

STATE OF CALIFORNIA OFFICE OF PROBLEM GAMBLING

MEDIA SOLUTIONS

FOCUS GROUP ABOUT PROBLEM GAMBLING

FINAL DRAFT REPORT

**JD FRANZ RESEARCH, INC.
Public Opinion and Marketing Research**



QUESTIONS. ANSWERS. RESULTS.

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CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	FINDINGS	4
III.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27

APPENDIX A: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B: MODERATOR'S OUTLINE

APPENDIX C: WORDS AND PHRASES

I. INTRODUCTION

The research findings presented in this report derive from a focus group that was commissioned by Media Solutions LLC on behalf of the State of California, Office of Problem Gambling conducted by JD Franz Research, Inc. of Sacramento. It included both problem gamblers and individuals who have been affected by their relationships with problem gamblers. Twelve people participated in the group: six problem gamblers and six affected individuals.

The group took place at Opinions ... of Sacramento in the community's Arden Arcade area. It was held on Wednesday, December 18, 2013 between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m.

All of the participants in the groups were recruited by Opinions using an outreach email to their database with telephone follow-up. Gamblers in the group 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

Affected individuals in the group 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

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.

Those working in the marketing professions, those who work in the gambling industry, 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 group 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 proposed for targeting them. Specific areas of inquiry were as follows:

- Reactions to various words and phrases that might be used to describe excessive gambling
- Reactions to the words “treatment” versus “counseling” and preferences between them
- Reactions to the phrases “State-funded” versus “free” and preferences between them
- Barriers to getting help with problem gambling
- Possible solutions to the barriers
- How these barriers might be overcome
- Reactions to seven possible print advertisements
- Reactions to seven possible public service announcements for television
- Additional comments

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; the **Words and Phases** used during the initial part of that discussion can be found in **Appendix C**.

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. This is particularly true given the fact that only a single group was conducted.

II. FINDINGS

Findings from the focus group 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 Do You Feel About These Words and Phrases Related to Gambling?

To initiate the discussion, the moderator handed out the list of words and phrases that can be found in Appendix C and asked participants to write down a brief sentence or two about what each means in their world. After they had completed this task, she asked them to read their work aloud. The entire group was then invited to identify themes they had heard and to suggest conclusions that might be drawn from the exercise.

The results of this activity displayed a great deal of candor as well as an interesting mix of sentiments. Because this commentary is so diverse, thoughtful, and thought-provoking, it is presented in its entirety below:

- Problem gambling, I wrote my mother. Someone who is out of control to the point that it affects other people. Pathological gambling, I put I find that offensive. To me it's somebody who truly has no control. Pathological is like out of, whatever. Compulsive gambling, I consider that not addictive, like okay you gamble on a whim. It's compulsive but not that it's affecting your life. Gambling addiction, somebody who is in self-denial would be my mother. Why I'm here is to see if anybody has any ideas of how to make them accept it or recognize it. Treatment/counseling, what else can there be? Other than taking away her money, I mean that would be the other thing. State funded, I find that offensive. They provide me, tax payer, the way I feel. Free, offensive. Nothing is free, nothing.
- Problem gambling, this is something that I've always had to live with it. My mom always gambled and we moved a lot because she gambled her rent so it has always affected my life. Pathological gambling, I didn't like that phrase. It didn't make sense to me. Compulsive gambling and

gambling addiction, it all seems the same to me as far as problem gambling. Treatment, there are options if you can get the person to go. Counseling, it can be helpful if used. I didn't put anything for state funded or free because I wasn't really sure what it was implying.

