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# Cigarette Advertising and Black-White Differences in Brand Preference

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## Synopsis .....

*Anecdotal evidence indicates that the cigarette industry is targeting the sale of specific brands, notably menthol cigarettes, to black consumers. This paper presents data on the types of cigarettes smoked by white and black smokers. The cigarette brand preferences of two populations of smokers were examined. The first comprised 70 white and 365 black adult smokers seen at the Deaconess Family Medicine Center located in Buffalo, NY. The second population included 1,070 white and 92 black smokers who called a Stop Smoking*

*Hotline in Buffalo. The results showed that, in both populations, blacks were twice as likely to smoke mentholated cigarettes compared with whites.*

*In an attempt to evaluate the targeting of cigarette ads to black smokers as a possible explanation for black-white differences in brand preferences, cigarette ads appearing in magazines targeted to predominantly white or black readers were compared. Cigarette ads appearing in seven magazines were reviewed, four directed to predominantly white readers (Newsweek, Time, People, Mademoiselle) and three with wide circulation among black audiences (Jet, Ebony, Essence). The results showed that the magazines targeted to black readers contained significantly more cigarette ads and more ads for menthol brand cigarettes than magazines similar in content but targeted to white readers.*

*The observation that a higher percentage of blacks smoke menthol cigarettes than do whites is consistent with the findings regarding differences in the type of cigarette ads appearing in magazines intended for black or white readers. However, it is not possible to determine from this study whether cigarette advertising is the cause of the differences in preference of cigarette brands between white and black smokers. Future research focusing on understanding the reasons for cigarette brand preferences may provide ideas for antismoking campaigns aimed at specific target groups.*

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**A**NECDOTAL EVIDENCE INDICATES that the cigarette industry is targeting the sale of specific brands, notably menthol cigarettes such as Kool, Newport, and Salem, to black consumers (1). In this study, we investigated differences in the types of cigarette ads appearing in magazines aimed at black or white readers. In addition, we examined differences in cigarette brand preferences between the two groups of smokers, whites and blacks. The findings from this study may provide clues to antismoking themes that could be used to help discourage smoking among blacks.

## Methods

Cigarette ads appearing in seven different magazines over a 1-year period between June 1984 and

May 1985 were reviewed to assess differences in the types of cigarettes that are promoted among blacks and whites. Three of the seven magazines reviewed had a wide circulation among black audiences (2): Jet, Ebony, and Essence. Four magazines directed chiefly to white readers, but similar in content to the magazines directed to black readers, were selected for comparison: Newsweek, Time, People, and Mademoiselle. Three of the seven magazines were monthly publications. The cigarette ads appearing in each issue of the monthly magazines between June 1984 and May 1985 were reviewed. For the weekly magazines, a sample of 12 issues of the year were randomly selected for review. Only full-page ads were considered.

Ads were classified according to whether the

brand of cigarette advertised was mentholated, nonmentholated, or available as both mentholated and nonmentholated. In addition, the advertisements were classified according to the tar content as low tar, high tar, or available either way. Cigarettes with a tar content of less than 15 milligrams (mg) were considered to be low tar (3). The proportion of cigarette ads in a magazine issue was computed as the ratio of the number of cigarette advertisements to the total number of full-page advertisements.

The data on cigarette brand preference presented in this paper are based on interviews conducted with two populations of smokers. The first population was composed of 435 patients seen at the Deaconess Family Medicine Center (FMC) located in Buffalo, NY. During the 4-month period of February to May 1984, all patients attending the FMC were questioned about their smoking practices. A total of 498 (33 percent) current smokers was identified; 440 (88 percent) agreed to participate in a 10-minute interview. Five patients were excluded from this analysis because they were neither white nor black. Interviews were conducted by trained interviewers while patients were in the FMC waiting room. The FMC serves a population that is composed predominantly of low-income black women.

The second population of smokers comprised callers to the Roswell Park Stop Smoking Hotline. The hotline was established in August 1984 as a telephone referral and information dissemination service for smokers interested in quitting. Smokers who call the hotline are routinely asked about their current and previous smoking practices.

Data from interviews with 1,162 white and black smokers who called the Stop Smoking Hotline between August 1984 and June 1985 are included in this report. The smoking practices and demographic characteristics of these two populations are summarized in table 1.

