

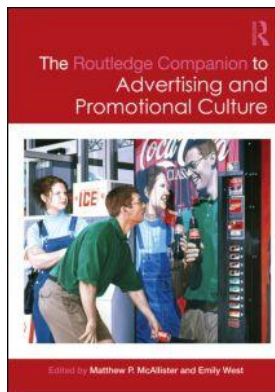
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“BRUT SLAPS . . . AND
TWINNS”: HYPER-
COMMERCIALIZED
SPORTS MEDIA AND THE
INTENSIFICATION OF
GENDER IDEOLOGY

*Matthew P. McAllister and
Chenjerai Kumanyika*

Miller High Life launched a marketing campaign in 2011 positioning the beer as “The Official Sponsor of You.” Combining the targeting of male sports fans, datamining of loyal consumer behaviors, relationship marketing, and the celebration of intrusive marketing techniques (in this case corporate sponsorship), the campaign invited consumers to register at millerhighlife.com to receive a check for \$1 (or a coupon for Miller merchandise, or a donation to a veteran’s group) and a personalized “contract” with the consumer’s name. A television commercial explaining the campaign aired on sports programming in February and March 2011. In the commercial, the Miller Delivery Man, played by actor Wendell Middlebrooks, visits homes to offer Miller fans their sponsorship contract. Foregrounding the economic tensions of the recession, the ad explicitly addresses issues of class. As the Delivery Man approaches one modest home, he says directly to the viewer, “The High Life is tired of a bunch of superfly, overpaid athletes getting all of the sponsorships, so we’re sponsoring real folks instead,” and hands out novelty contracts to one man watching television sports with friends and another working on his pickup truck (“Thanks for living the High Life, bubba”).

But, besides the theme of class, the campaign is also about gender, and disciplining those outside of “commonsense” masculinity. The only male that the Delivery Man rejects is the last one: a young white male with long hair, living in a large contemporary-style home, who opens his door shaving his chest and wearing an open robe, while a small dog barks and techno music plays in the background. “Ah, no,” the Delivery Man

says, shaking his head in disgust as he walks away. “C’mon man!” Clearly, the markers of unacceptability were not just those pointing to wealth but also those indicating the “non-masculine”: not short hair, not exclusively face-shaving, not big-dog owning, and not engaged in sports viewing or manual labor. The chest-shaving man did not qualify as “real” in the same way as the other, more traditional males, and thus was deemed not sponsor-worthy: not even close (“C’mon man!”).

As indicated by the campaign’s Facebook wall posts, some fans who signed up to be “sponsored” by Miller mirrored this gendered version of “real folks.” On March 8, 2011, for example, posts included “I’m a former Marine and a currently [sic] hard working cable guy that when I’m not working I’m hunting or fishing. I’m teaching my wife how to shoot and do it well enough to clip a gnats nuts off at 100yd.” Another wrote, “I live the High Life by assessing the three core values of High Lifeness: value, manlyness [sic] and common sense” (“Miller High Life” 2011).

Campaigns like this illustrate the confluence of two trends in media culture: hyper-commercialism and gender ideology. Miller’s “The Official Sponsor of You” campaign is more an example of the *discourse* of hypercommercialism rather than its political-economic manifestations such as institutional-level financing via product integration or event sponsorship. However, the campaign is nevertheless illustrative of why the intrusion of commercial messages into forms of culture such as sports and everyday life should invite scrutiny. Especially troublesome aspects of this trend include not just the commercial values that these messages accentuate, but also the accompanying ideologies of identity—including hegemonic masculinity and other gendered representations—that such marketing efforts reinforce in other cultural forms.

This chapter will integrate three literatures in developing an analysis of gendered, hypercommercialized sports texts: scholarship on gender ideology in advertising, on gender ideology in mediated sports, and on trends in hypercommercialism, arguing that the combination of these three trends both extends and intensifies ideologically problematic meanings in sports culture. After this review, two texts will be examined. One, a reoccurring segment in the 2003–05 football seasons of ESPN’s news-sports program *Sports Center* sponsored by Coors Light, illustrates long-standing trends in representations of sexualized women in advertising. The second, a 2011 sponsorship of Brut hygiene products on the national radio sports program *The Jim Rome Show*, distributes ideas of hegemonic masculinity throughout marketing and mediated content categories. The chapter argues that, with a culture dominated by niche marketing and sports culture, such intrusive commercial forms and their accompanying gender ideologies will become more common and explicit.