- Problem gambling, not a very strong statement. I feel that if you just say you have a problem with something that is kind of mediocre. Pathological gambling, that word pathological is that the person lies. Compulsive gambling, I thought that was a stronger statement. Gambling addiction, I didn't like this description. Addiction is an overused word. Treatment, it sounds like the person is sick. Counseling I didn't write down, but I would say I don't know about counseling. State funded won't work, it's a waste of money. Free, best option for a person who has a problem with gambling.
- Problem gambling, too generalized term referred to gambling almost like problem child. Pathological gambling, just like her, it made me think about lying about gambling. Compulsive gambling, kind of like binge eating. Just something that you do to the extreme but not often. Gambling addiction to me is the strongest term in that group. I kind of find it as putting gambling above your own welfare or other's welfare. Treatments, I don't really care for this phrase at all even though I understand that gambling is an addiction. Counseling is better, but I still don't care for it. State funded, I don't care for this term either. Free, it sounds good but it's an overused word.
- I don't like those four words or phrases there at all. Problem gambling to me means that it might be causing financial hardship in my life. Pathological gambling, to me pathological means lying and I don't lie about my gambling. I don't lie about it. I tell people I'm going to the casino. Compulsive gambling means to me that I would drop everything and go on a whim even just for an hour. It's almost like getting my fix. Gambling addiction, to me it means I think about it during those times when I'm bored or I have idle free time on my hands so I think about gambling. When I'm busy I don't think about it. It's something I don't admit to. Treatment and counseling, I don't. I never thought about those and I think it's because if I did then I'd be admitting that I had a problem and I don't think about them. I actually joke about them like yeah right. State funded, I'm not sure what that means. Free, I always think of the free rooms and the free perks I get at some of these places. Although I know it's not free.
- Problem gambling, I just put not being able to control myself while gambling but you have to admit it first. You have to admit you have a

problem before you have one. Pathological is also lying so I don't lie about my gambling. I go when I go. I don't really feel bad about it. Compulsive, I don't go to win. I just go to have a good time. Gambling addiction is not normally you stop after you're ahead. When you win you just go \$20.00 more and then \$40.00 more, and then the next thing you know all of your money is gone. Treatment, I'm not too sure about treatment. I don't know if there is, I don't know how it would go about it. Maybe talking to people. State funded, I think about how the state helps Indian people and all the casinos, they don't pay taxes so I mean there is a waste of our money. Free, nothing is free.

- Problem gambling is just spending too much money. Pathological, I didn't know what that mean really unless lying and I don't lie about it that's for sure. Everybody knows what I'm doing. I don't have a cell phone so they can't call me. I consider myself a compulsive gambler. Addictive, only when I'm at the casino because it's real immediate. I don't need treatment. I have a question mark for counseling and state funded. I like free.
- Problem gambling, I don't think I have a problem. Pathological gambler, I didn't like that term. Compulsive gambler, I've been a compulsive gambler years ago. Yes, I feel I was addicted years ago. Yes, I did go to treatment. I went to Gamblers Anonymous and the stories I heard scared me to death like losing all of your retirement fund. So you know when I heard those kind of things it scared me very bad. I've never had counseling. I didn't know what you meant by state funding. Nothing is free.
- Problem gambling, losing too much money affects family negatively. Pathological gambling can't stop gambling, addicted to gambling. Compulsive gambling, can't control self of gambling. Gambling addiction, must gamble often or in other words to function kind of like a drug addict you know and also affects self and family negatively kind of like drugs does too. Treatment, needed for seriously ill gamblers. In other words if it is affecting their family and your life and everything negatively and you have a problem then I think you need treatment. Counseling, same thing, needed for – if you don't have a problem with something until that something gives you a problem. State funded, I put lottery thinking maybe the lottery you know maybe our tax dollars are involved in there somehow. If it's a state thing right, the Lotto. The state runs it. Free, nothing in life is free.
- Problem gambling, I've learned you can't prevent yourself from gambling. You're not using Harvard production skills to stop yourself from

gambling. To find it hard to stop when you're in the casino environment. Pathological gambling, someone who can't stop and is not able to control themselves. Compulsive gambling, someone who is unable to control the urge to gamble. Gambling addiction, someone who has a problem. Treatment, you must be willing and wanting to make the change to get treatment. Counseling, it's part of the treatment whether you're in a group setting or one on one. State funded, programs that are set aside for particular communities or for the citizens. Free, no cost.

- Problem gambling is a path to gambling addiction. Pathological gambling is like a control or unable to distinguish application and truth. Compulsive gambling, lack of being responsible. Gambling addiction, complete loss of the ability to make mature and correct choices in life, positive choices in life. Treatment and counseling, not sure how much it would help but I guess it's positive steps and it's a place to start. State funded, isn't everything meaning taxpayer. Free, nothing is free.
- Problem gambling to me is when it becomes a priority for you instead of issues and dealing with your family. It's when gambling because the primary consciousness. Pathological gambling just has the connotation of it being beyond your trouble or some kind of mental dysfunction where – I don't like that term because it puts it outside of the control of the person. It's just an excuse not to behave. Compulsive gambling is just like pathological gambling with the initial aspect that you're so consciously driven to do this thing. It's just another excuse for gambling. Gambling addiction is, yeah I agree with the statement that was made about it becomes a necessary part of a person's psyche or you know it just, you have to do it or you won't feel right. Treatment and counseling, they are both the same. The person has to want to do it in the first place to be effective and that's the hardest step because nobody wants to be bothered with it. They sit there in the throes of it. State funded, I just thought that wasn't right because it's too much of a can of worms. Free, again same thing it's one of those words that is totally relative. Everything cost energy. There is nothing free. I don't like to say that but it's true.

