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Why Are Themed Brandstores So Powerful? Retail Brand Ideology at *American Girl Place*

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Abstract

Although there is growing interest in themed brandstores, we still know very little about the source of these retail environments' power to affect consumers profoundly. Utilizing an ethnographic study of *American Girl Place*, a culturally rich and highly successful retail environment, we find that effective retailing in these contexts is an intensely ideological affair. In our participant-observation of, and on-site interviews with, consumers at *American Girl Place* we find that the ideology of the brand manifests powerfully through a variety of different and distinct areas within the store: the Museum, the Library, the Café, the Salon, the Theater, and the Photo Studio. Ideological expression is central to each of these places. Tracking the influence of brand ideology through consumers' retail experiences, we theorize about the centrality of retail place in ideological branding. Although the confluence of ideology and retailing has been referenced in prior research, this paper focuses on and systematically develops the theoretical interconnection between the two. The physical immediacy of themed brandstore experience acts as a quilting point that links together related cultural concepts into a strong retail brand ideology. The implications of this theory draw our attention to ideological and morally-bound retail brand expressions, emphasize the importance of a variety of retail formats within a single store, and provide practical guidelines for retailers eager to build successful brands of their own.

Keywords: Consumers; Brand ideology; Brand museum; Flagship store; Ethnography

In the past few years, retail theory has developed a growing cultural orientation. This orientation has helped to build theory that has increased our understanding of how consumers react to retail advertising and its ideological orientations (Arnold, Kozinets, and Handelman 2001), how teenage females experience the shopping mall environment (Haytko and Baker 2004), and how successful strategy can be built upon the realization that retailers compete for the limited cultural resources of consumers by attracting interest in their life projects (Arnould 2005). Cultural research in retailing also contributes to our understanding of the nuances of consumers' hedonic motivations, as they engage in adventure, social, gratification, idea, role, and value forms of shopping (Arnold and Reynolds 2003).

Particularly salient to this trend is the recent turn to studying themed retail brand environments. Kozinets et al. (2002) introduced the "themed flagship brandstore" and theorized that these new retail forms had emerged to offer consumers a combination of entertainment and brand experience, where the two were so closely intertwined as to be indistinguishable from one another. "Consumers go to themed flagship brand stores not only to purchase products, they go to *experience* the brand, company, and products. . ." (Kozinets et al. 2002, p. 18). In a follow-up study,

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the same researchers found that themed retail held important implications for consumer behavior theory, namely, that such entertainment-oriented marketing environments often depended upon deep and playful consumer involvement to co-create the spectacle (Kozinets et al. 2004). Ailawadi and Keller (2004, pp. 337–338), in a thoughtful article about retail branding, call for further investigation and enhanced understanding of the crucial role of experiential marketing in retailing.

In a recent study, Hollenbeck, Peters, and Zinkhan (2008, p. 336) explore a special type of themed flagship brandstore that they term the "brand museum." Such a venue is characterized by museum-like features and ambiance, historical ties to an often nostalgically-represented past, and an ostensibly education-related mission. In the emerging stream of themed brandstore literature, an unusually high level of involvement by consumers is bountifully evident. They travel to these destinations from afar, and enthusiastically co-create the brandstore experience (Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004). Consumers even pay admission to brand museums, purchasing the privilege of learning more about the brand, company, and product (Hollenbeck et al. 2008). Yet we still know very little about why this highly motivated activity takes place. What is it that consumers are seeking and finding in these brandstores, beyond access to the cultural resources provided by many, if not all, successful "retail habitats" (Arnould 2005)? What is the source of successful themed brandstores' power to profoundly affect consumers?

It is a core contention of this paper that successful retailing in such contexts is an intensely ideological affair. We believe that in order to understand these questions, we must research the interrelationship between the retail brand's ideological orientation (Arnold et al. 2001) and the nature of consumers' retail experiences in themed brandstores (Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004). There is evidence to suggest that ideological motivation is an important new construct that transcends the six hedonic shopping motivations proposed by Arnold and Reynolds (2003), and moves our understanding of retail beyond utilitarian and hedonistic motivations (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994) into the realm of social and moral values. To concretize our understanding, we offer an initial definition of retail brand ideology as an extensive representation of moral and social values throughout the physical retail environment, a definition we develop further and explain later in the paper.

Our paper is organized as follows. First, we describe our field site and relate it to our current theoretical understanding of retail brands in order to develop the core notion of retail brand ideology. We then outline the ethnographic approach employed by our study and explore the discourses and practices used by consumers to experience *American Girl Place*. Finally, we develop the implications of what we have learned for the practice of retailing.

Theory and Context

In this paper, we describe an ethnographic exploration of a highly successful and remarkably rich themed brandstore environment, *American Girl Place*, and attempt to explain the role of this venue and its strategic underpinnings in the overall success of the *American Girl* brand. To do this, we will examine the role of the retail brand in consumers' lived experience of the store environment. We begin by situating our field site in retail history before describing what we perceive as its theoretical importance.

Putting American Girl Brand in Place

American Girl is a $431 million brand empire (Mattel, Inc. 2007) created by Pleasant Rowland, a former schoolteacher, news reporter, and textbook author, and daughter of Edward Thiele, one-time president of the Leo Burnett advertising agency. In 1984, after traveling to Colonial Williamsburg, Rowland began to contemplate the notion of bringing history alive and selling it to children (Morris 2003; Sloane 2002). The following Christmas, she was struck by the absence of quality dolls (alternatives to Barbie) to give her two young nieces. She describes how the two ideas came together and "literally exploded" in her brain (Sloane 2002, p. 70), generating the guiding concept behind the *American Girl* brand. She aimed to create a miniature version of the Colonial Williamsburg experience and offer it to American families using the playthings they have always loved: storybooks and dolls. Rowland envisioned this not as a new toy, but as a brand that would add new meaning and relevance to long-established toys (see also Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel 2002; Acosta-Alzuru and Roushanzamir 2003; Diamond et al. 2009). By 2007, more than 100 million *American Girl* books had been sold, the *American Girl* Magazine had a circulation of 700,000 paid subscribers, three made-for-television movies based on the characters had been aired, and one successful feature film had been released. In short, the brand had become a household name throughout America.

