

August 10, 2012

Consumer Risk Perceptions of Tobacco Products

Focus Group Summary Report

Contract No. HHSF223201110005B, Task 6

Prepared for

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term “modified risk tobacco product” means any tobacco product that is sold or distributed for use to reduce harm or the risk of tobacco-related disease associated with commercially marketed tobacco products.
~Section 911(b)(1) of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the authority to regulate the manufacture, marketing, and distribution of tobacco products to protect the public health. Section 911 of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act authorizes FDA to grant orders to manufacturers to allow the marketing of products that may reduce the harm or risk of tobacco-related disease associated with commercially marketed tobacco products. FDA may allow the marketing of these products, called modified-risk tobacco products, if it is deemed appropriate for the promotion of public health. To assess the potential impact that the marketing of modified-risk tobacco products may have on the likelihood of initiation and cessation of tobacco use, FDA requires information regarding consumer perceptions of risk of tobacco products and of modified-risk tobacco products.

FDA’s Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) contracted with RTI International to conduct consumer focus groups to assess consumer perceptions of the relative risks of various tobacco products. More specifically, these focus groups explored how consumers perceive their own personal risks for serious illness from use of tobacco products. Collecting information on the target audience’s perceptions will help inform the Agency’s efforts to implement the provisions of the Tobacco Control Act related to modified-risk tobacco products.

This report describes the study design and presents the findings from the first round of 16 focus groups. Section 2 describes the study procedures and materials, Section 3 presents the key findings from the focus groups, and Section 4 summarizes the results of the focus groups and factors to consider in the next round of focus groups.

2. STUDY METHODS

RTI International conducted 16 focus groups with consumers in four U.S. cities to assess their perceptions of the relative risks of various commercially-available tobacco products. This section describes the procedures and materials used to conduct the focus groups.

2.1 Study Design

From April to June 2012, RTI conducted 16 focus groups in four locations: Bethesda, Maryland; Raleigh, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Indianapolis, Indiana. RTI worked with the Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) to develop the methodology and focus group segmentation, including age groups, smoking behaviors, and other characteristics.

Table 2-1 shows the subpopulation and location for each focus group.

Table 2-1. Segmentation of Focus Group Participants

| Bethesda | Raleigh | Atlanta | Indianapolis |
|--|---|--|--|
| Female, aged 18 to 24 Light users and chippers ^a | Male, aged 18 to 24 Current users, ^b light users, and chippers College students only | Female, age 35+ Current users | Male, age 25+ Current users Smokeless users ^c |
| Male, age 18+ Recent former users and quitters ^d | Female, aged 25 to 34 Current users | Male, aged 18 to 24 Light users and chippers | Female, aged 18 to 24 Current users |
| Female, age 35+ Current users | Female, aged 18 to 24 Current users, light users, or chippers College students only | Female, aged 25–34 Current users African Americans only | Female, age 18+ Recent former users and quitters |
| Male, aged 18 to 24 Current users | Male, age 25+ Current users English-speaking Hispanics only | Male, aged 25 to 34 Current users African Americans only | Male, age 35+ Current users |

^a Smokes, on average, fewer than 10 cigarettes, cigarillos, or little cigars per day, every day, or smoked, on average, fewer than 10 cigarettes, cigarillos, or little cigars per day less than 20 days in the past 30 days.

^b Smokes, on average, 10 or more cigarettes, cigarillos, or little cigars per day, every day, or smoked, on average, 10 or more cigarettes, cigarillos, or little cigars per day at least 20 days in the past 30 days.

^c The original design specified males who *only* use smokeless tobacco products (e.g., chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip). Due to a low-incidence rate, we were unable to recruit a full group of smokeless-only users. Some participants also smoked cigarettes or other tobacco products.

^d Stopped smoking cigarettes, cigarillos, or little cigars less than 2 years ago but more than 6 months ago.

RTI subcontracted with local market research companies in each of the focus group locations to recruit participants and provide the facilities for hosting the focus group discussions. Using convenience sampling, the market research companies recruited from their databases participants who met the requirements for inclusion in the specific subpopulations. To be eligible to participate, respondents had to be able to read, understand, and speak English.

Additionally, individuals were ineligible for participation if

- they or a household member ever lobbied on behalf of the tobacco industry or personally represented or worked on behalf of a tobacco company in connection with a tobacco lawsuit;
- they or a household member worked for any of the following entities in the past 5 years: tobacco or cigarette company; public health or community organization involved in communicating the dangers of smoking or the benefits of quitting; marketing, advertising, or public relations agency or department;
- they or a household member worked for any of the following government agencies in the past 5 years: Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS); or
- they participated in any paid market research in the past 6 months.

Each focus group included between 6 and 11 participants, for a total of 142 participants.

Upon arrival to the focus group facility, participants read and signed an informed consent form (approved by FDA's and RTI's Institutional Review Boards) and were rescreened to confirm eligibility. Experienced moderators conducted the focus group discussions, while trained staff members took notes during the discussions. Each focus group discussion lasted 1 hour. Participants received a monetary incentive of \$50 for participating in the focus group discussion.

2.2 Study Materials

RTI worked with CTP to develop a moderator guide to discuss consumer use and perceptions of tobacco products. Table 2-2 summarizes the topics in the moderator guide, and Appendix A provides a copy of the moderator guide.

During each focus group, participants were presented with two sets of tobacco products: the first set included various brands of cigarettes, and the second set included various types and brands of smokeless tobacco products. Participants were asked to rank the products from each set from "least harmful to your health" to "most harmful to your health," using prepared worksheets (see Appendix B for copies of the handouts). The specific brands of

Table 2-2. Moderator Guide Summary

| Section | Purpose |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Introduction | Moderator described the purpose of the discussion and how the group would be conducted; participants introduced themselves. |
| Use of Tobacco Products | Participants who were current users described their use of tobacco products and reasons for use. Former users described what type of tobacco products they used to use and when they quit. |
| Ranking of Tobacco Products | Participants were presented with a variety of tobacco products and asked to perform two exercises to rank products from “least harmful to your health” to “most harmful to your health.” |
| Discussion on Ranking | Participants completed another ranking exercise using the four products deemed by each group as least and most harmful and then discussed their risk perceptions regarding the products presented to them. |
| Conclusion | Participants shared any final comments. |

tobacco products used during the discussions are described in Section 3. The order in which the products were listed varied across focus group sessions. Each group was shown cigarettes that varied in strength (regular, light, ultra light), shape/length (slim vs. regular), flavor (menthol vs. non-menthol), claims (natural vs. no claim), price (discount vs. premium), and familiarity (regional vs. national) and smokeless tobacco products that varied in strength, flavor, cut, and price.

2.3 Analysis

The focus groups were professionally video- and audio-recorded by the local market research companies and video-streamed by an independent subcontractor. The video streams were archived and professionally transcribed by the independent subcontractor. The note taker for each focus group used her notes and reviewed the videos and/or transcripts to prepare a detailed summary of each discussion. The moderator for each focus group then reviewed the summary for accuracy. A moderator then systematically reviewed and manually coded all detailed summaries to identify common themes and any exceptions to these themes and to identify similarities and differences among the various subpopulations included in the study.

3. KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings from the focus group discussions. We present the key findings for the following topics:

- use of tobacco products,
- ranking of tobacco products, and
- perceptions of tobacco products.

For each topic, we summarize the findings across the 16 focus groups and identify differences, if any, among groups.

3.1 Use of Tobacco Products

Each focus group began with participants discussing their current or former tobacco use. Participants who were current tobacco users were asked to tell the group what type of tobacco they use (e.g., cigarettes, cigars, smokeless tobacco), how long they had used the product(s), and their preferred brands.

Participants who were former tobacco users told the group what type of tobacco they used in the past, how long they used the product(s), how long ago they quit using the product(s), and the brands they used when they were smoking/using tobacco.

Participants then discussed the reasons they smoked or used other tobacco products, including what they enjoyed about the products, the benefits of using them, and factors that prompted them to smoke or use tobacco.

3.1.1 Brands Used

A variety of brands were mentioned by focus group participants, although a few stood out as more common. Across all groups (including both current and former users), Marlboro brands were mentioned most often. Although the general “Marlboro” name was given by most participants, specific types—including Marlboro Lights, Marlboro Red, Marlboro Menthol, and Marlboro 100s—were given by others. Groups with females were especially likely to name specific versions of the Marlboro brand.

Newport brands were the second most commonly mentioned brand (including Newport, Newport 100s, and Newport Short), followed by Camel brands (including Camel, Camel Lights, Camel Red, Camel snus, Camel Crush, and Camel Menthol).

Other cigarette brands with a few mentions included American Spirit, Kool, Pall Mall, and Parliament (and Parliament Lights) brands. L&M, Maverick, Misty, and Salem were mentioned by only one participant each.

The most commonly mentioned cigar or cigarillo was Black & Mild. Other brands mentioned included Dutch Master, Garcia Vega, Swisher (Swisher Sweets and Swisher Blacks), and White Owl. Acid, Djaraum, and Havana Gold cigars were mentioned by one participant each.

Skoal and Grizzly brands (including various cuts, and flavors) were the most commonly mentioned smokeless tobacco products, followed by Copenhagen brands.

There were very few differences between males and females in brand preference, with a few exceptions. More males than females said they used cigar or cigarillo brands (e.g., Black & Mild, Dutch Master, Garcia Vega, White Owl), and a few more females than males mentioned the American Spirit brand. Smokeless brands were also mentioned more often by males.

Brand preferences were similarly distributed across age groups as well, with no noticeable differences. With regard to race, groups with only African Americans mentioned the Marlboro and Newport brands in similar proportions to the other groups, but no respondents in those groups reported that they used any of the Camel brands. African American only groups also mentioned the cigar and cigarillo brands more than the other groups.

3.1.2 What Participants Like about Using Tobacco Products

As a warm-up exercise for the focus groups, participants were asked why they like to smoke/what they enjoy about smoking or using other tobacco products. The majority of participants across all groups said that it relaxed them, calmed them down, and provided some stress relief:

- *"They take the edge off, so you can calm down some and just relax."* (Hispanic male current smokers, Raleigh)
- *"When I get mad, I light up. I think in my mind, it's just something else to focus on."* (25- to 34-year-old female current smokers, Raleigh)
- *"If I don't have one, I'm not a nice person. It calms me down."* (25- to 34-year-old African American male current smokers, Atlanta)
- *"It calms me down from whatever the stressful situation is that I just went through."* (35+-year-old female current smokers, Atlanta)

Many participants mentioned that they enjoyed the social aspect of smoking or using other tobacco products. They talked about meeting people while outside smoking and the camaraderie that developed between smokers:

- *"At a bar, you meet so many different people and talk to so many different people that otherwise you won't just by going outside [to smoke]."* (18- to 24-year-old male college students, Raleigh)

A number of participants said they liked smoking (in particular) because of the break it offered from working, studying, or other routine parts of their day. The association between alcohol and tobacco use was also mentioned by many participants, who cited the additional “buzz” that tobacco gave to drinking. As one participant explained, it provided “*kind of another euphoria*” (18- to 24-year-old male light users, Atlanta).

Several participants across groups shared that they did not really enjoy smoking/using other tobacco products and that it was more of a habit or addiction. As one participant said, “*I don’t enjoy anything about it anymore, I don’t think. I think it’s more of a habit. I never really have been proud of it. It’s not really a pretty thing, but it happens*” (18+-year-old male smokeless users, Indianapolis).

A few participants across groups mentioned other aspects of smoking/tobacco use that they enjoyed, including its appetite-suppressing qualities, the routine it provided especially while eating or driving, and the feeling or flavor of the tobacco.

There were no noticeable differences by gender, age, or race/ethnicity in what participants said they liked/enjoyed about using smoking.

3.2 Ranking Cigarette Brands in Terms of Harm to Health

Cigarette Brands

- American Spirit
- Camel Blue
- Newport
- Marlboro Red (males only)
- Virginia Slims (females only)
- Basic (all groups except African American male group)
- Black & Mild (African American male group only)

Participants were given four handouts to complete that corresponded to the discussion. The first two handouts were related to cigarette brands. The moderators presented examples of cigarettes and asked participants to think about them in different ways.

For the first handout, participants completed a word association activity to describe the cigarette brands displayed. The second handout asked participants to rank the cigarettes from “least harmful to your health” to “most harmful to your health.” The sections below summarize the findings across groups.

3.2.1 Words/Phrases Describing Cigarette Brands

Tables 3-1 through 3-7 list the words and phrases that participants listed on the handouts for each of the cigarette brands shown. There were no obvious differences in the types of responses given by gender, age group, or race/ethnicity.

For American Spirit, the most commonly mentioned words/phrases were “natural,” “Indian/tribe/Native American,” and “cheap.” Table 3-1 lists other words/phrases used to describe the American Spirit brand.

Table 3-1. Words Used to Describe American Spirit

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| natural (22) | American | just tried them |
| Indian/tribe/Native American (11) | bar | leisure |
| cheap (9) | boys | lots of ads & coupons |
| unfamiliar, never heard of them (8) | chalk box | Mars bar/Gainesville |
| hippies (7) | cheerleading | more tobacco |
| hip/hipster (5) | cigarette | not in neighborhood |
| expensive (4) | classic | not strong menthol |
| chemical/additive free (3) | college students | old people |
| gross (3) | cool | original or traditional |
| terrible/worse than terrible (3) | don't know brand/box, | plain |
| yellow/eye catching (3) | don't like | premium |
| bright (2) | dry | relaxing/old type of smoke |
| healthier/less bad/safer (2) | failed attempt to be healthy | sister |
| long-lasting/slow-burning (2) | flower child | smell funny |
| never tried (2) | free | smooth |
| new (2) | fresh | sweaty gym socks |
| nope/no way (2) | great tasting | traditional |
| nothing (2) | harsh | trendy |
| ok (2) | heritage | ugly |
| organic (2) | interesting | What kind of flavor could it have? |
| | interesting logo | What? |
| | Joey | |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of who participants wrote the word/phrase on the handout.

Camel Blue was most commonly described with reference to "Joe Camel" or "the camel," as being "strong," and as a brand that has been "around a long time," is "antique," or "old school." Table 3-2 lists other words/phrases used to describe the Camel Blue brand.

