

# The marketing of menthol cigarettes in the United States: Populations, messages, and channels

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[Received 30 January 2003; accepted 21 August 2003]

**This commentary looks at the marketing menthol cigarettes to various targeted populations—women, middle school youth and Asian/Pacific Islander immigrants as well as African Americans. The authors take the position that “ethnic awareness” as evidenced in the advertising of menthol cigarette brands to African Americans is just one of four distinct messages that tobacco marketers have used for what they have termed the “coolness” category. The other messages are: healthy/medicinal; fresh/refreshing/cool/clean/crisp; and youthfulness/silliness and fun.**

**The commentary poses three questions: (a) Are new population segments being steered toward menthol cigarettes using marketing approaches that are similar to what has occurred with African Americans and women? (b) What exactly is the relationship between the marketing of menthol cigarettes and subsequent use of menthol tobacco products by specific population subgroups? (c) Are there lessons to be learned from the marketing of menthol cigarettes that can be used to improve the public health and medical communities’ smoking cessation and tobacco use prevention communications efforts?**

## Introduction

Mentholated tobacco brands represent approximately one-fourth of the cigarettes sold and consumed in the United States (U.S. Federal Trade Commission, 2000). Historically, the public health research community has not differentiated between menthol and nonmenthol cigarette brands in the design of qualitative and quantitative research studies. However, tobacco companies made clear distinctions between the consumers of menthol and nonmenthol cigarettes in their marketing research (Swartz, 1986).

Much of what is known about menthol cigarettes in the public health arena concerns Blacks, a population that has been characterized by a preference for menthol cigarette brands. Yet understanding the relationship between Blacks and menthol cigarettes gives us only part of the picture. In absolute numbers, the majority of menthol cigarette smokers in the United States are not Black (U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1998). Certainly, the tobacco industry has performed its most blatant targeting for menthol cigarettes over the years in Black communities, with billboards located throughout urban communities, financial support of Black organizations, segmented advertising in various media, and flashy product introductions of so-called “Black” cigarettes such as Uptown and X (Pollay, Lee, & Carter-Whitney, 1992; Robinson & Sutton, 1994). Other at-risk communities, including women and youth, have received their share of unwanted attention from the manufacturers and marketers of menthol cigarette brands, and their stories also are important (Lanyi, 1998).

It is important for researchers to use the Black experience as a model for understanding the issues involved in the marketing of menthol cigarettes. Yet focusing solely on Black menthol brand smokers to the exclusion of other groups minimizes the experiences of other menthol cigarette smokers and reduces opportunities for meaningful comparisons between and among population segments.

The primary objective of this commentary is to widen the lens as we explore the historical and current marketing trends of menthol cigarette brands. As researchers and community-based practitioners, we

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must gain a better understanding of exactly how tobacco companies have used advertising, public relations, promotions, and other marketing tools and practices for the past 50 years to expand the consumer base for menthol cigarettes for all targeted populations, not just Blacks. This information can provide a much-needed framework for increasing the awareness of public health and medical professionals regarding the practices that tobacco companies have used to recruit and maintain consumers of menthol cigarettes among various groups, such as women, middle school youth, and Asian/Pacific Islander immigrants.

### **Brief history of menthol cigarettes**

Menthol cigarettes were patented in the United States in 1925 by Lloyd “Spud” Hughes (Borio, 2001). Tobacco companies, utilizing medicinal themes, advertised and promoted menthol brands as less irritating and suitable for sore throats due to colds (Wood, 1959). From 1933 until the early 1950s, most menthol cigarettes were smoked on an occasional basis by individuals who regularly smoked non-menthol brands (R. J. Reynolds, 1984).

