

CONSUMER CONTACT

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DEPARTMENT OF
GAMING AND RACING

TESTING OF
HARM MINIMISATION
MESSAGES
FOR GAMING MACHINES
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INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of a QUALITATIVE MARKET RESEARCH study conducted for the **DEPARTMENT OF GAMING AND RACING** to evaluate reactions amongst target gamblers to HARM MINIMISATION MESSAGES screened during play of poker machines.

Specifically, the study aimed to assess the potential impact and effectiveness on gambling behaviour, of a series of ten potential HARM MINIMISATION MESSAGES.

This study, comprising five focus groups in Sydney, was conducted during February, 2003. Survey participants trialled one of two poker machines prepared by IGT, each with the ten messages locking play.

Acknowledgement

Financial assistance for this Project was provided by the New South Wales Government from the Casino Community Benefit Fund. The views expressed in this report, however, are solely those of the authors.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a TRILOGY of messages that resonates with target gamblers. As a group, these have the potential to encourage RESPONSIBLE gambling behaviour and to issue the INTERNAL response to evaluate their gambling activity.

- The messages with most impact on regular and problem gamblers are:

.. HAVE YOU SPENT MORE MONEY ON GAMBLING THAN YOU INTENDED

.. ARE YOU GAMBLING LONGER THAN PLANNED

.. HAVE YOU FELT BAD OR GUILTY ABOUT YOUR GAMBLING

- HAVE YOU SPENT MORE MONEY ON GAMBLING THAN YOU INTENDED and ARE YOU GAMBLING LONGER THAN PLANNED are both TRIGGERS with almost universal application to the gambling population.
- Both these messages then lead on to the third, HAVE YOU FELT BAD OR GUILTY ABOUT YOUR GAMBLING, as the result of the over-indulgence of time and money spent on gambling.
- These messages are the most effective of those tested as they act as triggers for gamblers to question their behaviour.

- The EFFECTIVENESS of these messages however, is somewhat limited, when considering their ability to issue a call-to-action to assess regular and problem gamblers' current behaviour and then to consider a change in the future.
- There is a SIGNIFICANT problem with the structure of the messages themselves. There are TWO PARTS to each message and it is the LINKING of the two that INHIBITS effective communication.
- The first half of the message acts as a warning, a harm minimisation message that encourages RESPONSIBLE gambling behaviour. It can issue a WAKE-UP CALL, INTERNALISED by targets to evaluate their current gambling behaviour. Thus, it applies to ALL gamblers and can lead to their imposing new sets of limits. It also provides CUES to recognise that they may have a problem, even if at an embryonic stage.
- The second half of the message comprises the proposed tag line, 'if gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635. Once the notion of gambling's being a concern is introduced, the target is perceived as having been DEFINED as PROBLEM GAMBLERS. This EXCLUDES the self-proclaimed regular or recreational gambler. 'Gambling is a concern'... once it has been acknowledged as impacting on the gambler's working and family life [as depicted in the current G-line FAMILY MAN commercial].
- The message has therefore CHANGED from one about RESPONSIBLE behaviour to one about dealing with a gambling PROBLEM.

- The direction to call the G-line service completes this EXCLUSIONARY process. This offers regular gamblers a 'way out' as a call to G-line represents the 'end of the line'. Only "severe" problem gamblers are expected to call G-line. The response then, is that the message applies to SOMEONE ELSE, NOT ME.
- This reaction should not be confused with DENIAL. The issue is that a call to G-line represents a call to seek help. This is an EXTERNAL response and one that is perceived as an extreme measure. Even when the question posed in the first half of the message strikes a chord and the verbalised response is affirmative, it is TOO LONG A BOW to draw to accept that a call to G-line is the requisite answer.
- In developing gambling harm minimisation messages, we need to DIFFERENTIATE between regular and problem gamblers both in message content and in our targeting routes. This is currently not the case.
- Given that the messages to emerge from this study as the most impactful and effective were those that related to RESPONSIBLE gambling behaviour, CONSUMER CONTACT recommends that these be restructured so as not to lose their impetus when the reference to G-line is introduced.
- IS GAMBLING SOLVING OR CAUSING YOUR PROBLEMS, HAVE POKER MACHINES BECOME YOUR BEST FRIEND and DO YOU GAMBLE AS A WAY OF ESCAPING FROM PROBLEMS appear to be the least effective messages in the suite. They should not be used.