Table 3-2. Words Used to Describe Camel Blue

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|---------------|
| Joe Camel/the camel (11) | average | hate |
| strong (9) | basic | high school |
| around a long time/antique/old school (6) | blue | hippies |
| smooth (5) | Camel crush | like a little |
| unfamiliar/unheard of (5) | camel smoking | mellow |
| classic (4) | cheap | men |
| cowboy (4) | cigar wannabee | minty |
| lights (3) | cold | my dad |
| will/would smoke (3) | commercial | nasty |
| Arabian/Egypt (2) | cool air | no tip |
| college (2) | coupons | non-filter |
| cool/cool guy (2) | coworkers | normal |
| desert (2) | delicious | not sure |
| familiar (2) | didn't like them | not the worst |
| foreign (2) | exotic | okay |
| gross (2) | fancy | plain |
| menthol/menthol light (2) | friends | rural |
| new look/product (2) | girlfriend's brand | sad camel |
| nice/nice design (2) | good cigarette for the money | so-so |
| no/no mas (2) | good logo | terrorists |
| Turkey/Turkish (2) | grandfather | too light |
| 1st brand I smoked | happiness | uninterested |
| adult cigarette | hard worker | Western |
| | harsh | |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout.

The most commonly mentioned words used to describe Newport were "menthol" (with some specifying "strong menthol"), "strong," and "Black people" or "African Americans." Table 3-3 lists other words/phrases used to describe the Newport brand.

Table 3-3. Words Used to Describe Newport

| | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| menthol/strong menthol (27) | urban (2) | hip |
| strong (10) | what I smoke (2) | home |
| Black people/African Americans (8) | America | I want one |
| classic (4) | awesome | light |
| ghetto/low class (5) | been around | mom |
| good (5) | best | my 3rd love |
| most available/popular/ common (5) | blessing | nice |
| smooth (5) | boring | normal |
| cool (3) | boys | old school |
| expensive (3) | brother | overpriced |
| harsh/rough (3) | brown filter | piquant |
| addictive/"crack" (2) | buzz | pleasure |
| cigarettes (2) | calming | simple |
| ethnic (2) | cheap | smoke one of them |
| favorite (2) | chill | stands out |
| fiberglass (2) | don't like | state |
| good color (2) | family | synthetic |
| me (2) | flashback | the brand |
| minty (2) | flavorful | the one people I know use |
| nasty (2) | fresh | too sweet |
| refreshing/relaxing (2) | Great! Can I have one? | vacation |
| teen years/teenagers (2) | green | youthful |
| | gross | yum |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout.

Common words used to describe the Marlboro Red brand included "cowboy," "cowboy killers," and "classic." Table 3-4 lists other words/phrases used to describe the Marlboro Red brand.

Table 3-4. Words Used to Describe Marlboro Red^a

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| cowboy (11) | America | point program |
| classic (6) | brand name | potent |
| cowboy killers (6) | cancer | quality |
| original (3) | delicious | ranch with horses |
| strong (3) | gross | regular |
| good/great (2) | harsh | robust |
| Marlboro Man (2) | I like them | satisfaction |
| old school (2) | legit stuff | tasty |
| red (2) | nasty | too hot |
| redneck (2) | non-menthol | tree killer |
| rough (2) | one I use now | white dude squares |

^a Male groups only

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout.

Female participants commonly described Virginia Slims as being for “older people” or the “elderly.” They also described the brand as “skinny,” “slim,” “thin,” or “slender.” Table 3-5 lists other words/phrases used to describe the Virginia Slims brand.

Table 3-5. Words Used to Describe Virginia Slims^a

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| older person/elderly (11) | dislike | old-fashioned |
| skinny/slim/thin/slender (6) | do not see often | slim Jims |
| classy/classy white lady (4) | fancy | small |
| long (4) | for the smokers who like to smoke | smooth |
| female/feminine (3) | former brand | South Carolina |
| my grandmother (3) | less tobacco light | sports |
| bad taste/yuck (2) | like smoking air | state |
| my auntie (2) | maybe | sweet smell of menthol |
| my mother (2) | never heard of it | tasteless |
| ahhh... | nothing about them | too expensive |
| Andre 3000 (Outkast) | oh no! | used to smoke |
| classic | okay | weird |
| college | old faithful | women only |
| cute | | you’ve come a long way baby |
| decent | | |

^a Female groups only

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout.

A large number of people who saw the Basic brand described it as “cheap.” Others said it was “generic” or “old,” “old fashioned,” or “old school.” Other commonly mentioned words/phrases included “basic” or “basic looking” and descriptions related to not knowing about the brand (e.g., “never heard of”). Table 3-6 lists other words/phrases used to describe the Basic brand.

Table 3-6. Words Used to Describe Basic^a

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| cheap (47) | harsh (2) | instinct |
| basic/basic looking (8) | no thank you/nope (2) | mom or friend’s brand |
| generic (8) | not appealing/not my type (2) | Newport low-brand |
| old/old fashioned/old school (7) | nothing (2) | normal |
| bland (6) | ok (2) | not very good |
| boring (6) | original (2) | OIP |
| never heard of/never tried/unknown (6) | African American | outdated |
| simple (6) | big, bold letters | reds |
| low/bad quality (4) | bottom of the barrel | regular cigarettes |
| gross/disgusting (3) | broke | so-so |
| nasty (3) | classic | standard |
| plain (3) | Confederate south | strong |
| terrible (3) | cowboy | trashy |
| dislike (2) | crack head | value |
| | fake | weak |

^a All groups, except the African American male group

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout.

Participants in the one African American male group that saw Black & Milds (African American males) used a variety of words to describe the brand (Table 3-7).

Table 3-7. Words Used to Describe Black & Mild^a

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| appealing | flavorful | smoke |
| bathroom | good | smooth |
| bowel movement | nasty | too strong |
| eh | | |

^a African American male group only

3.2.2 Familiarity of Cigarette Brands Used in the Rankings

Most participants in all groups were familiar with most of the cigarette brands, even if they had not tried them. Across groups, a few participants (and sometimes more) said they were unfamiliar with the American Spirit and Basic brands. In addition, while most participants recognized the Camel brand name, some participants were unfamiliar with Camel Blue specifically.

There were no major differences between gender groups in familiarity with the products, although the female groups were slightly less familiar with some brands. Younger participants (in the 18- to 24-year-old groups) were more vocal than older participants about brands they did not recognize.

Within the female groups (who were asked about Virginia Slims), some participants in the younger age groups (18 to 24 years old) were unfamiliar with the brand. Most female participants in the other groups had heard of it and/or smoked it in the past.

3.2.3 Summary of Rankings—Cigarettes

Participants were asked to rank the five cigarette brands shown from 1 (“least harmful to your health”) to 5 (“most harmful to your health”). As noted earlier, the rankings of cigarette brands varied somewhat by gender and race/ethnicity. All participants saw American Spirit, Newport, Camel Blue, and Basic (with the exception of the one group of African American males that saw Black & Mild cigarillos in place of the Basic cigarettes). In addition to the brands above, groups with females discussed Virginia Slims and groups with males discussed Marlboro Red. Because the types of cigarettes viewed varied by gender, we present the results of the rankings by gender. Sixty-eight female participants¹ and 73 male participants completed the ranking exercise. Some participants did not rank all of the products, and some participants gave all of the products the same ranking.

Cigarette Brands Ranked as “Most Harmful to Your Health”

Cigarette Brands— Female Groups

- American Spirit
- Basic
- Camel Blue
- Newport
- Virginia Slims

The majority of female participants ($n = 41$) ranked Newport as the “most harmful to your health.” The most common reason given was that Newport was a menthol cigarette, and menthol cigarettes were generally considered to be more harmful than non-menthol cigarettes. Participants said that menthol “*cuts the lining in your throat*” and “*it absorbs more*” (18- to 24-year-old female light users, Bethesda). Many participants also said that menthol cigarettes contained fiberglass, which aided in the

“cutting” and made it more harmful:

¹ A completed handout was not available for one participant.

- *"I always heard that menthol crystalizes your lungs."* (18+-year-old female former smokers, Indianapolis)
- [Newport has] *"things in it... that are more chemical, toxic chemicals."* (35+-year-old female current smokers, Atlanta)

Participants also mentioned Newport's "harsh" quality as influencing their ranking.

Participants talked about the burning sensation when you smoke Newport cigarettes and the cough that many Newport smokers develop as evidence:

- *"When I started smoking, I started smoking menthol, and when I switched to non-menthol, I coughed a whole, whole lot less."* (18+-year-old female former smokers, Indianapolis)

Male participants ranked Newport ($n = 34$) and Marlboro Red ($n = 30$) as "most harmful to your health." Male participants echoed the comments of female participants in their reasons for ranking Newport as the most harmful, including that it was a menthol cigarette:

- *"All the stuff they add to it is worse. The menthol is no natural thing."* (35+-year-old male current smokers, Indianapolis)
- *"...you're also inhaling the fiberglass that gets in your lungs, and after years, it tears your lungs up."* (35+-year-old male current smokers, Indianapolis)

Cigarette Brands—Male Groups

- American Spirit
- Basic*
- Camel Blue
- Marlboro Red
- Newport

*Black & Mild was used in the African American male group

Male participants also believed that Newport was harsh, and they had similar experiences as the female participants with the brand:

- *"I know a lot of people [who] smoked Newport and started developing a bad cough, so they switched from Newport to a real low style of cigarette."* (18- to 24-year-old male college student current smokers, Raleigh)

A number of male and female participants also brought up the buzz, headache, or sick feeling they got when they smoked a Newport as a reason to think that it was more harmful to your health.

Many male participants who ranked Marlboro Red as the most harmful said their ranking was based on their experience, Marlboro's reputation, and its popularity (as evidence that it is more addictive):

- *"I've always heard that Marlboro Reds being like the harshest so that's why I put that as [most harmful]."* (18- to 24-year-old male college student current smokers, Raleigh)
- *"They're like the cowboy killer, like they're pure cigarette."* (18- to 24-year-old male college student users, Raleigh)

- *"...Marlboro keeps with the whole, like, wild, wild, west type of packaging. Like, it's not filtered or any of that type of stuff, so it seems like it'd be a little bit harsher. I know for a fact it's harsher, so it seems like it'd be more harmful to you."* (18+-year-old male former smokers, Bethesda)
- *"I hear that they sell enough Marlboros, [so that] every man, woman and child can smoke at least one a day on the planet, so that's pretty nicotine-spiked."* (35+-year-old male current users, Indianapolis)

Cigarette Brands Ranked as "Least Harmful to Your Health"

Most female participants ($n = 43$) ranked American Spirit as the "least harmful to your health." The overwhelming reason given was because the product is marketed and advertised as being natural and additive-free. Participants said they believed the brand only contained tobacco, with no (or fewer) chemicals, and that it was organic, all which influenced their perceptions that it was less harmful than the other brands:

- *"I put more organic, but I don't know... [I heard] that they're better..."* (18- to 24-year-old female college student users, Raleigh)
- *"I mean, people who smoke American Spirit, they're... more, like, vegan and they care about their health..."* (18- to 24-year-old female light users, Bethesda)
- *"They don't put in as many additives. I'm sure it's not pure tobacco... but it's probably not as much [additives]"* (25- to 34-year-old female current smokers, Raleigh)

The majority of male participants ($n = 45$) also ranked American Spirit as the "least harmful to your health". Male participants cited the same reasons for their ranking, including the marketing of the brand as a natural, additive-free product:

- *"Supposedly no additives [so] you're smoking less chemicals."* (18+-year-old male former smokers, Indianapolis)
- *"Tobacco is really not good for you, but all this crap they add to it is worse than tobacco itself."* (35+-year-old male current smokers, Indianapolis)
- *"They say there's no chemicals on the crops supposedly. No additives or anything else added to it."* (18+-year-old male smokeless users, Indianapolis)
- *"...when you see all natural, you're hoping there's not that many chemicals... and you think they're just going to cut the tobacco and let it dry and they roll it up and that's what you got... So it's almost like a healthy cigarette, if there can be such a thing."* (25- to 34-year-old African American male current smokers, Atlanta)

Some participants in both male and female groups also mentioned the Native American/American Indian and other aspects of the American Spirit packaging as a reason that the brand seemed less harmful:

- *"Probably too because the Indians that make it, they live for many, many years."* (25+-year old Hispanic male current users, Raleigh)

- *"I know this is really strange, but, like, the Native American headdress, it reminds—I kind of feel like—it reminds me of looser tobacco, which is more healthy than cigarette tobacco."* (18- to 24-year-old female light users, Bethesda)
- *"There's a Native American on there, so I figure he's probably healthy."* (18+-year-old male former smokers, Indianapolis)

3.3 Ranking Smokeless Tobacco Brands in Terms of Harm to Health

Smokeless Tobacco Brands

- Camel snus
- Copenhagen
- Grizzly
- Red Man
- Skoal Wintergreen

After the discussion about cigarette brands, the moderators presented examples of smokeless tobacco products, and asked participants to rank them from "least harmful to your health" to "most harmful to your health" using the third handout. The sections below describe the findings across groups.

3.3.1 Familiarity of Smokeless Tobacco Brands Used in the Rankings

Familiarity with the smokeless tobacco brands was mixed. Most participants in all groups were familiar with at least some of the smokeless brands, even if they had not tried them. Groups with male participants had a higher level of familiarity than groups with female participants. In several groups of females, participants expressed that their rankings were based on limited information, and, in a few cases, they did not complete the ranking exercise.

Groups with younger participants (aged 18 to 24) had slightly more familiarity with the brands than the older age groups. Groups with African American only participants were slightly less familiar with the brands shown than the other groups.

No brand stood out as being particularly unfamiliar. However, two brands—Copenhagen and Skoal—stood out as familiar to the highest numbers of people. More participants in the younger age groups had seen or heard of Camel snus than in the other groups.

3.3.2 Summary of Rankings—Smokeless Tobacco

Participants were asked to rank the five smokeless tobacco brands shown from 1 ("least harmful to your health") to 5 ("most harmful to your health"). All participants saw the same five brands. As noted, some participants found this exercise difficult because they were unfamiliar with the products. As a result, some participants based their opinion on conversation during the group or what they saw on the packaging. Sixty-nine female participants and 73 male participants completed the ranking exercise. Some participants did not rank all of the products, and some participants gave all of the products the same ranking.