The transition of menthol cigarettes from their specialty status to the mainstream began in 1956, when the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company introduced Salem, a longer, filter-tipped menthol cigarette (Borio, 2001). Prior to the entry of Salem, sales of menthol cigarettes represented approximately 3% of the overall cigarette market, with 80% of menthol tobacco sales going to a single brand, Kool (Levy & Tindall, 1984). Within its first nine months of sales, Salem became a formidable rival for Kool, amassing nearly half of the menthol market and 3.1% of the total cigarette market, compared with 3.2% for Kool (R. J. Reynolds, 1977).

By the mid-1960s, nearly all of the tobacco companies were creating freestanding menthol brands and menthol extensions of their regular, nonmenthol brands to capitalize on the increasing popularity of this tobacco category (Philip Morris USA, 1986). Many of the new brands were short-lived, and as a rule, the menthol extensions averaged just 10% of a brand’s total volume (Brown & Williamson, 1979). Women’s brands such as Virginia Slims tended to include a menthol extension automatically, because the menthol segment included substantive numbers of women (Shaw, 2002; Sutton, Siador, Aguirre-Molina, & Domingo, 1993).

Two brands—Salem and Kool—vied for leadership of the “coolness” (menthol) market segment from the 1950s through the end of the 1980s (Lawson, 1986; R. J. Reynolds, 1977). Newport, after experiencing lackluster sales for nearly 16 years, began building its market share in the early 1970s. By the 1990s,

Newport had eclipsed both Salem and Kool to become the number one-selling menthol brand, a position it still holds (Campbell, 2000; de Garmo Market Research Department, 1980; Esty, 1974; Lawson, 1986; Shaner & Esty, 1984; Yates-Evans, 1984).

### **Method**

Internal tobacco industry documents, which provide detail on marketing research, practices, and theories, became available to the public and nonindustry researchers as a result of the Tobacco Settlement Agreement, various court trials, and information from classified documents (Kelder & Davidson, 1999). Access to these industry documents has given the public health community new awareness of how tobacco products have been advertised, promoted, publicized, and distributed over the years. These documents show how the audiences for specific menthol brands and brand extensions have been segmented and recruited (Ling & Glantz, 2002).

Tobacco Documents Online and the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library of the University of California, San Francisco, served as the two major sources of tobacco industry documents for this commentary. Also included in the review of materials were collections of alcohol advertising collected by Richard W. Pollay and housed at the Roswell Park Cancer Institute (Pollay, 1999).

The information in the tobacco industry marketing documents represented both qualitative research (focus groups, expert opinions, and internal analysis of industry trends) and quantitative research (product sales, media choices, switching studies, and public opinion polls). Unlike tobacco industry public relations materials that are written and designed for public consumption, the tobacco companies created these documents for their internal use so that the companies could better market their products for maximum product sales and profits. Comparisons by public health researchers of the primary marketing data and assessments developed by the various competing tobacco companies provide a frame of reference within which to evaluate the information.

### **Populations**

Despite the fivefold increase of menthol cigarettes as a category from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s, smokers of menthol have always represented a numerical minority among smokers overall (USDHHS, 1998). Furthermore, the popularity of the menthol category among various population segments has been uneven. A 1998 report issued by the Advocacy Institute identified women and Blacks as population segments with higher than average

consumption of menthol cigarette brands and also as the primary recipients of “targeted marketing strategies to promote tobacco consumption within these groups” (Lanyi, 1998).

### *Women*

Female smokers represented the first target population for menthol cigarettes. As early as the 1930s, an advertisement for Spud menthol cigarettes proclaimed that “to read the advertisements these days, a fellow’d think the pretty girls do all the smoking” (USDHHS, 2001). The entry of Salem menthols into the cigarette market 20 years later was well received by women smokers, who responded positively to the new filter and longer length as well as to the menthol flavor (Levy & Tindall 1984; O’Keefe & Pollay 1996; Southampton-Thornton, 1976). Telephone surveys conducted in 1988 and again in 1993 for the Community Intervention Trial for Smoking Cessation found that female gender was significantly associated with use of menthol cigarettes (Hyland, Garten, Giovino, & Cummings, 2002). According to a 1982 Canadian study, “Although some brands of menthol cigarettes are perceived as more masculine than others, as a group they still project an overall aura of femininity” (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., 1982).

