
- Yeah.
- **Moderator:** But does it keep your attention until you get that message?
- Yes. (Many agree.)
- This had more of an impact I think.
- But it doesn't connect to the problem I don't think.
- But you don't know what kind of activity they may be involved in to get to that point where they got someone chasing them to pay their debt.
- I think the age still is kind of a hang-up for me, these are kids.
- Yeah.
- They shouldn't even be in a casino. I don't understand. I don't think the age of the troubled gambler is a teenager, it's probably somebody in their 30s, 40s, or 50s, so I don't see how it relates.
- Not in my case; everyone I knew that had problems was younger, like twenty-one and twenty-six, so they're fairly young.
- **Moderator:** How old does that guy look to you?
- Seventeen.
- Sixteen.
- Well he can get into gambling problems at seventeen.
- Online. Yeah.
- But I think maybe what we're trying to say is maybe they would have something more to lose than just what an 18-year-old has to lose.
- Yeah, this is directed at the kids gambling, like the scratchers thing, they're gambling illegally.
- But if it's illegal and they're doing it would they call for help?
- **Moderator:** Free and confidential.
- It doesn't mention confidentiality on there though.
- You need to put that on all your ads.

- Like [Name] was saying just kind of who's the target audience, that you put this on, like the MTV during the younger times, it probably would be more effective than if you doing it during So You Can Dance in the evening times for adults.

Participants in Group Two simply said they thought this ad represented a drug deal gone bad. It's not about gambling:

- Drug deal gone bad.
- Yeah.
- Drug deal?
- Yeah.
- **Moderator:** So does that sound like a gambling thing to you?
- No. (Many agree.)
- Not at all. Not at all.

Game Over

To those in Group One, the man in this ad looks too comfortable even though he is upset. He is too well-dressed. The message, however, is a good one:

- See I didn't believe him.
- **Moderator:** You didn't believe him?
- No. He still looked very comfortable.
- I thought it was the best one of them all.
- He just seemed clean, he was dressed nice, he was in a nice environment.
- But he seemed very upset and his words related that.
- I liked the words.

- Sometimes people can be very successful and have lost everything just before they lose their house and everything else.
- Yeah, but it's more believable if they're less dressed up. And there's no mention again about the confidentiality.
- The idea of that one was the best with the pictures, people relating to they had a relationship, they had a home; maybe some of the details of him not looking so nice would be more effective, but I liked that concept.
- I liked the message, I just thought he looked too put together.

Participants in Group Two thought this ad was better than what they had seen so far - it explained the situation. To some, however, the ad didn't resonate.

Also, the person in the ad needs to be older to be believable:

- That was better than all the other ones, to me.
- Yes.
- I agree.
- It explained it. I mean it just went through details, like he had a girl, he had a life and now it's over because he's gambling.
- You relate to it a little better.
- I just felt the opposite. It turned me off. I don't know.
- Yeah, I didn't feel that one.
- Like a message for someone older, like it should have been the symbol. And maybe all these ads are aimed at younger people, but it just didn't play. It wasn't in sync.
- Yeah. I think so. The message that he was saying doesn't relate to what was going on in the picture.
- The words were good, I thought, it's just the video wasn't clear to me.
- I think it should have been somebody older.
- Then you could see that.

- Yeah.
- Yeah. Because to me somebody young like him, your parents are going, what are you doing, and they're sticking by you at that time. It's after you're a little bit older and they're like, come on now, you know better.
- Believable.

Anger and Other Addictions

Reactions to this ad in Group One were strongly and universally positive:

- I liked that one.
- I even liked the age of the guy.
- Yeah, that fits.
- The website was on there.
- And he wasn't just still shots, they showed him fighting and throwing the cups, that was a good image that sticks to you.
- The whole picture.
- **Moderator:** So that was really effective?
- Yes. (Several agree.)
- **Moderator:** Everybody likes that one? A keeper?
- Yes. (Several agree.)

In Group Two, participants said this ad was the best on so far. The denial is also clearly portrayed:

- I like that one.
- Somebody's true story.
- I liked that one too.

- That was the best one so far.
- Yes. (Several agree.)
- For me, I really liked the contrast between what he was saying, I don't do any of these but it has all the pictures of him doing it. It's something that I can relate to.
- Making excuses. Like I don't drink that much but he's chugging beers. It's kind of the lies you tell yourself.
- In denial.

Slot Machine

To those in Group One, this ad is good but not as good as the previous one.