AREAS EXPLORED

The main objectives of this study were to:

- identify, from a series of ten messages, those with the greatest potential to issue a call-to-action to consider changing gambling behaviour
- and / or to call G-line to obtain help with problem gambling.

In order to assess reactions to the messages and their delivery mechanism, initial responses were recorded individually. These areas were covered in a questionnaire relating to:

- .. recall of messages
- .. the degree of perceived effectiveness.

In the focus group proper, the following areas were explored:

- .. response to the various alternative harm minimisation messages
- .. residual impact of the messages and any perceived intentions of behaviour modification.

To provide input and direction on which of the harm minimisation messages to use and their effectiveness, we covered:

- immediate and considered reactions
- understanding
- perceived purpose
- personal relevance
- perceived target market - problem gamblers, regular gamblers or both
- the emotional impact
- memorability
- ability to generate awareness of the risks of problem gambling
- call-to-action to assess current behaviour and even further, to consider a change in the future
- identifying the messages with the greatest personal relevance
- identifying the messages with the greatest potential to initiate a call to G-line
- the cumulative impact achieved by the messages as a total series.

RESEARCH METHOD

.. TECHNIQUES

CONSUMER CONTACT concurred with the client that the standard qualitative research technique of the FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION was to be used for this study. This method is highly appropriate when dealing with emotive issues and community attitudes in areas such as those encountered in gaming / racing.

.. THE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Focus group participants arrived at staggered times and proceeded to play the machines for a short period. Each was then asked individually, what they remembered seeing whilst playing the machine and responses were recorded by the interviewing team. The questionnaire used for recording responses is appended to this document.

Then the participants were gathered together for the focus group proper, and seated according to the machine they played [to ascertain any differences in reaction as a result of the order of presentation of the messages]. The discussion session explored responses to the ten messages indepth. Each message was shown again, this time in written form and reactions were gauged in detail.

To complete the exploration of reactions, all focus group participants were given a list of the ten messages and asked to nominate the three

with most personal impact and the one message that would prompt a call to G-line, either for themselves or for a problem gambler.

.. **FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURE**

In total, FIVE focus groups were conducted. These were structured as follows:

1. Males, aged under 35 years
2. Females, aged under 35 years
3. Males, aged 35 to 55 years
4. Females, aged over 55 years
5. Males, aged over 55 years.

Each group comprised 9 respondents.

All survey participants were problem or regular poker machine gamblers, with regular gamblers the majority.

Screening questions were introduced into the recruitment process to determine whether or not gamblers met the criteria of regular or problem poker machine gamblers. Regular poker machine gamblers were defined as those who gambled at least once a week. Problem gamblers were those who played at least three times a week and answered 'yes' to the question, 'do you think you play the poker machines too often?'

Those who work in the advertising, market research, the media or gambling sectors were screened out of the survey.

.. THE STIMULUS

Two poker machines were delivered to CONSUMER CONTACT's mid city offices, each with ten messages for testing. One machine [labeled **L** for research purposes] showed the messages in running order while the other [labeled **P**] showed messages in random order. The machines were labeled in order to ascertain any differences in response to the messages based on the order of presentation.

Half the respondents for each focus group played the **L** machine while the other half played the machine labeled **P**.

The ten messages displayed on the screen were replicated in written form for further exploration in the discussion proper.

.. THE TEST MESSAGES

The messages tested in this research study were:

1. Are you gambling longer than planned?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
2. Have you lost a mate because of your gambling?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
3. You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem.
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

4. Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
5. Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
6. Have you ever borrowed money to gamble?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
7. Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
8. Have poker machines become your best friend?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
9. Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
10. Is gambling solving or causing your problems?
If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

.. **CLIENT VIEWING FACILITIES**

All focus groups in this series were conducted at CONSUMER CONTACT's mid-city offices where one way mirror viewing facilities were used by key Department officers to monitor the discussions in progress.

The focus groups were videotaped and audiotaped. All focus group participants agreed in writing to this recording procedure.

.. **RESPONDENT INCENTIVES**

As part of CONSUMER CONTACT's commitment to the responsible care of survey participants, instead of the usual cash incentive, respondents were given a voucher for Woolworths for \$50.

.. **PERSONNEL**

Responsibility for this study was shared by:

- .. Barbara Riley-Smith, BEc MBA, the principal of CONSUMER CONTACT, who has over twenty years experience as a market research practitioner.
- .. Jacqui Binder, BA Dip Ed, with over twenty years experience as a qualitative research analyst and focus group discussion moderator.