Gendered Ads, Gendered Sports, Hypercommercial Sports

A significant thread in much of the research on advertising is the problematic gender ideology of advertising. Much-cited scholars such as Goffman (1979), Williamson (1978), and Kilbourne (1999) have contributed to this research by focusing on the sexist and misogynist tendencies of advertising, which have consistently proven to be one of the most replicated ideological themes in all of media. Such tendencies include the narrow range of products and occupational roles associated with women characters, stereotypical and sexualized behavior, male dominance as signified through the overwhelmingly male voices in commercial narration, and the various indicators of female subordination. These “rituals of subordination” include nonverbal characteris-

tics such as masculinized and feminized touching and model placement. Shields with Heineken (2002) argues that, although portrayals of women in ads have become more diverse, the stereotypical representations found in earlier advertising still exist. In fact, images of both feminism and post-feminism are evident in but also contained by advertising. Feminist portrayals are often linked to an empowering commodity (Goldman 1992) and, with post-feminism, sexuality itself—enhanced by the commodities such as makeup or undergarments—is frequently associated with power and unabashed female pleasure. But, next to these more sophisticated attempts to deploy feminist themes and iconography for commercial aims, popular culture, including advertising, still features very traditional subordinately sexualized images, seemingly unaware of more progressive social movements, or what Grindstaff and West (2011: 25) call an “unreconstructed version of emphasized femininity.”

Many of these trends continue in ads across several product categories, including technology (Döring and Pöschl 2006; White and Kinnick 2000) and alcohol (Chambers 2006). Such portrayals are also not limited to US contexts (Able, deBruin, and Nowak 2010; Frith and Karan 2008; Hovland et al. 2005). Some scholars believe the sexualization of women in advertising to be at such a high level that it applies a “pornographic gaze” (Merskin 2006) and serves as “everyday pornography” (Caputi 2010).

Although much of the attention of gender in advertising focuses on female representation, male identity is also constructed ideologically. A key concept in mediated representations of males, including advertising, is “hegemonic masculinity,” a celebration of traditional constructions of maleness that emphasizes such qualities as patriarchal authority, imposing and domineering physicality, heteronormativity, and competition (Connell 2005; for sports contexts see Hardin et al. 2009; Nylund 2004). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize that the concept should also be understood as dynamic patterns of practice and representation that reproduce gendered hierarchies. To preserve these hierarchies, hegemonic masculinity must define itself against what it is not, and it therefore relies on the clear delineation, disparagement and subordination of outgroups, especially alternative sexualities and the feminine (Hardin et al. 2009). Similar to female portrayals, commercial representations of masculinity interact with race and class markers, including portrayals of angry working-class white rebels, prominent visual icons of muscularity, and the equation of violence with masculinity (Katz 2011). Among young male consumers, archetypes from advertising figure significantly in their “ideal” versions of masculinity, including that of the Daredevil, the Individual, and the Athlete (Zayer 2010).

Why would advertising be an especially gendered and sexist form of mediated discourse? There are several incentives for using sexist or highly gendered symbols: sex as a way to grab attention; the use of stereotypes to shortcut the storytelling while also offering non-threatening conventionality; the linkage of sexual success to the product as a way to (appropriately enough) fetishize it; and the representational tools for enhancing emotional communication—including eroticism. Goffman (1979) famously discussed extreme close-ups of body parts, faces and the positioning of the female body, techniques that simultaneously sexualized and subordinated them. Television further dramatizes these conventions with effects such as film-style visuals (i.e., slow motion, camera angles), editing, and music. Given the movement of media toward niche marketing and media outlets (Turow 1996), an additional and increasingly central reason for highly gendered advertising is the fit of advertising stereotypes in gender-based demographic segmentation (Wolin 2003).

Like advertising, mediated sports also are a highly gendered discourse. It is a particularly concentrated site for masculinist representation (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and arguably “the most powerful institution” in reinforcing hegemonic masculinity (Hardin et al. 2009: 185). The gendered nature of sports texts is illustrated in several ways, including the prominence of violent sports such as football (Fuller 2010b), the lack of coverage of women’s sports (Messner, Duncan, and Cooky 2003), the sexualization in male sports of women such as professional team cheerleaders (Chambers 2006) and sideline reporters (Skerski 2006), the sexualization of female athletes (Fuller 2010a), and the masculine style of sports radio (Nylund 2004; Smith 2010).

Commercial messages in sports media promulgate and even accentuate these gendered constructions given the prominence of advertising in sports and the realm’s gendered elements. Advertising spending on mediated sports by US companies in 2011 was estimated at \$27.8 billion (Plunkett 2011). With the mostly male-dominated nature of major sports programming, advertisers view this sector as a way to reach male consumers, a trend emphasized by niche venues such as multiple cable TV sports networks (the ESPN and Fox Sports networks) and magazines including *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN the Magazine*.

