

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Non-smoking cohabitants wanted!

To the Editor - In Dublin, a city of a million people, advertisements for accommodation sharing are generally found in one of two evening newspapers, *The Evening Press*. All advertisements for accommodation sharing in this newspaper for the Wednesday edition of the second week of each month in 1988 and 1993 were studied for reference to the characteristics desired of potential cohabitants. The second Wednesday of each month was determined by a randomised process.

Of the 916 advertisements for accommodation sharing in 1988 and the 1443 in 1993, 439 (48%) in 1988 and 729 (51%) in 1993 specified no specific characteristics required from potential cohabitants, concentrating solely on the accommodation and rent. The table shows the proportion of advertisements that expressed a preference for particular characteristics. Although the sex of a potential cohabitant was the predominant char-

acteristic sought of potential cohabitants, *The Evening Press* (Dublin, 1988 and 1993)

Characteristics	Advertisements in 1988		Advertisements in 1993		Z score
	n	%*	n	%	
Gender	439	0.479	776	0.329	7.26**
Professional	38	0.041	169	0.117	6.33**
Age	30	0.033	70	0.048	1.85
Non-smoker	29	0.032	197	0.137	8.43**
Employed	3	0.003	20	0.014	2.55***
Smoker	0	0	1	0.0007	Undefined
Other	14	0.015	15	0.01	1.05

* Based on total advertisements examined (916 for 1988 and 1443 for 1993).

** p < 0.01, 2-tailed.

*** p < 0.05, 2-tailed.

acteristic sought in both time periods, it had diminished significantly over time. Other than the gender, each characteristic was more likely to be specified in 1993. Preference for a non-smoker increased over fourfold from 3.2% in 1988 to 13.7% in 1993. In only one case was a smoker requested.

This study provides evidence that the number of requests for potential cohabitants to be non-smokers has increased dramatically since 1988 and suggests that, not only is the message about environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) getting through, but it is also generating affirmative action. This lends credence to the findings of opinion polls which indicate that people are becoming less tolerant of ETS.¹ Other than a point survey carried out by Chapman,² which showed that on a single day in Sydney, Australia, 24% of advertisers requesting a cohabitant required a non-smoker, little else is available that shows how individuals change their environment, particularly in their homes, to reduce their exposure to ETS over time.

The results of this study can be used as evidence to further reduce exposure to ETS. In the first instance, those who take the view that they will not share accommodation with a smoker can be reassured that they are not alone and that many others hold a similar view.

Secondly, potential advertisers can be made aware that it is not uncommon or unreasonable to specify that they would rather have a non-smoker share accommodation with them. Requesting a non-smoker also helps underscore the fact that smoking is a minority practice and one that is increasingly becoming less acceptable socially.

Thirdly, those who campaign against ETS can add these findings to their armoury and can carry out similar surveys in their own area to help them develop more novel messages in their campaigns. In addition to the above, this study has shown that non-traditional sources of information on health-related matters do exist and can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of educational campaigns. The challenge for us is to recognise these sources and use them to our advantage.

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1 European Bureau for Action on Smoking Prevention. *No smoke between us*. Brussels: European Bureau for Action on Smoking Prevention, 1993.

2 Chapman S. Shared accommodation - non-smokers wanted! *Tobacco Control* 1992; 1: 248.

Menthol cigarette smoking in African Americans and whites

To the Editor - A fundamental feature of African American smoking behaviour is a

preference for menthol cigarettes.¹ This may contribute to excess disease risk because menthol combustion produces carcinogenic compounds,² mentholation may permit deeper, more prolonged inhalation of cigarette smoke,³ and menthol cigarettes may permit more efficient absorption of nicotine, carbon monoxide, and other products from cigarettes, independent of inhalation patterns.⁴

Despite the potential hazards of menthol cigarettes, little is known about why they are so popular among African Americans. To address this issue, we administered a Baseline Menthol Questionnaire to menthol cigarette smokers who participated in a stop-smoking study. A total of 473 smokers participated, and their average age was about 43 years. White subjects smoked more cigarettes per day than African Americans (mean = 31, 27, 22, and 19 cigarettes per day for white males, white females, African American males, and African American females, respectively), and a significantly greater proportion of African American males (79%) and females (79%) smoked menthol cigarettes than white males (13%) and females (20%) (p < 0.01).

Over 60% of white and African American menthol cigarette smokers indicated that they would pay more money for a menthol than for a non-menthol cigarette, and 56% of African Americans compared with 28% of white subjects (p < 0.01) responded "no" to the question: "If you could not smoke a menthol cigarette would you smoke a non-menthol cigarette?"

The three main reasons adult smokers gave for smoking menthol cigarettes were taste, ease of inhalation, and social/family influence (table). African Americans were more likely than white subjects to indicate that they smoke menthol cigarettes because they are more easy to inhale and they can inhale them more deeply. Relatively few smokers of either race endorsed "image" or "advertising" as reasons for smoking menthol cigarettes (table).

It is not intuitively clear why so many African Americans prefer the taste of menthol cigarettes. Because taste is so important, however, it seems reasonable to explore the efficacy of stop-smoking interventions that adversely affect taste, such as rapid smoking, in African Americans and menthol cigarette smokers in general.

Many African American menthol cigarette

Reasons for smoking menthol cigarettes

	White (n = 39)	African American† (n = 174)
Menthol cigarettes taste better than regular non-menthol cigarettes	29 (74%)	144 (83%)
Menthol cigarettes are more soothing to my throat than regular non-menthol	20 (51%)	90 (52%)
I can inhale menthol cigarettes more easily than regular non-menthol cigarettes	8 (21%)	84 (48%)
I can inhale menthol cigarettes more deeply than regular non-menthol cigarettes	4 (10%)	58 (33%)
I always smoked menthol cigarettes	14 (39%)	110 (63%)
Members of my family smoke menthol cigarettes	6 (15%)	53 (30%)
My friends that smoke, smoke menthol cigarettes*	7 (18%)	72 (41%)
Menthol cigarettes suit my self-image better than regular non-menthol cigarettes	2 (5%)	24 (14%)
Menthol cigarettes are better for you than regular non-menthol cigarettes	2 (5%)	13 (7%)
Most of the advertising I see is for menthol cigarettes	1 (3%)	17 (10%)

* p < 0.01.

† Because there were no sex differences, data for males and females were combined.

‡ Twenty-one menthol cigarette smokers did not complete the baseline menthol questionnaire.