

Responsive Management



Hunters' and Anglers' Attitudes Toward Boating Safety, the Use of Personal Flotation Devices, and Various Messages that Communicate the Benefits of Wearing Personal Flotation Devices: Focus Groups Results

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Various Messages that Communicate the Benefits of
Wearing Personal Flotation Devices:
Focus Groups Results**

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Responsive Management National Office

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two focus groups were conducted for BoatU.S. in September and October 2001 with sportsmen to better understand attitudes toward boating safety and Personal Flotation Device (PFD) use, and to identify the messages that will most efficiently promote the use of PFDs. One focus group was conducted in Greensboro, North Carolina, with anglers who boat. The other focus group was conducted in St. Louis, Missouri, with hunters who boat. “Anglers” who boat were defined as individuals who fished while boating in the past year, and “hunters who boat” were defined as individuals who hunted while boating within the past year.

Focus groups are an important method to test messages because they allow for extensive probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional reaction to various messages, which are aspects that cannot be measured in a traditional telephone or mail survey. Focus group research is considered “qualitative” research. Qualitative research sacrifices reliability for increased validity. This means that, although focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as can sample surveys (high reliability), they often give researchers a deeper view of the issues being studied (high validity).

Each message was tested through focus group discussion. Identical messages were given to each focus group, with the exception of a few messages that were directed at the specific target audience of hunters or anglers.

The analysis consisted of a qualitative assessment of the individual focus groups. The recommendations presented in this report are based on focus group attitudes toward boating safety and PFD use and an overall assessment of the messages that best communicated boating safety and PFD use. The various messages were evaluated on both a broad conceptual level as

well as a detailed level (i.e. the effects of word choice, emotions, and images). These issues are all important in developing effective messages.

Anglers who boat and hunters who boat are aware of dangers, in general, while boating. Hunters who boat appear to pay little attention to safety messages directed toward recreational boaters or toward a general boating audience. This appears to be because many hunters who boat do not consider themselves recreational boaters. Hunters who boat need to be targeted as a specific audience to ensure that they hear PFD messages.

For both anglers who boat and hunters who boat, the best source of the message appears to be family members, especially children. Anglers felt another angler and the owner of the boat would be persuasive spokespersons. The owner of the boat or the operator of the boat has the authority to require persons in the boat to wear PFDs, according to anglers. It is important to note, however, that anglers who are boat owners did not feel comfortable demanding PFD use of everyone on their boat. Convincing boat owners that PFD use on their boat is their responsibility would be an important component of a communications program on increasing the use of PFDs.

While both anglers and hunters who boat regarded a law mandating the use of PFDs negatively, both groups were very positive about campaigns that endorsed hunters and anglers to wear PFDs while boating. Furthermore, hunting and fishing professionals and role models demonstrating PFD use could promote and increase the use of PFDs. Since these individuals are rarely seen wearing PFDs on TV shows and elsewhere, they send the implicit message that PFD non-use is not only “O.K.,” but perhaps is even a symbol of experience and status in the sport.

Only actual personal experiences with boating accidents that resulted in a death influenced anglers who boat and hunters who boat to seriously reevaluate their boating safety practices and use of PFDs. One of the main reasons both anglers and hunters who boat do not

wear PFDs is because they doubt they will be involved in an accident. Most felt an aura of invincibility. Witnessing an accident or losing a friend appears to eliminate feelings of invincibility and it leads to behavior changes such as PFD use. For hunters who boat and anglers who boat, “close calls” are not enough to change behavior. It might even be argued that a close call may embolden participants.

Anglers and hunters who boat both indicated that lack of comfort was an important factor in why they did not use PFDs more frequently. Anglers complained of the bulky design, and hunters mentioned the difficulty of putting on a PFD over multiple layers of warm clothing. As demonstrated during the hunters’ focus group, the adult-size inflatable PFD did not fit a larger sized person. Furthermore, when hunters and anglers wear a PFD, motions needed for hunting and fishing are restricted, and accessing items in pockets under the PFD is awkward. Hunters suggested that manufacturers make a warm coat with a PFD inside. Redesigning PFDs to be functional for specialized sports, responding to comfort concerns, and designing PFDs to fit larger persons would compliment campaigns to increase positive attitudes toward the use of PFDs.

Interpretation

All of the hunters and anglers in the focus groups agreed that wearing a PFD was a good idea and all supported a campaign to educate hunters and anglers about the importance of wearing one. Ironically, few wore a PFD and identified reason after reason why they did not wear one. It is not so strange that anglers and hunters who boat, even those who know PFDs are beneficial, won’t wear them considering that they live in a society where:

- PFD use is not important enough to be a law

- PFD use is a symbol of childhood and inexperience because:
 - When you get good enough at the sport you don't need a PFD - (Professionals Don't Wear Them)
 - When you become famous you don't need a PFD - (Television Personalities Don't Wear Them)
 - When you grow up you don't need a PFD - (Parents Don't Wear Them)

The relationship that anglers and hunters who boat seem to have with PFDs is clear.

These sportsmen almost universally admitted that PFDs were beneficial, yet few wore them.

"They probably wouldn't call them life preservers if there were something bad about them.." said one focus group participant.

This break between their opinions and their behaviors was uncomfortable for them. This discomfort could be seen in the many excuses anglers and hunters who boat made for not using PFDs, the defiant reaction to the discussion about being made to wear PFDs, and the underlying sense that they "wanted/needed" some negative event to help them resolve this tension.

This tension is known as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance is a phenomenon caused by the stress of having beliefs and actions that are contradictory.

Hunters and anglers who boat showed a remarkable list of reasons not to wear a device that most admitted could save them. Their level of defense escalated proportionally with attempts at persuasion. For instance, when the institution of mandatory PFD use became a topic in the hunter group, one man indicated that he would be sure NOT to wear a PFD if they were required. Similarly, the hunter group, who had admitted having had several close calls, and frequent need to boat under poor conditions, made the greatest variety of excuses to not use

PFDS. PFD use *touched a nerve*, and the stronger the admonition to PFD use, the stronger the defenses were, by the anglers and hunters, against being made to wear them.

The juxtaposition of PFD disuse with an admitted knowledge that PFDS are, at very least, a good idea, appeared to have placed these boaters in the awkward position of having to defend something that they “know” is wrong.

From one angle, this problem seems to be a “keyless lock.” Efforts to convince anglers and hunters to use PFDS lead them to resist PFD use. Fortunately, this is a lock that lends itself to “picking.” Facts are not the key. The facts, even among the least informed participants, seem to be clear: PFD use is a good idea. “Feeling,” not fact, is the key. They “know” it is wrong to not wear a PFD, but they do not “feel” it is wrong. The amazing defense they showed against a logically indefensible position created by their own dissonance appeared changeable only when faced by information from another “channel,” emotion.

In the face of an emotional, tragic event, one individual from the hunter group had been moved to wear a PFD. The emotional impact of losing a fellow hunter to drowning short-circuited the endless loop of facts and refutations. The bleak sense of loss lead to change.

In both focus groups, two public service announcement (PSA) videos were shown. Both were intended to stimulate PFD use by presenting images and facts. In one PSA a hunter is shown drowning due to lack of a PFD, in another anglers are shown a series of lures used to catch different fish but concluded by showing a dredging hook used to “catch” all the anglers who drown every year. Both videos coupled captivating, emotional images with yearly fatality statistics.

Those videos had a large impact on their intended audiences. They provided a key: a “needed” bad experience in proxy. The tension in the hunters and anglers who boated between

their thoughts and behaviors lean to a feeling that they “wanted” something to make them change. Those ads provided that experience in the best possible way, vicariously.

Both groups, regardless of statements and interpretation to the contrary after the viewing, were visibly rattled by the PSAs. Body language showed the focus group participants pressed back deeply into their chairs as if to escape what they were seeing. They were visibly uncomfortable.

Hunters and anglers who boat do not see their mortality in the realm of the “real.” It is not a comfortable thought. They avoid it. These PSAs gave them the key, the emotional “feel” they needed. These emotional PSAs “short-circuited” their endless loop of flawed logic. Repeated use of these unsettling, emotional PSAs seems sensible considering the reactions to them in the focus groups. Also, it may make sense to “re-elicite” these emotions at docks as a visual cue with a recognizable image from the ads to remind hunters and anglers the importance of the decision that they are about to make. One focus group participant said it best:

I think I would want a combination of the commercials and see a sign posted when I go a week later.