Advertising in sports media thus often features some of the most blatant examples of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, especially in beer advertising (Wenner and Jackson 2009). Ads airing during high-profile sports events may be especially violent, for example often showing the infliction of pain on less masculine males, men who display intimacy with women, or men of color (Duncan and Aycock 2009; Gulas, McKeage, and Weinberger 2010; Messner and Montez de Oca 2005). Ads created by viewers in “user generated commercial” contests for sports-oriented brands, where submissions often attempt to copy previously successful ads, will often emphasize violence as a form of humor (Gulas, McKeage, and Weinberger 2010). Sometimes the normative dimension of commodified masculinity is starkly explicit in sports-targeted advertising. Examples include 2007’s Miller Lite “Man Laws” campaign that aired during sportscasts—a campaign that not only privileged hypermasculinity but also disciplined alternative sexual styles with rules like “Don’t Fruit the Beer” (Meân 2009)—or 2005’s Milwaukee’s Best Light, airing during ESPN’s World Series of Poker telecast, which proclaimed that “men should act like men and light beer should taste like beer” (quoted in Schuck 2010: 1621).

In terms of women’s portrayals, ads in sports media have a long tradition of highly sexualized images, such as Old Milwaukee’s “Swedish Bikini Team” campaign from the late 1980s, the Coors Twins, and the Miller Lite “cat fights” (Chambers 2006). When women and men appear together, and even when the men are portrayed as less-than-hypermasculine, women are often either highly sexualized or portrayed as “bitches” who become obstacles to fun male consumption or general happiness (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005).

While gender ideology is a significant trend in commercial culture and sports, so are intrusive commercial influences and messages in non-advertising media content. Several scholars have analyzed the prominence over the last 20 years of very culturally aggressive commercial forms (for a review, see McAllister and Smith 2013). McChesney (1999) labels such trends “hypercommercialism.” We see this manifested in: product placement, product integration, and various forms of branded entertainment; forms of sponsorship; cross-promotion and licensing deals between media brands and their advertisers; commercial hybridity including long-form advertising like infomercials; commercially based websites and social media; home-shopping channels and

technologies; integrated marketing campaigns that coordinate various promotional techniques; and event advertising such as those designed for the Super Bowl or Oscars.

Although advertising at many other points in history has been culturally aggressive, recent years have seen a rise in hypercommercial activity. A combination of technological, economic, and policy shifts and the changing tactics that have resulted from them have encouraged a blurring of commercial and non-commercial forms. Among these changes are an increased focus on desirable targeted demographics, the integrated marketing possibilities of digital and social media, advertising clutter, flexible viewing technologies like the remote control and TiVo that threaten advertising by helping consumers to escape clutter, the resulting desperation of advertising-supported media—especially traditional media such as network television hit hard by the recession of 2008—to keep advertisers happy, and neo-liberalism/deregulation. With such factors, Baltruschat (2011) argues that the early involvement of marketers and the prevalence of product placement/integration will increasingly be part of the logic of media production.

As with gender ideology, sports is also a cultural influence in hypercommercialism. Mittell (2010: 62) posits that national and local sports broadcasting “has been a leader in commercial infiltration, as sponsors place their brand names on any program feature that broadcasters will license to them, resulting in Aflac trivia questions, Taco Bell replays, and Ameriquest halftime shows.” Celebrity endorsements of products, Super Bowl advertising, and venue signage likewise add to the sports-advertising mix. Focusing on one manifestation, sponsorship spending for North American sports is estimated at \$12.4 billion in 2011 (“Sponsorship Spending” 2011). Sponsorship with one or a few dominant advertisers is used frequently in sports broadcasts and events, such as end-of-season college football bowl games (Butterworth and Moskal 2009; McAllister 2010) and the outdoor NHL Winter Classic (Andon and Houck 2011).

Critics of such trends point to the increased volume of commercial voices such intrusion encourages, an emphasis to create content for some groups (such as youth) over others (the elderly), the suppression of criticism of commercialism and consumer culture, and the elevation of certain values that go with commercial culture, such as increased emphasis on attention grabbing/entertainment and an overall self-centeredness, as manifested by fast-paced, “me-first” commercial messages (see for example McChesney and Foster 2003). Certainly, like many commercial messages, sports ads have a high level of materialist values, such as the idea that brands can make a person popular (Pegoraro, Ayer, and O’Reilly 2010). No doubt such commercial ideology may intrude into sports programming, including product images and brand names throughout college football broadcasts (McAllister 2010) and neo-liberal ideology—reflecting similar individualist and consumerist perspectives from advertising—found in NASCAR and the mediated construction of NASCAR fans (Newman and Giardina 2010; Vavrus 2007). Wenner labels this intrusive commercial ideology, using a term from the anthropologist Mary Douglas, as “dirty,” where commercial values come to contaminate other cultural forms, including sports (Wenner 2007).

