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Gender, Power, and Performance: Representations of Cheerleaders in American Culture

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Gender, Power, and Performance: Representations of Cheerleaders in American Culture

by

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To my parents, Cecil and Jane Wright

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shown me to privilege sport and to respect the athleticism of women's bodies. I am honored to have worked with and studied under such unparalleled scholars and teachers.

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five-decade career in the newspaper business, his habit of reading the paper from front page to back each day, and his tendency to correct grammatical mistakes wherever they occur – even, or perhaps especially, in the church bulletin – inspired my interest in words and their meanings, as did my frequent trips to the library with my mother when I was a small child. A veteran of World War II, my father's indefatigable interest in the history of that conflict and its filmic representations also shaped my desire to study the United States and its cultural products, though I did not realize it during the third (or thirtieth) viewing of *Sands of Iwo Jima*. My parents' support knows no bounds; they are my personal cheerleaders, and it is to them that I dedicate this dissertation.

Gender, Power, and Performance: Representations of Cheerleaders in American Culture

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

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This dissertation reveals that the various, often conflicting media representations of cheerleaders are responsible for the many ways gender and power are refracted through the lens of American popular culture and on the bodies of American youth. Beginning in the circumscribed nineteenth century world of elite male privilege, the history of cheerleading is intimately connected to the discourse of masculinity in America. It is not until almost one hundred years after the activity's birth that its primary narrative changes from one of masculinity to one of power. This project calls attention to the ways in which sociohistoric context impacts representations of cheerleaders.

My interdisciplinary project draws on sources from the popular press; children's, adult, and mainstream literature, film, and television; material culture; and interviews with cheerleaders themselves; and engages with existing cheerleading scholarship as well as literary criticism and feminist scholarship. Each chapter interrogates a different, related trend in the cultural representation of cheerleaders, including: competing narratives of victimization, im/perfection, and popularity; a third wave feminist vision of gendered superpower; prescriptions of beauty and behavior; pornography and its connection to the professionalization of cheer; and the performance of representation by actual cheerleaders. Taken together, these chapters trace patterns of representation,

fraught with nuance and complexity, to provide a picture of a shifting cultural icon whose relationship to larger social movements is often reciprocal and who challenges societal expectations of gender and generation over three centuries.

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Introduction

"Jazz. The movies. The comics. These three art forms are the quintessence of American popular culture in the twentieth century and beyond. Some might go further and maintain that they encapsulate American culture as a whole. What is certain is that they embody key themes in U.S. society and reflect them back in ways that have helped shape that society. They have also refracted, influencing music, cinema, and visual art around the world, while providing the context and subject for 'high' art in their own country."[1]

Much like baseball and the cultural products feminist theorist Lillian Robinson cites in the epigraph to this introduction, cheerleading is an artifact whose roots can be traced at least as far as the Gilded Age of the United States. Its power is such that the mythology that surrounds the cultural icon of the cheerleader works to shape behaviors, expectations, and reactions. Now, in the twenty-first century, one hundred fifty years after its birth, the activity and its mythology work in concert.

The origins of this project go back to the summer of 2004 when, on a leisurely drive in far west Austin, I spotted a sign advertising registration for youth cheerleading. My first year of graduate school in American Studies had left me with a growing interest in youth cultural studies and more specifically in the burgeoning field of girls' studies, though I had long since buried my own cheerleading past (or so I thought), I wondered about the academic possibilities of closely studying a girls' cheerleading squad. My broader scholarly interest in gender and generation intersected with a commitment to agency; approaching cheerleading from the perspective of girl cheerleaders intrigued me. I made some calls and within a few weeks had a topic for my master's thesis and had started down the path that would eventually lead me to this point. As part of my Master's

[1] Lillian Robinson, *Wonder Women: Feminisms and Superheroes* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

thesis, an ethnographic study of girls' cheerleading, I began to research the history of cheerleading. What I found were mostly journalistic snippets and the occasional academic treatment.[2] Yet references to cheerleaders continue to appear in the popular press on a near-weekly basis. I concluded that this was a cultural icon with staying power, though one whose past was underexplored.

The topic of my dissertation elicits two main responses. People inquire as to my cheerleading past, and they share a personal story about cheerleading or cheerleaders. While I think the first is another way of gauging the source of my interest in the topic, it is worth noting that people want to know if I was a cheerleader. I can often tell by their tone of voice in asking the question that they come to the topic with ingrained notions of what that might mean. The fact that almost everyone I encounter, irrespective of place, wants to tell me about their experiences with cheerleaders reinforces the ubiquity of the activity and its participants. I have heard about photographic encounters with professional cheerleaders; people have told me of extended family members' cheerleading escapades, usually to comedic or astounding effect; and more often than not someone will inquire as to a celebrity or politician's cheerleading past. These episodes have begun with the question, "You mean like *Bring It On*?" more times than I care to recall.[3]

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[2] Mary Ellen Hanson's 1995 monograph, *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture* and Natalie Adams and Pamela Bettis's 2003 collaboration, *Cheerleader! An American Icon* are the two exceptions. I will discuss these in the coming pages.

[3] A 2010 article in the online magazine *Slate* dissects the surprising success of the *Bring It On* series, arguing that the original has "something for everyone" and, while its sequels do not offer the same "zippy dialogue and cynical attitude, […] If you come into the films with managed expectations, you'll find that each one has meticulously choreographed cheers, a few genuine laughs, and a satisfying ending." Marisa Meltzer, "Bring It On: How a Sleeper Hit about Cheerleading Became a Direct-to-DVD Franchise," *Slate.com*, January 26, 2010.

The general public's familiarity with the *Bring It On* franchise, their surface ability to recognize and identify with the topic of cheerleading, coupled with the lack of adequate scholarly attention to this pervasive figure, drove me to expand on the project that began with my master's thesis. The history of cheerleading offered in chapter one builds off of my initial research into the activity. The ethnographic component of chapter six includes data from that project as well, reanalyzed and reframed to consider representation.

In her coming-of-age memoir *Disaster Preparedness*, Heather Havrilesky recalls trying out for cheerleader in 1983 in Durham, North Carolina. Then a nascent junior high student trying to find her place in a new school culture, Havrilesky quickly identified the cheerleader as "pure magic, embodying what every impressionable, newly sexualized, awkward young girl wanted for herself. But she didn't share. She held her bubbly, confident perfection above the heads of mortal girls like a jeweled chalice, swatting away the pimply and the fat and the sullen and the lukewarm and the self-doubting with equal contempt." She describes the paradoxical importance of holding cheerleader status in her middle-class enclave on the east coast of the United States in the mid-1980s:

> Trying out for cheerleading, in seventh grade, was an act of sheer self-loathing, a tedious, torturous path that inevitably ended in rejection and inconsolable weeping. […] But it was obvious that cheerleading wasn't *just* an extracurricular activity or a sport, it was a path to salvation. Without cheerleading, you were just another worthless chump in a sea of nervous nobodies. You could try your best to wear the right clothes and organize your facial features to approximate the

> detached expression seen on the faces of the popular kids. But without cheerleading, the most you could hope for was to fade into the background and avoid being pinpointed as a notable loser.[4]

In the same way cheerleading offered Havrilesky immediate "deliverance from anonymity,"[5] failing to secure a position on the cheer squad had lifelong consequences for humor columnist Erma Bombeck. After listing some other options for "rejected cheerleaders," like "drop[ping] out of school and enter[ing] the labor market," and go[ing] out for ice hockey," Bombeck reports with characteristic exaggeration, "most of us become eaten up with resentment and dwell on it for the rest of our lives."[6] Similarly, those who do cheer often find themselves unable to break free of the association and all its varied meanings. Mainstream media is full of references to "former cheerleaders," a status that seems especially likely to crop up when someone violates the law or does not behave in accordance with societal expectations. Single mother Rose Lorkowski, driven by the desire to provide a better education for her son, starts a crime scene clean-up service out of financial desperation in *Sunshine Cleaning* (2008). She is referred to as a former cheerleader to juxtapose the mess of her current situation with the assumed picture of perfection viewers associate with a cheerleading past.

In tracing events from the late nineteenth century and analyzing texts from the mid-1950s to the beginning of the twenty-first century in an effort to discern patterns of

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[4] Heather Havrilesky, *Disaster Preparedness* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 117, emphasis in original.
[5] Havrilesky, 125.
[6] Erma Bombeck, "Desire to be a Cheerleader Never Fades," *News-Star World*, Mar. 14, 1982.

representation, I was not surprised to find an emphasis on white, middle-class, heterosexual, and eventually female cheerleaders. The activity's participants and its visual and literary representations share this homogeneity. With few exceptions, fictional representations of the contemporary cheerleader offer this picture: a female who is small in stature yet feminine; adheres to westernized notions of beauty; has long, often blonde hair that manages not to interfere with her athleticism; and is physically fit but not grotesquely muscular.[7] This body type is so prevalent among representations of cheerleaders that a certain amount of typecasting occurs in which the same actresses repeatedly play cheerleader characters.[8]

I did not expect to find that when fictional representations do not adhere to this description, it is within a narrative of struggle. The films *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999) and *Ready? OK!* (2008) are two examples of this. Sent to sexual orientation reassignment camp on suspicion of lesbianism (evidence: photos of gay rock star Melissa Etheridge in her high school locker and a lack of enthusiasm for kissing her football player boyfriend), cheerleader Megan protests but ultimately finds love with a fellow (female) camper in *But I'm A Cheerleader*. Ten-year-old Joshua is similarly sidelined by his community in *Ready? OK!* He aspires to be on the cheerleading squad at his parochial school, but his mom and the Mother Superior repeatedly thwart his efforts. Resolution comes with his mother's embrace of his individuality and a transfer to a more accepting fine arts school.

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[7] This is not to say all cheerleaders adhere to this characterization. People of all different backgrounds participate in cheerleading. Chapter one includes a portrait of contemporary demographics.

[8] Susan Murray discusses the intertextuality that results from this phenomenon in her essay "I Know What You Did Last Summer: Sarah Michelle Gellar and Crossover Teen Stardom," in *Undead TV: Essays on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer,"* ed. Elana Levine and Lisa Parks (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 42-55.

Centered on the assumption that cheerleaders must be heterosexual (and female, in the case of *Ready? OK!*), both texts challenge the prevailing discourse of sameness that surrounds popular representations of the cheerleader.

First on the scene in the 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and then more fully rendered over her seven seasons on television, demon-fighting cheerleader Buffy Summers is the most recent in a line of adolescent female vampire slayers chosen to prevent the apocalypse. *Heroes*' resident cheerleader Claire Bennet is genetically gifted so that her body regenerates following injury. This superpower allows her to save the world. Crime-fighting super agent Kim Possible mixes cheerleading for Middleton High School with tracking and defeating super villains in every episode of the eponymous Disney show. Although Buffy, Claire, and Kim all adhere to the standard of physical perfection described above, they threaten existing power structures by embodying (super)powers of their own. Cheerleading experiences a shift in the demographics of its participants over the course of the twentieth century; representation changes accordingly. Both of these developments contribute to a larger narrative about gender and power that surrounds this distinctly American cultural icon. Understanding cheerleading's trajectory and the various, often conflicting media representations of cheerleaders, then, helps us understand the many ways – both large and small – gender and power are refracted through the lens of American popular culture and on the bodies of American youth.

RESEARCH METHODS

This dissertation takes place at the intersection of feminist theory and cultural studies. It asks not "what happened?" – though that is important and there is some of that involved – but rather, "what does this mean?" My interdisciplinary research methods are shaped by Michael Rothberg's organizational method of constellation theory. In his study of collective memory and the Holocaust, Rothberg presents the idea of multidirectional memory as "that convoluted, sometimes historically unjustified, back-and-forth movement of seemingly distant collective memories in and out of public consciousness."[9] While cheerleading is worlds away from the Holocaust, Rothberg's study is a model for mine because of its theoretical underpinning. Rothberg "takes dissimilarity for granted," and he "investigat[es] what it means to invoke connections nonetheless."[10] This is the basis of constellation theory, and it affords one the opportunity to study disparate objects from unexpected places whose connections may not be readily apparent and place them within the same larger orbit to identify overlaps and make meaningful associations.[11] Interdisciplinary cultural studies is necessarily multidirectional; constellation theory allows for the dualities and conflicts of cultural practice. It appreciates paradox and enables an understanding of seemingly unrelated and even incongruous objects. The methodology of constellation theory helps to account for the simultaneous existence of

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[9] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 17.

[10] Rothberg, 18.

[11] Preeminent girls' studies scholar Angela McRobbie refers to "new constellations of gender power" in the introduction to her 2009 book *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change*. Over several chapters, McRobbie combines cultural studies with feminist sociology to "introduce a number of concepts […] in an attempt to map out the field of post-feminist popular and political culture." Her survey of shifts in media engages a framework of constellation theory and is a model for mine as well. See McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 4, 6. In addition, queer theorists such as Judith Halberstam use the rhetoric of constellations of power.

competitive cheerleading, pornographic cheerleader characters, and animated superhero cheerleaders.

Two key texts inform my notions of gender, power, and performance, and serve as the theoretical underpinnings for the title of my project, "Gender, Power, and Performance: Representations of Cheerleaders in American Culture." In "Doing Gender," sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman argue that gender is performed in social interaction and for an audience, a process they refer to as "doing gender."[12] It is this performative aspect of gender, its creation within a set of social circumstances, that allows us to access representations of the cheerleader across place and time. With regard to representation, the understanding is that media are sites where gender is produced. Allowing for West and Zimmerman's notion of a performative gender in social production with an audience, Rosalind Gill's concept of a postfeminist media culture brings issues of girls' and women's agency, power, and performance to the forefront.[13] Postfeminist media studies affords the researcher access to sites that are at once contradictory, complimentary, and often confusing. A study of media representations of cheerleaders benefits from this theoretical perspective of femininity's fraught relationship to the body.

My sources are numerous and varied. I draw on the popular press, fiction, children's, adult and mainstream literature, film, television, material culture, and interviews with cheerleaders themselves, and I engage with existing cheerleading

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[12] Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," in *The Social Construction of Gender*, ed. Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1991), 13-37.
[13] Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 147-166.

scholarship as well as literary criticism and feminist scholarship throughout the dissertation. I conducted archival research at the UCLA Film and Television Archive and the Pacific Film Archive at the University of California, Berkeley. I have watched entire television series; read entire runs of many publications, including *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*, *American Cheerleader*, *Texas Cheerleader Magazine*, and *Cheer Coach and Advisor*; and traced lawsuits from their initial filings in local jurisdictions through the federal appeals process. I have attended film screenings, presentations, and multiple performances by a social justice cheerleading squad (the Queertastiks), and I have traveled to interview the Science Cheerleaders and watched them promote science for citizens.

Throughout the project, I call attention to the ways in which sociohistoric context impacts representations of cheerleaders. For instance, while not conclusive, it would be a mistake to ignore the connection between the 1972 passage of Title IX and the increase in fictional cheerleader deaths in the twenty or so years that follow the legislation. Cheerleading cannot be divorced from the larger history of the country; representations of cheerleaders must take into account the intellectual shifts and social movements that accompany them. To that end, one model for this project is Miriam Forman-Brunell's *Babysitter: An American History* (2009). Forman-Brunell examines the figure of the babysitter, tracing the roots of the occupation to the 1920s and linking lived experiences

to fictionalized representations and broader cultural trends.[14] I offer a similar exploration of the cheerleader.

OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS LITERATURE

As I alluded to earlier, the cheerleader is a ubiquitous figure in American culture. An acknowledged part of collegiate culture since the late nineteenth century, cheerleaders escaped scholarly attention until the latter half of the twentieth century. Previous scholarship has focused largely on cheerleading as an educational venture. Social scientists, nutritionists, physicians, and others have written about popularity,[15] group dynamics,[16] disordered eating,[17] and injury rates[18] with respect to cheer. Very little

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[14] Miriam Forman-Brunell, *Babysitter: An American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[15] Alyson Andrea Beben, "A Barbie Who Puts Out: Adolescent Cheerleaders Contend with Standards of Femininity in High School and in Sport" (master's thesis, York University, 2002); Pamela J. Bettis and Natalie G. Adams, "The Power of the Preps and a Cheerleading Equity Policy," *Sociology of Education* 76, no. 2 (2003): 128-42; J. Jill Suitor and Rebel Reavis, "Football, Fast Cars, and Cheerleading: Adolescent Gender Norms, 1978-1989," *Adolescence* 30, no. 118 (1995): 265-72.

[16] Ginger F. Bihn, "On the Sidelines: Collegiate Cheerleading and Organizational Discourses" (PhD dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2003); Kimberlee Bredeson-Quiles, "Cheer Imagination to Sheer Reality: A View of Junior High Cheerleaders Behind the Lines" (master's thesis, Pacific Lutheran University, 2003); Thomas Allen Hisiro, "The Influences of Performance Athletes: Focus on High School Cheerleading" (EdD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2000); Suzanne Lee, "Cheerleaders and Administrators between 1945 and 1999: A Study of Extracurricular Activities in Tulsa, Oklahoma" (EdD dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2000).

[17] Erika Blusewicz, "Parental Influence on Disordered Eating Habits of Female Adolescents Who Participate in Aesthetic Sports Versus Nonaesthetic Sports" (Psy.D dissertation, Alliant International University, Fresno, 2008); Nicole Eberle, "Female High School Athletes and Issues of Disordered Eating, Aggression, and Femininity" (PhD dissertation, Colorado State University, 2009); Sonya SooHoo, "Social Construction of Body Image among Female Adolescent Cheerleaders" (PhD dissertation, University of Utah, 2008).

[18] During the 1970s and '80s, researchers were concerned with cheerleading's potential to harm one's voice. Examples of academic studies in that area include Paul Eugene Bravender, "The Effect of Cheerleading on the Female Singing Voice" (PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 1977); Vicki Rhodes Carter, "Effects of a Four-Day Cheerleading Camp on High School Cheerleaders' Voices" (master's thesis, University of South Alabama, 1989); Monica Ann McHenry, "Vocal SPL Control in Cheerleaders with a History of Frequent, Acute, Cheering-Related Dysphonic Episodes" (PhD dissertation,

scholarly attention has been paid to non-white[19] or non-female[20] cheerleaders. Only a handful of scholars have addressed the more athletic variant of competitive cheerleading, and they have done so recently and selectively, often limiting their studies to individual squads or features of the activity.[21] Those scholars who have devoted attention to cheerleading outside of the school setting have discussed representation only marginally, neglecting to attend to the implications of sociohistoric context.

Furthermore, scholars who have addressed some of the individual texts included in this dissertation often and ironically fail to include a discussion of the protagonist's

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University of Washington, 1983). Once cheerleading became more athletic, research began to emphasize safety issues and physical injury rates: Mark R. Hutchinson, "Cheerleading Injuries," *Physician and Sportsmedicine* 25, no. 9 (1997): 83; Deanna Levenhagen, "The Biomechanical Effects of Acute Fatigue to the Lower Extremity in Female Kentucky High School Cheerleaders" (EdD dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1998); Kathleen Martin, "Factors Affecting Concussion Symptom Self-Reporting among Division I Collegiate Cheerleaders" (master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2009); Jeff Mattis, "Injury Rates, Frequency, and Time Loss in NCAA Division I Cheerleading" (master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2005); Lindsay Salliotte, "Epidemiology of Injuries in Collegiate Male Cheerleaders in the United States" (PhD dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2011); Mark Schulz, "Athletic Injuries among North Carolina High School Athletes: The Epidemiology of Concussion and Cheerleading Injuries" (PhD dissertation, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002); Sandra Seufert, "The Effectiveness of the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisers Safety Certification Program in Reducing the Number of Injuries among High School Cheerleaders" (master's thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 2006); Brenda J. Shields and Gary A. Smith, "Cheerleading-Related Injuries in the United States: A Prospective Surveillance Study," *Journal of Athletic Training* 44, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2009): 567-77.

[19] Rajeswari Swaminathan's "'The Charming Sideshow': Cheerleading, Girls' Culture, and Schooling" is an exploration of race, class, and identity within a high school setting (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1997). Phyllis May-Machunda examines urban African American cheerleading in "'Uhn! Ain't It Funky, Now?': African American Cheerleading as Embodied Communication in Traditional Play and Performance in Washington, D.C." (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2009).

[20] Laurel R. Davis, "Male Cheerleaders and the Naturalization of Gender," in *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books, 1990), 153-161; Laura Grindstaff and Emily West, "Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport," *Social Problems* 53, no. 4 (2006): 500-18.

[21] Amy Moritz, "Real Athletes Wear Glitter: Articulating a Third Wave Sensibility through Cheerleading, Femininity and Athletics" (master's thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2006); Sarah Olson, "From Sidelines to Center Stage: The Development of Collegiate Competitive Cheer" (master's thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2008); Allison E. Wright, "Sidelined Performance: An Ethnographic Study of Girls' Cheerleading" (master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2005); Mary Wright, "Fly Flip Music Clip: The Music of Competitive Cheerleading, and Project Arbol: Deer-B-Gone" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2002).

cheerleader status. Part of the work of this project is to highlight previously overlooked texts and to argue that a full consideration of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s third wave feminist context is not possible without foregrounding the ways in which she relies on her (former) cheerleader abilities. Similarly, while 2009's *Fired Up!* – a film about two high school boys who attend a week of cheerleading camp instead of summer football practice in an effort to participate in what they expect will be a permissive and promiscuous culture – may have been marketed as not a cheerleading movie, the fact remains that any discussion of a film whose premise turns on the location of a cheer camp and a setting overcrowded with (female) cheerleaders must begin with cheerleading.

Mary Ellen Hanson's *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture* (1995) was the first book-length academic treatment of cheerleading. Originally written as her doctoral dissertation, Hanson's monograph uses a vast array of primary sources to chart a social history of the activity. She describes its beginnings in elite, nineteenth-century universities; its carefully orchestrated transition to secondary and elementary schools; and its shift from a male dominated sport to an extracurricular activity with diverse participants. Hanson introduces professional cheerleaders, remarking on the entertainment value of professional sports and the relationship between that commodification and the cheerleaders.

More recent scholarship on cheerleading generally approaches the subject ethnographically. Building on Hanson's historical foundation, education scholars Natalie Adams and Pamela Bettis researched a Midwestern middle school during the late 1990s. They present their findings along with an updated consideration of the figure of the

cheerleader in 2003's *Cheerleader! An American Icon*. They spent the 1998-99 school year observing the activities of the school's cheer squad – a non-competitive, sideline variant – and interviewing cheerleaders and their coaches and parents to gauge the effect of policies implemented to promote racially diverse squads in the early to mid-1990s. Adams and Bettis found that, although more girls had access to cheerleading instruction via elective cheer classes in the school, the financial burden was too much for some families. Over half of the girls enrolled in the cheer classes did not ultimately try out because of cheerleading's expense and/or because they could not meet the mandatory grade requirement of a C average. Furthermore, a disproportionate number of white, middle-class girls tried out, and were selected, for cheerleader as a result of the school's peer cultures; the Preps, the highest ranking peer group in the school, composed almost entirely of white, middle-class girls, best represented the popular characterization of cheerleaders in the school.[22]

Journalist James McElroy chronicled the competition 1997-98 season of the Greenup County High School (Kentucky) cheerleading squad in his book *We've Got Spirit: The Life and Times of America's Greatest Cheerleading Team*. McElroy spent over a year immersed in the everyday activities of the squad and thoroughly interviewed many members, parents, and coaches. He traveled with them to regional and national competitions and found that despite their nine national championships and multiple appearances on ESPN, fellow students and residents of their hometown largely ignored

[22] See Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader! An American Icon*, especially chapter five, "Cheerleading as a 'White Girl Thing': The Racial Politics of Cheerleading," 91-110. Adams and Bettis also present the findings of their qualitative study in their 2003 article, "The Power of the Preps and a Cheerleading Equity Policy," *Sociology of Education* 76, no. 2 (2003): 128-142.

the Greenup County cheerleaders.[23] Most recently, former *Jane* magazine writer Kate Torgovnick spent a year following three college squads from tryouts to national championships. Her 2008 book *Cheer! Three Teams on a Quest for College Cheerleading's Ultimate Prize* chronicles the journeys of The Stephen F. Austin Lumberjacks, The Southern University Jaguars, and The University of Memphis All-Girl Tigers as they struggle through unexpected coaching departures, fundraising trials in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and mounting injuries and last-minute roster adjustments.[24]

Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt's feminist ethnography of African American girls, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (2006), explores the ways in which triply marginalized girls transform methods of play into lasting cultural productions. Although her project is not classified as girls' studies, her focus on young females places it within the realm of the burgeoning field first popularized by British scholars Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber.[25] Contemporary scholars and researchers of youth and girls point to Carol Gilligan's 1982 book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* as a watershed moment in the study of female development, as Gilligan identified a lack of female voices in the literature of developmental psychology and sought to raise awareness of the field's male focus. In 1994, Mary Pipher caused a similar stir with the publication of

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[23] James T. McElroy, *We've Got Spirit: The Life and Times of America's Greatest Cheerleading Team* (New York: Berkley Books, 1999).

[24] The 2010 CW television series *Hellcats* was based on this book.

[25] McRobbie and Garber first introduced the notion of a "culture of the bedroom" in relation to girls' leisure activities, but Simon Frith is credited with popularizing the idea. See McRobbie and Garber, "Girls and Subcultures: An Exploration," in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Harper Collins, 1976), 209-222; Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 225-234.

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls. Using her own experiences as a therapist for girls, Pipher demonstrated that American culture pressures girls to fragment into "true and false selves" as they enter adolescence.[26] Pipher cited three reasons for this fragmentation: biological transitions that occur during adolescence; entry into a broader American culture that provides opportunities for painful or traumatic experiences; and an expectation of separating from parents and relying on peers instead. *Reviving Ophelia* sparked two responses, Sara Shandler's *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self* (1999), a collection of writings by girls ages twelve through eighteen that address topics as varied as body image, parents, school, school, sex, and politics; and Cheryl Dellasega's *Surviving Ophelia: Mothers Share Their Wisdom in Navigating the Tumultuous Teenage Years* (2001), a compilation of pieces written by women whose daughters faced enormous challenges throughout adolescence.

Gilligan's and Pipher's works continue to influence research on adolescent girls, but more recent scholarship moves beyond their initial offerings.[27] In the field of culture-oriented girls' studies, sociologist Anita Harris's edited collection *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* (2004) focuses on girls' lived experiences, as does the aforementioned Adams and Bettis's *Geographies of Girlhood: Identities In Between* (2005). In both *All About the Girl* and her monograph *Future Girl: Young Women in the*

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[26] Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 22.

[27] Three books in particular, Sharon Lamb's *The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do – Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt* (New York: Free Press, 2002), Rachel Simmons's *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 2002), and Rosalind Wiseman's *Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002), on which the 2004 film *Mean Girls* was based, have received a lot of attention for their efforts to detail aspects of female adolescence previously ignored.

Twenty-First Century, Harris theorizes twenty-first-century girlhood as a constitutive space, a realm within which contemporary social boundaries are defined.[28]

While the lived experiences of cheerleaders frame this project (and appear throughout), an overview of girls' media studies is particularly important here. Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance offer a collection of scholarship on "filmic girls, films intended for girl audiences, and the issues of girlhood" in *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood*.[29] Similarly, Sarah Hentges's monograph *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film* (2006) analyzes almost one hundred films, mainstream and independent, and compares plot conventions and narratives based on production. Finally, Ilana Nash explores depictions of girlhood across media platforms in *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*. Focusing on such characters as Nancy Drew, Judy Graves, Corliss Archer, and Gidget, Nash asks us to read these mid-twentieth-century girls as agents and as operatives within a larger patriarchal system.[30]

A BRIEF WORD ON TERMINOLOGY

I overuse two words in particular throughout this dissertation: cheerleading and cheerleader(s). "Cheerleading" refers to the activity itself; "cheerleader" refers to its participant. At times I also use "cheer" as a noun instead of "cheerleading." This is to

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[28] Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.
[29] Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance, ed., *Sugar, Spice, and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 16.
[30] Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 215.

avoid repetition and is consistent with contemporary industry jargon that employs "cheer" as both a noun – an encouraging yell, or the activity as a whole – and a verb – to yell in applause, encouragement, or triumph. Here is a list of cheer-specific terms and their definitions: "all-star" refers to competitive squads unaffiliated with schools; a "stunt" is a skill or feat in which two or more cheerleaders build upon each other physically; in a stunt, a "base" is the person who remains in contact with the floor and lifts the "flyer," or the person elevated into the air during the stunt; a "pyramid" is a stunt in which bases and flyers (one or more of each) are all linked together; a "basket toss" is a particular type of stunt in which three or more bases throw a flyer into the air and the flyer performs an aerial move prior to returning the ground in a "cradle," the end of stunt dismount in which the base(s) catch the flyer and hold her under the thighs and around the back; "tumbling" is any gymnastic skill used in a cheer, dance, or for crowd appeal and can be performed individually or as a group; a "motion" is the set position of a cheerleader's arms; a "chant" is a short, repeated yell, as opposed to a "cheer," which is a longer yell that can involve motions, stunts, accessories such as pom pons[31] or megaphones, tumbling, and/or "jumps," an action where both feet leave the ground in search of a coordinated placement of the arms and legs; and "facials" are expressions such as smiles during performances and games. Sideline cheerleaders are those who lead cheers on the periphery of an athletic field or court. Competitive cheerleaders participate

[31] On the term "pom pons": Lawrence Herkimer, widely known as the grandfather of cheer (detailed in chapter one), invented poms "to provide more flash and pizzazz on the new color televisions" but changed the name from pom pom to pom pon after conducting a camp in Hawaii and learning that U.S. troops stationed in the Philippines, Japan, and the Pacific Islands used "pom pom" as a slang term for sexual intercourse. "Pom pons" is often shortened to "poms." See Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 113.

in cheerleading competitions. This can occur in addition to or separate from sideline cheerleading.

I analyze a lot of fictional cheerleaders in the pages that follow. Whenever possible, I have referred to the characters using the same shorthand used in the originating texts. For example, Ruth Doan MacDougall's Henrietta "Snowy" Snow is simply called Snowy throughout the trilogy (chapter two). I have utilized this nickname as well. Lorna Landvik's Kristi Casey is referred to as Kristi; Gary Dillman's Dennis Bozeman is merely Bozeman. Regarding this last example, I have noticed male characters more often referred to by their last names. When I have replicated this disparity it is only for the simplification of quotations.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

My dissertation consists of six chapters, organized thematically. As the first and last chapters deal explicitly with the lived experiences of cheerleaders, this provides a framework. However, popular cultural representations of the activity and its participants are crucial to the arguments of each chapter. It is in this way that a constellation theory allows me to assemble a whole from seemingly disparate parts. Instead of organizing the project chronologically, for instance, the chapters are united by their overarching connection to cheer. There will be some (metaphorical) back-and-forth movement through time and space, but in the end we will piece together a coherent structure from moving parts.

Following the first chapter, which offers an extended history of the activity, each chapter interrogates a different trend in the cultural representation of cheerleaders, including: competing narratives of victimization, im/perfection, and popularity; a third wave feminist vision of gendered power; prescriptions of beauty and behavior; pornography and its connection to the professionalization of cheer; and the performance of representation by actual cheerleaders. Taken together, these chapters trace patterns of representation, fraught with nuance and complexity, to provide a picture of a shifting cultural icon whose relationship to larger social movements is often reciprocal.

Chapter one gives a detailed account of cheerleading's development. Beginning in the circumscribed nineteenth century world of elite male privilege, the history of cheerleading is intimately connected to the discourse of masculinity in America. It is not until almost one hundred years after the activity's birth that its primary narrative changes from one of masculinity to one of power. This chapter argues that the increasing democratization of cheerleading, a process that occurs slowly over the second half of the twentieth century and is not without its struggles, ushers in opportunity and, with that, conflict. From there, I move on to particular types of representation, incorporating the history detailed in the first chapter in order to construct a constellation of the activity in its current state.

In chapter two, I analyze the myths of popularity and perfection that often accompany fictional representations of cheerleaders. Analyzing a variety of works here, from mystery to literary to young adult fiction, I contend that cheerleader characters drive the action in many of the texts under scrutiny (as opposed to the secondary status to

which previous scholarship relegates them). Following the historical grounding of the first chapter, here I narrow the lens temporally and introduce mid-twentieth-century cheerleaders whose narratives complicate our understanding of what cheerleader status conveyed in the middle decades of the century. Furthermore, in this chapter I identify a shift in representation post-1960s: cheerleader protagonists become victims.

Continuing the trend of fictional cheerleader protagonists, in chapter three I examine action heroines in scripted television series and film. I locate these pom pon-gripping representations of power firmly within a third wave feminist framework and argue that they both embody and create the third wave, which I define according to its reliance on intersectionality and a commitment to collective action. This space allows them the flexibility to embody empowerment, exercise subjectivity, and enjoy a more conventional feminine appearance. In this chapter I also address the gendered and generational specificity of these characters, and I explore the concept of their containment in the form of mentors and sidekicks.

The next chapter combines fictional representation in the form of girls' series books and young adult novels with prescriptive literature to analyze the cheerleading industry. Worth an estimated $2 billion in 2008 and catering to four million participants, this industry consists of governing bodies, consumer-oriented retail ventures, and various forms of media. In this chapter I explore this media, placing special emphasis on cheerleading magazines, and I argue that the industry encourages a lifestyle centered on the cheerleader identity through its endorsement of particular products.

The mid-1970s advent of professional cheerleading ushered in a hyper-(hetero)sexualization of cheerleading. An overt emphasis on physical perfection and adherence to a westernized standard of beauty immediately accompanied such squads as the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders. Not long after, a fetishization of the cheerleader took place commercially through the vehicle of pornography. In chapter five, I trace this process through the lens of the 1978 film *Debbie Does Dallas*. Rather than engage in the larger feminist debate surrounding pornography, I acknowledge its limitations as a sensationalistic, repetitive, formulaic, excessive genre, and ask that we read *Debbie*, one of the first narrative porn films, for its transgressive possibilities, which become visible through the lens of the cheerleader character.

Finally, the last chapter bookends the dissertation with a portrait of twenty-first-century cheerleaders. Using the ethnographic methods of participant observation and in-depth interviews with cheerleaders, their coaches, and parents, I share my conclusions after following a squad throughout its fall season. In a cheerleading program that instills positive consequences not unlike other extracurricular youth sports programs (teamwork, dedication, self-confidence, discipline), what I refer to as the "official curriculum," I also find a hidden curriculum that still privileges football over cheerleading and therefore privileges boys over girls. Returning to representation in this chapter, I find a clear connection between the stereotype of the cheerleader as presented in chapter five – conventionally beautiful, (hetero)sexual – and the embodied performance of my subjects.

As the scope and scale of this project suggest, I cannot possibly offer a comprehensive survey of all literature, films, television shows, songs, or advertisements

that feature cheerleaders or engage with the cheerleader as cultural icon. Hardly a week goes by without a mainstream media reference to cheerleaders; as I write this, it seems as though each new round of fall TV lineups and blockbuster movie season includes at least one show with a cheer protagonist. But I do analyze many underrepresented texts and place them within a larger constellation that allows us to view the activity and representations of its participants with an understanding of the ways gender and power play out in the media and in the lived experiences of actual cheerleaders. By doing so, I offer a lasting framework for the study of a cultural icon that spans three centuries and challenges societal expectations of gender and generation. In the conclusion, I turn to the most recent cultural offerings and consider the direction of the activity and its participants.

Chapter One: A Struggle for Access: Telling the Story of Cheerleading's Past and Present

Cheerleading's birth in the United States military and its close relationship to college athletics located the activity firmly within a white, middle-class, masculine identity that permeated the Gilded Age.[32] But the fin-de-siècle American industrialization, urbanization, and democratization of education challenged this overt masculinity of cheering and as the activity's participants became more diverse, its reputation shifted. Following the second world war, cheerleading's story ceases to be primarily one of masculinity; it becomes one of struggle. Accessibility opened up cheering to Cold War definitions of the all-American girl and notions of who should represent the country by holding the title of cheerleader. As a result, integration issues plagued cheerleader selections. Cheerleading's relationship to Title IX has always been one of conflict, complicated by the activity's own inconsistent popular cultural representations. The commercialization of cheering, including but certainly not limited to the rise of professional squads that glamorize heterosexuality, only complicates this. These are the overarching themes this chapter will explore in greater detail. An investigation of the trajectory of cheerleading and its connections to larger social movements will provide a map from which to assemble a constellation of cheer.

As this project offers a cultural examination of cheerleading and highlights representations of cheerleaders in American popular culture, an overview of the activity's

[32] For a thorough discussion of the connections between masculinity and white supremacy around the turn of the twentieth century, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

rich and varied history will first provide the groundwork for the ensuing study. Tracing the path of the cheerleader through time and space will allow us to more fully understand the many ways in which the cultural icon has been represented since the activity's beginnings. However, it is not the work of this project to write the history of cheerleading; a significant portion of that work has been done. To that extent, the following narrative draws on secondary treatments and fills in gaps when necessary. Mary Ellen Hanson traces the rise of cheerleading in her 1995 book *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture*, a project that began as her doctoral dissertation. According to Hanson, "The cheerleader is an icon, an instantly recognized symbol of youthful prestige, wholesome attractiveness, peer leadership, and popularity. Equally recognized is the cheerleader as symbol of mindless enthusiasm, shallow boosterism, objectified sexuality, and promiscuous availability." So, Hanson asks, "How did cheerleading come to represent both the essence of social success and the target of social scorn?"[33] This chapter sheds light on that very question, suggesting that the activity's birth in privileged, all-male institutions and its subsequent transition to racially and economically diverse, coeducational gymnasiums goes far toward explaining why an examination of cheerleading in America requires the ability to juggle competing notions of gender and generation. It is tempting to think of the cheerleader as the innocuous all-American homecoming queen she has come to represent, but this project will persuade you that the figure of the cheerleader is at the heart of definitions of race, gender, and

[33] Mary Ellen Hanson, *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995), 2.

sexuality, and in fact there is no better place to look for an examination of the power struggles that accompany these issues than the body of the female cheerleader.