Aspects of the former ad that are compelling include the violence, the alcohol, and the artistry. There was also a subtle message in the background that you will lose a lot more than you win:

- I thought that one was okay but I still like the other one better.
- Yeah.
- Yeah, but compared to the last one it doesn't stand up to it.
- **Moderator:** What was it about the last one, the previous one?
- The violence.
- The alcohol.
- There was more artistry to it.
- The woman in the background or the tone of the last one said you can win a lot of money but you're going to lose a lot more.
- And that was in that previous one.
- Yeah, and it was very subtle. Did everybody hear it?
- Yes.

Participants in Group Two said the person in this ad is too young for this level of loss. They did, however, like the mention of debt and suggested it be added to the previous ad:

- I just think when you put a really young person and they're talking about losing their family and stuff like that...
- You're too young.
- Correct.
- What I liked about that one is that it brought up like debt, loans owned and stuff on money, having a loan shark come after you. I mean I just liked the whole debt idea, of bringing that up reminding people that...
- **Moderator:** Could you incorporate that, do you think it would make sense to incorporate that in some way into the one that you all liked?
- If you could somehow, I think that would be really strong.
- Well she can be yelling at him about the bills that are past due. He took this money and good-bye.
- I agree.
- It's probably going on in 99 percent of the households that people gamble.

Family Photo

Reactions to this ad in Group One were mixed – some liked it and some did not.

They did, however, agree that they preferred the previous one they called “Fighting” (the Violence and Other Addictions ad):

- That's a good one.
- It's good.
- Yeah.

- Good.
- I don't really like it.
- I don't like the voice-over.
- I just didn't like the imagery as much as the other one.
- The fighting one was the best.
- That gives you the stark realities.
- It gets your attention.

Those in Group Two thought this ad was all right but also preferred the Violence ad. The child, however, is a powerful image. They then offered ways in which a child might be incorporated into the Violence ad:

- That's okay but it wasn't...
- Yeah, I thought that kind of too with everybody slowly disappearing.
- I can really relate to that because I have a son and he's like sixteen months-old. My girlfriend and I are not married yet but she's always, like just about little things around the house, he does everything that I do, like everything. If I spit on the sidewalk, he's trying to spit on the sidewalk. So that one hits me pretty hard right there.
- I was much more partial to like the live video instead of just the photo.
- I kind of agree.
- Now if there was a kid somewhere where the scene was where that wine bottle was thrown and the wine, not at him but maybe like a scene right before that with a kid in it, I think all of that would be really good also.
- Or maybe like a mother holding a baby.
- **Moderator:** So we first we added debt to that one and now we're going to add a child to it?
- Yeah.
- It could be a notice from PG&E or SMUD.

- And the next thing to go is the utility, you know.

Silhouette of Gambler

Participants in Group One found this ad weak, insufficiently harsh, and boring.

One aspect of it that is better is that the Web address and phone number are shown on the screen long enough to be captured by the viewer. Also, the concept of confidentiality is included:

- No.
- Weak.
- It hits so many from a logical perspective but if you're that deep in the hole with a gambling problem you're not thinking logically.
- You have to have something more harsh.
- Kind of boring.
- Yeah, I was thinking that too. His monotone voice, he wasn't selling me gambling.
- Compared to the other ones with the imagery and stuff this guy was just sitting there talking; it was just not as powerful.
- And like with the website was on there early but it kind of made me tune out to him even more and just kind of focus on the website. But I thought if anybody was watching and wanting to write it down, they have more time to get it than with the other ones that just kind of flashed at the end.
- **Moderator:** So we need to make sure that the information with the phone number and the website is on the screen long enough so that people can get it?
- Right.
- And I would definitely bring home more of the confidentiality of the phone call.

Those in Group Two liked this ad; it says there is hope. Also, they liked the main points showing up as words on the screen and the fact that the person in the ad is asking for help. This would be their second choice:

- I kind of like that one.
- I like it.
- Yeah, because he's still in there seeing what he went through and there is hope.
- I did like that they're putting kind of the main points of his phrases on the screen for you.
- And I like it because he's asking for help. You know what I mean? Instead of just like the pictures show that you need help now after all this happening, now you need help. But he's actually asking, you know, I need some help, can you help me? I liked that part.
- **Moderator:** What about the rest of you, do you like this? Nodding heads.
- I still like the previous one the best.
- Yes.
- But this was a good one.
- **Moderator:** So this would be your second choice?
- Yes. (Many agree.)
- He was believable.
- Yeah.