Most of the sentences participants wrote were descriptive of their own particular gambling situations. There were, however, a few useful themes.

First, there was widespread rejection of the phrase “pathological gambling.” Several participants found it offensive. In addition, a substantial portion thought

it reflected lying about gambling. Many of the gamblers asserted that they don't lie about their gambling; they are actually quite forthright in saying that they are headed to the casino.

The word "free" was perhaps even more roundly rejected. Two people said they don't know what it means, and almost half pointed out that nothing in life is free. Two other reactions were that "free" represents the ostensibly free perks casinos provide to heavy gamblers and that the word is overused.

The phrase "State-funded" also provoked consternation. Issues included the fact that people already pay taxes, that they don't want to see another line item on their tax bills to address this problem, that the State promotes gambling with the lottery and support for Indian casinos, and that this is a "can of worms." Several also said they didn't know what the phrase means.

When participants were asked which description of excessive gambling they would prefer, there was no consensus other than the rejection of "pathological gambling." For the most part, participants tried and failed to make distinctions among the various phrases.

Generally, people favored "problem gambling," although there were some who felt this was not strong enough or too general. A final vote called for by the moderator yielded six votes for "problem gambling" and three for "gambling addiction."

When asked to select between treatment and counseling, participants were even less confident in terms of a recommendation. The general tone was one of unease and a widespread lack of understanding. People also emphasized that those who have gambling challenges need to admit they have a problem

and want to solve it before they can be helped. A final suggestion was that the two phrases should be combined into a conjoined “Counseling and Treatment.”

Although participants had generally rejected the word “free,” when it was paired with “State-funded” as a choice, “free” became more enticing. It also suggested a program run by former addicts and thus more likely to be successful.

To some, “State-funded” suggested credibility; to others, it did not. One might also have to qualify for a State-funded program the way one does for welfare. Free, on the other hand, might have a back-end requirement or be a scam. Better choices might be “no cost” or “nonprofit.”

Other concerns expressed at this point were the fact that the states of both California and Nevada actually support and endorse gambling. In addition, what might happen when the State cuts the budget? The State is also inefficient. This conversation evolved as follows:

- I like free.
- Free is more enticing.
- I think there is credibility when you say State-funded because it implies that somebody at the state level is reviewed it and decided it was good.
- You would have to qualify for it.
- If I had to choose, I would go with free. I know it's probably run by former addicts of some sort because they would probably, that's how they would have to get it done, and I paid \$10,000 for my ex-wife to go into a rehab program one month and it did work at the time, but it was run by all addicts, most of those types of places are. A situation like this I would probably feel as though free is probably going to get you the biggest injection of reality.

- In sales I learned that saying free it only matters that there's going to be something on the back end that they are going to have to do or it's some type of scam. But if you say no cost, State-funded, then people know that it's a community outreach program or whatever.
- **Moderator:** Does anybody like the no cost idea as opposed to free?
- If I saw free or no cost I would call and make sure it was free and then I would go.
- No cost says you're not paying anything so we're saying free with a different; it's answering your question.
- I think State-funded kind of implies to me that you have to apply or qualify or there's going to be a process. Most people who are already struggling to admit there is a problem are not going to want to go through all that. It's easier to show up and participate knowing that you don't really have to do background.
- Like welfare or something.
- **Moderator:** One person said that the fact that it's funded by the State gives it credibility.
- No, it doesn't.
- No.
- I would be looking for something that said non-profit because to me the non-profits are what give the aid without... They're not going to make money.
- I agree.
- I agree.
- I don't think it loses credibility, I just don't think it makes it more credible.
- I think the problem with State-funded is because we have more casinos and card rooms in California than any state in the country and we are right next to a gambling state where the state regulates that, and it feels like it's kind of we have to have this program also because we also endorse all the gambling and so forth. So it seems it's the double-edged sword.

