

Gendered Behavior in a Male Preserve: Role Playing at *ESPN Zone Chicago*

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The consumption of spectacular experience is of increasing interest to consumer researchers. Much of this consumption occurs in themed environments. These environments arouse and motivate consumers in multifaceted ways. In this article, we explore the ways in which gendered behavior is elicited and enacted in a sports bar venue. Using ethnographic methods, we examine male role behavior as it is exhibited at *ESPN Zone Chicago*. We enfold our interpretation of this behavior in theorizing about sport, spectacle, and mass mediation.

So I'm in a football pool and every so often we all get together at *ESPN Zone*, with that competitive spirit to sit and watch the games and talk about each others' picks, (you know) that fellowship type of thing. You get together with guys you grow up with and guys you meet over time, as a just natural male thing. The male thing at *ESPN Zone* is a place where you can just watch all the games and that's one thing that really (ah) drives the testosterone. ... Unless you bring a young lady who truly, truly enjoys sports, it's definitely a male dominated atmosphere, testosterone flying in the air. Women there don't change the dynamics. We don't change the way we react, anywhere from adult content language going on to just (you know) lots of drinking. You're really not cognizant of that female presence. If anything, that female presence has to really kind of adapt to our environment or else, it's kind of like a "tough luck" situation.

They've [*ESPN Zone*] set it up in such a way where ... it's kind of like one of those Chuck E. Cheeses for grown-ups to

enjoy games, or watching a bunch of different sports. It lends itself (ah) to just kind of letting you unwind. It's kind of like an ultimate sports luxury, being away from home ... just be a couch bum. Guys sometimes use it as their escape (you know). Guys need an escape.

Mark, African American male, early 30s

The words of our informant as revealed in this interview illustrates the nature of gender roles within this complex, sports-themed environment. Similar accounts of the public performance of cultural models of gendered behavior, enacted on the stage of retail theater, replete with themes of agency and ritualized display, are explored in the balance of this essay. We demonstrate, in our ethnographic account of gender in the *Zone*, the ways retail environment and gender roles interact to inflect gendered behavior.

We investigate the structuring of staged experience in which gender plays an important and almost autonomic role. This staging of retail experience has been recognized by marketing pundits such as Joseph Pine (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

and Michael Wolf (1999). That all the retail world's a stage is a metaphor ripe with implications that consumer researchers are fruitfully continuing to explore. Pioneers such as Michael Solomon (1983) and John Deighton (1992) have urged consumer researchers to consider the ramification of role and performances in consumer research. Our research suggests that *ESPN Zone Chicago* provides the male consumer with a cultural lens to enact the role of athlete or tele-athlete. For the moment, *ESPN Zone Chicago* is able to sell him his own personal stage, where others can easily see him as he sees himself, the center of a universe where his athletic exploits can be recognized. One informant comments

I get the impression that (you know) they're trying to create the impression that this is a real rah, rah man thing. You know what I mean? You know, with (the) all the sports and all. Girls here must feel, (hmm) like (uh) the rah, rah cheerleader. Yeah, I think that's what this place is like. It's like there's no pretend stuff, it's a game, the real game ... with the men here to play and the women here to cheer [smiles big and laughs].

Freddie,¹ White male, mid-20s

Performances such as that described by Freddie, find male guests starring as the lead character, whereas females are cast in supporting roles. Still, if *ESPN Zone Chicago* provides a stage, who is the audience? Often it could be seen that male, self-made, and *Zone*-aggrandized stars perform for their female companions. This gender dynamic is drawn out further in a revelatory excerpt from a researcher's field notebook:

I watch as a young male athlete is hitting his stride, falling into an easy rhythm of slinging footballs through the many moving targets of the Arena's scaled-down Football Field. His pretty blonde girlfriend gazes admiringly at his performance, as the game clock winds down. As the passer steps up the tempo, firing rapidly through the targets, his girlfriend begins to dig footballs from the return trough, feeding the passer and saving him precious seconds from rummaging in the well himself.