But what we want to argue is that, in some cases, one also sees a movement and intensification of gender ideology that is characteristic of advertising into forms of culture as hypercommercialism advances. It is not just the commercialism, but also other accompanying values that may be evident when media forms become hypercommercialized. Advertisers want a consistent brand image, and if their brand image involves problematic gender portrayals then this gets dragged along and even amplified when the commercial form invades other forms of content. Schuck (2010) noted this trend in poker

broadcasts, when male players during the games were paid to wear an especially masculine brand of sunglasses. Butterworth and Moskal (2009) critiqued the militaristic values in ESPN's telecast of the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl, of course sponsored by a military contractor, and the resulting association of these values with young men. We will focus on two much more explicit examples of "gendered commercial dirt" in sports, one that features sexualized women in what normally would be a mediated space free from such images, and the other as an example of intrusive hegemonic masculinity.

ESPN, Coors Light, ". . . And Twins"

ESPN, the cable sports network and brand and industry leader in media sports, has fully embraced hypercommercial forms of programming, including product integration and branded entertainment. Examples include sponsorship-oriented content like *State Farm NFL Matchup* (previously known as *EA Sports NFL Matchup*, a version that used Electronic Arts video game simulations from Madden NFL video games to illustrate the experts' predictions about upcoming games) and the Budweiser Hot Seat segment, where sports personalities are "grilled" (and therefore thirsty afterwards?).

The beer brand Coors has been especially aggressive with sponsorship in general and ESPN connections in particular. It was the product-placed beer—with Coors-explicit dialogue dubbed in post-production—for the 2003 NBC reality program *The Restaurant* (Husted 2003). Coors Field is where the Colorado Rockies baseball team plays. More significantly for this case study, from 2002 to 2010 Coors Light was the "official beer" of the NFL, a deal that in the second half of this arrangement cost MillerCoors \$500 million (Mullman 2010). With ESPN, past personalities such as Rich Eisen and Dan Patrick have appeared in Coors commercials ("Beer Here!" 2000), and the brand sponsors the analysis segment "Coors Light Cold Hard Facts."

Coors also has a reputation for producing especially sexist advertising. Coors Light's "Twins" campaign is a decidedly masculinist text, first airing in 2002 and partnered with the company's NFL sponsorship (Chambers 2006). Set to the song "Rock On," the commercials featured images of male bonding, intense sports fandom, violent football hits and humiliation, and—as highlighted by the rhythms of the music and editing—shots of sexy blond-haired female twins. As Chambers explains, the first commercial in the series emphasized the sexuality of the twin women models: "The sisters writhed to the beat and they suggestively leaned forward and used their upper arms to squeeze their breasts together" (167). A later version of the ad emphasized the football connection. The lyrics were:

I Love Playing Two-Hand Touch, Eating Way Too Much,
Watching My Team Win
With the Twins.
I Love Quarterbacks Eating Dirt, Pompoms and Short Skirts, Fans
Who Won't Quit.
And Those Twins
And I Love You Too.
Here's to Football!

Shots of the twins in cheerleading outfits are intercut with images of masculine fandom (stuffing food at tailgates, screaming in the stands, lots of beer, a male fan carrying a

woman fan), football violence (vicious quarterback sacks) and other cheerleaders winking at the camera. Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) imply that the sexism of Coors campaigns such as their “Twins” advertising bled over into (or, in Wenner’s terms, made dirty) football telecasts by encouraging television directors to include sexualized shots of pro-football cheerleaders to match the commercial style.

If there is a danger of iconic slippage when it is simply a series of ads airing during programming, then such concordance may be even more prominent with official sponsorship deals in place. In this case, Coors partnered with ESPN for ESPN’s Coors Light Night Cap, a short sponsored feature airing each week during three football seasons (2003–05) on *SportsCenter* (the network’s signature sports highlight program); the segment debuted on the evening of football Sundays and was repeated throughout the ESPN schedule that night and the next day. The 60-second feature would typically air immediately following a commercial break, with the announcer used by ESPN introducing the segment: “Coors Light Night Cap, brought to you by the coldest tasting beer in the world. Coors Light, the Official Beer Sponsor of the NFL.” Once the strong symbolic tie between ESPN, Coors, and the NFL is established by the intro (accompanied by the dubious logic of Coors being “the coldest tasting beer in the world”), the feature intercut slow-motion NFL highlights, fan behavior, and cheerleaders in the same style as the Coors Light “Twins” ads. The Night Cap was in fact similar to the Coors Light ads visually, musically, iconographically, and, perhaps most importantly, thematically.

