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## The Hyper-Masculinity of Sporting Events

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Media Studies

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### The Hyper-masculinity of Sporting Events

The roar of the crowd, tailgates down, and let Saturday commence; It's time for college football in Happy Valley. Within the student section of Beaver Stadium, dressed in their blue and white, the students participate in a wide range of game time expected traditions. These traditions include standing on the bleachers for the entirety of the game, singing the fight song as well as the alma mater along with the marching band, and a personal favorite, the act of a group of boys throwing a petite girl into the air and catching her for each point the Nittany Lions score after they make a touchdown. Needless to say, the sight of girls flying up into the air across the stadium creates a community of comradery like no other.

Collegiate level football, especially at large state-funded institutions like Pennsylvania State University, creates an atmosphere that can be referred to as a hyper-masculine fandom and perpetuates the stereotype of the College Bro. The characteristics of this audience can be evaluated through the ways in which they interpret texts and morph them into satirical, masculine gibes, which are deemed acceptable for that specific environment, for their own amusement. One of the specific texts they employ in the fan routine, that encourages audience interaction throughout the game, is the song "Hey! Baby" by Bruce Channel.

The original text/song had a standard introduction into the music scene, just as any song would have been recorded, produced, and released before its meaning and purpose was put to a different use in sports contexts. Bruce Channel's hit "Hey! Baby" was co-written with Margaret

Cobb and was recorded by Channel in 1961. At first, a small record label picked up the song called LeCam records; once it hit, Smash Records took the song national and later officially released the song under the Mercury Records' Smash label. "Hey! Baby" was number one on the Billboard Hot 100 list for three weeks in March of 1962; the public could not get enough. In July 2000, DJ Ortiz revamped Channel's song to put on his album, *Love, Peace & Vollgas*, adding the famous "Uhh, Ahh" rifts during the pause in the chorus. Then in 2002, DJ Ortiz's version of "Hey! Baby" was re-released as the unofficial theme song for the 2002 FIFA World Cup; this is when we see the song was first introduced into the sports arena and where its use for fandom began.

When this song is played during a Penn State Football game there is an addition of lyrics from the original song and meaning of the song is transposed. The breakdown of how this audience interprets this text is as follows; All of the students sing through the verses as the song is written, the chorus is where the addition is placed. The chorus lyrics are, "Hey! Hey Baby! I wanna know if you'll be my girl?", then a series of beats follow "bom bah-da bom". During these beats, which equals out to four syllables, the students (predominately the male students) chant their own added lyrics, "just for the night" and then continue onto repeat the chorus again. The students take this original text and add to it, which ultimately changes it, to present the culture, beliefs, and practices of the audience. One can then assume that the additional phrase in the way in which the group wants to define themselves because they are publicly displaying and chanting this ideal to a crowd of thousands of viewers. This addition forms a base and a jumping off point about the social culture and gendered environment that surrounds large state schools like Penn State.

The most simple of issues this interpretation of a text introduces is the fact that it construes the original purpose and meaning of the song. Simply in the 1960s this song was written to express the desire for a relationship not just a sexual act. During this time being someone's "girl" and asking someone to "be your girl" was an offer of formal possession and commitment, a monogamist agreement where the girl accepts the offer and commits to being yours; this phrase went along with other sayings like "going steady" meaning a dedicated relationship and not a one night stand. The way the audience of students interacts with the text shows a change in dating practices as well as relationship expectations and the culture that is perpetuated in college. The act of "one night stands" or the fascination and cultural buildup of "one night stands" are prevalent among college students, especially for males. Through the chanting of the lyrics to this revised song, "will you be my girl, just for the night", in the atmosphere of a male student dominated sporting event, one can say males are more inclined to attend sporting events, one can see the characterization of a hyper-masculine fandom and on an individual level the creation of the College Bro stereotype.