A crowd of young males has gathered around the enclosure, watching the performance intently. The passer's momentum and prowess have drawn spectators to the cage and energized the crowd. The onlookers alternate between athletic speculation and scoping out the girlfriend. This gathering of boys is simultaneously proud and jealous as it feeds vicariously off the passer's performance.

As time expires, the girl embraces her boyfriend, fawning over his achievement as he accepts his due with quiet reserve, scanning both the scoreboard and the eyes of the crowd as the couple steps from the cage. Gazing after the departing couple, offering some reluctant admiration for the passer's skill and some enthusiastic admiration for the girl's charm, and lamenting the paradoxical unfairness/abiding rightness of the to-the-victor-belongs-the-spoils ethos of sportsworld, some of the boys take up positions inside the cage, hoping to re-

peat, if not better, the performance they have just witnessed. (Researcher Fieldnotes)

In a rite straight from the Stone Age, his proving of grid-iron prowess is ritualistic; both courtship behavior and alpha display. From another perspective, it is for the anonymous others, the crowd of young males, that our star-for-the-moment performs. For them, his props include not merely the football field, and his talents, which he possesses temporarily, but also his female companion, whom he is exhibiting in some sense every bit as much as he is his athletic skill. There are performances within performances in the *Zone*. Expected performances, promised performances, actual performances, remembered performances, and fantasized performances, and these multiple performances take place on a stage that, like the fields and courts of professional sports themselves, structures the rules of gender within highly conventional and tightly defined boundaries.

In this article, we investigate the ways one retail environment influences these gender boundaries and, in turn, the way consumers themselves stage gendered role performances, conforming and directing behaviors as they navigate this mediatized social space. Our researcher experience at *ESPN Zone* suggests these environments can be both gendered and gendering. They are gendered in their abilities to fit gender perceptions and gendering in their ability to support existing networks of gender roles and relations. We present ethnographic findings that demonstrate the ways retail environments such as *ESPN Zone* arouse particular gendered consumer interactions and discuss the implications of these interactions for gender and themed environment theories.

THEORY OF THEMED RETAIL SPECTACLE

That we live in a culture of spectacle where our experience is transmuted by marketers who thematize entertainment (Rugoff, 1995) is the starting point of our inquiry. Marketers have always found a way to dramatize their wares, entrancing the potential buyer with the allure of products.

From the rise of the department store (Domosh & Seager, 2001; Sorkin, 1992) through the flowering of the flagship brand store, marketers have designed retail spaces that are fundamentally dramaturgical. Every aspect of the built environment—merchandising, traffic routes, sight lines, lighting décor, soundscape, and so forth—contributes to the blocking of consumers, who are transformed (both wittingly and unwittingly) from audience to cast members, and who become not merely buyers, but also sources of amusement for one another. As this complex retail staging unfolds, consumers are often both prop and actor. This appropriation of consumers is a critical component of the staging of retail theater because the performance of consumption, which is both a public enactment of retail therapy and an inversion of guerrilla theater, is itself a principal lure for shoppers (Sherry, 1998). This em-

¹All informants are given pseudonyms in this account.

bedding of performance art in commerce transforms consumers into props as well as actors, highlighting the passive–active dialectic that fuels spectacle. Consumers enact gender roles on a stage provided by the marketer, as evident in the revelatory incident we describe.

Consumer researchers have explored retail theatrics in such venues as malls, department stores (Creighton, 1998), open air markets (Sherry, 1990), and flagship brand stores (Peñaloza, 1999; Sherry, 1998). Our investigation extends this exploration into the realm of what sociologist George Ritzer terms the *new means of consumption* (NMC). According to Ritzer (1999, p. 2), the retail settings that have come into existence since the end of World War II have “dramatically transformed the nature of consumption.”