Future Directions

Based on these focus groups, a campaign to increase the likelihood of hunters and anglers who boat to wear a PFD would include the consistent use of emotion, possibly from a child or fellow angler or hunter, showing that hunters and anglers who boat are not invincible. For instance, a PSA where a child is shown stating “My daddy didn’t think he needed to use a PFD, but now he is dead.”

Perhaps even more wrenching and effective would be the same message above along with images of the child, even after the death of the child’s father, still trying to emulate her/his

father by not using a PFD either. For best impact, these messages should run in magazines and on television (during hunting and fishing shows), and then be reinforced on docks and put ins with the same, recognizable, consistent image and message. Repetition and emotion are important components of a successful campaign.

The boating community should also work on increasing the use of PFDs by having hunting and angling television personalities and other publicly visible representatives and personalities in the sport model PFD use. Public representatives of the sport, especially those who are highly esteemed by their peers, set the tone for appropriate sport behavior through the examples they set. They should set the right example.

The boating community should also strive to make PFDs more comfortable and more utilitarian for hunters and anglers who boat. Finally, boating messages must be tailored so they target specifically hunters who boat and anglers who boat, because most hunters who boat and many anglers who boat do not consider themselves primarily as boaters.

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“I don’t wear it [a PFD] all the time. I always know where it is and where safety things are. I’m like him, I can swim, if something would happen, I can get to it. Usually I’ll sit on it like a cushion. And when I go with my dad, since my dad can’t swim, I make sure he keeps his right next to him in case something would happen.”

-An angler who boats in Greensboro, NC.

“I’ll have to tell my brothers about this [focus group]. All these years that we haven’t been wearing a vest, they’re some place in the boat and we don’t even use them as cushions. I don’t even know where the hell they’re at. But they’re supposed to be there. Obviously, I’m going to walk away from this discussion different. Change is very hard for old farts. But I’m going to tell my brothers we have to at least find them [PFDs]”.

- A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

“We just had a duck clinic two weekends ago. In the course of two days as I recall, all I remember [us] mentioning was that they had to have a personal flotation device in the boat. We never stressed that they wear it. We didn’t give our opinions as far as sitting on them or anything like that. There was no emphasis on it whatsoever. Although I’ll make sure that’s changed in the future. It’s strange that it is such an important part of duck hunting that we didn’t mention it. And we’re instructing these kids on how to do it... I think the reason why we don’t mention it is because of our lackadaisical attitude towards it.”

-A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

“My first time hunting from a boat was when I went duck hunting. We had a johnboat we threw on the back of my truck. As far as safety precautions, we weren’t too concerned about that. We were worried about getting from point A on the boat ramp to point B, our blind.”

-A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

“I don’t really think about it to tell you the truth. I have a list of items in the morning where I wake up and say I have to make sure I have these items: my gun, my shotgun shells, my decoy, and my buddies. The last thing that I’m thinking of is the flotation device. I can’t remember how many times I’ve gone across that water and said, “You know what guys, we forgot our life preservers.” I’ve never been in a situation where I’ve thought, “Boy, this life preserver was probably more important than my shotgun!”

-A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

“You don’t go out there to be safe, you go out there to hunt. Safety is an add-on.”

-A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

“The only concern is when it [the PFD] inflates, it throws you back so you can’t swim. On a public access channel there is a Sunday morning fishing show, and they usually have well-known anglers in the area, and they never have vests on. So people see them doing it and think it’s acceptable [not to wear PFDs] since they do it all the time. If you promote something on TV in an unsafe manner, other people will do it that way too.”

-An angler who boats in Greensboro, NC.

“It’s not recreational boating, it’s hunting. Duck hunters are using smaller boats too. But [the boat] it’s just another tool.”

-A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

“We had three friends hunting went out in the johnboat. Something happened, the boat went over and they started swimming. All of a sudden one of them wasn’t there anymore. That just brought the whole thing to a halt. I’m not going to go out on a major river anymore. They’re [PFDs] often in the boat, but too often they are not used.”

-A hunter who boats in St. Louis, MO.

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Messages about the use of Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) were tested in two focus groups for the BOATU.S. Foundation. One group was held in Greensboro, North Carolina with anglers who boat (had fished from a boat within the past year), and one was held in St. Louis, Missouri with hunters who boat (had hunted from a boat within the past year). The purposes of these groups were to:

- Examine attitudes toward boating safety and PFD use.
- Identify mediums and messages that would increase PFD use.
- Identify mediums and messages that would best communicate the benefits of PFD use.

Focus groups allow analyses of thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and opinions that have a high level of content validity (Babbie, 1998). Content validity means that the results are an accurate representation of the truth for the people involved in the groups. However, because these results are based on small numbers of individuals, the data may not represent the exact thoughts of ALL anglers who boat...or ALL hunters who boat. Focus groups are an established and important method of qualitative research. They allow the extensive probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional reaction not available in a quantitative study such as a traditional telephone or mail survey.

The focus groups in this study were conducted using standard research methodology for qualitative research. The methodology for these focus groups was formal. One-way mirrors and unobtrusive observation occurred (Krueger 1988; Frey & Fontana, 1994). For a complete discussion of the uses of focus group research, see Morgan and Krueger (1997). Responsive

Management has used these techniques in other studies on natural resource and outdoor recreation topics (Bissell & Duda, 1993, 1995; Duda, Bissel & Young, 1998).

The analysis of these focus groups was an iterative process. Data were categorized into units of meaning using the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). For example, the moderator took notes and observations at the time of the focus group. Later, themes within those notes were reexamined, challenged, amended, and/or confirmed using transcribed audio tapes. Review of the videotapes allowed another level of review to examine, challenge, amend, and/or confirm the data gathered from the notes and the audio tapes. All members of the research team then participated in a final level of interpretation where the assembled data were again reexamined, challenged, amended, and/or confirmed.

A final report, with excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate the degrees of acceptance of the various mediums and messages, was created through this process. In addition to the data on mediums and methods, analyses and discussion of other unanticipated “emergent” issues are also included. Emergent issues are an intended effect, and one of the greatest benefits of, the qualitative research method. Emergent issues are often redirections, and/or reinterpretations about a phenomenon that are created through the focus group interactions, and through the iterative interpretative process. The emergent issue in this report was boaters’ underlying tension between their failure to use PFDs and their knowledge that they should be using them.

Verbatim comments appear in *italics* and are single spaced. Double-spacing between comments indicates a new speaker. The use of [brackets] indicates paraphrasing for clarity.

FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

ANGLERS' AND HUNTERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SAFETY AND THE USE OF PFDS

ANGLERS

Anglers who boat think about safety when boating. There was, however, a great deal of personal variation in how much they thought about boating safety and PFD use. Two of the anglers in the group, both females, always wore PFDs. Other anglers rarely or never wore PFDs.

At least some of the time, most members of the group did use PFDs. Safety issues were more important among those focus group participants who had been exposed to previous bad experiences, or those who had a generally high level of concern about safety with any sport. Among those having had a bad experience, the negative experience was a personal turning point. Although others in the group admitted to having heard of terrible accidents, and sympathized with those who had been involved in them, the lack of *first-hand* accident experiences seemed to impede their decision to use PFDs. All of the focus group members agreed that safety while boating was important. Several members admitted that they did not put as much emphasis on safety as they felt they should.

I had a bad experience. I definitely think that drugs and alcohol and boats don't mix. A group of people were on a friend's boat, and the driver was under [the] influence. The waves were large but he ran into our boat. And he almost threw someone overboard and nearly hit another boat. That really scared me, and I won't get on a boat unless I know who is driving the boat.

I'm pretty new in going out in boats, but my wife worries about me, so I wear my life jacket. I see a lot of other anglers don't put it on. But it is something I worry about... But to tell the truth, I haven't been thinking about it as much as I should.

One time a gentleman got caught in the line a few years ago and he went overboard [and he died]... It was a horrible experience. The captain didn't realize what was happening. So safety is very big for me. Now [since the accident, I wear a PFD] all the time. You just think, anybody could fall off a boat, and it might be a while before someone comes back to get you... It just makes you realize anything can happen on a boat.

Safety is always paramount, but not just with boating.

Confidence in swimming ability and around water seemed to directly correspond with a sense of confidence about not using a PFD. In an odd juxtaposition, anglers who boat admitted that anyone could drown, but then defended their lack of PFD use by noting that non-swimmers and people unfamiliar with boats were more susceptible to water accidents. About half of the anglers felt that wearing a PFD was unnecessary for themselves, although they made sure the PFD was nearby in the boat in case they might ever need it. Many anglers who boat waited for bad weather, water, or boat traffic conditions before they used a PFD.

