

# Philadelphia Puerto Ricans' Interpretations of Warning Labels in Cigarette Advertising

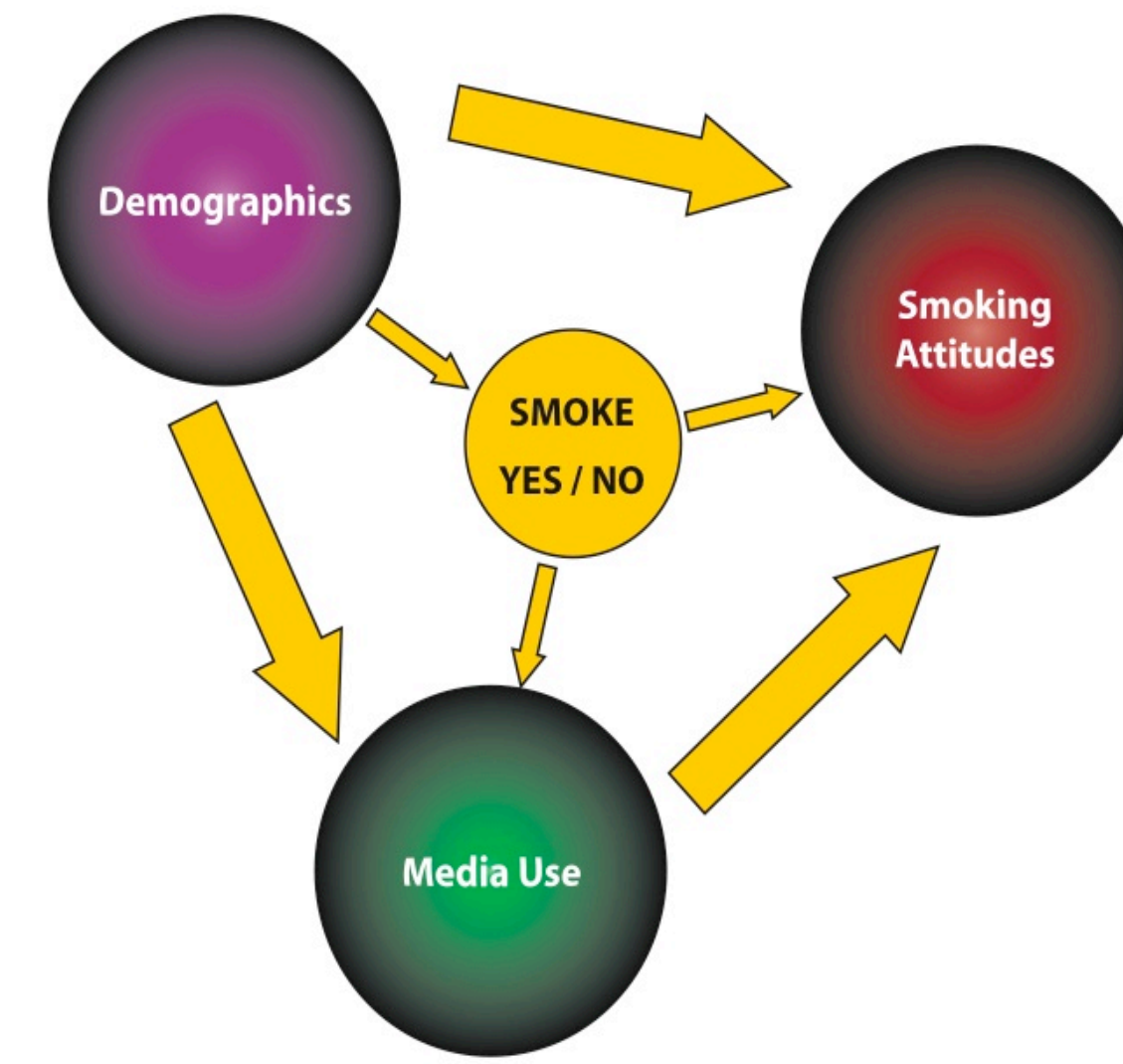
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## Overall Study Design

### Purposes

To examine the relationship between smoking behaviors/attitudes and media use of North Philadelphia Puerto Ricans

To test whether media literacy questioning can activate critical thinking about representation of tobacco in the media