Smokeless Tobacco Brands Ranked as “Most Harmful to Your Health”

Female participants had mixed opinions on the rankings for the smokeless tobacco products, perhaps due to their unfamiliarity with the products. More female participants ($n = 28$) ranked Red Man as “most harmful to your health” than any other brand. The number of participants ranking the other products as most harmful ranged from 8 to 16 participants.

Participants described the quantity that was used in each hit and the way it looked (e.g., juice, tar-looking) as reasons that Red Man seemed most harmful. The association with baseball (and the knock-off gum Big League Chew) was also discussed:

- *“It makes me think of like a huge wad of nothing but roast tar coming out of somebody’s mouth. They’re always coughing and spitting constantly.”* (18- to 24-year-old female current users, Indianapolis)

The packaging of Red Man also influenced those female participants who said it was most harmful. The pouch made them think that it was “old” and there was concern that it had not been improved over time:

- *“Yeah. Like they wouldn’t change anything about it, so it’s just been a stronger product for so long.”* (18+-year-old female former users, Indianapolis)
- *“...they have had some new things they can do to it to... make it better—maybe this is still the original recipe, so it could be the most harmful. ‘Cause they don’t have time to enhance it or make it better.”* (25- to 34-year-old African American female current users, Atlanta)

Skoal ($n = 29$) received the largest number of most harmful rankings among male participants. The number of participants ranking the other products as most harmful ranged from 11 to 19 participants.

Those who ranked Skoal as “most harmful to your health” cited their familiarity with the brand, its popularity, and its established place in the market as influences on their opinion:

- *“I just know a lot of that stuff in general leads to lip cancer, and people I’ve known who’ve died of that. Or have died of, let’s say, gum cancer. Get cancer in general from it, that’s [Skoal] probably the most common one used, so...”* (18+-year-old male former users, Bethesda)
- *“Skoal’s... been around quite a while. They got so many different types out there, you don’t know what all’s in each one of them.”* (35+-year-old current users, Indianapolis)

Smokeless Tobacco Brands Ranked as “Least Harmful to Your Health”

Female participants were split on which brands were least harmful, with some ranking Camel snus ($n = 18$) as “least harmful to your health” and others ranking Red Man as least harmful ($n = 19$). Most participants who ranked Camel snus as “least harmful to your

health" cited the small amount used in a hit and the pouch, which seems to serve as a buffer, as reasons for their ranking:

- *"[smokeless] really does tear your gum lining, and you can feel a little soreness after you take it out. And the Camel [snus] has like an outside wrapping to it which I think would be easier on your gum."* (18+-year-old female former users, Indianapolis)

Other participants discussed the new, modern packaging as a reason for ranking Camel snus as less harmful. These participants said that the package looked more like gum or mints and that it was less masculine and harsh-looking.

Female participants that said Red Man was "least harmful to your health" cited their belief that it is a natural product as the main reason. These participants discussed their belief that it is more "natural," the no-fuss packaging, and the Native American on the package (similar to American Spirit) as the basis for their opinions:

- *"I have probably a misconception that Red Man tobacco is perfectly fine with no additives... it has no additives and it's very natural and I think that's what they want you to think."* (35+-year-old female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"I gave it a 1 [least harmful] because—I guess because there's an Indian on it. It makes it kind of like it would be more natural."* (35+-year-old female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"And I said 1 [least harmful] for the Red Man because it's in a pouch. I don't know if it's more pure, maybe, as opposed to the other ones, so maybe you get less [tobacco] than the [others]..."* (18- to 24-year-old current and light users, Raleigh)

Other participants saw the experience of older people who had used Red Man for a long time, and were still living, as evidence that it may not be as harmful:

- *"I relate it to southern farmers or something, you know, and them rolling down the bag and sticking it in their pocket and you know—and you know those people lived a really long time."* (35+-year-old female current smokers, Bethesda)

Male participants were similarly split in the smokeless tobacco brands that they said were least harmful. Camel snus received the most "least harmful to your health" rankings ($n = 25$), followed by Red Man ($n = 23$). Male participants that ranked Camel snus as least harmful gave similar reasons as female participants for their rankings, including the "buffer" effect they believed the pouch may provide and the smaller quantity used at a time:

- *"...it's probably just because of the packaging, but... because it's in a packet, it's a smaller amount and it may be less direct contact with the tobacco."* (18+-year-old male former users, Bethesda)
- *"It comes in a little pouch. It's not directly interacting with your mouth you know, [so] you'll do better."* (18- to 24-year-old male college student smokers, Raleigh)

Male participants that ranked Red Man as least harmful also discussed the ability to see the product in a more “natural” form (i.e., “leaves”) and the Native American on the package as the basis for their opinions:

- *“I think it was kind of the American Spirit effect. It’s got Indians on there too, but also... it’s in a pouch. It seems less processed. It seems like they just cultivated the tobacco, threw it in the bag.”* (18- to 24-year-old male current users, Bethesda)
- *“[Indians] don’t have all the chemicals and tools and stuff, so it just seems like it’s straight from the wild.”* (18+-year-old male current smokeless users, Indianapolis)

3.4 Risk Perceptions of Different Types of Tobacco Products in Terms of Harm to Health

For the fourth handout, participants were asked to rank a combination of two cigarettes and two smokeless tobacco products from 1 (“least harmful to your health”) to 4 (“most harmful to your health”). The specific products discussed varied from group to group based on the discussion and what the moderator chose to select, and therefore not all brands may have been selected equally for consideration.

3.4.1 Summary of Rankings—Cigarettes and Smokeless Products

As a whole, participants across groups were split on whether cigarettes or smokeless tobacco products were more harmful to your health. Those who said that cigarettes were more harmful explained that inhaling the smoke into their bodies affected their lungs, heart, and organs, whereas smokeless tobacco effects were more external:

- *“...[how could] putting [smoke] into your lungs and into your throat possibly be good for you...? ...it’s like bad... for our bodies. And that’s why I think cigarettes are worse than dip and snus... It affects everything... You get smoke into your body that goes everywhere you know.”* (18- to 24-year-old male college student current users, Raleigh)
- *“I put cigarettes as most harmful because I would think, by inhaling them and the chemicals, it affects more of your body then...”* (18- to 24-year-old female college student users, Raleigh)

Participants who ranked smokeless tobacco as more harmful than cigarettes said that the health effects were usually more visible (in gum, lips, and tongue) and that they were felt more quickly than the effects from smoking:

- *“... it seems as though the smokeless tobacco harms you faster. It seems to be more direct to me. And I too... know someone who has tongue and throat cancer... and he smoked very little, but he chewed tobacco. So it’s kind of concentrated in that area I feel like, but I think it has a greater effect...”* (35+-year-old female current users, Bethesda)
- *“I know boys who have done this and said... I had to quit because I had a hole in my mouth.”* (18- to 24-year-old female college student users, Raleigh)

- *"I know so many people who have huge divots already in their gums... I'm just seeing people already in high school with major gum and mouth issues from that and yet I think you're pretty safe in the short term smoking for a little while..."* (18- to 24-year-old male college student users, Raleigh)
- *"... the cigarettes are going to take a lot more years to do damage to you than what those two cans would because you're packing them in your gum. You're going to get gum or mouth cancer 10 times [faster than] lung cancer."* (35+-year-old male current users, Indianapolis)

Some participants felt that the type of product (cigarettes versus smokeless) had less relationship to harmfulness and that how "natural" a product is was more influential.

3.4.2 Factors Influencing Risk Perceptions

When considering the ranking of products' harmfulness, several topics came up across groups. Product packaging was mentioned by some participants, especially for products that may have been unfamiliar (e.g., smokeless tobacco products). For cigarettes, the picture of the Native American on the American Spirit cigarettes was commonly mentioned as a reason that it appeared to be "natural." Participants thought about the packaging of smokeless tobacco in their rankings; some said that the simple, pouch-like packaging of Red Man meant that it was less threatening, whereas others said that it indicated the product was cheap and low-quality, and therefore more harmful. The new, modern shape of the Camel snus package was considered by some participants to be an indication that it was a cutting-edge improvement over previous products and that it was less harmful. The association with a tin for gum or mints was also important.

Color was also a consideration for some participants. While a few participants mentioned color spontaneously, others offered their thoughts when prompted. For example, the bright yellow packaging of the American Spirit cigarette stood out to some. As one participant said, *"yellow is really not a threatening color, as opposed to, like, red. Every hard cigarette is red. So I have the idea that that's going to be softer"* (Hispanic current users, Raleigh). Other participants echoed these thoughts, describing "red" cigarettes as harsh, *"like an angry, loud abrasive type of color, as opposed to like blue, or yellow..."* (Hispanic current users, Raleigh). Other participants disagreed and said that while the use of color may be good for marketing, it did not influence their perception of risks of the product.

3.4.3 Participants' Comments on the Ranking Process

The discussion continued with questions related to the process of ranking tobacco products' harmfulness and the influencing factors. Due to time constraints, not all topics were discussed in all groups.

Nearly all participants said that the difference in harm between products was small, in some cases *"like eye of a needle small"* (35+-year-old male current users, Indianapolis). As

participants said, *"... in the end, you're still doing a product that is widely accepted to cause cancer, in some way or another"* (18- to 24-year-old male light users, Atlanta) and *"at the end of the day, they're gonna put you in the grave"* (25- to 34-year-old African American male current users, Atlanta). This was true for differences between specific brands within tobacco type and for differences between product types (e.g., cigarettes compared with smokeless tobacco).

When considering the phrase "harmful to your health," participants generally agreed that it referred to diseases or conditions that were related to use of the product. Some participants said that they thought about how quickly the effects could be felt, whereas others considered how bad the effect would be. Some mentioned thinking about family members or friends who had been affected by the product. A few participants pointed out that harmfulness is also related to the quantity a person uses and how long they have used the product. Participants who felt that "natural" tobacco was less harmful considered additives in ranking harmfulness because *"tobacco is pretty much a plant... and if you add stuff to [it], it could be worse than it actually is because it's not natural from the ground"* (25- to 34-year-old African American females, Atlanta).

Most participants agreed that the products that they currently use (or most recently used) were generally as harmful as the products discussed.

Participants were mixed on how easy it was to rank products from least harmful to most harmful to your health. Some participants pointed out that some products were unfamiliar, and ranking them ended up being more of a guess, whereas others believed that all of the products in a category should get the same ranking (usually "most harmful") because the differences in harm were very small.

When asked if they had previously thought about differences between tobacco products and how harmful they might be to one's health, participants' reactions were mixed. Most participants who responded that they had considered the differences cited an effort to use a "lighter" product.

- *"I thought about it when I wanted to quit smoking and I couldn't at first really cold turkey. So I thought about going maybe to a Newport Light and then our doctor said it's all still bad for your system. It doesn't matter."* (18+-year-old female former smokers, Indianapolis)
- *"... as I got older, I would... progress from full-flavor down to Ultra Lights... because I'm getting older and maybe it might make a difference even if it's a millisecond of my life."* (18- to 24-year-old female users, Indianapolis)

Others said that although they had thought about the potential differences in harmfulness, it did not affect their decisions on which products to use because of their loyalty to a brand or because they felt that all tobacco products were harmful:

- *"...you don't really concern yourself with it. Like it's not really—I think it's more important for people to feel good man. That's what they really care about."* (18- to 24-year-old male college student users, Raleigh)
- *"I thought of [harm] to my health but I always assumed that they're all bad so I didn't really pay much attention."* (18- to 24-year-old female college student users, Raleigh)

Some participants said that they had not thought about the differences previously, and a few commented that the experience was thought-provoking.

- *"Man, it was so fast that I don't really think about it while I'm doing it. I mean, it's probably the first time I've actually thought about it."* (18- to 24-year-old female college student users, Raleigh)
- *"It sort of opens up your eyes... it's an eye opener... I'd guess you'd say."* (18- to 24-year-old male light users, Atlanta)

3.4.4 Beliefs Regarding Manufacturers Marketing a Product as Less Harmful

When asked if tobacco companies would market a product as being less harmful to your health, most participants agreed that they would if it were allowed. Participants noted that the manufacturers' job is to sell, and *"people would be more likely to buy it if it was less harmful"* (18- to 24-year-old female college students, Raleigh). Most participants said they would not believe any claims of a less harmful product if it were marketed that way.

Some participants generally believed that regulations or restrictions have mostly kept tobacco companies in check, citing the elimination of using "lights" or "ultra-lights" in tobacco brand names, but they noted that the switch to colors (e.g., red, blue) might have the same effect. Many participants considered that marketing a product as "natural" or "additive-free" (as with American Spirit) gave the impression that *"they're like the healthy alternative to smoking, still smoking, healthy smoking"* (18- to 24-year-old male college students, Raleigh).

Several female participants said that skinnier cigarettes marketed to women were portrayed as being less harmful. Others mentioned e-cigarettes as an example of a product that was marketed as being less harmful.

4. SUMMARY

We conducted 16 focus groups with current and former users of tobacco products to assess consumer perceptions of the relative risks of various tobacco products. Findings from these focus groups will inform the development of the protocol and stimuli to be used in a second round of focus groups, which will explore the potential impact of modified-risk products and claims on consumer perceptions.

Participants mentioned a variety of factors when asked to judge the relative risks of the tobacco products discussed in the focus groups, including the characteristics of the product, their own experience with the product, what they have heard or observed about the product from users of the product, the product's reputation and popularity, product marketing and advertising, product labeling, the packaging of the product (e.g., color), and the perceived quality and price of the product. We discuss these factors in more detail below. CTP may want to take these factors into consideration when developing the stimuli and moderator guide for the next round of focus groups.

4.1 Product Characteristics

Participants considered menthol cigarettes to be more harmful compared with non-menthol cigarettes because of beliefs about the additional chemicals added to menthol cigarettes and the belief that menthol cigarettes contained fiberglass. Participants considered cigarettes that seemed "harsh" when smoked and caused one to cough to be more harmful compared with milder cigarettes. Cigarettes that were marketed as additive free were considered to be less harmful than brands that contain additives.

For smokeless tobacco products, product characteristics considered included the quantity used in each hit; participants believed that the more used, the greater the harm. Another consideration was whether the product was enclosed in a pouch, such as snus, which was generally considered to be less harmful than the other smokeless tobacco products discussed in the groups.