Although tobacco companies recognized the importance of women as menthol smokers, the public health community did not explore this association. Important articles on marketing tobacco products to women neglected to mention menthol cigarettes as part of women’s smoking patterns (Amos & Haglund, 2000; O’Keefe & Pollay, 1996; Robinson, Barry, et al., 1992). The marketing of menthol cigarettes to women was not addressed specifically in either the 1980 or the 2001 surgeon general’s reports on women and smoking, due to the lack of published information (USDHHS, 1980, 2001). Even though research studies have documented increases in tobacco industry expenditures directed toward women, especially in the design of women’s cigarettes and “light” cigarettes, university and government research studies did not address menthol cigarette marketing practices directed toward women (Ernster, 1985; Jones, 1987; Warner & Goldenhar, 1992). Although tobacco companies probably conducted such research, that information was proprietary and much of it was not in the public domain until the recent release of internal tobacco documents.

### *Blacks*

A second key target population of menthol smokers consists of Blacks. Prior to the 1960s, the percentages of menthol and nonmenthol smokers in the Black population generally mirrored those of the general

population, with the majority of Black smokers consuming nonmenthol cigarette brands (R. J. Reynolds, 1984; Thale, 1977). Even as late as 1980, surveys of cigarette brand preferences conducted for the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company found that nonmenthol cigarette brands (Winston and Pall Mall) ranked second and third, respectively, behind market leader Kool as the preferred cigarette brands of Black smokers (Clark, 1980; Dean, 1967; Sharp, 1980).

Currently, approximately three-fourths of Black smokers smoke menthol cigarette brands (USDHHS, 1998). The preference for menthol cigarettes is especially marked among younger Black smokers (Hymowitz, Moulton, & Edkholdt, 1995).

The general awareness that the tobacco industry has targeted menthol cigarette brands toward Blacks was highlighted in 1989, when the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company announced its intention to test market a new menthol cigarette brand called Uptown in the Black community of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although the effort failed due to community protests, the announcement by the Reynolds Company stirred new interest within the public health community about the relationship between Blacks and menthol cigarettes (Robinson & Sutton, 1994; USDHHS, 1998).

### *Youth*

Adolescents represent the third key population of menthol smokers. The 1999 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), commissioned by the American Legacy Foundation and the CDC Foundation, found that menthol cigarettes were serving as starter cigarettes for youth of various races and ethnicities (Ringel, Wasserman, & Pacula, 2002). According to the 1999 NYTS, nearly half of students who smoked in grades six through eight smoked menthol cigarettes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). Results from the 2000 survey confirmed those findings (Farrelly, Vilsaint, Lindsey, Thomas, & Messeri, 2001).

According to data from the NYTS, use of menthol cigarettes was higher among Black youth and lower among White youth by high school, in comparison with middle school levels. The highest rates of menthol cigarette use among high school students were Black smokers (76%), followed by Asian American youth smokers (62%), Hispanic youth smokers (47%), and White youth smokers (29%) (Farrelly et al., 2001). The use of menthol-flavored cigarettes by the youngest smokers (grades six through eight) may be similar to the situation with spit tobacco, where manufacturers advertise flavored products to youth with the goal of “graduating” them to the regular brands as they become more accustomed to using tobacco (Koppett, 1998).

*Other groups*

Anecdotal information exists regarding consumption of menthol cigarettes among users of marijuana. The belief, going back more than 30 years, is that smoking cigarettes, especially menthol cigarettes, prolongs the high from smoking marijuana. In a May 1972 memo, Philip Morris researcher Al Udow wrote that information from various sources indicated that Kool cigarettes were considered the best cigarettes to smoke “after marijuana” or for mixing with marijuana cigarettes (Udow, 1972).