ESPN hired the same commercial singers used by the ad campaign to write and record the sound track to fit the days’ football highlights, and of course integrate them with the sponsor’s brand (Mushnik 2005). During Week 14 (December 12 and 13) of 2004, for example, the opening lyrics for the segment were:

I Love Busting People’s Chops, Givin’ Up Some Props, the Snap, Crackle,
 Pops
 And Twins
 I Love Saying What’s My Name, Showing Who’s Got Game, the Lion’s
 Didn’t Take,
 And Twins
 And I Love You Too.

(ESPN 2004)

The segment would continue in this vein, with the final male-voiced chant “Here’s to Football!” mirroring again the advertisement. This sponsored segment was criticized by one sports journalist for its celebration of violence (Mushnik 2005), and indeed many of the lyrics (“Busting People’s Chops”; “The Snap, Crackle, Pops”) were synced with images of hard football tackles and hits from that day. In the above example, the fans shown are all male, including intense celebration, screaming, and team-colored face painting. In the “Givin’ Up Some Props,” the video shows a player pointing at a “Remember Our Troops” in-stadium fan banner, associating football with militarism. But clearly the masculine domain also extends to the objectification of women: in both the ad and the sponsored segment, women exist as sex fantasy. In the case of the sponsored segment, the actual “Coors Twins” are not shown (in fact, no twins are shown), but instead we see low-angle shots of bare-midriffed cheerleaders—signaling that “twins” is meant to connote female sexuality (and male sexual fantasy?) generically. All cheerleaders (and therefore sports-associated women) become “twins” in terms of

their sexuality and sameness. This of course is true in the original commercials, where “twins” is meant to connote not just the two actual Coors twin sisters, but potentially all women who by association exist for the pleasure of the male sports fan. The Night Cap makes this semiotic slippage more explicit and intense by its non-sequitur use of the “twins” lyric while not actually showing twins, but rather women in general. And, in fact, the role of female sexuality is key—musically, the song pauses at “and twins” when the cheerleader shot occurs; it signals the centrality of objectification to the brand, and it signals the (assumed male) viewer to gaze at the cheerleaders. Oddly, though, unlike the commercial version, beers and drinking are not shown. The physical product is thus taken out of the sponsored segment, which focuses instead on images used to construct the brand—images of violent football, male fandom, and female sexualization.

This sexualized branding is especially noteworthy given that it has occurred on ESPN. Although certainly the cable sports network is a very masculine domain and has been criticized for not covering women’s sports adequately, as Messner, Duncan, and Cooky imply (2003) the network generally engages less in “sexual voyeurism” than sports on local broadcast stations. The network also has had some progressive milestones, including the hiring of Gayle Gardner as a national sports anchor in the early 1980s (Ricchiardi 2004). But with the Coors sponsorship, and the promise of advertising revenue that it brings, the sports network regressed to an earlier gendered age.

While the ESPN sponsorship highlights the sexualization of women with its “And Twins” refrain, the next example is especially focused on hegemonic masculinity and involves another prominent sports medium, radio.

Sports Radio and “Brut Slaps”

The Jim Rome Show is a three-hour daily nationally syndicated sports radio program. According to the program’s website, it airs on 200 stations and attracts more than 2 million listeners (Premiere Radio Networks 2011). The program features its own slang terms—“The Jungle” for the program, “Van Smack” for Jim Rome—as well as “clones”: fans who call in regularly to offer sports “takes” and to “talk smack” of other callers. Social media, including a Twitter feed and a Facebook page, support the program. In 2011, Rome also had a television program on ESPN, *Jim Rome Is Burning*, which was cross-promoted with the radio program (Rome later left ESPN for CBS Sports Network).

National and local sports talk radio is often characterized as argumentative and belittling of contrary opinions. Scholars have noted of the *Rome* program in particular that it is highly masculine in the aggressive verbal style of both the host and the callers, routinely ridiculing sports figures or callers (Nylund 2004; Smith 2010). Along these lines, once a year the program holds a “Smack-Off” in which invited callers will compete to be chosen as the “best” trash-talking phone call, usually defined as the most clever at insulting other callers. However, Nylund and Smith also argue that the occasional counter-hegemonic moment can occur on the program, as for example when the host defends gay people associated with sports or critiques homophobia. Rare though they may be, these moments are important to note as they represent possibilities that perhaps are made less likely as the ideology of gendered advertising becomes increasingly enmeshed in these programs, as we will argue.