.. **CODE OF ETHICS**

CONSUMER CONTACT's principal is a Full Member of the Market Research Society of Australia. The company adheres to the Code of Professional

Behaviour of that body which includes the assurance of confidentiality of respondents' identity and answers.

.. **CONFIDENTIALITY AND COPYRIGHT**

All information gathered in relation to the project is the property of the CASINO COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND and CONSUMER CONTACT is not at liberty to disclose any of this information to any other party.

The intellectual property produced during the course of this contract is owned by the CASINO COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE:

Before reviewing the findings of this study, it is important to note that focus group interviews seek to develop insight into consumer attitudes and needs and to generate hypotheses or suggest direction. It is customary to remind the reader that, because of the small sample size, the special recruiting methods used, regional limitations and the study objectives per se, qualitative research precludes statistical projections. The findings are suggestive, not definitive.

THE FINDINGS

NB The findings are reported in total across the five focus groups. Where differences occurred between the genders or the age groups, these are discussed in the body of the report.

1. IMMEDIATE AND CONSIDERED RESPONSES ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS

The following section of this report provides the tabular findings and commentary on the individually recorded responses generated by an interview of survey participants immediately after trialling the test machines.

All figures shown in the tables are RAW SCORES and NOT PERCENTAGES due to the small base sample size [N = 44 respondents in total]. It is cautioned that these tables are QUALITATIVE in nature and should not be interpreted in a strictly QUANTITATIVE manner.

1.1. UNPROMPTED MESSAGE RECALL IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TRIAL

Caution: Small Base N = 44 in total

MACHINE 1: MESSAGES IN ORDER

	TOTAL	MALES UNDER 35	FEMALES UNDER 35	MALES 35-55	MALES 55+	FEMALES 55+
Is gambling a problem for you / if gambling is a concern for you / a problem for you	10	-	3	3	1	3
Have you lost a mate because of your gambling / if you've got a friend hurt by gambling	8	2	1	2	1	2
Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended / can afford	5	2	-	-	1	2
Have you ever borrowed money to gamble	5	2	-	-	1	2
Have poker machines become your best friend	5	1	1	1	1	1
Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling	3	-	-	1	2	-
Is gambling solving or causing your problems	5	-	2	1	2	-
Are you gambling longer than planned	3	2	-	1	-	-
Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems / are you gambling for relief, to take your mind off your problems	2	-	-	-	1	1
Excessive gambling is a problem / moderation	2	-	2	-	-	-
You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem	1	1	-	-	-	-
Not to gamble more / stop gambling	1	-	-	-	-	1
If you need to speak to someone about your addiction	1	-	-	1	-	-
Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling	1	1	-	-	-	-
G-line	13	2	3	4	2	2

Call a telephone number	4	1	1	-	1	1
1800 633 635	4	1	-	1	-	2
Incorrect / vague / no recall of the G-line number	9	1	3	3	1	1

MACHINE P: MESSAGES IN RANDOM ORDER*Caution: Small Base N = 44 in total*

	TOTAL	MALES UNDER 35	FEMALES UNDER 35	MALES 35-55	MALES 55+	FEMALES 55+
Is gambling a problem for you / if gambling is a concern for you / a problem for you	14	3	2	1	3	5
Have you lost a mate because of your gambling / if you've got a friend hurt by gambling	8	1	1	2	1	3
Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended / can afford	2	1	-	1	-	-
Have you ever borrowed money to gamble	4	1	-	-	-	3
Have poker machines become your best friend	3	-	1	1	1	-
Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling	2	-	1	1	-	-
Is gambling solving or causing your problems	2	-	-	1	-	1
Are you gambling longer than planned	4	-	2	1	-	1
Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems / are you gambling for relief, to take your mind off your problems	3	1	-	1	-	1
Excessive gambling is a problem / moderation	1	-	-	1	-	-
You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem	1	1	-	-	-	-
Not to gamble more / stop gambling	1	-	-	-	1	-
If you need to speak to someone about your addiction	1	1	-	-	-	-
Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling	2	-	-	1	-	1
Slow you down	1	-	-	-	1	-
G-line	11	1	4	2	1	3

Call a telephone number	3	1	-	-	-	2
1800 633 635	3	1	1	-	-	1
Incorrect / vague /no recall of the G-line number	8	1	3	2	1	1

