



Unleashing Manhood in the Cage: Masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts

Christian A. Vaccaro, Melissa L. Swauger

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Unleashing Manhood in the Cage: Masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts addresses the question “Why do mixed martial arts participants endure grueling workouts and suffer through injury, with little or no pay, just to compete?” The answer is because the participants enjoy a form of idolization from their supporters, each other, and culture more generally, which is linked to masculinity. In fact, MMA organizers, from the very beginning, purposefully created elements of the sport that are linked to dominant narratives about manhood. In this context, men don thin open-fingered gloves, lock themselves in a caged enclosure, and slug it out in a fight with few rules to see who comes out on top. This all occurs while “ring girls” in high-heels and skin-tight shirts and shorts stride around outside the cage holding signs and peddling t-shirts. The sum of these elements is the creation of a type of a publicly accessible and consumable form of masculinity. The sport of mixed martial arts is a rich and intriguing space where the construction of gender can be explored through a sociological and ethnographic lens.

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