- When you say state funded, when I hear state funded, I'm going to look on my property tax bill for another line item on there.
- What happens when the state cuts the budget? There is no social service in the state of California that is actually reliable, that you can actually count on from one year to the next.
- Your people might not like this but name one thing that the government does efficiently?
- I see inefficiency, when I see state funded I'm like you, I see my tax dollars being raised.

What Are the Barriers to Getting Help for Problem Gambling?

Barriers identified by members of the group included pride, the need to admit one has a problem, time, cost, how to find a program, the program's location, how the program is promoted, and the perception that there might be considerable additional effort beyond the program itself:

- Pride.
- They have to admit that they have a problem.
- Time and cost.
- Knowing how to find the program. Where do you go to find?
- Location.
- There's a certain degree of I'm already putting myself through this treatment program... How much additional crap am I going to have to sign up for and agree to and commit to and everything else... Perceived additional effort is a huge reason to back off.

When the moderator probed about the extent to which the stigma associated with gambling might be a barrier, there was some agreement. Generally, however, the group tended to feel that unlike drug or alcohol addiction,

gambling is glamorized, a sentiment that was repeatedly reinforced when the possible advertisements were shown:

- Yes.
- I don't agree with the statement. Gambling itself isn't stigmatized in many cases and also glamorized and things like that. Alcoholism is not glamorized. Drug addiction is not glamorized; but gambling, not necessarily addiction, but gambling is definitely glamorized.

Reactions to Possible Advertisements

The remainder of the discussion focused on seven print or web ads and seven television ads that might be presented to problem gamblers and their friends or relatives. Participants' reactions are considered by ad in the sections that follow and then summarized at the end.

Print or Web Ads

You Are Not Alone (Senior Focus)

Several of the participants indicated that they liked this ad. There was some concern, however, that it would only resonate with those who play the lottery, although this concern was also rejected by a non-lottery player.

The ad is clear and concise, and it shows that the person is distraught. The OPG logo looks like dice, however, and it may be difficult to read the ad with its different-sized fonts. Finally, the ad could be viewed as "disingenuous" because there is a need for programs, but the State of California sponsors the lottery. A vote on this ad requested by the moderator yielded five strong yes votes and one somewhat hesitant one:

- I like it.
- I do like it.

- I don't play lottery tickets so I don't feel like that would apply to me.
- I don't play the lottery either, but I do like it.
- It's sharp, it's clear, it's concise. I just like it. It's just enough.
- I don't like the green logo, the OPG, it looks like dice.
- I don't like ads that have different size texts and because it's like what exactly does that say. If it was on a billboard I wouldn't have time to squint and read that up in the corner and thinking what am I missing here.
- I do like it because it shows the distraught of the person, the man, and the lotto ticket is big enough that you know what it is without really seeing the top part. I think it's effective.
- I think is disingenuous because they say gambling is a problem enough in California for us to have programs for it but we still have the lottery.
- I would make the picture of the man bigger and the lottery ticket smaller.
- I agree with (Name) about it is pretty funny about the dice.

Change Your Game (Senior Focus)

The initial reaction to this ad was positive. The emphasis on cards and lottery tickets, however, could represent an inducement to gamble. This is particularly true if people don't read all the way down to the 800 number; the message may be to change to a different game.

The calculator in the ad is outdated; one person also pointed out that the gambler to whom he is related never uses a calculator because she doesn't want to know how much she lost. The ad should clearly show an inability to pay one's bills.

The ad also may not be taken seriously by those with a problem. If everything has been lost, then one wouldn't see the money in the ad:

- I like that one.
- I like the cards, the money and the calculator.
- I agree with the ad.
- They seem like the images will make people have that urge to go gamble because they are putting so much emphasis on the cards and on the lottery tickets.
- I don't like the picture. It seems to be outdated. A calculator.
- I've got to say that my spouse is the one with the problem and I've never seen her bust out a calculator. She doesn't want to know what she's lost.
- No specifics, I just don't like it.
- I don't think it's inferring how much you've lost, I think it's inferring that you can't pay your bills in that picture is how I look at it. I don't think someone with a problem would take this seriously.
- If you lost all that money you wouldn't be seeing the money, it's gone. All I see is money there.

Change Your Game (Youth/Adult Focus)

The first reaction to this ad was to dislike it. Although the ad is eye-catching, the picture on the right is horrible because it glamorizes gambling. People who look like that are not generally seen in casinos.