Beginning in 2011, Brut hygiene products for men became an official sponsor of *The Jim Rome Show*. Similar to Coors Light, this brand has long associated itself with sports and masculinity; the name of the brand obviously indicates a physical masculinity,

famous athletes Joe Namath and Muhammad Ali were previous Brut endorsers, and the brand’s main tagline is “The Essence of Man” (Brut 2011b).

The specific campaign supported by the sponsorship was the “Brut Slap” campaign, accompanied by a variety of media including television, a website, social media, and of course radio. The company’s press release for the campaign framed it as “a humorous creative execution” designed to “celebrate the differences in everyone and being true to yourself” (Brut 2011b). However, in the ads themselves and supporting integrated marketing materials, “celebrate the differences” seems to be manifested as “punish the differences,” and “true to yourself” seems to be realized as “rigidly masculine” (whether the campaign was “humorous” or “creative” is in the eye of the beholder). The campaign is based not only on the violent metaphor of being “slapped”—and is clearly a play on the gendered term “bitch slapped”—but also explicitly reinforces a working-class hegemonic masculinity, depicting and congratulating the physical abuse of other male identities not in that category.

One television ad begins with a close-up of a smug-looking white male as “elevator” music plays. He speaks directly to the camera: “Hi, I’m Alex. You know, most people mistake me for European. I prefer wine to beer. And I spent 200 dollars on this haircut. I’m a slave to feng shui.” A second ad begins with another white male: “Oh I go antiquing. Not because my wife makes me. But because my eighteenth-century French mahogany bonnetiere would look just silly without the matching walnut rococo nightstand . . . duh.” Both commercials then cut to a split screen with the words “SOME MEN NEED TO BE SLAPPED.” A hand is shown being splashed with Brut; and then, in slow motion accompanied by the sound of a thunderclap, the hand slaps the man’s face—hard. As triumphant music plays, both men are portrayed as being slapped into acceptability; they are immediately changed and grateful for this correction. “That’s good stuff,” the first man says in his commercial, in a deeper voice; “There’s my manhood,” says the second. The campaign was supported by a Facebook page in which visitors could play a game where they choose a male caricature to be slapped (“The Brutslap Symphonic Slapapplication”) and vote for a type of man to be slapped. A similar “slapapplication” could be found at brutslap.com (Brut 2011a). The Facebook page explains a particularly slapworthy example as men who “may carry a ridiculous little dog in a designer bag”; other caricatures include a *Twilight*-esque “Pretty Boy Vampire” and a preppie “Ken Doll.”¹

During *The Jim Rome Show* the official tie-in commercial messages came in three forms: pre-recorded commercials voiced by Jim Rome, “live reads” by Rome during the program before commercial breaks, and Brut’s sponsorship of the 2011 annual “Smack-Off.” In these various commercial forms, the program mirrored the violent language of the campaign. For example, in the pre-recorded ad, Rome says:

Clones, I’ve got a brand new sponsor to kick off 2011 with. And I am pumped. I am going Old School with it. Brut Cologne. Yeah, I said it. Brut. Old School Cool. Back in the day Muhammad Ali repped Brut. So did Joe Namath. And what was cooler than Broadway Joe styling his mink coat and white cleats and shocking the world? So, when Brut came to me and said, we want you to pump our new message, without even knowing what it was I said “Bring it, I’m down.” Then when I heard that message, I knew it was a no-brainer. Brut is reminding all of us, some men just need to be slapped. Yeah, I said that. That’s how Brut gets down. And not like you do it to demean somebody or you’re looking to go.

But, rather, to get somebody to man up. Or wake up. Or bring it. You know, the reaction most of us had when Longie, Jared, and Hutch talked the old gunslinger into coming back one more time. Like come on, man, really? Brut offers a full line of grooming products, cologne, deodorant, anti-perspirant, and shaving gel. Brut is everywhere: Twitter, TV, online, and facebook.com/brut. Because, at the end of the day, some dudes just need to be slapped, Brut.

(*The Jim Rome Show* 2011a)

The commercial begins by hailing the Jim Rome fans (“clones”), and references a specific sports embarrassment (Brett Favre being courted for one last season by players for the Minnesota Vikings). In this case, some possible masculine polysemy is introduced (Namath’s “mink coat”), and the qualifiers somewhat distance the violent connotation (“not like . . . you’re looking to go”). On the other hand, the “Yeah I said it” signals the bluntness of the message, and the connection to masculinity is overt (“man up” and “some dudes just need to be slapped”).