Sample demographics (N=141)	
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	53 %
Female	47 %
<b>Age</b>	
9 - 12	16 %
13 - 19	30 %
20 - 35	18 %
36 - 50	21 %
>50	14 %
<b>Primary language spoken in household</b>	
Spanish	48 %
English	16 %
Spanish/English the same	37 %
<b>Education</b>	
Last grade completed (of respondents over 18 years old N=75)	
Grade 1 - 6	19 %
Grade 7 - 9	15 %
Grade 10 - 12	51 %
Some college	9 %
College degree	5 %
<b>Place of birth</b>	
U.S. mainland	37 %
Puerto Rico	54 %
Other	8 % (12 individuals, 11 of them born elsewhere in Latin America)
<b>Place of birth by age (% born in U.S.)</b>	
Age 18 and under	59 %
Over age 18:	19 %

### Method: In-home interviews

Interviewing took place between April and August 2005.

Individual questionnaires gathered demographic data and quantifiable views about smoking prevalence and behaviors of each family member.

Focus group interviews gathered qualitative data on interpretations of media materials concerning smoking.

### Sample

Availability sample of 36 Latino families (141 individuals) recruited from the area of Philadelphia with the greatest concentration of Latinos. See table at left for more comprehensive demographic information.

## Warning Labels: Reactions and Interpretations

In 36 group interviews, 24 offered unprompted comments on the warning labels in the Kool and Virginia Slims magazine advertisements shown.

Below are key categories and examples of statements regarding the warning labels or their contribution to the meaning of the advertisement as a whole.

### Balance

Participants in 11 groups viewed the warning label as a counterpoint to the sales message of the advertisement, leading to evaluations of the ads as fair representations of smoking.

*I think that the ad is completely well-organized. It tells you to use cigarettes, but it also warns you that cigarettes cause cancer and that they are bad for your health.* (Kool)

*I think all the information is complete. It says everything. . . it warns you and tells you what they had to say, what they wanted to express.* (Virginia Slims)

*[In response to the interviewer's question, "Do you think that children and teenagers are affected by this (ad)?"] No, because the surgeon's warning is there, it's on the paper.* (Virginia Slims)

### Missed

Two participants completely failed to notice the warning label.

*I think they should put a warning sign, you know?* (Kool)

### Inadequate

Participants in 11 families criticized the warning label for being too small, or otherwise inadequate.

*. . . the warnings are often colorless, so that they don't attract your attention.* (Kool)

*The warning is really small there. It's not noticed. You notice everything else more.* (Virginia Slims)



This ad ran in the December 1999 issue of *Glamour en Espanol*. The text says "I can say everything without speaking a word. Virgia Slims: Find your truth." The label warns that cigarette smoke contains carbon monoxide.

### Anti-Smoking

Participants in 8 groups interpreted the advertisement as a whole as having a generally anti-smoking message.

*It's so we don't smoke them. This is an ad so that people don't use cigarettes.* (Kool)

*For me this is a warning . . . about the damage that cigarettes cause. . . Because it says that she can say it all without saying a word. . . advertising of the damage that cigarettes cause.* (Virginia Slims)