The moderator summarized the discussion by noting that most participants didn't like the ad. Suggestions for improvement included replacing the "Change Your Game" headline with the "Gambling Problem?" one, putting the man from the Gambling Problem ad where the people are, and replacing the lottery tickets with past-due bills. They also noted that it isn't necessary to put the type of game in the ad; everyone has their own preferred game:

- No.
- No.
- It's definitely an eye catcher.
- If you took gambling problem and you're not alone and put on there with both pictures.
- I like the change your game.
- I don't like it.
- The picture on the right is horrible. That is a terrible picture. It is very glamorous.
- When I'm in a casino, I'm sorry, but I don't see people like that.
- **Moderator:** So how many of you like this picture?
- No.
- No.
- I like it.
- **Moderator:** But mostly you don't like it.
- I would like it if you changed change your game.
- **Moderator:** So suppose I changed the headline change your game to gambling problem, you're not alone.
- And put that man where those people are.
- Exactly.
- Or put payment past due where the lotto tickets are.
- You don't need the game. Everyone makes up their own game.

Is It Worth the Risk? (African-American Focus)

Generally, the group liked this ad. It makes a statement, and even though young people may not own homes, they will get the idea:

- I like that.
- That's a good one.
- That's making a statement.
- What about young people that don't own a home though?
- They get the idea though.
- **Moderator:** So we like this one?
- Yes.
- **Moderator:** How about the wording, is it worth the risk?
- Yes.

Is Gambling Affecting Your Family? (Asian Focus)

This ad was attractive to the group, particularly for family members. It would be better, however, if it showed the many things that are affected by excessive gambling, such as one's car and bills. Perhaps it should say, "Is gambling affecting your life?" to include those without families. Also, the casino picture is too lavish:

- Best one.
- That's a good one for the family members.
- For family members yeah.
- I like more, "Is gambling affecting your everything?", because it affects everything and maybe show a picture of the family and a picture of the car and a picture of a guy doing bills to me is what will catch my eye.

- I would think that the program is trying to reach the people with the problem and so and I realize you guys all that the family is affected but the one who needs the treatment or who the program is trying to reach I think is a person.
- **Moderator:** What about is gambling affecting your life?
- Yeah.
- Casino and lights, shouldn't you have a black crow or something and not seeming so lavish? If a black crow was there it would show that death and some aspect of it.
- I like the slogan. I like the fact that it's getting to the point but it's not, it's too, it should be overall.

Are You Gambling Away More Than Just Your Money?

Several participants indicated that they had already seen this ad on a billboard, and they like it. It may be difficult, however, to read so many words when one is speeding by in a car. Nevertheless, it does plant a seed for thought. On the other hand, the message "You are not alone" make people feel better because they are not the only ones with a gambling problem. This in turn should motivate them to look into the program:

- I feel like I've seen that before.
- This has been on a billboard already.
- It's a billboard.
- I like that one.
- I like that one, too.
- **Moderator:** Why do you like it?
- It has a picture of the family in the car with him.
- I've seen it on my drive to work every day and it's on I-80 and I still think that gambling problem is the best verbiage. I do like the fact that

gambling away more than your money but when you're driving past with a lot of people it's hard to really even see that.

- I agree.
- I like this one because it plants a seed. This person is driving too fast on I-80, and just like that you can see are you gambling away more than just your money, it plants a seed.
- Even if you don't see anything else on the board you know what it's saying.
- I understand what it's saying.
- Their goal to get people who need help to come in? I think the gambling problem you're not alone has more of a tendency to make me feel better.

Is Gambling Ruining Your Relationship? (African-American Focus)

Initial reactions to this ad included "terrible" and "lame." One person pointed out that this wouldn't work for those not in a relationship. When the moderator probed, no one responded that they liked this ad:

- What if you're not in a relationship?
- Terrible.
- Lame.
- I don't like that one.
- No.

Summary

When the moderator asked for conclusions from participants' assessments of the print and web ads, by far the majority selected the headline from the first ad ("You Are Not Alone") as being their preference. The picture they would want was the man, also from this ad. The headline and the picture of the man should

be accompanied by what one might call a montage of visuals: past due bills, the wallet with the family, and a car and a house.