The live read distills the message even more, and what little light-heartedness may be present in the first ad is removed. Airing in July of 2011, this message had Rome saying:

Brut. Love Brut. One of the most important sponsors in the history of this program. . . . They’ve got a message, they’ve got a campaign. The slap campaign. Brut agrees with me on this. Sometimes you’ve got to prop somebody up. You’ve got to give them their due; you’ve got to give them their ups. But sometimes you’ve got to slap them like, come on, what are you thinking? Are you really going to go there? Are you really going to say that? Some people do not have a clue. And Brut is not afraid to say it. Brut is not afraid to hit somebody with a Brut slap, and neither am I. That’s why we are in business together. Because at the end of the day, some dudes just need to be slapped, and Brut is not afraid to say it.

(*The Jim Rome Show* 2011e)

In both cases, the ads are read with Rome’s typical intensity. So, although the description of the campaign by the company itself mentions its “humorous” tone, in both Rome-read ads that humor is barely or non-existent; the qualifiers are slight; the idea of being the “slapper” is tied to courage (“not afraid to hit somebody”). In the live read, the word “hit” is explicitly associated with “slap,” and is further tied to the program’s ethos of humiliating “smack talk.”

Rome’s declaration of Brut as “one of the most important sponsors” refers mainly to the brand’s sponsorship of the April 8, 2011 “Smack-Off.” Prizes for the winner were financed by the sponsor, or, to use Rome’s language, “you get hooked up big by Brut” (*The Jim Rome Show* 2011c). Choices for prizes were a tailgate and tickets for an NFL game, or a trip to Las Vegas for a mixed martial arts (MMA) event; the latter is often referred to as “ultimate fighting.”

Brut’s presence in *The Jim Rome Show* did not stop with the explicit commercial messages or the sponsorship acknowledgements. Brut and “Brut slaps” were mentioned several times within the program. In a March episode, a listener suggested that Brut sponsor an athlete in a new “jousting” league. In his response, Rome references the primary themes of the Brut Slapped campaign using the language of the campaign (“old school cool”) and traditional masculinity and, in this case, femininity:

. . . @[account name] tweets, “Rome, awesome interview yesterday with [joust] Charlie Andrews. War Brut Slapping a sponsorship sticker on Sir Charles’s jousting armor.”² I’ll tell you what, I’ll talk to Brut about that. I’ll talk about it; they need money. They’ll be in arenas; he said it’s the next big thing. He said stadiums, not even arenas. Let me tell you something, they probably had Brut back then. Brut’s old school cool. They probably had Brut back in the twelfth century. Back in the 1180s, when the jousts were tearing it up. Brut’s so far ahead of its time. Brut is so far ahead of its time, it’s probably ahead of showers. They had Brut back then. You’re right though. These guys do need some decals. They do need some signage. They need Brut. I’m going to talk to my pals at Brut about that. . . . [Minstrel music playing.] Let me tell you something. Lady Guinevere loved it when her man slapped on some Brut. She was up in that tower. Dudes would Brut slap each other and themselves. Try to get up and get her. I’ll tell you what, man, I’ve thought about this. Jousting is cool.

(*The Jim Rome Show* 2011b)

Clearly Rome is having fun with this, as the minstrel music makes clear. But he is not making fun of the sponsor. He is associating Brut with (perhaps appropriately enough) medieval brutality: jousting = Brut slaps; women = prize for the winner of Brut slaps. And, as indicated by this quote, listeners also used “Brut slap” in their language, and integrated it with the language of the program. In a May episode, another listener sends in an email expressing anger at the NFL labor lockout of that season: “War Brut slaps to every owner and player” (*The Jim Rome Show* 2011d).

During the April 8, 2011 “Smack-Off” episode, arguably the most verbally “brutal” broadcast of the year, several listeners/callers mentioned Brut and the linkage of the campaign’s language to victorious aggression. “Dan in DC just Brut slapped Jeff in Richmond off the pedestal,” quoted Rome from a listener’s admiring email of one caller/participant’s victory over another. One “Smack-Off” caller/participant commented on a sports story earlier in the week about a physical altercation involving basketball player LeBron James’s mother: “How about Brut sponsoring the 2011 ‘Smack-Off’ on a day when this next take will most definitely be the most common theme of the event? Hey, LeBron, what did your mom’s five fingers say to the valet’s face? ‘Some guys just need to be slapped.’” Another caller boasted about his own ability to smack talk/Brut slap: “Last year I came in, called my shot on Wednesday, Brut slapped everyone in the next week on Friday, nobody had ever had the game or the gonads to even try something like that much less pull it off” (*The Jim Rome Show* 2011c).

