

From the *desk*  
of the *Editor*

## No one deserves lung cancer



Robert Overmann

Smoking rates across the U.S. are at an all-time low, according to an August 2012 Gallup report. Unfortunately, a new, collectively damaging social trend has taken its place. Many diseases associated with regular tobacco use have become viewed by the public as “fitting” punishments for those with unhealthy habits.

Let’s be clear — nobody “deserves” to be stricken with a terrible illness, regardless of their actions or lifestyle.

Smoking rates across the United States are at an all-time low of 20 percent, according to an August 2012 Gallup report. Consider during the mid-1950s, 45 percent of U.S. adults smoked regularly, according to the report.

The decreased use of tobacco is great news, as “tobacco use is the most important risk factor for cancer causing ... 71% of global lung cancer deaths,” according to the World Health Organization. I’m glad fewer of my fellow humans are dying of this terrible cancer, but there still are others suffering from illnesses stemming from this addictive habit.

Many diseases, such as emphysema, heart disease and lung cancer, often associated with regular tobacco use, have become socially stigmatized.

During the 1950s, when nearly half the nation’s adults smoked, tobacco use was a social norm. In fact, according to my father, an adult, male non-smoker often was viewed with suspicion.

Ironically, the smoking demographic now suffers from the same stigmas they once inflicted upon their non-smoking counterparts. Since cigarette smoking was identified as damaging to health and anti-smoking campaigns mounted their assaults against the habit, “an increase in the social unacceptability of smoking has dramatically decreased tobacco use in the USA,” according to an August 2008 study published in the Social Science and Medicine journal.

The stigma against smoking now has been applied to those afflicted with lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, strokes and other diseases. I’ve heard individuals make comments declaring an individual who smoked “got what they deserved,” when they were diagnosed with lung cancer. Along the same lines, I’ve heard individuals make comments that an obese individual “got what they deserved” when they suffered cardiac arrest or were diagnosed with diabetes. Some consider liver disease a “fitting punishment” for a life of heavy alcohol consumption.

The common denominator for all these situations is the unintended backlash of public health educational campaigns. We must always be wary of implicitly labeling the demographic in question as “subversives,” when their only crime was poor self-control and chronically damaging their health. Stigmatization might be the most effective way to combat the public’s unhealthy habits, but it comes with a terrible price.

Yes, individuals with unhealthy habits do cost society by disproportionately burdening public health services. But they’re human beings. Nobody benefits from the stigmatization of illnesses. This stigmatization might deter donors from funding disease research, and it certainly creates unnecessary additional stress for those diagnosed with these seemingly unstoppable diseases.

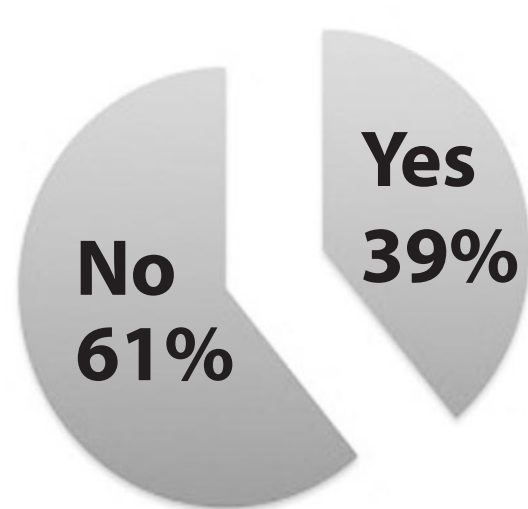
This stigmatization is even less fair to those who practice healthy habits. Non-smokers get lung cancer every day. Heart attacks certainly affect those who don’t live their lives cheeseburger to cheeseburger. Alcohol isn’t the exclusive destroyer of livers. However, those who do safeguard their health now often are met with disregard and disgust when they announce their diagnosis. The hardworking roofer who is stricken with asbestos-related lung cancer now is facing two diseases — the lung cancer within his body and the social disease of unfair stigmatization by a vindictive society.

We’re all going to die someday, perhaps due to these common diseases of the modern world. Let’s not judge others for their illnesses and their lifestyle choices, but recognize they’re facing a daunting and frightening disease. The sick and downtrodden deserve compassion, not prejudice, for their struggles ahead.