The foreclosure sign was also suggested, although both this and the previous conversation indicated that use of such a sign might not be a good idea. Numerous people lost their homes to foreclosure for reasons other than gambling, and as one person noted, relatively few people lose as much as their homes to gambling:

- The man.
- With the painted house too.
- I like the man and the wallet with the family.
- I like the car and the house.
- I think gambling is scary so I think you should run a lot of stuff together.
- The only picture I don't like is this, the happy couple in the casino.
- **Moderator:** I think I heard you all say that this is the wrong picture and the wrong message. Do we want the payment past due?
- Yes.
- **Moderator:** Do we want to consider this image, the wallet with the cards coming out?
- Yes.
- I like the size of the print on the top and the bottom of the first one.
- **Moderator:** You want it to be bigger.
- And black and white so people can see it.
- I want to reiterate one thing though, the foreclosure one bothers me so immensely because far more people lost their homes to foreclosures that

had nothing to do with gambling and I would find that offensive if I lost my home.

- I don't know anybody who has lost their home gambling.

Public Service Announcements for Television

Andrew Hopper

Few of the reactions to this ad were positive. Although there were some who liked the content, people generally disliked the ad, finding it dark, confusing, unclear, and too fast. There was also the sense that the camera was shaking:

- I didn't like it.
- I don't know, it was too dark.
- Yeah, the picture was too dark. There wasn't enough color in it.
- Too much going on.
- There's a lot going on.
- Was it me or was the camera shaking?
- I actually liked it I just thought at the very end of it you couldn't get the phone number that fast. It was too fast and it wasn't very clear. I like the content of it.
- I liked it, the concept. It was to me a real situation, the drinking, it looked real.
- The man obviously has a family because it showed the wallet and a family.
- I like the phrase, "No matter how much you can win, you can lose more."

OPG/Lottery 1-800-GAMBLER (Gambler Focus)

This ad was quite roundly rejected. People found it amateurish and "fake." They also thought it needed to have less going on and to be more simple:

- I did not like that one.
- I don't like that one at all.
- It seems fake.
- I felt like my 13 year old could have put that together.
- I do too.
- What I like about that though is the fact that it's not so much going on.
- Me too.
- It's not as complicated as the first one.
- It was simple and straightforward.

OPG/Lottery 1-800-GAMBLER (Affected Individual Focus)

Reactions to this ad were somewhat more positive. People liked the portrayal of the person being affected and thought this would be appropriate to direct toward the family. The ad may not be realistic, however, and the picture doesn't seem real:

- That felt like an extension of the last one.
- I like this one because it's ... about the person who is being affected.
- I didn't like it because it said "confronted the gambler." No, when I "confronted my husband," something like that. It could have been more realistic.
- It takes away the realness of it.
- What if she wasn't married?
- I think they're being generic.
- Are we overanalyzing it?

- That's what you're supposed to do.
- I think it's a good commercial for a family looking for help for a loved one or something.
- I thought it was a good commercial for family that has a gambler because in my case if it's an aunt and brother but more with the elderly aunt her care is eventually going to fall on me, so it shows me that I can call this number and that's it not, that you can get help.
- The picture with the words wasn't good. It seemed fake. It seemed cheap.
- I would like to see somebody who has actually been through the program who is real.
- The message is good but you can't see the person's face and I think it needs that.

Dixon BOOF - "Digital Stats"

The immediate reaction to this ad was, "Wow." The numbers it portrayed are attention-getting and "alarming." They are definitely of interest. The data could be presented better, however; it needs images of young people or real people. One other comment, offered previously, is that the ad could be viewed as hypocritical because California supports gambling:

- Well that made me go wow. I really liked that one.
- I thought it was offensive. Because California supports gambling so much as far as how to regulate it and so forth that the statistics out there that's hypocritical to me completely.
- I just said wow. Wow, that's a lot of people.
- I liked it. I like the fact that I could just read it, I didn't have to hear anything. Those numbers are alarming to me.
- I didn't like the blocks where the numbers were all in. I found it – I think you could do numbers a lot better.

- I agree.
- I think if you're trying to gear it towards teenagers or kids or college kids, whatever, there should be some imagery there with the statistics because kids don't know.
- **Moderator:** One of the things that I've heard pretty consistently is that you would want real images of real people.
- Right.

AACI BOOF – “Play Some Cards?”