I don't wear a life jacket. It would be safe to do that but... Safety is important. I [just] don't think anything is going to happen [to me].

During the day, no [I do not wear a PFD]; during the night, definitely yes.

I know I need to wear it, but I'm a good swimmer.

I think a person's confidence around the water plays into that a lot. I see that people that don't have good swimming ability are more susceptible than people who have been around water their whole life and are more confident around it.

My friend, when he goes out with his girlfriend, he makes sure she wears one [a PFD] because she's not confident on the water, but he doesn't. Confidence and experience makes you hesitant to put it on. For me confidence is the number one issue.

Even though you're confident around a racecar, or horse or the water, professionals realize you don't take a chance without proper equipment. It [a PFD] needs to be shown as part of the sport and everyone would do it.

I don't wear it [a PFD] all the time. I always know where it is and where safety things are. I'm like him, I can swim; if something would happen, I can get to it. Usually I'll sit on it like a cushion. And when I go with my dad, since my dad can't swim, I make sure he keeps his right next to him in case something would happen.

I really don't like wearing them. You don't want to become that statistic that could have been prevented. I never really think about it [a PFD] because I'm confident around the water.

When conditions are not so favorable—cold, windy or lots of boat traffic—then safety ranks higher. If boat control is an issue, I'll tend to wear a life jacket.

One of the more frequent, and initially perplexing, comments focus group participants made (both anglers who boat and hunters who boat) to justify their lack of PFD use was that they had not yet had a bad experience to convince them.

Maybe that day, if something happens, it will alert me to wear it. If I see someone that has a life jacket and is saved. (Moderator: What's your reaction to her experience?) It's terrible [that the man died]. I've heard of other incidents like that when people weren't wearing a life jacket.

PFD discomfort was another reason that participants gave for not using a PFD. Anglers who boat complained that PFDs restricted movement for fishing activities such as casting and reeling. Suggestions were made that PFDs should be designed to fit more like clothing and be less bulky. Anglers agreed that this would increase their likelihood of wearing PFDs.

If they made one like a shirt and a little more comfortable, I would wear it.

I don't care to be restricted by it.

I feel like I'm being held down [by the PFD] when I'm trying to get a fish in.

If they made one I could just wear that would fit around my waist instead of up over my shoulders. Casting, reeling in, anything other than driving a boat, it's restricting me.

For me it's mainly comfort and that it restricts me. If it was like my shirt or jacket; that I don't have to think about it and it didn't rub you wrong. If there was a way to make it not so bulky...

Another comment was made that, unlike most televised sports where professionals are generally shown using the proper safety equipment, fishing role models and professional anglers seldom wear PFDs. This means that those individuals upon whom others most strongly model their sport behavior are setting the wrong example. Adults also perpetuated this poor example by supporting PFD use for children, but not modeling the behavior themselves.

While it would seem that making PFDs mandatory should express the importance of PFD use, especially considering that fines for not wearing PFDs were mentioned as being an influential reason to have them in the boat, anglers balked at the idea. They suggested that a law requiring mandatory PFD use might be resented and even discourage PFD use. The only exception to this opinion was that anglers who boat were supportive of laws requiring children under a certain age to wear PFDs. Even though anglers who boat admitted the benefits to using PFDs, they still resisted committing to wear them. Persistent justifications for not wearing PFDs were (over) confidence around water and dislike for how PFDs fit.

You never know what can happen. I was by myself in my boat last week and the string I have tied around my anchor got caught on my foot and I almost tilted over the boat. I wasn't watching the excess string. It could have knocked me out, but the flotation device would have kept me floating. Probably it would be a good idea to wear it.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat were aware of the dangers of using a boat while hunting. They readily admitted that they boated under the worst possible conditions: poor light, bad weather, and overly-laden boats. The sense of the tone of the hunter group was one of open admission of numerous boating issues that were unsettling to them.

On the Mississippi River at 4:30 in the morning, it's cold. I think back especially after the '93 flood, we were coming across another river in the dark and cold. [We] had a large 17

foot boat; not a johnboat. We were plenty careful. There is a concern. There are a lot of buoys that aren't lighted and other hunters, and it's usually foggy and hard to see. It's a real issue.

Many times I get intimidated by the rivers because it's dark, visibility isn't the best, and the rivers are pretty dangerous as it is. From a safety perspective, that's pretty high on my priority list.

Despite these concerns, most admitted that PFD use was either low on their list of boating priorities, or not even on their list of priorities at all. For some of them, the boat was simply a means of conveyance.

My first time hunting from a boat was when I went duck hunting. We had a johnboat we threw on the back of my truck. As far as safety precautions, we weren't too concerned about that. We were worried about getting from point A on the boat ramp to point B, our blind.

As with the anglers, exposure to a bad experience seemed to be the “necessary” catalyst of change. One of the focus group participants reexamined his safety practices after losing a friend on a boating/hunting trip.

I think the boat is far more dangerous than the gun... We had three friends hunting [that] went out in the johnboat. Something happened, the boat went over, and they started swimming. All of a sudden one of them wasn't there anymore. That just brought the whole thing to a halt. I'm not going to go out on a major river anymore. They're [PFDs] often in the boat but too often they are not used.

Another hunter also talked about a bad experience.

I sunk a boat up on the Mississippi 2 years ago. I thought a lot about it [wearing a PFD] because I didn't have one on. For your information, 30 feet from shore is a long way.

While hunting from a boat, hunters wore PFDs only part of the time, if at all. Only one hunter out of the group wore a PFD at all times, and one hunter never wore a PFD. Hunters had long lists of reasons that they used to rationalize lack of PFD usage, some of which are listed and illustrated below:

- Being focused solely on hunting

We're not even thinking about it [a PFD]. We're thinking about getting to that blind.

- Forgetting to put the PFD on, not taking time to put it on

I don't really think about it to tell you the truth. I have a list of items in the morning where I wake up and say I have to make sure I have these items: my gun, my shotgun shells, my decoy, and my buddies. The last thing that I'm thinking of is the flotation device. I can't remember how many times I've gone across that water and said, "You know what guys, we forgot our life preservers." I've never been in a situation where I've thought, "Boy, this life preserver was probably more important than my shotgun!"

- Getting too hot while hunting

I do [wear a PFD], but there are times when I don't. There's always one in a boat. Especially when you get hot picking up the decoys and then you have to put your life jacket on and sometimes I'm a bit reluctant to do it. But, there's always one in the boat for [each person].

- Being in shallow water

If you don't have to go out into the channel, it's not much of a concern. Most of the hunting is done in water that is waist deep.

- Having difficulty putting on a PFD over layers of clothing, the PFD being uncomfortable

It's tough to get duck hunters to wear them [PFDs]; they've got so many clothes to start with.

There is a disadvantage to a life vest and that is that by the time you've got all your gear on, it's hard to get anywhere. You've got layers and layers of clothing and you're trying to get that thing [a PFD] around you and get it zipped up. That takes some doing.

- Having difficulty mounting a gun while wearing a PFD, using a PFD only under certain circumstances

I will wear a vest judging by conditions, and that's my personal opinion of what the conditions are, and I have been wrong before about that. In my experience, I've found that that life jacket of mine is a better seat cushion. Especially if I'm shooting because of the difference it makes in mounting a gun. I think you'd find very few duck hunters that kept it on during the shooting session.

- Personal experiences that shed doubt on PFD effectiveness

The things that look like suspenders that go around your waist and inflates within 15 seconds of hitting the water: I've tried wading with it and it was like it was not even there. There was so much other stuff it was like it didn't make any difference at all.

Sometimes when you're out there, by the time you add shotgun shells and clothing you've added a good 15 pounds to your weight, and I don't know how much the vests that we're wearing would help.

If something would happen, I could take my waders off and swim rather than bobbing around. I could be wrong. Is swimming with a flotation device better or just jumping into the water and swimming?

- No reason at all.

We don't [wear PFDS]... I wish we [my brothers and I] did more often, but we don't... It's a shame, and I don't know why. Even having a couple of close calls, you would think that would be a wake up call. But we still don't. (Moderator: Are you concerned about it?) I'll probably just continue until it does me in someday, and I will probably continue to hunt and do it that way like we always have. (Because you really don't see the big concern?) Sure, there's one [a PFD] in the boat... we just have to find the damn thing.