Robert Overmann is a senior English major from Cape Girardeau, Mo.

## Web Poll

Do you make a special effort to buy Fair Trade goods?



Out 18 of votes.

## Contact

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-The Roasterie

**Springfield**  
-Blends for Life Organics

**Fenton**  
-Stringbean Coffee Company

\*according to FairTradeUSA.org\*

## Change the world with coffee



Laknath Gunathilake

Drinking copious amounts caffeine might be the only vice I have, and most mornings, like many students, I trudge to the Student Union Building to grab a cup of coffee before heading to class.

One might be surprised as to how a single cup of coffee can change the world, but a shift in consumer consciousness and purchasing habits could have a profound impact on developing economies. This shift has become known as “ethical consumerism” during the past decade.

Andrew Crane and Dirk Matten, two scholars of corporate responsibility issues at York University, said ethical consumerism involves a conscious choice to purchase and use products selectively based on personal moral beliefs and values.

I was surprised when I realized my caffeine addiction actually is helping small farmers in places like Costa Rica, Guatemala, Thailand and Indonesia escape from poverty. The \$1.07 I pay for each cup of coffee is helping the environment and the livelihoods of rural coffee-growing communities.

If you are a regular coffee drinker like me and consume coffee with the Fair Trade label, you might be helping rural

farmers achieve social, economic and environmental development goals. According to the Fair Trade USA website, “Fair Trade Certified” is an assurance that farmers follow a market-based model for alleviating global poverty.

Fair Trade also provides funding for school supplies, tuition and uniforms for children in these farming communities, as well as access to doctors, medicine and proper nutrition, vaccinations and health education to the communities they purchase coffee from, according to FairTradeUSA.org.

Senior Kyle LaVelle, an economics and sustainable development major, said ethical consumerism strictly is a subjective preference, and could mean anything from forgoing excessive consumption to buying produce locally or clothes from a thrift store. LaVelle said the more informed you are as a consumer, the more apt you are to make ethical choices.

Senior Summer Jensen, who currently is teaching a class about social business at Truman with LaVelle, said although most people talk about the notion of ethical consumerism, very few actually put it to practice. She said leading a class about social business has reminded her to practice ethical consumerism during her daily life and be more accountable for what she teaches.

If you are a cash-strapped college student like me, barely scraping through the semester with a minimum wage, on-campus job, you might wonder how you still could be an ethical consumer without breaking the bank.

The notion of ethical consumerism as expensive and only for more affluent people is a misconception. This confusion mostly is a result of the practices

of an ostensible few who use ethical consumerism as means of collecting cultural capital. You don’t necessarily have to be an organic food-munching TOM’s shoes owner who commutes on a single speed bike and claims to reduce the carbon footprint to qualify as an ethical consumer.

Rather, some of the simple choices you make daily could help you become a more ethically conscious consumer. A good place to start is by decreasing the portions of your meal at the dining hall to make sure you eat everything on the plate. One would be surprised at the amount of food waste collected each day from the Truman dining halls. Sodexo general manager Lora Cunningham said in an interview last year Truman students waste over 1,000 pounds of food every week.

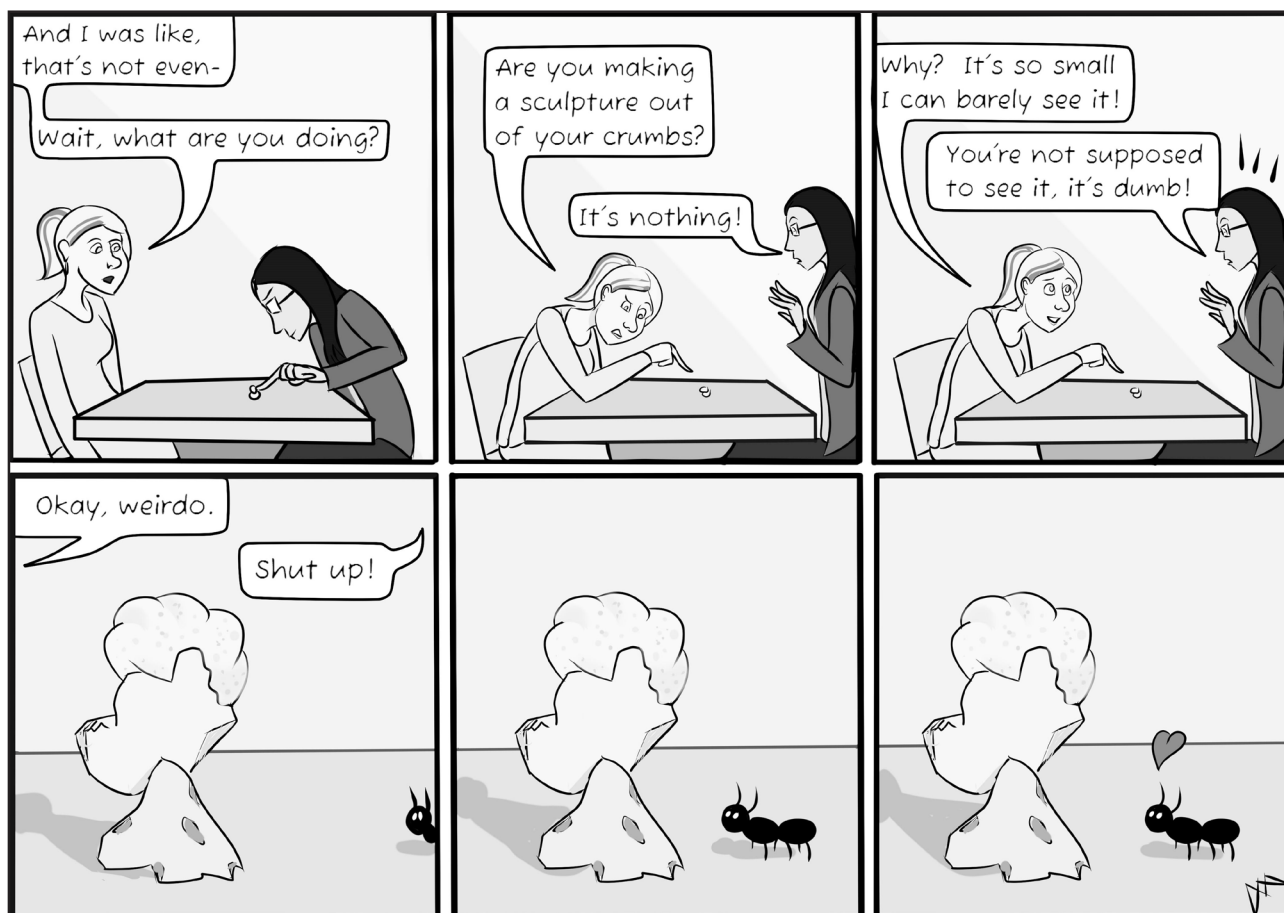
Being an ethical consumer might at times include forgoing our current consumption patterns. This could mean cutting down on fast food and cooking your own meals at home, or owning a single pair of tennis shoes instead of three you rarely use.

The least you could do to expand your consumer consciousness is learn more about how your purchasing decisions affect the world at large. Check out websites like [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org) that provide ethical ratings for more than 40,000 companies, brands and products, or examine the label of a clothing item to ensure it is not produced by a sweat shop.

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## Cartoon

By Megan Archer



### Editorial Policy

The Index is published Thursdays during the school year by students at Truman State University, Kirksville, MO 63501. The first copy is free, and additional copies cost 50 cents each. The production offices are located in Barnett Hall. We can be reached by phone at 660-785-4449. The Index is a designated public forum, and content of the Index is the responsibility of the Index staff. The editor in chief consults with the staff and adviser but ultimately is responsible for all decisions. Opinions of Index columnists are not necessarily representative of the opinions of the staff or the newspaper. Our View editorials represent the view of the Editorial Board through a majority vote. The Editorial Board consists of the editor-in-chief, managing editor and opinions editor. The Index reserves the right to edit submitted material because of space limitations, repetitive subject matter, libelous content or any other reason the editor in chief deems appropriate. Submitted material includes advertisements and letters to the editor.

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