Cheerleading began as an exclusively male activity at the collegiate level in the late nineteenth century and spread to secondary schools in the 1900s, followed by middle and elementary schools in the 1950s. Women entered cheerleading as early as the 1920s, and cheerleading in professional sports began in the 1960s. Hanson locates the more modern depiction of cheerleaders as frivolous in the shift from a primarily male activity to one populated by females: "Male college students were a recognized social elite in the 1920s. Cheering, perceived as a masculine, collegiate activity, was therefore idealized. By the 1970s, cheering was prevalent in public schools at all socioeconomic levels and it was done primarily by females. Perceived as a feminine subsidiary to masculine athletics, cheering thus became trivialized."[34] As cheerleading moved from the confines of prestigious private schools to fields and stadiums all across America, its reputation shifted.

YELL-LEADING: BIRTH TO WAR

United States Navy records allow us to track cheering's presence in the U.S. military back to 1842; some early college yells developed from this tradition. Take, for instance, the Princeton Locomotive:

Ray, ray, ray

Tiger, Tiger, Tiger

[34] Hanson, 3.

Sis, sis, sis

Boom, boom, boom

Aaaaah!

Princeton, Princeton, Princeton!

Although Princeton University spectators engaged this cheer in the first intercollegiate football game between Princeton and Rutgers on November 6, 1869, they borrowed it from the military. Students overheard a similar cheer as the New York 7th Regiment passed through Princeton, New Jersey, during the Civil War.[35] There is limited evidence to suggest that collegiate cheering began even earlier, as fans at the first intercollegiate sporting event, a crew race between Harvard and Yale in August of 1852, recall a young man spontaneously rising from his seat to rally support for Harvard.[36] Regardless of its first official appearance, though, it is clear that cheerleading originated within the strict boundaries of elite nineteenth-century colleges.

In the early 1800s, approximately two percent of Americans aged eighteen to twenty-one attended colleges; they were exclusively white males, primarily of British descent. As a response to severe restrictions on the part of faculty in the post-Revolutionary War era, this student body exerted its independence by developing recreational activities, many of which took the form of sports, outside the purview of

[35] Natalie Guice Adams and Pamela J. Bettis, *Cheerleader! An American Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 11-12.
[36] Craig Lambert, "Cheerleaders Take Flight," *Harvard Magazine* 103, no. 1 (2000): 86.

authority.[37] Student interest increased once intercollegiate contests began, and, as not all of the interested students could participate in the athletic events, spectators expressed allegiance by attending games at their home campuses as well as those of their opponents. Cheering developed as an informal activity at the games, as a student would occasionally step forward and encourage others to yell in support of the team.[38] In fact, some of the earliest yell leaders were injured or second- and third-string players who would leave the bench to organize the crowd.[39] By the early 1900s, football was the most popular sport on college campuses and a revenue-producing activity. In conjunction with this popularity, increasingly more institutions participated in intercollegiate football games, and "the need for institutional identity and proving one's loyalty to one's schools became intensified."[40] As a result, organized cheering evolved to meet that need.

Colleges and universities began designating official male cheerleaders in the late 1890s. The young men were often referred to as rooter kings, yell leaders, yell kings, yell masters, or yell marshals as well as cheer leaders. Historians identify the University of Minnesota's Johnny Campbell as one of the earliest designated "yell marshals" in 1898

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[37] Hanson, 9. Sports were mild compared to other student-led extracurricular activities such as rioting, arson of campus buildings, and assaults on faculty. For more on the growth of extracurricular activities, particularly athletics, in higher education, see Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 177-179.

[38] According to Rajeswari Swaminathan, female spectators also cheered at the earliest games, but they remained in the stands and served a different purpose: "Women in coeducational institutions and in women's colleges in the late 1800s and the early 1900s cheered but the first male cheerleader volunteers cast themselves in a different role. The supportive and sometimes boisterous role of the female cheerleader was different from the male cheerleader who stepped off the bleachers to lead the cheers." See Swaminathan, "'The Charming Sideshow': Cheerleading, Girls' Culture and Schooling" (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1997), 79. Swaminathan's description is vague and confusing but seems to make a distinction between individual males who separated themselves from the larger student/spectator body and females who remained with the group, perhaps similar in nature or a precursor to the pep clubs that would soon emerge.

[39] Hanson, 10.

[40] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 12-13.

(Figure 1.1).[41] Although the first formal cheerleaders were typically captains of other sports, such as baseball or track, most colleges had organized cheerleading squads by the early 1900s.[42] The first cheerleaders were self-selected or chosen by their peers as an acknowledgement of their popularity.[43] By the 1920s, cheerleading was established as an activity requiring "disciplined performance," and the selection process became increasingly formal as the position of cheerleader gained prestige.[44]

Figure 1.1 - University of Minnesota's Johnny Campbell

As intercollegiate athletic contests increased in popularity and crowds began to fill newly constructed stadiums, cheerleading squads grew in size and began to utilize

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[41] Hanson, 11. As Adams and Bettis note, "cheerleader" was originally written as two separate words. A hyphen was added in the 1920s and then omitted and the spelling changed to the one-word form familiar today. See Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 143, n. 5.

[42] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 13.

[43] Then-future President of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt participated in this custom during his tenure as a Harvard University undergraduate. He wrote in a letter of the fall of 1903, his senior year: "I was one of the three cheer-leaders in the Brown game." Ted Morgan, a Roosevelt biographer, explains that the student body would select "men of prominence" to serve as cheerleaders for each game. The excerpt from Roosevelt's letter appears in *The Oxford English Dictionary* as the earliest instance in which the term appears in print.

[44] Hanson, 79, 13.

tumbling and stunts to increase their visibility. Princeton and Yale each had three yell leaders in 1924, as did Baylor University by 1927. A publication from that year, *Just Yells: A Guide for Cheer Leaders*, demonstrates the widespread popularity of cheerleading at the time, as it lists cheers from 143 colleges and universities across the nation.[45] Some schools, such as Stanford University and Purdue University, even offered courses in cheerleading in the mid-1920s.[46] Male cheerleaders continued to hold positions of importance throughout the 1920s and were often compared to quarterbacks as "symbols of undergraduate leadership which would translate into professional success in adult life."[47] Cheerleading's origins in American military traditions and sporting events afforded it an acceptable place in the formation of American masculinity. As scholars Natalie Adams and Pamela Bettis note, "Through the regimen of physical contests that football provided in its more bloody days and the hardships and discipline encountered in early American military life, cheers and cheerleading were an acceptable part of the socialization of American men."[48] Early twentieth century American urbanization, industrialization, and democratization of education ushered in a challenge to the overt masculinity of cheer.

Although the exact year that marked the beginning of women's participation in collegiate cheering is unknown, historians identify the 1920s as a period of demographic

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[45] Hanson, 14.
[46] Hanson, 30.
[47] Hanson, 12. A 1911 editorial in *The Nation* promoted cheerleading as "one of the most valuable things a boy can take away from college."
[48] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 14.

transition within cheer.[49] Certain factors developed on American college campuses and across the nation in the 1920s that may have helped to facilitate the entrance of women. Although women were still excluded from most of the private, all-male colleges responsible for the rise of cheerleading, state-supported and land-grant institutions invited them to enroll. Greek organizations began to dominate student culture, which allowed for the selection of popular and well-known students to many leadership positions. And finally, during the 1920s beauty pageants and mass media such as the advertising and movie industries increasingly emphasized the display of female bodies as entertainment.[50] Song girls, an early form of feminized cheering, began at the collegiate level during this time and served as the precursor to dance teams now common at the high school and junior college levels.[51] Song girls appeared as early as 1929 at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) games and originally sang with the band; they eventually expanded their repertoire to include dance routines and the use of poms.[52] Beginning in the 1930s, women emerged as leaders of larger pep clubs – like the song girls – and transitioned to smaller, more visible cheerleading squads.[53] Song girls and

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[49] Reed Ueda provides limited evidence of female high school cheerleaders around the turn of the twentieth century in his study of schooling in Somerville, Massachusetts. According to Ueda, "Girls increasingly attended the baseball and football games where they served a unique role. […] At the ballgame, girls could throw prudish restraint aside and vociferously exhort their heroes. By 1899, they were leading 'organized cheering': the girl spectators were gradually acquiring the role of high school cheerleaders." However, Ueda's claim is based on female spectators; he does not describe the presence of women on organized cheering squads. See Ueda, *Avenues to Adulthood: The Origins of the High School and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 129.

[50] Hanson, 16-17.

[51] The Kilgore College Rangerettes (Kilgore, TX), created in 1939, are among the most well-known dancing drill teams. See http://www.rangerette.com.

[52] Hanson, 18.

[53] Hanson, 15-16.

similar troupes fit under the larger umbrella heading of spirit groups, of which cheerleading squads are also a part.

Despite the entrance of women in the 1920s, men continued to dominate cheering well into the 1930s.[54] Adams and Bettis suggest three reasons for this: "During this era, men still outnumbered women on university campuses; further, traditional feminine emotional and physical traits did not seem appropriate for cheerleading; and the belief that women could even be harmed by the activity kept most women from participating."[55] Girls were thought to be inherently incapable of the athletic stunts and tumbling feats male cheerleaders performed, and educators expressed concern that girls would "develop harsh voices, unladylike 'smart-alecky' conduct, and excessive conceit."[56] Dance was an acceptable behavior for girls to exhibit, which accounts for pep squads and drill teams, but any show of athleticism was inappropriately masculine. Women experienced resistance upon entering the male-dominated realm of cheerleading, as their entrance "disrupted what were considered to be the traditional role and activities of cheerleaders at

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[54] For information on the history of women and higher education in America, refer to the following: Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987); Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

[55] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 13.

[56] Hanson, 21. This attention to female voice development continues in varying form into the twenty-first century. As noted in the introduction, researchers focused their efforts on the vocal effects of cheering well into the 1980s. Though not detailed in the present study, at least one of the subjects of my ethnographic research (fully documented in chapter six) expressed concern over the potential distress her daughter's participation in cheer might cause to her voice. The girl was also a choir singer, and her mother worried about her daughter's vocal ability. However, when executed properly, cheering relies on the muscles of the diaphragm and should not tax the vocal chords.

the time."[57] As late as 1939, sportswriters excluded females from their selection of the national All-American cheer squad, and even in the 1950s head cheerleaders were typically male.[58]

ISSUES OF ACCESS

The narrative of women's entrance into cheering closely parallels that of women workers during World War II. The mid-1940s wartime mobilization of college-age males inadvertently offered women opportunities from which they previously had been excluded. Furthermore, much like the women workers of the 1940s, female cheerleaders found their positions threatened upon the soldiers' return. In fact, many colleges banned women from their cheer squads in the 1950s as a way of facilitating men's re-entry.[59] Nonetheless, cheerleading squads across the nation have been predominantly female since the 1950s.[60] Until the mid-twentieth century, cheering in America was arguably a masculine endeavor. Postwar, female cheerleaders struggled to keep their positions on squads and, in some cases, to make the squad at all. This is no longer a story only about masculinity; it is a story about power. The struggles over social power do not end; they become struggles over access, broadly defined.

Some institutions resisted the inclusion of women on their squads for decades. Harvard did not allow women to cheer until 1971, and the University of Michigan cheer

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[57] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 28.
[58] Hanson, 16; Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 14.
[59] The University of Tennessee is one such college; many secondary schools across the nation did the same.
[60] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 29-30.

squads remained all-male until 1975.[61] In an ironic twist on cheerleading's military roots, female cheerleaders are not welcome at Virginia Military Institute (VMI) unless they are students elsewhere. Prior to VMI's acceptance of women cadets in 1997, female cheerleaders came from nearby schools such as Mary Baldwin College and Southern Seminary to join VMI's coed squad. Once females enrolled, they were eligible to tryout for cheerleading along with their male counterparts. Many of the male cadets booed the female cadet cheerleaders, threw peanuts at them during games, and argued that the short-haired female cadets "[did not] even look like cheerleaders." Others said that having female cadets on the squad created "sexual tension."[62]

Texas A&M University provides a contemporary example of the ways in which tradition, power, and gender expectations all play out through the funnel of a megaphone. Located in College Station, Texas, A&M still does not allow women to cheer for its athletic teams. Founded in 1876 as an all-male military institution, A&M began to admit women unconditionally in 1972. It was the first college in Texas to participate in cheerleading, with the first official squad of yell leaders forming around 1900. These original yell leaders were freshman cadets, and this tradition remains only slightly altered, as contemporary yell leaders are almost entirely junior and senior male members of the University's Corps of Cadets. Non-cadet male students have served as yell leaders,

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[61] Lambert, 86; Hanson, 18.
[62] David Nakamura, "Jeers, Boos for Female Cadets on VMI's Cheerleading Squad," *Washington Post*, November 24, 1998.

but women – Cadets or not (the Corps first admitted women in 1973) – have yet to serve as yell leaders.[63]

In 2001, a female student challenged the tradition by proposing a coed competitive squad called the "Fightin' Texas Aggie Competition Cheer Squad." The squad of thirty women and one man gained provisional status with the following restrictions: they were not to receive University funds; they were not to cheer at University events; they were not to use the school logo; and they were not to hold practices on campus. Opposition to the squad was strong, as students and alumni decried the loss of tradition it signified. The University then required the squad to remove the word "Aggie" from its name; it became known as the "Texas Ag Elite." Administrators promised to strip the squad of its provisional approval should it "encroach on the turf of the yell leaders."[64] Much like their less formal nineteenth-century predecessors, the Texas A&M competition cheerleaders organized on their own and then met with administrative resistance.

As college administrators formalized cheerleading in universities across the United States, secondary school officials adapted it for younger students. Only a small percentage of American youth attended high schools prior to the twentieth century, as

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[63] John D. Bloss, Texas A&M University Association of Former Yell Leaders, personal interview with the author, September 26, 2006. According to Bloss, women accounted for almost twenty percent of the Corps of Cadets in 2006, and the goal is for their representation to reach fifty percent by the year 2020.

[64] Kris Axtman, "'C' is for Controversy: Texas School Where Pompoms Aren't Welcome," *Christian Science Monitor* 94, no. 10 (2001): 3; Dana Curry, "Fears Over Cheers," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48, no. 15 (2001). The 2009-2010 academic year saw the Texas Ag Elite recognized as an official Club Sport through the Texas A&M Department of Recreation. Though they are now all-female, known as the "Texas A&M Competition Squad," and able to compete at the collegiate level, they still do not represent the University as an official spirit group. However, the squad has competed at the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) Collegiate Nationals in Daytona Beach, Florida, something they could not have done without official recognition, even as a Club Sport. See http://competitionsquad.tamu.edu/.

most considered it necessary only in preparation for a college education and access was limited. However, by the 1930s, sixty percent of high school-aged youth were in school. Early-twentieth-century reforms such as child labor laws and rising age limits for compulsory education contributed to the democratization of secondary schooling.[65] The rapid increase in enrollment consequently forced educators to redefine the mission of public education, and this redefinition included extracurricular activities as well as curricular components.[66]

As an activity recognized in coeducational public schools, cheerleading became accessible to a greater number and variety of students. Girls began to cheer at the scholastic level in the 1940s, perhaps as a result of increasing opportunities: cheerleading squads were present in over 30,000 high schools and colleges by the middle of the decade. Cheerleading remained a coed activity throughout the 1950s, but a feminization had already begun. In a 1955 overview of cheerleading programs in secondary schools, one of the emerging trends listed was the prevalence of girls on squads.[67] Cheerleading continued to spread within the public school system, and junior high and elementary schools also boasted squads by the 1950s.

While collegiate cheering originated within student culture and administrators eventually organized and formalized it, adults structured scholastic cheering from its

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[65] Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 211.
[66] Hanson, 18-19. Also see Susan Fuhrman and Marvin Lazerson, ed., *The Public Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).
[67] Hanson, 23-24.

inception. Thus, adults viewed it as a pedagogical device[68] and institutionalized all aspects of the activity. Selection of cheerleaders, conduct, training, and supervision of squads were all highly structured elements of scholastic cheering. Hanson highlights the effects of such institutionalization:

> In defining cheerleading as an extracurricular activity, educators invested it with educational and social value. Participants would learn and demonstrate good sportsmanship, discipline, cooperation, and leadership. As student leaders and highly visible ambassadors for their schools, cheerleaders would exemplify acceptable social and academic standards.[69]

Once educators solidified cheerleading's place within the realm of pedagogy, it was not long before community organizations, again structured by adults, adopted it as their own.[70] Organized youth sports leagues such as Pop Warner Football[71] and Young America Football developed as early as the 1930s to furnish young boys with playing experience. As these programs evolved, they expanded to include cheerleaders as accessories to sporting events. Historically, youth sports programs have been sex-segregated: boys played sports while girls cheered for them. Despite more recent attempts

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[68] Psychologists Jacquelynne Eccles and Bonnie Barber's research on extracurricular activities is instructive here. See Eccles and Barber, "Student Council, Volunteering, Basketball, or Marching Band: What Kind of Extracurricular Involvement Matters?" *Journal of Adolescent Research* 14, no. 1 (1999): 10-43. They discuss the differences between "constructive leisure" and "relaxed leisure." Sociologists Patricia Adler and Peter Adler studied the former: Adler and Adler, "Social Reproduction and the Corporate Other: The Institutionalization of Afterschool Activities," *Sociological Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1994): 309-328.

[69] Hanson, 29-30.

[70] Although some extracurricular activities are more susceptible to this than others (those that fall within the realms of drama or athletics, for example), it would be a mistake not to recognize the potential connection between middle-class socialization and such group activities. See Adler and Adler. There may also be an effort to educate children in the broader ideals of citizenship. See Fuhrman and Lazerson, *The Public Schools*.

[71] For more information on the history of the Pop Warner organization, see chapter six.

by girls, with some success, to infiltrate the boys' leagues, community youth organizations remain largely divided according to gender.[72] Furthermore, both scholastic and community-based cheer programs inadvertently limit participation to those students with available time, money, and access to transportation.[73]

The feminization of cheerleading in the 1940s and 1950s shifted the popular image and understanding of cheerleaders. Indeed, the cheerleader came to be viewed as the all-American *girl*. This notion of ideal femininity influenced cheerleader selection. As a result, the second half of the twentieth century saw many integration issues within cheer squads. In her work on social change in North Carolina, historian Pamela Grundy notes the impact of such legal decisions as the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Grundy states, "The selection of cheerleading squads would, in fact, become one of the most volatile school desegregation issues around the South."[74] In many cases, cheerleader selections became the catalysts for riots, violence, and school walkouts.

Purdue University's Black Student Action committee demanded the inclusion of black cheerleaders in 1968 and two African American women were added to the squad.[75] In the spring of 1969, selection presented more of a problem at Walter Williams High

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[72] Hanson, 35-36. A 2009 *New York Times* article demonstrates the lengths some youth sports programs have gone to in recent years to increase girls' participation. The Centers for Disease Control found that in New York City and Boston in 2007, thirty-five and forty-two percent of girls played sports, respectively, compared with higher numbers of boys. Youth sports leaders report that "persuading girls [to join] takes weeks of wooing: encouraging them to sign up with friends, holding girls-only clinics, and winning over teachers they trust." Katie Thomas, "Youth Groups Try Teamwork To Bring Girls Into the Game," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2009.

[73] Hanson, 42.

[74] Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 285.

[75] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 101.

School in Burlington, North Carolina, as white students booed the black students who tried out for the squad in front of the student body. Only white girls were elected and fights erupted at the school. Black students protested on the front lawn, burned buildings, and a fifteen-year-old boy was shot to death.[76] That same year in Crystal City, Texas, over half of the town's 2,800 students staged a historic twenty-eight day walkout in protest of cheerleader selection. The population of rural Crystal City was eighty-five percent Chicano, but the largely white faculty in charge of selection chose only one Chicana cheerleader. Along with representation on the cheerleading squad, the students also demanded the right to speak Spanish in the classroom, the employment of more Chicano teachers, and a more culturally inclusive history curriculum. The walkout is often attributed with the birth of La Raza Unida Party movement in Texas.[77]

Desegregation of cheerleading squads was one of the last actions required of Florida's Seminole County Public Schools in compliance with a 1970 lawsuit the federal government filed against the district. While the district's racial makeup was fourteen percent African American, its squads were almost entirely white.[78] Twelve years later, in 1982, the first black cheerleader at the University of Mississippi experienced severe opposition when he refused to wear the Confederate flag on his uniform. He received threats, and his detractors burned his dorm room door, flooded his room, and threatened

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[76] Grundy, 267.

[77] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 6, 100-101. The Crystal City walkout was organized and implemented under the direction of Jose Gutierrez. It was part of a calculated political movement. For a more detailed account of La Raza Unida see Ignacio M. Garcia, *United We Win: The Rise and Fall of La Raza Unida Party* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1989); Armando Navarro, *La Raza Unida Party: A Chicano Challenge to the U.S. Two-Party Dictatorship* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000).

[78] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 95.

his father's job. As a safety precaution, other African American students escorted him around campus at all times,[79] echoing the campus escorts James Meredith required upon his entrance to Ole Miss in 1962.

More recently, parents have filed lawsuits, schools have implemented policies, and the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights has intervened in disputes over the disproportionate representation of whites on cheerleading squads throughout the country. Two African Americans tried out for the squad at a junior high school in Arp, Texas, in 1988 but were not selected. The Texas Education Agency intervened upon allegations of score-tampering and ordered Arp Independent School District to allow all eighteen candidates to cheer or risk the loss of state funding.[80] Adams and Bettis conducted ethnographic research on pseudonymously named schools Wichita High School and Wichita Mid-High, located in the Midwestern United States, in the 1990s. From 1991 to 1995, 140 girls were selected for cheerleading squads, twelve percent of whom were non-white. Twenty-five percent of the school population was non-white, which prompted the Office of Civil Rights to file a complaint against the district that threatened the loss of federal funding if the issue went unresolved.[81] Similarly, thirty-one students tried out for the Columbiana Middle School (Alabama) cheer squad in 2001. Seven of the contestants were African American, but only one African American was selected for the ten-member squad. Parents contacted the school administration and then

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[79] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 101.

[80] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 96. Arp is located in east Texas, near the Louisiana state line, almost 450 miles from the south Texas border town of Crystal City. Twenty years after the walkouts that begat La Raza Unida, cheerleader selection remained controversial in the state.

[81] For more information on this ethnographic study, see Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 91-110.

the Office of Civil Rights and the two parties sought mediation. An investigation ensued and eventually all candidates were offered positions on the squad.[82]

In their 2003 monograph, Adams and Bettis speculate as to why the integration of cheerleading squads became such a heated issue. They suggest, "One of the primary reasons why many whites objected so vehemently to the selection of African American girls […] was based on their own notions of who could best represent ideal girlhood or womanhood."[83] While whites continue to dominate cheerleading statistically, the participation of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans has increased dramatically in recent years. At cheerleading camps in South Texas, for example, half of attendees are now Mexican Americans. Encouragement of diversity, either through legal battles or the voluntary implementation of more inclusive selection processes, has challenged the perception that cheerleading is a "white girl thing."[84]

THE RISE OF CONTEMPORARY CHEERLEADING

In passing Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972, Congress sought to equalize opportunities offered to females and males in all federally funded education programs. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Prior to the passage of

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[82] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 95-96.

[83] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 109. Ideal femininity is coded as white and upper class, which makes it difficult for women of color and/or working class women to embody. See Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); bell hooks, "Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 157-164. With specific respect to the integration of cheer squads, a fear of miscegenation was at times the culprit behind the resistance on the part of whites, largely because of the cultural myth that football players (especially captains and quarterbacks) marry – and hence procreate with – cheerleaders.

[84] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 109.

Title IX, cheerleading was often the only school-sponsored physical activity for girls in many parts of the country, and often the only way for girls to affiliate with sports. As Title IX was a response to the limited opportunities afforded girls, a side effect of the effort to move girls onto the playing field "situated cheerleading in opposition to girls' sports."[85] In terms of athletics, Title IX was essentially designed to address the problem of boys playing sports while girls cheered for them. Cheerleading therefore found itself in competition with girls' athletics, and the activity underwent a transformation. As *Washington Post* journalist Amy Argetsinger notes, after the passage of Title IX, "Cheerleading might have vanished. Instead, it harnessed the spirit of the times, evolving into a mélange of highflying acrobatics and show-biz flair that required more athleticism than before."[86]

Discussions of cheerleading in regards to Title IX inevitably lead to the question of whether cheerleading is a sport. The national coordinator for Title IX athletics at the Office of Civil Rights, Mary Frances O'Shea, has said that cheerleading "is not considered a sport for equity purposes," and that remains true despite requests for reconsideration.[87] The distinction is an important one, especially at the scholastic level where school districts fund sports and participants fund activities. This means that school districts cover the costs of uniforms, equipment, travel expenses, and competition entrance fees, among other things, when cheerleading is categorized as a sport.

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[85] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 60.
[86] Amy Argetsinger, "When the Cheerleaders Are the Main Event: For Private Teams, Victory Is Their Own," *Washington Post*, July 10, 1999.
[87] Mariah Burton Nelson, "Should Cheerleading Be Considered A Sport?" *Knight-Ridder Newsservice*, December 14, 1995.

Otherwise, financial responsibility falls to the participants themselves. At last count, twenty-six state high school athletic associations recognize cheerleading as a sport; others are actively considering it.[88] Many high school and college coaches support categorizing cheerleading as a sport because it increases the availability of resources such as practice facilities, school funds, and access to athletic trainers. Other arguments in support of categorization include the potential for more equitable coaches' salaries and college cheer scholarships.[89] Those who sponsor and coach all-star squads feel that their primary focus on competition places them squarely in the category of sport.[90] Journalist Kate Torgovnick followed three college cheer squads through their 2006-2007 seasons. The resulting story sheds light on the nuances of this distinction.[91]

Nonetheless, most cheerleading organizations, many state athletic organizations, high school and college cheer coaches, and the Women's Sports Foundation feel otherwise. In relation to classification at the high school level, categorizing cheerleading as a sport would subject it to scholastic regulations regarding the eligibility of transfer students, practice times and limits, and restrictions on how far the team could travel to compete, which would jeopardize squads' abilities to participate in national championship competitions.[92] Beyond scholastic rules, many view categorizing cheerleading as a sport as an easy way for institutions to subvert Title IX. The Women's

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[88] Rebecca Boyce, "Cheerleading in the Context of Title IX and Gendering in Sport," *The Sport Journal* 11, no. 3 (2008), http://www.thesportjournal.org/article/cheerleading-context-title-ix-and-gendering-sport.
[89] Many colleges and universities currently offer scholarships to both male and female cheerleaders, although the amounts vary drastically from school to school. See Hanson, 93-94.
[90] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 57-58.
[91] Kate Torgovnick, *Cheer! Three Teams on a Quest for College Cheerleading's Ultimate Prize* (New York: Touchstone, 2008).
[92] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 59.

Sports Foundation's position is that cheerleading is "normally considered to be an extracurricular activity […] to be conducted in conjunction with sports contests and involv[ing] elements of physical activity," and that "the existence of a competitive opportunity does not qualify the extracurricular activity as an athletic team or sport."[93] Unless a cheerleading squad's primary purpose is competition "on a regular season and post season qualification basis […] and if the team conducted regular practices in preparation for such competition while under the supervision of a coach," it cannot constitute a sporting opportunity for girls.[94]

The Foundation's position, and that of many who do not support cheerleading as a sport, is primarily a reaction to the efforts of those schools not in compliance with Title IX to nominally equalize girls' participation and thus achieve compliance by simply recognizing existing and already funded activities as sports to avoid creating new athletic opportunities for girls. The concern in such situations is the elimination of conventional women's sports such as softball and volleyball. Furthermore, such a move would complicate the status of male cheerleaders because coed sports do not qualify, for the purposes of Title IX, as female sports.[95] In the 1970s, when the passage of Title IX coexisted with a second wave of feminist activism, "cheerleading, like beauty pageants and Playboy bunnies, represented all that feminists were working against."[96] At the

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[93] Women's Sports Foundation, "Cheerleading, Drill Team, Danceline and Band as Varsity Sports: The Foundation Position," July 20, 2000, http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/issues/rights/article.html?record=95.
[94] Women's Sports Foundation.
[95] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 59.
[96] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 60.

beginning of the twenty-first century, however, cheerleading's evolution from a support activity to a competitive athletic endeavor complicates its place in society.[97]

Response among cheerleading enthusiasts to Title IX and 1970s feminist activism centered on "reshap[ing] cheerleading as an activity congruent with newer images of the ideal woman."[98] This involved the emergence of "tight, athletic motions, difficult jumps, pyramid building, and fast-paced, crowd-pleasing dances to music," and "required girls who were not only strong but were also agile, well-coordinated, and possessed athletic prowess."[99] The cheerleading industry, well established by the 1970s, reacted to the evolving expectations of cheerleaders by updating their products and services to meet those needs.

Although cheer camps and clinics – multiple or single-day events, respectively – began in the 1940s, they originally emphasized values over techniques.[100] Considered the "founding father of the cheer industry,"[101] Lawrence Herkimer modified the goal of camps in the early 1950s and was the catalyst for what is today more than a billion dollar

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[97] Connecticut's Quinnipiac University threatened to cut women's volleyball and replace it with a competition cheer squad for the 2009-2010 season. Five players and their coach filed suit and in a ninety-five page decision, U.S. District Court Judge Stefan R. Underhill agreed with the plaintiffs: "Quinnipiac discriminated on the basis of sex during the 2009-10 academic year by failing to provide enough equal athletic participation opportunities for women." However, while the University manipulated both its men's and women's team rosters, it "violated Title IX *only by counting members of its competition cheer squad as varsity athletes when it was not run in a way that qualified it as a varsity sport*." See David Moltz, "Key Title IX Ruling," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 22, 2010, http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/07/22/quinnipiac, emphasis in original.

[98] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 48.

[99] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 48-49.

[100] Hanson, 39-40. The first camp was held in New York State in 1944; the first clinic was held in Iowa in 1949.

[101] Hanson, 44.

per year industry.[102] Herkimer founded the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) in 1953 and was one of cheerleading's first entrepreneurs. He offered cheer camps and clinics nationally and by 1956 his organization boasted members in forty-eight states. His camps consisted of five-day sessions held on college campuses in the summers that taught cheering and stunting techniques as well as crowd psychology and the use of poms.[103] As cheerleading became increasingly athletic, Herkimer's camps developed accordingly.

Jeff Webb, a disciple of Herkimer's who left NCA in 1974 to establish his own cheer company, Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA), started organizing national championships in 1981 in response to cheerleaders' athletic abilities and began televising the competitions on ESPN in 1983. This rise of cheer competitions was another part of cheerleading's transformation from sideline to center stage. As Adams and Bettis note, "With the introduction of these popular annual cheerleading championships, cheerleading became a commercial venture on its own with commercial sponsors, television air time, national exposure, and eventually international exposure."[104] At the turn of the twenty-first century, national championships enjoyed a television audience of nearly half a million viewers.[105]

Webb expanded his organization to include Universal Dance Association (UDA) and the cheer and dance uniform and accessory company Varsity Uniforms and incorporated as Varsity Spirit Corp., which became a publicly traded corporation on the

[102] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 111.
[103] Hanson, 43-44.
[104] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 49.
[105] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 49.

NASDAQ in 1992.[106] Herkimer's and Webb's companies together controlled seventy-five percent of the cheerleading market, mostly in camps and uniform sales,[107] until 2006 when Webb's Varsity Spirit bought out NCA.[108] Cheer camps alone generate more than $100 million per year; in 2002, UCA held 1,400 camps with 250,000 participants.[109] Over 100,000 cheerleaders participate in various championship competitions each year, with 40,000 of them traveling to Orlando, Florida, to compete in UCA's nationals.[110] The commercialization of cheerleading includes corporate sponsorship as well; companies such as Chick-fil-A, Nike, Claire's, AT&T, Gillette, and Thermasilk are just a few corporate sponsors for special cheer events like national competitions.[111] The 2011 UCA sponsors as advertised on the organization's website include Varsity.com, Varsity Spirit Fashions, Gatorade sports drink, Invisalign Teen ("the clear alternative to metal braces"), PBteen (the youth-centered division of home goods store Pottery Barn, which carries a line called Varsity Cheer), and Degree Girl antiperspirant/deodorant.[112] In 1994, *American Cheerleader* magazine debuted to impressive sales and now maintains a readership of over one million.[113] The brand has since expanded to include seven more titles such as *American Cheerleader Junior* and *Dance Spirit*.[114]

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[106] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 114-115.
[107] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 112.
[108] "Industry Profile: Jeff Webb of Varsity Brands, Inc.," *Cheer Coach & Advisor*, May 2006.
[109] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 118; 119.
[110] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 120.
[111] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 121.
[112] See http://uca.varsity.com/UCASponsors.aspx.
[113] Erik Brady, "Cheerleading in the USA: A Sport and an Industry," *USA Today*, April 26, 2002.
[114] Erik Brady, "From Megaphones to Mega-Profits," *USA Today*, April 26, 2002.

The 1990s saw the rise of all-star squads that exist solely to compete in state, regional, and national championships. Unaffiliated with schools, participants on these squads do not cheer for any athletic teams. Gymnastics training facilities, faced with a decline in gymnasts in the 1980s, began offering cheerleading instruction as a means of staying in business. While gyms originally trained middle and high school cheerleaders, owners soon capitalized on cheerleading's growing popularity and formed their own elite squads. Over 1,500 private training facilities currently sponsor all-star squads, and the National Federation of State High School Associations reports that competitive cheerleading is "the fastest-growing sport for girls,"[115] with almost 400,000 students participating.[116]

Contemporary cheerleading's increased focus on athleticism accounts for an increased risk of injury. According to researcher Mark Hutchinson, M.D., cheerleaders lose an average of 28.8 days to injury, more than any other high school athlete.[117] Although nonfatal knee and ankle injuries are the most common, the twenty-first annual report of the National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research found that cheerleaders suffered more catastrophic injuries than any other female athletes at either the high school or college level.[118] From the 1982-83 through 2002-03 academic years,

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[115] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 39-40.

[116] *Inside Cheerleading*, May/June 2009, 15. Other research from American Sports Data puts overall cheerleading participation at 3.73 million individuals including scholastic, recreational, collegiate, and all-star cheer.

[117] Mark R. Hutchinson, "Cheerleading Injuries," *Physician and Sportsmedicine*, 25, no. 9 (1997): 83.

[118] Report authors define a catastrophic injury as "a sport injury that resulted in a brain or spinal cord injury or skull or spinal fracture." *Twenty First Annual Report of the National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research*, January 28, 2005, http://www.unc.edu/depts/nccsi/AllSport.htm.

cheerleaders suffered 52.3% of all direct catastrophic injuries to female athletes.[119] The authors of the report note that the increased incidence of injury directly relates to the athletic turn in cheerleading. As one popular t-shirt worn by competitive cheerleaders suggests, "Cheerleading – if it were any easier it would be called football."

All of this emphasis on access, integration, ideal femininity, and athleticism makes it easy to overlook the newest development, which may prove to usher in challenges the activity has yet to confront: international cheerleading. Public schools in the United Kingdom now offer it,[120] as does at least one private school in Senegal.[121] April 2009 saw the inaugural worldwide International Cheer Union (ICU) Cheerleading and Dance Team Championships in Orlando, Florida. Over eighty-five teams represented forty-five countries including Taiwan, China, Jamaica, Germany, Thailand, Colombia, Chile, New Zealand, Canada, Slovenia, Finland, and Mexico as well as the United States.[122] The activity is in the process of Olympic committee approval, too, which means the Olympic Games may one day see cheerleaders as competitors and not just sideline supporters.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief outline of cheerleading's origins in American military and collegiate sporting traditions followed by the activity's eventual diversity

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[119] A direct injury is an injury "which resulted directly from participation in the skills of the sport." Ibid.
[120] Jennifer Howze, "Why Cheerleading Is Good for the UK," October 22, 2010, http://www.jenography.net/2010/10/when-bloggers-are-cheerleaders/.
[121] LaToya Lewis, "Girls From Senegal: Africa Gets a Taste of Cheer," *Texas Cheerleader Magazine*, Summer 2009: 34.
[122] Griffin Myers and Chris Korotky, "One for the History Books," *Inside Cheerleading*, May/June 2009.

throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It has highlighted important parts of that history, touching on social movements and their larger impacts on society, and tracking broader trends in the trajectory of the activity. In doing so, it has laid the groundwork for a constellation of cheer, allowing for connections based on these varied starting points.

We will refer back to this chapter as we progress; this foundation provides reference points, opportunities for expansion, as well as points of contention. We should be careful not to view the history of cheerleading as a direct evolution from point A to point B, but rather as a complicated, nonlinear course of events that often cluster around the same time or theme. What is important about this history is that it allows us to create a constellation of cheer, holding the various developments, representations, and experiences of cheerleaders in concert with one another.

Chapter Two: Death Becomes Her: Fictionalized Cheerleaders, Popularity, (Im)perfection, and Victimhood

The cover image of Elmore Leonard's 2004 *New York Times* best-selling novel *Mr. Paradise* shows a blonde cheerleader outfitted in a bright yellow and royal blue pleated miniskirt and midriff-bearing halter top, her left foot attached to the inside of her right knee in a cheerleading pose known as a "liberty." She holds a matching blue and yellow pom in each hand, her left arm outstretched. She perches atop the hood of a shiny black car, an ornament (Figure 2.1).