BOTH MACHINES L AND P COMBINED:*Caution: Small Base N = 44 in total*

	TOTAL	MALES UNDER 35	FEMALES UNDER 35	MALES 35-55	MALES 55+	FEMALES 55+
Is gambling a problem for you / if gambling is a concern for you / a problem for you	24	3	5	4	4	8
Have you lost a mate because of your gambling / if you've got a friend hurt by gambling	16	3	2	4	2	5
Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended / can afford	7	3	-	1	1	2
Have you ever borrowed money to gamble	9	3	-	-	1	5
Have poker machines become your best friend	8	1	2	2	2	1
Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling	5	-	1	2	2	-
Is gambling solving or causing your problems	7	-	2	2	2	1
Are you gambling longer than planned	7	2	2	2	-	1
Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems / are you gambling for relief, to take your mind off your problems	5	1	-	1	1	2
Excessive gambling is a problem / moderation	3	-	2	1	-	-
You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem	2	2	-	-	-	-
Not to gamble more / stop gambling	2	-	-	-	1	1
If you need to speak to someone about your addiction	2	1	-	1	-	-
Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling	3	1	-	1	-	1
Slow you down	1	-	-	-	1	-

G-line	24	3	7	6	3	5
Call a telephone number	7	2	1	-	1	3
1800 633 635	7	2	1	1	-	3
Incorrect / vague recall of the G-line number	17	2	6	5	2	2

'If gambling is a concern for you...' appears on each of the ten messages screened and its repetition was clearly effective in this trial.

Similarly, the direction to call G-line registered well.

It would seem that the order of message play on MACHINE L allows for a wider range of messages to be recalled by more targets than the random order alternative on MACHINE P.

HAVE YOU LOST A MATE was the most frequently recalled single message of the ten tested immediately following trial. However, this does not, on its own, suggest that the message is persuasive, only that it is noticeable. In the discussion session, this message lost much of its initial impetus.

1.2. EFFECTIVENESS PERCEPTIONS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TRIAL

After playing the machine but prior to any discussion, respondents were asked to nominate, on a four point scale, how effective they found the messages to be. The following table presents the responses for both machines played:

BOTH MACHINES L AND P COMBINED*Caution: Small Base N = 44 in total*

	TOTAL	MALES UNDER 35	FEMALES UNDER 35	MALES 35-55	MALES 55+	FEMALES 55+
VERY EFFECTIVE	10	1	2	2	3	2
QUITE EFFECTIVE	17	4	4	4	1	4
NOT VERY EFFECTIVE	6	1	2	2	1	-
NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE	9	1	1	1	4	2
NOT SURE	2	1	-	-	-	1

These results indicate that, on first exposure, gamblers tend to find the messages potentially quite effective. From the focus group discussions, it emerged that the messages were thought to be effectively targeting problem gamblers.

1.3. THE THREE MESSAGES SELECTED AS MOST IMPACTFUL - FOLLOWING DISCUSSION

During the focus group discussion, panelists were asked to record their selection of the three messages they found to have the most personal impact. The results are tabled over:

Caution: Small Base N = 44 in total

	TOTAL	MALES UNDER 35	FEMALES UNDER 35	MALES 35-55	MALES 55+	FEMALES 55+
Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended	39	7	7	7	9	9
Are you gambling longer than planned	26	8	1	7	5	5
Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling	20	1	4	5	4	6
Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling	14	1	7	1	2	3
You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem	12	3	1	5	2	1
Have poker machines become your best friend	6	2	1	-	-	3
Have you lost a mate because of your gambling	4	1	-	2	1	-
Have you ever borrowed money to gamble	3	-	3	-	-	-
Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems	3	-	-	-	3	-
Is gambling solving or causing your problems	1	-	-	-	1	-

We find that there is a TRILOGY of messages that resonates with target gamblers.

HAVE YOU SPENT MORE MONEY ON GAMBLING THAN YOU INTENDED emerges, from the focus groups, as a WAKE-UP CALL, a SIGNAL to reconsider gambling behaviour.

Similarly, target gamblers can relate to and identify with the ARE YOU GAMBLING LONGER THAN PLANNED message.

Both these messages then lead on to the third, HAVE YOU FELT BAD OR GUILTY ABOUT YOUR GAMBLING, as the result of the over-indulgence of time and money spent on gambling.

IS GAMBLING SOLVING OR CAUSING YOUR PROBLEMS appears to be the message with the least personal impact in the suite.