ESPN Zone Chicago, our field site, is distinctive for more than its complexity compared to the sites of many earlier studies, such as many on the long list of sites mentioned by Ritzer (1999), comprising such venues as themed malls and restaurants, casinos and cruise ships, sports stadiums and museums, and, increasingly, culturally reconfigured public and private institutions, such as planned communities and smart homes. Other previous investigations have focused on what might arguably be described as sites of the feminization of public space. Retail theater has its origins in the joint colonization of public space by women, and the transformation of women from domestic producers to prototypically modern consumers (Domosh & Seager, 2001). The “feminized rituals of shopping” (Bowly, 2001; Domosh & Seager, 2001, p. 91; Miller, 2001) that are the locus of contest, cooperation, and cooptation between marketers and consumers—the sites of resistance and appropriation that the cocreation of consumption requires—are the traditional focus of consumer research. *ESPN Zone Chicago* is also a gendered space, but our informants recognize it as essentially masculine in character. Arising as it does from its roots in neighborhood sports bars, athletic fields, and couch potato patches, *ESPN Zone Chicago* approximates a male preserve and a playground of men.

RESEARCH SITE

ESPN Zone Chicago comprises 35,000 square feet of spectacular consumption potential in that city’s upscale shopping district. The site is a joint venture between the Disney Corporation and the sports network ESPN. It is a complex hybrid of restaurant, sports bar, and theme park that encourages patrons, through a host of simulations, arcade and virtual reality games, and ubiquitous television monitors, to immerse themselves as participants and spectators in a phenomenological universe we describe as *sportsworld*. Patrons are invited to “Eat, Drink, Watch, Play” with the first clause of the servicescape’s advertising slogan, and discouraged from imagining any other conceivable alternative state of being with the slogan’s conclusion: “What Else Could You Want?” The principal venues of the servicescape—the primarily par-

ticipatory Arena, with its banks of games, and the primarily spectatorial Screening Room, with its banks of monitors—ensure both the active and passive engagement of consumers with sport. Gottdiener (2000) asserted, in a manner consistent with Belk (1995), that the pervasive commoditization of life (e.g., themed malls, theme parks) has resulted in new forms of consumption (NFCs). NFCs are new to classic theories of consumption, and to modern life, and are remarkable chiefly for the place-based nature of their impact. These consumption spaces are pleasure zones that serve both as medium and object of consumer behavior. Place is coproduced by marketers and consumers, and shapes, if not entirely determines, the consumption experience.

Following Fischer and Gainer (1994), we use sport as a window onto male gender role behavior, but, unlike them, we do not focus to any great degree on analytic distinctions between participation, spectatorship, and fandom. In our work at *ESPN Zone Chicago*, we have heeded Real’s (1998, p. 15) call to “problematize” what he calls “MediaSport” the way a “remote anthropologist” might approach “strange” behavior. Because most analyses of this phenomenon deal with gender image—in particular, the focus is on female marginalization, stereotypification, and sexualization—and because there is an emerging interest in masculinity, we opted to pursue the more neglected route of male audience research (Kinkema & Harris, 1998). We are not concerned in this study with masculinity so much as the performance and display of masculinity in public spaces designed to elicit patterned behaviors. The site evokes both the communal ritual of the stadium and personal fantasy of home televiewing.

METHODOLOGY

We embarked on a research team approach to a multifaceted ethnographic inquiry. For a period of 2 years, an ethnographic team composed of 3 men and 3 women from a variety of generations, cultures, and attitudes toward sport inhabited the venue across all hours and seasons of its operation. The use of such a diversified team is a critical departure from standard ethnographic practice reported in the literature. This diversity permitted a more nuanced exploration of the phenomenon than conventional practice allows by enabling triangulation of individual observations in the formulation of a cogent, multiperspectival interpretation. Working singly, in dyads, and in triads, the field workers used participant observation, interview, and photography to collect data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and logs of e-mail correspondence with participants were kept. Field-site artifacts, such as *Zone* menus, *Zone* brochures, and other promotional literature found on-site were preserved for interviewing use in projective and autodiving tasks with informants.