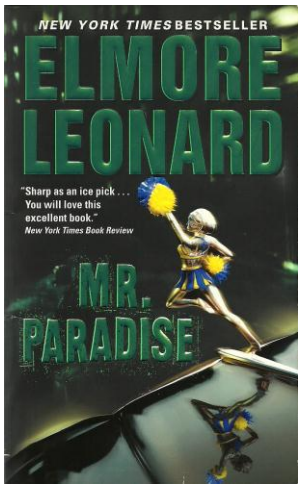

Figure 2.1 – Cover of Elmore Leonard's *Mr. Paradise* (2004)

This cover image is a gold-plated doppelganger for Chloe Robinette, former escort-turned-professional girlfriend whose sole client is octogenarian Tony Paradiso (known to his employees as Mr. Paradise). The main difference between the hood ornament and the actual cheerleader is that in lieu of a halter top Chloe sports the University of Michigan's

letter M hand-painted on her bare chest in blue Magic Marker by Mr. Paradise himself.[123] Much like the figurine, Chloe is largely ornamental; her (unintentional) death serves as an entryway into the Motor City's latest whodunit. Most interesting, given the limited amount of time we, as readers, spend with Chloe, is her prominence on the *Mr. Paradise* cover. I propose to analyze an unexpected grouping of works here – from mystery to literary fiction to young adult literature – in an effort to create a thematic cluster within the constellation of cheer. Almost all of the texts discussed in this chapter feature cover images of cheerleaders. However, none include such an overdrawn combination of trivialization and sexualization, which reminds readers just how powerful the cheerleader image is as a marketing tool alone.[124] The borderline pornographic scene of drug-and-alcohol-fueled debauchery that turns on the pseudo-cheerleading of Chloe and her roommate over in five chapters, Leonard concerns himself with homicide for the remaining 300 pages of *Mr. Paradise*. Yet it is a replica of Chloe's body on the cover, a visual reminder that the cheerleader remains a titillating object, even postmortem.

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[123] Elmore Leonard, *Mr. Paradise* (New York: HarperTorch, 2004), 43.

[124] The Leonard image shown above graces the cover of a mass-market paperback, a formatting difference worth noting. Smaller and less expensive than trade paperback and hardcover books, mass-market books appeal to a particular audience, often "someone coming to the book from the movie." Their smaller size allows them to fit in carousels near cash registers at gift shops where buyers are most likely to make impulse purchases- hospitals, airports, drugstores, and grocery stores, for example. Priced affordably so as to facilitate impulse purchasing, other differences in production include paper and binding quality. Although there is an original category of mass-market books, the format is used largely for genre fiction: mysteries, romance, science fiction, and thrillers. For more information on the differences between trade and mass-market paperbacks, see *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, March 16, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/books/review/PaperRow-t.html. In his book *The Late Age of Print*, Ted Striphas (following Jay David Bolter's lead) refers to the early twenty-first century as "the late age of print," saying it "draws attention to the ways in which the social, economic, and material coordinates of books have been changing in relation to other media, denser forms of industrial organization, shifting patterns of work and leisure, new laws governing commodity ownership and use, and a host of other factors," one of which is the digital revolution. See Ted Striphas, *The Late Age of Print: Everyday Book Culture from Consumerism to Control* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 3.

It is not just the cheerleader as cover image that has staying power, as one recent Texas court battle can attest. A sixteen-year-old female cheerleader known in the press by the initials H.S. alleged three fellow students at Silsbee High School (Silsbee, Texas) raped her. The three young men were indicted for sexual assault of a child. At least one of H.S.'s attackers pleaded guilty to a lesser misdemeanor assault charge and was sentenced to a year in prison. That sentence was suspended in favor of two years' probation, a $2,500 fine, community service, and attendance at an anger management class. Throughout all of this legal wrangling, H.S. continued to cheer for Silsbee's athletic teams, including the boys' basketball team, of which her rapist was a member. A dedicated cheerleader who ignored the school's suggestions that she avoid homecoming festivities and other environments where she might encounter her attackers (such as the school cafeteria), H.S. refused to cheer for her rapist individually, meaning she would not chant his name repeatedly when his turn came at the free throw line. For this the school removed her from the cheer squad. H.S.'s parents sued the school district on the grounds that it violated her right to freedom of expression. An appeals court dismissed the case, saying, "In her capacity as cheerleader, [H.S.] served as a mouthpiece through which the school could disseminate speech – namely support for its athletic teams."[125] Here, as with Chloe Robinette's ornamental presence on the *Mr. Paradise* cover, cheerleaders represent something far more complicated. Female victims – Chloe the murder victim, H.S. the

[125] Caroline Heldman, "Cheerleader Required to Cheer for Man Who Assaulted Her," *Ms. Magazine*, October 15, 2010, http://msmagazine.com/blog/blog/2010/10/15/cheerleader-required-to-cheer-for-man-who-assaulted-her/. On May 2, 2011, the United States Supreme Court refused to hear the case. Federal courts ordered H.S. and her parents to reimburse the school district the almost fifty thousand dollars it spent "defending against a frivolous suit." Bob Egelko, "Cheerleader Who Wouldn't Root For Assailant Loses," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 3, 2011.

rape victim – risk mistreatment, disrespect, harassment, and trivialization in the aftermath of their assaults, whether they are living or dead. Often their removal signifies abuse of power, the postmortem body of the cheerleader (depicted on a book cover, a movie poster, the front page of a newspaper) an indication of injustice.

Although cultural references to cheerleaders appear at least as early as 1911,[126] the depiction of cheerleaders changes in two significant ways during the second half of the twentieth century. As the previous chapter explored, Mary Ellen Hanson writes about popular cultural images of cheerleaders in her 1995 monograph *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture*, and Natalie Adams and Pamela Bettis build on her analysis in their 2003 book *Cheerleader!: An American Icon*. Hanson identifies cheerleaders as "stock character[s]" who "embod[y] positive and negative stereotypes."[127] These cheerleader images, Hanson suggests, "equate automatically with social success. The cheerleader is popular, never lacks a date, and is often linked socially with elite male students, such as athletes."[128] Hanson concludes that the male athletes who serve as the cheerleaders' dates are, in fact, the "significant character[s]," whereas the female characters serve "subordinate role[s]."[129] I disagree. Rather than merely secondary characters, I contend that the female cheerleaders in the following texts – films

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[126] A 1911 editorial in *The Nation* equated cheerleading with football quarterbacking in terms of future success in business. Perhaps more tellingly, 1920s cheerleaders (mostly male at the time) were described in *The New York Times* as "lithe, white-sweatered and flannel-trousered youths in front of the bleachers, their mingled force and grace, their gestures at the same time hieratic and apparently jointless […] And even an ancient Greek pulse would halt for a moment at that final upward leap of the young body, like a diver into the azure[…]" "The Broadening Curriculum," *The New York Times*, January 25, 1924, 16, quoted in Mary Ellen Hanson, *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995), 2.
[127] Hanson, 100.
[128] Hanson, 101.
[129] Hanson, 102; 100.

and novels appearing between 1973 and 2007 – drive the action; they serve as narrators, protagonists, and even title characters, in which the definition of their importance to the story is explicit from its inception. Automobile hood ornament Chloe Robinette is arguably more object than subject, killed off so early in the narrative, her gold-plated body left to represent the lifestyle of her benefactor more than anything else. But Sandy Olsson, Henrietta Snow, Jo Spencer, Kristi Casey, Hannah Love, the cheerleaders of Sweet Valley High, and the Corcoran sisters are principal characters whose storylines propel the narratives. Previous treatments of cheerleaders in American popular culture have been shortsighted, excluding all but a handful of more readily accessible texts and dismissing cheerleader characters, relegating them to secondary status, as do Hanson and Adams and Bettis. Part of the work of this project is to recover these characters, contextualize them, and place them within the larger constellation of cheerleading in America in order to show how the specific sociohistoric moment in which they appear is responsible for their characterization.

The prevalence of cheerleader protagonists increases dramatically during the Cold War,[130] and a substantial number of them fall victim to dark forces. This is the second way in which the representation of cheerleaders shifts. Looking at this temporally specific crop of texts through a broad historical lens, it is compelling to connect such a

[130] For background information on the Cold War, consult the following: Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945-2002* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

sizable array of victimized cheerleaders to the larger social movement of second wave feminism, to say that the passage of Title IX brought about the literal removal of female cheerleaders from the sidelines of playing fields (as it moved those same females onto the fields) and the literary removal of cheerleader characters. Yet the very real victimization of cheerleader protagonists that takes place in post-1960s literature continues into the twenty-first century, when girls cheer on sideline and competitive squads as well as participate in more federally funded athletic programs than ever before, which complicates this link. However, given cheer's varied history and the anxieties over the role of women and girls that persist into the twenty-first century (as the Silsbee, Texas, case illustrates), perhaps we should not be surprised. If anything, the existence of competing narratives – victimization and popularity, and, later, popularity and superpowers – proves the tensions inherent in the activity itself. The cheerleader is not a constant symbol. Its image shifts over time, and the texts this chapter explores help shed light on this often vilified, much maligned character.

THE CHEERLEADER AS THE POPULAR GIRL

The first episode of the early-2000s crime-drama *Veronica Mars* opens with three cheerleaders bopping across the high school parking lot, basking in the California sun, a signifier of adolescent success in mainstream America.[131] The millennial Mars – only recently removed from the cheerleading squad, we quickly learn – and her squadmates are decades away from the 1950s example of popularity shown in the film *Everybody's*

[131] See chapter three for a more complete treatment of *Veronica Mars*.

All-American (discussed below), and these competing images of cheerleaders as the epitome of social success are reminders that, although some characteristics persist, this is not a static icon. Indeed, a quick turn through film and television reveals, along with Mars, a number of texts that offer glimpses of cheerleader characters. *Friends*'s Rachel Green dons her high school cheerleading uniform in an attempt to impress a date because, as she tells roommate Monica Gellar, "My lucky dress wasn't working out too well for me but for four years this baby never missed."[132] *Daria*'s Brittany Taylor is repeatedly linked to the quarterback of Lawndale High School's football team.[133] Lane Kim, Rory Gilmore's best friend and self-described audiophile, left the marching band for the cheer squad after being told she is "cheerleader material" (and as a result of the loneliness she feels after her best friend begins dating).[134] The pilot episode of *Friday Night Lights* introduces cheerleader Lyla Garrity concurrently with her star quarterback boyfriend, Jason Street.[135] It seems as if every male in southern California chases after Kelly Kapowski at some point during her four years at Bayside High School, and *Saved By the Bell*'s most popular cheerleader reprises her role as resident bombshell in the series sequel, *Saved By the Bell: The College Years*. Similarly, we first meet Joanie

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[132] "The One with the Fake Party," *Friends*, directed by Michael Lembeck (1998; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Television). Rachel Green and Monica Geller are two of six young adults (three women, three men; all white; all heterosexual) who live and work in New York City. The series ran from 1994 to 2004 and was nominated for over 200 awards, almost sixty of which it won.

[133] *Daria* (1997; MTV Animation). An animated series that featured an intelligent, cynical teenage girl in the lead role, *Daria* ran from 1997 to 2001.

[134] "Secrets and Loans," *Gilmore Girls*, directed by Nicole Holofcener (2002; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Television).

[135] "Pilot," *Friday Night Lights*, directed by Peter Berg (2006; NBC Universal Television). While the television show, based on the 2004 major motion picture (which is in turn based on H.G. Bissinger's 1990 nonfiction book of the same name), is the most gender-inclusive of the series, only the first season offers viewers a glimpse of cheerleaders as fully rendered characters.

Cunningham on the 1970s show *Happy Days*, but her character co-helms the (failed) spinoff *Joanie Loves Chachi*. Betty and Veronica, of *Archie Comics* fame, spend years cheering for Riverdale High School and sharing the spotlight as the object of Archie's attention. Both Grace Bowman on *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* and Lucy Camden on *7th Heaven* offer portraits of cheerleaders for whom Christianity and popularity play central roles. Marcia Brady, the eldest and more popular sister on *The Brady Bunch*, joins the squad at Westdale High School; her younger sister Jan tries but fails to make the squad. *Superman*'s Lana Lang is a cheerleader, as is *Batman*'s Susie.[136] The pilot episode of *Freaks and Geeks* places pretty cheerleader Cindy Sanders in the realm of the unobtainable when Sam Weir considers asking her to be his date to the homecoming dance. His friend Neil Schweiber uses Cindy's cheerleader status to explain why she and Sam are not a match: "The dance is tomorrow. She's a cheerleader. You've seen *Star Wars* twenty-seven times. Do the math."[137]

The characters cited above are all female. Since ninety-five percent of actual cheerleaders are female, it is not surprising that filmic representations are largely gender specific. Interestingly, when contemporary male characters' cheerleader pasts are revealed, it is most often secondary and within the confines of heterosexual relationships, thereby extending the accepted notion of cheerleading as a heteronormative activity,

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[136] Lana Lang first appears in DC Comics' *Superboy* #10 (Sept/Oct 1950). Her character is a consistent love interest for Clark Kent throughout the various *Superman* iterations, including the television series *Superboy* and *Smallville* and the 1983 film *Superman III*. Cheerleader Susie appears in episodes fifteen and sixteen of the first season of *Batman*, where she is one of the Joker's helpmates. "The Joker Goes to School," and "He Meets His Match, the Grisly Ghoul," *Batman*, directed by Murray Golden (1966; Twentieth Century Fox).

[137] "Pilot," *Freaks and Geeks*, directed by Jake Kasdan (1999; Apatow Productions). Though it only ran for one season (eighteen episodes), the quirky show about two groups of high schoolers during the 1980s was nominated for several awards and won an Emmy.

something Adams and Bettis remarked on with respect to the film *But I'm A Cheerleader*.[138] To this end, the sitcoms *Modern Family* and *Rules of Engagement* both contain references to heterosexual coupled males' cheerleading histories. Phil Dunphy, *Modern Family*'s sometimes clumsy married father of three references his days as a college cheerleader and his marital status when he says, "My wife won't let me go to Vegas. Trust me that is not a phone call you want to make to a group of ex-college male cheerleaders. They will mock you with a hurtful, rhythmic taunt."[139] *Rules of Engagement*'s Adam Rhodes cheered on a coed squad in high school. His fiancée mistook his comments about the football team to mean he had played; a spring cleaning that results in Adam unearthing his varsity letter jacket clears up confusion when Jen spots a megaphone pin on the lapel and asks Adam if he dated a cheerleader. Adam's tone and facial expression reflect his disappointment when he recalls, "No. I made the squad. She didn't. That's why we broke up." Adam's cheer past couched in heterosexual relationships from its introduction, he feels safe using the coed nature of the activity to defend his participation to his close-minded friends: "I even hooked up with a couple of the girls on the squad. […] There's nothing to be ashamed of."[140] The early-twenty-first-century televisual landscape Adam Rhodes and Phil Dunphy occupy is rife with contradictions. Even though Phil's *Modern Family* brother-in-law is part of the only openly gay couple on a popular network sitcom, Phil's cheerleading past is

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[138] Adams and Bettis only nod to the film in their brief discussion of "the cultural ambiguities of the contemporary cheerleader," saying it only works "if the audience brings to the viewing the preconceived notion that cheerleaders represent wholesomeness rather than […] lesbianism" (3).
[139] "See You Next Fall," *Modern Family*, directed by Steven Levitan (2011; Twentieth Century Fox).
[140] "The Home Stretch," *Rules of Engagement*, directed by Gail Mancuso (2011; Game Six Productions).

contextualized as heterosexual. Despite his friends' relentless mockery linking cheering and homosexuality, "The Home Stretch" episode of *Rules of Engagement* ends with Adam tossing a diner waitress into the air to retrieve a child's escaped balloon, a clear performance of cheerleader-specific athleticism and skill that leads the child to proclaim Adam "like a superhero," thereby solidifying his status as non-threatening, virile (heterosexual) male.

The last scene of *Rules of Engagement* shows Adam alone, performing a cheer. Aside from this solitary act, his and Phil's former coed cheer squad memberships are only referenced, never displayed. From the beginning, the film *Everybody's All-American* showcases full coed cheerleading squads. Though released in 1988, director Taylor Hackford's film opens with footage of the 1956 Sugar Bowl, placing it and the subsequent elaborate pep rally squarely within cheer's transitional decade of the 1950s. The Louisiana State University Tiger fans line the streets as a parade marches through the center of town, including a band, a caged tiger on display, batons aflame, and a coed cheerleading squad. When the parade comes to rest, it is the male squadmembers who lead chants through their megaphones; the female members stand behind and beside them, using poms and cheering in a secondary manner.[141] This representation of a coed cheerleading squad in the 1950s, with male cheerleaders in the lead yet gradually ceding ground to their female counterparts, remains in line with the larger history of cheer as discussed in the first chapter.[142] However, it is a long way from 1950s Louisiana to 2000s

[141] *Everybody's All-American*, DVD, directed by Taylor Hackford (1988; Warner Bros, 2004).
[142] The 1947 film *Good News* offers an earlier depiction of cheerleading's history, as it opens with a musical pep rally (following storyboards that describe the youth culture of the 1920s) during which a

California, and the five decades that span the time from the Gray Ghost's football career in *Everybody's All-American* to the mysterious death that drives teenage detective Veronica Mars tell us much about American popularity, girlhood, and cheerleading. During this time, what it meant to be a cheerleader changed dramatically. The cultural representations of cheerleaders reflect this change, as they feature an overwhelming number of female protagonists. It is clear from the emphasis on popularity and perfection in these texts that the cheerleader continued to be seen as one of the cultural elite; however, the striking number of victimized cheerleader characters allows us to see a more fully rendered picture of this cultural icon.

The 1978 film (originally a stage production) *Grease* starring Olivia Newton-John as fair-haired good girl Sandy Olsson and John Travolta as dark and brooding Danny Zuko cut to the heart of early cheer historian Hanson's observations equating female cheerleaders' social status and choice of mate. Set in southern California in the late 1950s, *Grease* offers a snapshot of what an outsider will do to fit in when faced with the mid-century American high school social scene. Having spent the summer frolicking on the beach with the expectation that she and her family would return to their home in Australia before the school year began, Sandy said a tearful goodbye to her summer romance with Danny only to find herself still in California on the first day of school – and unbeknownst to her at the same school as her beach babe. A foreign exchange student eager to be accepted, Sandy is convinced to join the cheerleading squad at Rydell High School when Patty Simcox, resident goody-goody, entices her at lunch on the first

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female singer gazes up longingly at male cheerleaders. *Good News*, DVD, directed by Charles Walters (1947; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2000).

day, saying, "I hope you'll be at cheerleader tryouts. We'll have so much fun and get to be life-long friends!"[143] Sandy and Danny learn of each other's whereabouts at the first pep rally, though the reunion does not lead immediately to a rekindled romance and Sandy soon finds herself spending date nights at the diner with athletes while Danny turns away from his greaser "T-Birds" and attempts to become the athlete that Sandy seems to want. All of this is in line with Hanson's description of fictionalized cheerleaders whose social calendars stay full due to their associations with equally popular male students.

But how do we define popularity? Is it something one either has or does not, without any tangible evidence as to why? Seeking to better comprehend the workings of popularity and recognizing its importance in adolescence, scholars focused their efforts on the institutional setting in which they were most likely to observe youth with their peers – the school. Writing in *Child Development* in 2005, Joseph P. Allen and his collaborators note, "The most socially accepted (i.e., popular) individuals at any phase of development are likely to be those who are most attuned to and skillful at meeting the spoken and unspoken norms within their peer groups."[144] The recent findings of Allen and his colleagues indicate that one's popularity is closely connected to one's ability to

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[143] *Grease*, DVD, directed by Randal Kleiser (1978; Paramount Pictures, 2006). *American Graffiti* is another 1970s film whose setting, the summer of 1962, offers a glimpse at the changing icon of the cheerleader. The cultural markers of drag racing, sock hops, and drive-in theaters are all similar to the mid-twentieth century milieu *Grease* inhabits, and the film (voted one of the American Film Institute's Top 100 Films of All Time) opens with the recently graduated former class president, a male, ending his relationship with the head cheerleader, a female. However, her status as such does not factor into the plot of the film and we as viewers know of it mostly because a screenshot of her yearbook photo is captioned with the title. *American Graffiti*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (1973; Universal Pictures, 2005).

[144] Joseph P. Allen, Maryfrances R. Porter, F. Christy McFarland, Penny Marsh, and Kathleen Boykin McElhaney, "The Two Faces of Adolescents' Success With Peers: Adolescent Popularity, Social Adaptation, and Deviant Behavior," *Child Development* 76, no. 3 (May/June 2005): 748.

discern the rules of the hegemonic peer culture at any given time. In her quest for acceptance at Rydell High School, Sandy joins the cheerleading squad and sets her sights on athlete boyfriends. These are the characteristics she defines as critical to success in her new world. [145]

The film spends much time highlighting both Sandy and Danny's attractiveness within their same sex and opposite sex peer groups, as tension regarding their ultimate coupling drives the plot. Danny spends hours on athletic fields in pursuit of a letter sweater; Sandy, as we have seen, quickly becomes a cheerleader. Her academic excellence is never questioned, and while we are initially led to believe that Danny is uninterested in scholastic success, the film approaches bildungsroman status with his achievement of the letter sweater and eventual reunion with Sandy, both of which require him to become a better man than he was in the early scenes of the film.

Speaking to the legacy of legendary director Frank Capra, filmmaker John Cassavetes said, "Maybe there never was an America in the thirties. Maybe it was all Frank Capra."[146] Films like *Grease* (1978) and *American Graffiti* (1973) encourage us to ask whether there was an America in the fifties, either, or whether it was all retrospective seventies filmic representation. James Monaco in *American Film Now* notes, "The main

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[145] *Grease* hit American theaters in 1978, but the work of researcher D.K. Wheeler can help us understand its late-1950s setting and Australian-American relationship. In the spring of 1961, Wheeler sought to define the concept of popularity within American and Australian adolescent peer groups. Ultimately, his findings "suggest that the core of characteristics associated with adolescent popularity is compounded of an attractive appearance, the euphoric and altocentric traits, participation in sporting and other activities, and some degree of cognitive ability shown in and out of school." D.K. Wheeler, "Popularity among Adolescents in Western Australia and in the United States of America," *The School Review* 69, no. 1 (Spring 1961): 79.

[146] Quoted in William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Seventies: A Social History* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1987), 6.

thing new about American movies in the seventies is what's old." Monaco described the decade in film as one without culture or style, "unless it is nostalgia."[147] But critic William Palmer sees nostalgia as an isolated trend that occurred on a smaller scale than what he identifies as seventies film's "major impetus […] to draw upon the social history of the time for metaphorical inspiration."[148] Films like *Easy Rider* and *Apocalypse Now* fall into this category. George Lucas's *American Graffiti*, which film historian Peter Lev argues jump-starts "a new round of teen films, this time in a nostalgic mode," is the first of several texts (such as *Grease* and *Happy Days*) to portray the 1950s and early 1960s as a golden era, before the social upheaval that surrounded the Kennedy assassinations and the Vietnam War.[149] Nostalgia notwithstanding, the 1950s were a more complex decade than these popular culture touchstones reflect. To be fair, the longing for an imagined fifties – a safer, more optimistic, carefree youth – stemmed from the desire to escape what was often a complex, even tense reality. It would be misleading to dismiss *Grease* as merely 1970s longing and escapism; Sandy's tale of an outsider seeking social success in a 1950s American high school illustrates the importance of cheerleaders to that type of story and, as a result, to the larger cultural narrative.

Novelists Ruth Doan MacDougall and Jill McCorkle wrestle with the complexities of mid-century cheerleaders' lives in their fiction. Fittingly, MacDougall's Henrietta Snow trilogy also showcases mid-twentieth century cheerleaders' tendencies to

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[147] James Monaco, *American Film Now: The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 60.
[148] Palmer, vi.
[149] Peter Lev, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000), 90-91. Viewers of *American Graffiti* saw the film as bittersweet and reflective of the negative side of the 1960s.

equate social success with male attachment. The first installment in MacDougall's series, *The Cheerleader* (1973) chronicles Henrietta "Snowy" Snow's time in high school in Gunthwaite, New Hampshire. Describing both the 1950s and Snowy's goals for the coming year (her sophomore), MacDougall writes: "It was a time when goals shone clear, and Snowy's goal was glittering success, and success included love. Love meant Tom Forbes. Tom was a junior and one of the biggest catches in Gunthwaite High School."[150] Beyond the success of Forbes, an upperclassman known for his good looks and prowess on the football field, "Ever since junior high, she had wanted to be a Varsity cheerleader. It was her clear-cut ambition. […] beyond the goal of a glamorous women's college was the goal of fame. […] And she believed that the stepping-stones to fame began [with Varsity cheerleading]."[151] A true coming-of-age novel, *The Cheerleader* encompasses only the abbreviated time of high school, whereas its sequels – *Snowy* and *Henrietta Snow* – encompass decades in the lives of Snowy and her friends (referred to in typical 1950s parlance as "The Gang"). By the end of *The Cheerleader*, Snowy's tenure as Varsity head cheerleader and girlfriend of Tom Forbes have both come to an end – the latter due to her own choosing and on her own terms, finally – and she is headed to the prestigious, if nontraditional, Bennington College in neighboring Vermont the coming fall.

The goals of the fifteen-year-old Snowy that opens the book in 1955 achieved by the end of it, it is in the self-titled sequel, penned twenty years later and attributed to fan

[150] Ruth Doan MacDougall, *The Cheerleader* (1973; reprint, Center Sandwich, NH: Frigate Books, 1998), 11.
[151] MacDougall, *The Cheerleader*, 49.

demand, that Snowy "exemplifies that old adage: be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it" (as literary scholar Ann V. Norton writes in her foreword to *Snowy*).[152] Indeed, Snowy finds that her cheerleader status follows her temporally and geographically, as at Bennington, "Despite her desire to be an 'enigmatic eccentric,'" her identification as a former cheerleader "impresses 'even the most blasé.'"[153] Yet it is not until the trilogy draws to a close, Snowy has entered her seventh decade, and is living with Tom Forbes following the unexpected suicide of her husband years before that the title character – for the first time with *Henrietta Snow* "not to name Snowy by type or nickname,"[154] thereby acknowledging her adulthood – reflects on how her years as a high school cheerleader may have influenced the trajectory of her life. Recalling her first experience trying out for the Gunthwaite High School squad, "She could still feel the shock, the sickness, the hot face and icy hands, of the moment she saw the semifinals list of the chosen girls posted on the gym-office door and her name wasn't on it." Her athletic, outgoing friend Jean "Puddles" Pond convinced her to tryout for the Junior Varsity squad, arguing that freshmen rarely made Varsity. Snowy's remembrance continues: "And yet she *had* made JV's and then Varsity and then Gilly had named her the Varsity captain, and all this nonsense had helped shape the person she'd become, God help her. When Tom first asked her out, he'd been only vaguely aware that she was a JV cheerleader, but would he have been interested in her at all if her sole claim to fame was

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[152] Ann V. Norton, foreword to *Snowy*, by Ruth Doan MacDougall (Center Sandwich, NH: Frigate Books, 1993), vii.
[153] Norton, foreword to *Snowy*, viii.
[154] Ann V. Norton, foreword to *Henrietta Snow*, by Ruth Doan MacDougall (Center Sandwich, NH: Frigate Books, 2004), ix.

getting good marks?"[155] MacDougall's trilogy is predicated upon the dual importance of popularity and romantic success in the life of its protagonist, both of which she achieves as a result of her cheerleader status.

MacDougall's trilogy, a series that follows Snowy from adolescence through middle age and into senior citizenship, forces us as readers to view the cheerleader as subject, as actor in broader social movements. Beyond its narrow focus on the life of one cheerleader (and her two best friends), the sixty-year span of the series also allows for an intimate journey through six decades of what is arguably cheerleading's most eventful time. The series opens in 1955, with Junior Varsity cheerleaders Snowy and Puddles attending a school dance. When they have trouble locating a couple on the dance floor, the girls assume the two have "gone parking," an early reference to Snowy's ongoing anxiety toward situations that involve "Getting Fresh" – the euphemism Snowy and her girlfriends use to describe sexual contact.[156] Saddle shoes are in fashion, the only piece of the uniform Varsity cheerleaders continue to wear after they finish cheering at football and basketball games. After they remove the bloomers, jumpers, and dungarees with blouses that place them so squarely in the mid-1950s, "Green saddle shoes showed beneath the slacks of all the cheerleaders, badges of rank."[157] Forced to tryout in front of the student body, the minimum requirement for squad membership a cartwheel, the lone cheerleader with a split in her arsenal is long remembered by her male and female classmates alike. We glimpse the dual meaning of the split in *Henrietta Snow*, the third

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[155] MacDougall, *Henrietta Snow*, 345, emphasis in original.
[156] MacDougall, *The Cheerleader*, 11; 14. The phrase "Getting Fresh" is capitalized throughout the text.
[157] MacDougall, *The Cheerleader*, 189.

book in the series, when Tom Forbes, back with Snowy after they have each spent decades with others, recalls this feat of gymnastic ability: "Tom grinned. As if he could forget the only girl on their cheerleading squad who could do a split! He'd dated Rita Beaupre because of this, more than anything else, but she held out on that secret though allowing him to discover everything above the waist."[158] Tom's reminiscence of Rita decades later emphasizes the postwar nature of their adolescence, when the term "going steady" was popular among youth.[159]

The Cheerleader's tagline as printed on later editions of the book reads, "What was it like before the Sex Revolution? A bittersweet best-seller about lost innocence." MacDougall's first installment ushers readers through the bucolic fifties by slowly building momentum to Snowy's loss of virginity and college acceptance. Snowy and her friends are sideline cheerleaders, the only iteration of the activity available to girls in the middle of the twentieth century. But Snowy comes of age in the late fifties and attends an unconventional New England women's college at the dawn of the sixties. She spends semesters working in a Boston publishing house and renting a room in the city. The white, middle class, American society Snowy inhabits is very different from the circumscribed world into which she was born. *Snowy*, the 1993 sequel to *The Cheerleader*, sees "The Gang" struggle through the tumultuous sixties and seventies as "the novel explodes 1950s myths about marriage, work, and motherhood."[160] As Norton notes in her foreword to *Snowy*, "like *The Cheerleader*, [it] portrays sexuality realistically

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158 MacDougall, *Henrietta Snow*, 141.
159 MacDougall, *The Cheerleader*, 11. Tom's conflation of Rita's flexibility and her promiscuity is one of the ways MacDougall emphasizes the baselessness of such enduring stereotypes about cheerleaders.
160 Norton, foreword to *Snowy*, vii-ix.

and joyfully, as a part of life vitally important to women as well as men." However, the proliferation of birth control options around this time afford Snowy a certain amount of control over her fertility and cause Norton to label MacDougall's second offering "feminist fiction." [161]

If *The Cheerleader* offers an example of 1950s high school cheerleading, when sideline squads consisted of females who, like Snowy, tried out in front of the student body, were deemed Captain based on grades rather than knowledge of sports or personal athletic ability, and relied on their cheerleader status to land dates with attractive athletes, then *Snowy* and *Henrietta Snow* provide continual updates to the activity in the form of second generation and secondary characters. We begin to see the evolution of cheerleading early in *Snowy* when we learn that a former squadmate has become a college cheerleader. Puddles tells Snowy: "She's cheering at Rumford this year, she's the only sophomore to make the squad. She said she had to learn a whole new style, more athletic. They build pyramids, do stunts."[162] Later, Snowy and her best friends, Puddles and Bev, become mothers. Though one of Puddles's daughters cheers, Snowy's daughter would rather play softball, something Snowy remarks Puddles herself would have enjoyed had that been an option in the fifties.[163] This is MacDougall's nod to Title IX, the legislation that made softball available to so many girls post-1972.

Not unlike her protagonist, Ruth Doan MacDougall was born in New Hampshire, the state where she has spent most of her life. She also attended Bennington College,

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[161] Norton, foreword to *Snowy*, ix.
[162] MacDougall, *Snowy*, 56.
[163] MacDougall, *Henrietta Snow*.

along much the same timeline as Snowy.[164] In an essay titled "The Silent Generation," MacDougall explains Snowy's reference to The Gang's generation as "the disappeared," having "dropped out of sight between our parents' generation and the baby boomers." She credits then-president of IBM Tom Watson, Jr., with bestowing the adjective "silent" upon the generation in his 1957 DePauw University commencement speech:

> The term caught the fancy of LIFE Magazine, and from there became the label for the members of this era of conformity. Our parents had coped with the Depression, and they taught us the importance of security. We wanted to be safe from poverty, even from scrimping and "making do." We married young and had children young, settling down to domestic bliss and Tupperware parties – until we read THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE.[165]

The free-spirited, sexually liberated – if guardedly so – poet Snowy who marries, gives birth, and becomes a young widow in *Snowy* ages in *Henrietta Snow*. In her foreword to the third installment of the series, Norton remarks, "Though it seems an oxymoron to say, 'The cheerleader is sixty years old,' Snowy qualifies as a senior citizen by the end" of the novel.[166] She is a former cheerleader now; attendance at her twenty-fifth high school reunion confirms this. However, cheerleading itself remains an integral part of the narrative. Puddles, herself an aging former cheerleader, finds a second career as the assistant coach of a competition cheer squad in 1990s North Carolina. She describes the activity as "*nothing* like" what she and Snowy did in high school, and says, "These girls

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[164] See http://ruthdoanmacdougall.com/author/index.html.
[165] See http://ruthdoanmacdougall.com/more/silent.html.
[166] Norton, foreword to *Henrietta Snow*, ix. While Snowy's cheerleading is largely metaphorical at this point, senior cheerleading squads do exist. I address these in the conclusion.

are real athletes, they do tumbling, gymnastics, stunts, and dances."[167] MacDougall uses Puddles's outspoken, educated character to present an evolving depiction of this complex activity. Through Puddles, we learn about cheerleading uniforms forty years after *The Cheerleader*, the physicality involved in the more demanding version of cheer, the funding struggles that accompany competitive cheerleading, and even biased judging and litigious parents. MacDougall's Snowy provides readers the cheerleader as subject, as actor, throughout the series, and Puddles's participation in the most contemporary form of the activity continues to offer Snowy agency in this realm, albeit via reflection and shared reminiscence. The MacDougall who took to the home in the early sixties remains there, but she is not silent. Initially comfortable around the hearth, she begins writing about girlhood in America using a symbol – the cheerleader – that proves pliable over the next several decades and allows her to explore such broad topics as American womanhood, parenthood, and widowhood. Fictional Snowy teaches us that to view cheerleaders as one-dimensional adolescents is to miss the multifaceted ways in which the cultural icon of the cheerleader interact with gender and generation.

POPULARITY AND IMPERFECTION

> Nobody wants the truth. But sooner or later you learn that there are no fairy tales; there *is* no glamorous mother hidden on a faraway island, no prince on a white horse, no treasure chest full of jewels.[168]

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[167] MacDougall, *Henrietta Snow*, 325, emphasis in original; 326.
[168] Jill McCorkle, *Ferris Beach* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1990), 334, emphasis in original.

Many of novelist Jill McCorkle's protagonists make the same mistake: they "idealiz[e] and romanticiz[e]" love.[169] This is true of Jo Spencer, the title character of McCorkle's 1984 novel *The Cheer Leader*, and it is also true of Kristi Casey and Hannah Love, cheerleader protagonists of Lorna Landvik's *The View from Mount Joy* and Erika J. Kendrik's *Confessions of a Rookie Cheerleader*, respectively. In their quests for true love, each of these characters employs a dichotomy of perfectionism and victimhood. These works are all united by an attention to this dichotomy. Furthermore, these stories explode the myth of the popular by grappling with an assumption of perfectionism that is often attributed to the figure of the cheerleader.

The first page of Lorna Landvik's 2007 novel, *The View from Mount Joy*, sets up head cheerleader Kristi Casey's status among her peers at Minneapolis, Minnesota's Ole Bull High School: "Kristi Casey is a stone fox."[170] Narrator Joe Anderson does not yet know Kristi as he reads this graffiti on the wall of the school's boys' bathroom, but one look at her confirms this for him: "When I met her it only took a nanosecond to realize: *Man, is she ever*."[171] We, as readers, later learn that not only is Kristi head cheerleader, but she earns the superlative "best-looking" from her peers and she excels academically, repeatedly making the honor roll.[172] Even Darva Pratt, an Ole Bull student who is "not part of the consensus" but sarcastically claims Kristi as "our golden girl" knows the

[169] Barbara Bennett, *Understanding Jill McCorkle* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 11.
[170] Lorna Landvik, *The View from Mount Joy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 3.
[171] Landvik, 3, emphasis in original.
[172] Landvik, 141.

school's head cheerleader is "the wet dream of hundreds of high school boys."[173] And Kristi herself, in her role as head cheerleader, sets up her own standard of perfection when she selects the school's mascot. Kristi chooses Shannon Saxon, saying she "wasn't the right body type" to be a cheerleader: "Well, geez, everyone knows a cheerleader has to be just about perfect."[174] Kristi's popularity, demonstrated from the outset by narrator Joe, is connected to her peers' view of her as the perfect cheerleader. Her orchestration of that popularity, furthermore, is in accordance with scholars' findings that the most socially successful individuals are those who best navigate the standards of their peer groups.[175]

And yet through Joe's narration we learn that Kristi's private life is not perfect. "The Casey house smelled of cigarettes and liquor and the kind of couches you see for sale at the Goodwill. It was not what I expected from the house Kristi Casey burst out of into the world every morning."[176] An accident disables Kristi's father; her mother abuses alcohol as a coping mechanism; the house itself is a wreck. We glimpse Kristi's loose hold on her double life when she questions Joe's presence outside her house one evening. "I gave [your brother] a ride home from work," Joe explains. Once Kristi realizes that Joe was *inside* her home, she threatens him, "if you open your big mouth about anything you saw in there, well…well, then I'll tell everyone about your aunt being a dyke."[177] Kristi knows that maintaining the perfection of her public image is key to her continued

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[173] Landvik, 4.
[174] Landvik, 21-22.
[175] See Allen, et al.
[176] Landvik, 86.
[177] Landvik, 88.

popularity; when faced with a threat to that image, she reciprocates by threatening one of her only true friends.