1.4. THE MESSAGE THOUGHT MOST LIKELY TO PROMPT A CALL TO THE G-LINE - FOLLOWING DISCUSSION

Survey participants, during the focus discussion, nominated the one message they thought would be most likely to prompt a call to G-line, either for themselves or a problem gambler. The results are tabled over:

Caution: Small Base N = 44 in total

	TOTAL	MALES UNDER 35	FEMALES UNDER 35	MALES 35-55	MALES 55+	FEMALES 55+
Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended	10	1	2	2	3	2
Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling	8	6	2	-	-	-
You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem	8	1	1	4	1	1
Have you ever borrowed money to gamble	6	-	-	1	2	3
Have you lost a mate because of your gambling	3	-	-	-	1	2
Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling	2	-	-	1	1	-
Have poker machines become your best friend	2	-	-	-	1	1
Is gambling solving or causing your problems	2	-	1	1	-	-
Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems	1	-	1	-	-	-
None / no response	2	-	1	1	-	-

It emerges that the ability to IDENTIFY with a message, almost seems to reinforce the LACK of a gambling problem. ARE YOU GAMBLING LONGER THAN PLANNED is missing from this list entirely. While this was thought to be common behaviour amongst gamblers, it does not appear, that ON ITS OWN, without links to other potential problem indicators, it is a description that differentiates a problem gambler from a recreational or regular gambler. Rather, the belief that it is common behaviour to gamble longer

than planned is used to rationalise a LACK of a gambling problem. If it is common to gamble longer than planned, then it is argued, this is the norm rather than the exception. As such, GAMBLING LONGER THAN PLANNED does not appear to be considered a singular reason to initiate a call to G-line for help.

As discussed throughout this report, it is only when gambling is recognised as being a problem that a call to G-line is considered warranted.

On the other hand, HAVE YOU SPENT MORE MONEY ON GAMBLING THAN YOU INTENDED seems an effective wake-up call and one that could signal a gambling problem that needs to be addressed by accessing G-line.

2. THE TEN MESSAGES

Are you gambling longer than you planned? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

This message met with almost universal identification. Targets readily admitted to a tendency to continue playing a poker machine longer than they had anticipated or INTENDED. 'Planned' then, is not the correct word; it is not quite appropriate to an ENTERTAINMENT context.

The message has PERSONAL RELEVANCE to regular gamblers. It came in second, in the list of messages with personal impact.

In terms of TONALITY too, the first half of this message, has a very personal character. It conjured up images of a mother, wife or even their own conscience, chiding them. The feminine 'voice' or indeed, their own inner selves, suggests caring and protectiveness.

Staying longer was considered a common occurrence. Some stay longer if they are winning, others to "chase" their losses. This trend is a component of gambling behaviour that leads to feelings of recrimination, after the event. As such, it goes hand-in-hand with HAVE YOU SPENT MORE MONEY ON GAMBLING THAN YOU INTENDED and leads on to

HAVE YOU FELT BAD OR GUILTY ABOUT YOUR GAMBLING.

GAMBLING LONGER can be taken two ways, thought targets. First, it could refer to the current gambling session and taken to suggest it may be time to stop. This is clearly a resonating harm minimisation message. Alternatively, it could call up past sessions and suggest a cumulative loss of time. Either way, it was thought to be quite effective in generating the internal response to consider how much time they are spending at the machines:

"it's not a bad wake-up call...there are better things you can do with your time" (Males, 35-55)

According to younger men, time is money. The longer they play, the more money they might lose. Again, we see that there is a warning noted.

This message did not though necessarily lead targets to consider they have a gambling problem. Indeed, it is the very commonness of staying longer that robs it of its impetus as a singular trigger to a problem:

"that would probably be a lot more effective if they said the second question, 'and do you do it consistently because anyone can do it once... it doesn't really matter, but if you do it consistently, it is a problem" (Males, Under 35)

Consequently, the second half of the message seems too exaggerated. GAMBLING LONGER did not strike any focus group members as a reason to call G-line.

Have you lost a mate because of your gambling? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

This message, though quite well recalled after screening, did not emerge as all that appropriate.

First, it is a little ambiguous. LOST may not refer to a friendship and if it did, our male targets were quite certain that a friendship would dissipate not because of gambling per se. Their interpretation was that BORROWING money and not paying it back would end the friendship:

*"borrowing money maybe and you didn't pay
him back because you lost it"* (Males, Under 35)

*"it could only happen if you borrowed money
and didn't pay him back...and you wouldn't
do that"* (Males, 55+)

LOST can suggest death. Some wondered whether a mate had committed suicide because of his gambling problem. This notion was considered too extreme to be used in a harm minimisation campaign.