Participants across groups were split in the type of tobacco product (i.e., cigarettes or smokeless tobacco) that was generally more harmful to your health. Those who said that cigarettes were more harmful believed that inhaling the smoke affected their internal organs and was generally more dangerous. Those who said that smokeless tobacco was more harmful said that the visible effects (e.g., to teeth and gums) and their belief that effects were felt more quickly were reasons for their ranking. Some participants believed that the type of product (cigarettes versus smokeless) had less relationship to harmfulness and that how "natural" a product was is more influential.

4.2 Product Packaging, Labeling, and Marketing

Participants commented on the influence of product packaging, especially for products that were unfamiliar, such as some brands of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products. Participants associated the picture of the Native American on the American Spirit cigarettes with being “natural” and thus less harmful to their health. The various shapes of smokeless tobacco packages were also mentioned by participants as factors that influenced their ranking of products. Some agreed that the simple, pouch-like packaging of Red Man meant that it was less threatening, whereas others felt that it indicated that it was cheap and low-quality, and therefore more harmful. The new, modern shape of the Camel snus package was considered by some participants to be an indication that it was a cutting-edge improvement over previous products and an indication that it was less harmful. The association with a tin for gum or mints gave the impression that the product was less harmful.

Color was mentioned by a few participants. When prompted, others voiced similar opinions about the meaning of package color. Participants perceived yellow and blue to be nonthreatening and thus less harmful to their health and red to be a harsh color and thus more harmful to their health. Other participants disagreed and said that while the use of color may be useful for marketing, it did not influence their perception of risk.

Information on the product label was considered by some participants in ranking the products. For example, American Spirit, which was labeled as “100% Additive-Free Natural Tobacco,” was considered to be less harmful to your health by some participants.

Manufacturers’ marketing of the product was also considered when ranking the products. For example, the marketing of American Spirit as being natural and additive free led to the belief that this brand is less harmful, although the company makes no claim that this brand is less hazardous than other cigarettes. Most participants believed that manufacturers would market a product as being less harmful to your health if they were allowed to do so. Some participants believed that some products were already marketed as less harmful, such as cigarettes labeled as “natural,” e-cigarettes, and skinnier cigarettes.

4.3 Other Factors

When ranking the products, the price and quality of the product was considered by some participants. Some participants considered products that were cheap and of low-quality to be more harmful to their health, whereas others believed that cheaper products were less harmful because they contained fewer chemicals.

When asked to explain their product rankings, participants made reference to their own experience with using the products and their familiarity with the products when doing the rankings. For some participants, if they had not used the product previously or were not

familiar with it, they based their rankings on what they had heard or observed about the product from users of the product or the product packaging. However, some participants who were not familiar with the products were unable to do the rankings.

The product's reputation and popularity were factors considered by some participants when ranking the products. For example, many of the male participants who ranked Marlboro Red as the most harmful said their ranking was based on Marlboro's reputation and its popularity as evidence that it is more addictive and thus more harmful. Other participants believed that products that are popular are less harmful because so many people use them.

**APPENDIX A:
MODERATOR GUIDE**

I. Welcome and Ground Rules (5 minutes)

MODERATOR: Welcome and thank you for participating in tonight's discussion. My name is _____ . Tonight, I am interested in hearing your opinions about tobacco products. You have been asked to participate in tonight's discussion because you use (or have used) some of the various types of cigarettes and other tobacco products that we are going to look at and discuss tonight.

Before we begin, I want to go over a few ground rules for our discussion tonight, which will last about an hour.

- Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time.
- If at any time you are uncomfortable with my questions, you can choose not to answer. Just let me know that you prefer not to answer.
- Everything we discuss today will be kept private to the extent allowable by law. Your name and contact information, which only the study staff knows, will not be given to anyone else and no one will contact you after this interview is over.
- Tonight's discussion will be audio and video recorded. The recordings will help me write the final report and will be kept in a secure location and then destroyed at the end of the study. No names will be mentioned in the final report created from these interviews.
- Some of my coworkers are viewing our discussion. They're watching to make sure that I ask you all of the questions I have for you today. At the end of our conversation, my colleague may come out with some last minute questions for you.
- Most importantly, there are no right or wrong answers. I want to know your opinions. I do not work for the people sponsoring this research and I didn't write the questions we're going to look at, so don't hold back on giving me your honest opinions.
- I'm not a medical doctor or an expert on smoking or tobacco, so I can't answer specific questions. At the end of our discussion, however, I have some materials that you can take with you if you'd like.
- Please silence your cell phones.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

II. Tobacco Products Introduction (5 minutes)

You are here tonight because we would like to hear your thoughts about tobacco products. There are many types of tobacco products on the market. Some you smoke, some you chew, some you keep tucked in your cheek, and some dissolve in your mouth.

1. **[For current and light users]** Let's go around the room and have everyone tell us your first name, what brand and type of tobacco products you currently use, and how long you have been using those tobacco products.
2. **[For former users]** Let's go around the room and have everyone tell us your first name, what type of tobacco products you used to use, and when you quit.

3. **[For smokers]** Why do you/did you like to smoke? What do/did you enjoy about it? **[For users of other tobacco products]** Why do you/did you use smokeless tobacco products? What do/did you enjoy about it?

III. Ranking Different Types of Cigarettes and Smokeless Products in Terms of Harm to Health (30 minutes)

Now I'm going to put on the table a number of different brands of cigarettes. Some of them may be familiar to you. [Introduce the 5 examples of cigarettes one at a time, then pass around the examples and let everyone handle them and look at them.]

4. *[Pass out Handout #1.]* On the handout, for each product, list the first word or phrase that comes to mind. *[After participants have finished the exercise, choose 3 products and ask...]* What word or phrase came to mind when you looked at [product name]? *[List product/words on white board.]*
5. Which products, if any, have you used before or are familiar with?
6. Which products, if any, have you not used before or are not familiar with?
7. *[Pass out Handout #2.]* I'd like you to take a few minutes and rank these products from the least harmful to your health to the most harmful to your health, using the numbers 1 through 5, where #1 is least harmful and #5 is most harmful. Feel free to pick them up and look at them if you want to, but please do not open the packages.
8. I want you to know that I don't know what the correct ranking is, or if there is a correct ranking. I just want to hear your opinions about which cigarettes are more or less harmful to your health.

[After participants have finished the individual rankings, randomly choose 3 products and ask...] Where did this product fall in your ranking? Why?

[Remove products from table.] Now I'm going to put a set of smokeless tobacco products on the table. *[Introduce the 5 examples one at a time, then pass around the examples and let everyone handle them and look at them.]*

9. Which products, if any, have you used before or are familiar with?
10. Which products, if any, have you not used before or are not familiar with?
11. *[Pass out Handout #3.]* I'd like you to take a few minutes and rank these products from the least harmful to your health to the most harmful to your health, using the numbers 1 through 5, where #1 is least harmful and #5 is most harmful. Feel free to pick them up and look at them if you want to.
12. Again, I don't know what the correct ranking is, or if there is a correct ranking. I just want to hear your opinions about which smokeless tobacco products are more or less harmful to your health.

[After participants have finished the individual rankings, randomly choose 3 products and ask...] Where did this product fall in your ranking? Why?

IV. Discussion about Ranking Different Types of Cigarettes and Smokeless Products in Terms of Harm to Health (20 minutes)

Ok, we have just ranked two sets of different cigarettes and smokeless products from the least harmful to your health to the most harmful to your health. *[Put all products on table.]*

13. *[Pass out Handout #4.]* Now let's consider these four products. *[Select two products from each ranking exercise, one that was ranked high and one that was ranked low, and then list the 4 products on the white board in random order.]* How would you rank these four products from least harmful to most harmful? Once again, #1 is least harmful and #4 is most harmful to your health.
 - a. Which products do you consider to be most harmful to your health? Why?
 - b. *[If not mentioned]* Is there anything about how the product looks that helped you decide how harmful it is? If so, what?
 - c. *[If not mentioned]* What about the way it's packaged?
 - d. *[If not mentioned]* What about things you've heard about the product in the past?
 - e. Which products do you consider to be least harmful to your health? Why?
 - f. Now, thinking about the product you ranked as least harmful (#1) and the product you ranked as most harmful (#4): How much do these products differ in terms of harm to your health?
 - Do you think there are small or pretty big differences in how harmful these two products are?
 - Do you think there are small or big differences among the remaining products we looked at tonight?
 - g. *[If not already discussed]* When doing the rankings, how were you thinking about the phrase "harmful to your health"? In your own words, explain what this means to you. *[Probe]* When doing the rankings, were you thinking of harm to yourself personally or harm to others?
 - h. *[Ask a few people and those that use other products]* Do you consider the product you currently/used to use to be more or less harmful to your health compared with the other products we've looked at tonight? Why?
14. What did you think of the ranking exercises? Did you find it easy or hard to rank the products from least to most harmful to your health? Explain why it was easy or hard.
15. Before tonight, had you compared or thought about the different tobacco products and their potential harm to your health?
16. Which do you think are more harmful to your health, cigarettes or smokeless tobacco products? *[Probe]* Why do you think that? *[If general consensus, ask if all of the one type are more harmful than all of the other type. Take care to not presume that users believe smokeless to be less harmful than cigarettes.]*

17. Do you think tobacco product manufacturers would market a product as being less harmful to your health? Why or why not?
 - a. Are you aware of any tobacco products that are currently marketed as less harmful to your health?
 - b. If yes, which products? Why do you think these products are less harmful to your health? *[Probe on product labels or advertisements.]*

V. Debrief/Closing

18. Do you have any questions before we conclude?
19. Tonight's discussion is part of a study funded by the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA. Some FDA team members are viewing tonight's discussion online. Before I let you go, let me check to see whether they have any questions for you. *[Note taker takes any questions to moderator or lets moderator know there are no questions.]*

Our discussion has brought up a lot of questions about the health risks of tobacco use. As I mentioned, I have some brochures available here for you or a friend that you're welcome to take with you. *[Place brochures near door so participants can pick one up if they choose.]*

[FORMER SMOKERS/RECENT QUITTERS ONLY] If you are interested, there is a quit line mentioned in the brochure that you may call.

Thank you for participating in tonight's discussion. I appreciate your time and effort.

APPENDIX B: HANDOUTS¹

¹ For each handout, the order of product names was randomized by group.

Handout #1: *For each product, please write the first word or phrase that comes to mind.*

Marlboro Red/Virginia Slims²: _____

Camel Blue: _____

Newports: _____

Basic/Black & Mild³: _____

American Spirit: _____

² Marlboro Red brand was presented in male groups only, while Virginia Slims brand was presented in female groups only.

³ Black & Mild brand replaced Basic brand in African American male group only.

Handout #2: *Please rank the products from least harmful to your health to most harmful to your health, using the numbers 1 to 5, where **1 = least harmful** and **5 = most harmful**.*

_____ Marlboro Red/Virginia Slims

_____ Camel Blue

_____ Newports

_____ Basic/Black & Mild

_____ American Spirit

Handout #3: *Please rank the products from least harmful to your health to most harmful to your health, using the numbers 1 to 5, where **1 = least harmful** and **5 = most harmful**.*

_____ Copenhagen

_____ Red Man

_____ Skoal

_____ Grizzly

_____ Camel snus

Handout #4: Please rank the products from least harmful to your health to most harmful to your health, where **1 = least harmful** and **4 = most harmful**. This time write in the product name next to its ranking #.

1 — Least Harmful _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 — Most Harmful _____

February 2014

Consumer Perceptions of Modified Risk/Reduced Exposure Cigarette Claims

Focus Group Summary Report

Contract No. HHSF223201110005B, Task 6

Prepared for

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term "modified risk tobacco product" means any tobacco product that is sold or distributed for use to reduce harm or the risk of tobacco-related disease associated with commercially marketed tobacco products.
~Section 911(b)(1) of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the authority to regulate the manufacture, marketing, and distribution of tobacco products to protect the public health. Section 911 of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act authorizes FDA to grant orders to manufacturers to allow the marketing of products that may reduce the harm or risk of tobacco-related disease associated with commercially marketed tobacco products. FDA may allow the marketing of these products, called modified risk tobacco products, if it is deemed appropriate for the promotion of public health. To assess the potential impact that the marketing of modified risk tobacco products may have on the likelihood of initiation and cessation of tobacco use, FDA requires information regarding consumer perceptions of tobacco products and of modified risk tobacco products.

FDA's Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) contracted with RTI International to conduct focus groups to assess consumer perceptions of the relative risks of various tobacco products. An initial round of 16 focus groups explored how consumers make judgments about the harmfulness of tobacco products. Data from the first round of focus groups informed the development of a series of cigarette packages featuring fictitious brands and health-related claims (e.g., less tar, fewer toxins). A second round of 16 focus groups explored consumers' reactions to these mock cigarette packages and health claims and their relationships to their cigarette brands. Collecting information on the target audience's perceptions will help inform the Agency's efforts to implement the provisions of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act related to modified risk tobacco products.

This report describes the study design and presents the findings from the second round of 16 focus groups. Section 2 describes the study procedures and materials, Section 3 presents the key findings from the focus groups, and Section 4 summarizes the results of the focus groups and factors to consider in the next round of focus groups.

2. STUDY METHODS

RTI International conducted 16 focus groups with consumers in four U.S. cities to assess their perceptions of the reduced exposure and modified risk claims presented on two fictitious cigarette brands. The study also examined brand loyalty among participants and how brand loyalty might affect perceptions and use of reduced exposure and modified risk products that could be marketed in the future. This section describes the procedures and materials used to conduct the focus groups.

2.1 Study Design

From September to November 2013, RTI conducted 16 focus groups in four locations: Bethesda, Maryland; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Londonderry, New Hampshire; and Jackson, Mississippi. RTI worked with the Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) to develop the methodology and focus group segmentation, including age groups, smoking behaviors, and other characteristics. Table 2-1 shows the subpopulation and location for each focus group.