Years later, after both Kristi and Joe graduate from high school and college, Joe remains in Minneapolis while Kristi experiences a religious conversion and becomes a traveling evangelist. She eventually returns to her hometown to lead a revival; while there, she visits Joe and updates him on her life. She divulges that she initially moved to Los Angeles, California, after college, in hopes of becoming an actress. However, after auditioning for three years and not receiving any work, Kristi realized, "For the first time in my life, people weren't begging to do me favors, weren't bowing every time I passed. I didn't know who I was – but it sure wasn't Kristi Casey."[178] By referring to herself in the third person here, she acknowledges that the Kristi Casey people had begged to do favors for, had bowed down in front of, was more of a myth than a reality. Soon after this realization, Kristi takes a job waiting tables and meets a man, Per, who calls himself a movie producer. In reality, he makes pornographic films. Although Kristi refuses to act in them, she does move in with him and become his girlfriend. She also becomes a drug runner for him: "See, he had a couple of sideline businesses, and one was importing a little cocaine."[179] But when Kristi is no longer willing to participate in Per's drug trade, he begins to abuse her. Although the abuse initially takes the form of threatening and name calling, "'when he got really frustrated that he couldn't control me' – She made a fist and slammed it into her open palm." Joe asks if Per hit her; Kristi confides that it was

[178] Landvik, 200.
[179] Landvik, 202.

worse than that. She shows him a scar that took "about a billion stitches to close up." She adds that her front teeth are fake but, "at least the jerk had a great dentist."[180] Just as when Kristi orchestrates her own popularity in high school, she goes to great lengths to ensure her physical perfection, undergoing cosmetic dentistry and reconstructive surgery to hide her victim status.

This is not Kristi's only abusive relationship, nor is it her only brush with victimhood. She marries Tuck Drake, a former college football player-turned-United States Senator who also experienced religious conversion. Yet Drake is repeatedly unfaithful to Kristi, prompting anonymous middle-of-the-night phone calls informing her of his relationships with (male) Senate pages as well as other women. At the close of the novel, Drake runs for President of the United States, with Kristi as his Vice Presidential running mate. This plot twist is the result of an unusual circumstance: one of her husband's "deranged fans" shoots her.[181] And although the official story as reported by the news media is that Kristi is shot despite her husband's attempts to push her out of the way, she relays the truth to Joe. Drake, she says, "acted purely on instinct, and his instinct told him to get out of the way, however he could. Even if he put me *in the way.*"[182] During this conversation, Kristi also tells Joe of Drake's infidelity and relays her plans to divorce. Yet the very next day, as Joe learns along with the rest of the country, Drake announces that his wife will become his Vice Presidential running mate. We cannot help but think this is because, as Kristi tells Joe, "Tuck knows what he did. […] And he's

[180] Landvik, 203.
[181] Landvik, 340.
[182] Landvik, 341, emphasis in original.

sick…sick with fear that I'm going to tell someone."[183] As with her relationship with Per the abusive pornographer, Kristi keeps her pain private and accepts gifts in return for her silence. This, then, is a cheerleader who illustrates popularity built on the illusion of perfection, who at times manipulates that illusion, but who ultimately experiences repeated instances of intimate partner violence, infidelity, and attempted murder.

Kristi Casey is not the only character who hides her victim status. Jo Spencer, the protagonist and narrator of Jill McCorkle's 1984 novel *The Cheer Leader*, never discloses the extensive abuse she suffers at the hands of her boyfriend, Red Williams. Growing up in 1970s Blue Springs, North Carolina, Jo's peers vote her "most popular" her senior year at Blue Springs High School and she is the chief cheerleader as well. She is well-liked; she attributes winning Miss Congeniality at pajama party sleepover pageants to her ability to appease: "I was very good at saying what people needed to hear […] and it was this factor alone which I think ultimately led to me being the first name in the group, the most popular senior girl."[184] This popularity and assumed perfection – and the status they afford her – are key elements of McCorkle's novel. Literary critic Barbara Bennett explains the author's motive: "McCorkle grapples with perhaps a less analyzed image – the popular girl – because readers tend to resist the idea of such a girl having any problems worth examining."[185] Much like Landvik does with Kristi Casey, McCorkle

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[183] Landvik, 341.
[184] Jill McCorkle, *The Cheer Leader: A Novel* (1984; reprint, Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1992), 37.
[185] Bennett, 14. Literary examples of cheerleaders as popular girls abound. See, for example, Carolyn Ferrell, "Can You Say My Name?" in *Don't Erase Me: Stories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 68-86.

studies the tensions that underlie this popularity, the misguided assumption that the cheerleaders who represent adolescent success do so because they embody perfection.

Although Jo is the architect of her own popularity, as is Kristi Casey, whereas Kristi goes to great lengths to secure the illusion of perfection, Jo initiates her own *im*perfection. Jo's friend, Lisa, brings beer to a party the summer before their senior year and assumes that Jo will not partake because she is the chief cheerleader. Jo insists that is untrue and admits that she smokes, which is "against the rules."[186] A conversation about drinking ensues; her friends ask if she will tattle, and Jo says she is "tired of being treated like a goody-goody."[187] At another party later that year, Jo sees a childhood friend, Beatrice, who now uses drugs. Beatrice pokes fun at Jo's cheerleader status by implying her sexual promiscuity. As Jo chats with her future boyfriend Red for one of the first times, Beatrice, high on drugs, tells him, "You know you're out with the chief, don't you? […] All you have to say, Red, is you can do it, you can do it, you can, you can, and she probably will!"[188] The irony of this situation is twofold: Jo is not promiscuous, a fact that creates tension in her relationship with Red; and after Jo and Red become exclusive and Red begins to exert his control over Jo, he is unfaithful to her with Beatrice.

Jo confronts Red; he denies the affair, saying, "Nothing happened, baby, I'm sorry." And then he turns on her: "Before I can even finish, he has both of my arms and pins me to the wall. He has that same blank look and he is right in my face." Jo continues to narrate the altercation:

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[186] McCorkle, *The Cheer Leader*, 63.
[187] McCorkle, *The Cheer Leader*, 64.
[188] McCorkle, *The Cheer Leader*, 92-93.

> "Nothing happened. But don't you see…" He shakes me. "Something could have happened and it would have happened because you weren't here, because there are things more important to you than being with me. You never want to be with me." He shakes me harder and I have to think of something else, something that can make me feel like this isn't happening. "You don't care a thing at all about being with me, really being with me, and all of a sudden, she comes up and wants it! Yeah! You know some people really do want it! Everybody's not like you, Jo. Everybody's not frigid and unfeeling. You're fucked up all by yourself. Don't you see? The crying, the way you never say anything – you're crazy! Only a crazy person would be like you. You'd like it if you never had sex, if you never had; you want to pretend that nobody knows that you have. Well, let me tell you baby, they know, everybody knows!"[189]

As the above excerpt exemplifies, Red abuses Jo physically and emotionally. She never shares the stories of her abuse with anyone, and she experiences a mental breakdown during her first year of college, after she and Red go their separate ways. She becomes severely anorexic, her grades plummet, and she has recurring nightmares. While the rest of the story is told in first person, Jo narrates this chapter of her life in the third person, as though from a distance. But before she relinquishes control, she takes us through her family photo album, captioning pictures of her childhood. Tellingly, just weeks before

[189] McCorkle, *The Cheer Leader*, 154-155.

the onset of the breakdown, she writes, "Here, I am in front of my college dorm that late summer day when my parents left me there and it almost doesn't look like me at all."[190]

Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo was among the first scholars to call attention to the powerful role of cultural images on the body in her 1993 collection *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Writing about the connection between eating disorders and gender, Bordo notes that anorexia often manifests after abuse and "can be seen as at least in part a defense against the 'femaleness' of the body and a punishment of its desires."[191] Though Red accuses Jo of a lack of sexual desire, the two are sexually active, as the end of his rant implies: "You want to pretend that nobody knows that you have [had sex]." Jo employs psychological disassociation while Red torments her ("He shakes me harder and I have to think of something else, something that can make me feel like this isn't happening."), but her anorexia can be read as an example of this post-abuse defense mechanism Bordo identifies.

Another feminist philosopher theorizing the body in the mid-nineties, Elizabeth Grosz argues for an appreciation of the body as a social construction and finds earlier accounts, such as those offered by Freud, Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault, to be predominantly male in nature. Grosz's sexually specific reading of the body attempts to correct this male-centric view of human corporeality by studying those bodily

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[190] McCorkle, *The Cheer Leader*, 57.

[191] Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 8. Following Bordo, Joan Jacobs Brumberg's Body Project postulates a twentieth-century emphasis on "good looks" over "good works," the nineteenth-century version of female perfection. According to Brumberg, the popular culture of the twentieth century led to increased expectations regarding physical perfection: "American girls came to define themselves more and more through their bodies." See "The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls," Joan Jacobs Brumberg, http://www.thebodyproject.com/book.mgi.

experiences that are uniquely female.[192] If Grosz is among the first philosophers to theorize the body as female, Catherine Driscoll is among the first to emphasize the feminine aspect of adolescence on the body, offering a picture of feminine adolescence in Western cultures in her 2002 monograph *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*. Driscoll's genealogy of feminine adolescence intentionally avoids constructing girls in opposition to "the mature, independent woman as feminist subject," instead arriving at an intersection of cultural studies and feminist theory that locates girlhood at the nexus of modernity.[193] Literary scholar Brenda Boudreau finds that during adolescence, which she describes as the developmental stage during which the body becomes "more visibly sexed," girls experience "feelings of disembodiment." Girls' attempts to "reconcile [their] bod[ies] to the demands of a socially proscribed gendered identity" often leave them at odds with their bodies in the search for independence.[194] This is the scenario in which we find Jo Spencer at the end of *The Cheer Leader* – spiraling out of control, anorexic, almost literally disembodied. As Bennett notes, there is a "danger" for Jo, one that "lies in not getting beyond adolescence, in letting the temporary fears and pressures of the age become permanently debilitating."[195] If MacDougall's *The Cheerleader* is a coming-of-age tale that ends in triumph, with

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[192] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994). Since then, feminist philosophers and queer scholars have challenged Grosz's theories. See, respectively, Abigail Bray and Claire Colebrook, "The Haunted Flesh: Corporeal Feminism and the Politics of (Dis)Embodiment," *Signs* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1998): 35-67; Catherine Mary Dale, "A Queer Supplement: Reading Spinoza after Grosz," *Hypatia* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 1-12.
[193] Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 9.
[194] Brenda Boudreau, "The Battleground of the Adolescent Girl's Body," in *The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women*, ed. Ruth O. Saxton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 43.
[195] Bennett, 14.

Snowy's high school graduation, college acceptance, and successful navigation of adolescence, McCorkle's similarly titled *The Cheer Leader* is a warning of the darker underbelly of adolescence – its shadow.

Bennett recognizes McCorkle's focus on the conflicts in women's lives and locates such conflicts at the crossroads of "independence versus dependence, femininity versus strength, the nurturing of others in direct conflict with preservation of self, [and] purity and virginity in opposition to sexual freedom and expression."[196] While McCorkle's status as a literary figure is greater than the other authors discussed in this chapter, which affords her a higher level of literary criticism, Bennett's remark applies to all the writers and the characters addressed in this section. All of these tensions describe Jo Spencer at various points in her life, and especially in her relationship with Red. Interestingly, these are the same tensions we find in the Henrietta Snow series, and both MacDougall and McCorkle are women writers who lean heavily on their own autobiographies as they craft their narratives.

Bennett explains that the teenaged McCorkle "was intelligent and popular, a cheerleader, honor roll student, and homecoming queen," much like her protagonist Jo Spencer.[197] And indeed, McCorkle herself admits to relying on her adolescence as a starting point in her writing: "When I begin constructing a scene, though I have now lived in several different places, the setting that always comes first to mind is my hometown – more specifically, my hometown as it was when I was an adolescent."[198] Perhaps this is

[196] Bennett, 9.
[197] Bennett, 4.
[198] Jill McCorkle, "What to Wear on the First Day at Lumberton High," quoted in Bennett, 4.

why, as Bennett suggests, McCorkle's work is so personal, even domestic. "The voices of her characters tell stories of a region no longer burdened by the past, but rather one that is grappling with the problems found in average homes within ordinary families."[199] The same can be said of MacDougall's fiction, with its fierce geographic commitment to New England and its protracted six decade survey of the American family in the twentieth century.

Much like Jill McCorkle and Ruth Doan MacDougall, author Erika J. Kendrick draws on her own personal history in her novel *Confessions of a Rookie Cheerleader*. Kendrick promotes herself as a "former fabulous NBA cheerleader" on her self-titled website.[200] Kendrick's biography is very similar to that of her protagonist, Hannah Love: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Stanford University, Master's in Business Administration, record executive at Island Def Jam, and Chicago Bulls cheerleader. The mascot of Kendrick's website is an animated image reminiscent of Wonder Woman – a woman with exceptionally long, dark hair wearing thigh-high boots, a midriff-bearing two-piece spandex outfit complete with cape, bicep-covering gloves, and red and white poms.

In contrast to Jo Spencer's crippling mental breakdown and picture of impending doom, Hannah Love is the epitome of self-confidence. After describing her lifestyle in the earliest stages of her first-person narrative, Hannah summarizes, "Everything was so perfect. I had the perfect job; I was reunited with the perfect friends, in love with the

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[199] Bennett, 10.

[200] See the author's website: http://www.erikakendrick.com/home.php.

perfect man, living in the perfect condo, slinging the *most* perfect weave. It just didn't get any better than this!"[201] And later, when Hannah describes her pre-audition workout routine (she is auditioning to be a "Chicago Diamonds" professional cheerleader), she adds to the list her perfect body: "I'd hoped to be a serious contender weighing in at a hundred and twenty-two pounds, size 4."[202] But even Hannah, with her perfect life, falls victim to some of the imperfection that Kristi Casey and Jo Spencer experience.

Chapters four and five describe Hannah's engagement to Daniel Goldman, her "perfect" boyfriend – as his name suggests, a man of gold. At 4:22 A.M. the next morning, however, the phone rings. The caller asks for Daniel. When the caller identifies herself – "this is Shannon, his girlfriend" – Hannah drops the phone. Once she finds the receiver and recovers from the shock of what she has just heard, she asks some questions and, after a two-hour conversation, learns that Daniel has been seeing Shannon for five years and that they have a son together. As Shannon says, "But we are his family," Hannah thinks, "what had been the brightest day of my life was suddenly murdered pitch-black."[203] Kendrick hyperbolizes Hannah's broken engagement with the use of the word "murdered"; though devastating, the end to her perfect life does not equate to the repeated abuse Kristi Casey and Jo Spencer suffer.

Indeed, "murder" means something different for Kendrick's Hannah Love than it does for the intended victims of Gary Dillman's third person narrator in *The Cheerleader*

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[201] Erika J. Kendrick, *Confessions of a Rookie Cheerleader: A Novel* (New York: One World Books, 2007), 6, emphasis in original.
[202] Kendrick, 66. In an attempt to disguise the autobiographical details of her narrative, Kendrick pseudonymously refers to the Chicago Bulls cheerleading squad as the Chicago Diamonds.
[203] Kendrick, 12-13.

Murders. Hannah's perfect life is shattered by circumstances beyond her control, by the knowledge that the man she trusted and planned to marry was living a double life that included another woman and a child in another state, but a darker force is at work to destroy the seemingly perfect lives of former cheerleaders in *The Cheerleader Murders*. Yet the all-too-familiar (and as we have seen all-too-false) concepts of popularity and imperfection are still at work.

DEAD CHEERLEADERS

Dennis Bozeman, murderer of former cheerleaders, operates under an "If I can't have them, no one can" mentality as he stalks his targets for weeks to learn their routines and plot their deaths. An outcast in high school, his motivation is to take revenge on those who "had been snobbish cheerleader[s] ten years ago and probably did not remember his face."[204] Bozeman daydreams of the moment he will finally be able to tell the former cheerleaders not only of their snobbery but also "about his pain and longing to be popular," a tale he would weave "when she was his helpless prey, under his control," and, eventually, "as he pushed the knife slowly through her skin, soft tissue of her inner belly and finally deep inside her."[205] Reality proves Bozeman less powerful than his illusions, however, and he resorts to chloroform-soaked cloth to overpower his victims. Following their murders, he redresses them in their decade-old cheerleading uniforms and places

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[204] Gary Dillman, *The Cheerleader Murders* (Vallejo, CA: Dark Realm Press, 2007), 2. *The Cheerleader Murders* is available in paperback and as an e-book from Dark Realm Press, "Electronic publishers of paranormal and horror stories in e-book formats!"

[205] Dillman, 2. There are echoes of pornography here, and Dillman uses similar phrasing throughout his prose, suggesting a sexual connection between Bozeman and his victims.

them on the football field of their alma mater, where police find them early the next morning.

Though published in 2007, the setting of *The Cheerleader Murders* is ambiguous and its antagonist is closely connected to his high school past. He proudly drives a 1969 Camaro Coupe, and remarks of his first victim as he drags her lifeless body to the car, "Yeah, baby, if you had lost your attitude you would have enjoyed going out with me in this car."[206] While we, as readers, know we are ten years removed from Bozeman's high school graduation, we also know the car is a recent acquisition and his psychosis makes him an unreliable narrator. The assistant librarian-turned-cheer coach in Kate William's *Sweet Valley High Super Thriller #11: "R" for Revenge*[207] is similarly attached to her own youth, also driving a now-classic car and listening to music from the 1970s, yet her position on the school's "Girls of '76" squad, state champions that year, helps place the book in 1996. Central to the plot is a national magazine's interest in writing a follow-up piece on the 1976 squad twenty years after their victory. Due to an unfortunate facial tick that causes her jaw to spasm, Nancy Swanson left the squad as a result of severe bullying by her fellow cheerleaders. She continues to harbor a grudge. *Revenge*'s prologue foreshadows Nancy's abduction, imprisonment, and attempted drowning of Sweet Valley's current squad in a reality-challenged attempt to take revenge on her former teammates.[208]

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[206] Dillman, 3.
[207] The Sweet Valley High series is discussed in detail in chapter four.
[208] Kate William, *Sweet Valley High Super Thriller #11: "R" for Revenge* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997).

Nancy's home life is circumscribed, confined to the 1970s lifestyle her mind has never truly escaped. Her décor is all lava lamps and beanbags; her stereo plays Joan Baez and John Denver. However, once Nancy leaves home, her mind switches back and forth between the seventies and the nineties, the contemporary setting of the story. Due to this disorder, she confuses the current squad with the Girls of '76, and this causes her to make statements like the following: "They were nasty, all of them! That's how their type is. They care only about looks. They'll steal your boyfriend, steal your life! […] They deserve their punishment!"[209] Nancy's psychosis is such that she mistakes individual cheerleaders from one squad for their predecessors twenty years before. This artifice leads her to abduct the entire (current) squad, imprison them in her basement, and slowly fill the room with water over the span of a weekend, all the while convinced she has enacted revenge on the Girls of '76 who so cruelly bullied her off the squad and stole her boyfriend.[210] She is both victim and aggressor, a former cheerleader unable to successfully transition from a bullied adolescence to a healthy adulthood. She is the danger Jill McCorkle warns of when she leaves us with an unstable Jo Spencer on the precipice between adolescence and adulthood.

Dennis Bozeman, murderer, and Nancy Swanson, attempted murderer, live in their pasts but seek revenge in their own presents. The cheerleaders who inhabit the world of R.L. Stine's *Fear Street* must contend with an evil of a wholly different order –

[209] William, 215.
[210] The book ends with the cheerleaders' rescue in dramatic fashion moments before the basement fills with water and they all drown.

an otherworldly spirit beyond their control.[211] Lookalike sisters Bobbi and Corky Corcoran live on Fear Street, said to be haunted by its centuries-old namesake, the Fear family. The blonde-haired, green-eyed, fair-skinned, high-cheekboned, model-like teenagers try out for and rise to the top of the Shadyside High School cheer squad immediately upon moving to the town. A school bus accident on the way to the first football game of the season throws cheer captain Jennifer Daly from the bus; she lands in the Fear Street cemetery, directly on top of the grave of Sarah Fear. Jennifer dies upon impact but is reincarnated when the long dead and mysterious woman inhabits her body. The Shadyside High cheerleading squad begins experiencing strange events as a result of Jennifer's body containing an evil spirit. Bobbi's arms are paralyzed during practice, rendering her unable to catch fellow cheerleader Kimmy as she dismounts from a stunt; Kimmy thus falls and breaks an arm. Bobbi is dismissed from the squad because of her assumed negligence. Following the meeting during which she learns of her dismissal, she becomes trapped in the school locker room showers as scalding hot water pours from every faucet. Bobbi eventually drowns; her sister finds her lifeless body facedown in the steam-filled shower room, "red as a lobster […] her mouth locked open in a silent

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[211] R.L. Stine created the *Fear Street* series in 1989. The *Fear Street Cheerleaders* group of books (six total) is among over 100 total *Fear Street* books, the best-selling young adult book series in history. Born in 1943 in Columbus, Ohio, Stine has sold over 350 million copies worldwide, making him one of the best-selling children's authors in history. See http://rlstine.com/about/. Stine published the first *Fear Street Cheerleaders* book in 1992, though narrative clues place the story's action a few years earlier. One of the cheerleaders sports crimped hair, a style popular in the 1980s; the Corcorans' most impressive gymnastics tricks are cartwheels, spread eagles, and synchronized walkovers, all of which are underwhelming and out of style in the cheerleading world by the mid-1990s; and, perhaps most significantly, the pre-Corcoran Shadyside High School cheer squad makes reference to "that cheerleading competition that's on ESPN," suggesting a lack of familiarity with the cheer competitions that ESPN began broadcasting in 1983. R.L. Stine, *Fear Street Cheerleaders: The First Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1992), 13.

scream."[212] *The First Evil* ends with Corky fighting the evil spirit (in the shape of a reincarnated Jennifer Daly) back from where it came – into the grave of Sarah Fear – to avenge her sister's death. Corky's body relies on muscle memory to fend off the evil spirit and, foreshadowing the actions of Buffy, the Vampire Slayer (who will be interrogated in the next chapter), Corky's cheerleading skills save her:

> She landed hard on her feet. Absorbed the pressure of the landing by bending her knees. Then pushed up, up – into a high standing jump. Raised her hands. Caught the top of the open grave as the wall of dirt began to swirl back down on her. Pulled herself up and out as the dirt began to lower itself back down into the hole.[213]

Unfortunately for Corky and for Shadyside, the evil spirit still lurks, haunting Corky, her boyfriend Chip, and the rest of the Shadyside cheerleaders well into *Fear Street Cheerleaders: The Second Evil* and beyond.

In *The Second Evil*, Stine employs the familiar conventions of paralysis, hot water, and drowning[214] to create an atmosphere of terror. He also uses the setting of the high school to frighten Corky; she is alone in the science lab and the door slams shut, the blinds close, the lights turn off, the lids pop off all of the specimen jars, and the hand of a skeleton breaks off and attempts to strangle her, all while hundreds of previously incapacitated frogs, flies, caterpillars, and even a cow eyeball crawl over her.[215] She

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[212] Stine, *The First Evil*, 133.
[213] Stine, *The First Evil*, 159.
[214] R.L. Stine, *Fear Street Cheerleaders: The Second Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1992), 31-32; ch. 20-21; ch. 22.
[215] Stine, *The Second Evil*, 85-90.

escapes to find boyfriend Chip in the school's wood shop, facedown in a pool of blood, his hand severed by the power saw.[216] Much like *The First Evil*, *The Second Evil* ends with Corky fighting one of her fellow cheerleaders whose body has been taken over by the evil spirit. Again she emerges victorious and yet again Stine closes the book with an indication that the evil remains. On the last page of *The First Evil*, Corky finds the pennant that never left the hand of her nemesis Jennifer Daly in her bed; the mail brings her an unsigned letter that reads, "IT CAN'T BE DROWNED" at the close of *The Second Evil*.[217] Corky is left to battle the evil spirit at cheerleading camp in *Fear Street Cheerleaders: The Third Evil*, where Stine continues to draw upon literary conventions of the successful young adult series despite a slight adjustment in setting.[218] Silliness aside, victimhood and evil go hand in hand for Stine's *Fear Street* cheerleaders, whose bodies the evil spirit occupies post-mortem to inflict pain and destruction upon living squad members and their friends and family members.

CONCLUSION

Cultural representations of cheerleaders increase significantly in the second half of the twentieth century, and contrary to previous scholars' pronouncements that cheerleaders remain secondary, these characters are pivotal to their stories. As is the case

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[216] Stine, *The Second Evil*, 91-94.
[217] Stine, *The Second Evil*, 167.
[218] Along with the *Fear Street Cheerleaders* series, which consists of *The First Evil* (1992), *The Second Evil* (1992), *The Third Evil* (1992), and *The Evil Lives* (1998), Stine includes victimized cheerleader characters in *Fear Street Super Chiller Cheerleaders: The New Evil* (1994) and the less ominously titled *Seniors: Fight, Team, Fight!* (1998). A close reading of each offering is unnecessary; settings and character names shift slightly but the hallmarks remain constant.

with the Henrietta Snow trilogy, they are often the title characters. With increased representation comes a variety of experiences, some unwelcome. Authors like Jill McCorkle and Lorna Landvik focus on their cheerleader characters' imperfections and eventual victimizations and thereby explode the myth of the popular. Indeed, the proliferation of victimized cheerleaders in post-1960s literature speaks to the new ways cheerleaders are drawn as the demographics of the activity shift. The dichotomy of perfectionism and victimhood that unites some of the works discussed in this chapter and that helps to destroy the mid-century view of the cheerleader as the popular girl is what readies us for the cheerleader as superhero(ine).

Chapter Three: Slayers & Superheroines: The Third Wave Feminist Response to the Cheerleader Character

Victimhood and evil go hand in hand for the *Fear Street* cheerleaders of chapter two, whose bodies the evil spirit occupies post-mortem to inflict pain and destruction upon living squad members and their friends and family members. Cheerleader Jennifer Check, of the movie *Jennifer's Body*, comes by her wicked powers in a similar fashion: after a deadly fire puts a preemptive end to a concert at a local bar, Jennifer becomes the sacrificial virgin in the band's satanic ritual. Members of the all-male band take her to a secluded location outside of town known as The Falls, restrain her, and rape her.[219] The postmortem body and the issue of agency are the main differences in these narratives. The bodies of R.L. Stine's *Fear Street* cheerleaders are vessels for an otherworldly evil spirit who inflicts pain on its enemies, whereas Jennifer's body is her own weapon, responding to her direction. She survives her attack and takes her revenge on the unsuspecting male youth of her community.

The attack leaves Jennifer with an unrelenting appetite for blood. She seduces a football player mourning the death of his best friend, a victim of the previous night's fire.

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[219] *Jennifer's Body*, directed by Karyn Kusama (Fox Atomic, 2009). Released on September 18, 2009, starring Megan Fox and Amanda Seyfried and written by Diablo Cody, the film opened on just over 2,700 screens and made almost seven million dollars in its first weekend. The review aggregate website Rotten Tomatoes reported forty-three percent positive critical reviews. Individual reviews highlight Cody's dialogue, such as this from film critic Roger Ebert, who gave the movie three out of four stars: Cody has "the soul of an artist, and her screenplay brings to this material a certain edge, a kind of gleeful relish, that's uncompromising. This isn't your assembly-line teen horror thriller." See Roger Ebert, "Jennifer's Body (R)," *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 18, 2009. Screenwriter Cody is also connected to an updated filmic version of *Sweet Valley High*, due in 2012. Though the Wakefield sisters are adults and their cheerleader status is no longer prominent in the sequel, Cody's involvement in another cheerleader-related project highlights this tendency of those in the entertainment industry to repeatedly portray cheerleader protagonists.

She tells him the deceased wanted them to be together and asks him to feel her broken heart; she places his hand on her chest as they walk into the woods that surround the school grounds. Jennifer indicates he will see his friend again very soon, and she then pushes the football player – an athlete of considerable stature – so hard that he lifts off the ground, flies backward, and hits a tree. The serene atmosphere of the scene breaks as Jennifer's teeth become fangs and, though the camera cuts away as the bloodbath ensues, the soundtrack is one of his screams and her animal-like rage. For her next kill, Jennifer lures a Goth student named Colin to the attic of an abandoned house in a rundown neighborhood after nightfall. Rats scamper amidst the candlelight; rap music with heavy bass plays louder and louder as Jennifer's seduction ritual progresses. Jennifer tugs at Colin's pants; he cuts himself on an unknown object in the dark and shadowy attic. The sight and smell of his blood only encourage the ravenous Jennifer, who breaks both of Colin's hands so as to render him incapable of resistance, then kills him and consumes his innards through his torso and drinks his blood. Cheerleader Jennifer draws on her inner strength and uses her own body as a lethal weapon following her attack. In both instances, she leads her prey into isolated areas, disarms them, and completes her mission with only her mouth and her bare hands.

This 2009 filmic representation showcases power in the face of victimhood – in response to victimhood, even. As such, *Jennifer's Body* signals a shift in representation. The examples provided in the preceding chapter highlight cheerleaders as victims: of emotional, mental, and physical abuse, and of kidnapping and murder. By and large, those cheerleader protagonists exist in the second half of the twentieth century,

suggesting their collective demise is a phenomenon related to the second wave of feminist activism, an effort to remove cheerleaders from the national scene post-Title IX. For Jennifer Check, the cheerleader protagonist of *Jennifer's Body*, victimhood is a catalyst. Rather than accept her fate as a victim of rape, Jennifer becomes the aggressor. She uses her victimhood to her advantage, as she draws superhuman strength from an unimaginably horrific ordeal. In the progression of cheer narratives, this begins a new chapter.

In response to the patriarchal family structure that idealized domesticity and relegated women to secondary status, the post-World War II social movement known as second wave feminism[220] sought gender equality economically, politically, and socially, and promoted recognition of the ways in which society socialized girls and boys. The last chapter explored cheerleader characters who grew out of that era: popular, all-American models of nostalgic perfection (often flawed), and victims of abuse, kidnapping, and murder. This chapter finds a late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century shift in

[220] Irish activist Frances Power Cobbe is credited with first employing the wave metaphor in 1884, when she wrote that some social movements "resemble the tides of the Ocean, where each wave obeys one uniform impetus, and carries the waters onward and upward along the shore." However, this metaphor was applied to the earliest generation of women's rights activists retroactively, when Martha Weinman Lears's 1968 *New York Times Magazine* article "The Second Feminist Wave" distinguished the work of mid-twentieth-century feminists from a previous movement. In her introduction to *No Permanent Waves*, historian Nancy Hewitt problematizes the wave metaphor: "Several important dimensions of feminist activism are lost in the standard narratives. First, the chronology of women's rights and feminist activism in the United States is contained in discrete and separate waves, while in reality such movements overlapped and intertwined across U.S. history" (5). Nonetheless, Hewitt notes, "It may be impossible to jettison the concept of feminist waves. Indeed, the Library of Congress is now introducing *first wave* and *second wave* as topical categories" (8, emphases in original). Instead, Hewitt recommends reconsidering the metaphor to include something similarly undulating; she suggests radio waves. See Hewitt, ed., *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010). The Summer 2002 issue of *Feminist Studies* reassesses the second wave; the Summer 2008 issue of *Third Space* considers how to reconfigure the wave metaphor.

representation. Much as the second wave of feminist action gives way to new schematics in the 1980s and 1990s, so does the representation of cheerleaders change.

The 1980s and 1990s saw an evolution of cheerleading: in schools and private gymnastics facilities across the country, the sideline variant of the activity welcomed a competitive version.[221] No longer restricted to cheering for other athletes, competition cheerleading offers participants the opportunity to cheer for themselves and compete against other squads doing the same thing. Popular culture reflects this progression in big budget Hollywood films *Bring It On* (2000) and its four sequels *Bring It On Again* (2004), *Bring It On: All or Nothing* (2006), *Bring It On: In It to Win It* (2007), and *Bring It On: Fight to the Finish* (2009), as well as *Fired Up!* (2009); the hour-long scripted coming-of-age television drama *Hellcats* (2010-2011);[222] and reality television shows such as *Sports Kids Moms and Dads* (2005), *Cheerleader U* (2007), and *Cheerleader Nation* (2006), plus some episodes of MTV's transformation show *Made* and documentary-style series *True Life*.[223]

The competition cheerleading movement and popular culture's response to it coincided with Girl Power, the 1990s effort to "enhance girls' self-esteem and validate girl culture."[224] Along with the filmic representations referenced above, the end of the

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[221] The first chapter includes a longer treatment of this development.
[222] Journalist Kate Torgovnick's 2008 exploration of the world of competitive collegiate cheerleading, *Cheer! Three Teams on a Quest for College Cheerleading's Ultimate Prize*, inspired The CW show.
[223] As noted in chapter two, the Corcoran sisters of R.L. Stine's *Fear Street Cheerleaders* series are early examples of competitive cheerleaders in literature.
[224] Susan J. Douglas, *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 125. In her "Girl Power" entry in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, Marnina Gonick traces the movement to the early 1990s, to the origins of Riot Grrrl in Olympia, Washington, and Washington, D.C. According to Gonick, Riot Grrrls' roots were in punk music. They "celebrated Girl Power for its aggressive potential to change girl culture. Girl Power became the idea that

twentieth century saw a rise in cheerleader protagonists who exhibit physical prowess, intellectual cunning, and heroism in the face of danger. These cheerleaders, all girls – always female, never male – display traits in line with cultural studies scholar Catherine Driscoll's concept of the "superheroine." Driscoll defines this figure "as distinct from the superhero, as two different elements are foregrounded" in the superheroine narrative: "first, as she develops a personal revenge narrative justifying her violence, and second, as her body becomes a weapon."[225] Jennifer Check's superhuman strength employed in response to sexual violence places her firmly within this tradition of the superheroine. Vampire slayer Buffy Summers, hero Claire Bennet, and crimefighter Kim Possible also conform to the standards of Driscoll's superheroine, and they are the subjects of this chapter.[226]

This chapter argues that crimefighters, vampire slayers, and other heroic girl cheerleaders – models of Driscoll's superheroine – are a specifically third wave feminist response to second wave attempts to rid American popular culture of cheerleaders. I

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drove self-expression through fashion, new attitudes toward femininity, and a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to cultural production." Gonick goes on to explain that the United States Health and Human Services used the name Girl Power for a 1997 initiative directed at young females, and, "as a positive message about the strength and capabilities of females," many commercial ventures have appropriated Girl Power. Marnina Gonick, "Girl Power," in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Claudia A. Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 310-314.

[225] Catherine Driscoll, "Women as Martial Artists in Early Twenty-First Century Cinema," in *Women Willing to Fight: The Fighting Woman in Film*, ed. Silke Andris and Ursula Frederick (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 168.

[226] A June 2011 *Glamour* magazine editorial asks, "Dear Hollywood, Where's Our Superhero Movie?" After listing new and upcoming releases that are vehicles for comic book heroes such as Batman, Captain America, and Superman, the magazine's editors note, "Not coming soon to a theater near you? A superhero movie – *any* superhero movie – starring a woman. […] It's time a leading lady got to use her own extraordinary powers to save humankind" (p. 164, emphasis in original). The documentary film *Miss Representation* highlights this representative disparity, noting that only sixteen percent of protagonists in film are female. *Miss Representation*, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom (Girls' Club Entertainment, 2011).

locate these late twentieth and early twenty-first century representations at the intersection of the third wave of feminism, a working definition for which I offer in the following section, and the Girl Power movement, with equal emphases on *girl* and *power*. These superheroine cheerleaders save the world, quite literally and repeatedly, in ways that both reflect and construct their sociohistoric positions as empowered girls who operate within constraints and rely on mentors and sidekicks.

THIRD WAVE FEMINISM: A DEFINITION

> When women are portrayed as tough in contemporary film, are they being allowed access to a position of empowerment, or are they merely being further fetishized as dangerous sex objects? Even within feminist film theory the modern action heroine has emerged as an extremely fruitful but difficult character to interpret. On the one hand, she represents a potentially transgressive figure capable of expanding the popular perception of women's roles and abilities; on the other, she runs the risk of reinscribing strict gender binaries and of being nothing more than sexist window-dressing for the predominantly male audience.[227]

Jeffrey Brown asks us to consider the place of female action figures in contemporary film and, by implication, all moving images. Brown sets up an implied dichotomy, allowing heroines one of only two choices. They can be empowered and,

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[227] Jeffrey A. Brown, "Gender, Sexuality, and Toughness: The Bad Girls of Action Film and Comic Books," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 47.

therefore, empowering; or they can be sex objects and, hence, objectified. They cannot be both. Brown does not offer a temporal location for these heroines. In this chapter I argue that these action heroines – superheroines – exist firmly within a third wave feminist framework and, furthermore, that this temporal space allows them the flexibility to embody both empowerment and something akin to sex object. Not only are these superheroines representative of the third wave, they help create the third wave.

Postfeminist media studies offers a useful vantage point from which to reflect back upon the Girl Power movement and its cultural offsprings. According to Rosalind Gill, a postfeminist sensibility allows for contradictions such as:

> The notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference.[228]

Importantly, a postfeminist media sensibility is not contradictory to third wave feminism. It should not be understood as "an epistemological perspective nor as an historical shift." Instead, it is a media culture "that characterizes increasing numbers of films, television shows, advertisements and other media products."[229] In this way, a postfeminist media

[228] Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 149.
[229] Gill, 148.

sensibility provides a framework within which we can analyze third wave feminist cultural products.

When she set out to compile her anthology *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995), Rebecca Walker approached people about contributing to a collection on "feminism and female empowerment in the nineties."[230] The contributors, who all self-identify as feminist, struggle with imposed definitions of "who they are supposed to be […] and how they are supposed to interact with and respond to the world."[231] Collectively, the writings serve to further the concept of intersectionality, as they "debunk the stereotype that there is one lifestyle or manifestation of feminist empowerment." Rather, they exhibit "self-possession, self-determination, and an endless array of non-dichotomous possibilities."[232] This notion of intersectionality, or the idea that multiple identity vectors converge to create a unique self, is central to the definition of third wave feminism I employ here.

Introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, the concept of intersectionality is highly regarded by scholars across disciplines. In her defense of intersectionality as a successful feminist theory, Kathy Davis offers this definition: "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of those interactions in terms of power." Davis also notes that Crenshaw introduced

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[230] Rebecca Walker, ed., *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), xxxvi.
[231] Walker, xxxiv.
[232] Walker, xxxiv.

intersectionality "to address the fact that the experiences and struggles of women of colour [sic] fell between the cracks of both feminist and anti-racist discourse." [233]

Originally published in 1995 and reissued as an expanded edition in 2001, Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation* "gives voice to young feminists' personal experiences."[234] In her introduction to the collection, Findlen lists some of the many identifiers of her collaborators: Asian bisexual; lesbian daughter; educated, married, monogamous, feminist, Christian, African American mother; articulate, white, middle-class college kid; politically astute, active woman; Chicana single mother. And, she notes, "These identities all coexist (with varying degrees of comfort) with feminism."[235] Along with Walker's, Findlen's anthology exemplifies intersectionality. Scholars and activists who "seek to create identities that accommodate ambiguity"[236] cultivate the third wave as they define it.

My definition of the third wave recognizes the conflicts addressed in Gill's definition of a postfeminist media sensibility, namely the suggestion of bodily femininity; the overt sexualization of culture; and the shift from objectification to subjectification, especially as it plays out on the bodies of girls themselves. I honor Walker's recognition of a feminist self-identification, and I acknowledge the tensions and contradictions inherent in an intersectional approach to identity and theory, as Findlen's list

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[233] See Kathy Davis, "Intersectionality As Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful," *Feminist Theory* 9, no. 1 (2008): 67-85. Also see Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 14 (1989): 538-54.
[234] Barbara Findlen, ed., *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation* (Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1995; 2001), xv.
[235] Findlen, xvi.
[236] Walker, xxxiii.

demonstrates. Along with a focus on intersectionality and an acceptance of ambiguity, these texts all highlight the third wave's respect for collective action, in scholarship and in activism. Importantly, for the third wave, this group is not gender-segregated in the same way it was for the second wave, even though a crucial component to the definition of third wave feminism is the continued resistance to an oppressive patriarchy.[237]

A BRIEF HISTORY OF "TOUGH WOMEN"[238] ONSCREEN

A handful of anthologies and monographs published since 1990 grapple with the increasing representation of action-oriented female protagonists on television and film. Scholar Sherrie Inness labels figures such as *The Bionic Woman*'s Jaime Sommers and Ripley from *Alien* "tough women," and she locates their onscreen rise in the second wave of feminist action in the United States: "In order to understand the roots of this aesthetic,

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[237] This distinction is what separates third wave feminism from a postfeminist sensibility. Carisa Showden sees the two ideologies as related by "a shared 'girl power' ideal" but unrelated "in nearly all other ways" ("What's Political about the New Feminisms?" *Frontiers* 30, no. 2: 166). Of the two, Showden finds third wave feminism the most promising: "What is political about some third-wave feminism is, first, the coalition-building that has become increasingly central and has changed some of the objects of feminist inquiry; and, second, a committed focus on intersectional identities and multilayered discrimination" (167). The scholar-activists cited above fit this definition. In comparison, some who argue that feminism as a social movement is no longer necessary: Rene Denfeld, *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* (New York: Warner Books, 1995); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life: How Today's Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch With the Real Concerns of Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996); Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence From Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Cathy Young, "Feminists Play the Victim Game," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1999; Cathy Young, "Lady Boss Busted: Is the 'Glass Ceiling' a Matter of Choice?" *Boston Globe*, November 3, 2003.

[238] In *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*, film studies scholar Hilary Neroni presents an overview of cinematic heroines she reads as violent. Neroni locates the earliest filmic representations of violent women in Hollywood serials of the 1910s and 1920s, followed by film noir of the 1930s and 1940s, and then horror and blaxploitation films in the 1970s and early 1980s. Although there is some crossover between tough women and violent women, the cheerleader protagonists discussed in this chapter fall into the former category. Hilary Neroni, *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 16-19.

one needs to recognize how second-wave feminism rippled through American society in the last few decades, changing women's roles on all levels of society." As Inness notes, "Feminism questioned the notion that women are 'naturally' not aggressive, incapable of handling the same challenges as men. Feminism also taught women to question the gender status quo."[239] The effects of this movement were felt across the country, in offices and on playing fields, especially as a result of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Therefore, according to Inness, this "created a new vision of womanhood, one tougher than before. This cultural shift helped create an environment where women could adopt more aggressive roles than those that they had been able to have in the 1950s and earlier decades."[240] Instead of serving as sidekicks and gun-toting accessories, women began to helm action-based television shows and feature films. The cheerleader superheroines of this chapter reap the benefits of this celluloid progress, as their narratives rely on sidekicks.

Much like Inness, film studies scholar Yvonne Tasker details what she labels the "sporadic integration" of women into action- and adventure-oriented cinema of the late eighties and nineties.[241] However, Tasker makes another claim, identifying Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone as "the most publicised [sic], most visible

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[239] Sherrie A. Inness, "Boxing Gloves and Bustiers: New Images of Tough Women," in *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.
[240] Inness, "Boxing Gloves and Bustiers," 6. Listing "physically strong and supernaturally enhanced women" from earlier American popular culture such as Rosie the Riveter, Wonder Woman, Calamity Jane, Annie Oakley, Wild Edna, Carrie Cashin, Violet McDade, Nevada Alvarado, Jirel of Joiry, Red Sonya, and Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, Inness admits, "Strong women characters have always existed in the American mythology. What has changed are the sheer numbers" (2). Notably, a lot of these "tough women" play the role of sidekick.
[241] Yvonne Tasker, *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 67.

image[s] of the figure of the muscular male hero who had come to dominate the American action cinema of the 1980s." She reads their success "in terms of a backlash against the feminism of the 1970s, as indicative of a new conservatism in both national and sexual politics."[242] Their popularity, Tasker argues, leads to an image of "musculinity" in American cinema, a term she defines as "indicat[ing] the extent to which a physical definition of masculinity in terms of developed musculature is not limited to the male body within representation." This then allows for "an emergent action tradition to which female stars are central."[243] Images of musculinity and acceptance, even glorification, of female physicality paves the way for cheerleader superheroines of the third wave who rely on their bodies in the fight against evil.

The "action dramas" of the 1990s and beyond differ from their predecessors in significant respects, "primarily because of their rewriting of formal conventions and their increased emphasis on telling women's stories instead of telling stories about superheroes who happen to be women," according to communication studies scholar Amanda Lotz.[244] Rather than simply employ a gender-reversal device, Lotz identifies "truly innovative

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[242] Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1. Lisa McGirr chronicles the rebirth of the American conservative movement that began in the 1960s and culminated with the landslide election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 in *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Susan Jeffords argues that 1980s films showcasing white males as action heroes are a response to the crisis of masculinity that resulted from the social and cultural upheavals of the previous twenty years. Speaking of Reagan and his Vice President (and later successor) George H.W. Bush, Jeffords says, "Both of these predominant models – the hard body and the 'sensitive family man' – are overlapping components of the Reagan Revolution, comprising on the one hand a strong militaristic foreign-policy position and on the other hand a domestic regime of an economy and a set of social values dependent on the centrality of fatherhood." See Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 13.

[243] Tasker, *Bodies*, 3.

[244] Amanda D. Lotz, *Redesigning Women: Television after the Network Era* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 69-70.

series" as those which "draw complex female characters and tell stories about a distinctly female experience." She locates the emergence of this trend in the late 1990s.[245] Lotz's definition of successful action dramas are those that "blend textual strategies theorized to appeal to male and female audiences to create a narrative form that features spectacular fight scenes as well as complex characterizations depicting the negotiation of psychological struggles and emotional desires."[246] It is precisely this blend of personal revenge narrative and physical power that places Driscoll's superheroine directly in line with this trajectory of action dramas. Driscoll's superheroine is "a quite differently gendered version of the action hero,"[247] and she exists in the third wave. As Lotz notes, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fits this model. The NBC action drama *Heroes* is another television show that conforms to these standards.

"SAVE THE CHEERLEADER; SAVE THE WORLD," OR CHEERLEADERS WHO SAVE THE WORLD

"It's about power- who's got it, who knows how to use it."
~Buffy Summers[248]

"Save the cheerleader; save the world…. Save the cheerleader; save the world…. Save the cheerleader; save the world." NBC used this tagline to promote its cliffhanger episode of the action drama *Heroes* during the fall 2006 sweeps season. Repeated over and over as the screen faded to black, the implication was that if hero Peter Petrelli could

[245] Lotz, 69.
[246] Lotz, 70.
[247] Driscoll, 171.
[248] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode no. 7-01, first broadcast 24 September 2002 by WB. Directed by David Solomon and written by Joss Whedon.

save cheerleader superheroine Claire Bennet, he could then stop the world from destruction. The twist was that Peter only would save the cheerleader. She, then, a hero in her own right (or a superheroine for our purposes), would be the one to save everyone else.

The ensemble series *Heroes* debuted on a then-struggling NBC in the fall of 2006. The network assigned it a good time slot (Monday nights) but did not invest much in the way of promotion initially. The show garnered a following and NBC increased promotional efforts, including airing trailers on the video website YouTube. *Heroes* quickly became the network's best performing series in five years, winning more viewers than any other new show among adults aged eighteen to forty-nine, twenty-five to fifty-four, and eighteen to thirty-four. The show also won the most total viewers and became the number one new scripted television show of the 2006-2007 season. In May of 2007, NBC announced a six-episode spinoff series, *Heroes: Origins* to supplement the regular season. This spinoff encouraged fan interaction as it asked viewers to vote for a hero character to join the second season of the show.

The heroes to whom the show's title refers are people born with genetic anomalies that result in superpowers. Some examples of these superpowers are: invisibility; telekinesis; pyrokinesis; memory erasure; phasing through matter (the ability to walk through walls); superhuman strength and the ability to duplicate oneself; telepathy; teleportation; flight; thermonuclear energy; the ability to paint the future; and the ability to absorb the powers of others. Claire Bennet's superpower is cell regeneration. With roots in science fiction and comic books, *Heroes* employed a

serialized story arc and followed a "suspended enigma structure."[249] This narrative ploy intentionally left vague such mysteries as the source of the heroes' powers; how they are connected to each other; and the purpose and direction of the mysterious Company who guides the heroes. As a result, fans took to the Internet to speculate on future storylines and character development.[250]

Viewers first meet Claire through the viewfinder of a video camera. Wearing a cheerleading uniform, as she does throughout most of the first season,[251] Claire leaps off of a rickety scaffolding several stories high.[252] She screams. Her body hits the ground with a thud. Battered and bloodied by the fall but not dead, Claire rises and snaps her shoulder back into place as the camera races toward her. Cataloging her efforts and results, she marks this "attempt number six."[253] Claire's repeated efforts to injure herself upon discovering her ability to regenerate reinforce the disruption the power causes in her life. As viewers learn in the third episode of the series, she struggles to accept her

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[249] Lynnette Porter, David Lavery, and Hillary Robson, introduction to *Saving the World: A Guide to "Heroes*" (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007), 3.

[250] The appendix of *Saving the World* includes a list of Internet resources: Porter, et al., "*Heroes* Around the Web," in *Saving the World,* 247-248. The network and *Heroes* creator Tim Kring had conditioned the show's fans to look to the Internet for information; NBC launched the show's official website concurrently with the television commercials advertising the first season. For more information on the marketing of the show, see Porter, et al., "Empowering *Heroes*: Marketing the Series," in *Saving the World*, 61-74.

[251] Once her superpower puts her at risk, and in an attempt to avoid detection by The Company, Claire and her family relocate from Texas to California. While the end of season one saw Claire in plain clothes, in season two, she attempts to join the cheerleading squad at her new high school. Notably, even at the end of the first season, after the identity of "the cheerleader" has been revealed and Claire is no longer visually defined by her cheer uniform, the other heroes continue to refer to her as "the cheerleader."

[252] The setting is Odessa, Texas, and the landscape resembles the desolate, defunct oil fields described in H.G. Bissinger's *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*. Bissinger's account of the 1988 Odessa, Texas, Permian High School Panthers football team's march to the state championship inspired a feature film and a television series, the latter of which premiered on NBC during the same fall season as *Heroes*.

[253] *Heroes*. Episode no. 1, first broadcast 25 September 2006 by NBC. Directed by David Semel and written by Tim Kring.

superheroine status. Cameraman and Claire's lone friend Zach, who is aware of her ability to regenerate following bodily injury and even death, confronts her: "You're just gonna go pump your pom poms [sic] and pretend you're no different than any other girl on the squad?" Claire responds in the affirmative. Zach continues, "But you are, Claire! You are different; don't you see that? Don't you see that none of this matters? School spirit doesn't matter. Being a pretty, blonde cheerleader doesn't matter. It's not who you are anymore." In her response to Zach's pleas, Claire tries to communicate that it is her newfound ability that does not matter to her: "Who am I? So what, I can crawl through a wood chipper and live to tell about it? That narrows my choices in life to freak or guinea pig. In most cases, both. What's wrong with wanting to be normal?"[254] Claire continues to struggle with her newfound status until the fourth episode, when she employs one of the main components of Driscoll's superheroine definition: the personal revenge narrative.

The previous episode saw Claire narrowly escape sexual assault at the hands of the quarterback, Brody. In the aptly titled "Collision," Claire exacts her revenge by driving his car, with him in the passenger seat, headfirst into a wall. Before impact, the two converse. She tells him that even though he claims not to remember what happened the night before, she does. And she knows he sexually assaulted another cheerleader. As Claire accelerates, Brody implies that Claire's inebriation influenced her behavior: "You get drunk, you come onto me, and it's my fault?" Claire's speed increases with her rage. She calls him a liar. Brody: "You can't rape the willing, Claire. You wanted it as bad as I

[254] *Heroes*. Episode no. 3, first broadcast 9 October 2006 by NBC. Directed by Greg Beeman and written by Jeph Loeb.

did. Now stop the car." Instead, she drives faster and asks him if he will tell everyone at school that she is promiscuous. When he responds that he already does, Claire's determination hardens. "You should let it go, Claire. There's nothing you can do about it," are the last words Brody says before the car hits a bump, bounces, and he screams.[255] The realization that Brody is wrong, there is something she can do about it, motivates Claire to accept her superheroine status. In the same way that *Jennifer's Body* cheerleader Jennifer moves from sexual assault victim to superheroine through the mode of the personal revenge narrative,[256] so does *Heroes*' cheerleader Claire. And Claire's acceptance of her superpower has ramifications beyond her own life; first, saving the cheerleader is the key to saving the world. But soon the cheerleader will save the world.

In episode thirty-two, "Cautionary Tales," Claire's father, Noah Bennet, dies from a gunshot wound to the eye. He returns to life after receiving an injection of her blood.[257] Two episodes later, viewers learn that Claire's blood offers life-saving possibilities for other characters as well.[258] Minor plots and character development aside, the first season of *Heroes* culminated in a core heroic presence at the right place at the right time, so as to

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[255] *Heroes*. Episode no. 4, first broadcast 16 October 2006 by NBC. Directed by Ernest R. Dickerson and written by Tim Kring and Bryan Fuller.

[256] The way in which Claire secures a spot on the cheer squad at her new high school after relocating to California from Texas could also qualify as a personal revenge narrative. After trying out for the squad and being told, "You're not extraordinary," Claire surprises the cheer captain while she is out for a night of drinking on school grounds. Claire uses her superpower to trick the captain into thinking she is injured in a horrific accident; then, when local law enforcement catch the captain imbibing illegally and she loses her position on the cheer squad, a miraculously healed Claire takes her place. *Heroes*. Episode no. 29, first broadcast 29 October 2007 by NBC. Directed by Jeannot Szwarc and written by Adam Armus and Nora Kay Foster. (In yet another moment of extratextual crossover, Dianna Agron plays the *Heroes* cheer captain and *Glee*'s pregnant cheerleader or "cheerio," Quinn Fabray, discussed in the conclusion.)

[257] *Heroes*. Episode no. 32, first broadcast 19 November 2007 by NBC. Directed by Greg Yaitanes and written by Tim Kring. Claire is unaware of this transaction until after the fact; The Company, an omniscient entity discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, injects Noah in an attempt to blackmail him.

[258] *Heroes*. Episode no. 34, first broadcast 3 December 2007 by NBC. Directed by Allan Arkush and written by Jeph Loeb.

prevent world annihilation in the form of nuclear holocaust. Subsequent seasons backtrack to provide history and biography while also shifting between the future to explore a world in which ninety-three percent of the population has died from the Shanti virus and those who remain live in quarantine, and the present where the heroes struggle with their abilities and The Company's efforts to cultivate a cure. When the virus becomes resistant to all other cures, it is Claire's ability that offers world-saving hope. Otherwise, the show's use of flashforward leads viewers to believe, the Shanti virus will infect and kill everyone on earth.[259] Why Claire's blood? The ability for cells to heal themselves after injury is only present in Claire. This marks her as a superheroine.

As the show's antihero, Sylar, remarks to Claire in "The Second Coming," she is special and can never die. After opening her skull and poking around inside her brain, Sylar replaces the top of Claire's head and tells her that he could not kill her even if that was his goal.[260] And indeed, in a scene reminiscent of the series' first, *Heroes* ends with Claire climbing to the top of a carnival Ferris wheel and throwing herself off of it. She stands up to face news cameras assembled to cover a press conference, snaps her dislocated shoulder back into place, heals, and says, "My name is Claire Bennet, and this is attempt number…I guess I kinda lost count."[261] No longer in disbelief of her superpower, Claire's latest attempt to injure herself was to reassure herself that her regenerative powers survived the most recent apocalypse prevention. She has lost count

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[259] *Heroes*. Episode no. 30, first broadcast 5 November 2007 by NBC. Directed by Daniel Attias and written by Aron Eli Coleite.
[260] *Heroes*. Episode no. 35, first broadcast 22 September 2008 by NBC. Directed by Allan Arkush and written by Tim Kring.
[261] *Heroes*. Episode no. 78, first broadcast 8 February 2010 by NBC. Directed by Adam Kane and written by Tim Kring.

of her efforts to save the world. It is notable that *Heroes*, a series whose success is arguably based on the strength of its ensemble cast, opens and closes with its cheerleader protagonist defying death and showcasing her superheroine status.

More than once over the course of the series, superheroine Claire Bennet invokes the ordinary nature of high school cheerleading in opposition to her extraordinary ability to regenerate. While still coming to grips with her power and attempting to deny her superheroine status and remain "any other girl on the squad," Claire asks, "What's wrong with wanting to be normal?" The next season, once Claire's status endangers her family and they relocate from Texas to California, she relies on the activity's reputation as one of "normal" adolescence when she petitions her father for permission to tryout for the cheerleading squad at her new high school.[262]

Vampire slayer Buffy Summers, first introduced in Joss Whedon's 1992 film and reincarnated five years later in his television series, is similarly concerned with exhibiting normalcy when confronted with paranormal powers. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* creator Whedon's intentions are well documented. In conceiving of the character, Whedon "consciously set out to turn the tables on the typical horror scenario in which a beautiful, blonde girl is always attacked and killed."[263] The driving question for Whedon was, "What if the girl goes into the dark alley[, a]nd the monster follows her[, a]nd she

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[262] *Heroes*. Episode no. 27, first broadcast 15 October 2007 by NBC. Directed by Adam Kane and written by Tim Kring.

[263] Susan Payne-Mulliken and Valerie Renegar, "Buffy Never Goes It Alone: The Rhetorical Construction of Sisterhood in the Final Season," in "*Buffy" Meets the Academy: Essays on the Episodes and Scripts As Texts*, ed. Kevin K. Durand (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 59.

destroys him[?]"[264] The 1992 film starring Kristy Swanson is Whedon's intial response. True to form, Whedon's Buffy is a conventionally attractive, blonde, high school cheerleader. However, she soon learns her fate: to battle vampires as the slayer, or the Chosen One. Her Watcher, Merrick, informs her of her slayer status and trains her for battle. Buffy's relationships change over the course of the film as she accepts and grows into her slayer abilities. No longer popular with her school's in-crowd, Buffy befriends an outcast, Pike, whose best friend has (conveniently) begun to show vampiric tendencies. Under the direction of Merrick, Buffy and Pike work together to fight the forces of evil.

Debuting at number five at the box office in July of 1992, *Buffy* garnered mixed reviews from critics and achieved moderate financial success.[265] There was a disconnect between Whedon's original script and the studio's final product, and this accounts for the discrepancies between the film and the 1997 television series pilot, which Whedon wrote as a sequel to his original film script.[266] The television series ran from March of 1997 until May of 2003 and starred Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy.[267] Still the slayer – the Chosen One – Gellar's Buffy lives in Sunnydale, California, a small town precariously placed over a Hellmouth, which is a target for supernatural activity. Her Watcher is Rupert Giles; she surrounds herself with a group of friends known as the Scooby Gang.[268]

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[264] Mim Udovitch, "What Makes Buffy Slay?" *Rolling Stone*, May 11, 2000, 60.
[265] The movie grossed $16,624,456 in 1,981 theaters. From http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=buffythevampireslayer.htm.
[266] For example, in the film, vampires experience death in ways similar to humans. In the television series, they turn to dust when staked in the heart.
[267] Whedon continues the series in comic book form, which offers seasons eight and nine through Dark Horse Comics.
[268] Buffy and the larger Whedonverse she inhabits are favorite topics of media and cultural studies scholars. The peer-reviewed academic journal *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* (http://www.slayage.tv) addresses the series from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives. Caralyn Bolte's

Having moved with her mother from Los Angeles to Sunnydale, California, Buffy must try out for cheerleader at her new high school if she is to regain a position on the squad. The third episode of season one opens with Buffy in a cheer uniform, holding poms. Her Watcher Giles tells her, "This is madness. What can you have been thinking? You are the slayer. Lives depend upon you. […] You have a sacred birthright, Buffy. You've been chosen to destroy vampires, not to wave pom poms [sic] at people." Buffy responds, "I will still have time to fight the forces of evil, okay? I just wanna have a life. I wanna do something normal, something safe."[269] This connection to "normal" adolescence through participation in cheerleading is one of the things the television Buffy shares with her film predecessor. Although film Buffy tacitly agrees to skip cheerleading practice in order to meet her Watcher Merrick after school, she neglects to do so. Merrick tracks her down, appearing in the girls' locker room to confront Buffy about her absence. It is then that Buffy relays her uncertainty about her slayer status: "Don't you get it? I

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essay, "'Normal Is the Watchword': Exiling Cultural Anxieties and Redefining Desire from the Margins" in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 93-113, remarks on the marginality of Buffy and Veronica Mars. Kevin K. Durand gathers a variety of scholarly angles in his edited collection "*Buffy" Meets the Academy: Essays on the Episodes and Scripts as Texts* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009). In *Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the "Buffy" Fan*, Lorna Jewett places the series at the "postfeminist conjunction of feminism and femininity" (7). Elana Levine and Lisa Parks's anthology *Undead TV: Essays on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) considers *Buffy* from multiple perspectives. Standout essays are Mary Celeste Kearney's "The Changing Face of Teen Television: Or Why We All Love *Buffy*," on the show's (and other early WB shows') appeal to a multigenerational audience with a youthful sensibility (17-41); Levine's "*Buffy* and the 'New Girl Order': Defining Feminism and Femininity" (168-189); and Susan Murray's "I Know What You Did Last Summer: Sarah Michelle Gellar and Crossover Teen Stardom" on intertextuality and media crossover (42-55). Rhonda Wilcox's *Why Buffy Matters: The Art of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005) examines the artistic components of the series; Wilcox's co-edited anthology with David Lavery, *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), examines the show's literary influences and explores its extratextual outgrowths.

[269] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode no. 1-03, first broadcast 17 March 1997 by WB. Directed by Stephen Cragg and written by Dana Reston.

don't want to be the chosen one. I don't want to spend the rest of my life chasing after vampires. All I want to do is graduate from high school, go to Europe, marry Christian Slater, and die!"[270] *Heroes*' Claire Bennet and both incarnations of Buffy Summers initially resist their superheroine callings and instead strive for "normal" adolescence. This longing for normalcy and a return to safety in numbers (a part of the cheer squad, for example) is not unfounded. The cheerleader characters discussed in this chapter have more in common than their superheroine status; they all exhibit a level of extraordinariness that leaves them vulnerable to attacks from villainous forces.

As discussed in chapter two, the designation of cheerleader often confers a privileged status upon the individual, denoting popularity, prestige, and social acceptability in high schools across America. Indeed, cheerleaders often signify high school itself. An early image of the television series *Veronica Mars* is that of three cheerleaders making their way across the parking lot of their high school, carefree and breezy in the California sunlight. It is not until later on in the first episode that viewers learn cheerleader Veronica's best friend has been murdered and that Veronica will forgo her cheerleader status to investigate the murder as only she can.[271] Similarly, Disney's

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[270] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, DVD, directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui (Twentieth Century Fox, 1992).

[271] Veronica Mars is a teenage detective in the vein of Nancy Drew. While she parallels Buffy in that she rejects her cheerleader status in order to pursue her own vigilante justice (in response to sexual assault – the way in which she partially fulfills Driscoll's superheroine mold), Mars is not supernaturally gifted and thus not considered here. It is worth noting, however, that *Buffy* creator Joss Whedon marked Mars "as the only worthy inheritor of the Slayer's crown" [See Sophie Mayer, "'We Used to Be Friends': Breaking Up with America's Sweetheart," in *Investigating "Veronica Mars": Essays on the Teen Detective Series*, ed. Rhonda V. Wilcox and Sue Turnbull (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), 137]. Mayer's is one of the only scholarly treatments to recognize Mars's cheerleader status, and to connect Mars to Claire Bennet, albeit briefly. In the same volume (a lengthy, well-researched effort to canonize the series), Sarah A. Leavitt and Lewis A. Leavitt consider Mars's relationship with her father: "'Who's Your Daddy?': Issues of Fatherhood" (67-81); Joyce Millman takes up the same topic in "Daddy's Girl," in *Neptune Noir:*

Kim Possible, of the eponymous series *Kim Possible*, a crime-fighting cheerleader with time- and space-traveling abilities, also displays extraordinary powers. Does the cheerleader status these girls obtain prior to learning of their powers enable those very abilities?

Although she no longer cheers, Buffy draws on her cheerleading skills from the first episode of the *Vampire Slayer* television series. This is evident in the agility she displays fending off vampires; her use of martial arts mixed with tumbling passes (gymnastics) is clever and successful. Critics of martial arts cinema label this type of movement in battle aerialism. Most often this refers to moves consistent with kickboxing, such as high kicks, roundhouse or spin kicks, and even flipping. However, Buffy's movements are specific to the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century cheerleading that expects physical power and dynamism from its participants. Take, for instance, the sequence that opens episode sixteen of season seven, "Storyteller."[272] Buffy, dressed all in black, with her long blonde hair worn down but secured under a knit cap, walks purposefully through a graveyard, crossbow strapped to her back. It is dark; vampires attack. She uses a gravestone as leverage to propel herself up and kick her attacker from behind, then handstands on top of the gravestone, in a motion that resembles a cheerleading stunt (Figure 3.1).

Unauthorized Investigations into "*Veronica Mars*," ed. Rob Thomas (Dallas, TX: Benbella Books, Inc., 2006), 46-57. Focusing her analysis on the places where gender and generation ("girl") meet occupation ("sleuth"), Marla Harris suggests "a correlation […] between social spectatorship and surveilling suspects, reading the social scene and reading a crime scene, and that being a teen girl is (like) being a girl detective." See Harris, "Not Nancy Drew but Not Clueless: Embodying the Teen Girl Sleuth in the Twenty-First Century," in *Nancy Drew and Her Sister Sleuths: Essays on the Fiction of Girl Detectives*, ed. Michael G. Cornelius and Melanie E. Gregg (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 153.

[272] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode no. 7-16, first broadcast 25 February 2003 by WB. Directed by Marita Grabiak and written by Jane Espenson.

Figure 3.1 – Buffy in handstand on gravestone, vampire flying backwards post-kick

Next, Buffy uses her crossbow to shoot the vampire in the heart, disintegrating him. She is not yet safe, though. A second vampire attacks. She is still atop the gravestone. To dismount, she performs a back tuck, a gymnastic feat at which many contemporary cheerleaders are adept (Figures 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4).

Figure 3.2 – Stage 1 of Buffy's back tuck (throws herself back off of gravestone)

Figure 3.3 – Stage 2 of Buffy's back tuck (mid-revolution, tuck position)

Figure 3.4 – Stage 3 of Buffy's back tuck (immediately prior to landing, exiting tucked position)

Buffy's unique combination of aerialism and cheerleading-specific gymnastic and stunting movements allow her to battle demonic vampires, killing two in this scene alone.

Although Buffy's identity as the slayer is largely hidden, a handful of her friends are in on the secret.[273] After he witnesses the effects of her slayer superpowers, one such friend, Xander, tells another, "It's cool, Buffy's a superhero."[274] Following the vampire showdown in that same episode (the second of the series), Buffy's friend Willow asks her who won. Buffy responds, "Well, we averted the apocalypse. I give us points for that." Confirming Buffy's suspicion that the previous night's battle with the vampires was indeed apocalyptic, the episode ends with Xander, Willow, Buffy, and Giles walking to class the next morning, ruminating on its implications. Giles: "We are at the center of a mystical convergence here. We may in fact stand between the earth and its total destruction." Given Buffy's agility and her vampire-slaying abilities, it is arguable that her cheerleading past makes her the only viable candidate to save the world. *Heroes*' Claire Bennet reaches a similar fate as the first season of the action drama progresses. But these superheroines do not save their worlds alone. As powerful as they are, their narratives exemplify the power of collective agency – a specifically third wave feminist conception of *girl* power.

POWERFUL GIRLS

In the film version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Merrick tells Buffy that he has trained "hundreds of girls" to be slayers – only girls. Writing about comic book heroines, Mike Madrid observes, "There are a lot of 'men' in comic books […] Besides Wonder

[273] Together they are known as the Scooby Gang, or the Scoobies. They assist Buffy in her vampire-slaying activities.
[274] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode no. 1-02, first broadcast 10 March 1997 by WB. Directed by John Kretchmer and written by Joss Whedon.

Woman, there are not that many 'women,' and even fewer 'ladies.' But there are lots of 'girls.'"[275] Additionally, there are no male superhero cheerleaders. While the overall representation of cheerleader characters as female is in keeping with the demographics of the activity itself, whose participants are overwhelmingly female,[276] the allocation of superpowers to adolescent girls is a departure from traditional narratives. In fact, a not uncommon response from girls to the onset of adolescence is an unhealthy relationship with food that often leads to eating disorders, as Irene Karras recognizes in her consideration of Buffy as "The Third Wave's Final Girl."[277] The representation of girl cheerleader characters as heroic runs counter to the conventional narratives that mark girls as powerless post-menarche.

Merrick connects Buffy's slayer status to adolescence in a particularly feminine way. Following her first slay, he asks her if she "felt sick" or "had cramps." Buffy, clearly uninterested in sharing the details of her menstrual cycle: "Yeah, I felt them a little, but I'm not due for a couple of weeks since you're so hot on the subject." Merrick then explains that this reaction is natural for slayers and will help her track vampires. She responds, "Great. My secret weapon is PMS."[278] The film version of Buffy and her television series-spinoff character are firmly grounded in adolescence. They operate

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[275] Mike Madrid, *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines* (Minneapolis, MN: Exterminating Angel Press, 2009), vi, emphasis in original.
[276] Admittedly difficult to quantify, at last count 95% of the nation's four million cheerleaders were female.
[277] Irene Karras, "The Third Wave's Final Girl: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," *thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory & culture* 1, no. 2 (March 2002), http://www.thirdspace.ca/journal/article/view/karras/50.
[278] Karras notes that the female vampire slayer receives her calling upon menarche, and suggests "two potential metaphors: are the vampires examples of the evil predators awaiting sexual females? And what is the implication of having a woman become most powerful when many sociologists and psychologists have said real girls lose their power…" See Karras, "The Third Wave's Final Girl."

within a circumscribed world of high school, as do superheroine Claire Bennet and crime fighting super agent Kim Possible. All of these extraordinary cheerleaders are adolescent girls.

Almost two decades before Buffy, *Carrie* (1976) introduced the concept of female adolescent violence.[279] Connecting Carrie's "monstrosity" to her menarche, feminist film theorist Shelley Stamp Lindsey notes, "sexual difference is integral to the horror she generates."[280] As Lindsey argues, "*Carrie* presents a masculine fantasy in which the feminine is constituted as horrific."[281] Conversely, Carrie's third wave superheroine successors, equally female and adolescent, are represented as heroic.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer was released in theaters on July 31, 1992. The television series ran from March 10, 1997, to May 20, 2003. Beginning June 7, 2002, *Kim Possible* ran for four seasons and aired its last episode September 7, 2007.[282] *Heroes* premiered September 25, 2006, endured a mid-series network-wide writer's strike, and ended February 8, 2010. The timing alone places these texts and, therefore, their protagonists, firmly within a realm of third wave feminism. The post-second wave space that these texts occupy coupled with their cheerleader protagonists' superheroine status is a post-1980s mediated attempt to contain the various identities of cheerleaders that have sprung

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[279] Carrie gains telekinetic powers as a result of getting her first period. *Carrie*, directed by Brian DePalma (Redbank Films, 1976).
[280] Shelley Stamp Lindsey, "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 1996), 284.
[281] Lindsey, 281.
[282] The *Kim Possible* franchise also includes books and made-for-television and direct-to-video movies.

up since the enactment of Title IX. And containment, in these texts, takes the form of (male) sidekicks and mentors.

"I Couldn't Save the World Without You": Mentors and Sidekicks

The Disney series *Kim Possible* is a multi-product brand, with made-for-television and straight-to-video movies, children's books, computer games, and the television show, and the content of these products often overlap. During the opening credits of the film *Kim Possible: A Sitch in Time*,[283] Kim and her fellow Middleton High School cheerleaders practice a routine to a song with the lyrics, "I'm hot." The image of Kim is that of an athletic, muscular girl, as evidenced by her stunting and tumbling abilities and toned physique, especially her legs. Here is an image comparing Kim Possible as a cheerleader and as a "crime stopper" (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 – Comparison of Kim Possible's dueling identities

[283] "Sitch" here is short for "situation."

Viewers immediately meet Kim's sidekick, Ron Stoppable.[284] Ron is both the school's mascot and Kim's best friend (in later episodes of the series he is Kim's boyfriend). The images of Kim and Ron emphasize that he is secondary to her. Take, for example, the following book covers. The first is a TokyoPop Cine-Manga version of the series (Figure 3.6).

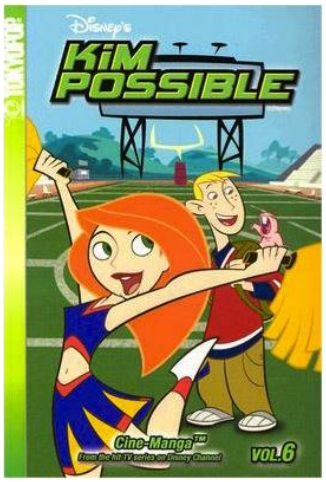

Figure 3.6 – TokyoPop cheerleader Kim

Notice that cheerleader Kim is posed so that her arms, left leg, and hair obscure much of Ron. However, she glances back at him, and this directs the gaze of the reader to Ron. The second cover image is from *The New Ron* (Figure 3.7). Kim and Ron are back-to-back, with Kim in her crime-fighting gear and Ron still in his school mascot clothes. They give each other sidelong glances, perhaps indicating that they are a team.

[284] Much like Kim Possible is a play on "impossible," Ron Stoppable is "unstoppable."

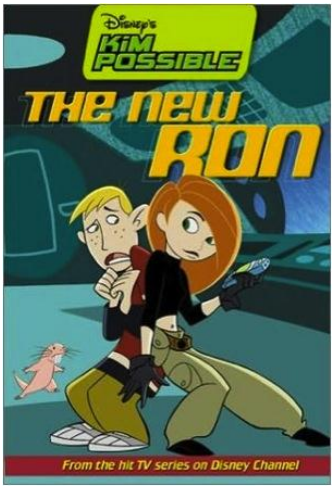

Figure 3.7 – *The New Ron* book cover

However, Kim's position is slightly forward: her right shoulder is in front of Ron's left, and her right hand is outstretched. Also, Kim appears confident whereas Ron exudes fear. Similarly, the cover of *Showdown at Camp Wannaweep* emphasizes Ron's fear as opposed to Kim's confidence and even determination (Figure 3.8).

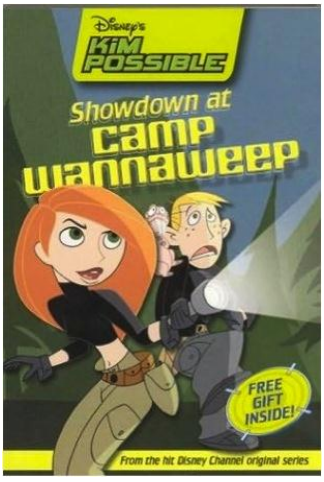

Figure 3.8 – Showdown at Camp Wannaweep book cover

In this image Ron is even further behind Kim, and he is either following her or his fear has caused him to retreat, with one foot perched to run. Kim's eyes are no longer directed

at Ron; she is now focused on the villain ahead. Finally, on the cover of *Bueno Nacho* Kim is talking to Wade, the "super genius" who directs her on her missions (Figure 3.9).

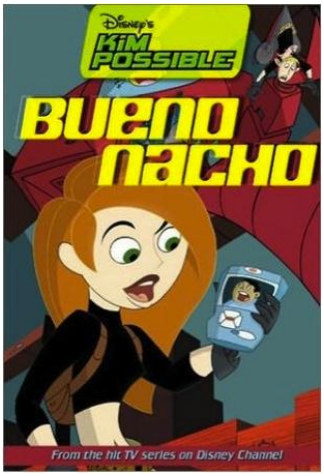

Figure 3.9 – *Bueno Nacho* book cover

Ron is in the upper right corner, literally hanging by the seat of his pants.