In regular strategy sessions, researchers met to analyze data and shape the emergent design of the study. Individually

and as a group, qualitative analytical coding techniques, such as margin noting, memoing, thematic notation, and categorization (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989) were employed to inform our analytical interpretations. These interpretations of consumer behavior were further facilitated through discussion and negotiation during the strategy sessions. These sessions also guided the process of purposive sampling, as the diversity of our research team resulted in rich, multi-perspectival interpretations based on interviews with informants differing in gender, age, ethnicity, and nationality. These interviews were conducted with *Zone* management and front-line employees, in addition to consumers.

As a means of validating our interpretations, informants were enlisted in the process of member checking as the project unfolded. This process tempered our analytical abstractions with individual consumers' lived experience. These interactions with consumers further informed our analysis and increased the resonance of our ethnographic findings.

EMBODIED CULTURE AT *ESPN Zone*

Researchers have focused broadly on the motivation for tourism and the regulation of tourist behavior, producing arguments on either side of the themes of tourists as free agents questing for authentic experience, tourists as exploited pawns consuming artificial experience, and tourists as fragmented subjects with no unifying belief in the absolute value of experience. Our field site typifies such refraction of apparently paradoxical issues. As a gendered space bordering on a male preserve, *ESPN Zone Chicago* draws tourists in search of verisimilitude and fantasy, of proliferation and reduction of choice, of retail and street theater, of distracted diversion and critical realism. Often, consumers mock the gaming even as they embrace it, providing metasocial commentary on their participation. Suspended in an androgenic marinade that is universally described as "overwhelming" (or as producing "sensory overload"), tourists are hyperaware of their bodies as they negotiate the site, as evinced in the words of one of our tourist informants:

What isn't going on or contained in this place? Lights, camera, action! It's much like what you Americans would say, "very Hollywood." So much to hear and see at one time. It's hard to keep track of. One could perhaps lose sight of oneself if (hmm) not careful.

Michael, White French male, mid-30s

The manic sensation of operating in overdrive, seen by many international visitors to be a particularly American condition (along with devotion to monumentalism, kitsch, and heroes) whose excessiveness is momentarily attractive (as long as it is not exported), appears to be profoundly engaging to the locals. *ESPN Zone Chicago* primarily facilitates consumption of American culture by Americans, who represent most of

the consumer base. This was apparent to our multicultural research team, as well as tourists, such as Linda, a consumer visiting Chicago from China. She notes

Uh, I think that sport is important in American culture, with the food and the drink, it's all entertainment. I think that's what American culture is. Spending money, playing games, drinking, partying, eating ... all American culture.

Linda, Chinese female, mid-30s

In this setting, we see that customers both consume and produce the "culture." These ideas are captured by some informants who noted, "Everybody here is American, and there are American sports on TV." Another informant remarked, "Most of the sports around here, in here, are of American culture." Moreover, for consumers this familiar cultural element appears to take on significant roles.

Oh, if you look around the bar, you see a guy with a Dale Earnhart t-shirt, and somebody walking around with a Raider's t-shirt over there. And America loves sports, I mean you know, sports for better or for worse, we deify athletes. They're more important than presidential candidates. There are some people that have their own life with sports. You know, they have their job and they have their team. And the team is a bigger deal than their job.

Dick, American White male, mid-40s

Unlike other erstwhile NMC venues such as Planet Hollywood and the Jekyll and Hyde Club, *ESPN Zone* has thrived, expanding to eight stores nationwide since the first *Zone* opened in Baltimore in 1998. Perhaps *ESPN Zone Chicago* is bucking this trend because of the universal appeal that lies at the confluence of NMC and the social institution of sport. At *ESPN Zone Chicago*, it is sport that provides a multifaceted character to such performances. Palan (2001) advised consumer researchers to study the situations and contexts in which gender roles are performed, as the setting may heighten gender identification and salience for consumers. Our field site lends itself to just such an exploration, because it cathects gender so strongly.

SPORTSWORLD AT A GLANCE

It's just like a real game at the stadium. When the scores pop up you can hear the other people shouting "yeah" or "boo" and it's just like being at a Notre Dame game when everyone around you is shouting. (I don't know) I just started waving my hands in my seat with the folks on the TV.