Table 2-1. Segmentation of Focus Group Participants

| Bethesda, MD | Oklahoma City, OK | Londonderry, NH | Jackson, MS |
|---|--|--|--|
| Female Light smokers ^a | Female Light smokers | Male Light smokers | Male Light smokers |
| Female Ages 30 to 65 Current smokers ^b | Male Ages 30 to 65 Current smokers | Male Ages 30 to 65 Current smokers | Female Ages 30 to 65 Current smokers |
| Male Ages 18 to 24 Urban Poly-users ^c | Male Quit Interest | Female Quit Interest | Male Ages 18 to 24 Urban Poly-users |
| Male Quit interest ^d | Female Quit interest | Male Quit interest | Female Quit interest |

^a Smokes, on average, fewer than 10 cigarettes per day, every day, or smoked, on average, fewer than 10 cigarettes per day less than 20 days in the past 30 days.

^b Smokes, on average, 10 or more cigarettes per day, every day, or smoked, on average, 10 or more cigarettes at least 20 days in the past 30 days.

^c The original design specified males who *only* use smokeless tobacco products (e.g., chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip). Due to a low incidence rate, we were unable to recruit a full group of smokeless-only users. Some participants also smoked cigarettes or other tobacco products.

^d Plans to stop smoking within the next 60 days.

RTI subcontracted with local market research companies in each of the focus group locations to recruit participants and provide the facilities for hosting the focus group discussions. Using convenience sampling, the market research companies recruited from their databases participants who met the requirements for inclusion in the specific subpopulations. To be eligible to participate, respondents had to be able to read,

understand, and speak English. Individuals were ineligible for participation if they had other characteristics that could potentially bias responses (e.g., connections to the tobacco industry; employment in the public health, advertising, or marketing industries) or if they had participated in market research in the past 6 months.

Each focus group included 6 to 11 participants, for a total of 143 participants. Upon arrival to the focus group facility, participants read and signed an informed consent form (approved by the Food and Drug Administration's [FDA's] and RTI's Institutional Review Boards) and were rescreened to confirm eligibility. Experienced moderators conducted the focus group discussions, and trained staff members took notes during the discussions. Each focus group discussion lasted 1 hour. Participants received a monetary incentive of \$50 for participating in the focus group discussion.

2.2 Study Materials

CTP led the development of a moderator guide to discuss consumer use and perceptions of tobacco products. Table 2-2 summarizes the topics in the moderator guide, and Appendix A provides a copy of the moderator guide.

On a handout, participants listed the words that came to mind when they thought of their cigarette brand and discussed their thoughts about their brand. During each focus group, participants were asked to name the cigarette brand they smoked and to describe the interaction they had with their brand (e.g., listservs, coupons). Participants then listed the words that came to mind when they thought of "tobacco companies in general" and discussed their attitudes toward tobacco companies. See Appendix B for a copy of the handouts.

Participants were presented with six different mock cigarette packages consisting of two fictitious brands (Durham and Carteret) that were developed by RTI and CTP. The fictitious brands and their packaging were designed to look realistic but to avoid being mistaken for currently available brands.

The packages had a variety of statements prominently displayed that made health claims about the product. A total of 12 claim statements, developed by CTP, were used on each of the brands (with a total of 24 packs). One set of statements made claims that the product presented modified exposure to a harmful constituent (reduced exposure), while a second set of statements made claims that the product posed reduced risk of harm to the user (modified risk). Other characteristics of the statements included general versus specific claims, positive versus negative framing, familiar versus unfamiliar chemical names, and references to an organization (bogus) with implied scientific credentials. Each claim statement emphasized certain words by bolding them and placing them inside the top of the

Table 2-2. Moderator Guide Summary

| Section | Purpose |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Introduction | Moderator described the purpose of the discussion and how the group would be conducted. |
| Brand Relationship | |
| Introduction | Participants introduced themselves and briefly discussed their brand of cigarettes and how long they had used <i>that brand</i> . |
| Attitudes | Participants were asked to complete a top-of-mind exercise that asked them to think about their brand of cigarettes and the first words or phrases they associated with the brand. Follow-up discussion focused on common themes and their reasons for the associations. |
| Interaction | Participants discussed the ways that they interacted with the company that makes their cigarettes and any communications that they receive from their brand or other brands. |
| Tobacco Companies | |
| Attitudes | Participants completed a second top-of-mind exercise that asked them to think about tobacco companies in general (<i>not just the makers of their preferred brand</i>) and the first words or phrases they associated with tobacco companies. Follow-up discussion focused on common themes and their reasons for the associations. Participants also ranked the level of trust they felt for tobacco companies from 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("very much"). |
| Statement and Prototypes | |
| First reactions | Moderator briefly introduced sample product packaging and offered participants an opportunity to see, hold, open, and read the boxes. Participants then discussed their initial thoughts about the products, including what they did and did not like, things they noticed, and questions the packages brought up. |
| Perception of statements | Moderator focused on the statements (claims) printed on the packaging. Participants discussed their thoughts and feelings about them, including their understanding of the statements' meaning, whether the statements were believable, the source of the statements, and the perceived target audience for statements like those shown. |
| Perception of product with statements | Participants discussed other aspects of the sample products. Topics included participants' interest in trying or using a product like the samples shown, their feelings about how the products would taste, and their opinions on whether statements like those discussed would catch their attention. Participants also discussed their thoughts on whether similar products would be successful if they were sold and who they believed would use them. |
| Conclusion | Participants shared any final comments. |

cigarette package. The claims were presented in a variety of colors (blue, transparent) and formats (e.g., rectangular packages, stamps with ribbons). Each group viewed six different cigarette packages and statements (three packages of each brand, each with a different statement). Table 2-3 lists the combination of different sample statements, colors, and formats presented during the groups.

Table 2-3. List of Statements, Phrase Emphasis, Brand, Claim Color, and Format

| Claim | Phrase Emphasis (for pack flip top and bolding within claim) | Durham | | Carteret | |
|--|--|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| | | Claim Color | Format | Claim Color | Format |
| All the satisfaction you want, with less chemicals | Less chemicals | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| Contains significantly fewer toxins, according to the U.S. Toxicological Association | Fewer toxins | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| Lower tar | Lower tar | Blue | Stamp w/ribbon | Transparent | Half circle |
| Low nicotine | Low nicotine | Blue | Stamp w/ribbon | Transparent | Half circle |
| Contains significantly less nicotine and carbon monoxide levels compared to regular cigarettes | Less nicotine | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| America's first cigarette with no formaldehyde | No formaldehyde | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| 50% lower ethylene oxide | Lower ethylene oxide | Blue | Stamp w/ribbon | Transparent | Half circle |
| Independent scientific panel concluded this product is safer alternative to regular cigarettes | Safer alternative | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| Safer alternative to most cigarettes | Safer alternative | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| 100% Natural Tobacco | 100% natural | Blue | Stamp w/ribbon | Transparent | Half circle |
| Contains less than 0.3 mg nicotine/cigarette | < .3 mg nicotine | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |
| Triple filter charcoal technology: Safer for smokers | Safer for smokers | Blue | Rectangle | Blue | Frill-edged full circle |

2.3 Analysis

The focus groups were professionally audio-recorded by the local market research companies and video-streamed by an independent subcontractor. The audio files were professionally transcribed by the independent subcontractor. The note taker for each focus group used her notes and reviewed the audio files and/or transcripts for accuracy. Pre-group questionnaire and handout data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. A moderator then systematically reviewed and manually coded all transcripts to identify common themes and any exceptions to these themes and to identify similarities and differences among the various subpopulations included in the study, where possible. Handout and participant data were summarized and included in tables for interpretation.

2.4 Participant Characteristics

Overall, the total number of participants was 143. Participants were nearly evenly divided between male ($n = 79$; 55.2%) and female ($n = 64$; 44.8%). Participants were evenly divided across age ranges. Participants were most likely to have some college ($n = 54$; 37.8%) or a college degree ($n = 43$; 30.1%). Only eight participants (5.6%) had less than a high school degree, and only five (3.5%) had a post-graduate degree. The majority of participants identified as non-Hispanic ($n = 134$; 93.7%) and Caucasian ($n = 83$; 57.3%). The majority of participants reported smoking every day ($n = 103$; 72.0%). Of the participants that smoked every day, the majority ($n = 66$; 64.1%) reported smoking 10 to 30 cigarettes per day. Slightly more than one-quarter of participants who smoked every day ($n = 28$; 27.2%) reported smoking less than 10 cigarettes per day, and only nine (8.7%) reported smoking more than 30 cigarettes per day. Only 40 participants (28.0%) reported smoking on some days. Of participants who smoked on some days, the majority ($n = 29$; 78.4%) reported smoking on fewer than 20 days per month. The majority of participants who smoked on some days ($n = 28$; 73.7%) smoked fewer than 10 cigarettes per day on the days they smoked.

Participants were asked to rate how much they wanted to quit smoking on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a lot*). The majority of participants reported their interest in quitting as “3” ($n = 39$; 27.3%), “4” ($n = 34$; 23.8%), or “5” ($n = 47$; 32.9%). Participants who reported their interest between 2 and 5 were asked whether they were seriously considering stopping smoking in the next 6 months. The majority of participants ($n = 106$; 80.2%) reported that they were considering stopping smoking in the next 6 months. The majority of participants ($n = 71$; 67.6%) also reported that they were planning on stopping smoking in the next 60 days. The majority of participants ($n = 106$; 85.5%) reported that they did not use chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip.

3. KEY FINDINGS

This section presents key findings from the focus group discussions for the following major topics:

- brand relationship,
- tobacco companies (including attitudes toward tobacco companies), and
- claim statements and sample products.

For each major topic, we analyze the various subtopics included in the discussion. We summarize the findings across the 16 focus groups and identify differences, if any, among groups.

3.1 Brand Relationship

Each focus group began with participants discussing their current cigarette use. Participants were asked to tell the group which brand(s) of cigarettes they use and how long they had used the brand. In cases where a participant used multiple brands, the discussion focused on their preferred brands.

Focus group participants mentioned a variety of brands, although a few stood out as more common. Across all groups (including current and former users), Marlboro brands were mentioned most often. Although the general “Marlboro” name was given by most participants, specific types—including Marlboro Lights, Marlboro Red, Marlboro Menthol, and Marlboro 100s—were mentioned by others.

Newport brands were the second most commonly mentioned (including Newport, Newport Lights, Newport 100s, and Newport Shorts), followed by Camel brands. Other brands receiving a few mentions included American Spirit, Benson and Hedges, Kool, Maverick, Pall Mall, Parliament, and Seneca.

3.1.1 Attitudes toward Brand

Participants participated in an exercise to assess top-of-mind thoughts and reactions about their usual or preferred brand (Handout 1, Appendix B). They were given a few minutes to write down the first few words or phrases that came to mind when they saw, heard, or thought about their brand of choice. Tables 3-1 through 3-3 summarize their responses.

Table 3-1. Words and Phrases Used to Describe Your Cigarette Brand: Favorable

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Cleaner tasting/no cotton taste/great taste/taste good/tastes decent/pleased with the taste/taste/taste fresher/like the way it taste/taste better/no bad aftertaste/tasty (22) | Social/socializing (2) | Great and awesome brand |
| Smooth/smooth taste/the smoothness/smooth and stronger (22) | Happy (2) | Great dessert |
| Calming/calm your nerves/calm me down/calmness (16) | Girly (2) | Great for pleasure and juicy conversation |
| Relax/relaxing/relaxation/relaxing after meals/relaxing in the PM (16) | It's affordable/affordability (2) | Harsh |
| Inexpensive/cheaper/cheap/cheap cigarette (11) | Good tingly feeling/warm fuzzy feeling (2) | Hate sharing |
| Stress relief/stress reliever/takes stress away (10) | Cute/pretty (2) | High |
| Cool/cool taste/crisp, cool, clean/"Kool as the wind" (7) | Head change/helps collect my thoughts (2) | I feel like they are doing less damage to my body |
| Flavor/flavorful (6) | Satisfying (2) | It's not strong |
| Beer/goes well with a beer/goes well with Bud Light (5) | Newport pleasure/Live with pleasure (2) | Like the feeling I get |
| Enjoyable/enjoyment/I enjoy smoking (5) | Long lasting (2) | Me time |
| Mild (5) | Tension relief/release of pressure (2) | Meditate |
| Break/break time/take a break (4) | Boss status | Middle of the road |
| Drinking/goes good with drink (4) | Breathtaking | More sophisticated |
| Strong/strong flavor/strong enough to get the job done (4) | Chill | Not too thick |
| Good/good quality (3) | Choice | One of the best brands out there |
| Light (3) | Coffee | Security |
| Minty/peppermint (3) | collective | Player |
| Soothing (3) | Comfortable | Quality cigarettes |
| Best/best cigs there are (2) | Concerts | Refreshing |
| Good smokes (2) | Confident | Reliability |
| Doesn't burn/no burn (2) | Consistent | Sexy |
| | Cost less than Newports | Smell/scent |
| | Don't talk back | They do not make me cough |
| | Easy to smoke | They don't smell like regular cigarettes |
| | Fun | Unique |
| | Genuine | Value |
| | Going out | Variety |
| | Good menthol flavor | Wish they had flavor |
| | Good sensation | Young/young people's cigarette |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout. Responses were coded and combined as appropriate. Minor edits were made to correct for spelling and other errors.

Initial reactions were mostly positive and focused on aspects of smoking that participants enjoyed. Many participants talked about the flavor of their brand (e.g., full-flavor) and the way it tastes (e.g., enjoyable):

- "I love the flavor, the way they taste...." (Male quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- "...the flavor. Everything else is like 'blah.'" (Male current smokers, Londonderry)
- "I wrote 'crisp, cool, clean, relaxation'." (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)
- "Smooth, light, relaxing, no bad aftertaste." (Male light smokers, Jackson)

Table 3-2. Words and Phrases Used to Describe Your Cigarette Brand: Unfavorable

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Expensive/\$/expense/more expensive (15) | Nicotine/nicotine rush (2) | Ill heart effects |
| Need one/need one now/want to have one/I want one myself/give me one (7) | Thinking about smoking one right now/I would like to smoke (2) | Inconsistent quality |
| Bad smell/stinky/smell/smoke smell/hate the smell of smoke (6) | \$5 something | Inconvenient |
| Cancer stick/cancer/can cause cancer (5) | Third item on agenda in AM | Lungs |
| Addictive/addiction (4) | Baby sister has spot on her lung | Messy |
| Seems like a quick catching habit/negative habit/bad habit/habit (4) | C.O.P.D. | nasty |
| Health/unhealthy/bad for my health (3) | Costs too much | Ouch |
| Bad breath (2) | Depressing | Secondhand smoke is bad to the people around you |
| Death/dying (2) | Environmental triggers | Sickness |
| It goes out very often and you have to relight often/going out when not being pulled on (2) | Guilt | Something to occupy me |
| Killer/smoking kills (2) | Half my life | Stingy with coupons |
| | Helps me with my boredom | The first thing I think of is a fresh cigarette |
| | I hate smoking | What are they putting in them now? |
| | I know smoking cigarettes is not good for you | Wish I had an e-cig right now |
| | I might have to get some | Wrinkles |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout. Responses were coded and combined as appropriate. Minor edits were made to correct for spelling and other errors.