Hunters who boat appear to bring PFDS in their boats mostly to meet their minimal legal obligation. To many hunters who boat, PFDS are unnecessary.

A lot of times you see really cheap PFDS in the boat just because it's a law...I use it as a cushion for my fanny, but that's almost always where it's at. I hate to say it, but I can't even remember the last time I wore a personal flotation device while duck hunting. That's just the way it's been. My biggest concern was getting from point A to point B. It was never worrying about my safety.

I think overall [if there were no laws about PFDS] there would not be life saving devices or controls like that in the boat because the only reason they're there is because the law requires it. If you don't have the life vest and other safety devices in the boat when they [officials, wardens, etc.] check it, you get a ticket. People really wouldn't think about it [having PFDS in the boat] if not for that law.

Although there was some support for requiring PFD use for children under 16 years of age, hunters also indicated that any legal "coercion" caused by mandating PFD use would have a contrary influence on their behavior.

I think everyone said that the flotation device is in the boat because it is a law. As soon as you make it a law that everyone has to wear it, you're not going to even find it in the boat.

You're going to find people that think they're an adult and they have too much government in their life as it is.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

Although anglers who boat and hunters who boat had differences in their opinions about PFD use, they also shared several sentiments. The majority of both groups wore PFDs only part of the time, and anglers and hunters mentioned PFDs being uncomfortable and restricting the movements necessary for their respective sports. PFD use depended on situational conditions for both anglers and hunters. In addition, both focus groups suggested design improvements for PFDs, which they believed would increase the use of PFDs. Hunters in particular indicated that PFDs were only in boats at all because of the law. Anglers and hunters warned that a law requiring PFDs to be worn may actually decrease PFD use.

Anglers and hunters who had been affected by a boating accident were more likely to wear PFDs in contrast to anglers and hunters who had not had personal experience with a boating accident. Boating accidents that directly affected hunters or anglers were major events that changed their perceptions about boating safety and PFDs. Boating safety appeared less important to the hunters because hunting was the main purpose of the trip and the boat was just another tool needed to hunt. Lack of PFD use attributed to confidence around the water was more prominent in the angler group, although a sense of "it's not going to happen to me" was mentioned in both groups several times.

Both groups had a sense that they "should" be wearing PFDs, but both groups defended not using them with a variety of reasons. Interestingly, the idea of mandated PFD use seemed to provoke a strong, almost defiant, sense of resistance.

AWARENESS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD DROWNING RISKS

ANGLERS

Once aware of the percentage of anglers who died while fishing, anglers who boat expressed some concern and surprise over the high percentage of fatalities that could have been avoided through PFD use. While anglers did not always wear a PFD or convince another adult to wear one, they tended to make children wear them. Adults seemed to feel less need for a PFD. As children, these same adults modeled their non-use on their parents.

I grew up fishing with my brother, but our parents didn't fish. So when they told me to put it [a PFD] on, I didn't perceive them as the expert. And I looked to my peers. So if none of them wore life jackets, then I didn't. Wearing a life jacket makes you feel like a child and foolish, and you want to be grown up, so if there is no supervision, or the adults aren't wearing them, you take them off and act like an adult. If the children's role model is not wearing a life jacket, then the children don't.

Growing up as a kid, I wasn't taught or made to wear my vest when I was fishing with my dad. And since I look up to my dad, I figured whatever he did was ok. I knew about life vests. But they didn't make you wear it.

If you're fishing, you're not going to be able to watch your child the whole time and fish. He just wants to make it as safe and easy as possible to make sure his child is safe.

I will probably make my child wear one. I would probably wear one. But it would be hard for me because I'm not used to wearing one.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat considered PFDs "a good thing," but were hesitant to wear them. Actual bad experiences were the primary motivators of change. "Close calls" did not motivate behavior change. Of those who have thought most about PFD use and changed their safety

behaviors, one had to swim for shore without a PFD when a boat sank, and another had a personal experience of a friend dying who was not wearing a PFD.

Inflatable PFDs were passed around for the hunters to examine. A couple of the hunters tried on the inflatable PFDs, but there were some difficulties with the design. To put on the PFD, the hunters required assistance from another focus group participant.

Those straps are flimsy. When it's dark and you want to get where you're going, trying to get your arms through those straps, it's like trying to get through a spider web.

See, it takes two people to get it on.

More importantly, the hunter was unable to latch the straps in the front of the PFD. The adult-sized inflatable PFD did not accommodate larger body builds. Since body weight might be a sensitive issue for many hunters, difficulty finding a PFD that fits could possibly discourage larger persons from using them.

I think some of the smaller guys would benefit from it [the inflatable PFD] more than me.

I'm the little guy out of my brothers (the PFD does not latch on the larger man). They'd look at this and throw it back in my face. It's a pain in the ass with all the gear on. I look stupid (because the PFD straps do not reach the whole way around him).

It says adult, but one size does not fit all.

Additionally, the inflatable PFD covered the torso where hunters would need to access their pockets.

This is thinner so it would be easier with a gun, but where this sits it's somewhat awkward because that's where you'd keep extra shells and stuff. With bib waders on, the vest hits at the wrong spot. The jacket should come down further.

Lastly, hunters who boat were concerned that an inflatable PFD might make it difficult to swim, since all the buoyancy would be on the front of the body. A complaint was made that an inflatable PFD that was tested made no difference due to other equipment on the person. Doubt

arose that a PFD would be helpful; Swimming without one might be better than “bobbing,” and additional weight from shotgun shells and extra clothing might make PFDs ineffective.

Hunters who boat were aware of boating accidents through the media but their mindset was that accidents happened to someone else. One individual had fallen overboard but made it to shore without a PFD, which seemed to increase his sense of invincibility. When statistics were shared that 90% of deaths probably could have been avoided if the hunter had worn a PFD, the hunters did not find it surprising.

You don't go out there to be safe, you go out there to hunt. Safety is an add-on.

I've been pitched out of my boat and made it to shore. [But] I've never had to do it in frigid waters. I have no idea what the survival on that would be, but I do know that the flotation device would not make it any warmer. I don't really know how to explain it. Sometimes I wear it but only under really choppy conditions. It's in my boat because it's a law.

It's not recreational boating, it's hunting. Duck hunters are using smaller boats too. But [the boat] it's just another tool.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

While anglers *were* surprised, hunters were not when presented with the number of fatalities related to lack of PFD use for their sport. Both groups supported laws for children to wear PFDs, but not for adults. The idea of government mandated PFD use showed very strong opposition to the idea of being told what to do regarding PFDs.

AWARENESS OF AND MESSAGES REGARDING THE USE OF PFDS

ANGLERS

According to the anglers who boat, there had been little or no public education regarding PFD use and boating safety.

I haven't heard anything on the news, and I'm part of a club that sends me magazines. They don't talk about flotation devices or boating deaths from accidents.

About the past year or so, I saw something in B.A.S.S. Magazine; they started pushing personal flotation devices.

Again it was mentioned that the television fishing shows rarely or never portray anglers wearing PFDs. These shows rarely endorse PFD use. It was suggested that role models positively showing the use of PFDs may encourage children to wear PFDs, regardless of parents' behaviors. In addition, these role models would reinforce PFD use previously encouraged by parents.

On a public access channel there is a Sunday morning fishing show, and they usually have well-known anglers in the area, and they never have vests on. So people see them doing it and think it's acceptable [not to wear PFDs] since they do it all the time. If you promote something on TV in an unsafe manner, other people will do it that way too.

HUNTERS

Although the statistics convinced hunters who boat that action should be taken, they remembered little if any positive advertising, publicity, or coverage on PFDs. The public service announcement on life preservers that had been seen on TV was "hazy" and was not directed to a specific audience. Hunters made a definite distinction between recreational boating and hunting. Their perception was that the public safety announcement on boating was not related to hunting.

The Missouri Water Patrol had a brief spot where they did a public service announcement on TV. But I wouldn't swear to that. [But it did not relate to hunting], it was just a general life preserver thing. It's real hazy; I can't even remember when I saw it.

You see these public safety things about boating but nothing directly related to hunting. There's not a person in this room that if they were doing something with their grandkids ... wouldn't have something [a PFD] on them [the grandkids]. But with hunters – there is a line between recreational and hunting.

It's on the front page of the paper every season how they're looking for some guy [who drowned], so it's brought to the forefront for us every year. I just think it doesn't really matter. (Moderator: Why is that?) When I'm out there, I'm the predator, not the prey, and so I'm invincible.