It seems that YOUR GAMBLING did not register well. This would appear to be because survey participants were unable to perceive themselves as having such a significant problem that they would lose their friends.

Women over 55, tended to take this message in a different way. They considered LOST as referring to the loss of socialising:

“you just don't go out with someone if they want to sit on the pokies all the time” (Females, 55+)

Across all age groups, the loss of a wife, husband or boyfriend / girlfriend was thought to be a far more apt analogy than losing a mate. They felt that excessive gambling would have a more direct impact on a partnering relationship.

It should also be noted that younger women found the reference to a MATE, too blokey. This gave them the opportunity to distance themselves, finding it gender specific. They also thought it sounded too “ockerish”.

You may be the last person to realise you have a gambling problem. If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

There were mixed reactions to this message. Men, from 18 to 55, seemed to relate better to the idea expressed here than women and older men. It seemed that the image these men presented to their peers was quite important and they did not want to be thought of as “a loser”:

“I wouldn't like to think that people do think I have a problem...I mean, it's not something you want ...what your mates think of you is fairly important ...I have got a couple of mates that I think have problems and it makes me think how I would hate them to think of me in the same way” (Males, Under 35)

For these targets, the message was an enticement to speak to their friends, rather than call G-line. They would seek an "assessment" of their own gambling habits if they now had doubts. They would also, they claimed, alert their friends who they thought were gambling excessively. Many young women too, thought they would point out a problem to a friend and perhaps, call G-line to have brochures sent to them. For our other targets, this message did not seem to work well. Some found it difficult to understand, claiming it required too much thought. Others simply shied away. This message has the character of a truism and the tone of a sticky-beak. Their response is DENIAL.

Have you spent more money on gambling than you intended? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

As with GAMBLING LONGER, this message has universal application. All our targets could relate:

"it can apply to anyone, someone who intends to spend \$5 and spends \$10 or someone who wanted to spend \$100 and spends \$200" (Males, Under 35)

"when you go to a club, you say this is my limit but you always go beyond that limit...you always think you will be able to recover it" (Females, 55+)

This message can be associated with a cumulative effect over time or with the current gambling session. It would appear that spending money on gambling - and losing it - is the clearest signal of a problem. There is a perception that a gambler without a problem, would commit to self-

imposed limits, avoiding over-spending. Consequently, this message was selected most frequently as both having personal impact and as issuing a call-to-action to telephone G-line.

It has the ability to impinge on the "playing haze" especially when losing and curtail spending:

"makes you aware...aware that you could go overboard...face reality" (Females, 55+)

"it makes you think, 'oh, how much have I put in ?'..." (Females, Under 35)

If the amount of money spent had left a gambler feeling deprived or if their family had to go without, then a call to G-line would be clearly warranted.

This aspect of gambling, the risk of over-spending, leads on to feelings of anxiety, guilt and shame, according to younger men and women particularly. Older focus group members, found themselves rather discomfited by the message and quickly sought to justify any of their over-spending. It reminded them of the "cranky, nagging wife" complaining about the amount they had spent.

Have you felt bad or guilty about your gambling? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.
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The initial response to this message was lukewarm. The message seemed "low key", "not dramatic enough". However, it appears to have strong latent merit. It is perceived as the result, the after-effect of GAMBLING

LONGER and SPENDING MORE MONEY than intended. Again, it is common for gamblers to feel this way, especially as noted by younger women, "the next morning". In this sense, it has the sound of one's conscience and over time, seems to have a gnawing effect.

In others, we noted that this message evoked feelings of shame. To these, it seems too authoritative, distant and not understanding, as in the voice of a non gambler, a priest, a headmaster, a police officer or even "the grim reaper".

The power of this message will lie in its placement. It belongs after GAMBLING LONGER and SPENDING MORE. It seems that this is not a message that works as a thought-starter either on its own or to curb excesses at the time of gambling. It belongs at the end of the storyline, as the recognisable consequence of GAMBLING LONGER and SPENDING MORE than intended.