While the brand represents an important component of our study, our primary concern is the retail habitat in which it resides. We situate our study in the first *American Girl Place*, located in the heart of the American Midwest, Chicago, one block off of the famous Magnificent Mile shopping district. The store opened in 1998 at approximately the same time entrepreneur Roland sold the company to toy giant Mattel, Inc. *American Girl Place* contains 35,000 square feet of space on three levels and serves as both a tourist attraction and a magnet for locals. Selling spaces are specialized and parsed into a museum containing historical dioramas, a theatre, a café, a doll hair salon, and library-like gathering spaces that encourage interaction among shoppers and examination and use of products. The success of this retail mecca is visually evident in the hundreds of large red shopping bags bearing the *American Girl* logo that spill out of the store and onto the streets in the hands of excited girls and women. The Chicago store was the lone retail venue until 2004 when a second store was opened in New York City. Two years later a third *American Girl Place* opened in Los Angeles. Smaller outlets, labeled *American Girl Boutique and Bistro*, have been added in Atlanta, Dallas, Boston, and Minneapolis.[7]

[7] At the time of this printing the Chicago *American Girl Store* has moved two blocks away into the Water Tower Mall on Michigan Avenue.

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As we will detail in this paper, and has been noted by a range of scholars and popular authors, the *American Girl* brand is built upon nostalgic nationalist ideals translated into female child-rearing values (Acosta-Alzuru and Kreshel 2002; Acosta-Alzuru and Roushanzamir 2003; Gilmore and Pine, 2007). With impressive stores, myriad stories and deep product lines, the *American Girl* is a complex brand with a strong ideological component and easily recognizable tangible manifestations. Backed by a rich web of innovative and successful retail stores, lines of books and clothing, a series of how-to-live books, and more, the *American Girl* brand is simultaneously a toy, a library of texts, and a set of values.

But the central and, we believe, unique contribution in this paper is to assert that it is the physical environment of *American Girl Place* – the store and its contents – that fully enables and elaborates the brand experience, and dramatically realizes the brand's individual values and overarching ideology. In this paper, we will examine the in-store venues in which this ideological activity occurs, how it is created and, particularly, how consumers embrace and contribute to the ideological theater that is the *American Girl Place* retail experience.

Putting Retail Place in its Theory

Ailawadi and Keller (2004) offer a sweeping overview of the field of retail, suggesting that researchers study a range of topics relating to consumers' experience of retail settings. Our approach favors that advocated by Arnould (2005), who suggested that retailers be conceptualized as institutions that evaluate consumers' cultural projects and provide desirable but scarce resources expressly designed to further those projects, while at the same time competing for shares of consumers' own cultural resources. Retailers' purpose in this exchange of cultural resources is to gain emotional proximity to consumers and become part of their individual and group identity creation endeavors. Understanding the social nature of consumers' relationships with brands has become a fundamental directive of contemporary consumer research. Recent investigations have revealed the complex and co-constructive dance of sense-making that consumers perform with themselves and with one another through brands. Our investigation emphasizes the materiality of retail experience – the role of physical presence – and its time-bound, situated nature in this complex and important process.

The purpose of this ethnographic exploration of *American Girl Place* is to understand the ideological function of the retail brand in the lives of consumers. Floor (2006, p. 141) correctly notes the important role of ideology in building and maintaining a successful retail experience. However, Floor (2006) conceptualized retail "ideology brands" as retail brands with a moral dimension such as *The Body Shop*, *American Apparel*, or *Ben & Jerry's*, failing to regard the phenomenon of retail ideology from the broader perspective enabled by corporate sociology. We define retail brand ideology as retail branding initiative and experience based upon a detailed representation of moral and social values, presented in an extensive and intensive manner through the physical environment, and linked to actual moral action in the lives of involved consumers.

As a retail experience, *American Girl Place* contains many of the core cultural elements of retail brand experience that have been identified in the foundational work on consumer behavior in cultural and communal contexts. It inspires an intensely loyal consumer base whose members have emotional ties to, and relationships with, the brand and the place (Gobé 2001; Pimentel and Reynolds 2004; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006). It has an active brand community (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). It is an experiential retail environment in which a form of spectacular consumption occurs (Kozinets et al. 2004). It contains a range of myths, narratives and stories that deeply involve the consumer (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Kozinets 2001). Yet the orchestration of these elements into a single quintessential physical location offers us an unprecedented opportunity to follow and observe the way retailing can partake in ideological branding, the use of ideology in the service of retail branding.

Tuan (1977) theorized that place is a humanized space, a location transformed through emotional connections to give it a sense of comfort, familiarity, and insideness. So, perhaps most important for retail theory, *American Girl Place* is truly a "place" in its full anthropological sense. It is our contention that this humanizing of retail space into consumer destination, this transformation of bare walls into a potent source of consumer comfort is one that involves a moral transformation, the translation of business necessity into moral imperative through retail brand ideology. Studying consumers' retail brand experiences at *American Girl Place*, a context in which both ideology and emotion are so much present offers us the opportunity to observe – and derive practical lessons from – retail brands' ideological, cultural, and emotional impact in a "laboratory" that represents one of the pinnacles of contemporary retail achievement.

Ethnographic Method

Our investigation of *American Girl Place* employed traditional ethnographic techniques similar to those used to study consumer behavior in a variety of retail settings (e.g., Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Kozinets et al. 2002, 2004; Sherry 1998a; Thompson et al. 2006). We formed a multinational, multigenerational bi-gendered research team of six people that observed and participated to varying degrees in the lived experience of *American Girl Place* and the *American Girl* brand. For a 36-month period, we conducted singly and in small groups of two or three, intermittent participant-observational fieldwork. We each observed, interviewed, photographed and videotaped consumers in and around *American Girl Place* in Chicago; three of the researchers visited the New York location as well. Time was spent in the Café having lunch or afternoon tea, in the theater viewing the *American Girl* play, "Circle of Friends", in the Salon and at the entrance to the Hospital, where dolls are groomed or "treated," as well as in the Library, Museum and other selling spaces. Interviews were also conducted with the store's marketing director and various sales associates.

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The original objective of the ethnography was to explore the retail setting and the interactions among consumers within this built environment. Of particular interest was how the store represents and creates the brand and how consumers interact with the brand and each other in a context created by the experiential totality of the brand offering. Data collection encompassed researcher observation of activity in the built environment, participation in shopping trips and play sessions, and the conduct of personal interviews that lasted anywhere from ten minutes to three hours. Young girls were the only research participants who were compensated for their interviews; those interviewed in-store were allowed to choose an outfit for their dolls with a value of $22–25. The full consent of both parents and children was received for these interviews, and strict research ethics procedures were followed.

