

Synthesis of Learning across 3 Years of Concept and Message Testing among American Indian Tweens and Parents

Formative audience testing has been a critical component of the VERB™ campaign's development, driving its content, tone, and implementation. Before new advertising is launched, concept testing is conducted to validate the communication strategy and aid in the selection of concepts that resonate strongly with the target audience; are acceptable, understandable, culturally appropriate, and motivating; and have few unintended effects. After an advertising concept is produced, message testing is conducted to explore the target audience's reactions to specific concepts; to determine which messages the target audience finds understandable, relevant, appealing, unique, and motivating; and to identify anything that is confusing or controversial. Though much of this information gleaned from the testing is specific to each ad, these data contain a wealth of valuable information about key target audiences—tweens and parents—that can be used to help shape other health communication efforts on physical activity.

Two reviewers from the VERB evaluation team independently analyzed qualitative investigation reports from both the concept and message testing to identify recurrent themes and recommendations among each audience segment. In this report, findings are presented for the African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and American Indian tweens, their parents, and other adult influencers. Health communication practitioners can utilize these findings to assist them in developing more effective, culturally competent, and appropriate messages that encourage physical activity among youth.

Findings for American Indian Audiences

The following thematic summary is generated from focus groups and individual interviews with American Indian tweens and their parents that were conducted as part of the VERB campaign's message development process. These themes were derived from the reports that were generated from five rounds of qualitative data collection conducted between August 2002 and September 2004. The reports covered both concept and message testing for ads promoting physical activity among tweens (children aged 9–13 years) and their parents. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics and methods for each investigation. Participants took part in focus groups or in-depth interviews in which they shared their responses to television, print, and radio ads. The resulting reports were then analyzed for their overarching themes and concepts and are presented here. It is our hope that these findings can be used to support and inform the development of concepts and messages that promote physical activity among American Indian tweens and encouragement from their parents to be physically active, leading to more culturally sensitive messaging and effective physical activity promotion for this audience.

Please note: Qualitative techniques have certain limitations. These investigations are exploratory in nature; that is, they are used to stimulate dialogue, elicit a range of

responses, generate ideas, and drive message development. Because of the limited number of participants, unstructured questioning procedures, and the potential for one respondent's opinions to influence those of other respondents, the formative investigation findings reported here should not be considered conclusive or generalizable. The findings contained in this report represent insights gleaned from 3 years of qualitative investigations for the development of messages for a physical activity campaign. When applying these within your community and situation, they should be viewed within the context of their limitations.

Table 1. Methods and Participant Characteristics

Location and Date	Method	Number Conducted	Target Audience	Length of Interview/Focus Group
Billings, MT August 2002; Albuquerque, NM August 2002	Focus group	2 (1 in each city)	6th and 7th grade girls	45 minutes
	Focus group	2 (1 in each city)	6th and 7th grade boys	45 minutes
	In-depth interview	4 (all in Billings)	6th and 7th grade girls	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	6 (3 in each city)	6th and 7th grade boys	30 minutes
	Focus group	3 (2 in Albuquerque; 1 in Billings)	Parents of at least 1 low-activity tween	90 minutes
	Telephone Focus group	1	Moms of at least 1 low-activity tween	60 minutes
Greenbay, WI October 2002	In-depth interview	4	6th and 7th grade girls	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	1	6th and 7th grade boys	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	2	4th and 5th grade boys	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	2	4th and 5th grade girls	30 minutes
	Focus group	3	Parents	1 hour

Tulsa, Ok June 2003; Seattle, WA June 2003	In-depth interview	4	6th and 7th grade girls	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	1	6th and 7th grade girls	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	4	4th and 5th grade boys	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	4	4th and 5th grade girls	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	5	6th and 7th grade boys	30 minutes
	In-depth interview	4	6 th and 7th grade girls	30 minutes
	Focus group	9 groups	Parents:	30 minutes
Leech Lake, MN July 2004	Focus group	4	3 groups of mothers	1.5 hours
	Focus group	4	1 group of fathers	1.5 hours
Cass Lake/ Bemidji, MN September 2004	Mini focus group (telephone)	2	Parents	30 minutes groups
	In-depth interview (telephone)	1	Parents	30 minutes groups

* Focus groups comprised at least six participants; mini focus groups comprised four participants; and in-depth interviews were conducted one-on-one.

