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Role Playing at *ESPN Zone* Chicago

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we explore the ways in which gendered behavior emerges in a themed retail environment in the United States. We present a portrait of Postmodern Paleolithic in our interpretation of masculinity as it is encouraged to manifest itself in the context of retail theatre.

Our fieldsite, ESPN Zone Chicago, a spectacular complex of eating, drinking, watching and playing opportunities, epitomizes the flagship brand store genre of the so-called new means of consumption. It is a male preserve inviting its patrons to immerse themselves in the virtual and actual dimensions of sportsworld.

We examine the ways in which consumers inhabit and appropriate the site, and focus in particular upon the strategies used by patrons to enact masculinity. Using an ethnographic team approach to data collection and analysis, we analyze the ways in which participating and spectating in a sports milieu interpenetrate and articulate as consumers perform the cultural ideology of gender.

We discuss the American nature of this performance, as well as the manner in which the corporate culture of the venue shapes the expression of gender roles. We emphasize throughout the article that retail theatre is dependent for its efficacy upon the co-creative collaboration of marketers and consumers.