On its own, it can seem too personal and lead to denial:

"I feel insulted by it... because they are telling me something...what right do you have to tell me... even just to make that suggestion about what I am doing"
(Males, Under 35)

Have you ever borrowed money to gamble? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

Several survey participants claimed they had lent friends money to gamble but few admitted they had borrowed money:

"I haven't borrowed money to gamble...I've only borrowed money to buy food" (Females, Under 35)

And for these, the message had the ability to re-think future loans:

"if I just borrowed it and I was going to put it in, I would probably go, 'actually I should save it for a few drinks or something else' rather than put it through the machine and have it gone in a few seconds...I would be like, 'oh maybe I will save a bit, or reduce the amount'..." (Males, Under 35)

However, the very idea of borrowing money to gamble smacked of desperation to our focus group members. Consequently, the message was strictly aligned with PROBLEM GAMBLERS in their minds. And they were only too happy to be able to distance themselves from this message.

Since borrowing to gamble was thought to be symptomatic of an extreme gambling problem, it offered a strong signal that a call to G-line was warranted. Unfortunately, the "that's not me, mate" response, as noted amongst men, discounted their own involvement with the message.

Do you gamble as a way of escaping from problems? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

ESCAPE is NOT considered a negative in the context of 'recreational' gambling. Indeed, most survey participants agreed that they play poker machines for just this reason:

"it takes your mind off your problems, that's the idea...escape...relax...wind down...after a bad day at work" (Males, 35-55)

They argued that so long as they played "in moderation", this did not pose a risk. There was no internal response - the message did not trigger a reconsideration of their behaviour. On the contrary, it confirmed its acceptability.

If however, the gambler was perennially running away from problems or chasing a win to meet financial problems then our targets could see there could be a problem that needed to be addressed. This would suggest a gambler at the extreme end of the spectrum, someone who could be clinically depressed and well on his / her way to needing G-line or a psychiatrist:

"that's talking to someone with no life... escaping reality" (Females, Under 35)

It is recommended that this message be dropped from further consideration.

Have poker machines become your best friend? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

Younger gamblers could not relate to this message. They found it to be mocking poker machine players, "making fun" of them. This message

sounded "sarcastic" and younger targets dismissed it with a laugh. In fact, some found it amusing, "witty", agreeing that when it paid out, they were as fond of the machine as they were of their best friend for that moment.

Older targets took it more seriously but clearly did not want to identify with the message. They associated it with lonely, old people who might easily be depressed:

"it's not talking to me but there are a lot of lonely, sad people out there...playing all day" (Males, 35-55)

"the day that happens you're really in trouble" (Males, 55+)

Do you lie to hide the extent of your gambling? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

This message was thought to be the most emotive of the series. It played especially well amongst younger targets. It impacted quite immediately with younger women while amongst young men, this message resonated at more of a latent level. LYING, both genders understood, involves another person. It implies a relationship, usually of a romantic nature and their concerns were raised about lying threatening that relationship. This has personal relevance and impact. It is the PERCEPTIBLE RISK that gambling can change their behaviour, can lead them to be deceitful, that is effective as an internal thought-starter:

"I reckon lying is probably the biggest thing with gambling...because it breaks up relationships"

and stuff" (Males, Under 35)

*"that's scary...that makes me feel guilty...
because I'd be hurting someone else, not just
me" (Females, Under 35)*

Most significantly, young gamblers thought that lying could be an early warning that their gambling was becoming a problem. As such, it was not targeted only at problem gamblers but at all gamblers:

*"it could be an early syndrome, like it doesn't have
to be a full on problem gambler yet" (Males, Under 35)*

Some of the younger men in the survey also associated this message with gamblers lying to their friends, preferring to play a poker machine over spending time with them.

Still, lying was not a strong enough indicator to warrant a call-to-action to telephone G-line.

This message proved less effective amongst older targets. Lying was almost a NORM amongst SEASONED gamblers. They claim to lie about their wins as much as about their losses, both to their partners and their friends. They also claimed to expect to be lied to in return:

*"yeah, right...my wife tries to ask me how much
I've lost...or if I won \$2000, I'd tell her \$1000 and
put the rest in my pocket...and I reckon she
does the same" (Males, 35-55)*

*"you tell a few fibs to your wife...you don't tell
your friends if you've won or how much" (Males, 55+)*

"I think everybody has lied, I know I have"

(Females, 55+)

Is gambling solving or causing your problems? If gambling is a concern for you, call G-line (NSW) 1800 633 635.