We undertook relatively unobtrusive informal interviews with hundreds of stakeholders. These opportunistic and strategic conversations took place within and around *American Girl Place*, and in venues as varied as restaurants and cafés, buses, trains, and hotel rooms. We interviewed girls, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, fathers, grandfathers, brothers, tourists, store personnel and patrons of adjacent retail establishments.

Significant portions of these conversations were captured in research fieldnotes. Additionally, we observed hundreds of other consumers interacting and reacting to the store, and captured these observations in our fieldnotes. Furthermore, the members of the research team videotaped or audiotaped 17 formal one-two-hour in-depth interviews, five of which were conducted in the retail environment, with the intention of creating videographies of the brand experience (e.g., Kozinets et al. 2003) to complement written accounts.

Simultaneously, team members monitored Websites, bulletin boards, and blogs associated with the *American Girl* brand and read a selection of the books and other historical narratives produced by the company. Members of the research team also followed trade press accounts of the brand, grounding them in the narrative milieu that surrounds the phenomenon.

Frequent e-mail communication allowed the research team to triangulate observations and experiences and to test interpretations. During and after the fieldwork, the data were analyzed by the researchers using familiar constant comparative and hermeneutic methods, including the deliberate identification of disconfirming cases and subsequent reformulation of conclusions (Spiggle 1994). Findings were derived in an iterative fashion and discussed repeatedly by team members until consensus emerged. These findings, to which our paper now turns, reveal the strong role that retail brand ideology plays in consumers' experience of *American Girl Place*.

Retail Brand Ideology at *American Girl Place*

We find the *American Girl* brand ideology contained in the dolls of different collections and texts, but elaborated and made fully manifest in discrete focal areas: the Café, the Circle of Friends play of the *American Girl Revue*, the "Museum" area, the Doll Hair Salon, the Photo Studio and the Library. The number of the different venues suggests the fecundity of the retail ideology. All are venues that elicit brand performances; different categories of physical space and material presence give rise to varying types of brand experiences. These experiences are, we argue here, the most vivid and tangible manifestations of brand ideology possible. We are interested in explaining and identifying the ways that ideological commitments can be enacted on the level of retail brand experience. In the sections that follow, we explore the various "places-within-places" of the retail environment, detailing their role in the process of providing consumers with an experiential immersion in *American Girl Place's* retail brand ideology.

The Museum

As we indicated earlier in this paper, Hollenbeck et al. (2008) recently explored the significance of the museum form in retailing [see also Kozinets et al. 2002; Sherry 1998b]. Joy and Sherry (2003) had also emphasized the physical, embodied nature of museum experience. Hoberman (2003, p. 467) writes about the "museal aura" of objects presented in Victorian museums, which is "a transcendent essence linked to their [the objects'] presentation as decontextualized objects under the care of an expert and under the gaze of a properly detached and analytical museumgoer." Our investigation suggests not only the generality of this museal aura, but also its alteration over time and through use and contact with the context of retailing. We begin with a description of two related sections of *American Girl Place* that we term "the Museum," then induct to theory.

In the lower level of *American Girl Place*, we find two different areas that provide a museal sense. In one area are museal vitrines that depict rooms in the homes of the historical characters, but the characters themselves are not in evidence; participants often suggest that they feel a sense of projection, as if they could enter these worlds. There are also (adult) eye-level glass cases that contain the historical dolls and their clothing and accoutrements, drawn from the books. Under these dollcases are dispensed the slips of paper with pictures and prices that serve as souvenirs and vehicles for requesting merchandise from the cashiers.

The vitrines offer historical dioramas depicting the dolls' homes, which appear as sorts of dollhouse interiors with rich and accurate historical detail. Shoppers consistently described this area as reminding them of a "museum." This museum area combines pedagogical and ludic uses of space as it stages theatrically the domestic realms of femininity. In the following section, our fieldnotes describe the vitrine area.

> As we approached this museum-like area, we notice that the larger-scale dioramas provide a literal window onto the interior cultural-historical persona of each *American Girl* doll. A traditional cooking fire, a Victorian parlor, a classroom, a bedroom and other contexts are meticulously reproduced. My impression, standing and ruminating on these views from the past, is that they act as a sort of projective field for me. They contextualize the dolls in their historical period, yes, but I can also see how they would encourage children and adults to imagine themselves living in the era of the dolls.

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> Over time, we have found that it is not unusual to find adult women, unaccompanied by children, browsing in this area with no reason or intention to shop. The place is exactly like a museum. There's a learning process going on here that transcends the shopping experience, and even the brand... Another shopping group composed of grandmother, mother and daughter is looking at the museum collections. They talk about the objects displayed and how life was different for girls at that age. The content of their banter shows that they are very familiar with the names and stories of the dolls. They talk about Samantha, Molly and Josephina as if they were real persons, like close friends... Comparing fieldnotes with the team has shown how viewing these little displays has often served as an impetus for people sharing their family stories, especially grandmothers who lived in or knew intimately about, these times (Various Fieldnotes, *American Girl Place* Chicago, 2003).

As our notes record, the reproduction of domestic spaces belonging to different historical periods provides opportunities for grandmothers to project themselves into the conversation. They talk to girls about their childhoods and share memories that may have been shared with them by their own mothers and grandmothers. In this manner girls learn about different times in a more immediate and personal way than they otherwise would, and immerse themselves in realities that are bounded and structured by the nature of the *American Girl*. The objects displayed in the vitrines thus offer up what Arnould (2005) might classify as temporal resources for young girls and socialization and utopian resources for older women.

As one of our participants astutely observed, the adjacent but distinct doll display area succeeds because it "connects *all* women". "Audrey," a frequent *American Girl* shopper and a participant in our ethnographic research, tells of enjoying visits to the store, either solo or with nieces or friends' children. She described her emotional reaction to this area and the historical and generational connections that it stimulates.

> "I was actually moved, especially when I went into the room where they have all the showcases of the dolls...There was such a feeling of connection among the generations, among the girls with the mothers and the grandmothers. And, you know, the girls darting around and saying, oh, you know maybe I'll take this and get that. And the grandmother also looking."