Hunters find it difficult to change set habits. Safety behaviors such as PFD use appear to evolve from a drowning or other bad experiences. None of the hunters recalled hearing negative publicity about PFDs.

They probably wouldn't call them life preservers if there were something bad about them.

At the same time, publicity encouraging the use of PFDs was also nonexistent. A hunter assisting with a recent instructional clinic on duck hunting remembered that PFDs had not been emphasized at all. In fact, the only mention of PFDs to the kids at the duck clinic was that PFDs had to be in the boat.

This time of year you get catalogue after catalogue, and I can't say that PFDs were featured in any of them.

We just had a duck clinic two weekends ago. In the course of two days, as I recall, all I remember mentioning was that they had to have a personal flotation device in the boat. We never stressed that they wear it. We didn't give our opinions as far as sitting on them or anything like that. There was no emphasis on it whatsoever. Although I'll make sure that's changed in the future.

Suggestions were made to incorporate a PFD as part of a warm hunting jacket and to make it part of the gear. Although the expense of such a coat might deter some from purchasing it, money spent on hunting equipment might be redistributed to allow for such a purchase.

It would be so much easier if someone would design a warm hunting jacket that could be a flotation device.

They'd [hunters] rather spend \$150 on a decoy than a vest.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

Media messages stressing the importance of PFDs were seldom seen by anglers who boat or hunters who boat. Few hunters or anglers clearly remembered publicity they had seen on boating safety. While safety ads directed to a general boating audience may reach anglers who boat, hunters who boat do not consider themselves recreational boaters and, therefore, are not as likely to listen to those same messages. Both hunters and anglers stressed the importance of professionals and role models endorsing and using PFDs.

REACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TO SPECIFIC MESSAGES

Through the collaboration of Responsive Management and BOATU.S., six specific messages were identified as potential messages for boating safety and PFD use. The following messages were read to participants in both focus groups.

- *PFDs are more comfortable and less obtrusive now than they use to be. They don't get in your way.*
- *Drowning is a real possibility. If you don't wear a PFD, you could die.*
- *You may not want to wear a PFD, but it is your responsibility to your family to keep yourself safe.*
- *It is not a sign of weakness to wear a PFD.*
- *Wearing a PFD is a smart thing to do.*
- *A PFD is good life insurance.*

Responses to each of the messages are included. Anglers' and hunters' reactions have been separately noted to differentiate between the two target audiences.

- **PFDS are more comfortable and less obtrusive now than they use to be. They don't get in your way.**

ANGLERS

This statement did not elicit a positive response because it seemed to conflict with PFD experiences. Ski vest designs are possibly more comfortable to anglers who boat, but it was suggested that the more comfortable PFDs are most likely expensive. Anglers who do not own the boat from which they fish or who fish only occasionally may be less likely to purchase a more expensive and comfortable PFD.

Right now I don't own a boat, so I have to use what other people have on the boat. And I know I'm not going to spend a bunch of money on something I don't use much.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat did not have any specific comments regarding this message. However, earlier in the focus group, the hunters made it clear that PFDs were still uncomfortable and restricted their movements.

- **Drowning is a real possibility. If you don't wear a PFD, you could die.**

ANGLERS

This message received no reaction from anglers who boat. Their lack of response possibly related to their confidence that an accident would not happen to them. For others, drowning is a reality, but the chance of drowning would not change the anglers' actions.

Yes [it is a possibility], but I just don't wear it.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat responded to this message moderately well. However, the statement did not counteract their attitude of invincibility.

Well, had we not lost a friend, we probably would be sitting on our life jackets.

I would say that although we've had some very close calls, nothing has really changed for us, that's the way it's always been. Change is a difficult thing when you've done this all your life.

I think the [message] that indicates this may save your life is what needs to be conveyed.

- **You may not want to wear a PFD, but it is your responsibility to your family to keep yourself safe.**

ANGLERS

This message would encourage anglers who boat to wear PFDs. This was a powerful message because people cared about their children and wanted to see them grow up. For the

sake of their children particularly, anglers would be persuaded to wear a PFD. However, PFD use would still be influenced by situational factors, such as bad weather or boat traffic.

That would be a powerful message for me because I really care about my kids. That would persuade me to wear one [a PFD] more. I'd wear it for my kids. I want to be around for my kids. I have a lot I want to tell them and teach them. If it would help me be around, I'd do that.

I'd wear one [a PFD] for the importance of being there for the kids. But if you're in traffic, it [going overboard] usually happens when there are more boats around. If you're alone in a cove, chances of going overboard is low.

HUNTERS

This statement regarding family responsibility had positive responses from hunters who boat. Hunters were more likely to be cautious about their safety out of concern for their family.

Everyone is going to be affected by who falls out of the boat and drowns. I think one of the ways to solve it is to impress upon the boat owner or the person operating the boat that the boat doesn't leave the dock or the put in unless everyone puts on a life vest.

I think [the motivation to save your life is due to the] responsibility to your family. I equate wearing a PFD to wearing a seat belt—because my family depends on me.

- **It is not a sign of weakness to wear a PFD.**

ANGLERS

Anglers who boat did not feel this was an issue. However, peer pressure and caring about what people think of an individual not wearing a PFD might persuade an angler to wear a PFD.

They must think I'm just an idiot if I don't wear it [a PFD]. Peer pressure not on the macho issue, but most aren't ignorant enough to think, I'm the only one out of 60 that doesn't need to wear one. It's smart to do.

Because of peer pressure; I'd want to fit in. (Moderator: Peer pressure because everyone else is [wearing a PFD], or peer pressure because it's a dangerous situation?) It must be dangerous.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat did not have specific comments regarding this message.

- **Wearing a PFD is a smart thing to do.**

ANGLERS

Anglers who boat agreed with the statement that wearing a PFD is a smart thing to do.

Better for you to be smart and wear a life jacket, and then [present] some facts showing me how it's helped situations and what death rates are of people not wearing them.

HUNTERS

Hunters agreed with the statement that wearing a PFD is a smart thing to do.

After a discussion like this—it would be stupid not to wear them [PFDs]. It's moving it's way up on the priority list.

- **A PFD is good life insurance.**

ANGLERS

This message elicited little response from the anglers who boat.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat responded well to the message that PFDs were good life insurance. Based on these responses, developing a campaign stressing PFDs as a type of life insurance for your family could be successful in increasing PFD use.

I think the insurance would probably motivate me more than anything. It would ensure [that I could] see my grandkids when they got older. What brought me to even start wearing them was the sinking of my boat. Thirty feet was a long ways when I had all my gear on and my stuff was floating down the river. [I thought that] if I had that on, I wouldn't be fighting this current like I am.

When I get on boats, everyone, the little kids including the adults, has on their life jackets. Anytime, someone could go over. If you have that respect for the water toward recreational boating, it should be like that during hunting.

- **Other Comments About Specific Messages**

ANGLERS

Some messages resonated more strongly with anglers who boat than others. The messages that received the best reaction would remind anglers to wear PFDs out of responsibility to their family. Furthermore, all messages relating to PFD use should emphasize that wearing PFDs is the “right thing” to do. Having role models/professional anglers and advertisers would help drive home the point.

I think everyone out on the water should have a PFD on. So everyone out on the water says you should have one. How better else to set the example? It can't just be one group or another; everyone has to agree and say this is what we do out on the water, this is what you should do out on the water.

It needs to be apparent, even if it's not an ad for boating safety. The ad could be selling fishing lures, but if the guy in the ad is wearing a life vest, that's going to start to wear on you.

HUNTERS

The hunters who boat thought all of the six tested messages were effective and solid reasons to wear a PFD. In addition, a suggestion was made to contrast the use of PFDs in the summer and winter. Hunters observed that most PFD use was in the summer, although PFD use would be even more critical in the winter. Messages that should be promoted would state PFDs can save your life and stress that the boat owner or operator should demand that everyone wears a PFD.

I would say there seems to be a difference between recreational boating and guys that use the boat to hunt. It's not my fault; it's just the way it is.

Well, if you can build a case to get people to wear them in July, there's a lot more reason to wear them in November. The conditions you're operating in, the temperature especially, and the way you're dressed and everything else: it should be a bigger incentive. You could build a campaign by contrasting [PFD use in winter and summer]. People wear them in the summer months but fail to in the winter.