Smokers in both study populations were asked what brand of cigarettes they usually smoked. Depending upon the brand reported, smokers were questioned further as to whether they smoked filtered or unfiltered cigarettes, king-size or 100s, menthol or nonmenthol, and regular or lights. For the purposes of this paper, smokers were classified according to whether they usually smoked menthol or nonmenthol cigarettes. The few smokers who could not be classified, because of insufficient information, were grouped into the unknown category. Smokers who reported that they had no usual brand were grouped separately.

Table 1. Characteristics of the 2 study populations

Characteristics	Family Medicine Center (N = 440)	Hotline callers (N = 1,199)
Percent female.....	65.9	65.1
Mean age (years).....	36.3	43.3
<i>Race</i>		
Percent white.....	15.9	89.3
Percent black.....	82.9	7.6
Percent other.....	1.2	3.1
<i>Education</i>		
Percent with less than high school diploma.....	36.6	12.2
Percent with high school diploma.....	31.1	50.8
Percent with education beyond high school.....	32.3	37.0
<i>Smoking history</i>		
Mean number of ciga- rettes smoked daily.....	15.8	28.4
Mean number of years smoked cigarettes.....	17.3	23.6

NOTE: Data on persons of other races were excluded from analysis.

Chi-square statistics were computed to evaluate differences in the types of cigarette ads appearing in magazines with circulations to mainly white or black audiences. The chi-square statistic was also computed to evaluate differences between white and black smokers concerning their preference for menthol or nonmenthol cigarettes.

## Results

Table 2 summarizes the types of cigarette ads appearing in each of the seven magazines reviewed for this study. Compared with the four magazines targeted to white readers, the three magazines intended for black readers contained a greater proportion of cigarette ads (9.9 percent versus 12.0 percent, chi-square = 4.32, *df* = 1, *P* = 0.04), ads for menthol cigarettes (15.4 percent versus 65.9 percent, chi-square = 142.2, *df* = 1, *P* < 0.01), and ads for high tar cigarettes (13.7 percent versus 25.9 percent, chi-square = 23.4, *df* = 1, *P* < 0.01). However, it should be noted that in all seven magazines most of the ads were for low tar cigarettes (range: 50 percent to 86 percent).

Table 3 shows the percentage of white and black smokers in the two study populations who indicated that they usually smoke brands of menthol or nonmenthol cigarettes. In both populations of smokers, the percentage of persons who usually smoke menthols was twice as high among blacks as among whites (FMC: 66.6 percent versus 28.6 percent, chi-square = 38.1, *df* = 1, *P* < 0.01;

Table 2. Cigarette advertisements in magazines targeted to white and black readers

Magazine and target audience	Mean number of ads	Mean number of cigarette ads	Cigarette ads (percent)	Type of cigarette						Tar content					
				Menthol		Nonmenthol		Both <sup>1</sup>		Low tar		High tar		Both <sup>2</sup>	
				Mean	Per-cent	Mean	Per-cent	Mean	Per-cent	Mean	Per-cent	Mean	Per-cent	Mean	Per-cent
Mademoiselle (monthly)—women ages 18–25 years who are college students, career women, young marrieds.....	87.3	5.9	6.8	1.0	16.9	1.4	23.8	3.5	59.3	5.1	86.4	0.6	10.2	0.2	3.4
Essence (monthly)—young black women interested in social and political issues, fashion, cooking, culture ...	63.6	7.0	9.1	4.6	65.7	0.3	4.3	2.1	30.0	4.0	57.1	1.4	20.0	1.6	22.9
Time (weekly)—general readership; interest in news features, national and world current events .....	30.2	3.9	12.9	0.2	5.1	2.7	69.2	1.0	25.7	3.2	82.1	0.3	7.7	0.4	10.2
Newsweek (weekly)—general readership interested in features, news, background information .....	33.1	4.1	12.4	0.2	4.9	2.7	65.8	1.2	29.3	3.2	78.1	0.4	9.7	0.5	12.2
Ebony (monthly)—black readers interested in current events, arts, politics, entertainment .....	70.9	8.3	11.7	4.9	59.1	0.7	8.4	2.7	32.5	4.6	55.4	2.1	25.3	1.6	19.3
People (weekly)—general readership interested in personalities affecting politics, movies, lifestyles ..	54.8	6.5	11.7	1.6	24.6	2.8	43.1	2.1	32.3	4.2	64.6	1.2	18.5	1.1	16.9
Jet (weekly)—black readers interested in news, sports, entertainment, politics .....	15.8	3.0	18.9	2.5	83.4	0.1	3.3	0.4	13.3	1.5	50.0	1.2	40.0	0.3	10.0

<sup>1</sup> Brand available both as mentholated and nonmentholated cigarettes.