These related sections of *American Girl Place* may create a sense of openness and connection in part because of what they depict: little girls and their homes. The representation of domestic space through the American ages exudes a sense of homeyness (McCracken 1989), a sense that is vital to the more lingering, relational female shopping experience (Underhill 1999). The image of the home – replete with its evocation of family identity, history, and values – is potent and effective when distanced through time, and legitimized by the importance of a museum display. The play experience itself, the very tactility of the dolls, is also distanced by their encasement. The distance from the doll may create in the now purely visual observer a desire for physical contact, for touch. The dolls are singularized (one doll at a time, in her own home) and thus elevated in importance.

To a young visitor born in Lithuania, the contents of the doll display case dedicated to an individual historical doll, her expression, her Spartan clothing and accoutrements bespoke American optimism. The ideology is conveyed through an interpolating observation of the doll, its pose, and its surroundings. Gazing at the case of Addie, the African-American slave girl, "Valerie" said thoughtfully,

> "Americans are so courageous. She always has a smile on her face, she's never sad. [Then, looking around at the other cases, she observed] They all manage to live a good and happy life - even though some are pretty poor."

Kozinets et al. (2002) and Hollenbeck et al. (2008) found the legitimizing role of museum cases to be an important aspect of themed flagship brandstore and brand museum experiences. However, neither study emphasized the linkage between ideology and this form of retail experience. In this study we find that the museum section, as a pedagogical, historically-accurate depiction of the private home space, serves the ideological function of distancing. It takes something intimate and familiar – a home – and encourages new forms of reflection upon it that emphasize time, family, and feminity. Yet an important metaphor of *American Girl* – both brand and *Place* – is epitomized in these perfectly preserved historical rooms. This is not the iron cage of Weberian rationality, but the velvet-lined cage of morality being represented in neatly contained worlds on display. Through ideological example and material manifestation of the posable dolls, the brand calls out to parents and grandparents to apply it as a role model for their daughters and grand-daughters.

The Salon

Located on the store's second floor is the representation of a more public space of female socialization, a beauty salon for the dolls. Professional doll hair stylists are on hand to groom consumers' dolls' hair. The stylists not only undo the damage girls have wreaked on the dolls' hair, but also offer grooming and maintenance tips. "Katie," a young girl, pointing to the photos lining the walls in the vicinity of the salon, tells us "This is the way they [the dolls] are supposed to look."

Although glamour for glamour's sake is not part of the *American Girl* ethos, the message that appearances must be maintained and that uncombed and un-styled hair is less than desirable is clear. Given the prominence of hair and grooming rituals in (post)modern identity maintenance (McCracken 1996) and in the play that we observed in girl's rooms, it is not surprising to find that the doll salon also mirrors its human counterpart as a forum for female socialization.

> Coinciding with the grooming of the actual doll for a fee of twenty dollars (the "Pampering Plus" treatment costs an extra five), girls and women initiate conversation around recalled critical incidents in grooming among their families. They use hair-related observations to recount personal narratives of identity (re)formation over time. Strangers allow each other

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intimate access to their lives in casual conversation, as part of the *communitas* (an intense and sudden feeling of communal bonding) of the salon (Fieldnotes, *American Girl Place* Chicago, 2003).

Impromptu family dramas also occur here. Our fieldnotes recount how the salon becomes a type of "extended feminine site," a place confirming the role of the doll and the brand in the family's life and identity. This area reproduces with high authenticity one of the major realities of a feminine culture where body grooming represents one of the most socially important areas of competence that any girl has to develop in order to become a woman and a mother.

The pedagogic flair of this space together with the professional performance delivered by the saleswomen imbues the ostensibly light-hearted experience of grooming a doll with a level of professionalism and seriousness that might be unexpected. At *American Girl Place*, doll hair is, on economic and social levels, serious business. Learning how to brush, arrange, and polish the doll's hair is a serious job and our fieldnotes capture our observations of many groups of girls carefully observing the professional stylists. Their eyes frenetically follow the action while their impatient hands reveal that they are eager to try to replicate these results themselves.

Many opportunities to tell stories arise during these initial observations; narratives concern styles and prices, the experience of waiting in line, and the anticipated satisfaction associated with the successful styling of artificial hair. Women share personal and family stories, connecting with other salon customers to nearly the same extent and in the same ways as they do with the family members and friends who accompanied them to the store. The doll hair salon is a place of "girl talk" of feminine values, of reaching out to others who share female culture and understanding, bridging differences and building community, evoking and channeling the atmospherics of real-world hair salons. These are stories of damage and recovery, gifting and inheritance, and spuriousness and authenticity, all of which eventually get related to the exigencies of motherhood and femininity. The delivery of a familiar female service, albeit in appropriately altered form, within the store setting serves to link the brand in a new way with authentic and important feminine experiences, adding cultural breadth to the ideology adhering to it and enhancing the impact of the retail experience.

The Circle of Friends Theatre

Another store location that bears special mention is the small (approximately 100-seat) theatre on the store's first floor that houses the *American Girl* Musical Revue. Our field immersion gave us the opportunity to attend the "Circle of Friends" play, a performance with high production values, featuring actual girls playing the parts of the doll characters and enacting scenes from favorite *American Girl* stories and books, assisted by real actors and musicians. The play reifies the events of the books in a way that many consumers find moving and unforgettable. The tales of heroic girls, combined with evocative, inspirational music and song lyrics based on the patriotic and heroic themes of the books, were observed to elicit laughter, tears, and all of the other outward signs of the emotional journey associated with a satisfying entertainment experience. Roseanne, a 9-year-old, said was enthusiastic about the way that the play instantiated something important about the human values of friendship:

> "It was a play about friendship and so, I wanted to see how they acted it out. They made a friendship quilt and they acted out each of their squares and each of the squares are like a story about friendship. I liked Kirsten's because she had to go away to help her mom because her mom was having a baby and she missed her friends for a couple of weeks and her friends were making a quilt but Kirsten thought it was for her teacher but it was really for her. So then at the end she has a birthday party for her and her friends give her the quilt."

Roseanne's reflections about the play demonstrate that she is not merely following a narrative about particular characters, but is gathering important information – cultural resources – that she can use to understand human values and relationships. Even without attending the play, knowledge of its presence in the theatrical space and the photographs and video and audio recordings that capture and convey highlights of the performance to *American Girl Place* visitors send a powerful message. Partaking in the oldest form of entertainment known, the play is a high culture, conservative representation of brand ideology. Like the classical music that forms the background soundtrack of the *American Girl Place* shopping experience, the very existence of the theatre, the space dedicated to it, bespeaks a cultured approach to shopping and girlhood, a type of retail Pygmalion for pre-pubescent Eliza Doolittles.