Silhouette of Family Member

Participants in Group One found this ad mundane and boring. One person, however, said they liked the inclusion of a family in the ad:

- They need a better actor.
- Boring. It almost puts you to sleep, just tune it out.
- The wording missing.
- And she doesn't even have a face.
- That would never be on TV.
- I would like that message better if she was right in your face.
- Very monotone.
- I liked an ad to the family. I mean there are other people involved and that was the only one like that; I like that idea.

In Group Two, participants started this conversation by noting that there needs to be a commercial with a woman, as women are gamblers, but this woman is not the gambler. Instead, she is talking about someone else, and the way she is doing so is annoying. Who is the gambler? It might be an ad to encourage friends and relatives to join a group like Al Anon, but even that isn't clear:

- I didn't like that one.
- It was more personal.
- If she were referring to herself, then it would be a big difference, because I did not see no women in any of the commercials.
- I definitely felt that her putting herself in like ... well not herself but talking about somebody else wasn't very ... It didn't really speak to me.
- Who is the gambler? Is it her son? Is it her husband? Who is it? And then she said they, so it seemed like more than one. A house of gamblers.
- This is not third place.
- I'd like if it had been a little bit more specific. Just like you said, like when she confronted the gambler I wondered the same thing, who is it, your

husband or what? If she had said when I confronted my husband or whatever.

- She detached herself from the situation.
- I can see my wife saying that. I can see my wife saying, oh he's out with the guys again.
- But if she's saying he, she's personalizing it to you.
- But then when she said the gambler, I'm like eh.
- When I heard this, right away I thought it wasn't a gambling ad it was for like the family, like Al-Anon. It was like, oh, you can call there, the family can call.
- Yes. You're right. So it was like if part of your family needs help they can call this number. But it wasn't clear.

Which Ad Would You Choose?

Group Two had already selected the ad they referred to as "Fighting" as their first choice and "Silhouette of Gambler" as their second choice. Accordingly, the choice of an ad was not pursued any further at this point in the discussion for that group.

In Group One, discussion following the showing of all of the ads led to "Violence" being the first choice and the one with a picnic blanket being second. They would also like "Chase" if the person in it were older:

- The guy on the picnic blanket where the kid stays away and the wife stays away.
- Yeah, I think that's my number two.
- Yeah, me too. That's mine.

- I think the kid running.
- Yeah.
- Yeah, I liked that one too.
- I liked the kid running away too.

How Do You Feel About the Web Advertisements?

In the next segment of the groups, participants were shown and asked to discuss two or three Web ads. This section of the groups was similar to the previous three discussions but was briefer and less enthusiastic. Participants appeared to be tired and less interesting in looking at more advertising.

Participants in Group One found the first Web ad “bland,” thought the second one made the first look exciting, and simply commented that the third had the headache again. In Group Two, participants found the first Web ad busy and hard to figure out. They also suggested that the 24/7 availability of the toll-free number be included in every ad, because people may need to call when they are leaving a casino:

- Awful busy.
- I was thinking like what is going on.
- Yeah, it's too busy.
- It took me awhile to figure out they're little chips.
- I was just like, buttons? I think it's just too busy.

- When you're online there are so many ads that are thrown at you constantly; they never stop, that you blur them; so I wouldn't even look at that, I wouldn't even read it.
- I think most of us probably would say we wouldn't even look at it or wouldn't notice that.
- Yeah, it's really busy. But I think that 24/7 hotline number, that right there, I think that should be put on the other ones if it could.
- Yeah. Because I know people leave the casinos and they're like, oh my god, what am I going to do now? And they probably would want to need to call somebody, you know, leaving a casino or whatever.

At this point, the moderator asked the group to confirm that it was important to have the word “confidential” in the ads and then asked if the word “free” would be important as well. Participants agreed that both of these terms should be included and then added that 24/7 should be part of the ads as well because people gamble late at night and are coming home early in the morning.

- **Moderator:** You saw on some of them it said free and confidential, and I heard that you liked the confidential part. Nobody mentioned the free part. Would it be important to put confidential on the ads?
- Yes. (Many agree.)
- **Moderator:** How about free?
- The free is good too because they spent their money or lost their money.
- So it needs to be free.
- And that hotline.
- That 24/7 is important because when I think about gambling it's usually late at night, early morning coming home.

