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Results of the 2003 Survey of FACT Participants: Youth Activism and Communication

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Over the past few years, a number of states have initiated youth-led movements as part of their comprehensive tobacco control programs. The long-term goal of these movements is to reduce tobacco use. To accomplish this goal, a number of strategies are typically used, including developing youth leadership, focusing on anti-tobacco industry messages, and using peer-to-peer communication to spread these messages. These strategies are intended to influence youth to become empowered, leading them to take control of their lives and avoid the targeting efforts of the tobacco industry.

The Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board was an early leader in this youth initiative and established and provided support for Fighting Against Corporate Tobacco, or FACT, to reach its goal of a 20% reduction in tobacco use among middle and high school youth by 2005. To assess the program's progress, the University of Wisconsin Monitoring and Evaluation Program surveyed interested youth regarding their involvement with FACT.¹ This brief describes leadership and communication found within FACT.

Major Findings:

- **100% of respondents participated in at least one FACT activity.**
- **FACT 'bash participants' had a substantially greater level of activity involvement than those respondents who had not participated in a FACT bash.**
- **The majority of respondents communicated to their peers and to adults about the negative effects of smoking and the targeting practices of the tobacco industry.**

Background

Currently, FACT has a database of nearly 7,000 youth listed as either participating in or learning more about FACT-related events. Because 80% of current smokers started smoking under the age of 18 and 27% of Wisconsin high school students currently smoke, FACT is a critical component of Wisconsin's comprehensive program.²

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In its early planning sessions in 2000, FACT developed youth leadership and used peer-to-peer communication to spread information on tobacco industry tactics. By using such strategies in building events and activities, FACT attempts to have an impact upon the norms and behaviors influencing everyday perceptions of tobacco use.

Methods

In 2002, a survey was mailed to a sample of 1,069 youth who previously attended a ‘bash’ or signed up to participate in or gain more information about FACT.³ A bash is a weekend event where FACT teens have the opportunity for skill-building, social interaction, and planning local actions. Bashes have been held in 2001, 2002, and in 2003. In this brief, bashes will refer to those held in 2001 and 2002. The response rate for this survey was 33%. Survey questions focused on a number of items, including leadership and communication. Other items, such as belief in teen advocacy, views toward tobacco industry, involvement in FACT, and perceptions of FACT, have been discussed elsewhere.⁴

Results

Youth Activism

The survey was developed to indicate levels of youth activism, defined as direct action in support of or opposition to a cause, through involvement in specific events. We also distinguish between those who had attended previous ‘bashes’ (n = 122, 34%), and

Table 1. Involvement in Tobacco Control Activities by FACT Bash Participation

	Bash Participants (n = 122)	Non-Participants (n = 234)
<i>General Communication Activities</i>		
Participated in Coalition Event	71 %	15 %
Developing anti-tobacco industry materials	67 %	29 %
Presentation to younger kids	60 %	25 %
Building media materials on cigarette use	60 %	12 %
Letter to editor	17 %	6 %
<i>Smoke-Free Activities</i>		
Action for a smoke-free school	50 %	18 %
Work toward smoke-free restaurants	46 %	14 %
Hosting smoke-free social	44 %	25 %
Support for smoke-free community	38 %	16 %
<i>Point-of-Purchase Activities</i>		
Reduce stores selling to kids	40 %	12 %
Counting convenient store advertisements	31 %	10 %
<i>Website Suggested Activities*</i>		
Sticker-bomb	24 %	13 %
Walk of shame	24 %	12 %
Email blitz	11 %	12 %
Work it, baby!	7 %	2 %
Other	64 %	23 %

*Activities specifically listed www.fightwithfact.com

those who had not (n = 234, 66%). The purpose is to determine any differences between the two groups, with the assumption that those in the former would be more active. Sixteen questions focused on participation in specific activities. Respondents were provided the opportunity to note the level of their participation by choosing one of the response categories: “I was one of the leaders of the activity,” “I was very active, but not a leader,” “I was active,” and “I was not involved.”

Respondents could also note that their FACT group was not involved in such an event or, simply, that they did not know. Table 1 compares bash participants and non-participants by the percentage of involvement in activities.

The activities have been thematically grouped. For instance, ‘general communication activities’ refers to those activities that allow FACT to spread their message, and ‘smoke-free activities’ refer to those activities that pertain to building a smoke-free environment. ‘Point-of-purchase activities’ center on retail outlets and ‘website suggested activities’ are those activities that can be found on www.fightwithfact.com.

Compared to non-participants, those who had attended a bash had substantially greater involvement in all activities, except the *Email Blitz*. Overall, the majority of respondents were involved in ‘general communication activities,’ while the respondents were least involved in ‘website suggested activities.’

Communication

Peer-to-peer communication emphasizes teens interacting with each other in order to spread and receive specific messages. These messages are given greater credibility since they originate from, and disseminate to, teens that are able to self-identify with each other.⁵ In order to determine the level of peer-to-peer communication by FACT participants, four questions were asked. Two of the questions asked if the respondent had spoken with a friend about either the tobacco industry targeting teens or about the negative effects of smoking. The third question asked if the respondents had spoken to their parent(s) about the tobacco industry targeting teens, and the fourth question asked if the respondent had spoken with adults about the negative effect of smoking.