All of these book covers – which are also crossovers with television show episodes – emphasize Ron Stoppable's disposability. In terms of his visual representation, he is, ultimately, a sidekick. However, the text of *Kim Possible: A Sitch in Time* suggests otherwise. In the very beginning of the film, Kim says to her sidekick, "Ron, I couldn't save the world without you"; scene after scene reinforces this. For example, just six minutes and forty-five seconds into the film, Wade interrupts Kim and dispatches her to a robbery at the Tri-City Museum. The first robber she encounters remarks disparagingly, "Oh, super, the cheerleader," immediately dismissing her crime stopping abilities (much like *Heroes*' Claire Bennet, the robber references Kim's cheerleader status out of context, as she is wearing her crime-fighting gear and not a cheer uniform). Kim then employs a series of acrobatics (reminiscent of Buffy) to fight

and escape the robber and his three co-conspirators; eventually they catch her and stuff her into a sarcophagus. She needs her sidekick, Ron Stoppable, to appear at the museum and rescue her after the four robbers have fled with their bounty.

A variation of this scene is repeated throughout the film as Kim travels the world in an attempt to track down the robbers and retrieve the stolen goods. Although a futuristic robot visits and tells her, "Kim Possible, the fate of the future, humanity, and the planet Earth itself rests in your hands," in reality, Kim is unable to save the world until Ron first saves her. This rhetoric of saving the world is similar to that of the *Heroes*' tagline, "Save the cheerleader; save the world," and the implication that once Peter Petrelli saves Claire Bennet, she will then save the world, much like the situation (or the "sitch") with Kim Possible and Ron Stoppable.

Fictional girl characters who save the world in their spare time are consistent with a 1990s girl power moment that also coincides with the evolution of All-Star and competitive cheerleading. Although my argument is that these more recent popular cultural representations of cheerleaders as superheroines, crime fighters, and vampire slayers are connected to this particular sociohistoric moment, I also want to recognize that this is not specifically connected to cheer. Take, for example, the marketing insert that came with the boxed set of *Kim Possible* books (Figure 3.10).

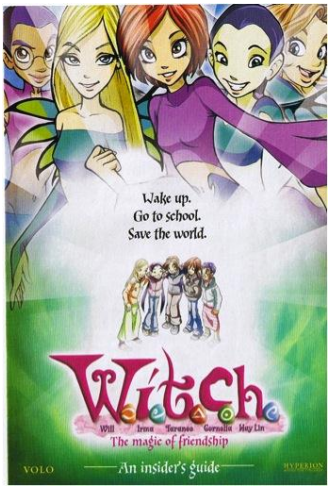

Figure 3.10 – *W.i.t.c.h.* promotional material

An "insider's guide" to a new series, *W.i.t.c.h.*, whose tagline is, "Wake up. Go to school. Save the world." The description on the inside reads, "Welcome to the world of W.i.t.c.h. Where the power of friendship has transforming results." This series, though much more explicit about its reliance on a group, employs the same "save the world" rhetoric as *Kim Possible*, *Heroes*, and even *Buffy*.[285]

As a vampire slayer, Buffy must rely on a "Watcher" – Merrick in the film and Giles in the television series. He trains her and acts as her mentor but is not capable of her slaying abilities. In fact, there are times Buffy must save him from harm. She does this with the rest of her group of sidekicks as well, a gang that expands as the series progresses. Both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Heroes* are ensemble shows, meaning they rely on a large cast of characters. From a production angle, it is not surprising that the extraordinarily powerful cheerleader protagonists would have sidekicks, mentors, and

[285] *W.i.t.c.h.* is a non-cheer example of a third wave product that exists within the postfeminist media culture Gill describes.

helpmates to drive the action. However, from an analytical standpoint, the effect of this is to diminish the power of the adolescent girl. Rather than allow her free range of her superpowers, Kim's sidekick Ron, Buffy's Watchers Merrick and Giles and the Scoobies, and Claire's savior Peter and father Noah all exist to contain their potential power.

"My Power Should Be Our Power": Collective Action in the Third Wave

The third wave of feminism acknowledges the tension and contradiction inherent in its intersectional approach to identity.[286] Because some of the characters discussed here serve to restrain and aid the superheroines, the concept of collective action problematizes the aforementioned theory of containment. For instance, Kim Possible relies on her sidekick Ron Stoppable to rescue her repeatedly, thereby decreasing Kim's overall power. Nonetheless, Ron and super genius Wade are integral to Kim's crime-fighting success; both containment and collective action exist in these narratives, proving the third wave's capacity for flexibility and complexity.

In the last episode of season one, "Prophecy Girl," Buffy dies and her friend Xander, who is not supernaturally gifted, revives her conventionally, with CPR.[287] Throughout the series, Buffy relies on her Watcher to guide her and on her friends to help her save the world from a coming apocalypse. As the series draws to a close, Buffy trains potential slayers – "potentials" – in preparation for the final battle against the First Evil.

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[286] This is part of what Showden argues holds political promise for the third wave: "As intersectionality shapes feminist activism, new possibilities for coalitions become visible, and the specific goals or political projects of feminism are fruitfully reconceived as well." Showden, 167.

[287] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode no. 1-12, first broadcast 2 June 1997 by WB. Directed and written by Joss Whedon.

In the penultimate episode, "Chosen," with the help of her friend Willow, Buffy transfers her power onto the potentials; the collective action this decision inspires marks Buffy as a third wave feminist superheroine.

In her monologue the night before they battle the First Evil, Buffy acknowledges her existence in opposition to a patriarchal contingent, which is an important component of third wave feminism as opposed to postfeminism (as defined here).[288] Buffy: "In every generation, one slayer is born. Because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful *men*."[289] Buffy then introduces the cooperative action component of her plan:

> So I say we change the rule. I say my power should be our power. […] From now on, every girl in the world who might be a slayer, will be a slayer. Every girl who could have the power, will have the power. Can stand up, will stand up. Every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?[290]

As Buffy speaks, images of girls engaged in everyday activities are shown abandoning their tasks, and the assumption is that these potential slayers choose the power that Buffy offers them. The final scene of the series is an uncounted number of slayers, led by Buffy, atop the Hellmouth, perched to fight (and defeat) the First Evil below.

The group of heroes of which Claire Bennet is a part represents a similar collective force directed at an unknowable evil whose goal is world destruction. The concepts of good and evil are not always clear in *Heroes*. A mysterious and powerful

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[288] It could also be argued that the First Evil represents the patriarchy.
[289] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode 7-22, first broadcast 20 May 2003 by WB. Directed and written by Joss Whedon.
[290] Ibid.

organization known as The Company exercises control over the heroes, abducting, marking, and tracking them from an early age. As the series progresses, viewers learn just how connected to The Company the heroes' families are, and when parents prove to be Company men and women, the group's true motives are called into question.[291] Are the heroes a part of The Company, or are they united against it? The flashback and flashforward plot device of *Heroes* guarantees shifting allegiances. However, though the group's membership may grow and change, its goal is certain: to save the world.

Much like the third wave's collective stance against an overbearing patriarchy is an important aspect of its definition as such, so are the members who make up that collective. As noted in the definition of third wave feminism that begins this chapter, the movement is not restricted to females; in fact, the third wave welcomes participation from all interested parties regardless of gender, generation, race, sexuality, or other identity vectors. The makeup of the band of heroes, Kim Possible's team, and the Scooby Gang is another way in which these superheroines and their narratives construct the third wave as they embody it. Superheroine cheerleader Claire Bennet saves the world, but not without the help of Peter Petrelli, Nathan Petrelli, Hiro Nakamura, a host of other heroes, and her adopted father Noah Bennet. Ron Stoppable and super genius Wade accompany superheroine cheerleader Kim Possible in her fight to stop criminals. Aside from her mentor Giles (or film version Merrick), Buffy's Scooby Gang consists of Xander Harris, Willow Rosenberg, reformed vampire Spike, and a revolving cast of other characters

[291] Porter, et al., "The Ambiguity of Evil in *Heroes*," 129-139.

throughout the run of the show. When necessary, these superhero cheerleaders welcome assistance without regard for such identity markers as gender.

CONCLUSION

Chapter two's Snowy reconciled cheerleading and feminism in a specifically mid-twentieth-century way, exemplifying popularity in youth and reflecting on her cheerleader status as she progressed past it in adulthood to occupy one of the earliest fictional cheerleader subject positions. She is our first protagonist whose narrative combines a real sense of agency and a true understanding of cheerleading's history. By the time Snowy's best friend Puddles becomes a cheerleading coach in the third installment of the series, post-Title IX competitive cheer is the choice of an entire generation of girls. As a result, the representations offered to them undergo a makeover. They are no longer the popular but imperfect, often victimized fictional cheerleaders who populate the cultural offerings of the 1970s and 1980s, when cheerleading itself experiences an identity crisis. Beginning with Buffy in 1992, the representation of cheerleaders shifts to incorporate the newly athletic, demanding, and even competitive variant of the activity. Located at the postfeminist media studies intersection of third wave feminism and the Girl Power movement, these superheroine cheerleaders save the world as they reflect and construct their sociohistoric positions.

Chapter Four: The Spirit Industry: Girls' Series Books, Cheerleading Magazines, and Individuality

As detailed in chapter one, cheerleading began as a purely scholastic sideline activity but has developed to include community youth sports programs[292] and professional sideline cheerleaders as well as competitive cheerleading, which takes place both as a part of school and community programs and independently, in affiliation with private gymnastics facilities. There are over seventy-five regulatory organizations that cater to these different types of squads.[293] Some are national, like American Cheerleaders Association (ACA), Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA), National Cheerleaders Association (NCA), Spirit Xpress, and American Cheer Power, all of which operate within the Varsity Brands, Inc., company, and the United States All Star Federation. Other, newer agencies focus their efforts on safety issues: the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) offers a safety certification program as well as numerous resources for parents and coaches.[294] All in all, these organizations provide a variety of services, from cheer camps and clinics to local, regional, national, and now international competitions.

Some of these groups also offer cheer-specific merchandise, such as apparel and accessories, fundraising products, and home décor and gifts suited to cheerleaders. Smaller, independently owned businesses target cheerleaders as consumers as well. Worth $1 billion at the turn of the twenty-first century, the spirit industry doubled in size

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[292] I discuss one such program in chapter six.
[293] Kate Torgovnick, *Cheer! Three Teams on a Quest for College Cheerleading's Ultimate Prize* (New York: Touchstone, 2008), xix.
[294] See http://aacca.org/.

in five short years, claiming an estimated value of $2 billion by 2008. A minimum of 250 private gymnastics facilities across the United States offered instruction in tumbling and stunting skills specifically geared toward cheerleaders in 2000. Eight years later, that number had quadrupled to over 2,000. Journalist Kate Torgovnick notes that while "sports like football and basketball stagnated years ago," cheerleading gained its four millionth participant in 2007.[295]

Beyond the many governing bodies and consumer-oriented retail ventures, the spirit industry consists of prescriptive media. First seen in the form of instructional textbooks, this now includes multiple magazine titles, videos, and podcasts. Finally, in examining the industry that targets cheerleaders as consumers, we would be remiss in not addressing children's and young adult literature, some of which falls into the larger critical category of prescriptive, but differs from the way I am using it here (to mean instructive). In this chapter I will explore this media, placing special emphasis on series books and periodicals, and arguing that the spirit industry endeavors to encourage a lifestyle centered on the cheerleader identity through its endorsement of specific products and services.

I remain concerned with representation here, and though this chapter reflects the overall goal of constructing a coherent constellation of cheerleading in America, it incorporates a new method to that end. I employ a content analysis in my study of cheerleading magazines, particularly with respect to their covers. I find that cheerleading magazine cover models are overwhelmingly female and white, and their representation

[295] Torgovnick, xiv.

individually signifies a departure from the larger emphasis on cheer group dynamic we have seen previously.

CHEER INSTRUCTION, 1975 TO 2011

The twenty-first-century spirit industry is largely driven by corporations, especially Varsity Brands, Inc., the parent company of ACA, American Cheer Power, NCA, Spirit Xpress, UCA, United Spirit Association, Varsity! Remarkable Original Choreography (V!ROC), and *American Cheerleader* magazine.[296] As chronicled in the first chapter, this industry is the result of the efforts of Lawrence "Herkie" Herkimer, [297] widely known as the grandfather of cheerleading, who wrote *The Complete Book of Cheerleading* in 1975, after traveling for twenty years conducting cheer clinics in forty-four states and abroad. Consisting of a historically based introduction, fifteen instructional chapters, and three organizational appendices, the tome offers historians a snapshot of 1970s cheerleading. Tellingly, many of the photos that accompany step-by-step instructions showcase male cheerleaders, which belies Herkimer's own experience as a college cheerleader. Many of the jumps, tumbling moves, and stunts the book suggests potential cheerleaders practice are outdated and no longer in fashion. In fact, of the first six jumps featured, only one is still prevalent today: the "Herkie," originated by and named after Herkimer himself (Figure 4.1).

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[296] In 2010, Varsity undertook a national survey of 1,016 girls ages thirteen to eighteen in an effort to identify who or what has the greatest influence on this group of consumers. They found that the opinions of teen girls themselves matter the most. "Teen Girls: Influence, Involvement and Empowerment," November 16, 2010.

[297] Herkimer founded the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA), as discussed in chapter one.

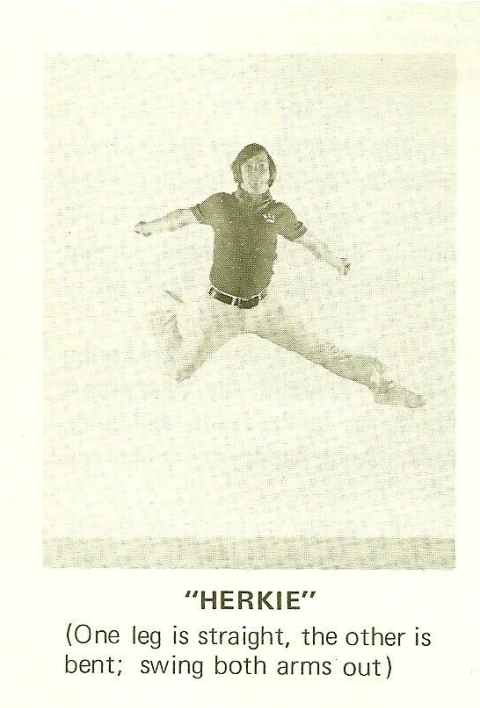

Figure 4.1 – The "Herkie" jump[298]

Herkimer also includes instructions for learning how to do the splits, a skill no longer necessary in cheer. He devotes an entire chapter to use of the mini-trampoline, with a list of twenty guidelines and multiple-shot photo spreads indicating how best to incorporate the apparatus into a sequence of tumbling feats.[299]

In comparison, Justin Carrier and Donna McKay's 2006 instructional handbook *Complete Cheerleading* begins with chapters on voice and motion technique, neither of which Herkimer cover, and then spends seven chapters teaching elements of stunting. Carrier and McKay offer updated information on jumps and tumbling, eschewing Herkimer's banana jump and backward roll and favoring instead the more popular toe

[298] L.R. Herkimer and Phyllis Hollander, ed., *The Complete Book of Cheerleading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, Inc., 1975), 22.
[299] Herkimer and Hollander, ed., 71-81.

touch and full twist. *Complete Cheerleading* is replete with photos of cheerleaders demonstrating the skills Carrier and McKay discuss; however, almost all of the featured cheerleaders are female. In the tumbling chapter, the spotter or gymnastics instructor is male and the participants are female. In all seven of the stunting chapters, the majority of the participants are female (Figure 4.2). The spotter is male, which is a) an accurate representation of cheerleading competitions, and b) allows for distinction between the spotter and the cheerleaders. In photos of co-ed partner stunts, the base is male, another accurate portrayal of contemporary cheer.

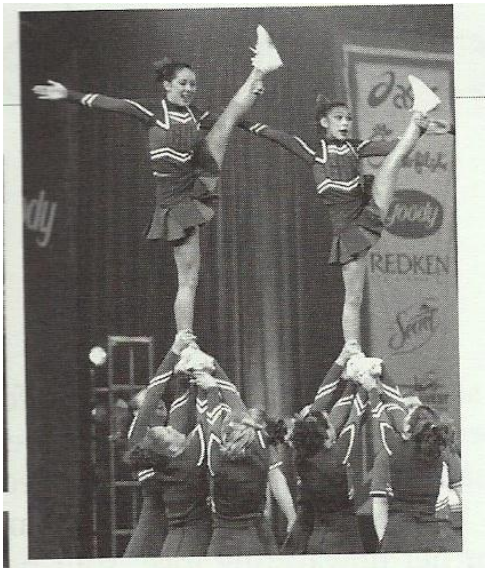

Figure 4.2 – All-female stunt photo from *Complete Cheerleading*[300]

Carrier and McKay devote the last three chapters of *Complete Cheerleading* to choreography, competition, and conditioning, three topics with which Herkimer does not concern himself. Chronologically speaking, competitive cheerleading had not yet come

[300] Justin Carrier and Donna McKay, *Complete Cheerleading* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2006), v, 206.

about when Herkimer wrote *The Complete Book of Cheerleading*, so we should not fault him for failing to address a topic that would not arise until the next decade. However, the differences over this thirty-year span are great, and these two instructional texts highlight the many shifts that occur. Though they are similarly formatted, Carrier and McKay update essential cheerleading technique through their chapters on jumps and tumbling; the addition of graduated chapters on stunts based on skill level (basic, intermediate, advanced) and squad dynamics (coed, all-female); and the emphasis on vocal and safety elements. Attention to what Carrier and McKay's 2006 text lacks in comparison to Herkimer's – the extensive pictorial manual on how to improve one's splits and the best ways to incorporate a mini-trampoline into a cheer routine, for example – dates the 1970s handbook.

Cheer instruction adapted to the available, popular technology of the twenty-first century, and in 2008 the video game developer Namco introduced *We Cheer* (quickly followed by its sequel *We Cheer 2* the next year) for the game console Nintendo Wii. Players use remote controls as poms and follow onscreen choreography instructions to increase the level of difficulty and compete for the position of squad Captain. The controller-free *Let's Cheer!* for Xbox 360 Kinect (2011) takes instruction even further, offering options for group or individual play (Figure 4.3) and providing "the ultimate in squad-bonding and cheer training" according to *American Cheerleader* magazine.[301]

[301] See http://www.americancheerleader.com/2011/11/lets-cheer-for-kinct-for-xbox-360/.

Figure 4.3 – *Let's Cheer!* for Xbox 360 Kinect, screenshot of individual player mode

Unlike *We Cheer*, with its strict focus on dance choreography, *Let's Cheer!* stresses motions, jumps, and dancing. Players earn points based on their ability and skill level; mastery results in access to new routines and rewards such as avatar accessories. The games share an emphasis on character customizability; this feature increases the individuality factor of the games and promotes a unique cheerleader identity.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, GENRE FICTION, AND GIRLS' SERIES BOOKS

With its focus on commercial goods and material possessions, the contemporary cheerleading industry encourages a lifestyle built around one's cheerleader status. This lifestyle is highly dependent on the western consumer culture of late modernity that caters to and benefits from girls' disposable income.[302] Recognizing the buying power of and influence of high school girls, corporate sponsors seek out cheerleaders "in hopes of connecting with teens through word-of-mouth marketing." One such company, PepsiCo, began sponsoring Varsity events in 2004, reaching approximately 500,000 consumers in

[302] Sharon R. Mazzarella and Norma Pecora discuss the reciprocal relationship between girls and consumer culture in their 2007 article "Revisiting Girls' Studies: Girls Creating Sites for Connection and Action," *Journal of Children and Media* 1, no. 2: 105-125.

less than three years.[303] PBteen, the youth-centered division of home goods store Pottery Barn, partnered with Varsity to offer a line of bedding and accessories that feature national cheer association logos, megaphones, and optional monograms (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 – PBteen bedding

Along with bedding, cheerleaders can order backpacks, lunch totes, reusable water bottles, and wall décor in a variety of colors and patterns. While the PBteen/Varsity line is available to all consumers with the necessary resources (access, income), its customizability provides an opportunity for individuality, much like the video game avatars discussed above.

Under the guise of keeping their readers up to date, cheerleading magazines use recurring columns to highlight current events. The August 2005 "What's Going On" pictorial from *American Cheerleader* (Figure 4.5) suggests readers "cheer and chill to this" new soundtrack for *One Tree Hill*, a television series that features a "former cheerleader and *AC* [*American Cheerleader*] covergirl,"[304] as well as movies and books with teen girl protagonists.

[303] Jennifer Wedekind, "Pom-Poms for Pepsi," *Multinational Monitor* 28, no. 2 (March/April 2007), 52.
[304] "What's Going On," *American Cheerleader*, August 2005, 19.

Figure 4.5 – "What's Going On," *American Cheerleader* (August 2005)

The same period that spans the time between Herkimer's handbook (1975) and the introduction of cheerleading-specific video games (2008) saw shifts in genre fiction and girls' series books[305] and the birth of young adult fiction. *American Cheerleader*'s inclusion of contemporary girls' series books (Figure 4.6) in its editorial content reinforces the notion that consuming specific products contributes to the construction of a cheerleader identity even when out of uniform.

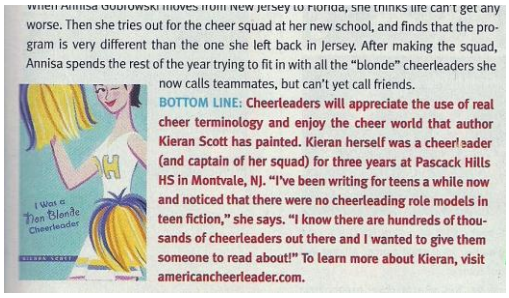

Figure 4.6 – Inclusion of Kieran Scott's *I Was a Non Blonde Cheerleader* in *American Cheerleader*'s August 2005 "What's Going On" column

[305] I am using Carolyn Carpan's definition of series books: "'A sequence of separate narratives, mostly about the same characters and usually written by one author' or ghostwriters under a pseudonym. Progressive series develop a story in sequential installments, while books in successive series can be read in any order, since each plot is separate and characters don't age or change." Carpan, *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths: Girls' Series Books in America* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), xii.

As scholar and librarian Carolyn Carpan details in *Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths*, the first comprehensive social history of American girls' series books,[306] although such staples of girls' reading as the Nancy Drew detective series endured, the 1967 publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* brought about "a new literary genre." *The Outsiders*, a tale of ingroup/outgroup dynamics based on Hinton's experiences as a teen in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was the first in a new genre of "realistic fiction for teens, focusing on stories about problems in adolescents' lives."[307] Teen romance stories surged in the 1980s following the popularity of realistic fiction in the late 1960s and 1970s. Carpan attributes this to three major trends, saying the revival was a response to the second wave of feminist action; a developing conservative New Right movement;[308] and the publishing industry's entrance of paperback originals.[309] When the horror genre blossomed in adult fiction and film of the 1990s, teen series followed,[310] but "by the early twenty-first century, both romance and horror fiction were passé."[311] The rise in girls' series and young adult fiction protagonists who possessed "unusual powers" indicated that "the third wave of feminism [was] help[ing to] make girl power a part of American popular culture."[312] An admittedly incomplete list of young adult, genre fiction, and

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306 Literary scholar Peter Stoneley connects the history of girls' readership in America and the rise of a consumer society in his monograph *Consumerism and American Girls' Literature 1860-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
307 Carpan, 101.
308 This is in conjunction with the 1980s dominance of the male action hero, discussed in chapter three (see page 99, especially note 240).
309 Carpan, 114.
310 Carpan, xv.
311 Carpan, 130.
312 Carpan, xv.

series books with cheerleader characters published during this period follows this trajectory.

The first young adult novel to place on the *New York Times* paperback bestseller list was a 1985 edition of a Sweet Valley High series. Introduced in 1983, *Sweet Valley High* was the first soap opera romance series. It follows the Wakefield sisters, identical twins Elizabeth and Jessica. Series creator Francine Pascal intended the sixteen year olds as good and bad foils for each other; Elizabeth is the responsible, intellectual, aspiring journalist, whereas Jessica is the thoughtless, popular cheerleader. As a result of the popularity, Pascal expanded the brand[313] to include such spinoffs as *Sweet Valley High and Friends*, *SVH: Senior Year*, and *Sweet Valley High Super Thriller*, all of which include cheerleading storylines.[314] Following on the heels of *Sweet Valley High*'s success as a soap opera series, Scholastic Paperbacks began *Cheerleaders*, a series that ran from 1985 to 1988 and included upwards of fifty titles.

Much like Carpan's history of girls' series maps out, the cheerleader trope appears in romance fiction in the 1980s and then again in teen horror series in the 1990s.[315] The girl heroines with "unusual powers" Carpan identified as part of the third wave girl power ethos at the turn of the twenty-first century give rise to vampire cheerleaders,[316] ghost cheerleaders,[317] witch cheerleaders,[318] and a variety of detective cheerleaders.

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[313] Carpan, 121, xv.
[314] *Sweet Valley High Super Thriller #11: "R" for Revenge* is discussed in detail in chapter two.
[315] The cheerleaders of R.L. Stine's *Fear Street* are discussed in chapter three.
[316] Caroline B. Cooney, *The Cheerleader* (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1991); Daniel Waters, *Generation Dead* (New York: Hyperion, 2008).

CHEERLEADING MAGAZINES, PHOTOGRAPHIC INDIVIDUALITY, AND LIFESTYLE CREATION

Since 1994, the cheerleading industry has relied on regularly published periodicals to relay current trends to its participants. As discussed in chapter one, the bimonthly *American Cheerleader* enjoys a national readership of over one million.[319] Though its audience is much smaller at only thirty thousand readers per issue, *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*, whose first issue was Winter 2004/2005, specializes in all-star and collegiate cheer news. *Cheer Coach and Advisor*, which debuted with its Winter 2004 issue but does not publish consistently,[320] caters to cheerleading program administrators. Regional *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* (tagline: "Cheerleading…it's a Texas thing!") purports to have an international presence and strives to "launch new brands and provide an instant awareness and growth within the cheerleading community."[321] Editorial content works to encourage the ongoing cultivation of a cheerleader identity both in and out of uniform, while the magazines' overwhelming preference for singular cover models visually highlights individuality.

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317 Julie Kenner, *Good Ghouls Do* (New York: Berkley Jam, 2009).
318 Kelly McClymer, *The Salem Witch Tryouts* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2006); McClymer, *Competition's A Witch* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2007); McClymer, *She's A Witch Girl* (New York: Simon Pulse, 2007).
319 Erik Brady, "Cheerleading in the USA: A Sport and an Industry," *USA Today*, April 26, 2002. The publisher of *American Cheerleader* expanded to include *American Cheerleader Junior* and at least six other spirit industry-related titles. Varsity Spirit bought *American Cheerleader* in January 2012. Ionna Opidee, "American Cheerleader Sold to Varsity Spirit Corp," January 26, 2012, http://www.foliomag.com/2012/american-cheerleader-sold-varsity-spirit-corp.
320 In 2004, the magazine put out two issues: Winter and Fall. The following year, it kept the seasonal dating but increased publication to quarterly: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. However, the Winter 2006 issue was followed by May/June 2006, July/August 2006, and so on, through January/February 2009, with the exception of one two-month period (March/April 2008). After the January/February 2009 issue, the magazine began dating its issues topically: Competition Issue 2010, Recreation Issue, Twisted Issue 2010, Holiday 2010, Recreation Issue 2011, Scholastics Issue 2011, Allstar/International Issue 2011.
321 "2010 Texas Cheerleader Magazine Media Kit," http://www.texascheerleadermagazine.com/pdf/tcm-mediakit2010_hires.pdf.

Although their audiences differ slightly within the larger world of cheer, these four titles do enjoy a certain amount of shared content. For instance, each magazine includes safety and instructional information. Topics vary from issue to issue; stunting is the focus of one issue while tumbling takes center stage in another (Figures 4.7 and 4.8).

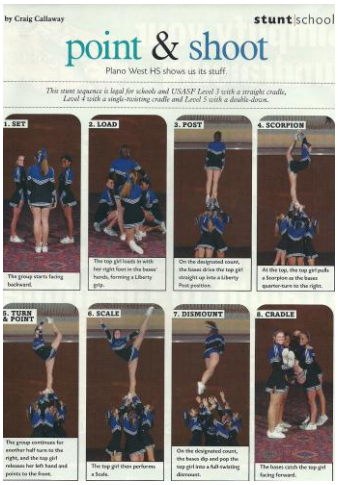


Figure 4.7 – *American Cheerleader* December 2010, Stunt School column

Figure 4.8 – *American Cheerleader* August 2005, Tumbling Tech column

Beyond instructional content, all of the magazines remain current on fashion and beauty trends, and that extends to cheer apparel. Articles about the newest uniform craze are

typical, but there are two less overt ways cheerleading magazines communicate popular styles: advertisements and product placement. *American Cheerleader*, *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*, *Cheer Coach and Advisor*, and *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* all subsist on advertising and their pages are filled with glossy photos of the latest cheer shoes, the most outrageous fundraising ideas, and other products that do not relate to cheerleading but that target girl cheerleaders (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9 – Tampax advertisement, from *American Cheerleader*, April 2011

The Tampax advertisement seen in Figure 4.9 may not provide instruction in cheerleading, but it certainly suggests that cheerleaders choose this type of feminine hygiene product over the alternative, and it directs consumers to the website BeingGirl, where they can find "menstruation information and advice for girls," including sections on "the period diaries" and "boy questions."[322]

In concert with advertising, editorial content suggests that cheerleading is a lifestyle and that material objects are an important part of one's cheerleader identity. The

[322] "Being Girl," http://www.beinggirl.com/.

American Cheerleader pictorial "School Savvy" (Figure 4.10) is a good example of editorial product placement.

Figure 4.10 – "School Savvy," *American Cheerleader* product placement

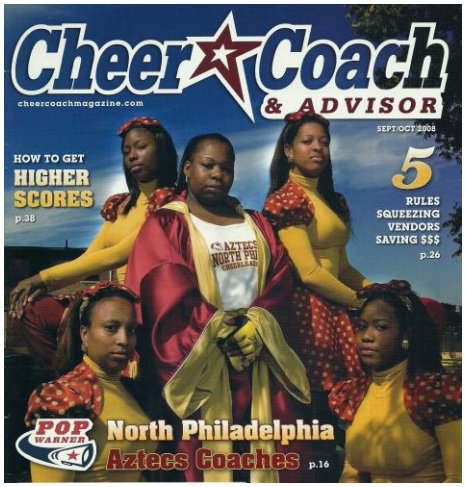
Appearing in the 2005 back to school issue, "School Savvy" offers recommendations on products to help cheerleaders "look sharp from head to toe when heading back to school," including shoes, jewelry and other accessories, and beauty products such as fragrance.[323] Product recommendations by way of editorial content support the consumerist ethos that material objects are integral to one's identity.

Each periodical employs an advice columnist, though there is little continuity the longer the run of the title. For instance, the February 2006 issue of *American Cheerleader* features "All-Star Advice," in which "eight cheerleaders answer your all-star cheer questions."[324] Five years later, in April 2011, actress and author Elizabeth Berkley shares advice on how to avoid jealousy in "Ask Elizabeth."[325] *Texas Cheerleader Magazine*'s "Ask Kelly" column, written by a licensed professional counselor, invites questions from

[323] *American Cheerleader*, August 2005.
[324] *American Cheerleader*, February 2006, 42-44.
[325] *American Cheerleader*, April 2011, 14.

cheerleaders and their family members. One column from the Summer 2009 issue addresses a question from a reader whose mother is incarcerated, another reader whose parents are divorcing due to her father's infidelity, and a mother of twin tweens who is unsure of the appropriate consequences she should use to discipline her children.[326] Advice columns afford single cheerleaders (or, in the case of "Ask Kelly," relatives of cheerleaders) the opportunity to express concern and receive counsel. It is one of the ways the magazines allow for cheerleaders' individuality.

The inclusion of cheerleader profiles, sometimes but not always of the cover models, is another way the magazines spotlight individuals. In the case of *Cheer Coach and Advisor*, all of the individuals showcased on the cover are also profiled in the pages of the magazine. They are industry professionals, such as the Pop Warner North Philadelphia Aztecs coaching staff (Figure 4.11) whose photo adorns the Sept/Oct 2008 issue.



[326] *Texas Cheerleader Magazine*, Summer 2009, 16.

Figure 4.11 – Sept/Oct 2008 issue of *Cheer Coach and Advisor* featuring the Pop Warner North Philadelphia Aztecs coaching staff, who are also profiled on pages 16-18 of the magazine.

As is the case with the five women pictured above, the industry professionals' cover shoot clothing and accessories are chosen to reflect their work as cheer coaches. Readers are to assume that the image portrayed on the cover is an accurate representation of the models' cheerleading personas. In this instance, the North Philadelphia Aztecs head coach wears gear more often associated with boxing (a t-shirt, training gloves, oversized satin robe), while her staff surrounds her in bodysuits with puffed sleeves, skirts, and bows. None of the women smile. The interior profile focuses on their squad's competitive success; the cover photo suggests the staff's strengths as trainers.

Inside Cheerleading Magazine and *American Cheerleader* both present occasional celebrities (Figure 4.12) who have a connection to cheerleading, but they typically use featured cheerleaders, "today's cheerleader" and the "cheerleader of the month" (Figure 4.13), respectively.

Figure 4.12 – Olympic gold medal winner Shawn Johnson on the May/June 2009 cover of *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*

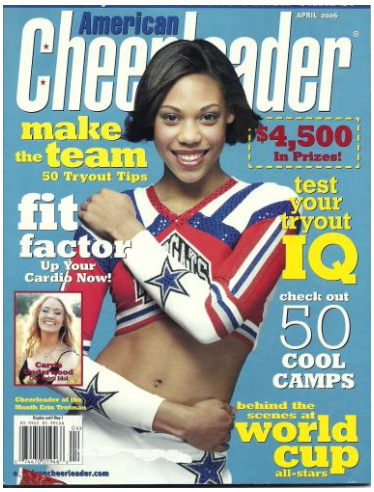
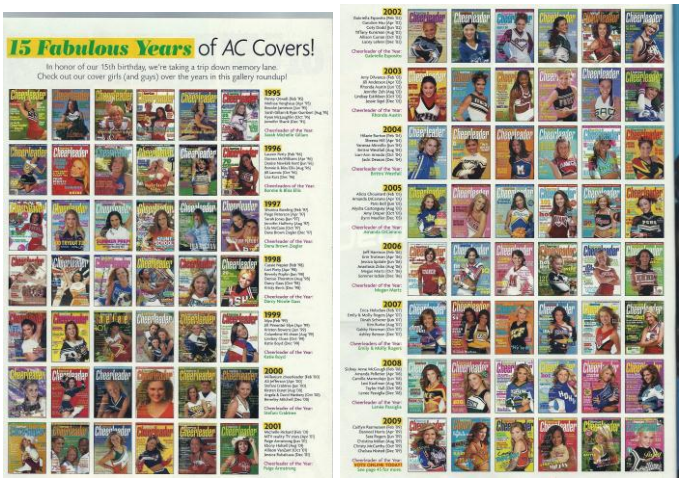


Figure 4.13 – *American Cheerleader* April 2006 Cheerleader of the Month Erin Trotman

This photographic preference for singularity visually highlights the individual, which is significant in an activity dependent on teamwork and group cohesion.

In fact, a content analysis of these magazine covers reveals an overwhelming emphasis on the individual cheerleader. I analyzed fifteen years of *American Cheerleader* covers (1995-2010, Figures 4.14 and 4.15), five years of *Inside Cheerleading Magazine* (twenty-eight issues beginning with its inception in 2004 and ending in 2009, Figure 4.16), and six years of *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* (twenty issues, from its first issue in 2004 to mid-2010, Figure 4.17).[327]

[327] I also analyzed the covers of *Cheer Coach and Advisor* beginning with its inaugural issue, as indicated earlier, but I do not include this in the content analysis here, as the cover models are industry professionals and not cheerleaders.



Figures 4.14 and 4.15 – *American Cheerleader* covers, 1995 – 2010

Figure 4.16 – *Inside Cheerleading Magazine* covers, June/July 2004 – July/Aug 2009

Figure 4.17 – *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* covers, Winter 2004/2005 – Spring/Summer 2010

In almost all cases, the models pose against solid backdrops. Rarely, graphics are added later.[328] *Inside Cheerleading Magazine* had the most group and action shots: of the twenty-eight issues total, fifteen individuals stood against solid backgrounds, four sets of groups or partners did the same, five individuals pose in the foreground of sporting events, and four photographs show actual cheering. None of the *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* or *American Cheerleader* cover models are active in this way. This allows for a heightened emphasis on the individual cheerleader.

There are far more female cheerleaders represented than male cheerleaders. *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* features one male cheerleader; *Inside Cheerleading Magazine* features two males individually and twelve total, accounting for group shots; *American Cheerleader*, by far the publication with the greatest number of sources, features ninety-nine females and six males, all but one of them pre-2006. The cover models are

[328] Occasionally, *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* superimposes graphics like snowflakes, stars, the outline of the state of Texas, or a dollar sign over the otherwise solid color backdrop.

overwhelmingly white. Of the sixty total individuals showcased on *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*, one is Latina and two are African American. *American Cheerleader* presents a total of seven African Americans on its fifteen years' worth of covers.

With few exceptions, cover models on all three publications wear cheer uniforms. This is another way in which the magazines communicate trends in uniforms and apparel. Compared to the other publications, the uniforms *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*'s cover models wear are tame. Some of them show exposed arms or midriffs, but not at the same time. In fact, anytime a midriff is exposed, the cheerleader's arms are covered and she is usually wearing a turtleneck. Legs are generally not shown. In comparison, the models on *Texas Cheerleader Magazine* often display exposed midriffs, short skirts, and cut-outs on their shoulders. The few male models who adorn the covers wear short sleeve regulation uniform shirts or t-shirts and pants.

According to cheer historian Mary Ellen Hanson, cheerleading uniforms evolved with the rise of organized squads. Male yell leaders originally wore street clothes, as they were spectators. Once organized cheer squads were common (by the early twentieth century), men wore casual attire in school colors that was often distinguished by school insignia. Such matching outfits helped focus the crowd's attention on the yell leaders. Male cheer uniforms remain largely the same as they did in the 1940s – pants with sweaters or collared shirts. More recently, men have begun to substitute shorts for pants or wear more casual warm-up suits, as do the (admittedly few) male cover models seen here. Hanson notes that male cheerleaders' use of shorts "introduces a measure of gender

parity, since women's cheer uniforms usually feature very short skirts."[329] But short skirts have not always been the norm for female cheerleaders.