The audience can be defined as a fandom and dubbed hyper-masculine through the use of many examples and backing of theory. As previously stated the action of an audience interpreting and changing a text in order to project their overt ideals as a combined group in a designated place, can be an act of an exclusive group like a fandom. Matt Hills' explains the transition of individual fans into participants of fandom's as an, "ongoing process of exchange between 'inner' and 'outer' is what characterizes any broadly object-relations perspective: the self is always related to, and realized in, a particular environment. These exchanges of self and environment occur, however, at the level of unconscious fantasy: we are not aware of their dynamics. It is an emphasis on identity as a process related to social and cultural others/objects"

(Hills 1146). In order to break this down, one must first establish that the action of this particular audience only occurs when they are grouped together in the specific setting of the stadium. If the Penn State football fans were out of the arena, watching the game alone, they would not participate in the stereotypical activities like singing the song the way they do in the stadium in their homes. It is because of the group acceptance and the fandom deeming the chant to be appropriate for the environment that this action occurs. This shows the distinction between individual fans and participants in the fandom. Hills states that the “self is always related to, and realized in, a particular environment”, so that the structure of this fandom’s culture is constructed in the stadium and is in turn accepted in the college environment due to the validity, impact, and importance of stadium culture to the school. Hill then explains that the exchanges between self and environment, individuals participating in the activities of the environment like chants and lifting girls, convey a “level of unconscious fantasy” where the individuals are not “aware of their dynamics”. This can be used to explain the reason supposed independent individuals willingly submit to the chanting of ideals that they may not agree with. The environment of the massive stadium, huge crowd, testosterone inducted athletic feats, create an arena of fantasy that leaves the individual awestruck in a state of unconscious follow the leader. The type of fantasy that occurs out of the distance from conscience thought can be labeled as hyper-masculine. The aggressiveness of sports effort, the connotations of the fight songs, the loud, boisterous crowd all reflect the gender cues of masculinity and create a severely masculine space. Within this hyper-masculine arena it is evident that an extreme masculine stereotype could develop out of this atmosphere.

As active viewers in this media age, we are well aware of the media’s portrayal of college life, specifically the College, Frat Bro. The movie Bros can be defined by their most common

characteristics; they move and interact in inseparable packs of men that are usually their fraternity brothers. They throw and attend parties frequently (much more frequently than they attend class), overuse alcohol, participate in shenanigans, and most importantly, womanize. And these are the type of boys who chant “just for the night” at the top of their lungs. Now the issue stands that the portrayal of Bros in film has become ever so apparent in the characterization of actual college students; the instigation of media that these acts are how men characterize themselves in college and that the media view of college culture is the realistic college experience. The inseparability of the media Frat Bro and males attending large, state schools has opened the flood gates of Bro behavior into college culture and constructed the now typical stereotype of The Bro. In terms of the fandom that is established in the stadium culture of colleges, it also aids in the development and implementation of The Bro stereotype in universities alongside the media. Richard Dyer classifies that stereotypes “make sense of society through generalities, patternings and ‘typifications’”, which is exemplified through the characteristic previously listed for the College Bro stereotype, like their lifestyle and relationship habits (Dyer 207). Furthermore, Dyer addresses that the reference of stereotypes is an instantaneous reaction to the person and a split-second classification into their stereotypical group; he says it is characterization through “immediately recognizable and defining traits” that pertain to that group (Dyer 208). For the Bros in the stadium, it is their instant, belligerent chanting response to the song or their perfectly matched, blue and white, face paint and beer coosie. These “defining traits” are how the remaining college students perceive and identify The Bros; however, in the fandom culture of the stadium there appears to be many more Bros than would have been identified if one was outside the stadium. This ultimately shows the effect this fandom has on the stereotyping of the universities environment. Most important, Dyer states that

in order for stereotypes to express their values as a group the “effectiveness in stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus”, this is what everyone within the group thinks and does together, which therefore solidifies the stereotype. One can see this within the core practices of the stereotypes and then is passed along to the fandom. The addition to the song was a consensual agreement decided on by The Bros as a group that was then picked up and integrated into the fandom practices of the football games.

From the identification of the fandom and its connection to The Bro stereotype within state universities, one can see the ways in which audiences interact and morph texts. In this case, the text/ song was adapted by the fandom of Penn state football, however, the change of this song ultimately defined the fandom’s values and perpetuates the stereotype of The Bro.