I think any of them [the messages] are good. It's just individuals will pick one. They are all solid reasons.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND INFORMATION CREDIBILITY

Anglers and hunters who boat were asked who would be the most influential in delivering messages encouraging PFD use. Several sources of information were presented for the focus group participants to consider: the Coast Guard, BOATU.S., state fish and wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North American Hunter/North American Outdoor Group, Ducks Unlimited, the NRA, their wife, their children, or a hunting partner, were all possible sources of information.

ANGLERS

The messages to which the anglers positively responded would be most persuasive coming from the owner of the boat or from another angler. It is important to note that while the owner of the boat may not feel he or she had the right to make someone wear a PFD, he or she did feel an obligation to keep the passengers safe. Interestingly, while boat owners did not feel comfortable mandating the use of PFDs in their boat, anglers would wear a PFD if the boat owner required it. In addition, anglers felt that the message would be effective coming from another angler.

[As a boat owner] I can't tell them [that they have to wear a PFD]; well, I couldn't tell them that they have to wear it, but I'd definitely tell them they should.

If you want to get a message to someone, you have to know your audience. And who knows anglers better than another angler?

Since it affects anglers, if it's going to be in an advertisement, I think it should be those people who are affected.

HUNTERS

For hunters, the sources that would most effectively convey these messages were conservation organizations, such as Ducks Unlimited. Such promotion by conservation organizations would increase the likelihood that hunters who boat would pay attention to the ad.

I would be more likely to pay attention if an ad came on TV from the conservation department or Ducks Unlimited. Messages from the Coast Guard... I don't consider them a big factor in my life.

State organizations delivering messages would not be as strong as messages from conservation organizations, but would be more credible than national agencies. The hunters

agreed that the strongest message would be delivered through portraying a family that lost a hunter to an accident.

If you wanted something that was hard-hitting and that would hit close to home, you should have a campaign or a commercial or something where it shows the woman going to the door and an official come up to the door and say, "Ma'am your husband's not coming home today... we found his boat overturned." I think that would be a really powerful commercial.

There are a lot of the outdoor shows on TV... They are hitting the select audiences... But through the outdoor shows and magazines, they're hitting us.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

Hunters who boat seemed to be most likely persuaded to wear a PFD by family or conservation organizations. Anglers who boat appeared to be persuaded to wear PFDs by the owner of the boat and by another angler. Although anglers did not mention family specifically as a source that would convince them to wear PFDs, previous discussion suggest family would also be an effective source of these messages.

ATTITUDES AND SUGGESTIONS REGARDING PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

- **Orange Notice Sign**

Anglers who boat and hunters who boat were shown an 11x17 plastic orange sign with a large heading across the top, "NOTICE," with three subheadings of "If you use a boat," "Anglers," and "Hunters" and information pertaining to each under the appropriate subheading. The bottom of the notice contained logos of fishing, hunting, and boating organizations supporting the notice. Appearing above the logos was the statement, "Each year over ninety

percent of all sportsmen who die on the water were not wearing a Life Jacket. WEAR YOUR JACKET! The life you save may be your own.”

ANGLERS

Anglers who boat had divided opinions on the orange notice sign. Some said it would receive attention due to the bright orange color. However, those same anglers admitted that they would not actually read the sign. Not reading the sign was attributed to the small print and large amount of text.

The color would get your attention,[but] the print is so small people won't take time to read it.

It's too much to read.

The individual who indicated that he would have read this sign stressed that it probably would not have changed his behavior. Another explained that this sign would be ineffective for him because he does not pay attention to all the things that are posted. Although they provided different reasons, anglers were in agreement that a notice sign would not be the most effective manner to encourage PFD use.

I don't pay attention to all the things posted. People coming up to me and telling me personally, you're going to listen to that more. If you have to sign in someplace to launch your boat [and] they tell you have to wear your life jacket, I would be more likely to listen to that than a sign.

It would be children that would read it, not adults.

I'd read it, but I don't think it would affect my behavior.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat concluded that the orange notice sign would not influence their boating practices. The reasons they gave for not reading it were that, it stated information that they already knew, and that it had too many words on it. They joked that the sign would probably be used to sight rifles.

It [the notice] would be good for target practice.

This [notice] would last about 3 seconds.

Yeah, you could use it to sight in a rifle.

If it were posted at a put in, I probably wouldn't look at it.

If someone did read the sign, chances were high that he would not read all the way to the bottom to the main message of “wear your jacket.”

I think there's too much wording on here. Something simpler would be more effective.

Looking over this, right here at the bottom where it says, “Wear Your Jacket,” and it's got great big letters on here that says it's a notice, well we know it's a notice. Why not put “Wear your jacket,” up there instead and then something else? No one's going to get down the sign to that; they'll stop reading by then. And it just says it requires you to have them in the boat, not to wear them.

I wouldn't give that 2 seconds. I'd see that notice and be like, “Oh man, more new rules.”

One hunter stated that he would read a notice such as this, but only if it were posted on the board with other regulations.

Any area I go to, I check the board because regulations are always changing. Especially if it's an area I'm not familiar with. If you don't read it, you get in trouble because every place the rules are different. But if it was tacked on a pole, I'd walk right by it.

Suggestions to improve the sign included replacing “NOTICE” at the top with “Wear Your Jacket,” or having the message come from a child’s perspective on losing a father.

Put a picture of a boy on there with, “Why didn’t Dad wear a life jacket?” That would probably catch more of an eye.

We’re bright people. You’re telling us something we already know.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

While the color of the sign made it easy to see, both anglers and hunters who boat felt the notice signs would be ineffective due to the small print and the fact that it would not be read. In both the hunter and angler group, there was an individual who would read it, but these individuals would not change their safety practices because of the notice.

- **Most Anglers Wouldn’t Be Caught Dead in a Life Jacket**
- **Most Hunters Wouldn’t Be Caught Dead in a Life Jacket**

This advertisement was printed on a standard 8½x11 sheet of paper. The use of the word “hunter” or “angler” in the message corresponded to the audience to which it was shown. Across the top was the message in large print, “Most Anglers Wouldn’t Be Caught Dead In A Life Jacket” or “Most Hunters Wouldn’t Be Caught Dead In A Life Jacket.” Underneath that statement was a gender-neutral, computer-generated image of an angler or hunter floating face down in water. Directly below the picture was the statement, “Each year over 90% of all sportsmen who die on the water weren’t wearing a life jacket. Wear your life jacket! The life you save may be your own. It’s Your Life. Wear The Jacket.” Across the bottom were fishing, hunting, and boating logos supporting the ad.

ANGLERS

The message, “Most anglers wouldn’t be caught dead in a life jacket,” was too negative for anglers. The use of reverse psychology with “Most anglers wouldn’t be caught dead without a life jacket” was suggested. However, even the revised message would not necessarily convince anglers who boat to wear a PFD.

[It is] too negative.

I definitely don’t want to be dead.

I think it’s pretty powerful.

Too much for me.

I think it would be better to use reverse psychology. Most anglers wouldn’t be caught dead without a life jacket.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat responded positively to, “Most hunters wouldn’t be caught dead in a life jacket,” because the message was easily conveyed to the audience.

I should take this along to show my brothers.

You don’t really have to read it.

It makes you read it to figure out what they’re talking about.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

This ad had slight differences in the picture and word choice, since it corresponded to different sports, but the messages were almost identical. Hunters and anglers who boat

responded with opposite opinions to this ad. Hunters found it effective whereas anglers found it too negative to be convincing.

- **Save Yourself For the Ones You Love**

This advertisement was printed on a standard 8½x11 sheet of paper. Across the top was the message in large print, “Save Yourself For The Ones You Love.” Underneath that statement was a picture of three fish. Directly below the picture was the statement, “Each year over 90% of all sportsmen who die on the water weren’t wearing a life jacket. Wear your life jacket! The life you save may be your own. It’s Your Life. Wear The Jacket.” Across the bottom were fishing, hunting, and boating logos supporting the ad.

ANGLERS

The anglers who boat reacted to, “Save yourself for the ones you love” positively. The anglers observed the double implication of self-preservation for family, and to continue fishing. Yet on this ad, the message that generated the most discussion was, “It’s Your Life. Wear The Jacket.” In comparison, “It’s Your Life. Wear The Jacket,” was a more powerful message to the anglers than “Save Yourself For The Ones You Love.”

I like, “It’s Your Life. Wear The Jacket.” (Moderator: That’s more powerful?) Yes.

I still like, “It’s Your Life. Wear The Jacket.” because that gets straight to the point.

I like this one. As Americans, we value our life. You never know when you’re going to be in an accident. So it is a powerful message for me.