Dave, African American male, late 30s

Sport has become spectacularized and as this informant enumerates, there is a connected spirit between the real and the virtual sports fan. Contests themselves become embedded in, if not peripheral to, the events ostensibly facilitating

their delivery. In fact, televised sports contests are situated within a context of cultural pageantry (Guttman, 1992; Holt, 1995; MacAloon, 1984; Martin & Miller, 1999) that includes pre-/mid-/postgame activities, commentators, frontier advertising interventions, festive comportment in the stands, and a host of other diversions. This pageantry is clearly visible in the spectatorial overtones suffusing *ESPN Zone*. That these spectacles often unfold as melodrama, especially as broadcast by wise and knowing commentators with whom the fan is encouraged to identify, invites spectators to employ sport as a vehicle of fantasy and projection (Rose & Friedman, 1997), immersing themselves in a simulated sportsworld.

ESPN Zone Chicago immerses its patrons in the sportsworld. Real, virtual, and broadcast engagement interpenetrate one another. Consumers shuttle rapidly between the roles of participant and spectator, as noted by this informant: "I enjoy watching other people who are interesting or good at the games they play as much as I enjoy playing games myself." Consumers are reminded constantly that they are at the epicenter of sportsworld as they merge with its continuous production. Corporate officers regard the ESPN brand as comprising a "group hug of sports fans," and identify both the brand's managers and its consumer franchise as "fans." This ethos of inclusiveness and *communitas* also encourages an appreciation for the irreverent outspokenness embodied by the network's celebrity broadcasters and commentators (Larson, 2001, p. 23). One informant noted

Sport is a very male dominated type of thing, where everyone has some kind of commentary. At *ESPN Zone* you can look face to face with your comrades and say "I told you, Randy Moss is garbage and Drew Bledsoe is really a great quarter back." ... You can feel like an expert, because it's a forum where you can raise your opinions back and forth freely. You're the person that feels like the expert.

Mark, African American male, early 30s

Moving beyond the virtually embodied experience of athleticism itself, we discuss the consumer's experience of the metasocial significance of sport. In terms of Stratton's (2001) theory of cultural fetishism, sport, and the athlete who embodies it, can be interpreted as a "fantastic representation of phallic power, and its image is one with which men "identify narcissistically."

CONFLUENCE OF SPORT AND GENDER

It's different [*ESPN Zone*]. Most of the time when I come when I'm with the guys, I'm just watching the game. We just watch the game. I would bring a date to ESPN cause it's inexpensive and you can do the same thing as at home. It's focused around guys, the game, and the big screen. So even when you have a date it's the same thing, you can do the same thing ... you don't have to not watch the TV. When you're

here it's not too much of uh a stretch from what you would be (like) doing on a Monday night.

Jonathan, African American male, early 20s

Sport is a site of the negotiation of gendered identity. Despite the long, discontinuous, and rapidly accelerating participation of women (Guttman, 1992), sport is still frequently understood as an exaltation of masculinity. For example, in surrender to the *communitas* of the fraternal bonding of fans, the ceremonial enactment and celebration of male identity are powerful motivations for the performance of sport. Jonathan's opening remarks illustrate there is also an underlying affiliation between man and sport and an attempt to combine these two relations (i.e., sport and women) in one place. Consider some other observations:

I think it's an ideal environment to take a group of buddies, your male friends. When you think about team sports it's usually a male or female sport. It's when you build camaraderie. If you look around it's mostly men here.

Dave, African American male, late 30s

In a social milieu in which male-to-male companionship is highly valued, but must be carefully defined, sports provide a perfect outlet for this closeness, and *ESPN Zone Chicago* and other sports bars like it provide the perfect locations. Another informant similarly remarks, "There's a level of camaraderie that's present here that's different (you know) than any other atmosphere ..."

These are spaces in which socially acceptable good clean fun can be pursued by men. It is a place where "buddies" can be together, in which men can watch men's sports, in which camaraderies can be established and maintained.