As a result of their narrative depth and breadth, the *American Girl* stories have inspired not only the "Circle of Friends" theatrical production play that is provided as a popular, ticketed form of extra entertainment in American Girl Place, but have served as source material for three highly successful made-for-television movie specials, each later marketed on DVD, and one major motion picture release in 2008. Although we cannot provide a detailed analysis of the Circle of Friends theatrical production in this manuscript, we assert its value in demonstrating the retail brand ideology. Furthermore, with real girls playing the parts of dolls, beautiful period costumes replacing doll clothes, and spoken word replacing child's book text, the production tangibilizes and realizes the symbolic power of the *American Girl* brand as a rich tapestry of stories. Similar to other highly inspirational entertainment brands such as *Star Trek* (Kozinets 2001), and *Star Wars* (Brown et al. 2003), this rich narrative content provides conceptual space for consumers' to locate themselves on affective "mattering maps" (Grossberg 1992) and to build idealized conceptions of themselves and their social worlds.

The Library

On the first floor is also located the Library, a large area filled with various *American Girl* themed books. From an initial set

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of three historical dolls, accessories, and accompanying books has come *American Girl* offerings that cater to almost every need of female "tweens": lines of clothing for girls and their mothers, fashion accessories, hair and skin care products, greeting cards, room decorations, electronic organizers, and jewelry. These products, along with the *American Girls of Today*, are grouped together in various sections of the second floor shopping area. In the first floor Library, however, it is the inner, rather than the outer, needs of girlhood that are served.

The *American Girl* Library is unadulterated ideology, filled not only with historical dolls and their stories, but also with contemporary narratives, how-to manuals, and books about personal grooming, social etiquette, and relationships. The Library provides the pedagogic component of the brand, particularly valued by adult women. They feel that by buying *American Girl* products they are "supporting the family" and that their efforts to teach girls how to behave in a world where morality seems to be in short supply are aided by the *American Girl* books and dolls. The rich collection of books gives material form to the profound concern the brand has for girls and the women whose task it is to guide and socialize them.

The Photo Studio

Marking the store as a tourist destination, the Photo Studio is a location intended to provide a lasting memento of a special experience in a way that interjects the girl into the reality of the *American Girl* brand experience, and thus allows her to partake directly of the brand ideology. Hidden away around a corner on the store's first floor, as if avoiding pretensions of crass commercialism, the Photo Studio nonetheless marks the store as a special space, a site of memories worth capturing. In the studio, girls are turned into *American Girl* models-for-a-moment. They pose for a professional photo that can be printed as an *American Girl* themed portrait design or the simulated cover of an issue of the *American Girl* Magazine. As a highly personalized souvenir, it can later be displayed or preserved for posterity. From an ideological perspective, the portrait not only emphasizes the special quality of the retail experience, it also literally links the brand image with the image of the individual girl, a visual demonstration of their affiliation.

The Café

As has been noted in past studies of themed flagship brandstores and brand museums (Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Kozinets et al. 2002), the provision of specialized food and dining experiences can play a significant role in the theming of retail experiences. The *American Girl Café* is a semi-formal dining room with pink stripes and an abundance of pink accoutrements. It is single-mindedly designed to accommodate the special needs of girls, their mothers and grandmothers, and their dolls. Dolls sit at the dining table in specially designed booster chairs next to their owners, and are served from their own striped bone china teacups. The restaurant boasts that "dolls eat free." It is, however, worth noting that only authentic *American Girl* dolls are permitted to dine in the Café. This is an exclusive club.

The New York Times reported that, before it opened, the *American Girl* Café in the Times Square *American Girl Place* location had taken an astounding 30,000 reservations (Moskin 2004). The Café is designed to provide families with royal treatment and a stage where they can celebrate personal events like birthdays, anniversaries, moves, or simply enrich the special experience that is a visit to *American Girl Place*. The layout, the atmosphere, and the decorations and table adornments facilitate and stimulate interpersonal interaction, the recall and creation of family mythologies and memories. As well, cards containing questions that prompt conversation and steer it in particular directions are provided to make this a special meal. In the following blog posting, "Alan" writes about his family's experience at the *American Girl* Café, reflecting on the effects of this conversational stimulation.

> This lunch is no ordinary lunch, mind you. You get a nice meal with cinnamon buns and dessert, along with a seat for your doll. . . Seriously, we did have a great time there. Daniel was a trooper as we sat at a very frilly table. He is a great big brother who loves his sister very much. He even let Mia (the doll) sit next to him so Caroline could help her with her tea. (No need to read it again. You read it right the first time.) On the table was a box with questions for us to ask each other. We found out all sorts of fun information about each other. We laughed and realized some things about our family that we hadn't known before. As we were leaving I couldn't help but wonder why we had to come to New York to a restaurant in a store with a doll to have such a fun experience around the dinner table. Too often we are trying to rush through dinner to get the kids in bed, meet a schedule, or some other reason, and we forget to use the time to enjoy each other and learn more about our hopes, disappointments, and dreams (The Front Porch 2008).

The morality of the retail experience is reflected in Alan's contrasting of this special experience with the mundane, routine realities of everyday existence. Although this is merely "a restaurant in a store," the experience generated a new sense of family closeness. He states that they discovered new – and apparently meaningful – things about one another while dining at the café. Alan then proceeds in his posting to reflect on research showing the importance of family dining experiences, and then provides some Biblical references.

The Café menu reflects the ethnic diversity of the dolls and their stories, again actualizing in tangible, gustatory, and inescapably cultural terms the reality of the narratives and their referents. Although there are some child-friendly touches, such as Oreo sprinkles on chocolate mousse, there are many "high society" touches such as tea served from white bone china pots that evoke tradition, beckon enhanced cultural capital, and intimate that this is an experience to assist in the effective socialization of young ladies. Soda pop is not served. The tea is bitter, unsweetened, as befits people of proper social standing (Levy 1981). Ingredients such as watercress, fresh mint, and blue cheese are used (Moskin 2004). Ideologically, the message provided is that this is a proper, moral place—a place to share a

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virtuous and dignified meal that both teaches and rewards good girls.

Interrelating Materialism and Heroism in American Girl Place's Ideology

Alongside the ideology of these products, narratives, and places are other ideologies that are more difficult to discern. One of the hallmarks of an ideology is that it not only makes a particular view of the world seem natural, but it makes it seem desirable, complete, and perfect. This notion of a perfect world was combined with a perfect product or brand and a perfect place in consumer discussions of *American Girl Place*.