In addition, many participants discussed the ways that smoking in general, and their brand specifically, contributed to stress relief and feelings of relaxation.

- *"... it's my place. I feel nice and secure. It's my own little world, nobody bothering me."* (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"...when I'm having a stressful day.., I can go out in the garage and smoke a cigarette, and that just relieves all the stress that's going on for the day."* (Male quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"You just take a drag and it's kind of like, whoosh. The pleasure center."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"The first thing I do when I get in my truck after work is smoke. It's a sign of freedom. I'm free for the rest of the day."* (Female quit interest, Jackson)

Some participants talked about the social aspect of smoking and how cigarettes become part of a familiar routine:

- *"It goes well with a beer."* (Male light smokers, Jackson)
- *"...social like drinking beer, hanging out. I only smoke when I go out with my friends."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)

Table 3-3. Words and Phrases Used to Describe Your Cigarette Brand: Product Description, Brand Imagery, and Other

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Cowboy/cowboys/cowboy man/cowboy killer (11) | Convenient | Money |
| Menthol (10) | Cool | Motorcycle racing |
| Marlboro Man (7) | Cool colors | My brand seems to be the popular one |
| Green box/green/short green pack/green and white (5) | Crush bead | Natural |
| Well known/popular (5) | Crushes | Newport |
| Can find them anywhere/buy them everywhere/always available everywhere/readily available (4) | Different in a way which there aren't many smokers who smoke Kool | Non-menthol |
| Reds/red package/red/red box (4) | Ease of purchase | Only smoke Newport because it's the brand everyone around me smokes |
| Smaller/small/short (3) | High school | Original |
| 100s (3) | Horse | Outdoors |
| Brand/brand of choice (2) | I started smoking this brand because my mother and father smoked this brand | Phillip Morris Co. |
| Country (2) | It's a clove | Recessed filter |
| Everyone I know smokes Marlboro/Marlboro is a common brand to smoke (2) | Light up a cig | Regular/menthol switch |
| First brand/first ever cigarette (2) | Like Newports | Shorts |
| Gold pack/white and gold box (2) | Walmart | Small cigar |
| Lights/ultra-lights (2) | Well-designed packaging | Smoker sign up |
| Smoke (2) | Western | Smoking Joe |
| Thin/slim (2) | Big company | SOS |
| Will give away prizes/win prizes (2) | Ethnic | Spin the wheel |
| Car racing | Hearty | Stereotypical African American brand |
| Common | Men | Tennis tournament |
| | Menthol 100s box | That first touch |
| | Marlboro Lights | Tough |
| | Masculine | White pack |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout. Responses were coded and combined as appropriate. Minor edits were made to correct for spelling and other errors.

Others talked about the quality of their cigarette brand and the ideas that were associated with it. Participants who smoked Marlboro brands were particularly likely to write down words or phrases that described the Marlboro image:

- "... if you go to a country concert, a lot of people will be smoking that brand." (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- "...for Marlboro, I said 'tough.'" (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- "[The packaging] evokes exotic adventure like a little Indiana Jonesy..." (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- "I think of the Marlboro Man." (Male light smokers, Londonderry)

Although the exercise was designed to elicit attitudes toward the smoker's brand, participants described negative associations with cigarette smoking that were not brand-specific. Many talked about the health effects of smoking and their concern about what their cigarette use may be doing to them:

- *"...even though this is my brand, I still think of dying when I do the cigarette..."* (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- *"Everything I have about cigarettes is pretty negative, so I just put 'death,' 'sickness,' 'cancer,' and 'bad breath.'"* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)

Others talked about the effects of smoking on a person's appearance and the problems with odors:

- *"I don't know. I'm just tired of smoking 'em, tired of the taste, the smell."* (Male quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"And most of all the smell in my clothes. Because I used to smoke in the house, but now I don't... and I can tell a complete difference."* (Male quit interest, Bethesda)
- *"Nasty. I'm trying to quit... When I get a pack, I smell it coming. I go into places now and I've smoked all my life and it's just nasty. It's a nasty, disgusting habit."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)

Some participants said that, although they realized smoking was bad, it was an addiction that they found hard to overcome:

- *"I wrote 'I need one now.' And it's a bad habit."* (Male current smokers, Londonderry)
- *"I said 'I want one now.' I said, 'but I want to not want one anymore'... I wish I didn't. Addictive."* (Female quit interest, Jackson)

Many participants brought up the cost of cigarettes. Some said they thought their brand was cheaper than others or that it was an affordable option, but most participants said that cigarette smoking was an expensive habit:

- *"It tastes decent, but the quality's really expensive."* (Male quit interest, Bethesda)
- *"It's expensive. I said when they went up to four dollars, I was gonna quit. Now they's five, I'm still smoking, so..."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)

3.1.2 Interaction with Brand

In a follow-up conversation, participants were asked about the ways that they interacted with the company that makes their brand of cigarettes. Responses were mixed, with some participants saying that they received no communication from their preferred brand, and others saying that they regularly got mail or e-mail from the companies. Nearly all who

received mail from their brands said that it included coupons of various types. Only a few participants said they did not like receiving the coupons or other mail from their brand:

- *"They get your e-mail and then they send you coupons... I even got birthday presents from them."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"They send me like two dollars off a pack. If you're gonna send me two dollars off a pack, I'm gonna smoke that."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"From Marlboro I get a birthday card... Congratulations for beating cancer and getting one more year...."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- *"I feel pretty good, because you actually get money off the product that you're using, and that helps a little bit."* (Male poly-users, Jackson)

A few participants in most groups said that they had visited the cigarette company's Web site. While there, they commonly reported that they signed up to receive discounts or entered sweepstakes to win prizes. A few others mentioned that brand representatives at bars and clubs would hand out promotional materials for anyone who signed up for a mailing list.

- *"...Every year they give away hats and bottle openers—and Zippos—and stuff like that. So I go sign up whenever I get something in the mail."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"They have coupons and gifts that you can enter, too. ... Marlboro actually has a ranch, and you can enter to go to the ranch, all expenses paid, which I do quite regularly."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"Well, like when you go to a bar, sometimes they'll come and get your license and then they send you coupons and stuff like that. They used to give you free packages of cigarettes, [but] now they give you coupons."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)

The moderator probed on questions of interaction with tobacco brands via social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Very few participants in any of the groups reported that they had looked for their brand on social media sites, and only a few of those reported interacting with the company that makes their brand on social media.

Some participants mentioned that they had participated in brand loyalty programs (e.g., "Marlboro Miles," "Camel Cash") but that those programs had been discontinued.

3.2 Tobacco Companies

After the discussion about participants' preferred brands, moderators talked about tobacco companies as a whole. Participants were reminded to think about all tobacco companies that make cigarettes and other tobacco products (including smokeless tobacco and cigars) and not just the company that makes their preferred brand.

3.2.1 Attitudes toward Tobacco Companies

Participants participated in a second exercise to gauge their initial thoughts and reactions to tobacco companies as a whole (Handout 2, Appendix B). They were given a few minutes to write down the first few words or phrases that came to mind when they saw, heard, or thought about tobacco companies or the tobacco industry. Tables 3-4 and 3-5 summarize their responses. Responses did not differ significantly by gender, age group, or race/ethnicity.

Unlike the discussion related to preferred brand, initial reactions to tobacco companies were mostly unfavorable. Many participants focused on the money that tobacco companies make, with words and phrases like “money,” “rich,” “millionaires,” “wealth,” “power,” “conglomerates,” and “big business” making up a large portion of the responses and discussion. While many participants felt that it was self-explanatory, a few elaborated:

- *“...You have tobacco companies, who have lobbyists on their side, [and] ... tobacco companies make so much money, but that money is funneled to other places. And I believe that they have political parties that back them, and that’s how they have so much money and wealth and there’s more power that’s then involved with it.”* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *“They’re conglomerates.” “Yeah, I wrote money and power.”* (Female quit interest, Londonderry)
- *“They’re making tons of money... I mean cigarettes have been around forever. How much money do they need?”* (Male light smokers, Jackson)

Some participants talked about their other negative perceptions of the tobacco companies, including inappropriate marketing practices, chemicals and other additives to cigarettes, and the idea that tobacco companies only care about making money, and not about the lives of their customers:

- *“I think the cigarette companies are evil. They have a total disregard for the lives of their customers. They’re unwilling to make cigarettes safer by removing toxic additives and not making them more addictive than they were naturally.”* (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- *“I think of drug dealers.”* (Male quit interest, Bethesda)
- *“I don’t think that they tell the truth about everything they put in cigarettes.”* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *“They’ve been lying to us for a hundred years about the dangers of smoking...”* (Male current smokers, Londonderry)

Table 3-4. Words and Phrases Used to Describe Tobacco Companies: Unfavorable

| | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Rich/filthy rich (14) | Causing death/mass genocide/ | Assholes |
| Money maker/making money/has | life takers (3) | Bank |
| money/a lot of income (8) | Chemicals (2) | Bastards |
| Greedy (7) | Conglomerates/monopolies (3) | Corporations that provide a |
| Money (7) | Deception (2) | toxic luxury item |
| Big business/huge (6) | Drug dealers/worse than drug | Expensive |
| Killers/killing people/killing people | dealers (3) | Exploitation |
| over time to get rich (5) | Evil/evil business (3) | Malice |
| Addiction/addictive products (4) | Bad/bad guys (2) | Masking the ill effects |
| Big money (4) | Making money killing/They kill | Money control |
| Cancer (4) | millions and yet are the | Parasitic |
| Liars/fact bender/lies about danger of | billionaires of the world (2) | Profiteers |
| smoking (4) | Millionaires (2) | Negative societal effects |
| Profits/tremendous profits/large profits | Not concerned about | Selling death to addicts |
| (4) | health/They don't care (2) | Sneaky |
| Wealthy (4) | Mad/aggravated/angry (2) | Total disregard for the lives |
| Billionaires/billionaire owners/billion | Power/power hungry (2) | of their customers |
| dollar industry (3) | Produced a product that is | Underhanded |
| Manipulative (3) | addictive and harmful.../They | Undertakers |
| Money hungry (3) | know they are pushing addictive | Unwilling to remove toxic |
| That's how they make their | products (2) | chemicals and make |
| money/they are making money off of | Selfish (2) | cigarettes more addictive |
| us/mega rich off poor me (3) | All about dollar bill and by any | than they actually are |
| Big money in bed with government/ | means | |
| government kickbacks (2) | | |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout. Responses were coded and combined as appropriate. Minor edits were made to correct for spelling and other errors.

- *"They're predators. There's no doubt about that. And they... do false advertising to entice these children to come in and think this is so cool to smoke, and you can do it; it's not going to hurt you."* (Female quit interest, Jackson)
- *"My first was 'greed' and 'deceptive and false advertising.' They make it look so glamorous and cool."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)

Tobacco companies did have a few defenders in the groups. Some participants said they felt that the industry was unfairly picked on and that they were operating a legal business that should be left alone:

- *"I wrote 'discriminated.'... They're just like anything else negative—picked on and taxed—and ridiculed—and bullied."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"I have 'harassed by the government'."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"I think we need more tobacco. As... a smoker, I think too that they're infringing on my rights, the public, because I want to go to the café and eat my dinner and sit*

there [and] smoke a cigarette. I can't do that anymore." (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)

Table 3-5. Words and Phrases Used to Describe Tobacco Companies: Favorable/Neutral

| | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Forever/been around forever/ historic/long history in this country (5) | Good promoters and hustlers Great marketing Go for it. We need more. | Reliable Savvy Smart |
| Lack of advertisements (3) | Gonna stick with my brand | Strong |
| Affordable (2) | I think they are giving what the public wants | Thank goodness they make it |
| Carolina/North Carolina (2) | Lower prices | They came up with a great idea |
| Competitive (2) | Lucrative | Trendy |
| Coupons/incentives (2) | Lung | Warning labels |
| Taxes (2) | Marlborough | Well-established |
| Advertisements | Philip Morris | Young |
| Assertive | Ongoing | |
| Bold | Quality | |
| Freedom | | |

Note: Number in parentheses indicates the number of participants who wrote the word/phrase on the handout. Responses were coded and combined as appropriate. Minor edits were made to correct for spelling and other errors.

