

“I think it gave me a little bit of mistrust”: Exploring Trust in COVID-19 Science Among College Students

Introduction to Study & Rapport Building

Good afternoon! Thank y’all for taking the time out of your day to participate in this study. My name is [name], and I’m a [title] here in the [college name]. You all can just call me [name].

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how young adults view science and the scientific process, how they come to know the accuracy of information regarding science, and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their views on science and the role of politics in science using the lens of the “impressionable years” hypothesis of political psychology.

There are no wrong answers here—I am simply trying to learn what y’all’s opinions are. Your identity will be protected; all identifiers will be removed from the study so you may remain anonymous. If at any time during the focus group you decide you no longer wish to participate, you may leave and still receive your credit.

1. What questions do you have before we get started?

Introductory & Transition Questions

2. Tell us a little bit about yourself. What is your name, hometown, and major?
3. I see that we’re all communication students here. Have any of you ever taken a science class?

Key Questions

4. **Perceptions of Science:** Who remembers what the scientific method is? You probably learned about this in middle or high school.
5. **Perceptions of Science:** Wonderful. So for those of you who don't remember, the scientific method is basically how research is conducted so that we can expand our understanding of the world and create new knowledge technologies.
6. **Perceptions of Science:** Now, we're going to do a little activity. There are pieces of paper and some colored pencils and crayons in front of you. You are going to draw a picture or a process map or just some kind of visual of what you think the scientific method is. I'll give y'all about 7-10 minutes.
 - a. All done? Awesome! Okay. Let's go around the table and share what you drew.
7. **Perceptions of Science:** How do you think technologies like vaccines are developed?
8. **Perceptions of Science:** What do you think the government's role is in creating technologies like vaccines?
 - a. What do you think the government's role *should* be?
9. **Science Communication:** We're going to shift gears a bit and talk about news and information about scientific discoveries on social media. Here is a tweet about a study published in *Medicine* titled "The Foegen effect: A mechanism by which facemasks contribute to the COVID-19 case fatality rate."
 - a. What do you think about this post? Do you think it is accurate?
10. **Science Communication:** How do you think social media impacted your views of the pandemic?
 - a. How do you think social media impacted others?

11. **COVID-19's Impact:** How do you think growing up and becoming an adult during the pandemic has impacted how you view science and the scientific method?

a. How do you think the pandemic has impacted other people your age?

Ending Questions

12. **All things considered:** How do you think communicators can improve communicating science like the pandemic?

13. **Have we missed anything:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank y'all for participating in this study. Please do not share the discussions of this focus group with others. You will remain anonymous and all identifiers will be removed for the purpose of this study to protect your identity. If you have any questions you may contact me via email at [email] or phone [number]. Have a wonderful day!