As Hanson relates, women's uniforms followed a similar trajectory to that of women's fashion in the twentieth century. When women entered cheer, they also wore uniforms that resembled casual street attire; they paired sweaters or blouses with full or pleated skirts consistent with contemporary styles and lengths. Skirts remained at or below knee-length throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and the 1940s saw the addition of jumpers, satin culotte and jacket sets, princess-style dresses, and slacks for cold weather. Following the fashion trends of the time, cheerleading skirts lengthened substantially in the 1950s. Shorter skirts were common in women's golf and tennis as well as cheer by the 1960s, though, and the arrival of the miniskirt in the late 1960s "made cheerleading outfits look somewhat conservative by comparison."[330] Since that time, skirt lengths have varied only slightly. The most recent new trends in cheer uniforms are the introduction of flat-front skirts, sometimes with slits, and tops that include variations on the halter, with straps that go around the neck or cross in the back. Although some tops are midriff-bearing, they are more prevalent among older squads. Such trends have replaced the sleeveless shells and pleated skirts of the 1990s. As Figures 4.13 through 4.17 show, female cover models on *Texas Cheerleader Magazine*, *Inside Cheerleading Magazine*, and *American Cheerleader* exemplify uniform fashions. The fifteen years of *American Cheerleader* covers, especially, indicate the magazine's fidelity to the trajectory.

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[329] Mary Ellen Hanson, *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995), 84.
[330] Hanson, 84. Also see Susan K. Cahn, *Coming On Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The late-twentieth century saw the boom of the cheerleading industry, and the growth of cheerleading-specific periodicals is evidence of that. The publications endeavor to instruct and counsel on technical matters such as stunting, cheering, and tumbling, much like the grandfather of cheerleading Lawrence Herkimer's first handbook *The Complete Book of Cheerleading* did in 1975. They showcase individual cheerleaders in their use of single-model covers and interior profiles, which represents a significant departure from the larger emphasis on group dynamics so integral to cheer. Photographic representation continues to marginalize non-whites and non-females, and some cover photos show a preference for uniforms that highlight female cheerleaders' bodies, foreshadowing the tensions of the next chapter. Establishing these constellation points – a strong cheerleading industry built on instruction and the commercialization of a cheer lifestyle – allows us to better understand the lived experiences of cheerleaders and the tensions they grapple with as they construct their own cheerleader identities.

Chapter Five: Dallas and *Debbie*: Pornography and the Fetishization of the (Hetero)sexualized Professional Cheerleader

The contemporary cheerleading industry is a multifaceted, commodity-driven niche market broad enough to encompass almost all areas of its participants' lives yet so unique as to focus its efforts on one shared identity vector: participation in cheer. Chapter four described the cheerleading industry and explored its connection to youth cheerleaders. This chapter is also industry-specific; it details the rise of professional cheerleading, a variant of the activity largely restricted to women ages eighteen and above.[331] As noted in the introduction, assembling a map of cheerleading's place in American culture using the organizational method of constellation theory affords the ability to move metaphorically through space and time, without the limitations of chronology and genre. It is with this in mind that we return briefly to the middle of the twentieth century and move forward from there to continue our construction and examination of the cheerleader as cultural icon.

As I argue in this chapter, the rise of professional cheerleading in its current state ushered in a hyper-(hetero)sexualization of cheer that cannot be divorced from production technology and larger media culture. Professional cheerleaders operate within a virgin/whore dichotomy with the additional requirement that they are to be seen and not

[331] A vast majority of professional cheerleading squads are female-only; however, as of this writing, some squads offer positions to males who serve as stunt partners. An example of one such squad is the Baltimore Ravens. Their 2012 cheerleader requirements can be found online at http://www.baltimoreravens.com/People/cheer/Tryouts_Fact_Sheet.aspx. A Ravens squadmember (Molly Shattuck) also held the title of oldest NFL cheerleader at thirty-eight until recently when Cincinnati Bengals cheerleader Laura Vikmanis made the squad at forty and continued to cheer until at least forty-two. New Line Cinema bought the rights to her story. See "The NFL's Oldest Cheerleader Coming to the Big Screen," March 25, 2011, http://www.rttnews.com/ArticleView.aspx?id=1583897.

heard outside the restricted bounds of their governing organizations. They are seen and not heard in another sense as well. Unlike their sideline and competitive cheerleader counterparts, professional cheerleaders – a distinction that refers to the elite level of play the athletes for whom they "cheer" have reached – operate much like drill and dance teams. They perform choreographed routines set to music, usually during halftime and timeout intervals of games. Organized cheering is not expected of them. However, given the overwhelming popularity of professional sports and the media culture that feeds it, professional cheerleaders occupy an important space in American popular culture. Furthermore, the marketing and commercialization of professional cheerleaders – seen through swimsuit and lingerie calendars, among other products – strongly influences popular representations of the cheerleader in American culture. The larger effect of this overt (hetero)sexualization of the cheerleader is a lasting westernized standard of beauty and femininity, one that young female cheerleaders try to emulate, as we will see in the next chapter.

The most obvious example of the popular cultural representation of the hyper-(hetero)sexualized cheerleader occurs in adult film. Not long after the birth of professional cheerleading in its recognized form, a fetishization of the cheerleader took place commercially through the vehicle of pornography. While I do not want to devote an inordinate amount of space to a consideration of porn, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the existence of the cheerleader figure as a trope in adult film. Much like the professional cheerleader acts as a cultural touchstone, so does the representation of the cheerleader as a character in pornography. I do not address the larger feminist debate

surrounding the issue of pornography in general.[332] Instead, I recognize the repetitive, formulaic, and sensationalistic limitations of the genre, and I engage with film scholar Linda Williams's theory of excess in an in-depth treatment of one film.

There are numerous cheerleader-themed adult films. An incomplete list includes the following titles: *H.O.T.S.* (1979); *H.O.T.S. II* (1990); *Pom Pom Girls* (1976); *Satan's Cheerleaders* (1977); *Cheerleaders Beach Party* (1978); *The Naughty Cheerleader* (1970); *The Cheerleaders* (1973); *The Swinging Cheerleaders* (1974); *Revenge of the Cheerleaders* (1976); *Hollywood High 2* (1981); *Motorcycling Cheerleading Mamas* (1997); *Playboy's Cheerleaders* (1999); *Cheerleader Ninjas* (2002); *Hot Body Competition: Slam Bang Cheerleader Challenge* (2003); *Jim Holliday's Spring Break Sex Kittens* (2004); and *Ninja Cheerleaders* (2007). However, in this chapter I focus specifically on *Debbie Does Dallas* (1978), one of the earliest narrative pornographic films, and I argue that its narrative structure allows us to read it as transgressive when combined with the objectives of classical realist cinema: the goals of a single protagonist, one line of action, and definitive closure. A transgressive reading of *Debbie Does Dallas*, a film that owes much to the concurrent rise and popularity of professional cheerleading,

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[332] Anti-pornography feminist scholarship includes: Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Pornography Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Robert Jensen, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007); Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Robin Morgan, "Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape," in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: Morrow, 1980). Feminist scholarship in defense of pornography includes: Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove Press, 1996); Constance Penley, "Crackers and Whackers: The White Trashing of Porn," in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Duke University Press, 2004); and Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds., *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (Rutgers University Press, 1993).

furthers our understanding of the ways in which gender, power, and sexuality are refracted through the lens of American popular culture and on the bodies of female cheerleaders.

AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS: PROFESSIONAL CHEERLEADERS AND THE HYPER-(HETERO)SEXUALIZATION OF CHEER

Before we delve into pornographic characterizations of cheerleaders, let us first inspect some mainstream depictions in order to see how unresolved sexual tension and contradiction results in an expectation of heterosexuality. Popular representations of the contemporary American cheerleader are often conflicting. Adams and Bettis highlight these "cultural ambiguities" by providing examples from recent songs, films, and television shows: country singer Toby Keith uses the image of "the popular all-American girl whom all high school boys want to date" in the song "How Do You Like Me Now?"; the Academy Award-winning film *American Beauty* utilizes "a young, seemingly innocent yet sexy cheerleader" to fulfill the sexual fantasies of a middle-aged father; the Spartan cheerleaders in the recurring skit on the sketch comedy show *Saturday Night Live* represent "the inanity of shallow boosterism" in their quest for the perfect cheer; and the movies *Sugar & Spice* and *But I'm A Cheerleader* capitalize on their audiences' "preconceived notion that cheerleaders represent wholesomeness rather than criminal intent or lesbianism."[333] The contradictory nature of the cheerleader image stems from the many varied and conflicting notions of what cheerleaders symbolize. As Hanson

[333] Natalie Adams and Pamela Bettis, *Cheerleader! An American Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

suggests, "For every positive cheerleader stereotype, there is a negative stereotype which is equally entrenched in popular understanding."[334] For every fictional heterosexual girl-next-door in a cheerleading uniform, there is a perpetually perky, sexually promiscuous girl shaking her pom pons.

As the 1999 film *But I'm A Cheerleader* indicates, cheerleaders are expected to participate in a heteronormative culture, and they suffer severe consequences when they play with the definition of this binary.[335] Whereas male yell leaders of the 1920s were considered campus leaders and seen as those to emulate, contemporary male cheerleaders' sexuality is questioned.[336] And unlike female athletes, female cheerleaders do not often face questions regarding their sexual orientation or the "negative consequences of their activity being labeled as a 'lesbian haven.'"[337] Anything other than heterosexuality is unacceptable and, in fact, unthinkable. Scholar George Kurman highlights the assumed heterosexual status of the female cheerleader and her primary audience when he states, "She incarnates, in a word, a basic male-voyeuristic fantasy."[338]

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[334] Mary Ellen Hanson, *Go! Fight! Win! Cheerleading in American Culture* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1995), 103.

[335] *But I'm A Cheerleader*, directed by Jamie Babbit (Lions Gate Films, 1999). The premise of the film is as follows: a female cheerleader's parents and friends suspect she is gay and confront her with the "evidence" they have collected, such as pictures of women in her locker, posters of gay rock star Melissa Etheridge in her bedroom, and her disinterest in making out with her football player boyfriend. They send her to a sexual redirection camp in hopes that she will learn heterosexuality. She falls in love with a fellow female camper and her parents refuse to bring her home.

[336] Communication studies scholars Laura A. Grindstaff and Emily West's ethnographic research with coed college cheerleading squads addresses the intersection of gender and sexuality. See Grindstaff and West, "Cheerleading and the Gendered Politics of Sport," *Social Problems* 53, no. 4 (Nov. 2006): 500-518; "Hegemonic Masculinity on the Sidelines of Sport," *Sociology Compass* 5, no. 10 (Oct. 2011): 859-881.

[337] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 67.

[338] George Kurman, "What Does Girls' Cheerleading Communicate?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 2 (1986): 58.

The rise of professional cheerleading squads is largely responsible for this overt heterosexuality of the contemporary cheerleader.

In the early days of professional football, from the 1950s to the early 1970s, teams utilized local high school cheer squads, drill teams, and promotional groups consisting of both males and females for cheering and entertainment purposes. Then the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders were formed in 1972 and the landscape of professional cheerleading changed instantly. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders were the brainchild of then Cowboys general manager Tex Schramm, who endeavored to capitalize on the primarily male television audience by creating a "flashier, more entertaining" halftime show. To that end, he hired a choreographer to compose routines for an older, all-female dance group that would serve as "atmosphere producers."[339] The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders originally dressed in short white shorts, white go-go boots, and midriff tops that tie in the center. Their uniform is largely the same today. They rarely do any organized cheering; instead, they function mainly as sideline and halftime entertainment, performing kick routines during television timeouts, cheering and waving poms on-camera and as the players enter the stadium at the beginning of each half. Nonetheless, the group "soon came to symbolize the essence of professional cheerleading: glamour, sex appeal, celebrity, and merchandising success."[340] The evolving image of the professional cheerleader was always closely connected to the parent organization that created it.

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[339] James Ward Lee, "Legends In Their Own Time: The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders," in *Legendary Ladies of Texas*, ed. Francis Edward Abernathy (Dallas: E-Heart Press, 1981), 197.
[340] Hanson, 52.

Production technology evolved to include the use of "isolated cameras" that provided close-ups of players and fans. The popularity of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders increased substantially when a cheerleader winked at a camera during a close-up at the 1976 Super Bowl and that wink reached a television audience of seventy-five million viewers.[341] Also known as "honey shots,"[342] enthusiastic fan response to such provocative camera angles brought about a proliferation of imitation dance troupes throughout the National Football League (NFL).[343] By 1973, twenty-one of the NFL's twenty-six franchises employed similar groups of scantily clad women.[344] In 1979, forty-eight percent of America's viewing audience watched a made-for-television movie about the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders.[345] The original squad of Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders included only seven members; as quickly as 1981, NFL cheerleaders on various squads numbered 580.[346]

As sociologist Laurel Davis notes, the presumed gender of the audience affects both the onscreen portrayal of professional cheerleaders and the cheerleaders' own performances. "The assumption that the male audience is voyeuristically fixated on the female cheerleaders," Davis writes, "helps to structure the performances and presentation

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[341] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 74-75.
[342] The relationship of this term to the "money shot" of pornography should not be overlooked.
[343] Hanson, 53.
[344] Hanson, 52.
[345] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 75. The phenomenon also spread to basketball; the Laker Girls have been featured in a television movie as well. See Hanson, 55.
[346] Hanson, 55.

of cheerleaders."[347] Davis also underscores the camera operator's place in this scenario, as "the male view of a cameraman often helps to frame female cheerleaders as erotic objects."[348] John Berger's concept of the male gaze is also a factor in the construction of the cultural stereotype of the cheerleader as (hetero)sexualized object. Berger theorizes that women actually internalize that gaze: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves."[349] Cheerleaders, especially members of professional squads who regularly find themselves on national television, are objects of the male gaze of the audience and they internalize that gaze to then reflect the eroticized role back to their spectators.

Professional cheerleaders rarely do any organized cheering. Instead, they function primarily as time-out and halftime entertainment. They are also responsible for various promotional activities such as public appearances, advertising, and merchandising. They

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[347] Laurel R. Davis, "Male Cheerleaders and the Naturalization of Gender," in *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Michael A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books, 1990), 159.

[348] Davis, 159.

[349] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (1972; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 47. Following Berger, feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's work put the spectator in a masculine subject position that has also been criticized as heteronormative. See Mulvey's groundbreaking essay (written in 1973, originally published in *Screen* in 1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, ed. Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (New York: Longman, 1995), 321-332. Queer theorists have responded to Mulvey, saying her theory did not allow space for a non-heteronormative spectator. Mulvey wrote a follow-up piece in 1981, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by 'Duel in the Sun' (King Vidor, 1946)," *Framework* 15-17 (Summer 1981): 12-15. More recently, in her essay that opens the anthology *Reclaiming the Archive*, Mulvey accounts for the work of feminist film historians since the publication of her original article: "Without losing sight of those issues of gender, spectacle, and so on that characterized the first wave of feminist film theory, they have built up a more nuanced and shifting concept of spectatorship that leads directly to the question of audience." Mulvey cites Christine Gledhill and B. Ruby Rich as two such feminist film historians whose work complicates the male gaze in response to her textual approach. See Mulvey, "Unmasking the Gaze: Feminist Film Theory, History, and Film Studies," in *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*, ed. Vicki Callahan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 22.

are almost always called cheerleaders, even though "it would be more accurate to call them chorus girls or show girls," as Hanson suggests.[350] Nevertheless, professional cheerleaders are usually marketed "as sexual playmates who never play," and this image helps foster the inescapable dichotomy of the virgin and the whore, or the good girl and the bad girl. This tension between good and bad extends to publicity:

> For cheerleaders to maintain the sexual tensions that make them sexually provocative, they must not receive too much exposure, both literally and figuratively. They cannot be presented as overly sexual or they become associated with strippers and porn stars, rather than as the secretive, subtle fantasy.[351]

To combat negative publicity, most professional cheerleading organizations enforce strict codes of conduct. While their routines on the field may include sexually provocative moves, their behavior off the field must be beyond reproach. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders, for example, are prohibited from smoking, drinking in uniform, and dating football players.[352]

Beyond their roles as organization spokespeople, professional cheerleaders are to be seen and not heard, as one recent controversy makes clear. In a play during the game on Thanksgiving Day, 2011, Dallas Cowboys football player Jason Witten accidentally tackled cheerleader Melissa Kellerman. Neither was injured, and Kellerman took to the

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[350] Hanson, 60.

[351] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 78.

[352] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 133. In their jointly written memoir, sisters Suzette, Stephanie, and Sheri Scholz detail their years as Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders from 1978 to 1985. Forthcoming about drug use and dieting, the authors confirm the strict anti-fraternization policies that characterize the organization. See Scholz et al., *Deep in the Heart of Texas: Reflections of Former Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

social media website Twitter the next day, posting two messages described as "good-natured and innocuous," and "pretty much the perfect tweets: Clever, self-deprecating and a bit funny."[353] Nevertheless, they were the last tweets Kellerman posted. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders organization forced her to delete her account immediately following the second message. The organization, which began allowing cameras to record cheerleader auditions for its *Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making the Team* reality television show that airs on the Country Music Television (CMT) network in 2006, retains tight control over the franchise, and that includes its participants, their portrayals, and the messages they convey.

The urban legend of "The Promiscuous Cheerleader" is an expression of the erotic, sexualized image constructed of cheerleaders. According to sociologists Gary Alan Fine and Bruce Noel Johnson, the legend is as follows: "[It] tells of a girl who has sexual relations (often fellatio) with members of an athletic team. She becomes ill, sometimes while cheering at a game, and must be rushed to the hospital. There doctors pump her stomach, removing a miraculous amount of semen."[354] As the authors note, this legend "expresses a collective male fantasy of the innocent, yet sexually avaricious, woman. She is the girl-next-door who will succumb to the expression of male prowess."[355] The legend originated in the mid-1970s, not long after the rise of

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[353] Chris Chase, "Cowboys cheerleader knocked over by Witten forced off Twitter," *Yahoo! News Network*, November 26, 2011.

[354] Gary Alan Fine and Bruce Noel Johnson, "The Promiscuous Cheerleader: An Adolescent Male Belief Legend," in *Manufacturing Tales: Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends*, by Gary Alan Fine (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 60.

[355] Fine and Johnson, 61. The authors collected variations of the legend in 1977 in Minnesota and note similar reports of it in New York and Pennsylvania (p. 67 n. 9). My own research suggests that high school

professional cheerleading and its unapologetic attempt to exploit the sexuality of cheerleaders for the eager male audience. Indeed, a handful of adult films reproduce variations on this scene.[356]

Professional cheerleading's overt emphasis on (hetero)sexuality strongly influences popular representations of the cheerleader in American culture. The cheerleader has come to symbolize a westernized standard of beauty and femininity in America – a slender, fit, attractive, heterosexual woman. The merchandising efforts of professional sports are partly responsible for this characterization of cheerleaders. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders alone offer a swimsuit calendar, a deck of playing cards, and replicas of their uniform for both girls and women.[357] Known as "America's Sweethearts," the squad is also the subject of many videos and photos, mostly adult in content.[358] While there is limited evidence of cheerleaders described in homosocial, sensual language in the early twentieth century,[359] contemporary professional

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and college students in the 1990s in various parts of the country (California, Florida, and Massachusetts) also heard similar legends involving a cheerleader and an athletic team. In her book *Fast Girls*, Emily White describes a rumor she calls the "train job" that also involves one female and several males. See White, *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut* (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 51.

[356] For example, the basic premise of *The Cheerleaders* (1973, dir. Paul Glickler) is that a cheerleading squad will have sex with the opposing football team's players under the assumption that they will be too tired to play well.

[357] Dallas Cowboys Official Online Pro Shop, http://www.cowboysonlineproshop.com/.

[358] The Philadelphia Eagles (NFL) cheerleaders produced a video of their 2005-2006 lingerie calendar photo shoot, the first of its kind in the League. Their website, which is linked to the Eagles team site but warns of "mature content," boasts a 2012 swimsuit calendar app ("app" here is short for "application," meant as a digital download for smartphones), which they promote as the "first in the NFL" http://www.philadelphiaeagles.com/cheerleaders/swimsuit-calendar.html. Philadelphia (and its neighboring city Pittsburgh) is also home to a chain of strip clubs titled Cheerleaders.

[359] For an example of such language, see Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 74. At a time when cheerleaders would have been overwhelmingly male, a 1924 editorial in *The New York Times* notes, "A contemporary of Pericles, strolling into one of our football stadiums, would…delight in those lithe, white-sweatered and flannel-trousered youths in front of the bleachers, their mingled force and grace, their gestures at the same

cheerleading is largely responsible for the overwhelmingly sexual descriptions now familiar in the twenty-first century.

Although other portrayals of cheerleaders are prevalent – the trivial, inane booster and the wholesome girl-next-door – most depictions concentrate on the physicality and sexuality of women. There is some crossover, as this icon is fluid, but the stereotype of the cheerleader as a beautiful, heterosexual female is ingrained in American popular consciousness and pervades cultural representations of cheerleaders.

"SCORE ONE FOR DEBBIE": DEBBIE DOES DALLAS, NARRATIVE (CHEERLEADER) PORNOGRAPHY, AND TRANSGRESSIVE POSSIBILITY

The 1978 release of the iconic cheerleader pornographic film *Debbie Does Dallas* spurred a trilogy of events that, when all was said and done, would not only propel the tiny film into the spotlight but would allow it to become one of the top-five-grossing pornographic films of all time.[360] The film's art director, A.J. Cohen, attributes "the notoriety and the huge popularity of this miniscule little film that, by all means, should have fizzled away," to the title character's costuming.[361] Indeed, Debbie's cheerleading uniform (Figure 5.1) was so similar to those of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders that the NFL franchise initiated a lawsuit against the filmmakers. The financing for the film, which was shot entirely in New York, came from recognized members of organized crime. The film's producer, Mickey Zaffarano, came under investigation by the FBI once

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time hieratic and apparently jointless…And even an ancient Greek pulse would halt for a moment at that final upward leap of the young body, like a diver into the azure…"

[360] *Debbie Does Dallas Uncovered*, directed by Francis Hanly (Las Vegas, NV: Sundance Channel Home Entertainment, 2006).

[361] *Debbie Does Dallas Uncovered*.

it was determined that he and other mobsters were profiting as pornographers.[362] The sudden death of Zaffarano during the FBI's investigation and attempted arrest drew nationwide attention. Finally, the mysterious disappearance of Bambi Woods, the film's star, in the mid-1980s was the culmination of the chain of events that enabled what could have been a fly-by-night film to not only remain on the radar of adult film fans and critics but also to continue to spur sequels and remakes over thirty years after its debut.[363]

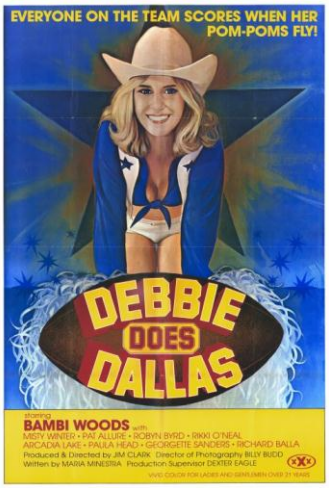

Figure 5.1 – *Debbie Does Dallas* movie poster (1978)

Written during the "golden age" of hard core[364] feature film,[365] *Debbie Does Dallas* was one of the earliest narrative porn films.[366] It also conforms to Carol Clover's

[362] The FBI initiated an investigation into the pornography industry at large upon the 1972 release and subsequent success of *Deep Throat*; ties to organized crime were found. See *Inside Deep Throat*, directed by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato (Los Angeles, CA: Imagine Entertainment, 2005).
[363] *Debbie Does Dallas: East vs. West* was released in 2003. It draws on the plot of *Bring It On* (2000) by proposing a cheer-off between urban and suburban squads, here presented as Latina v. Anglo. Other sequels and remakes include *Debbie Does Dallas 2, 3, 4,* and *99*, *Debbie Does Dallas: The Next Generation*, *Debbie Does Iowa*, *Debbie Goes to College*, *Debbie Does 'Em All*, *Night of the Living Debbies*, *Debbie Duz Dishes 1, 2,* and *3*, *Bang the Debbie Slowly*, *Debbie Does the Devil in Dallas*, and most recently 2007's *Debbie Does Dallas… Again*. In 2001, Susan L. Schwartz created a musical version of the film, *Debbie Does Dallas: The Musical*, and it was produced off-Broadway in 2002.
[364] The term "hard core" dates to the 1950s and was primarily used to construct a legal definition of pornography in the 1957 United States Supreme Court *Roth* decision. Following scholar David Andrews, I

standards for sensational film "body" genres.[367] As such, *Debbie* is both a narrative film with echoes of the classical realist style and is repetitive, formulaic, and spectacular.[368] Yet what if we also read it as transgressive? Yes, like much seventies-era pornography (and much adult film in general), *Debbie* – though written by a woman (Maria Minestra) – conforms to what film scholar Linda Williams labels "excess[ive]." However, its narrative structure allows us, as viewers, to read the text as more than what, upon first viewing, may seem like an anti-feminist skin flick. In her essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Williams reminds us that sensational film body genres "are often defined by their differences from the classical realist style of narrative cinema," the latter of which "have been characterized as efficient action-centered, goal-oriented linear narratives" that are also "driven by the desire of a single protagonist, involving one or two lines of action, and leading to definitive closure."[369] For, as Williams suggests, although gratuitous sex is often dismissed as unnecessary for anything other than excitement, "there may be some value in thinking about the form, function, and system of seemingly gratuitous excess" in pornography.[370] I argue that the value lies in combining the narrative structure of *Debbie Does Dallas* with the aforementioned objectives of

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take "hard core" to mean, "unsimulated sexual depictions." See Andrews, *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in Its Contexts* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 26.

[365] Eric Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16 MM Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature," in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 371. Schaefer defines the golden age of the feature-length hard core film as the early 1970s through the mid-1980s.

[366] For more on the genesis of narrative porn, see Schaefer.

[367] See Carol Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations* 20: 189, quoted in Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4: 4.

[368] Williams, 3.

[369] Williams, 3.

[370] Williams, 3.

classical realist cinema, particularly the drives of a single protagonist, one line of action, and a definitive closure.

The film opens on a shot of cheerleaders practicing their routines on the sidelines of a football field. They wear tight white midriff tops – sans bras – long white skirts, white bloomers, and white knee-high socks. The camera zooms in on one cheerleader as she bends over, stretching. Her bloomers are exposed and, as the thin white fabric covers little, so are her genitals. The squad discusses Debbie's recent invitation to try out for the Texas Cowgirls cheerleading squad (a thinly veiled version of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders). Debbie must finance her trip to Texas and her squadmates offer to help her raise the travel funds. They then decide to raise enough money so that the entire group can make the trip to watch Debbie audition for a place with the Cowgirls. As this conversation takes place, the cheerleaders walk to the locker room, undress, and shower. The camera pans the room, zooming in on each cheerleader's breasts individually.[371]

As a means of fundraising for their trip to Texas, Debbie and her fellow cheerleaders initially work part-time jobs. However, the (female) cheerleaders experience harassment at the hands of their (male) employers. For example, Debbie's boss at the sporting goods store suggests, "I'll give you ten dollars if you let me look at your tits." This offends her; after she rebuffs him and he begs her, she tells him, "You know we're all good girls," ostensibly implicating the rest of the cheerleading squad in her response. The dichotomy of the good girl and the bad girl or the virgin and the whore is not new to either representations of cheerleaders or portrayals of women in pornography. Certainly,

[371] *Debbie Does Dallas*, directed by Jim Clark (New York: School Day Films, 1978).

the very suggestion on the part of Debbie – "You know we're all good girls" – coupled with the debauchery that follows seems to capitalize on that very dichotomy. But it is the way in which the narrative unfolds that allows us to read the story as transgressive.

Following the exchange with her employer, Mr. Greenfield, Debbie returns to the locker room to prepare for another cheer practice. As the camera again pans cheerleaders' bodies in various stages of undress, one of the squadmembers says, "Well, girls, we're certainly not earning enough money to do what we wanna do" (by which she means fund the squad's trip to Texas). Other squadmembers proceed to complain about their futile attempts to avoid their own employers' prying hands, much like Debbie's. Debbie then confesses that she let Mr. Greenfield "kiss and suck" her breasts, and she explains how she made more money than the other women by doing so. It is at this point that Debbie suggests to the squad that they take control of the situation. When she encounters some resistance, she reminds her fellow cheerleaders that even if they behave as they do with their boyfriends, "we're all still virgins, right?" Debbie recognizes a demand and, along with the rest of the squad, capitalizes on it. Rather than continue to be fondled and harassed, the cheerleaders take control of the situation and begin to charge their employers, other men, and even women to touch them and engage in sexual activity with them as a means of fundraising their trip to Texas.

The film proceeds in true 1970s pornographic fashion, with scenes that, though slightly different with respect to subplot and characters, are highly repetitive and formulaic. Roberta, the cheerleader who works in a candle shop appropriately owned by Mr. and Mrs. Hardwick, calls her boyfriend while at work. During the conversation, she

begins to fondle her own breasts and nipples. Upon hanging up the phone, Roberta removes her shorts and masturbates, eventually employing a candle to do so. Her employers enter the store individually (Mrs. Hardwick finds Roberta first), lead her to a couch, and initiate a threesome. In similar fashion, two cheerleaders wash cars as a way of earning money. Inexplicably, the car owner is not home while the women complete this task, yet he returns just as the sky turns gray and rain begins to fall. Mr. Brady, the car/homeowner, invites the cheerleaders inside to change out of their wet clothes. After they accept his offer and are inside the house, they offer to do "anything else" for him. Mr. Brady inquires as to how much it would cost him to watch the two women undress. He gives them ten dollars for that and then gives them another twenty-five dollars in order to "kiss [them] all over." Eventually the three engage in oral and anal sex.

Library-worker Donna has not seen her football player boyfriend in quite some time because of her day job at the library and her "babysitting job" in the evenings. He finds her in the library stacks and tells her that he misses her and needs her. She succumbs to his wishes, perhaps recalling Debbie's initial suggestion for the cheerleaders to behave as they do with their boyfriends, and kneels in front of a row of books to pleasure him. As she rubs semen all over her face, Donna's boss, Mr. Biddle, happens upon them. In order to convince him not to tell her parents, Donna allows Mr. Biddle to give her "a good spanking." He asks her about the new company she and her cheerleader friends have started, inquiring about what kind of services they provide. Much like the cheerleaders who wash Mr. Brady's car, Donna reassures him that they provide "anything." "What I always wanted to do," says Mr. Biddle in an excited voice, "was pull

up your skirt and take down your pants and spank your bare bottom." Donna tells him that is acceptable and leaves the cost entirely up to him, in an attempt to profit from the interaction monetarily as well as persuade Mr. Biddle to forget about the earlier incident between her and her boyfriend.

Repetitive, formulaic, sensationalistic pornographic examples abound in *Debbie Does Dallas*. The preceding scenes are but three possibilities chosen to illustrate the way in which the narrative form of *Debbie* elides with the bodily excess of pornography to achieve specific objectives of classic realist cinema: a single protagonist (Debbie), involved in a goal-oriented line of action (fundraising a trip to Texas), culminating in definitive closure (Debbie's final act results in Mr. Greenfield funding the entire squad's trip to Texas).[372]

After much anticipation and upon Mr. Greenfield's request, Debbie finally wears her Texas Cowgirls uniform to work (never mind the fact that she has yet to travel to Texas in order to tryout for the Texas Cowgirls cheerleading squad). When she arrives at the sporting goods store she tells Mr. Greenfield she is "dressed as you wanted me." His voice comes over the store's public address system. He asks her to lock the doors and proceed to the dressing rooms, where he then appears costumed as a football player and chases Debbie around the store until he catches her. He states, "Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be captain of the football team, but I was too small. But I had one thing that

[372] The 1989 film *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders* offers a similar reading. The excesses are greater and the digressions less forgivable, but the basic plot is such that a cheer captain and her squad abduct a well-endowed superhero (Flesh Gordon, in a spoof of the 1930s science fiction series *Flash Gordon*) and dispatch him back to their home planet to fight a villain who has rendered all of their men impotent.

was big enough. […] I've always dreamed of being the quarterback and making love to the captain of the cheerleaders." He undresses her and fondles her breasts. She fellates him; the screen fades to black. The following words appear in quick succession: "TOUCHDOWN FOR MR. GREENFIELD" "SCORE ONE FOR DEBBIE." Both Mr. Greenfield and Debbie emerge victorious, as the final wording suggests.

In his study of stripper movies, popular culture scholar Jeffrey Brown reconsiders the male gaze and its relationship to performance and display. Though not categorically pornographic, the striptease films Brown discusses and cheerleader pornography share a narrative structure and an element of fetishization:

> The interesting thing about the narrative pattern is that the fetishization of these women is so obviously and directly linked to the punishment of the male voyeur and the vindication of the female object. […] The catalyst for the entire plot is men's obsessive looking at women on display. It is, at least on the surface, the traditional power relationship between the sexes cut to its most basic elements, but rather than portraying the voyeur as the bearer of power, the one in control, he is shown as pathetic."[373]

Like strippers, cheerleaders are performers. The power they hold as such demands a renegotiation of control. Debbie and her squadmates occupy a position of power by virtue of their status as cheerleaders, and they exploit that power to their advantage, thereby realigning the traditional anti-feminist narrative of adult film.

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[373] Jeffrey A. Brown, "If Looks Could Kill: Power, Revenge, and Stripper Movies," in *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011), 128.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights some of the tensions that surround cultural representations of cheerleaders and argues that the parallel 1970s rise of professional cheerleading in its current state and narrative adult film are largely responsible for those tensions. However, the conflicting notions of good and bad that professional cheerleaders embody speak to the often confusing ways gender and power operate. Much like the superheroines of chapter three, Debbie and her squadmates threaten existing power structures. Instead of accepting harassment and defeat, they identify weakness in their enemies and create success for themselves. Debbie and her fictional counterparts reflect the westernized standard of beauty and femininity – slender, fit, attractive, heterosexual, female – that professional cheerleading commoditized. As my ethnographic research detailed in the next chapter suggests, this standard is so far-reaching that young female cheerleaders try to emulate it in their public performances through their appearance and behavior.

Chapter Six: The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue Squad: An Ethnographic Study of Girls' Cheerleading

Through the vehicle of the cheerleader, we have seen the various ways gender and power are refracted through the lens of American popular culture. Chapters three and five, especially, showed us how power struggles play out on the bodies of (female) cheerleaders as well. Given the complicated history and fluid state of cheerleading in America and its overwhelming popularity among girls,[374] the question remains: what does contemporary cheerleading mean to its participants? Furthermore, what does it mean for young girls in the twenty-first century who cheer? Recognizing the construction of the cultural icon to this point and arguing that we cannot fully understand the current place of cheerleading in the United States without interrogating the ways girls practice it, this chapter offers a portrait of a particular type of twenty-first-century cheerleading through the lived experiences of girl cheerleaders. This twenty-first-century ethnographic fieldwork completes the constellation of cheer begun five chapters and one hundred fifty years ago.

In this chapter I detail the findings of my ethnographic study of girls' cheerleading, arguing that the squad I followed for a season was part of a larger youth sports program whose official curriculum endeavored to teach "life skills" such as teamwork and dedication but whose hidden curriculum privileges football over cheerleading. As the organization was gender-segregated, this resulted in a privileging of

[374] Of the approximately four million cheerleaders nationwide, ninety-five percent are female. See Taboada; Brady, "Cheerleading in the USA."

boys over girls. Beyond that, my research also suggests that these girls consciously performed a cultural stereotype of the cheerleader as the heterosexual standard of beauty and femininity as described in chapter five (and again below). In their appearance and behavior at practices compared to at games and competition, and in their responses to specific interview questions, the subjects construct the cultural icon they are in fact seeking to emulate.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND METHODOLOGIES OF STUDY

I conducted ethnographic research on the Mountain Springs Pop Warner Pee Wee Blue cheerleading squad through the summer and fall of 2004.[375] The squad was comprised of ten girls,[376] aged five to twelve.[377] Located on the outskirts of a midsize,

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[375] "Mountain Springs" is a pseudonym. "Pee Wee" is an age-specific designation standardized by the Pop Warner organization. I have added "Blue" to the end of the squad's name as a way of distinguishing between the Pee Wee squad I researched and a second Pee Wee squad in the same local Pop Warner organization. In reality, color names differentiate these two squads; I have merely changed the colors of both squads to prevent identification. All quotes attributed to participants are taken from interviews conducted during the fall 2004 football season, August – December, and all names have been changed in accordance with privacy policy. All quotes can be cited individually upon request.

[376] My sample is small, in that I focus in-depth on one squad, made up of ten girls. However, as John Honigmann notes, "a common culture is reflected in practically every person, event and artifact belonging to a common system." See Honigmann, "Sampling in Ethnographic Fieldwork," in *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*, ed. R. Burgess (London: Routledge, 1991), 79-90. In a similar vein, Jay Mechling addresses the usefulness of intensive case studies in his book *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth*: "My research and frequent conversations with people who have been Boy Scouts persuade me that both these things are true: there is a remarkable similarity in the Boy Scout experience across space and time, *and* the nature of the Boy Scout experience is considerably variable" (xxiii, emphasis in original). Mechling also says, "If we are to understand what it means for the average boy to be a Boy Scout, then we must look closely at the everyday details of that experience" (xx). It is with this in mind that I undertake a study of what it means for the average girl to be a cheerleader in the Pop Warner organization. See Mechling.