3.2.2 Trustworthiness of Tobacco Companies

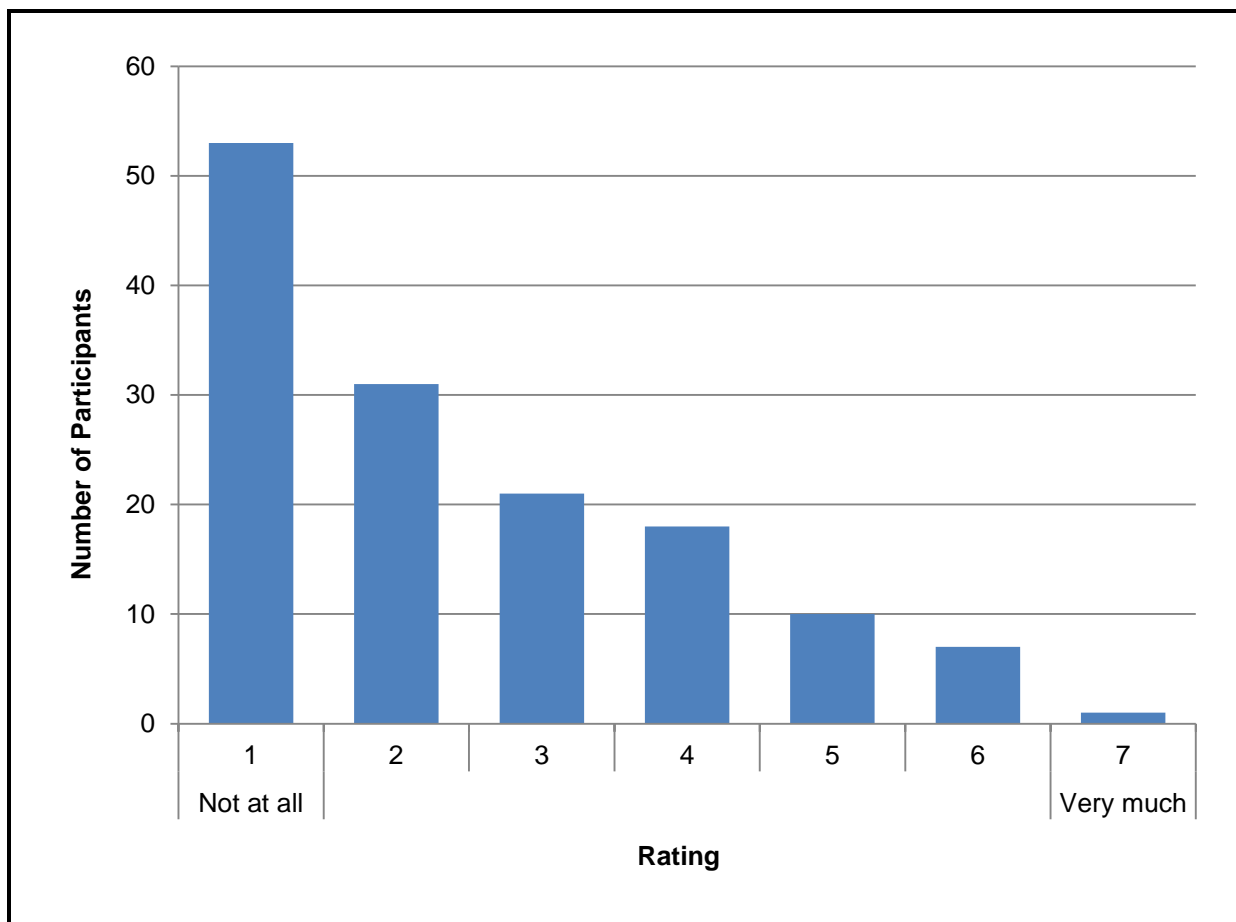
Participants then rated how much they trusted tobacco companies as a whole, on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Although ratings of trust were low overall, reactions were mixed (Figure 3-1).

Participants who gave the tobacco companies a low rating of trust (1, 2) pointed to deceptive marketing techniques, selling an addictive product, and a feeling that the companies do not care about their customers as reasons for their ratings:

- *"Why would I trust something, like a company, that's trying to kill me?..."* (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- *"I don't think they would put the warning signs on there if the government didn't make them do it."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"... I don't feel like they give a damn... whether you live or die. They're making money off of you with every pack that you buy, and they want you to buy as many packs as they can possibly sell you."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"If you look at the grand scheme of things, it's a 50/50 with them. They're doing better today I think with the labels... and people are smarter, but you can't unsqueeze a tube of toothpaste. They squeezed it pretty hard."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- *"That's like asking somebody, 'Do you trust your drug dealer?'"* (Male light smokers, Jackson)

- *"I feel like they're out to get the money. They don't care if I get sick. They just want me to buy the product."* (Female current smokers, Jackson)

Figure 3-1. Trustworthiness of Tobacco Companies



Others who gave them low trust ratings said tobacco companies were not transparent about what was in the products, especially a long list of chemicals.

- *"They added more chemicals than they used to when they first came out... It's a lot different now."* (Female quit interest, Londonderry)
- *"Because they don't tell you everything they do. And everything that's in them."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)

Other participants said they had a range of trust that fell somewhere in the middle (3, 4, 5). These participants reported being torn between the health risks, questionable marketing, and motives of the companies versus the consistency, availability, and quality of the products.

- *"...I don't trust that they worry about people's well-being... but one thing I do trust is that they're consistent with their product... If it was illegal and you were just buying, it would be different every time. I trust their consistency."* (Male quit interest, Bethesda)
- *"It's like two ends of the spectrum. If you're thinking about 'Are they doing things for the public welfare?' that's a zero. If you're talking about, 'Do they have the knowledge to make their product?' well, that's very high... [W]ell then, it's somewhere in the middle."* (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"I feel neutral I guess. I obviously trust them enough to smoke their cigarettes, you know, but I know no matter what cigarettes you're ever gonna smoke, it's gonna cause a problem... But I don't think their intentions are to like purposely take my life away or anything..."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"I trust them a little bit, because I trust that if I buy a regular pack, it's going to be regular. And if they're menthols, menthol."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)
- *"... I don't trust that, obviously what they're putting in my cigarette is good, but I know that if I'm stressed in that moment, it will help."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)
- *"Well, you've got to trust a little bit for keeping a good product out there..."* (Male poly-users, Jackson)

Fewer participants rated the companies on the high end of the scale (6, 7). Those who did focused on the consistency and quality of the product, and their relative health as measures for trust:

- *"The product I smoke is a quality product... I feel fine—and just me, personally—I trust the companies are giving me the product that I'm paying for."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"It hasn't killed me yet, and I've known just as many people die with lung cancer that don't smoke as [that do]."* (Male poly-users, Jackson)
- *"I mean, it hasn't been tampered with or [is] poison. You're getting what you want."* (Female quit interest, Jackson)

3.3 Claim Statements and Sample Tobacco Products

The moderator distributed a subset of six packs to each focus group (three each of the Carteret and Durham brand), each with a different claim statement. Participants were encouraged to look at the packs, feel them, and pass them around. The sections below describe the findings across groups.

3.3.1 First Reactions to Sample Products

After passing them around, the moderator asked for initial reactions to the sample product boxes with no cues or prompting. Some participants immediately noticed the statements that were on the packages, whereas others talked about other aspects of the packaging. To

streamline discussion, the moderator focused discussion on perceptions of these other aspects and postponed conversation about the specific statements until the next section of the guide.

Participants reported that they were particularly struck by the coloring of the “Carteret” packaging. It was clear that most of them had not seen an orange cigarette pack, and some participants noted the novelty of the color. Comments on the “Durham” samples concentrated on the perceived flavor and its appeal for men.

Several participants across types of groups noted that both brands appeared to be “value” brands. They said the packages made it seem that these brands would be cheaper than some of the brands they were familiar with.

- *“These would be the cheapest cigarettes you can find.”* (Male quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *“They look rather generic.”* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)
- *“Bottom of the shelf cigarettes.”* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)

3.3.2 Perceptions of Statements

Initial reactions to the statements on the sample packages were somewhat varied within all groups. There were no clear differences between group types. Some participants focused on specific claim statements, whereas others looked at the group of statements all together. Many expressed initial skepticism about the validity of the claims. Some participants were surprised to see chemical names (e.g., formaldehyde) mentioned on a cigarette package, either because they did not know their cigarettes contained them or because they did not want to be reminded:

- *“No formaldehyde.’ Are you serious? That would make people be like, okay, this is better for me because there’s no formaldehyde. But in reality, it don’t matter.”* (Male quit interest, Bethesda)
- *“100% tobacco’ is the only one that wouldn’t bother me, because I know I’m injecting something bad for you, stop reminding me. And when you tell me there’s less tar, they’re saying there is tar... I don’t want to think about that as I’m doing it.”* (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *“I think it makes me realize all the bad stuff that’s actually in a cigarette. It’s 50% of this, so that still means there’s 50% still in there.”* (Male quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *“Well, yeah. Less—we’ve got less this, less this, less this. So you’re still smoking a cigarette, but it’s got less of all this, [so]... instead of an hour later, you’re gonna want another 30 minutes later.”* (Female current smokers, Jackson)

Understanding of Intent

Many participants across all groups said they thought the intent of the claims was to get smokers to switch brands to something they perceived to be healthier or to recruit new smokers who have not indicated brand loyalty.

- *"I think that just draws more people—and especially the people that don't smoke cigarettes because of all the bad stuff in them... I think it would maybe bring some more people out of their shell to try them at least."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"What it actually means to me is basically that they're trying to get new people to smoke. Maybe that might influence them. All of us are regular smokers. We're going to stay loyal [to our] brand and that's it.... That's just for somebody new or whatever."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- *"They're promoting themselves... as a better brand."* (Female quit interest, Londonderry)

Some participants across all types of groups said they thought the claim statements were designed to help people feel better about their decision to smoke:

- *"It makes it easier to justify to yourself that it's okay to have it."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- *"It's wool over your eyes; think this is better for you... when really, it may not be better for you."* (Female current smokers, Jackson)
- *"...or not even good for you. Or even: 'We're gonna sell these fake cigarettes for the same money, they're still gonna buy 'em, and they're thinking they're getting what they want when they really ain't.'"* (Female current smokers, Jackson)

A few participants said that they thought the statements were also designed to "cover" the tobacco companies, which had been under scrutiny in recent years.

Believability

Most participants said they did not believe the statements that were presented on the sample packages would be true (if they were on actual cigarette packages). Some types of statements stood out as particularly problematic. For example, statements that used broad terms like "lower" or "safer" prompted questions from some participants about the definition of those terms and the reference points:

- *"Maybe this is a little lower in tar, but how much? And how much difference is that going to make to you, and what else did they put in it to make up for that tar?"* (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- *"Low and lower doesn't mean anything. Low nicotine compared to what? None of those have anything backing them up."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)

- *"Especially when they're a new brand—lower compared to what? Compared to Marlboro Reds? Sure. You don't really know what the comparison is, if these are all new brands..."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"But when you tell someone the same satisfaction with less chemicals, well that's the company telling you you'll get the same satisfaction. It's for the consumer to decide, 'Am I getting the same satisfaction?'"* (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)

Other participants said they did not find any of the statements believable:

- *"They don't want people to quit smoking. That's how they make their money."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"My deal is I don't believe them. Just because it's on the box, it doesn't necessarily mean that—like, this has happened. Just because it says 100% natural tobacco, how do I know?"* (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"I think it's all just a gimmick to get someone to buy the brand."* (Male current smokers, Londonderry)
- *"I think it's a falsehood myself, low nicotine. Because they say it's proven that one cigarette is just as bad as the other. Studies have shown that lights and low nicotine are not necessarily low in nicotine. They're not necessarily what they say they are."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)

A few participants said they thought there was some truth to the claims, because they believed that the statements would have to be approved by FDA or the companies could be sued for false advertising if they were found to be untrue.

Only some participants across groups said they would try to verify the information in the statements. Those who said they might try to determine if they were true said that they would look up ingredients or other information on the company's Web site, via Google, or another online resource.

Source

Most participants across all types of groups said they believed that statements like those shown on the sample packages would come from the tobacco companies or manufacturers as a way to advertise or promote a product that was perceived as "better" or "healthier." Some participants even specified that the statements would come from a marketing or advertising department or agency.

- *"It looks like marketing... it's just more of a quick statement for marketing: 'this is better than what we used to do.'"* (Male current smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"Yeah, because they promote themselves and they want you to pick the healthier alternative... if they could make it seem like they're the safer alternatives and they put it in a pretty package and they say, 'Here, try these,' you're still going to get addicted. But you're buying their product."* (Female quit interest, Londonderry)

- *"I think it's the cigarette company doing as much advertising as they can since everything else was taken away. That's their little mini-advertisement."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)

3.3.3 Perceptions of Products

When asked how statements like those on the sample products would influence participants' perceptions of the products, the most common reaction was that it would have no effect at all. The participants in these groups expressed loyalty to their brand, and they emphasized that they likely would not even notice the statements. This sentiment held true whether the statements were proposed for versions of their current brands or for a newly introduced brand (like Durham or Carteret).

- *"... after you're smoking for so long, you're like, 'I already know what I want, can you give me my [brand]?' I don't even know what the pack says, I couldn't even tell you what it says."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"...when I walk into a store to buy my cigarettes, I don't even notice any others. I walk in, I tell them exactly what I want, I walk out."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"I would never notice it, unless it was like the whole entire box..."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"It's still going to be harmful, no matter what. So something like that is not going to make me change from what I normally smoke."* (Female quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"You wouldn't see them at first because they're behind the counter. Most people can't read that far anyway."* (Male current smokers, Londonderry)

A few participants across groups said that having the statements on the packages might make them feel better about smoking.

- *"Just to try it if it... tasted almost like mine—you gotta realize, I smoke a pack a day and if I change brands, I could live a little longer..."* (Male quit interest, Oklahoma City)
- *"I think it'd make you actually think about... just how much you were—taking in. And right now, it's no thought."* (Male poly-users, Jackson)

Personal Interest in Trying Product

When asked if they would consider trying products with statements like those on the sample packages, brand loyalty and not wanting to try something unknown were the most commonly mentioned reasons participants gave for declining:

- *"I wouldn't waste my money on it. If I'm going to buy something that's killing me, I'm going to buy something I like."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)"

- *"So I think I'm really loyal to that brand, and it wouldn't even cross my mind, I'm certain, to buy something else."* (Female light smokers, Bethesda)
- *"I'm not looking for a new cigarette. I don't know what someone would have to do to convince me to purchase another pack of cigarettes other than what I smoke."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)

Other participants said they would be interested in trying the products, especially if they were free or if someone offered them a sample. These participants expressed curiosity about the taste and interest in knowing whether the products would satisfy their cravings for a cigarette.

Attention-Getting Statements

Most participants across all groups reported that they noticed statements or notices on packages that offered discounts and coupons (e.g., \$1 off; buy two, get one free). Other statements that participants said would get their attention are unlikely to be on cigarette packs or advertising and indicate the extent to which smokers are aware of the health effects of smoking, of their addiction, and of their desire to overcome it.

- *"Non-addictive. So I can pick them up and put them down whenever I want."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- *"If they actually put all the ingredients on it that would get my attention. I would actually stop and read them just to find out what I've been putting in myself for 30 years."* (Male current smokers, Londonderry)
- *"Cigarettes are no longer harmful."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)
- *"Something positive and upbeat... on [the sample packages], they're talking about the bad things that are in it—which is negative marketing. They should reverse it..."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)

Perceived Likelihood of Product Success

Participants were asked whether they thought that products like those shown as samples would be successful if introduced in the United States. Reactions were mixed. Those who said they thought the products would be successful saw their alleged health benefits as consistent with the public's interest in healthier options for food and other products as the primary reasons. Participants emphasized that a new brand would have to be advertised heavily and priced well in its introduction to be successful.