Responses to this ad were mixed – some participants liked it, while others didn't. There was also the concern that young people play dice, not cards, so the ad is not realistic or likely to engage many youth. The progression presented in the ad was generally favored – it's like the progression of drug use, and the ad is similar to one that focuses on marijuana. When the moderator probed, however, the group doubted the ad would motivate young people to call in:

- Nope.
- I liked it.
- That's exactly what I was talking about. I thought it was great.
- Wow.
- They don't play cards they play dice.
- Yeah.
- I feel like dice would just make more sense because it's easier to have dice and throw dice all day then have cards and get in trouble.
- I don't think cards is unrealistic.
- I think they'll get the point but I agree with what she's saying.
- I think kids would get that.

- They should do both, a group playing cards and a group playing dice.
- I don't like it personally.
- I liked it.
- I liked it because the message there was a progression to more gambling just like they do with drugs. You start small and then as your addiction grows it gets bigger. His mind took him all the way into a casino with the chips. So he played it out in his mind how far and how out of control it can get.
- And the consequences.
- If I had read it differently he had already had that problem and it took him back.
- I read it as if it thought about all those things that could happen.
- That's how I thought of it.
- There's a similar PSA on TV with a joint and he does the same thing, going through the process in his head.
- **Moderator:** Does anybody think this would attract a kid with a gambling problem to call?
- No.

MEAD BOOF – “Gambling With My Life”

The general reaction to this ad was a lack of understanding. People also said they liked the previous one better:

- I didn't even understand the first part of it.
- I understood the first part but the second part was kind of random.
- The kids card one was much better than that one.
- Yeah.

Santa Clara BOOF – “Last Time”

This ad didn't feel realistic to participants; the person asking for money from the piggy bank is too young. It would be a lot more powerful if the person making the plea were an adult, perhaps the father:

- It almost seemed like a Saturday Night Live skit.
- I don't like it.
- I think they need to hire me.
- I mean I like that he is taking the money from the piggy bank because that's real, but I feel the kids are too young. I always thought about I can't wait to gamble and now that I'm 27 and realize it can be a problem. When I was 21 I never thought about it as a problem. Now that I'm older I think about it.
- I agree.
- I tell you what; I would feel sick to my stomach if I saw a father do that.
- It would be powerful.

Summary

When the moderator asked participants to summarize their responses to the television ads, the general reaction was that they didn't really like any of them. Most appealing were the one on the playground and the one with the piggy bank, particularly if they were changed as the group suggested. The group also said they would like to see something portraying a woman, as there are a number of women in casinos. Finally, one participant commented that the State is a competent entity and could do a better job:

- **Moderator:** If I'm summarizing at this point, what I think I've heard is that you don't like any one of these commercials.
- No.

- Not really.
- Just the one as a PSA to prevent kids from gambling.
- **Moderator:** The playground one with the card game and his vision either backwards or forwards.
- I like the last one but I didn't think it was executed correctly.
- **Moderator:** How many think if it was done properly the last one would be a hit?
- If it was an adult.
- A father, yes.
- I like the one with the lady, the second one that showed her face with anguish, with the family member.
- I would like to see the face of someone who has completed a program and is there saying, hey, this worked for me. If you have a problem this is free, this is confidential. I would like to see someone who really got help from it.
- I agree with you. I would like to see a woman. I see so many women at the casino. So a woman not middle-aged, 40, 50, 60 in that age group. I would like to see a woman in that age group.
- I think they are pretty intelligent so they put this program up. The ads are not matching up.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

How Do Gamblers and Affected Individuals Feel About Key Words and Phrases?

When it comes to the manner in which those who gamble to excess are described, there is no clear consensus. Support is strongest, however, for the phrase “problem gambling.” Meanwhile, the phrase “pathological gambling” is quite resoundingly rejected.

Gamblers and affected individuals do not appear to perceive or understand a distinction between “counseling” and “treatment,” and neither term seems to be preferred. The only suggestion group participants made that may merit consideration is to combine the two into the phrase “counseling and treatment.”

Initially, people were inclined to reject the term “free,” because nothing is really free. When “free” was compared with “State-funded,” however, it became considerably more attractive. Concerns about State funding include potential taxation, having to qualify as with welfare, inefficiency, and possible future budget cuts. Whether the State is a credible sponsor is questionable.

From our perspective as observers of public policy and public perception, it is doubtful that the Office of Problem Gambling can do much if anything about the image of the State as a provider of public services. It also has no control over the impression given by the word “free.” OPG may therefore wish to consider alternatives to both of the approaches it tested (“free” and “State-funded”), because neither of these appears to resonate particularly positively.