Reactions to the second Web ad were more positive. Participants liked the fact that the ad covers the top and bottom of the page. They also said it is clear and to the point:

- Of the two I would like this one better because I think that's supposed to encapsulate like the whole web page, if I'm not mistaken; that's what I take from the white spot in the middle; so I think that one might catch my eye better than the one that's kind of hidden on the side with a bunch of other ads. So the better of the two.
- Yeah, I agree.
- Cleaner.
- Clearer.
- To the point.
- It's not busy.
- It is cleaner. The other one has so much stuff on it that it's really easy to just gloss over it; this one is pretty simple.
- This is an eye grabber compared to the other one. The other one was too busy; this one is clean, sharp and it grabs your attention.

Do You Have Anything to Add?

No one in Group One had anything to add. In Group Two, participants suggested that the ads – at least the print ones – elaborate on what the program has to offer. They also suggested more advertising and advertising in different places:

- I was thinking maybe they could elaborate on what exactly they can offer you from the phone number a little bit.
- In the print ads.

- Yeah.
- Local groups or something like that. Local resources. People in your area.
- **Moderator:** What it is that they're offering?
- Yes. (Several agree.)
- And too, I think they just need to put it out there more. More ads.
- Advertise that.
- Advertise more.
- Maybe they need to put them on more sports. I've never seen them on baseball, football, basketball.

What Should I Tell My Client About This Group?

Key messages according to those in Group One were as follows:

- Grab your audience.
- Show the harsh reality.
- Everything has to be good.
- Don't show so many headaches.
- The imagery has to be captivating.
- Free and confidential.
- The information that we talked about.
- Multiple ethnicity.
- And ages.

In Group Two, participants indicated that it was important to make it personal, be aggressive about getting the message out, reflect what people are thinking rather than telling them what to think, and include women as gamblers:

- Definitely make it personal. Something believable that everyday people can relate to.
- That's basically it.
- Be aggressive. In getting the message out.
- And I think following up on the point over here, definitely make the statements so that you come to the conclusion so that they don't tell you what to think, it's what you are thinking.
- Yeah. Like you see yourself.
- Yeah, very personal.
- Yes. I think every one of the commercials that we liked it was because we could put ourselves in that. And every one of the print ads we liked it was because the statement led us to the conclusion, it wasn't just a blanket statement of you're evil and gambling is bad. It let you come to the conclusion.
- I was just thinking about the commercials weren't touching a lot of the women. Because like right now I can look in my purse and bring out some losing lottery tickets, so what would be a good commercial is somebody reaching in their purse trying to look for change to pay for milk and bread, and just keep bringing out losing tickets or something like that.
- I like that. That's really good. She ought to get paid for that.
- That's a good idea.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What Is the World of Problem Gambling Like?

Although the results of this research may not be particularly surprising to people who study problem gambling on a regular basis, they were eye-opening to those who implemented this research. Participants in the groups were extraordinarily candid, which we found both surprising and gratifying.

They also offered a striking mix of positive and negative thoughts about gambling that were highly personal. While the portrayals of gambling in the group of gamblers were generally more stark and poignant than those in the group of affected individuals, both groups expressed excitement, joy, frustration, pain, and loss at more or less the same time.

What Are The Solutions?

Solutions identified by the groups were relatively few and tended to focus on individual discipline. Key strategies that were mentioned included setting personal limits, having casinos monitor gamblers the way bars monitor drinkers, making better choices of friends, and playing at free on-line sites to achieve the thrill of winning without the dismay of loss. There was also general agreement that gamblers need to recognize they need help before they will seek it. Finally, comments about Gamblers Anonymous were very limited and not at all positive.

What Are the Best Ads?

The billboard most favored by both groups is “Are You Gambling Away More Than Just Your Money?” Gamblers also thought “Is Gambling Taking Over?” would be a good choice; this ad actually out-pollled the former ad, although the discussion clearly favored “Are You Gambling Away More Than Just Your Money?”

Among the print ads, affected individuals favored the homeless man but with the phrase, “Gambling Problem? Call for Help” rather than the phrase currently on the ad. Gamblers, on the other hand, found this ad “over the top” and well beyond anything they would relate to. Thus it may not be a particularly good choice.

Gamblers strongly favored the green circle with the money around it, suggesting that the money be green and the text be white. As a second choice, they liked “Gambling: Is It Out of Control,” but with the phrase “Is It” changed to “Are You” in order to personalize it. They also suggested that this ad have changing pictures illustrating various types of gambling, depending on the location of the ad.