- *"Everybody's going healthy. Everybody—now it looks like a healthy cigarette. So I think it would blend in. Even... a smoker. It's all in the mindset, so you're smoking healthier."* (Male poly-users, Jackson)
- *"... There's a certain crowd it'll appeal to just so they can feel better about themselves."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)

- *"...From a marketing perspective, if they were thinking of launching like a safer... cigarette, that probably the technique would be to get it into the hands of... influencers..."* (Female light smokers, Bethesda)

Those who said they did not think the new products would be successful mentioned brand loyalty among smokers, the difficulty breaking into a well-established and crowded market, and a perception that the products looked cheap and generic.

- *"Probably not. I mean cigarette smokers are like a lot of beer drinkers. They tend to be brand loyal."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)
- *"I don't think they could fight the big boys."* (Male quit interest, Londonderry)
- *"They look generic, and I don't think the young people would go for it at all."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)

Target Audience for Product

The most commonly mentioned target audience for the new products focused on youth: kids, young people, and new smokers. Participants discussed that new smokers represent an opportunity to build brand loyalty with something new, rather than trying to change the habits of established smokers. In addition, some participants talked about how young people have more information about healthy behaviors and the health effects of smoking than older adults did when they started smoking. As a result, young people may look for a healthier alternative to currently available cigarettes:

- *"So you got to target newer smokers—because anyone who has been smoking for a while or just knows the brands that are out there, they're more likely to try one of the old standards before they try something new."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"Maybe it's just a gradual introduction to it—and [it] doesn't appear to be too threatening."* (Male poly-users, Bethesda)
- *"You know what they say in school about [cigarettes] and try to get you not to smoke and everything. They might go to the store and say, oh, well, look at this. It's probably better."* (Female light smokers, Oklahoma City)

Some participants also mentioned that the products might target people who are trying to quit smoking:

- *"...if you're trying to quit, you're looking for lower nicotine, you're looking for fewer toxins... By looking at these cigarettes, the majority of these packs imply to me that they're... not as strong as a regular cigarette."* (Female current smokers, Bethesda)
- *"It advertises lower nicotine and less carbon monoxide and if you're trying to quit something, that's in your face, like 'whoa—both those things are kind of bad for me, maybe I should quit'."* (Male light smokers, Londonderry)

4. SUMMARY

During the first round of focus groups, we investigated the product marketing, characteristics, packaging, and other factors that consumers use to draw conclusions about the health risks of tobacco products. In this second round of research, we focused on gaining a better understanding of how current tobacco users might respond to cigarettes marketed as reduced exposure or modified risk products. Trying or adopting these products would require consumers to switch from their usual brands. As a result, we also investigated brand loyalty among smokers, how brand loyalty might affect consumers' perceptions of these products, and the likelihood they would try or eventually adopt them. The findings from these 16 focus groups will inform the development of an experimental study to assess participants' reactions to advertisements for tobacco products marketed as "safer" than currently available products.

4.1 Brand Relationship

Marlboro was most commonly reported as participants' preferred brand, followed by Newport. Virtually all participants were brand loyal. High satisfaction with their current brand stemmed from a combination of product taste, nicotine delivery (feelings of stress relief and relaxation from smoking), and associative imagery conveyed by the brand's advertising. Participants used the product packaging and claims on the "new" brands to draw some conclusions about the quality and characteristics of those brands. For instance, some participants across groups noted that the fictitious brands appeared to be "value" brands. Although extensive probing on this topic was not possible, it may be that a lesser-known, less established, and less popular brand would automatically be considered to be "value," "generic," or "bottom shelf."

Implications for experimental study: Brand loyalty will have to be carefully measured and accounted for in the experimental study. The tobacco industry's historical use of brand extensions (particularly the products formerly marketed as "light") suggests that they are well aware of consumer resistance to brand switching and may prefer to market any approved reduced exposure or modified risk products as an extension of current brands. In addition to measuring and accounting for brand loyalty, we may want to consider creating an extension of a current brand (to the extent legal) as one condition of the experimental design.

4.2 Tobacco Companies

Focus group participants were not naïve about the tobacco industry's history of marketing products they knew were addictive and unhealthy. They were also well aware that tobacco companies are in business to make a profit. However, some participants had positive

opinions about these companies because they felt that the cigarettes they produce are of consistent and high quality.

Implications for experimental study: There are two general implications for the experimental study related to participant perceptions of tobacco companies. First, participants viewing a “bogus” brand with no large parent company may question the consistency and quality of a brand manufactured by a company that is not recognized as a major manufacturer. Second, some participants attributed the claims on the bogus brands they viewed to tobacco companies. The extent to which participants find tobacco companies credible could affect their judgments of claims on bogus brands presented in the experimental study.

4.3 Claim Statements and Sample Tobacco Products

Participants in each focus group were exposed to six different statements. The moderator guide was designed to elicit a general discussion about the believability of the statements as a whole and any judgments about the products participants made as they viewed the packages and statements. Discussion also focused generally on why and the extent to which participants thought they or other smokers would be interested in trying the presented products. Although the moderator guide was not designed to elicit a discussion comparing and contrasting specific statements or types of statements, we did note some general consensus among participants that may help FDA determine which claims—or types of claims—would be most like those tobacco companies might use and those consumers might find most believable.

- Broad, general terms, like “lower” “safer” and “fewer,” were met with a very high level of skepticism.
- Chemical names had a mixed effect that appeared to depend less on the familiarity of the chemical than its perceived attributes. For example, participants were familiar with “formaldehyde” and “arsenic,” but some expressed surprise and concern that these chemicals were in their current brands (although not in the “new” brands).
- Claim statements that included chemical names (e.g., formaldehyde, ethylene oxide) sometimes had a “boomerang” effect. In many cases, participants did not see these statements as appealing for their health benefits. Instead, the presence of the chemical names reminded participants of the dangerous ingredients in tobacco and the potential harm of products that contain those chemicals.
- Lower nicotine was not perceived favorably, as participants expressed concern about not getting the level of nicotine they got from their current product.
- There were no clear conclusions about the effect of including “credentials” (e.g., a source like the “U.S. Toxicological Association) on participant reactions to the claims. However, most participants said they thought these claims would come from the tobacco companies. As summarized earlier, participants may have trust in the consistency and the quality of the products these companies produce, but most did

not appear to find the companies trustworthy in other domains. Some participants questioned whether similar claims might come from FDA or would have to be approved by FDA and might therefore be more credible than those developed by the tobacco industry.

Finally, all of the focus group participants were well-established smokers, with a majority of smokers saying that they had smoked for 5 years or more. A subset of participants were identified as potential quitters. Most participants expressed little interest in trying these products, although there was some openness to these products among a few smokers interested in quitting.

**APPENDIX A:
MODERATOR GUIDE**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement

The public reporting burden for this collection of information has been estimated to average 1.1 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Moderator's Guide:
Consumer Knowledge and Perceptions about Tobacco Products
(Round 2)****Welcome and Ground Rules**

MODERATOR: Welcome and thank you for participating in tonight's discussion. My name is _____. Tonight, I am interested in hearing your opinions about tobacco products. You have been asked to participate in tonight's discussion because you use (or have used) some of the various types of cigarettes and other tobacco products that we are going to discuss tonight.

Before we begin, I want to go over a few ground rules for our discussion tonight, which will last about an hour.

- Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to not answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time.
- If at any time you are uncomfortable with my questions, you can choose not to answer. Just let me know that you prefer not to answer.
- Everything we discuss today will be kept private to the extent allowable by law. Your name and contact information, which only the study staff knows, will not be given to anyone else and no one will contact you after this interview is over.
- Tonight's discussion will be audio recorded. The recordings will help me write the final report and will be kept in a secure location and then destroyed at the end of the study. No names will be mentioned in the final report created from these interviews.
- [If applicable: Some of my coworkers are viewing our discussion. Some are watching from behind this glass and some are viewing the discussion remotely. They're watching to make sure that I ask you all of the questions I'm supposed to ask you. Near the end of our conversation, I'm going to go check and see if they have any last minute questions for you.]
- Most importantly, there are no right or wrong answers. I want to know your opinions. I do not work for the people sponsoring this research and I didn't write the

questions we're going to look at, so don't hold back on giving me your honest opinions.

- I'm not a medical doctor or an expert on smoking or tobacco, so I can't answer specific questions. At the end of our discussion, however, I have some materials that you can take with you if you'd like.
- Please silence your cell phones.
- Do you have any questions before we begin?

Brand Relationship

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

As I mentioned, tonight's discussion is about cigarettes and other tobacco products. You've been invited to participate because you all have firsthand experience with tobacco—which means you have a lot of information to share.

We are going to start by talking about the cigarettes you smoke. To start: Let's go around the room and have everyone tell us your first name, what **brand** of cigarettes you currently use, and how long you have been using that brand.

2. Relationship with Brand: Attitudes (5 minutes)

[HANDOUT 1 – 4–5 top of mind]

Ok, so as we heard, you all smoke a variety of different brands of cigarettes. Now I want you to think a little more about *your* brand of cigarettes and answer a few questions.

Turn to page 1 of the handout and list 4–5 words/phrases that come to mind when you think about your brand of cigarettes. Just jot down the first things that come to mind when you think about your brand of cigarettes. [IF NEEDED: You don't need to write a lot here—or spend too long on this.]

- What are some of the things you wrote down?

3. Relationship with Brand: Interaction (5 minutes)

So, thinking about the company that makes your cigarettes, let's talk about how you interact with them.

Are there ways—other than purchasing their cigarettes—that you interact with them? Have you ever contacted them? (Have you ever called? Or visited their website?) Maybe you've participated in a loyalty program or contest they've run?

Does your brand contact *you*? Are you on any listservs or mailing lists?

- Do you receive offers or coupons from the company that makes your brand? How often do you hear from them?
- Is there any other type of communication you receive on a regular basis? (What is it?)
- How do you feel about them contacting you?

4. Tobacco Companies: Attitudes (5 minutes)

[HANDOUT 2 – p.2 – top of mind and industry trust]

Ok, now we're going to think about tobacco companies in general. Turn to the last handout and take a minute to complete these two questions about tobacco companies. [IF NEEDED: When we say, "Tobacco Companies," we are talking about tobacco companies in general/overall, not the company that makes your brand]

- When you hear the words "tobacco companies," what comes to mind?

[Write responses on white board.]

- How do "tobacco companies" relate to their customers? How do "tobacco companies" view their customers?
- How trustworthy would you say "tobacco companies" are in general?

[If not mentioned above: When you think about "tobacco companies," do you think of your brand of cigarettes—or something different?]

5. Statements and Products

Introduction of Prototypes (10 minutes)

Ok, now we're going to look at some sample products. This is a brand that was made up for the sake of tonight's discussion. We are using this made-up brand because we wanted to give you a cigarette pack to react to, but since you all smoke different brands of cigarettes, we didn't want to pick any one specific brand.

Note to moderator: If participants get distracted by novelty of brand (e.g., "well, I can't say because I don't know this brand"), redirect with, "Well, imagine this was your brand. How would you feel about it then?"

First reactions to prototypes: *Pass around prototypes.*

- What do you think of this product? What comes to mind when you see this?

Perceptions of Statements (10 minutes)

(prototypes stay in circulation.)

- What comes to mind when you read these statements?
- Understanding:* What do you think these statements mean?
- Believability:* Do you believe these statements? Any of them? Why or why not? Do some seem more believable than others? Which ones? Why?
- Source/Attribution:* Who is making the statement?
 - Are tobacco companies allowed to make statements like this (or make any kind of statement they want)? If not, who would stop them?
 - Can you imagine this coming from another source (than already mentioned)? [The government? Tobacco Companies? Public Health Organization? Medical Association?]
 - What would it look like if it came from [Gov/Industry/Brand]? What would be different?
- Verification:* How would you decide whether or not this statement is true? Where could you look for more information? Who would/could you ask to determine whether or not these statements are true?
- Intention of claims:* What is the purpose of this statement? Who is it intended for?

- g. *Product type*: What other type of tobacco product can you imagine these statements being applied to? (Cigarettes? Another type of tobacco product? A product that doesn't exist yet?)

Perceptions of Product (with Statement) (10 minutes)

- a. Would you be interested in trying this product? Why or why not? What would interest you? What would make you hesitant to try it?
- [If not mentioned] Do you have an idea of how it would taste? Would it satisfy your craving for a cigarette?
 - If not interested: What kind of statement *would* get your attention? Is there something you can imagine seeing on a cigarette package that would get your attention? (Do you think that's realistic?)
 - If a tobacco product with a statement like this were sold in the U.S., would it be successful? Why or why not?
 - Who would be interested in trying this product?
 - Who would use this product (on a regular basis)?
- b. What would people think of you if they saw you using a product like this? Would it be positive or negative?

False Close

That is all the questions I have for you. Before we finish, I'm going to run back and check with my colleagues to see if I missed anything or if they have any additional questions for you.

Debrief/Closing (5 minutes)

In today's discussion, we mentioned some statements about less harmful tobacco products, and viewed some examples of products claiming to be less harmful. It's important for you to know that the statements I showed you, and the sample package of cigarettes, were made-up for the sake of tonight's discussion. In other words, they are hypothetical and those products and statements do not actually exist. In fact: There is no safe tobacco product.

This study was sponsored by the Food & Drug Administration. Part of the mission of the FDA is to communicate to the public about the harmfulness of tobacco use. In order to do this, it is important that they understand people's thoughts about different types of tobacco products—and about the harmfulness of tobacco products in general. Your participation has been very valuable and we appreciate you taking the time to come here tonight and share your thoughts and ideas with us.

If you are interested in learning more, please help yourself to one of these brochures on your way out.

**APPENDIX B:
HANDOUTS**

Handout #1—Think about **your brand** of cigarettes. Please write the first words or phrases that come to mind.

Handout #2—Think about **tobacco companies** in general. Please write the first words or phrases that come to mind.

How much **trust** do you feel for **tobacco companies**? (*Circle your response*)

| <i>Not At All</i> | | | | | | | <i>Very Much</i> |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |