

February 2, 2026

Davidson College Archives & Special Collections

E.H. Little Library at Davidson College

Davidson, NC 28035

I am researching the prevalence of highly sexualized female imagery in cigarette advertisements featured in American college and university student-publications and these advertisements' influence on cigarette sales among college-aged males. I write to request further observation of Davidson College's collection of the student-run magazine "Scripts 'N Pranks," as many editions from the 1940s and 1950s contain such advertisements.

In reviewing these editions, I hope to understand more about the marketing strategies backing the inclusion of such imagery and to investigate whether these advertisements actually increased sales among male college students. Using psychoanalytic and historical perspectives, I will analyze how major cigarette companies weaponized the female body in their advertising campaigns to assess the legitimacy of the "sex sells" marketing strategy. I will also examine how student-run magazines differed regionally in their inclusion of such advertisements.

Davidson College's archives contain editions of "Scripts 'N Pranks" spanning back to the early 1900s, providing an extensive collection of student-publications to compare to collections at other schools. Davidson College has institutional resonances with several other small, high-performing liberal arts colleges whose archives I wish to explore. A trip to Davidson College would allow me to discuss these materials with professors who have valuable expertise in the evolution of mass media and its historical uses. Thank you for the chance to collaborate.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellis Beach

Mary Ellis Beach

HUM 104: "Connections and Conflicts II"

Dr. O'Geen

February 2, 2026

The Seduction of Cigarette Advertisements in "Scripts 'N Pranks"

In surveying several past editions of "Scripts 'N Pranks," Davidson College's student-run magazine devoted to literature and humor, I became increasingly aware of how much of the "humor" and how many of the advertisements relied on overly sexualized depictions of women to be effective. While this crudeness was a theme that carried throughout, I felt it most acutely when regarding advertisements for cigarettes, often included at the very beginning and end of an issue. This blatant misogyny urged me to take a closer look at the seduction tactics used by major cigarette manufacturing companies, like Chesterfield and Camel, to appeal to college-aged (18-24 years old) men, recalling advertisements included in issues of "Scripts 'N Pranks" from the 1940s and 1950s.

These advertisements' tactic of distortion and commodification of women as a means of furthering marketability was quickly replicated by "Scripts 'N Pranks" and many other student-run papers, including "The Lehigh Bachelor," whose staff "went as far as employing twelve women by October of 1942 in hopes that their beauty would encourage more male students to purchase the journal" (Lucot 32). I find this blanket manipulation of the female sex to lure in customers to be highly problematic. One striking example appears on page 13 of the October 1952 issue of "Scripts 'N Pranks," which features an advertisement for Mooresville Theatres. The ad reads "We have girls on our screens!!!" and displays an image of a woman in only her bra (Myers 1952). This is the same issue (October 1952) whose cover page depicts two

scantily clothed women leaning against a pillar, both with their legs spread open to reveal the numbers of pages on which to find “some real babes” (Myers 1952). This gambit is employed in almost every issue after 1952, most obviously on page 3 of the April 1955 issue, where a woman in a revealing top, sleeves sliding down, asks, “Harry, will you please run to Alenn Beck’s room and pick me up a copy of ‘Scripts ‘N Pranks’?” (Bell 1955). These are just a few, more obvious attempts by the magazine to increase popularity amongst students by appealing to the male gaze.

These abuses of the female body are also problematic because they're lazy (although effective) and revealing of the quality of the product being advertised. Marketers took this shortcut often. Instead of exercising creativity to sell a product or commenting on its intrinsic quality, they exploited the wide marketability of the female body, reinforcing the idea that "sex sells." This longstanding marketing adage and tactic utilized sex appeal, suggestive imagery, and themes of desire to grab consumers' attention and boost brand recognition by sexual association (Mayer et al. 2014). What’s also disconcerting was (and still is in some cases) the normalization and efficacy of marketing strategies that employed highly sexualized female imagery. I think it’s safe to assume that the inclusion of those “real babes” increased readership, because from there on out the magazine’s incorporation of conventionally attractive women became more frequent, much like the objectification and weaponization of the female body by major cigarette manufacturing companies in their advertisements.

These advertisements, targeting young, college-aged males, were so effective because they worked on two levels of sexual appeal: visual and physical. Visually, the models chosen for such advertisements were conventionally attractive—thin, white figures with perky breasts and large eyes, donning full heads of hair. The portrayal of these women remained equally constrained. A number of these advertisements show women demonstrating athleticism—like in

Chesterfield cigarettes' "Girl of the Year" initiative, which appears in several 1960s issues of "Scripts 'N Pranks"—or demonstrating intelligence, all the while never sacrificing their sweetness or subservience to men.

For example, on page 36 of the March 1942 issue of “Scripts ‘N Pranks,” Camel cigarettes makes one of their more persuasive advertisements using Peggy Lennox—one of the few female pilots qualified to give instruction in the CAA flight training program at the time, but more importantly “blonde,” “pretty,” and “doing a ‘man-sized job’ of turning out pilots for the Army and Navy” (Hodges 1942). The advertisement also makes a point of calling into question her professionalism as a female pilot training men: “She may call you by your first name now and then, but when she calls you up for that final ‘check flight,’ you’d better know your loops inside and out. It’s *strictly regulation* with her” (Hodges 1942). By italicizing “strictly regulation,” the author purposefully insinuates the opposite, or at least has the reader consider whether Lennox had sexual ties with any of the men she trained, despite her professional appearance.

Physically, these advertisements work to create smoking fetishizations by having the consumer associate smoking-derived pleasure with sexually-derived pleasure, mostly through oral fixation. For instance, page 36 of the October 1952 issue of “Scripts ‘N Pranks” contains an advertisement for Camel cigarettes urging customers to “Test Camels in your “T-zone” for 30 days!” accompanied by a photo of a woman with a large “T” over her mouth and throat, exclaiming “T for taste, T for throat” (Myers 1952). Another advertisement for Camel cigarettes pictures a woman smoking a cigarette, admitting, “Every smoker wants a cigarette that will bring him pleasure, pack after pack” (Myers 1952). Women featured in hedonic advertisements, like these, are often communicating the usage-derived sensations that can be achieved by smoking

Camel cigarettes, implementing the same vocabulary used when discussing sexually derived pleasure.

I hope to discover more about how the cultural relevancies and historical developments of the 1940s and 1950s influenced harmful idealizations of the female body by major cigarette manufacturing companies. I wonder how portrayals of women in popular media during this time period affect the ways in which we view women today—whether the marketability of the female body has evolved. A continuation of this research may involve a comparative analysis, studying the methods used by cigarette manufacturing companies to reinvent the suggestive nature of their advertisements following the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) in 1998, which instituted major marketing restrictions on tobacco companies, mainly prohibiting youth-targeted advertisements.

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Copy of Artifact

Test CAMELS in your
"T-zone" for 30 days!



CAMELS are America's most popular cigarette. It makes sense to test them as your *steady* smoke. Smoke only Camels for thirty days. See how rich and flavorful they are—pack after pack! See how mild CAMELS are—week after week!

**T for Taste—
T for Throat**

CAMEL leads all other brands by billions of cigarettes!

**Test CAMELS for 30 days
 for Mildness and Flavor!**



- Every smoker wants a cigarette that will bring him pleasure, pack after pack. More people find more pleasure in Camels than in any other cigarette. So try Camels as your steady smoke. Try them for 30 days and see how mild, how flavorful, how thoroughly enjoyable Camels are, week in and week out — and you'll see why

CAMEL LEADS ALL OTHER BRANDS BY BILLIONS OF CIGARETTES!