Among the television advertisements, “Anger and Other Addictions” was a strong favorite of both groups. There were also suggestions that this ad portray

other challenges, such as debts or the loss of a home. The second choice among affected individuals was “Silhouette of Gambler”; gamblers found the ad with the picnic blanket and “Chase” but with an older protagonist equally compelling as second choices.

What Should Ads Be Like?

Throughout both groups, people called for ads that are personal and that reflect what they are thinking and feeling as they confront problem gambling. Ads should also be stark and harsh, showing the losses that can result when gambling is out of control. They should not, however, be so “over the top” (like the homeless man) that they clearly do not depict most problem gamblers.

Two other points merit further consideration. First, the people portrayed in ads depicting major losses need to be older, as younger people are unlikely to sustain such levels of loss. Participants also felt that young people do not have major gambling problems, which is of course not true. They did, however, want the losses to correspond to the ages of those portrayed, which makes sense. Older people lose homes; young people lose cars.

Second, almost all if not all of the gamblers portrayed in the ads are men, but men are not the only ones with gambling problems. Women should also be presented as targets of problem gambling advertising.

What Else Should Be Included?

Almost universally, participants in the groups agreed that the ads should contain:

- The phrase “free and confidential” or “free, confidential”
- The phrase For Help Call: (as opposed to Call for Help)
- The Web address
- The phone number
- The name of the sponsor to legitimize the ad

Finally, they pointed out that in television ads, the Web site and phone number need to play slowly or long enough to be read.

We realize that this is a lot of information to put in a small or short ad, but we are nonetheless inclined to agree that all of it is important. We would therefore encourage the Office of Problem Gambling to figure out how all of this information can be incorporated without the ads looking busy.

APPENDIX A: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
OFFICE OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

MEDIA SOLUTIONS

FOCUS GROUP SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. RECORD GENDER:

- MALE
- FEMALE - RECRUIT A MIX

USE STANDARD FACILITY INTRODUCTION.

USE QUESTION 2A FOR GROUP 1 (AFFECTED INDIVIDUALS) AND QUESTION 2B FOR GROUP 2 (GAMBLERS).

GROUP 1

2A. As we understand it from your response to our outreach email, you are a person who has experienced negative consequences due to your involvement with someone who has a gambling problem: either someone you care about has a gambling problem, you are involved with a problem gambler, or your relationship with your spouse or significant other has suffered because of his or her problem gambling. Is that correct? (And which of those would you say best characterizes you?)

- PERSON CARED ABOUT HAS GAMBLING PROBLEM
- INVOLVED WITH PROBLEM GAMBLER
- RELATIONSHIP WITH SPOUSE/SIGNIFICANT OTHER HAS SUFFERED DUE TO OTHER PERSON'S PROBLEM GAMBLING

RECRUIT A MIX

- NOT CORRECT – THANK AND TERMINATE

GROUP 2

2B. As we understand it from your response to our outreach email, you are someone who has experienced problems in your life due to gambling: either you feel as if you cannot stop, you have lied about your gambling, you have looked for help with a gambling problem, or you have been diagnosed as a compulsive gambler. Is that correct? (And which of those would you say best characterizes you?)

- FEEL AS IF CANNOT STOP GAMBLING
- LIED ABOUT GAMBLING
- LOOKED FOR HELP - RECRUIT A MIX
- COMPULSIVE GAMBLER
- NOT CORRECT – THANK AND TERMINATE

3. Do you or does anyone in your household work in advertising, marketing, public relations, or marketing research?

- YES – THANK AND TERMINATE
- NO - CONTINUE

4. Do you or does anyone in your household work for a casino or another type of organization in the gambling field?

- YES – RECRUIT SOME BUT SHOULD NOT DOMINATE
- NO - RECRUIT MOST

5. Do you or does anyone in your household work for an organization that helps problem gamblers?

- YES – THANK AND TERMINATE
- NO - CONTINUE

6. Have you ever participated in a small group discussion or focus group about products or services?

- YES - CONTINUE
- NO - SKIP TO Q9

***IF YES, ASK:**

7. And have you participated in such a discussion or group in the past year?

YES - THANK AND TERMINATE
NO - CONTINUE

***IF NO, ASK:**

8. Have any of the discussions or groups you have participated in talked about gambling?

YES - THANK AND TERMINATE
NO - CONTINUE

9. Briefly, how do you feel about gambling in California?

IF RESPONSE EXHIBITS EXTREME VIEWS OR A LACK OF INTEREST, PLEASE THANK AND TERMINATE. *PLEASE BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL TO EXCLUDE ANYONE WHO HAS REALLY STRONG FEELINGS.*