- **Real Anglers Don't Swim With the Fishes**

This advertisement was printed on a standard 8½x11 sheet of paper. Across the top was the message in large print, “Real Anglers Don't Swim With The Fishes.” Underneath that message was a computer-generated image of a hand sticking up out of the water holding onto the base of a fishing pole. Directly below the picture was the statement, “Each year over 90% of all sportsmen who die on the water weren't wearing a life jacket. Wear your life jacket! The life you save may be your own. It's Your Life. Wear The Jacket.” Across the bottom were logos of various organizations who supported the ad.

ANGLERS

The ad, “Real Anglers Don't Swim With The Fishes,” did not strongly convey the importance of PFDs to anglers who boat. This statement appears to reinforce the anglers' mindset that they are not going to need a PFD because accidents will not happen to them.

This ad, it wouldn't tell me to wear my life jacket. Because most people would just read the big print first and not the small print.

I think that's counter productive. Real anglers don't swim with the fishes. Because I'm thinking I'm a real angler and I won't go in the water because that's not going to happen to me.

- **Sitting Ducks**

This advertisement was printed on a standard 8½x11 sheet of paper. Across the top was the message in large print, “Sitting Ducks?” Underneath that statement was a computer-generated graphic of a man and a gender-neutral person sitting back to back in a boat holding rifles. Directly under the graphic was the answer, “Not If They're Wearing Life Jackets.” Under that in smaller print was the statement, “Each year over 90% of all sportsmen who die on

the water weren't wearing a life jacket. Wear your life jacket! The life you save may be your own. It's Your Life. Wear The Jacket." Across the bottom were logos of various organizations who supported the ad.

HUNTERS

Hunters who boat responded favorably to the "Sitting Ducks" advertisement because it captured their attention and held it. In addition, the theme in the middle of the page and the self-explanatory nature increased the influence of the ad. According to one hunter, this would be an effective advertisement in a magazine.

Sure, this is much more effective [than the other messages].

This would make a good page in a DU [Ducks Unlimited] magazine.

The theme is right there in the middle so you're eyes hit it. It's much more effective because you don't have to really read it.

I think it would have much more effectiveness than the orange notice sign. This catches your eye immediately. You know exactly what it's saying. They could even flash this on a TV show before an advertisement.

- **Brochures**

Four brochures were shown to hunters and anglers who boat. Two were designed like small booklets and would be attached to PFDs about the features of specific PFDs. The other two brochures were standard 8½x11 folded into thirds. One brochure targeted sportsmen who hunt and boat and included statistical information inside while the other brochure explained choices and available models of life jackets.

ANGLERS

When asked for their opinion on brochures, the anglers were evenly divided. Some would take brochures and read them while others would not. Statistics and factual information presented in the brochure were more likely to increase the chance of the brochure being read.

Some people read them and some people don't. Even for health conditions that are life and death, people won't always read them.

HUNTERS

According to the hunters in the focus group, brochures would not be the most effective medium to present PFD information to hunters. Thoughts were expressed that few people would pick them up and fewer would actually read them. The hunters stated that the only place brochures would be helpful to hunters would be near life jacket displays. The information in brochures could assist people interested in purchasing PFDs. According to hunters, brochures are more likely to be read if they are simple and straightforward.

I think they'd be sitting on the counter and they'd end up with a big stack of them at the end of the year.

Personally I'm not a brochure reader unless it was really simple and straightforward. This would be something I'd give to a child, but I don't think I'd pick this up and actually study it.

When I go up to pay for my stuff, this would be the last thing I'd pick up.

Maybe it would be good to put near life jackets to see what the advantage of them are.

I think the brochures have too much verbiage just like the orange notice. You need something that stands out. Those [sitting ducks and hunters wouldn't be caught dead ads] accomplish that.

I think posting them near where people are looking to buy life jackets would be good.

This is the sort of thing you go to a hunting or boating convention, it's in the bag and you never look at it again.

- **Video # 1 – Tackle box and dredging hook.**

A thirty second commercial was shown to anglers and hunters. In the video, lures are being tossed into an open tackle box and statistics are given regarding the number of fish caught with each type of lure. The commercial ends with a statistic of how many fishermen were pulled out with a dredging hook, and the hook is dropped into the tackle box. The large hook hitting the metal tackle box knocks out the sinkers and lures previously in the box and produces a loud noise.

ANGLERS

Anglers all understood that something bad was about to happen as the PSA reached its climax, and they all understood the symbolism and emotional point of the video, however some were confused why the large “anchor” was dropped in the tackle box. One focus group member explained that the device was a dredging hook used to pull out dead bodies. There was almost no further discussion on the video. However, anglers understood that the hook falling was a bad image and responded emotionally to the video. Nonverbal communication indicated that they were very uncomfortable with the video. It can be inferred that the video clip was so powerful that no one had comments, it was too uncomfortable to discuss, or lack of previous knowledge on dredging hooks made the clip less effective.

I don't see what the anchor is for. {Another angler: That wasn't an anchor.} What was it? {That was a dredging hook.} Oh, like to pull out bodies with? (Sigh).

HUNTERS

Hunters considered the video effective.

That's a good quick little promo for a TV show. If you notice on the fishing shows, they never have the vests on.

I think that film is pretty hard hitting.

I think that it's [the video] pretty effective.

- **Video # 2 – Ducks float. Duck hunters don't.**

Another 30-second PSA was shown to both anglers and hunters who boat. Suspenseful music played throughout the video. The video began half above and half under water, but quickly the camera perspective was looking up to the water's surface from under water, simulating what it would feel like to be sinking and drowning. As the video continued, the bottom of a small boat floated above, and a dog paddled around the boat. The dog and the boat got smaller due to the camera sinking down deeper in the water. Large air bubbles rose to the surface and a voice said, "Ducks float. Duck hunters don't."

ANGLERS

The second PSA may or may not be likely to encourage anglers who boat to wear PFDs. One individual said it would persuade them because it made them realize that they do not want what occurs in the video to happen to them. On the other hand, some anglers hinted that this commercial would not influence anglers' PFD practices. However, anglers were visibly uncomfortable with the video.

I think that would push me over because I think, man, I don't want to do that.

The more exposure, the more it brings it forefront to my mind. I don't see doing it for myself because I have the confidence in myself. The only way I can see right now to convince me right now is the peer image: that I might harm a child because I'm not setting a good example. As for me dying; I know it could happen, but I don't have that fear.

I don't think it's going to happen over night, just like drunk driving [awareness] or wearing seat belts. It's a very hard sale at the beginning. But now, no matter who gets in my car, I make them buckle up. I could get sued if anyone gets hurt.

I don't want his point to get lost: I would feel much better as a boater if I knew everyone out on the water driving a boat had attended a boater's safety course.

I think Maryland requires a boat driver to be a certain age. I would even go so far to say you need a license to drive a boat.

HUNTERS

The second PSA had not even finished playing when the hunters began talking about how the clip captured their attention. The hunters thought the dog swimming around the boat without his master was powerful. This strength of the image of the dog may stem from the fact that there is a strong family-like bond between many hunters and their dogs. The PSA may have elicited emotions related to having both jeopardized and “abandoned” an animal that was “family” and that depended on the drowning hunter. The video caused nervous joking and distressed nonverbal cues were noted. Although the hunters rated it as a very good video, they were critical that the tape only said to bring a life jacket. According to the hunters, for the tape to be more effective, it should stress wearing a PFD.

(While video is still playing.) Good one. That already is an attention grabber.

I was just thinking that [it is an attention grabber].

It's like a jaws theme in the background.

Right from the beginning you want to watch it.

But that says, “Bring your life jacket.”

It should say wear it.

We know it's a law to bring it, but it's not a law to wear it.

Hunters who boat felt that promotional efforts should be short, simple, and easily understood. Pictures provided a stronger message and caused an emotional response that increased the influence of the message. No matter what the form, the message must stress wearing the life jacket rather than just having a PFD in the boat.

Out of all the promotional materials presented, the hunters preferred the video clips. The hunters reasoned the videos would get more attention because people were already paying attention to the TV show. Furthermore, the second video clip put the hunter in the situation of drowning and demanded attention of the viewer. Even the background music complimented the message and elicited a positive response.

I think the commercials [videos] are powerful.

I think the marketing is more to the boaters than the hunters, and they should change that up a little bit.

These videos would catch my attention faster than any brochures or little signs in magazines. Because I'm already tuned into that show. That clip is still running through my mind.