In order to understand the ideological impact of *American Girl Place* upon an average female American consumer, we accompanied "Sharyn," a single, 30-year-old woman with no children, who was a friend of one of the researchers, on her first visit to *American Girl Place* in Chicago. Initially, Sharyn had associated the brand with "rampant consumerism" and viewed it with suspicion. In less than an hour, she experienced a remarkable conversion from skeptic to enthusiast. As she moved through the store, past case after case of dolls and their "perfectly" scaled, tiny, soft and colorful items recreated from different eras and cultural worlds, her negative preconceptions evaporated. She admitted that as a child she would have loved these things and that, in the end, she wanted everything she saw. She exclaimed: "OK, so this wasn't quite the reaction that I had expected. It's all so beautiful and perfect. It's overwhelming and wonderful." The unexpected progression of this interview as well as Sharyn's repeated use of the quintessentially ideological and morally-charged term "perfect" suggested the power of the physical surroundings to enact a dramatic change in brand perception, spurring our conceptualization of the idea of retail brand ideology.

Repeatedly, we heard other adult women describe *American Girl Place* and its offerings as "perfect." This notion of perfection comes through in the following in-store interview verbatim with a mother examining the quality of the product offerings.

> "Everything is done the right way. The clothes are constructed well, the skirt, the little scarlet edges and all the little beads and sequins. Everything... they just don't hold back, you know? Everything is perfect. I mean look at, look what they put in here. This is the outfit for a cheerleader. The little outfit, this trim is not easy to sew on here.

"The right way" is both a moral judgment and a perception of quality. "Perfect" is an attribute of the place and the products and, as Lacan (1977) taught us, an idealized state of complete fullness, complete realization. Perfection also seems to be on display in the idealized versions of hippie chicks, of Halloween costumes, of girl guitar players, and the myriad of other contemporary archetypes that are transformed into dolls, then singularized and cast in the museal aura through being encased in a special glass display.

As well, the "Just Like You" brand of dolls offers girls a chance to customize the skin, eye, and hair color of their dolls, presumably to match their own. Twenty different versions of these dolls are encased in an enormous glass case on the second floor of *American Girl Place*. These dolls promise to be "Just Like You," but are also strangely uniform and perfect, beautifully proportioned, smiling slightly, without blemish, unmoving, beyond misbehavior, ageless, frozen in time. One young disabled participant astutely observed from her wheelchair, "There's no real reality stuff here. Everybody's perfect. There's no wheelchairs. No life problems." Ideology is not intended to be accurate; it aims for an image of perfection. As Sharyn notes, this perfection, wonder, and beauty can feel "overwhelming"—another frequent description of the experience of the store.

Finally, our analysis of the values and ideology of *American Girl Place* would be incomplete without mentioning the interesting ideological interrelation of materialism and acquisitiveness with the idealized values of everyday female heroism. Repeatedly in our fieldnotes, we observed how the stimulation of numerous "beautiful" and "perfect" options, immaculately displayed behind glass, evoking the museal aura, combined with the excitement of pending acquisition. This emotional energy made *American Girl Place* the site of frenetic activity for girls and women. Perfection on display added to perfection for sale appear to create a powerful retail combination.

Girls dart from one display to the next, trying to decide what should accompany them home. Seven-year-old friends Maggie and Molly, who we also interviewed at home, showed (and pulled) us around the store while trying to decide what each will purchase for their $25 interview fee. They enumerate their current holdings: "Yeah, and I got Molly Bedtime. Molly School. Her trunk. And the Molly Goes to School. I think I would get something that would go with all of them. I don't know what to get. I think we should take a look upstairs." Material stimulation and largesse increase their excitement. Staccato conversation fragments draw each other's attention to numerous possible acquisitions.

> Maggie: "Look at this teddy bear."
>
> Molly: "Cute. Look at these necklaces." [Moving to the next display] Oh. You could use the rug. . .I think we should get a basket. Come on." [Grabbing the basket].

From our interviews, we learned that in their interactions with other girls at school and on playdates, these girls frequent compare their relative holdings of *American Girl* dolls and accessories with one another. At almost $100 per doll, children who can afford to have three or four dolls are clearly privileged, both in the eyes of their peers as well as in an objective material sense. Ownership of the dolls, with their ethical implications, indicates one's parents' significant investment, an indication of taste, distinction, and morality.

Indeed, with its high price tag and its cachet of enhanced class, shopping at *American Girl Place* is something that many consumers feel proud of and seek to publicize. On sidewalks, in the spaces between destinations and venues, girls and mothers carried dolls and often large red *American Girl* shopping bags. We interpret these bags as markers of materialism. With their large size, bold and recognizable red color and logo block let-

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tering, the bags become mobile billboards that proudly signal the recent presence of the brand in the life of the consumers carrying them. They exemplify not only the showy exuberance of conspicuous-style American consumption but also a type of caring, compassionate capitalism, an expenditure intended to produce better girls and a more moral socialization.

Sharyn was converted from skeptic to believer in the face of the brand's archetypal retail embodiment. This demonstrates for us that there is no inherent conflict between everyday heroism and materialism in contemporary America or at the store. A materialististic and acquisitive ideology blends effortlessly with the book's and story's narrative ideology of everyday heroism. What can we do to make the world a better place? Raise better children. What can we do to teach our young girls to be more moral, social, and caring? Buy them the *American Girl* brand. The complexity of *American Girl's* retail brand easily encapsulates this complex of meanings as it fits into a wider and more flexible ideological framework. 'Heroically' spending on ideologically appropriate goods is, in fact, the guiding value behind boycotting, green consumption, farmers' markets, carbon offsets, kosher and vegetarian eating, buying local, and many other established product and service sales. We analyze this ideological orientation and the critical role played by retail place in greater depth in the following section.

Discussion

What do consumers seek and gain from elaborate brandstores such as *American Girl Place*? What is the source of their power to affect consumers profoundly? Our findings draw us into a deepened understanding of the role of ideology in retailing. Layne (2004, p. 126) cogently observes that the ideology of middle class motherhood in the contemporary U.S. is that

> one should raise healthy, happy, competent, self-confident children. And also be sure not to get so caught up in all that is required to accomplish this that one forgets, or is too tired, to enjoy them. Mothers must constantly self-monitor to be sure that their children not only have all that they need but are also enjoying each moment of their childhood. That is not all. One must also record these "precious moments" so that they can continue to be enjoyed as 'priceless memories" for years to come. This two-part enterprise – providing children with "memorable experiences," and then assisting them to remember them – is an exercise in the contemporary management of children, and hence an enactment of love.