Thematic Summary of American Indian Findings

✓ **Use action to promote physical activity.**

American Indian parents and tweens responded more favorably to ads that used sounds and images that projected action. Sounds of children laughing and playing were easily understood. The tweens especially enjoyed seeing other children having fun being active. Alternatively, respondents were often confused when ads used spokespeople and characters that were merely talking or standing still to promote the concept of being active. Participants were also sensitive to narrator attributes, noting, for example, when narrators sounded bored. Narrators should use words that express action and speak with an upbeat tone that projects the excitement of being active.

✓ **Cultural elements help to target the message to the audience.**

Both parents and tweens responded favorably to sights and sounds that highlighted American Indian culture. Several respondents believed that most ads they see tend to target other ethnic groups and not address American Indians. Respondents appreciated ads containing American Indian imagery and cultural elements. Parents and tweens liked the sound of American Indian-style drumming heard in the background of audio ads. Tweens responding to radio ads preferred narrators who sounded American Indian and, for print ads, liked seeing shawl dancing and pow wows, traditional American Indian activities – included in the variety of activity ideas displayed in print ads. These cultural elements helped them understand that ads were made specifically for American Indian audiences.

✓ **Avoid being stereotypical.**

While American Indian cultural elements are appreciated, ads should be balanced so as not to be perceived as promoting American Indian stereotypes. Respondents appreciated seeing American Indians in both traditional and modern dress. They were also particularly averse to ads that strongly associated American Indians with negative characteristics, such as being obese. Ads that are overly aggressive in targeting American Indians can be interpreted as threatening.

✓ **Family togetherness strengthens the message.**

Parents praised ads depicting strong family interactions. They also enjoyed ads having a parental presence because these images reinforced the idea that American Indian parents have an influence on their children's daily lives. Multigenerational images, such as an elder training a child in traditional American Indian physical activities, were also highly admired. Such images evoked a sense of nostalgia among parents, reminding them of childhood moments with their families. Although images of family togetherness may motivate parents to encourage their children to be physically active, ads intended for children that feature adults might mistakenly be interpreted as targeting adult audiences.

✓ **Many parents enjoy images of nature.**

Parents responded positively to ads featuring images of nature, such as mesas and mountains. These images grabbed their attention and generated a calming effect. Words used to describe landscape images and images of nature included "relaxing," "quiet," and "calm." However, this calming effect did not necessarily motivate parents to encourage their children to be physically active.

✓ **Messages should convey a single unified thought.**

Materials that promote physical activity should clearly communicate the intended message, without resembling or alluding to other messages. For instance, several parents and tweens interpreted physical activity ads as "Say no to drugs" messages. Instead, messages should be singular, presenting a unified thought supported by images and sounds. Special vigilance should also be given to images or concepts that could be interpreted negatively, especially those that resemble images associated with historical oppression and other assaults on American Indian culture.

✓ **Colors are attractive!**

Both parents and tween respondents preferred images containing bright colors, colors found in nature (e.g., "sky blue"), and shades common in American Indian culture, such as indigo. Tweens were particularly attracted to bright colors like neon blue. Parents also enjoyed these colors, but were more attracted to warm colors and colors that

reminded them of nature. For example, parents often said that yellow reminded them of a warm sunrise or sunset.

✓ **Show a variety of activities!**

Parents and tweens responded favorably to ads that showed a variety of sports and other physical activities. They liked both conventional activities, such as playing basketball and bike riding, but also liked depiction of activities evoking American Indian traditions, including fishing, dancing, and playing games such as stick and hoop. Tweens also liked seeing new games that they never thought to try and activities that they already like to do. Parents appreciated ads that gave new ideas for activities that they could encourage their children to do, as well physical activities that they could do as a family.