Another group of menthol smokers is represented by Asians and Asian Americans, given the high rates of mentholated tobacco use in some Asian countries, such as the Philippines, where the rate is 66% (Giovino et al., 2002). However, because so little epidemiological research has been done in the United States on Asian American and Asian immigrant smokers, it is difficult to accurately identify which nationality groups within the Asian population have disproportionate menthol cigarette use.

**Marketing messages**

Three freestanding menthol brands—Kool, Salem, and Newport—accounted for nearly two-thirds of menthol smokers in the United States from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s (Levy & Tindall, 1984; Philip Morris USA, 1986). During this period, a limited number of advertising messages were central to the marketing of menthol cigarettes as an entire category and as specific brands.

The authors’ reviews of the tobacco documents and advertisements have identified four distinct messages that marketers of menthol cigarette brands have used extensively:

- Healthy/medicinal
- Fresh/refreshing/cool/clean/crisp
- Ethnic awareness
- Youthfulness, silliness, and fun

*Healthy/medicinal*

Manufacturers of the earliest menthol cigarettes promoted brands like Spud, Penguin, and Kool as healthier because they contained menthol similar to that which was commonly used in back rubs and throat lozenges (Levy & Tindall, 1984; Wood, 1959). Print and broadcast advertisements promoted menthol cigarettes as products to be smoked as needed—for example, when throats were irritated due to allergies and colds—rather than on an everyday basis (Levy & Tindall; Wood). Willie (a.k.a. Mr. Kool), the cartoon Kool penguin, often appeared on television,

in newspaper advertising, and as part of point-of-purchase displays in the 1940s and early 1950s dressed as a doctor (Pollay, 1999).

Even when the health benefits of menthol smoking were not stated explicitly in the advertising, the health association remained. According to advertising expert Richard Pollay,

Menthol is described in corporate documents as offering a “pseudo-health.” People judge that menthol has some beneficial properties related to pulmonary conditions because they encounter it only in cough and cold remedies... (Pollay, 1997)

In 1952, *Reader’s Digest* magazine republished an article by Roy Norr entitled “Cancer by the Carton” that detailed the dangers of smoking and the potential risks of lung cancer (Craig & Moellinger, 2001). Publication of this article represented the first public exposé of the dangers of smoking and its link to cancer. Other major publications began carrying similar articles about the dangers of smoking, and cigarette sales began a temporary decline (USDHHS, 2000). By the mid-1950s, explicit health references in cigarette advertisements were removed because even the mention of health in advertising copy was believed to trigger associations between smoking and cancer in the public’s mind (Brown & Williamson, 1964).

The inability to use direct health claims presented special difficulties for Kool cigarettes, given its decades of health-related advertising. Kool competitors Salem and Newport—menthol brands that entered the market in 1956 and 1957, respectively—were able to build a market for menthol cigarettes that was “not so dependent on the health or symptomatic appeals” (R. J. Reynolds, 1985).

*Fresh/refreshing/cool/clean/crisp*

During the 1950s, direct health references disappeared completely from menthol advertising. The new advertising used phrases like “cool and clean,” “fresh,” and “crisp” instead (Brown & Williamson, 1968; Kluger, 1996). Advertisements in general market publications like *Life*, *Look*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and daily newspapers promoted menthol brands with images of woodlands, rain forests, cascading waterfalls, rock gardens, and country streams near covered bridges.

Because most menthol smokers were women, it followed that much of the menthol cigarette advertising had a distinctly feminine aura. Many of the menthol advertisements featured couples, engaged in romantic activities, surrounded by old rustic mills, flowering fields, and images of spring. Even when advertisements for menthol cigarettes featured men, the message often was directed toward women readers. The central themes of the female-oriented

messages were that smoking menthol cigarettes contributed to female desirability and that relaxing with a menthol cigarette added to the ambiance of a beautiful and romantic setting. According to Michael J. Waterson, who has written on the link between tobacco advertising and product consumption, the goal of cigarette advertisements was,

conditioning through frequent associations with brands on the one hand and background atmospheres (i.e. nature), individuals (i.e. models) and objects (i.e. racing cars and surf boards) on the other.