She notes that girls are socialized at a young age into social values that combine with memory-making practices. While mega-brand Disney is Layne's (2004) exemplar of the practice, *American Girl*/Mattel arguably trumps Disney in the targeted, contemporary execution of the concept. *American Girl Place* is a well-spring of memory, both authentic and contrived. It is a place where memories are created, revised, recovered and recycled.

Past research has mentioned, but not fully developed, the relationship between ideology and the retail environment. Arnold et al. (2001) conceptualized retail ideology occurring through flyers, rather than through place. Kozinets et al. (2002) saw ideology at work in mythemes, but focused more on thematic elements than the role they could play in an extensive ideology. Hollenbeck et al. (2008) recognize the role of ideology in an iconic American brand, but focus narrowly on the museum form of the retail experience.

In this paper, we develop the particularized retail link between ideology and place by tracking its progression through emplaced consumer experience. Paradoxically and ironically, *American Girl Place* is situated within material marketplaces and involves materialist pursuits, from search through disposition, yet sells values of heroism and perhaps even abstinence. This ideological promotion is keenly targeted at mothers, and secondarily at grandmothers, to powerful effect. In an intricate dance of commoditization and appropriation, corporation and consumer address their rift with a combination of profoundly personal and prepackaged values and memories. Memories, which become aspirations that encapsulate values, are purchased and customized in a materialized intergenerational drama each time the sororal unit invokes the *American Girl* brand or crosses the threshold of *American Girl Place*.

Antecedents of commitment, according to Pimentel and Reynold's (2004) model, include the filling of a void and the definition or enhancement of identity. *American Girl Place* is filled with representations of powerful girls who evidence neither the vanity of Barbie nor the precocious sexiness of Bratz, and the small but perfect and historically accurate accoutrements that make possible – and credible – their everyday heroics. Not only does *American Girl Place's* retail brand ideology address an antecedent void, it transforms "calculative" and "normative" commitment into affective commitment via what the Pimentel and Reynolds model characterizes as "sacralization" (see also Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Like a trip to the Holy Land or a visit to Mecca, the journey to *American Girl Place* and the experience that awaits is the quintessence and culmination of this sacralizing process. Our literature is only beginning to explore the identity-oriented interrelationships of ideology – which is usually conceptualized more politically and socially – and sacralization, spirituality, and quasi-religions.

But what is the role of the "retail" in retail brand ideology? Kozinets (2008) recently built upon past theory by Žižek (1989) and Stavrakakis (1997) to develop the notion of overarching consumption ideologies consisting of differing ideological elements, each containing cultural constructs anchored by "quilting points" or *points de capiton*. In past theory, the point de capiton, the central element that articulates different social constructs together into a recognizable element of an ideology, has often been a historical moment, a major event. However, we suggest here that in the commercial world the role of the point de capiton can be played by the powerful immediacy of well-designed physical experience, the orchestration of human behavior, and the availability of consumer immersion. Ideology, quite simply, can be effectively woven together through retail experience. Wedded to a culturally potent brand, this becomes retail brand ideology—a set of tactics that culminate in a perfect place, rich in values, encouraging a type of ethically-grounded acquisition, where consumers find that purchasing and partaking are social pursuits that help them gain or regain morality.

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Another one of our core theoretical contentions in this paper is that the provision of rich, variegated, intentionally moral and value-laden experiences that transport consumers to other times and places is a key element in successfully enacting a retail brand ideology. Retail brands such as *The Body Shop* or *American Apparel* may seek to link their own production and marketing with particular ideologies, such as environmentalism or workers' and human rights. But, we would argue, these attempts will be far more successful if they are (1) encapsulated in detailed stories or "mythemes" (as argued and developed by Kozinets et al. 2002) *and* they are enacted in a set of interrelated retail brand experiences including as many of the following as possible: informational museum-style displays that partake in the museal aura, dramatizations, costuming and garb, themed food consumption and dining rituals, and informational rich materials such as books, as well as the more direct forms of affiliation display such as easily identified shopping bags and logo carrying t-shirts. By providing a variety of ideology-demonstrating-and-enforcing experiences, the retailer encourages a type of immersive experience reminiscent of the communitas of consumers found in other intensive retail service encounters (Arnould and Price 1993). Through multiple facets of the retail experience the cultural importance of the brand is reinforced. Enacted and made tangible, demonstrating its value through its values, the brand becomes real, meaningful, and significant. Ideology enforced by community elicits emotion, reaffirms commitment, and inspires devotion. With retail brand ideology firmly in place, shopping becomes pilgrimage.

This ideological understanding enhances and alters our current understanding of retail and cultural views of consumer behavior in retail venues, and meaningfully extends the body of flagship brandstore and brand museum research chronicled in the retail literature (Hollenbeck et al. 2008; Kozinets et al. 2002). We build on and extend Arnould's (2005) notion of resource exchange by showing that not only must retailers provide resources in a general way that are used by consumer's as part of their life projects, but that the retail experience itself can become an anchor for the ideological brand, an important marker that a potent and emotionally rich set of social values is up for grabs. The material aspect of the retail environment is an essential element enabling that ideology to manifest fully-bloomed and on display, in all of its realized complexity.

The physical experience suffuses the general ideology with reality. We propose that, the more "anchoring points" that the physical experience manifests – for example, the girls' heroic stories, museum cases, the hair salon with its female communitas, the library with its moral guidebooks, the uplifting theatrical review, and the restaurant with the family conversation cards – the more powerful, variegated, and "real" is the subjective ideological experience. At *American Girl Place*, products, services, meanings and experiences, both scripted and improvised, are all delivered with the unmatchable force of the spectacle. The power of this brandscape transcends current conceptualizations of brand extensions (e.g., Aaker and Keller 1990; Keller 1993) and moves them into a more holistic and consumer-centric cultural conception of brand ideology. With complex narrativity cemented into the physical environment of its retail environment, the brand achieves the immanence of ideology.

We encourage other researchers to continue developing these ideas about retail ideology through examining their manifestation in other branded retail environments. This paper has left untouched questions of the role of particular cultures, ethnicities, subcultures, communities, class and gender positions in such ideological pursuits, although their influence is likely to be theoretically and pragmatically important.