Make something short, simple, and to the point. And say it – "Don't just have the life jacket in the boat – wear it."

I'm there – I just got to convince my brothers. I could show them that [second] video.

COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

Both hunters and anglers found the videos effective, but they made both groups rather uncomfortable. It seems likely that this discomfort exposes the Achilles heel to hunters' and

anglers' hardened defenses against PFD use. This weakness explains much about the mystery of PFD non-use, and also holds the potential to stimulate action by those who need PFDs most.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Summary of the Facts

Anglers who boat and hunters who boat are aware of dangers, in general, while boating. Hunters who boat appear to pay little attention to safety messages directed toward recreational boaters or toward a general boating audience. This appears to be because many hunters who boat do not consider themselves recreational boaters. Hunters who boat need to be targeted as a specific audience to ensure that they hear PFD messages.

For both anglers who boat and hunters who boat, the best source of the message appears to be family members, especially children. Anglers felt another angler and the owner of the boat would be persuasive spokespersons. The owner of the boat or the operator of the boat has the authority to require persons in the boat to wear PFDs, according to anglers. It is important to note, however, that anglers who are boat owners did not feel comfortable demanding PFD use of everyone on their boat. Convincing boat owners that PFD use on their boat is their responsibility would be an important component of a communications program on increasing the use of PFDs.

While both anglers and hunters who boat regarded a law mandating the use of PFDs negatively, both groups were very positive about campaigns that endorsed hunters and anglers to wear PFDs while boating. Furthermore, hunting and fishing professionals and role models demonstrating PFD use could promote and increase the use of PFDs. Since these individuals are rarely seen wearing PFDs on TV shows and elsewhere, they send the implicit message that PFD non-use is not only “O.K.,” but perhaps is even a symbol of experience and status in the sport.

Only actual personal experiences with boating accidents that resulted in a death influenced anglers who boat and hunters who boat to seriously reevaluate their boating safety practices and

use of PFDS. One of the main reasons both anglers and hunters who boat do not wear PFDS is because they doubt they will be involved in an accident. Most felt an aura of invincibility. Witnessing an accident or losing a friend appears to eliminate feelings of invincibility and it leads to behavior changes such as PFD use. For hunters who boat and anglers who boat, “close calls” are not enough to change behavior. It might even be argued that a close call may embolden participants.

Anglers and hunters who boat both indicated that lack of comfort was an important factor in why they did not use PFDS more frequently. Anglers complained of the bulky design, and hunters mentioned the difficulty of putting on a PFD over multiple layers of warm clothing. As demonstrated during the hunters’ focus group, the adult-size inflatable PFD did not fit a larger sized person. Furthermore, when hunters and anglers wear a PFD, motions needed for hunting and fishing are restricted, and accessing items in pockets under the PFD is awkward. Hunters suggested that manufacturers make a warm coat with a PFD inside. Redesigning PFDS to be functional for specialized sports, responding to comfort concerns, and designing PFDS to fit larger persons would compliment campaigns to increase positive attitudes toward the use of PFDS.

Interpretation

All of the hunters and anglers in the focus groups agreed that wearing a PFD was a good idea and all supported a campaign to educate hunters and anglers about the importance of wearing one. Ironically, few wore a PFD and identified reason after reason why they did not wear one. It is not so strange that anglers and hunters who boat, even those who know PFDS are beneficial, won’t wear them considering that they live in a society where:

- PFD use is not important enough to be a law
- PFD use is a symbol of childhood and inexperience because:
 - When you get good enough at the sport you don't need a PFD - (Professionals Don't Wear Them)
 - When you become famous you don't need a PFD - (Television Personalities Don't Wear Them)
 - When you grow up you don't need a PFD - (Parents Don't Wear Them)

The relationship that anglers and hunters who boat seem to have with PFDs is clear.

These sportsmen almost universally admitted that PFDs were beneficial, yet few wore them.

“They probably wouldn't call them life preservers if there were something bad about them..”

said one focus group participant.

This break between their opinions and their behaviors was uncomfortable for them. This discomfort could be seen in the many excuses anglers and hunters who boat made for not using PFDs, the defiant reaction to the discussion about being made to wear PFDs, and the underlying sense that they “wanted/needed” some negative event to help them resolve this tension.

This tension is known as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance is a phenomenon caused by the stress of having beliefs and actions that are contradictory.

Hunters and anglers who boat showed a remarkable list of reasons not to wear a device that most admitted could save them. Their level of defense escalated proportionally with attempts at persuasion. For instance, when the institution of mandatory PFD use became a topic in the hunter group, one man indicated that he would be sure NOT to wear a PFD if they were required. Similarly, the hunter group, who had admitted having had several close calls, and frequent need to boat under poor conditions, made the greatest variety of excuses to not use

PFDS. PFD use *touched a nerve*, and the stronger the admonition to PFD use, the stronger the defenses were, by the anglers and hunters, against being made to wear them.

The juxtaposition of PFD disuse with an admitted knowledge that PFDS are, at very least, a good idea, appeared to have placed these boaters in the awkward position of having to defend something that they “know” is wrong.

From one angle, this problem seems to be a “keyless lock.” Efforts to convince anglers and hunters to use PFDS lead them to resist PFD use. Fortunately, this is a lock that lends itself to “picking.” Facts are not the key. The facts, even among the least informed participants, seem to be clear: PFD use is a good idea. “Feeling,” not fact, is the key. They “know” it is wrong to not wear a PFD, but they do not “feel” it is wrong. The amazing defense they showed against a logically indefensible position created by their own dissonance appeared changeable only when faced by information from another “channel,” emotion.

In the face of an emotional, tragic event, one individual from the hunter group had been moved to wear a PFD. The emotional impact of losing a fellow hunter to drowning short-circuited the endless loop of facts and refutations. The bleak sense of loss lead to change.

In both focus groups, two public service announcement (PSA) videos were shown. Both were intended to stimulate PFD use by presenting images and facts. In one PSA a hunter is shown drowning due to lack of a PFD, in another anglers are shown a series of lures used to catch different fish but concluded by showing a dredging hook used to “catch” all the anglers who drown every year. Both videos coupled captivating, emotional images with yearly fatality statistics.

Those videos had a large impact on their intended audiences. They provided a key: a “needed” bad experience in proxy. The tension in the hunters and anglers who boated between

their thoughts and behaviors lean to a feeling that they “wanted” something to make them change. Those ads provided that experience in the best possible way, vicariously.

Both groups, regardless of statements and interpretation to the contrary after the viewing, were visibly rattled by the PSAs. Body language showed the focus group participants pressed back deeply into their chairs as if to escape what they were seeing. They were visibly uncomfortable.

Hunters and anglers who boat do not see their mortality in the realm of the “real.” It is not a comfortable thought. They avoid it. These PSAs gave them the key, the emotional “feel” they needed. These emotional PSAs “short-circuited” their endless loop of flawed logic. Repeated use of these unsettling, emotional PSAs seems sensible considering the reactions to them in the focus groups. Also, it may make sense to “re-elicite” these emotions at docks as a visual cue with a recognizable image from the ads to remind hunters and anglers the importance of the decision that they are about to make. One focus group participant said it best:

I think I would want a combination of the commercials and see a sign posted when I go a week later.

Future Directions

Based on these focus groups, a campaign to increase the likelihood of hunters and anglers who boat to wear a PFD would include the consistent use of emotion, possibly from a child or fellow angler or hunter, showing that hunters and anglers who boat are not invincible. For instance, a PSA where a child is shown stating “My daddy didn’t think he needed to use a PFD, but now he is dead.”

Perhaps even more wrenching and effective would be the same message above along with images of the child, even after the death of the child’s father, still trying to emulate her/his

father by not using a PFD either. For best impact, these messages should run in magazines and on television (during hunting and fishing shows), and then be reinforced on docks and put ins with the same, recognizable, consistent image and message. Repetition and emotion are important components of a successful campaign.

The boating community should also work on increasing the use of PFDs by having hunting and angling television personalities and other publicly visible representatives and personalities in the sport model PFD use. Public representatives of the sport, especially those who are highly esteemed by their peers, set the tone for appropriate sport behavior through the examples they set. They should set the right example.

The boating community should also strive to make PFDs more comfortable and more utilitarian for hunters and anglers who boat. Finally, boating messages must be tailored so they specifically target hunters who boat and anglers who boat, because most hunters who boat and many anglers who boat do not consider themselves primarily as boaters.

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