Advertising scenery and atmosphere suggest a preferred state and advertising models suggest a preferred psychological and social status. (Waterson, 1990)

Another set of 1960s general market advertising messages for menthol cigarette brands focused more directly on men. Advertisements for Camel Menthol and Newport, for example, used images of sea-faring White men with rugged features standing on shorelines or boat decks, proclaiming the benefits of smoking menthol cigarettes with a fresh, new taste. A 1967 Marlboro advertisement in *Life* magazine featured a cowboy and his horse against an expanse of sky with the words “there’s a new cigarette in Marlboro Country—Marlboro Green” (Pollay, 1999). A 1967 L&M Menthol Tall advertisement in the *Saturday Evening Post* showed a rugged White male in parka standing on the back of a dogsled; the text linked menthol in cigarettes to “the crisp keen taste of the Northland” (Pollay, 1999). Alpine, a menthol brand from Philip Morris, featured a variety of White male images, from college professors to mountain climbers, with the message “Who put the men in menthol smoking? Alpine—that’s who! Now the menthol cigarette is as much at home in a man’s shirt pocket as it is in a woman’s handbag” (Pollay, 1999).

Unfortunately for the tobacco companies, few of the messages seemed to resonate with White men, and menthol cigarettes kept their largely feminine aura.

### *Ethnic awareness*

From 1966 through 1973, according to a report entitled “Salem Brand Review, 1956–1977,” Black smokers represented 47% of Kool’s growth (R. J. Reynolds, 1977). Much of this growth came as result of direct outreach to Black men (R. J. Reynolds, 1977).

A 1968 report prepared for Philip Morris entitled “A Pilot Look at the Attitudes of Negro Smokers toward Menthol” theorized that the matriarchal climate within Black communities provided a supportive atmosphere for menthol cigarette smoking by men

that did not exist in the White community (Tibor Koeves Associates, 1968). The report noted that even though menthol cigarette brands are smoked primarily by women, “that does not make them effeminate or sissie [sic] cigarettes for black men.” According to one of the Black male smokers who participated in a focus group, “My wife smokes menthols, and so do I. I learned from her” (Tibor Koeves Associates).

Brown & Williamson took a proactive stance in marketing to Blacks. Whereas their Kool advertisements in White-oriented media continued with the standard fare of waterfalls, country streams, and romantic couples, advertisements for Kool cigarettes in Black-oriented media featured darker-skinned models, slang terms associated with the Black experience (e.g., “groovy,” “baby,” and “soul”), and more masculine imagery (Pollay, Lee, & Carter-Whitney, 1992; Themba-Nixon & Robinson, 1997).

By 1969, Kool had become the number one cigarette among Blacks, replacing Pall Mall. Kool’s growth was spurred in large part by its growing popularity among Black men. (Shaner & Esty, 1984).

### *Youthfulness, silliness, and fun*

When Newport became the market leader for the coolness (menthol) segment, it did so with a message that emphasized fun and good times, especially in the visuals. To quote a focus group summary report, Newport was seen as the cigarette for young people who get “high on life” (Nicholas Research International, 1983).

Beginning in 1972, Newport used a common theme—“Alive with Pleasure!”—in magazine, newspaper, and billboard advertisements with all groups. The headline sometimes was shortened to a single word—“Pleasure!”—and when text was included, the message was “After all, if smoking isn’t a pleasure, why smoke?” (Pollay, 1999). The visuals showed people having fun, often engaged in activities that would be more appropriate for a child of elementary school age than a teenager or an adult.