This message proved to be very weak. It is convoluted and requires thought to interpret. Target gamblers literally could not be bothered with it. They found it bland, "cheesy", a hackneyed approach that could be applied to drinking alcohol as much as it could to gambling. Tonally too, it failed, as it reminded targets of "do-gooders":

"it's too long...and not to the point" *(Males, 55+)*

"it's a useless question...it's doing neither because I know gambling doesn't solve problems...it's asking me to answer one of those but I know its neither solving them nor causing them" *(Males, Under 35)*

"it's dumb...cryptic..." *(Males, 35-55)*

Many also found the message quite offensive:

"it's assuming that everyone has a problem" *(Males, 35-55)*

3. MESSAGE STRUCTURE PROBLEMS

This study revealed that there is a SIGNIFICANT problem with the structure of the messages and this needs to be clearly understood as limiting the overall effectiveness of the messages tested.

There are TWO PARTS to each message and it is the LINKING of the two that INHIBITS effective communication.

The first half of the message is perceived as a warning, a harm minimisation message. It is perceived as encouraging RESPONSIBLE gambling behaviour and the positive connotations of this are quite acceptable:

"it's giving you a message to...be sensible, that is good" (Females, 55+)

In varying degrees, these message components have the ability to issue a wake-up call to rethink current gambling behaviour and even to curb possible excesses at the time of screening. As such, the gambling population, as a whole, can INTERNALISE the message, and in fact they do. The question is asked in the message, and literally, the answer is verbalised by the poker machine player.

A number of the variants in the first halves invite universal identification. As a result, they are understood to apply to ALL gamblers. They provide two important kinds of signals to regular or self-proclaimed recreational gamblers. First, they TRIGGER THE EVALUATION of their current and past gambling practices which can lead to imposing new sets of limits. Secondly, they provide CUES to recognise that they may have a problem, even if at an embryonic stage.

The second half of the message DEFINES the target as PROBLEM GAMBLERS. First, it announces, 'IF GAMBLING IS A CONCERN...'. Our targets believe that gambling is only acknowledged as a concern once it has become, to use an apt medical analogy, chronic or acute. By the time gambling has become a recognised concern, it would have had significant impacts on the gambler's life [financially, etc]. The current G-line television advertisement, FAMILY MAN, was quite often cited as an example of a gambling concern.

The regular gamblers, those who do not perceive they have a problem, start to become EXCLUDED by the reference to a gambling concern. The message has therefore CHANGED from one about RESPONSIBLE behaviour to one about dealing with a gambling PROBLEM.

The direction to call G-line completes this EXCLUSIONARY process. This offers regular gamblers a 'way out' as a call to G-line represents the 'end of the line'. Only "severe" problem gamblers are expected to call G-line. The response then, is that the message applies to SOMEONE ELSE, NOT ME:

"that's someone else, it's not me...it's the problem gamblers" (Males, 35-55)

"it made me feel good that I wasn't one of those people, it gave me a bit of a kick actually" (Males, Under 35)

This response should NOT be confused with DENIAL. Clearly, there is an element of this amongst regular gamblers, often noted in focus group members' comments and the rationalisations they offered for their gambling as a form of entertainment. It was also noticed in relation to their avoiding current messages displayed in gaming venues as well as in the inclination expressed by some to leave the poker machine for another or for an alternative form of gambling while one of the test messages was being screened:

"I'd go and play something else...which is worse because I go to the Casino and like then I'd be playing something that is like \$10 a pop, so I'd lose more money" (Females, Under 35)

The core issue though is that a call to G-line represents a call to seek help. This is an EXTERNAL response and one that is perceived as an EXTREME measure, too extreme to relate to regular poker machine players even if they occasionally display some aberrant gambling behaviour:

"these would be aimed at problem gamblers, I mean, a guy that put \$5 in is not likely to ring the

G-line if he loses it"

(Males, Under 35)

Significantly, those targets on the way to recognising a problem, who have taken account of the first half of the messages, can be lost in the transition to the second half. In other words, even when the question posed in the first half of the message strikes a chord and the verbalised response is affirmative, it is TOO LONG A BOW to draw to accept that a call to G-line is the requisite answer:

"at first it made me think a little bit, I play a fair bit more than I should...but I don't want to hear that maybe I've got that bad a problem that I need to call G-line"

(Males, 35-55)

In developing gambling harm minimisation strategies, we need to DIFFERENTIATE between regular and problem gamblers both in message content and in our targeting routes.

APPENDIX - THE QUESTIONNAIRE