<sup>2</sup> Brand available both as lights and regulars.

hotline callers: 59.8 percent versus 23.6 percent, chi-square = 55.3,  $df = 1$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ).

Three brands of menthol cigarettes, Newport, Kool, and Salem, account for nearly 60 percent of all brands of cigarettes smoked by blacks. In contrast, the five most popular cigarette brands among white smokers account for only 42 percent of all cigarettes consumed. These were Marlboro nonmenthol (12.9 percent), Winston (9.1 percent), Salem (8.2 percent), Merit nonmenthol (7.5), and Newport (4.7 percent).

## Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that the types of cigarettes advertised in magazines vary according to the target audience. Magazines directed to black readers include a much greater proportion of ads for menthol cigarettes compared with magazines similar in content but directed to white readers. The predominance of ads for menthol cigarettes in magazines aimed at black readers becomes more pronounced when we consider ads

for cigarettes that are available both as menthols and nonmenthols. Ads for cigarettes that are manufactured both as menthols and nonmenthols often emphasized one or the other kind. For example, in magazines targeted to blacks, an ad for a brand of cigarette available as both menthols and nonmenthols often included a caption: "Available in menthol and regular." An ad for the same brand of cigarette in magazines intended for white readers had the words "menthol" and "regular" reversed in the caption so that it read "Available in regular and menthol." Similarly, the ways that the packs of cigarettes were displayed in ads varied. For white readers, packs of nonmenthols were pictured in the forefront or were otherwise highlighted; for blacks, packs of menthols were prominently displayed.

The observation that a higher percentage of blacks smoke menthol cigarettes than do whites is consistent with our findings on the types of cigarette ads appearing in magazines intended for black readers. However, it is not possible to determine from this study whether cigarette adver-

tising is the cause of the differences in preference of cigarette brands between white and black smokers. It is possible that manufacturers promote menthol brands to blacks to induce preference of their brand over other menthol brands. It is also possible that the preference for menthol cigarettes among blacks has nothing to do with advertising. For example, it could be that black smokers simply prefer the menthol taste in cigarettes. Without information on the magazines read by the smokers surveyed in our study, we cannot link exposure to advertising with cigarette brand preferences. The brand preference data presented in this study were collected from two nonrepresentative groups of smokers. However, the fact that our findings were similar in two very different groups of smokers lends support to the validity of our results. A recent analysis of data from the 1978 National Health Interview Survey confirms our finding of the greater preference for menthol cigarettes among black smokers (unpublished data from the Office on Smoking and Health, Public Health Service). Of black smokers, 61 percent smoked menthol cigarettes, compared with 27 percent of white smokers.

The findings from this study may have implications for smoking prevention and cessation efforts targeted to black populations. Differences in the types of cigarettes smoked by whites and blacks may reflect differences in the reasons why people smoke (4,5). Menthol cigarette ads frequently contain the images of pleasure and refreshment. Antismoking messages designed to counter these images in cigarette ads may be effective in discouraging young blacks from beginning to smoke and encouraging black smokers to quit. Counter-advertising specific cigarette brands may be particularly effective with black populations because most blacks smoke one of those brands. Future research should investigate beliefs and attitudes of black and white smokers that may explain why blacks prefer menthol brand cigarettes.

The marked preference for menthol cigarettes may have implications for epidemiologic research as well. Lung cancer mortality is higher among blacks than whites, probably due in part to the higher smoking rates among blacks (6-8). However, black smokers report smoking fewer cigarettes daily than whites (8). Regular menthol cigarettes tend to be higher in nicotine and tar content, compared with nonmenthol cigarettes; this difference may explain why black smokers smoke fewer cigarettes daily than whites. It is also possible that additives in menthol cigarettes en-

Table 3. Percentage of smokers in the 2 study populations, by kind or cigarette (menthol or nonmenthol) and race

Type of cigarette	Family Medicine Center		Hotline callers	
	Whites (N = 70)	Blacks (N = 365)	Whites (N = 1,070)	Blacks (N = 92)
Menthol .....	28.6	66.6	23.6	59.8
Nonmenthol .....	57.1	28.2	65.6	25.0
No usual brand ....	11.4	3.8	5.9	4.3
Unknown .....	2.9	1.4	4.9	10.9

hance carcinogenicity. We encourage investigators to evaluate the effects of menthol and nonmenthol cigarettes as cancer risks.

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