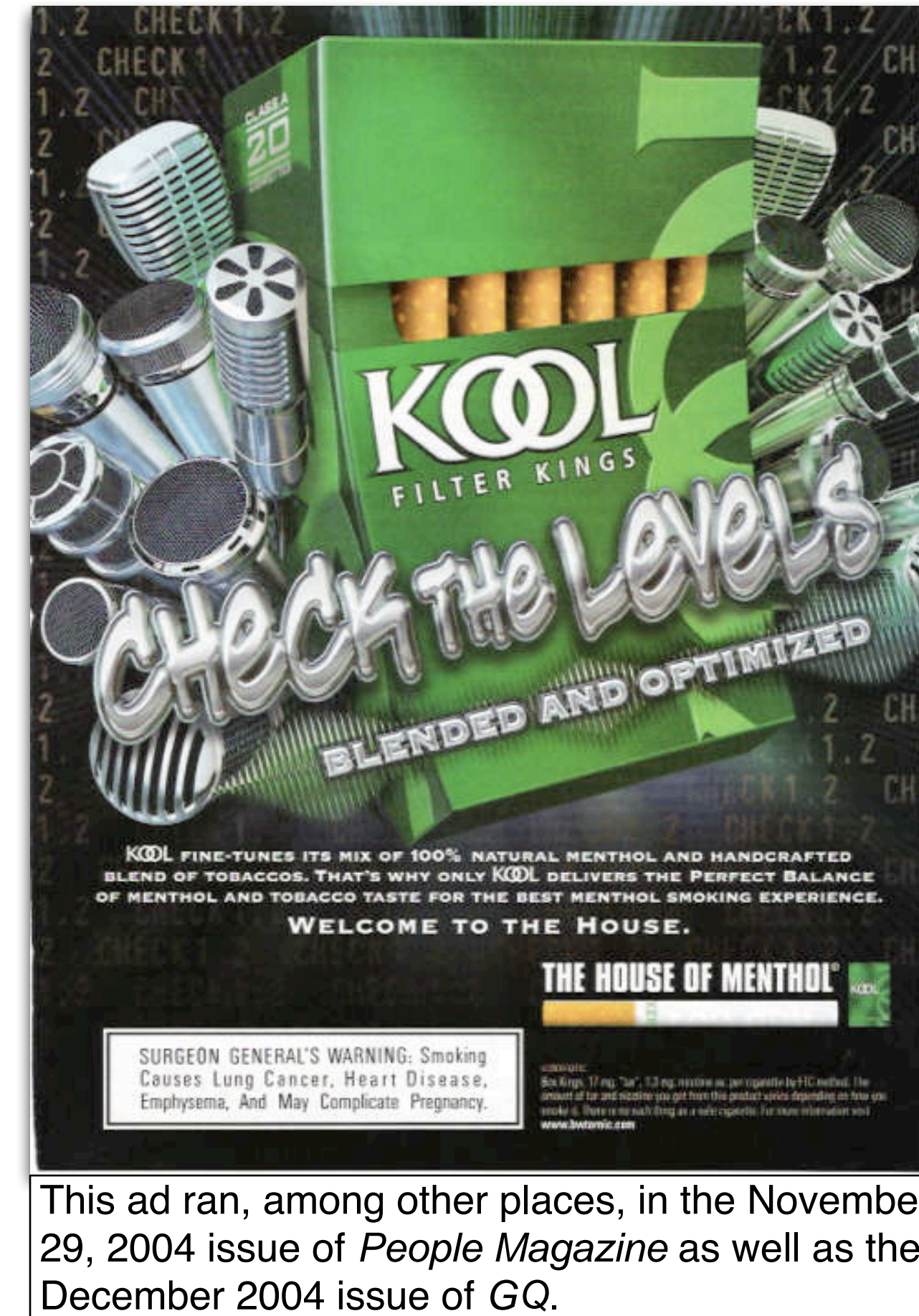
*[In response to the interviewer's question, "Why do you think this ad was created?"] To send a message to humanity not to smoke.* (Virginia Slims)

### Misinterpretation

Participants in 2 groups misunderstood the text of the warning.

*This picture, well, supposedly there's a caution from the Surgeon General that says that smoking does not cause harm but we know that it causes harm. What I think is that . . . well, I don't know if they have paid him off, because by being a surgeon, he is a physician. A physician knows, he has to take an oath when he graduates, to save lives, and we know that what nicotine does is cause harm. . . . So he cannot ever say that it is not harmful, like he says in that box at the bottom. Because we know that it's harmful. Especially because he is a surgeon.* (Kool)

*The warning says: "Surgeon general's warning, smoking causes..." what does it say here? "Cigarettes contain a lot of carbohydrates..." and...* (Virginia Slims)



This ad ran, among other places, in the November 29, 2004 issue of *People Magazine* as well as the December 2004 issue of *GQ*.

## Requirements for Warning Labels in Tobacco Advertising

US Code Title 15, Chapter 36, 1333:

"The phrase 'Surgeon General's Warning' shall appear in capital letters. . . . Each label statement shall appear in conspicuous and legible type in contrast by typography, layout, or color with all other printed material in the advertisement."

The Comprehensive Smoking Education Act of 1984 requires tobacco advertisers to rotate among four prescribed texts.

Example:

**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.**

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## Key Findings

- 1 - Consumers may not notice the Surgeon General's warnings in cigarette advertising.
- 2 - Consumers who do notice the warning labels may interpret both labels and advertisements in widely varying ways.
- 3 - Cigarette advertisements that provide fewer product cues may be more likely to be misinterpreted than those with images and/or text clearly related to cigarettes
- 4 - Lack of familiarity with labeling norms may lead to misinterpretation of tobacco ads, particularly in certain subpopulations

## Recommendations

- 1 - Public health advocates should be aware that even seemingly basic messages are not always seen or understood
- 2 - Public health advocates must take into account differences between population groups in program planning
- 3 - Further research is needed to explore the assumptions and interpretations encouraged by warning labels in advertisements aimed at Latinos and other subpopulations