Newport built its customer base by embracing the broadest possible spectrum of younger smokers: Blacks and Whites, male and female. This differed from Salem, with its primary attention to White women, and Kool, with its emphasis on Black men (Pritchard, 1991).

### **Communications channels**

Much has been written about the methods that tobacco companies used to target specific demographic communities, especially Blacks (Balbach, Gasior, & Barbeau, 2003). When the ban on tobacco advertising on television and radio went into effect in 1971, Black newspaper publishers actively recruited

advertisements from tobacco companies (Robinson, Pertschuk, & Sutton, 1992; USDHHS, 1998). Black newspaper publisher Dorothy Leavell, who headed the National Newspaper Publishers Association in 1998, estimated that tobacco advertising represented 60% of the advertising in Black newspapers (Muwakkil, 1998). The three major Black magazines—*Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence*—carried an average of 12% more tobacco advertising compared with mainstream magazines (Muwakkil). Billboards and transit advertising also were effective in advertising cigarettes to Blacks (R. J. Reynolds, 1989; Stoddard, Johnson, Boley-Cruz, & Sussman, 1997).

Although published research has looked at menthol cigarette advertising designed for Blacks, similar reviews have not been done on menthol cigarette advertising and women. However, a comparison of menthol and nonmenthol advertising in Black-oriented and general market magazines provides some preliminary data related to menthol cigarette brand advertising and women.

For the period from June 1984 to May 1985, the women's magazine *Mademoiselle* had 17% menthol-only advertising and 24% nonmenthol advertising (Cummings, Giovino, & Mendicino, 1987). By contrast, *Time* and *Newsweek*, two general market news weeklies with both male and female readership, each devoted only 5% of their cigarette advertising to menthol brands, whereas nonmenthol advertisements comprised 69% of cigarette advertisements in *Time* and 66% of cigarette advertisements in *Newsweek* (Cummings et al., 1987).

Tobacco industry documents also address the use of gender-specific marketing campaigns for menthol brands. Kool launched its extra-long menthols in 1969 with a campaign called "Lady Be Kool" and used daytime television and women's magazines as the preferred media choices. Brown & Williamson's marketing staff decided that this approach was necessary "because of KOOL's pronounced masculine image and because 70–80% of the extra-length menthol cigarette smokers were women" (Brown & Williamson, 1980).

Additional research is needed to document the extent to which advertisements for menthol cigarettes appeared more frequently in women's publications and on female-oriented television and radio programs than in general-market media prior to the banning of broadcast advertisements in 1971. Research also is needed to determine the extent of target advertising for menthol brands in other specific populations, including immigrants and refugees from South and Central America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific Islands, the Middle East, and Europe; gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons; the elderly; college students; and other demographic groups that have their own media outlets and cultural frameworks.

### *Product vs. promotion*

According to tobacco industry documents, the breakthrough success of Salem menthol cigarettes in the mid-1950s was attributed as much to the product—its reduced mentholation compared with Kool and other menthol cigarette products on the market—as it was to an advertising campaign that focused less on health and more on style (R. J. Reynolds, 1977).

Product research within the tobacco companies showed that most smokers of menthol cigarettes were attracted initially to brands with light mentholation. However, over time, smokers of the popular menthol brands began to demand stronger menthol levels, and in response, the tobacco companies gradually increased the level of menthol through reformulations of specific brands as a way of protecting their brands and keeping them from losing market share (Brown & Williamson, 1979; Lawson, 1986; Levy & Tindall, 1984; R. J. Reynolds, 1977). An example of this shift is described in Brown & Williamson's internal description of its Kool brand:

A number of factors have contributed to the success of this brand but two primary reasons are paramount. Most important, KOOL's advertising theme promised a specific product benefit ... "extra coolness," and the product itself, with its heavier menthol content, delivers on that promise. (Brown & Williamson, 1980)