Seating arrangements in the Screening Room are also a source of gender-typing. "Mike," a White male in his mid-20s stated that

I'm a man, so I like recliners. Very interesting and very comfortable. Obviously in these chairs ... it's awesome!

His comments point to the invisibility of his own gender awareness. Mike's comment suggests that men fit into recliners like hands into gloves. The fittingness of this form of furniture seems to derive from its symbolic proximity to notions of throneness, relaxation, and television, the master of the house reclined after a long day's hard work.

Food selection and preparation draws related commentary:

It was good ... loved the food, great beverages. I mean I thought that (uh you know) that they make good bar food ... that (uh) the appetizers are great, I knew that already that's why I came here. In fact we didn't even have a meal, we just had several different appetizers we all grazed on and that's because we knew the kind of stuff they have ... I mean Lord knows it's a coronary artery platter, but that's what we're here for!

Tim, White male, late 30s

Interpreting Tim's culinary comments, we find some highly gendered readings about which menu items constitute "man's food." Men's food tends to be "bar food," the type of food that can be eaten quickly, with one hand, gulped down while talking, drinking, or watching television. Our male informants at *ESPN Zone Chicago* are not actually interested in fine dining experiences. These more civilized experiences are absent from Tim's comments perhaps because they are not the domain of men. He takes this lack of dining to an extreme by elevating his own lack of a meal. A true hunter-gatherer at heart, Tim simply "grazed." Bar food, consisting of ingestion of multiple appetizers, is apparently meant for the grazing of those who must hunt their prey and gather camaraderie and calories in bars. Finally, the machismo of the diet inspires an act of bravado. Wisely invoking the deity, Tim notes with aplomb that the food he eats in these places is "*a coronary artery platter*" a heart attack waiting to happen. He suggests that the grease and fat of what tastes this good must be bad for you, but that the daring adventurer does not hesitate and, indeed, even welcomes this vital and potent man food. This cardio-meat-sport motif of manliness is a Chicago archetype, immortalized in the recurring "Superfans" sketch on *SNL* and embodied in "Da Coach," Mike Ditka.

Cynthia, a Black female in her mid-30s suggests of *ESPN Zone Chicago* that

It's (ah) very male focused. I mean the menu is very much geared towards men. Well, it's [the menu] very limited. It's got sliders' [mini hamburgers with grilled onions] on it, that's an example of what I would call very, very much a man focused meal ... which is a hamburger that has just a piece of bread, it's between a piece of bread.

Like Tim, Cynthia reads bar food as man food. Not only the sports space itself, but the food in this space is gendered. Sliders are "*a man focused meal*," likely because they are high calorie, high fat, contain red meat, contain bread, and are appetizer-like and quick to eat. Cynthia, a woman, apparently reads *ESPN Zone Chicago's* food offerings as gendered male, similarly to the way that Tim interprets them. Thus, although men and women routinely partake of the *ESPN* experience, our informants interpret that experience as having a masculine cast, as the following capstone commentary on *ESPN Zone Chicago* as a "guy's heaven" suggests. "Archibald," a White male in his 20s notes that "Yeah, definitely with the La-Z-boys [recliners], that was great. The guys are chomping down on their big cigars and their plate of wings and their beer and they've got their feet up and in the leather reclining chairs." To Archibald, *ESPN Zone Chicago* is both heavenly and heavily masculinized based on the rich fantasies that pervade the staged social spaces within its walls. The food—fat-filled plates of chicken wings—and beverages—beer, glorious beer—is masculine. The La-Z-Boy recliners (with even their name being gendered)

enforces a pose that has come to be associated with leisurely masculinity, the benefits of being male, of being enthroned in one's home palace, of being king. The "*chomping down*" of "*big cigars*" seems to connote imagery from '50s mobster flicks, Wall Street players, and Hollywood media tycoons—men of power, places of success, manly players in the games of men.

Informants also reveal their hypnotic enchantment with the vast constellation of screens, sounds, and information displays of the broadcast stimuli. One informant expresses his brain stimulation in these words:

I enjoy the statistics, right up to the minute stats. I can watch the game and (uh) look up and (uh) really tell who's having a strong day and who's having subpar performance. The scoreboard further prompts you to continue enthusiasm for your team in knowing how other teams in the league are doing ... in a sense it further energizes you.