Figure 1. Frequency of Respondents' Communication To Friends, Parents, and Adults

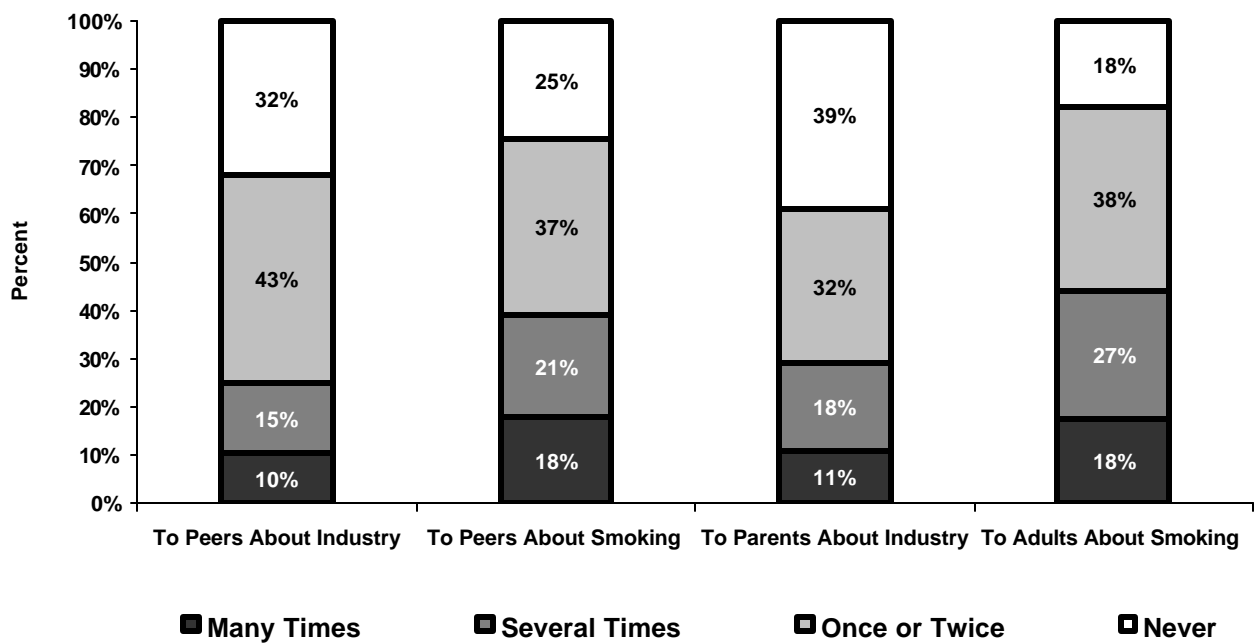


Figure 1 shows that most of the youth respondents communicated at least once. However, more respondents communicated about the negative effects of smoking compared to the targeting

strategies of the tobacco industry. For instance, when communicating to peers, 75% communicated at least once about the negative effects of smoking compared to 68% of the respondents communicating about the targeting efforts of the tobacco industry. A greater difference can be found when assessing communication to parents and adults (82% communicated at least once about the negative effects of smoking, and 61% communicated at least once about the targeting practices of the tobacco industry).

When the respondents are sub-divided into ‘bash participants’ and ‘non-participants,’ communication dramatically differs. Table 2 uses the ‘many times’ category from Figure 1 as an indicator of proportional differences in communication. In each area, a greater proportion of ‘bash participants’ communicated than ‘non-bash participants.’

Table 2. FACT Youth who Communicate ‘Many Times’ to Friends, Parents, and Adults by Bash and Non-Bash Participants

	Bash Participants (n = 122)	Non- Participants (n = 234)
To Peers about Industry	20 %	8 %
To Peers about Smoking	26 %	16 %
To Parents about Industry	33 %	6 %
To Adults about Smoking	27 %	15 %

Comments

FACT has become an integral component of Wisconsin’s tobacco control efforts. The youth that are part of FACT provide peer education on the negative effects of smoking and the targeting schemes of the tobacco industry. In a number of communities, the youth also work with local coalitions in their efforts toward building smoke-free communities.

This brief highlights the role of youth involvement in FACT activities and communication. It also illustrates differences in involvement between those respondents who previously attended the intensive training offered in a bash and those who had not. For example, a greater proportion of ‘bash participants’ were involved in FACT activities than those respondents who had not attended a bash. Moreover, ‘bash participants’ also had a greater proportion communicating to peers and to adults than ‘non-participants.’ If these differences are an indicator of successful skills building in tobacco control, the above underscores the need for continued training in support of youth advocacy.

¹ For discussion on FACT’s demographics and participation, see Renfro -Sargent M, Christiansen AL, Ahrens D. *Results of the 2003 FACT Evaluation: Demographics and Participation*. Monitoring and Evaluation Program Brief, Madison, WI: UW Medical School, February 2003.

² 2002 Wisconsin Youth Tobacco Survey, Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Public Health http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/health/TobaccoControl/pdf_files/YTSHighSchool2002FULLREPORT.pdf

³ For details on methods used, see fn 1.

⁴ *Supra*, n 1.

⁵ For an explanation of peer-to-peer communication, see Nixon Group [Golin/Harris International]. *Application for Statewide Youth-Led Tobacco Movement*. Nixon Group, Washington, D.C. 2000.

The Wisconsin Tobacco Control Board provided support for this brief. Full technical report will be available from the Monitoring and Evaluation Program, July 2003. Please call (608) 263-8627 for more information or to request a copy.

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