How Do People Feel About the Possible Print or Web Ads?

Three of the seven ads shown and discussed during the focus group elicited generally positive reactions: “You Are Not Alone” (Senior Focus); “Is It worth the Risk?” (African-American Focus); and “Is Gambling Affecting Your Family?” (Asian Focus). “Is Gambling Affecting Your Family?”, however, would require modification to be truly appealing. Specifically, the word “family” should be changed to “life” to make the ad more inclusive, and the picture of a lavish casino should be changed to images of things gamblers have lost.

When the moderator asked people to summarize their thoughts about all of the ads and suggest their ideal ad, they selected the headline and man from “You Are Not Alone.” Elsewhere, people had suggested that the message in this ad is attractive because it makes those who gamble excessively feel that they are not the only ones with a problem.

People then recommended that the ad be expanded to include what we referred to earlier as a “montage” of things people lose when they gamble too much. Importantly, this should not include the foreclosure sign, both because most of the foreclosures of late have been for other reasons and because most gamblers do not get to the point of losing their homes. We would also note, thinking back to the first focus groups we held on this topic, that people there rejected an extreme approach – the homeless man – as well.

How Do People Feel About the Possible Public Service Announcements?

At the conclusion of the discussions of the seven possible public service announcements for television, the general consensus was that people didn't particularly like any of them. Three of the seven, however, appealed to people to at least some degree.

Dixon BOOF – “Digital Facts” was attention-getting and striking in the magnitude of the number it presented. In order to have maximum impact, however, this ad would need better images.

AACI BOOF – “Play Some Cards?” was favored for the progression it portrayed, but would need a change in game from cards to dice, which is more likely to be played by youth. It is also questionable whether the ad would actually motivate young people to call.

Finally, Santa Clara BOOF – “Last Time” was potentially impactful, but only if there were a different character making the appeal. People suggested that the father asking for the child’s piggy bank could be truly powerful.

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 THOSE WHO REPORTED A GAMBLING PROBLEM (GAMBLERS). USE QUESTION 2B FOR THOSE WHO REPORTED BEING INVOLVED WITH SOMEONE WITH A GAMBLING PROBLEM (AFFECTED INDIVIDUALS). RECRUIT SEVEN OF EACH.

REPORTED GAMBLING PROBLEM

2A. 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

INVOLVED WITH SOMEONE WITH GAMBLING PROBLEM

2B. 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

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 – THANK AND TERMINATE
- 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.

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 2013 FOCUS GROUP 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 – could be particularly important since this group is a mix of gamblers and those affected by gambling

- 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 ... HAND OUT LIST OF WORDS AND PHRASES. Write a brief sentence or two about **each one** of these words and phrases, focusing on what it means to you in your world. If a word or phrase is offensive to you, make sure to include that. Grammar and spelling don't count!
- Let's go around the other way and talk about the words and phrases ... Remember that everything you say is confidential ...
 - What were your sentences?
- What themes did you hear?
- What can we conclude from all of this?

CHOICES

Now let's talk a little bit about choices among these words and phrases ...

- If you had to choose among the phrases “problem gambling,” “pathological gambling,” “compulsive gambling,” or “gambling addiction” to describe gambling that can be damaging to gamblers and those who care about them, which one would you choose?
 - Why?
- If you were looking for help, would you prefer to receive “treatment” or “counseling”?
 - Why?

- Would you be more likely to trust and reach out to an organization that said it is “free” or one that said it is “state-funded”?
 - Why?
- Now we said we preferred (treatment) to (counseling) ... Would you be more likely to call an organization offering “free” (treatment) (counseling) or one offering “state-funded” (treatment) (counseling)?
 - Why?

BARRIERS

- Clearly, we have described a lot of challenges, problems, and barriers ...
- (No one mentioned) (We didn't talk much about) ... Would you say that is a challenge or barrier? Why or why not?

PROBE FOR ALL NOT MENTIONED OR EXPLORE IN MORE DEPTH IF NEEDED:

- Limited or no English
- A sense of shame
- Society's stigmatization of gambling
- The beliefs of various cultures
- What solutions can you think of?
- What barriers are there to implementing these solutions?
- 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?

AFTER ALL SHOWN, ASK:

- 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?

AFTER ALL SHOWN, ASK:

- 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!