Robert, African American male, late 30s

The *Zone's* grandiose television montage holds many male consumers transfixed. For our male informants, the big screen's enormity invited their affinity, an attachment to the big screen stemming as much from its sheer grandiosity as from its visual and auditory clarity. One male informant, "Dyson" advances this interpretation:

Have you ever seen a guy not get excited about a big screen TV? If you come into my house, I don't care what expensive artwork I have hanging, I am going to say "Dude, come look at this TV! Ya know? Look at the picture!" So I think there has always been a thing in my mind. I like watching sports on big TVs.

As Dyson expresses, a component of the *Zone* experience arises from the scale at which it is produced. Penetrating deeper into the cultural implications of his utterances, they provide wonderful examples of the gendered nature of contemporary media audiencing. Television watching seems, in Dyson's account (as it is in La-Z-Boy positioning and branding), to be a quintessentially masculine behavior. As Tim inferentially juxtaposed "*grazing*" with "*dining*," finding the former male and the latter female, Dyson is here juxtaposing the high culture of art appreciation ("*expensive artwork ...*") with the seemingly lowbrow appreciation of a large-screen television. There is more to this apparently working-class valorization than meets the eye, however. Dyson's technofetishization points not only to a valorization of audiencing and relaxation, but also to the same sorts of capitalist technological utopian imperatives that drive Western, American, and much of global society. Dyson's fetishization of the largeness of the television screen is a projected fantasy about the expansion of self that occurs through being able to select from a vast number of channels. It is about the control

of other's internal spaces, through the (remote) control of exteriorized inner states that are projected on screen. The masculinist expansion of self that is inferred by the large television screen is a type of omnipotence, an association with power and size that exalts males in the *Zone*.

Seen through the lens of our informants, the effects of the high tech gadgets on display (e.g., television touch screens that informants manipulate at will, information boards updated to the minute, "monstrous" big screen), resonantly spectacular in both form and function, conspire to produce a complex of emotions. We again see these sentiments were echoed in an interview conducted with Brian and Michael, two White males in their late 30s:

Brian: "We wanted to be able to watch the game on the big screen."

Interviewer: "And the big screen ..."

Michael: "Makes it bigger" [said with a crescendo and big smile]

Brian: "Why not? Bigger is better. We are men after all ... I mean, because I can watch a regular size TV at my home. I want something out of the ordinary when I go out and a TV this large is that."

CONCLUSION

This article provides an overview of the gendered and gendering effects of a complex themed environment. Our multiperson ethnography of *ESPN Zone Chicago* reveals that themed environments can tap into and reproduce particular gender roles and relations, providing multiple cues for appropriate gendered behavior. In *ESPN Zone Chicago*, these cues derived from male-centered sports, where camaraderie, competition, stardom, exhibition before adoring audiences and women as trophies and forms of entertainment. We would expect to see widely divergent gender performances in radically different themed spaces. Our argument is that themed spaces are both gendered and gendering. By being gendered, we mean to indicate that they are positioned in the marketplace as attractive to those already holding particular views of gender roles and relations. By being gendering, we mean to indicate that they also reinforce a system of existing gender roles and relations. Entering into the themed space of *ESPN Zone Chicago's* sports bar therefore implies entering into particular patterns of social and gender relations.

Finally, on a more socially critical note, *ESPN Zone Chicago* functions as space that, in its unreflective reliance on consumers' usually unreflective reliance on situational cues, provides a set of social structures that can be as oppressively constraining to male as to female gender roles. Forced into roles where they must athletically perform to particular skill and style specifications, competitively cast against peers, alternately boxed into affiliative relations of camaraderie,

choosing from limited menus of unhealthy food, and leisurely reclination recreation, and force-fit into particular perspectives of male-female relationships, male behavior in *ESPN Zone Chicago* is in many ways as themed as the architecture itself.

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