The “wall postings” of the official Facebook page for Jim Rome indicated that even fans not calling in to the show would use the Brut slap metaphor to describe a needed punishment, and would amp up the associations with anti-women and vulgar sentiments. From a wall post about a conflict between an NFL coach and quarterback: “Marvin Lewis & Carson Palmer Boo hoo boo hoo. You sound like a couple of scorned teenage [sic] lovers. BRUT SLAP BITCHES” (posted July 27, 2011). Another wrote about a guest on the program: “Give this A hole a Brut slap for all of us” (posted July 22, 2011); another wrote about the posting of a photo of a man with a large mustache, “Brut slap this tool” (posted July 22, 2011) (*Jim Rome* 2011).

In such cases, fans’ language draws from the language and ideology of the campaigns and the Rome sponsorship: men acting inappropriately should be “Brut slapped.” *The Jim Rome Show* itself of course has often used such language (like “smack”), but the

sponsor's language offers another vernacular for verbal (and physical?) aggression. The Facebook games and television commercials explicitly add a physical dimension to this (seeing non-traditional men literally—not figuratively—slapped) and go beyond the verbal sparring that the *Rome* program typically used. And, while it may be questionable if such fan appropriation of a sponsor's language directly leads to confrontation and physicality in other settings, the availability and exchange of these types of metaphors are part of the broader ideological environment in which material violence takes place. As we saw, emailers/callers to the program and Facebook posters upped the ante of the ideology of the campaign by calling for real people, not just advertising characters, to be slapped, and by adding intensified language the campaign did not use, like "A hole" and "bitches."

Conclusion: The Intensified Ideology of Gendered Hypercommercial Trends

In the above examples, we see not just the movement of commercialism and materialism into what would have formerly been non-advertising spaces, but also a rigidly normative and often demeaning gender ideology moving between content categories as well. Certainly, as noted earlier, sports media already bring much gender baggage, but the hypercommercialized examples of Coors Light and Brut ideologically intensify these trends, at least in particular moments. In the case of the ESPN Night Cap, "twins" becomes a more generalizable concept for all women; in the case of Brut Slap, the themes of the campaign take on a violently heteronormative life of their own when imported into the context of *The Jim Rome Show*, and the humor and potential satirical nature of the campaign are gradually downplayed or removed. Both the opening Miller High Life and Brut examples also offer instances where at least some fans have picked up on and again intensified the language and masculine ideology of the campaign. To again use Wenner's (2007) metaphor, if commercial intrusion "dirties" cultural spaces, then in the case of sports the already dirty gendered space of mediated sports becomes downright filthy with the additional gendered dirt from hypercommercial campaigns.

The movement toward niche marketing and the increased financial influence of advertising in our sports and media culture indicate that the above trends will continue. For example, with additional sports radio like the ESPN and Fox Sports networks, and cable television networks such as that of ESPN and Fox, but also professional sports league endeavors including the NFL and MLB Networks, both the opportunity and the financial justification for sponsorship involvement in sports are increased.

Take for example Hooters, the restaurant chain with a sexualized female wait staff and sports-bar emphasis, which leverages "branded entertainment" to such a degree that it can practically be considered its own media brand. The series of televised specials, *Hooters Dream Girl Bikini Bracket Challenge*, explicitly tying sex in with the NCAA March Madness Basketball tournament, aired in 2011 on cable's F/X and Fox Sports Network. Commercials for Hooters that mix sports figures like college-basketball announcer Dick Vitale with "Hooters Girls" further the brand's ideological blending of sports, female sexualization, and hypercommercialism.

If we are moving toward a system of funding our media through sponsored advertising that blurs promotional and entertainment/news content, we may be seeing more of this particular hegemonic blend in our future. It behooves us to continually interrogate the

cultural and ideological consequences of an advertising-financed media system and to explore alternative financial systems to power our media that enable more diverse and less problematic representational tendencies.

Notes

A modified version of this chapter was presented to the Popular Communication Division of the International Communication Association annual meeting in 2012. Many thanks to Emily West and Gwangseok Kim for their careful and insightful editing.

- 1 The Brut Facebook page posted “Rules of the Slap” that offered qualification of violence in the campaign. But this qualification was itself qualified by the humor of the disclaimer and the claims to “common sense,” language typical of hegemonic masculinity: “the slapper’s code is something we take very seriously. Probably because our lawyers tell us we have to. (Whether it’s ok to slap a lawyer is debatable. After all, they are very litigious. Duh.) It’s pretty obvious who needs to be slapped, so we’re going to tell you who you shouldn’t slap. Slap rules follow the basic tenets of common sense. Or, as Leon says in ‘The Professional’: no women, no children. (Justin Bieber happens to be neither.) . . . BRUT does not advocate violence in any form and is not intending that people should ever be slapped in real life. Even if you think they deserve it” (“Brut The Slap” 2011, brackets in original).
- 2 The word “war” is Rome lingo for “call for” or “approve of.”

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