Implications for Retailers

Founder Pleasant Rowland asserts that "The dolls are relatively generic, but the visual and verbal stories wrapped around them – told through the books, clothing, and accessories – are the phenomenon's lifeblood" (Lavin 2003, p. 79). Her statement undersells the importance of providing a retail environment that is rich in signals and images. Our research suggests that parts of the *American Girl* brand's success comes from the way that decent, moral, human values are woven into the physical layout of the retail store. This melding suggests some useful lessons that can be applied by retail managers and brought to the retailing of other products and services. Four suggestions follow.

Use physical cues to suggest moral values

Consider how signals, symbols, and stories are used at *American Girl Place* to provide a truly human face to the brand. Ethics and social values are made a key part of the retail experience, but in a subtle way that does not overtly talk about morality. Happy, optimistic faces on dolls. A doll sitting at a small desk with one arm raised high to answer a question. Tasteful clothes that fit grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. Books about how to keep friends. Conversation starters that help families to learn new things about one another. In addition, the meanings of these signals, symbols, and stories are given a life outside the store. They are made portable and visible. We found that even relatively insignificant objects such as a shopping bag or sticker hold the power to showcase the brand to the larger community. These objects represent the deep values of the brand, and help customer recollect their meaningful retail experience. Build the moral image, but ground it in the physical.

Stimulate brand enactment within the retail store

The enactment of the *American Girl* brand takes many forms. In particular, the brand is enacted through the telling and retelling of the *American Girl* stories, many of which are learned, practiced and enjoyed within particular areas of the store, such as the Café, the Library, or the Theater. An appropriate retail strategy is to stimulate and facilitate this brand enactment. Individual retailers must stretch their imagination and creativity to find appropriate ways to perform and apply their brand's moral values. They must give consumers a reason to believe – not only in a value or unique selling proposition – but in those values. Think about what the ideology of the store is, and how it can be communicated. Then, consider how it can be built into consumer-to-consumer interaction so that it comes alive.

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Build a museum

It does not have to be big. It does not have to be expensive. But presenting something with a historical, traditional set of values in a museum case is sure to get your consumers' attention. We saw repeatedly how objects in rooms full of museum-like cabinet displays held an almost-magical power to intrigue, engage and delight young and old. The presence of the wondrous cabinet offers an invitation to your customers' imagination. It welcomes them into the symbolic world you are creating for them to explore, ascertain, learn, browse, fanaticize, yearn for, purchase and possess.

Be multifaceted

When planning and constructing a venue, retailers might consider a new form of design. This would be design that attends to ideology. How can a retail brand ideology be built and exhibited so that customers can fully experience it? An appropriately diverse store design would invite and welcome consumers with meaningful stories and values. Given the many different retail formats, it would be impossible to offer a 'one-size-fits-all' recommendation. There are numerous formats for building ideology into a retail environment that we describe in this paper.

As we gain increased understanding, we will find guidelines for enacting particular ideologies for particular groups through particular retail methods. When will it be appropriate to use a bookstore, a museum, a theatrical performance, a gaming room, a library, or a café? How should they be combined? What imaginative innovations are possible? Which retail industries would benefit most from an ideological approach, and which would benefit the least? These are questions that deserve further research. There is still much to learn and understand about this topic. With this study of *American Girl Place*, and the formation of the concept of retail brand ideology, we hope that we have helped initiate an interesting and profitable discussion of the role of ideology in retail branding.

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Executive summary

Themed retail brand environments are becoming an important component of consumers' experience of brands. These places provide stimulating retail environments for consumers which surround, engage, and immerse them in the world of the brand. The recent proliferation of these venues demands that we gain a fuller understanding of the sources of their power to profoundly affect consumers. By analyzing the case of *American Girl Place* we propose the idea that rewarding retailing in such contexts is an intensely ideological affair.

American Girl is a brand empire owned by Mattel. *American Girl* was created by Pleasant Rowland, a former school teacher inspired by the idea of selling history to children through dolls and their accessories. Today, the portfolio of experiential products of *American Girl* – ranging from collections of dolls of historic and contemporary eras to adventurous books and self-care manuals for tweens – makes the brand a landmark in the North American market of toys and edutainment goods.

Our investigation focuses on *American Girl Place*, a themed brand environment devoted to the *American Girl* brand experience. Through an ethnographic investigation of the focal areas of *American Girl Place* – the Museum, the Salon, the Theatre, the Photo Studio, the Café, and the Library – we examine the processes that underlie the ideological activity of the brand. We find that retail brand ideology is an extensive and varied representation of moral and social values throughout the physical retail environment.

Moral and social values are enacted throughout the store. Beauty and perfection characterize the dolls' appearance and display, suggesting a feminine emotional energy that energizes *American Girl Place*. This energy marks AGP as a place where intergenerational ideologies can be materialized, purchased and customized. In the Museum area, perfect reproductions of domestic spaces belonging to different, American Girl-brand associated historical periods create learning opportunities for girls. Motherhood and femininity are at the heart of conversations and activities performed in the Salon venue. The professional service delivered by salon attendants, who style doll's hair, emphasize how grooming is a serious component of girls' identity projects.

At the Theatre, a brand-centered play celebrates the values of heroic, altruistic girls. The emotional reactions bring to life important values of friendship and love. The Library adds an educational component, providing instructive 'how-to-live' material to guide girls, and assist the women whose task it is to socialize them. The Photo Studio, intended to provide a lasting memento, transmits the girl into the reality of the *American Girl* brand while partaking directly of its brand ideology. Finally, the Café, through its layout and atmosphere, facilitates and stimulates interpersonal interaction, sponsoring the recall and creation of family mythologies and memories.

Our study has several implications on the role and importance of retail brand ideology. First, use a variety of physical cues to suggest the moral and social values that define a brand. Consumers find that the solidity of a physical experience suffuses the general brand ideology with a sense of reality. Second, stimulate brand enactment within the retail store. Individual retailers should give consumers an active, moral, and social reason to believe in the brand's values. Third, build a museum, even if it is only a very small one. Your museum should celebrate a historical or traditional set of values, and gain consumers' attention. Finally, become multifaceted in your depiction of the brand and its values. Consumers' experiences of brand ideology have many elements. Retailers should encourage and work with this diversity rather than cling to single-minded notions of positioning. There are numerous formats, and many exciting opportunities for retailers, in the idea of retail brand ideology.

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