9. What is your age, please? ___ ___

UNDER 18 - THANK AND TERMINATE

- 18 TO 24
- 25 TO 34
- 35 TO 44 - RECRUIT A MIX
- 45 TO 54
- 55 TO 64
- 65 OR OLDER

10. Just to make sure we have a good mix of people in the group, we would also like to know your racial or ethnic background ... Do you consider yourself Caucasian, African or African-American, Asian or Asian-American, Hispanic or Latino, or something else? (And what would that be?)

- CAUCASIAN
- AFRICAN-AMERICAN
- ASIAN OR ASIAN-AMERICAN
- HISPANIC OR LATINO
- OTHER: _____

RECRUIT A MIX. THANK AND TERMINATE ASIAN-AMERICANS.

USE STANDARD CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY AND ZIP: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

APPENDIX B: MODERATOR'S OUTLINE

OFFICE OF PROBLEM GAMBLING MEDIA SOLUTIONS

MODERATOR'S OUTLINE FOR FOCUS GROUPS ABOUT PROBLEM GAMBLING

INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce Self

- Professional researcher
- Moderator - lead discussion
- No vested interest in outcome

Introduce Topic

- What we are going to be talking about this evening is problem gambling
- Details soon - first talk about a few ground rules and get to know you a little

Ground Rules

- Mirror
- Observers
- Audiotaping
 - Can't focus and take notes
 - Sure know what said
 - Work from tape on report
 - Speak up and distinctly; quiet voices
 - No talking at same time
 - Audiotape doesn't understand (nod, shake head)
- Would really like everyone to participate - every opinion important
- May ask to cut short so others can talk - part of process, make sure discussion is fair to everyone, don't take personally
- OK not to know - don't know a legitimate opinion - not a test of knowledge
- May well disagree - more interesting that way - disagree with idea, not person so not disagreeable
- Sensitive topic - everything said here is confidential, we will keep that - please do so yourselves also

Group Introductions

- Name – first name only
- One thing interesting about you
- Briefly, why decided to come this evening

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

- Take a lined tablet and a pen or pencil ... Write down up to ten words – can be fewer, but no more - that describe gambling in your world. Spelling doesn't count!
- Now write one or two sentences about how those words come together. You don't have to use all the words, just make sure that the sentences cover all of them in one way or another. Grammar and spelling don't count!
- Let's go around the other way and talk about gambling in your world ... Remember that everything you say is confidential ...
 - What were your words?
 - What were your sentences?

BARRIERS

- Clearly, we have described a lot of challenges and problems ...
- What solutions can you think of?
- What barriers are there to implementing these solutions?
- How do you think these barriers could be overcome?

IF NOT MENTIONED:

- What barriers are there to individuals who need help with problem gambling or need to get treatment?
- How do you think these barriers could be overcome?

CREATIVE MATERIALS

SHOW PRINT ADS ONE AT A TIME

FOR EACH ONE, ASK:

- What does this say to you?
- What is the message?
- Does it motivate you to do anything?
 - What?
 - Why?
- What do you like about it?
 - Why?
- What do you dislike about it?
 - Why?
- How would you modify it to make it better?
- Looking at all the ads, which one do you like the best?
 - Why?
- Would you combine them in any way to make a “very best”?
 - Why?
 - How?
- Where would (problem gamblers)(you) be receptive to seeing this ad?

PLAY TELEVISION COMMERCIALS ONE AT A TIME

FOR EACH ONE ASK:

- What does this say to you?

- What is the message?
- Does it motivate you to do anything?
 - What?
 - Why?
- What do you like about it?
 - Why?
- What do you dislike about it?
 - Why?
- How would you modify it to make it better?
- Thinking about all the commercials, which one do you like the best?
 - Why?
- Would you combine them in any way to make a “very best”?
 - Why?
 - How?
- Where would (problem gamblers)(you) be receptive to seeing this ad?

CONCLUSION

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- If you were in my place, what would you tell my client is the most important thing that came out of this discussion?

THANK PARTICIPANTS!