However, as the leading brands in the "coolness" category became more mentholated in order to keep their existing smokers, those brands became less attractive to what the industry calls FUBYAs—first usual brand young adults. Because individual brand preferences tend to be locked in fairly early in life (i.e., adolescence and early adulthood), the menthol brand that was able to capture teenagers and young adults invariably became the next market leader (R. J. Reynolds, 1977). Brands with more menthol taste watched brand sales fall and market share shrink as their customer base aged. This concept of consumers aging out was seen as particularly important to menthol cigarettes and was referenced repeatedly in the documents as a way to explain why strong marketing messages and heavy investments in media buys for faltering menthol cigarette brands did not succeed against advances by new competitors that had captured the attention of teenagers and younger adults (R. J. Reynolds, 1977).

The rise of Newport represents an example of this phenomenon. The combination of a product reformulation (1969) and a new, youthful advertising theme (1972) served as an important relaunch for Newport (R. J. Reynolds, 1984). Tobacco industry research studies from the early 1980s reported that younger adult smokers rated both Kool and Newport as

acceptable products but found that the Newport formulation was “*significantly smoother, milder and less harsh* [italics in original]” (R. J. Reynolds, 1984). The report concluded that as early as the mid-1970s, Newport’s light mentholation was attracting the youngest tier of smokers. All of Newport’s growth was attributed to its popular king-size brand, “which seems better attuned to younger adult product wants than Kool” (R. J. Reynolds, 1984).

A Philip Morris tracking study conducted in 1977 reported that Newport King had the youngest median age of all cigarette brands: 24.8 years, compared with a 38.0 median age for all smokers (Anderson, Holbert, & Isaacs, 1977). By 1983, Newport also had the youngest franchise of any brand in the market. More than half of its smokers were under age 25 (R. J. Reynolds, 1984).

In reviewing Newport advertisements collected by Pollay and others, the central theme of Newport advertising is obvious: “Kids just want to have fun.” Although the participants in the advertisements are rarely shown smoking, the advertising messages of Newport over the past 30 years have stressed that smoking a Newport is part of youth, part of having pleasure in life, part of having a good time. This focus contrasts with the messages that have been repeated over the years in the advertisements of other menthol cigarette brands: sophisticated jazz evenings; quiet romantic walks in woodlands; and the environmental beauty of sea, waterfalls, and foliage.

### Conclusions and research questions

Menthol cigarette brands have maintained a significant presence in the United States for decades, with extensive marketing to certain populations. Tobacco companies, like Brown & Williamson, insist that menthol in cigarettes is simply a flavoring (Brown & Williamson, n.d.). However, the high usage rates of menthol cigarettes in populations that have more difficulty in quitting and more adverse health affects due to smoking is cause for alarm and additional research (USDHHS, 1998). As public health researchers, we must explore more fully the market research on menthol cigarettes that is contained in the tobacco industry documents. We also must increase the level of research on the various techniques that have been used to market menthol cigarettes over the years.

Many questions remain unanswered in understanding the role of marketing in recruiting new smokers for mentholated tobacco products and in retaining existing smokers:

- Are new population segments being steered toward menthol cigarettes using marketing approaches similar to those used with Blacks and women?
- What exactly is the relationship between the marketing of menthol cigarettes and subsequent

use of menthol tobacco products by specific population subgroups?

- Are lessons to be learned from the marketing of menthol cigarettes that can be used to improve the public health and medical communities’ smoking cessation and tobacco use prevention communications efforts?

For too long, the public health community has given only a cursory glance at the ways in which menthol cigarettes have been marketed to certain populations, and the characteristics of the affected racial, ethnic, and gender groups. The availability of internal industry documents and new data from surveys that now ask about menthol brand smoking provide us with an opportunity to find answers to many of our questions. Learning more about the messages and media used to promote menthol cigarette brands to target markets such as women, Blacks, and youth can be an invaluable aid in helping to decrease the uptake of menthol brands and in creating improved prevention and cessation strategies for at-risk communities and populations.

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