[377] The five-year-old was the team mascot, which meant that she could not participate in stunting or competition but wore the same uniform as the rest of the squad and cheered with them at football games. Of the remaining girls, one was nine years old, two were ten years old, one was eleven years old, and six were twelve years old. The mascot was in kindergarten, one of the girls was in third grade, two were in fifth

central Texas city, the squad was white and middle-class, broadly defined.[378] All of the participants lived in two-parent homes.[379] Eight of the ten participants had at least one sibling; two were only children. Of the eighteen adults who provided their education levels and occupations, the results are as follows: six of the eighteen, or thirty-three percent, received less than a Bachelor's degree (two were high school graduates, two had Associate's degrees, and two had attended some college); ten of the eighteen, or fifty-five percent, received a Bachelor's degree; and two of the eighteen, or eleven percent, received graduate degrees.[380] In terms of their occupations, eleven of the eighteen, or sixty-one percent, were employed in professional or managerial positions; three of the eighteen, or seventeen percent, were small business owners; two of the eighteen, or eleven percent, were employed in the service sector; and two of the eighteen, or eleven percent, were stay-at-home moms.[381]

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grade, five were in sixth grade, and one was in seventh grade. With the exception of the mascot, all nine of the girls cheered for Pop Warner the previous year, though not necessarily on the same squad as each other.

[378] For a discussion of middle-class status, see Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking, 1998). Wolfe's definition is as follows: "while the economic definitions of middle-class status shift all the time, what tends not to change are the moral and cultural meanings of middle-class life. Unlike being poor, being middle class means earning enough to have some choice about where and how to live; middle-class people strive to practice a sense of personal responsibility by owning as much of their home as possible and by protecting themselves as best they can from the whims of employers. Unlike being rich, to be middle class is to believe that what one has achieved is due not solely to family advantage […] but to one's own hard work and efforts. We are best off thinking of middle-class status as […] a cluster of attitudes, beliefs, practices, and lifestyles that defines what it means to live in a way not too poor to be considered dependent on others and not too rich to be so luxuriously ostentatious that one loses touch with common sense" (2-3).

[379] Two of these families included one biological parent and one stepparent.

[380] This differs slightly from Wolfe's own research, in that his respondents were more likely to have less than a college education (forty-one percent), less likely to have a Bachelor's degree (thirty percent), and more likely to have a graduate degree (twenty-six percent). See Wolfe, 28.

[381] These figures differ significantly from Wolfe's findings. Not only were the occupations of his respondents more varied, of those common occupations, more of my respondents were professionals or managers, business owners, and stay-at-home moms, and fewer were in the service sector. See Wolfe, 28.

The Mountain Springs cheer registration fee was eighty dollars per participant for the 2004 season. Registration fees do not include the cost of uniforms or accessories; cheerleaders (and football players) are responsible for supplying their own uniforms and any accessories. For the 2004 season, the total cost of a Mountain Springs cheer uniform and all accessories, including shoes, was two hundred seventeen dollars.[382] When asked to share the approximate cost of Pop Warner cheering, parents estimated anywhere from one hundred dollars to "less than five hundred dollars." One mother responded that Pop Warner cheering was "very reasonable," whereas another mother thought it was "too much," and yet another, whose daughter did not participate in competition, said, "It's expensive. With the uniform and all the expenses, it's about three hundred dollars. For cheering at eight games, that's expensive." These costs do not include the additional expense of gymnastics and cheerleading classes, in which most of the girls participated. The classes could cost up to fifteen dollars per hour of group instruction, and the girls attended classes at least once a week, if not twice.

My primary methodologies were participant observation and individual interviews.[383] I attended twenty-five events from mid-July to the end of November, 2004, including one pre-season cheer committee meeting, one cheer clinic, fourteen

[382] This figure includes the following: skirt, top, bodysuit, bloomers, shoes, hair ribbon, and poms. This figure does not include any incidental expenses parents may have incurred such as entrance fees to the cheer competition or the cost of providing snacks for the cheerleaders and/or football players after games.
[383] I also had access to all emails sent between the cheer co-coordinators and coaches and those sent by the co-coordinator, also a coach, to the parents of her own squadmembers. I printed all of the emails I received and consider them data in much the same way my field notes are data.

cheerleading practices,[384] six football games, two squad parties, and one local cheer competition. I employed a field journal and took notes during and immediately following these events. I conducted a total of twenty-three individual interviews with nine cheerleaders, ten parents, three coaches, and one cheer co-coordinator. I digitally recorded and then transcribed all interviews. All participants (parents and cheerleaders) signed consent forms prior to their interviews, which allowed me unmediated access to all squad activities. Finally, I employed one less traditional methodology: I gave each of the ten girls a disposable camera and asked them to take pictures of the things and people that were important to them.[385]

I came to this project with what ethnographer Jay Mechling labels "the mixed strengths and weaknesses of the insider."[386] Due to my cheerleading past, I was already familiar with much of the terminology and practices of the activity. I was thus able to skip ahead on the learning curve in a way that other researchers less familiar with cheerleading may not have been. I was also readily accepted into the world of this particular cheer organization because of my own cheerleading experiences; I believe this had a tremendous impact on the way the cheerleaders, their parents, and coaches treated

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[384] The Mountain Springs cheerleaders began practicing twice a week, for an hour-and-a-half at a time, the first week in August. They reduced the practices to two hours once a week after school began in late August. When asked to share the approximate amount of time they spent on Pop Warner cheering each week, including practices and games, parents estimated anywhere from three to eight hours. One mother determined her estimate of six hours a week to be "minimal." Another mother, whose son plays football in the Mountain Springs Pop Warner organization, noted that cheerleading takes up less than half the amount of time as football. While her daughter has practice for an hour once a week and then cheers at the game, her son practices for two hours twice a week and then has to be at the field at least an hour before the game starts each week.

[385] This idea comes from Alison Clark's research with two-, three-, and four-year-olds. See Clark, "The Mosaic Approach and Research with Young Children," in *The Reality of Research with Children and Young People*, ed. Vicky Lewis, et al. (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 142-161.

[386] Mechling, xxi.

me. However, I was always an outsider because of my status as a researcher. Despite my knowledge of cheering, I was not a coach. I was also not the parent of a cheerleader, and my inability to fully conform to either of these roles, the only two possibilities for adults in the Pop Warner structure, left me vulnerable to outsider status.[387] Perhaps because my cheerleading experience was evident, the girls were not suspicious of me and were usually very open in my presence and in my conversations with them. The adults, parents and coaches, treated me as a peer; they were uninhibited in their conversations at practices and at games and were always forthcoming and generally interested in my research and thoughts on the squad. Often, adults whose children cheered on other squads mistook me for a parent or coach. While I was always cognizant of my researcher status, I think my ability to blend in afforded me greater access to the inner workings of the squad and the larger governing body within which it operated.

POP WARNER LITTLE SCHOLARS, INC.

As the Pop Warner organization informs the activities and behaviors of the Mountain Springs cheerleaders, some background is helpful in understanding the structure of the squad and its specific events. Joseph T. Tomlin formed a four-team Junior Football Conference in northeastern Philadelphia in 1929, in response to local factory owners' complaints of teenage vandalism; Tomlin intended to offer the offenders (all

[387] I often embodied one or the other of these positions for both the girls and their parents, though. The cheerleaders treated me as an authority figure in that they would ask my permission to leave the group – to go to the water fountain or the restroom, for example. I invariably referred them to the coach on such occasions.

boys) recreational opportunities on the playing field and thus keep them out of trouble. In 1934 the organization was renamed after legendary football coach Glenn Scobie "Pop" Warner, who promoted the program as an excellent athletic and character-building opportunity for youth. The organization experienced a decline in membership during and as a result of World War II, but rebounded to include over 3,000 teams across the country by the end of the 1960s. The Pop Warner program expanded to include cheerleading and dance teams in the 1970s, followed by flag football in 1983. The first set of rules for Pop Warner Cheerleading was published in 1985, and the National Cheerleading Competition began in 1988. The Pop Warner Super Bowl and the National Cheerleading Championships have been held at Disney's MGM Studios in Orlando, Florida, since 1995. In 2002, Pop Warner boasted almost 7,000 football teams and 4,800 cheerleading and dance squads in forty-one states and several countries around the world, totaling over 375,000 participants aged five to sixteen.[388]

Pop Warner is the largest youth football, cheer, and dance program in America and the only program that requires participants to maintain academic standards. According to the *2004 Rule Book*,

> The mission of Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc.[,] is to enable children to benefit from participation in team sports and activities in a safe and structured environment. Through this active participation, Pop Warner programs teach

[388] Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., "History," http://www.popwarner.com/history/pop.asp?lable=history.

> fundamental values, skills, and knowledge that children will use throughout their lives.[389]

The stated objectives of Pop Warner are threefold: "To encourage and increase youth participation in football, cheerleading and dance"; "To ensure a safe and positive playing environment for all participants"; and "To instill life-long values of teamwork, dedication and a superior work ethic in the classroom and on the playing field."[390] To those ends, Pop Warner applies "Positive Experiences," which prohibit tryouts and roster cutting but include a mandatory play rule to give everyone playing time, an allowance for on-field coaching at the younger levels, and individual awards only for academic achievements. The organization does not keep track of individual statistics and only rewards the athletic accomplishments of teams "to reinforce the importance of teamwork."[391] However, over 3,500 individual football players and cheerleaders are named All-American Scholars each year, and the organization has awarded over $250,000 in college scholarships.[392]

"LIFE SKILLS" ON THE SIDELINES: THE OFFICIAL AND HIDDEN CURRICULA OF MOUNTAIN SPRINGS CHEERLEADING

The Mountain Springs Pop Warner association, in accordance with the national Pop Warner organization, endeavors to "enable children to benefit from participation in team sports and activities in a safe and structured environment" and to "teach

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389 Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., *2004 Rule Book* (Langhorne, PA: 2004), 11.
390 Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., "About Us," http://www.popwarner.com/aboutus/mission.asp?lable=mission.
391 Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., "Football Overview," http://www.popwarner.com/football/pop.asp.
392 Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., "Pop Warner Timeline," http://www.popwarner.com/history/timeline.asp?lable=timeline.

fundamental values, skills and knowledge that children will use throughout their lives."[393] Their efforts to satisfy these objectives constitute what I refer to as the official curriculum of the program. However, there is also an unofficial or hidden curriculum of the Mountain Springs Pop Warner association that results in a privileging of football over cheerleading and, therefore, boys over girls.[394]

Officially, according to Mountain Springs cheer co-coordinator Linda, the program is about much more than football and cheerleading:

> I believe that exposing kids at an early age to the terms and rules of cheer and football help them achieve more as they mature, in whatever they choose to pursue, because we are not just teaching them cheer and football. We are teaching them how to be leaders, how to succeed, not to give up, be your best, support your teammates – win or lose, how to get along with everyone, how to accept defeat, how to graciously accept victory. These are life skills and [are] necessary to help them grow into healthy adults.

As the co-coordinator of the Mountain Springs cheer organization, a member of the governing board of the Mountain Springs Pop Warner association, and the coach of a cheer squad, Linda's intentions are part of the official curriculum for Mountain Springs participants. The Mountain Springs program is structured by adults – largely parents – for (their) children. Thus, it provides an extracurricular opportunity for further instruction

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[393] Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., *2004 Rule Book*, 11.

[394] I use the term "hidden curriculum" to refer to those policies and procedures that, intentional or not, are unacknowledged by the parent volunteers who structure the organization. The adults involved may or may not be aware of this hidden curriculum, and I do not speculate as to their awareness or intentions.

and is an example of what psychologists Jacquelynne Eccles and Bonnie Barber define as "constructive leisure."[395]

Constructive leisure allows for "more beneficial developmental outcomes" than its counterpart, "relaxed leisure," because constructive leisure offers participants the following opportunities:

> (a) to acquire and practice specific social, physical, and intellectual skills that may be useful in a wide variety of settings; (b) to contribute to the well-being of one's community and to develop a sense of agency as a member of one's community; (c) to belong to a socially recognized and valued group; (d) to establish supportive social networks of both peers and adults that can help one in both the present and the future; and (e) to experience and deal with challenges.[396]

Eccles and Barber note the positive results of participation in constructive leisure beyond developmental factors, such as lower incidence of school dropout, substance use, and criminal offense. They also link participation in extracurricular activities to higher rates of college attendance, grade point averages, and self-concept.[397] The potential benefits of participation in constructive leisure opportunities such as the Mountain Springs Pop Warner organization, then, are both immediate, like the acquisition of skills and a sense of belonging, and long-term, like future educational aspirations.

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[395] Jacquelynne S. Eccles and Bonnie L. Barber, "Student Council, Volunteering, Basketball, or Marching Band: What Kind of Extracurricular Involvement Matters?" *Journal of Adolescent Research* 14, no. 1 (1999): 10-43.
[396] Eccles and Barber, 11-12.
[397] Eccles and Barber, 12.

Sociologists Patricia Adler and Peter Adler studied constructive leisure activities and found that, "as a result [of increasing extracurricular involvement], afterschool activities have become one of the most salient features of many families' childrearing experience and are instrumental in defining the developing identities of participating youth."[398] Adler and Adler distinguish between the constructive leisure opportunities Eccles and Barber focus on, which include school-sponsored activities, and those afterschool options unaffiliated with formal education. They found that adult-structured activities such as the Mountain Springs Pop Warner association are powerful socializing agents for middle-class families, as they "encourage professionalization and specialization" and assume "an organization framework that encompasses an implicit ascension into the ladder of adult, corporate-style norms, values, and structures."[399] A consequence of this adult-dominated focus on recreational activities as instruments of socialization is a shift from child-directed play to work. Donna, the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad coach, emphasized this shift in her discussion of the squad's participation in the local cheer competition:[400] "I don't want them to hate it. I don't want

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[398] Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, "Social Reproduction and the Corporate Other: The Institutionalization of Afterschool Activities," *Sociological Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1994): 309.
[399] Adler and Adler, 324.
[400] There are two types of Pop Warner cheer squads: Traditional and Year-Round. Traditional squads are active from August 1st to December 31st, whereas Year-Round squads are active from January 1st to July 31st and then join their corresponding Traditional squads for football season. While Year-Round squads must take part in at least one competition during the year-round season, the Pop Warner Little Scholars Spirit Championships consist of Traditional squads only. Competition routines are no longer than two minutes and thirty seconds and consist of a combination of cheering, tumbling, stunting, and dancing. Impartial judges score squads on a 100-point scale in five major categories: Projection (Voice, Expression, Showmanship, Spirit); Fundamentals (Motion, Technique, Jumps, Tumbling, Partner Stunts/Pyramids); Dance/Choreography (Variety, Flow of Routine, Appropriateness of Music); Team Precision (Precision of Motions, Timing, Formations, Spacing, Transitions, Degree of Difficulty); and Overall Appeal (Overall Performance, Execution, Creativity, Crowd Appeal). Each league holds its own championship competition and the top two squads in each small and large category – Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced – move on

them to be happy when it's over, but I also don't want to let them think that it's easy and it's just totally for fun and it's not going to be hard work, either."

While some parents reported that their daughters still enjoyed cheering and would probably participate again the following year, some expressed concern that the squad's participation in the cheer competition and the increased emphasis on perfection that entailed had dampened the girls' enjoyment. One mother, whose daughter Amanda cheered on the same squad the previous year, said Amanda "didn't enjoy it as much this year." Amanda thought she might cheer again in the future, possibly in high school, but would not re-enroll for a third season with the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad. Another cheerleader, whose mother said her daughter was "not as much into it [as last year and] doesn't really feel too connected with the others," reported that she looked forward to trying out for the high school dance team and would probably not cheer again. For these girls, at least, cheerleading had become more work than play.

It is difficult to speculate as to exactly why these particular girls experienced less enjoyment during the 2004 season than they had the previous year, especially given the squad's participation in the cheer competition both years. However, Donna's comments regarding "hard work" suggest a heightened focus on placing higher than they did before. She commented, "I'd push them, but probably not as much as I do," if they were not competing. Although she acknowledged competing "might be too much pressure for the age group that they're in," Donna also admitted, "I want them to be perfect so that we can

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to regional competition. The same process determines which squads advance from regional competition to the national competition. The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad competed in the 2004 League competition but placed third and did not advance to regional competition.

do better than we did last year." The increased emphasis Donna placed on perfection with respect to the squad's competition routine, coupled with her own recognition that perfection involved "work[ing] as hard as we can," contributed to a shift from an activity of play to one of work.

When parents serve as coaches and structure the goals of extracurricular activities, the potential exists for them to become invested in the squad or team's success, often to the point that they obscure the original intentions of the activity. Donna's focus on perfection is an example of this. Mike, the assistant coach of the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad and the only male cheer coach in the Mountain Springs organization, highlighted this tendency when asked about the gender dynamics of his participation: "I think that dads don't want to do this. I think they'd rather coach football. They're not secure enough to realize it doesn't really matter, it's not about them; it's about the kids." Mike volunteered to serve as assistant coach not out of his own desire to do so but because the squad would not be certified to cheer without an assistant coach. When asked why he decided to coach, Mike responded, "Because my daughter needed somebody to be an assistant coach for her team. That's why I did it." Despite his time-intensive job as the owner/operator of three businesses, and even though his wife was also active with their daughter's squad, attending some of the practices and all of the games as well as the cheer competition, Mike volunteered to coach because his daughter would not have been able to cheer on this squad without an assistant coach, his ego or personal preferences notwithstanding.

Cheer co-coordinator Linda expressed a similar opinion regarding parental involvement:

> I believe that as an association [Mountain Springs], including some of the cheer coaches, need[s] to refocus and remember that this association was formed for the children of our area [and] not their "one child." The politics and the "daddy ball" and "mama cheer" need to stop. This is about 260 little men and 43 little ladies, not just the coaches and their sons and daughters or the "status" of being a coach or board member. [It is about] how can we as an association focus on ALL the children in our area to help them succeed.[401]

Linda's realization that some coaches explicitly favor their own children speaks directly to one Mountain Springs mother's observations about her daughter's experience on the Pee Wee Blue squad. When asked if she had any regrets about her daughter's participation, the mother responded, "No, my only problem with being involved with volunteer coaching is that if you are not a coach your child doesn't get the key positions as [does] the coach's child." She added, "This has been my experience in all youth programs." My observations of the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad corroborate this mother's complaint, in that her daughter was always placed in the back row for the competition routine and Donna's daughter took center stage. Two factors come into play when blocking the girls in competition formation, however: ability and height. Donna's

[401] Linda shared her comments with me in an email, and she emphasized the word "all" by using capital letters. Linda's incongruent use of the terms "men" and "ladies" with respect to the football players and cheerleaders further suggests that the programs privilege boys over girls. These terms also evoke moral and behavioral expectations that inappropriately age the participants.

daughter was one of the better cheerleaders, and the girl whose mother alleged favoritism was the tallest girl on the squad, which could account for her placement in the back row.

In concert with the larger regional and national arms of the organizations, the parent volunteers are responsible for the official curriculum of the Mountain Springs Pop Warner cheer program. As Linda emphasized in the remarks that began this section, the Mountain Springs participants learn "life skills [that are] necessary to help them grow into healthy adults." Adults structure this particular constructive leisure opportunity, though, and while kids' involvement offers them both short- and long-term benefits, the activity can shift from play to work. A correlative effect of this adult-directed shift is parental investment in the kids' success, which can eclipse the positive consequences and valuable lessons of involvement.

POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF CHEERLEADING

In their 2003 study of cheerleading, Natalie Adams and Pamela Bettis found that employers often seek out former cheerleaders because certain traits acquired through cheerleading translate into skills for employment. Of those traits, Adams and Bettis list the following: "Learning to speak in front of a crowd, learning how to overcome obstacles, fighting hard for what you want, leading others, and portraying a positive attitude (even when you don't feel so perky on the inside)."[402] A 2005 *New York Times* article reported that pharmaceutical companies actively recruit former cheerleaders to

[402] Natalie Guice Adams and Pamela J. Bettis, *Cheerleader! An American Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 125.

serve as drug sales representatives.[403] Many of the abilities that attract employers are remarkably similar to the less tangible skills Mountain Springs parents listed as those their daughters learned through cheering. While one mother found that her daughter learned "some good form" and one father cited "eye-hand coordination" as a benefit, most parents shared less tangible lessons such as self-confidence, teamwork, and discipline.

Parents most often cited a nebulous form of teamwork as the skill cheerleading conveyed. One mother found her daughter learned "how to work well with a group of girls," while two mentioned their daughters "learned to do a team sport." One mother listed "the team concept" as something her daughter learned, and two cited "being part of a team." Although one mother listed "teamwork," another found that while she "was hoping" her daughter would learn "team building skills," in actuality "she learned more about catty behavior." For two mothers, teamwork provided a way to counteract their daughters' dominant personalities. One mother expressed this sentiment in the following manner:

> [My daughter is] very strong, opinionated, a little bit bossy, and I think she's learning to do a team sport, which is really good for her because she likes to do her own thing and she's learning that it has to be a team effort. She still likes

[403] According to the University of Kentucky cheerleading advisor, the company recruiters "don't ask what the [cheerleader's] major is. Proven cheerleading skills suffice." As a result, one enterprising Varsity Brands senior staffer formed the employment firm Spirited Sales Leaders to facilitate the cheerleader-employer connection (http://www.spiritedsales.com). Stephanie Saul, "Gimme an Rx! Cheerleaders Pep Up Drug Sales," *The New York Times*, November 28, 2005.

things her way, but I think she's realizing that things can't always be the way you want.

Another mother suggested cheerleading helped her daughter "realized that she's not always going to be the leader, she's not always going to be the one that's in charge, [making] all the decisions." Cheerleading had taught her "to keep her mouth shut" (ironic given its emphasis on vocal projection).

Teamwork is an essential component of cheerleading, especially when stunts and pyramid-building are involved. The concept of stunting is predicated solely upon teamwork, not only for the quality of execution but also for safety. Quite simply, one cannot hoist a girl into the air without also trusting that she will be caught. Teamwork is fundamental to the very notion of precise motions and sharp words as well – the basic building blocks of cheerleading. How can the crowd follow a squad if each cheerleader is moving and yelling at her own pace? One Mountain Springs coach attributed increased teamwork to her squad's participation in the cheer competition: "I believe the girls become more focused on the team rather than themselves as we continue to move closer to the competition. They begin to help one another with the routine and give each other feedback and tips."

Two weeks prior to the local cheer competition, the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad received private instruction from the owner of a cheerleading training facility. In preparation for the impending competition, the gym owner, who had coached several successful all-star cheer squads, observed the squad and critiqued its performance. He asked one cheerleader why she had omitted some of the more difficult moves and,

dissatisfied with her answer that she had not felt like doing them, emphasized the team component of cheer: "There is not an 'I' in team. This is not an individual sport. You cannot pick and choose what you do or don't do." Teamwork is particularly important in a competition setting, as judges score squads on their precision and timing, hence the heightened focus on group cohesion in preparation for competition.

Four mothers listed self-confidence as a benefit of their daughters' cheerleading experience. One mother found that cheering gave her daughter "a lot of confidence to put herself out there. She isn't that kind of person by nature. She was the one that was really an observer [and] this has given her a lot of confidence." Another mother noted of her own child, "I think she's overcoming shyness by being able to perform in front of a group of people." The stepmother of the five-year-old mascot also cited self-confidence, "especially being a mascot on a team with [older girls.]"

The coach devoted the last five minutes of each practice to a Positive Reinforcement Circle, in which the girls sat cross-legged, knees touching. Each one took a turn and said something complimentary either about herself or a teammate. The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue coach instituted this activity so that each girl left practice feeling good about herself. According to Donna, the Circles were "a very important thing to do to keep your team focused on each other and to make it a team." While the Circles at times deteriorated into statements beginning with "My favorite part [of practice] was," rather than positive reinforcement, the girls often used the activity to compliment each other on that day's performance. This sometimes took a group form, as one comment towards the beginning of the season reflects: "I like that we all learned

those cheers so quickly." Most often, the girls praised one another's individual efforts. In one instance, Elizabeth complimented Valerie on her energetic, spontaneous spiriting after each cheer they practiced. When the cheer was over, Valerie would improvise, yelling "Go Tigers!" or "You're number one!" while jumping up and down or tumbling. The girls were expected to do this at football games, but Valerie took the initiative to do it at practice as well and her teammate verbally rewarded her efforts.

The coach also used the Positive Reinforcement Circles to offer feedback. She complimented the squad on learning the competition routine quickly at one practice, and at another she thanked them for "working really hard" and "pulling your weight." Although the Positive Reinforcement Circles occupied only a small amount of the squad's practice time, their strategic placement at the end of each practice helped to promote self-confidence in each cheerleader and served to counteract exhaustion and often frustration after an intense, two-hour practice. Listening to their teammates' positive reinforcement reminded the girls of why they enjoyed cheering.

Four parents cited discipline as a positive consequence of their daughters' cheer involvement. One father suggested, "Just to come [to practice] is a discipline, so she's more disciplined about that." Two mothers stressed the importance of making a commitment and sticking with it, and one mother claimed her daughter had learned perseverance through cheerleading. Parents are largely responsible for holding their daughters accountable to the commitment of cheerleading, but the coach's mandatory practice rule also encouraged dedication. If a girl missed practice, she was not allowed to cheer at that week's game. For those girls who competed with the squad, missing more

than three practices over the course of the season resulted in removal from the competition squad. In this way, the girls learned they must put in the hard work at practice in order to cheer at games, and that dedication to one's team is most important.

Although only two mothers listed respect and responsibility as byproducts of the Mountain Springs cheer experience, the coach emphasized both. Following the first football game, during which the girls criticized and corrected each other, Donna stressed the importance of respecting and supporting one another. She reminded the girls that they were not to correct each other and told them, "I will not tolerate criticism. You will support each other one hundred percent." She also added a dose of humility: "We all screw up. Every single one of you screw[s] up. Not one of you is perfect. You are all good, but not one of you is great. We all have a lot of work to do." She then implemented the rule that any negative criticism at games would result in the offending cheerleader sitting out the rest of the game. Only one squad member – the coach's daughter – was subject to this penalty throughout the remainder of the season.

As coach of the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad, Donna placed individual responsibility on the cheerleaders themselves rather than their parents. If a girl was going to miss a practice session or football game, it was her responsibility to call the coach prior to her absence. It was also her responsibility to contact someone after the missed session to makeup what she missed. This could involve learning new cheers or instructions for the upcoming game. One of the squad members did not wear her cheer shoes to one of the first practices of the season and when questioned about it responded

that her mother forgot to bring them. Donna replied, "It's not your mom's responsibility to remember your shoes. You cannot come to practice without your shoes."

Along with placing individual responsibility on the girls to remember their equipment and notify her of an impending absence, Donna implemented the election of a captain each week. The captain was responsible for calling (i.e. starting) the cheers and keeping the squad focused during that week's game. Voting was anonymous, and each squad member had to serve as captain once before anyone could be re-elected. In the case of a tie, the two (or more) girls with the same amount of votes each performed a cheer of her choosing for the rest of the squad. An anonymous run-off election then took place, and the cheerleaders cast their votes based on the candidates' performances. Preventing re-elections and holding run-offs gave everyone an opportunity to hold a leadership position. Donna acknowledged the potential for hurt feelings when someone was not elected captain until later in the season, but she knew the squad had several natural leaders who could monopolize the position if she did not require a new captain weekly. Rotating captains allowed each girl an equal opportunity to lead the squad and thus exercise responsibility in a group setting.

ON THE SIDELINES: THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM OF MOUNTAIN SPRINGS CHEERLEADING

The official or acknowledged curriculum of the Mountain Springs cheer program involves physical fitness, instruction in cheerleading techniques and practices, and the acquisition of less tangible skills like teamwork, responsibility, dedication, and self-

confidence. However, there is an unacknowledged curriculum as well. This hidden curriculum preferences football over cheerleading and, as the Mountain Springs organization is segregated according to gender, therefore privileges boys over girls.

Cheerleaders originated as sideline fixtures and halftime entertainment, and this remains the main function of the Mountain Springs cheerleaders. The girls are physically sidelined, as they are removed from the action of the game and as such are secondary. At their home field, the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad cheered on the side of the field opposite from the stands (Figure 6.1). Their families brought lawn chairs and sat directly in front of them. The girls faced their families, away from the field, and alternated between cheering directly to them and cheering to the football players. This arrangement highlights the disparity between how the football spectators value the cheerleaders and how their parents value them. They may be the primary attraction for their families, but they are clearly secondary to the football fans.

Figure 6.1 – At their home field, the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue cheerleaders stand on the opposite side of the field from the rest of the spectators and alternate cheering directly to their parents (who sit facing them) and cheering to the football players.

When asked which element of the Mountain Springs cheerleading experience was more important to them – football or cheer competition – the parents overwhelmingly selected cheering at the football games over competition. One mother deemed the games "the most" important because "that's where I think that they really develop a sense of activity and being a part of something bigger than themselves." The Mountain Springs cheer coach stressed that football games were "the reason we're supposed to be cheering." As opposed to a competition setting, football incorporated "the whole purpose of cheerleading":

> You're cheering on [the team] and getting the fans [excited] and doing your job as a cheerleader to support the football team or the basketball team or whatever team that you're supporting. Where[as], if it's just a competition, that's all you're doing, but you're not really getting the heart of why it was even there to begin with.

As a supplement, the coach also noted the importance of football in "bringing the guys and the girls together." The cross-sex interaction that occurred at the football games, though minimal, was another reason she privileged football over competition. In contrast to Donna's view, the assistant coach, Mike, reported that cheering at football games was important because "it gives [the cheerleaders] just as much purpose to be out there cheering as it does for the football players to be playing." He was the only parent to

equalize the cheerleaders' involvement at the games with that of the football players, although he did not preference either football or competition.

Mike also emphasized the girls' enjoyment over their participation in competitive cheering: "I think it's important that they have fun, more than they compete. As long as they have fun, I think it's great. If it's not fun for them I don't think they should do it." Only one parent expressed unequivocal approval of cheer competition. She felt competing prepared the girls "to work with an audience," which she noted was "important for anything you do in life." The same mother also said competition taught her daughter "that she's got to work hard for something." None of the other parents offered similar opinions regarding competition. When asked how important it was that their daughters compete, most responded, "Zero. Not at all," or "I could not care less."

The cheerleaders tended to prefer football games over competition as well, though their feelings varied somewhat from those of their parents. The cheer co-coordinator reported that her daughter had an opportunity to join an all-star squad but chose to cheer in the Mountain Springs Pop Warner organization again instead because "she loves to 'cheer for the boys.'" Another cheerleader, Kimberley, also explicitly privileged football over competition: "The main reason I think you should be a cheerleader isn't just to go to competition; it's to cheer for your football team." Megan said that she wanted to be a cheerleader specifically because "I just want the football players to do better and sometimes [cheering] helps." Only one Mountain Springs cheerleader even mentioned competition when asked why she wants to be a cheerleader. Valerie wants to cheer "because I like going to competitions and the adrenaline and everything." Given the

cheerleaders' own preference for football games, it comes as no surprise that the football players did not attend the local cheer competition. Their attendance was mandatory according to Mountain Springs rules, and as an incentive, their entrance fee was waived if they wore their football jerseys. However, the only Mountain Springs football players in attendance at the 2004 local cheer competition were brothers of cheerleaders who came with their parents.

Curiously, even though the parents and cheerleaders privileged football games over competition, most parents reported that the outcome of a game had no effect on their daughters. In some cases, parents were unsure their daughters understood the basics of the game, an issue the coach confronted at an early practice. As Donna went over her notes from the first football game, one of the cheerleaders asked, "How do we know if we're offense or defense?" The coach explained the importance of knowing which team has possession of the ball and then stressed that the cheerleaders needed to pay attention to the game. "If there's a cute guy over here," she stated, pointing away from the action, "you're not looking at him, you're looking at the field."

The parents' impressions were that the girls just liked cheering at the games, regardless of the score. The girls had a different opinion. When asked how they felt when the football team won, several girls said they felt "happy," or "really excited." When asked how they felt when the team lost, their answers became more dramatic. Valerie, whose brother played on the football team, said, "I'm kind of bummed, but we'll have another game to win." Kimberley was unable to complete her thought, saying, "I feel really bummed out because I feel like they put in so much effort and then to lose…"

Amanda replied, "I'm very happy that they tried their hardest. I'm not disappointed, it's just that I know that they tried and that's all that matters to me – if they tried." The cheerleaders and their parents, then, are very supportive of the football component of the Mountain Springs program, almost to the point of dismissing the more athletic activity – the cheer competition. In their responses, the girls privileged the boys' feelings regarding the outcome of the game over their own. They were not upset that the team lost, but they "feel bad because [the football players] tried hard," or "feel bad for them." Only one cheerleader reported feeling "sad" when they lost but also "still happy that I cheered for them." For Megan, to be a cheerleader actually means "to help the football players do better."

"WE ARE PROUD OF YOU": SUPPORTING THE BOYS

The Mountain Springs cheerleaders perform a variety of supportive roles for the football players that go well beyond the act of cheering at the games. In her work on adolescent socialization, women's and gender studies scholar Jennifer Scanlon notes that by the time they reach adolescence, "Girls learn […] that in order to be defined as successful they must please others, putting the needs of others first."[404] This helps to explain why, in their responses regarding the outcome of a game, the girls privileged the players' feelings over their own. Their actions before, during, and after games also demonstrate their efforts to support the players.

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[404] Jennifer Scanlon, "Boys-R-Us: Board Games and the Socialization of Young Adolescent Girls," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 187.

The girls were responsible for creating what is known as a breakthrough – a large sign mounted on tall posts, which the team runs through as they enter the field at the beginning of each half (Figure 6.2). Since the breakthrough was so large – approximately eight feet tall and ten feet wide – the cheer coaches or parents held it upright and the cheerleaders formed two lines, even with the breakthrough poles, facing inward. The players ran first through the sign and then in between the two lines of cheerleaders.

Figure 6.2 – An example of the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue breakthrough. The sign was usually mounted on tall posts and used as an accessory to the football players' entrance at the start of the games, but was also displayed on a wall (along with other signs of support) behind the cheerleaders at the local cheer competition.

The girls enacted the same formation without the breakthrough after the game and chanted, "we are proud of you" as the boys ran off the field. This was a popular chant for at least three different occasions. The girls chanted, "we are proud of you" after the team scored and as an injured player exited the field as well as at the end of the game, regardless of the outcome. When a player on either team was injured, the cheerleaders knelt in place and remained in that position, silent, until he left the field, at which point they returned to their feet and cheered for him (Figure 6.3). In a final supportive role,

cheerleaders and their parents signed up at the beginning of the season to take turns providing snacks for the approximately thirty football players after each game.

Figure 6.3 – Mountain Springs cheerleaders kneel and remain silent while an injured player is down.

While the cheerleaders and their parents contributed time and money to supporting the football players through their creation of a breakthrough sign and by providing snacks after games, the "we are proud of you" chant is, in a sense, the most obvious expression of support. It is also the most ripe for dissection. The chant is a continuous repetition of the phrase "we are proud of you," with the insertion of the word "hey" every so often. For example: "we are proud of you, hey, we are proud of you, hey, hey, hey, we are proud of you." When an injured player returned to his feet, the girls chanted, "we are proud of you" as a way of emphasizing his individual efforts to advance the team to victory, even though he suffered personal injury as a result of his participation. After the team scored, they again chanted, "we are proud of you" in praise of the team's success. The chant applied to both individual and team efforts. Finally, the

cheerleaders employed the chant when the game ended, regardless of the outcome. By chanting "we are proud of you" when the team won as well as when they lost, the cheerleaders stressed their continued support of the football players even if the team did not perform as well as its opponent.

With the "we are proud of you" chant, the cheerleaders continually reinforced the notion that the football players' efforts and feelings were the most important. They were more important than the outcome of the game, and they were more important than the cheerleaders' efforts or feelings. By employing the "we are proud of you" chant multiple times in each game, the cheerleaders verbally praised the players' efforts and reinforced the idea that the players' feelings were of utmost importance. In doing so, they internalized this supportive behavior and privileged the players' feelings over their own. Significantly, no one chanted "we are proud of you" for the cheerleaders.

The football players did not show their appreciation of the cheerleaders' efforts by attending their competition, held the day following the last football game. However, they did participate in a halftime ceremony during the last game as a way of thanking them. All of the football players lined up at the end of the field and walked to the middle individually to meet a cheerleader who walked to mid-field from the opposite end zone (Figure 6.4). As the two walked towards the center, a coach announced both of their names in the following manner: "Ashley Smith escorted by Tim Jones."[405] The football player handed the cheerleader a long-stemmed red rose with ribbons in the team's colors adorning the stem, her name written in large silver letters on one of the ribbons (Figure

[405] These are pseudonyms.

6.5). The two then walked together from mid-field to the sideline as another football player/cheerleader pair made their way to the center (Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.4 – At the Appreciation Ceremony, a football player walks from one side of the field to meet a cheerleader, who walks to meet him from the other side.

Figure 6.5 – As the football player and the cheerleader meet in the middle of the field, the player hands the cheerleader a long-stemmed red rose adorned with ribbons, one of which bears her name.

Figure 6.6 – After the football player hands the cheerleader the rose, a coach introduces the pair to the crowd (mostly parents and other family members/friends) and they walk from mid-field to the sideline.

While the Appreciation Ceremony presented quite the photo opportunity for parents of the players and cheerleaders, the kids were embarrassed to be forced together in such a manner. The girls waiting their turns giggled anxiously, while the boys stood in line and pushed each other almost reluctantly in the direction of the cheerleader with her hand outstretched, poised to accept the flower offered to her. The football team mother was responsible for coordinating the ceremony, which suggests that the football parents were more appreciative of the cheerleaders than were the actual players. With its boy/girl pairings, flower offerings, and march down the center of the field, the Appreciation Ceremony is strikingly similar to heterosexual wedding ceremonies and dating rituals. As the football players' parents (specifically the team mother) organized the pageant, it could also be read as the parents' attempt to teach their sons heterosexual relationships.[406]

[406] The Appreciation Ceremony highlights cheerleaders' potential function in affirming the heterosexuality of football culture, as without cheerleaders, it is primarily a male homosocial event, both in terms of

"I CAN BE THAT PEPPY GIRL": MOUNTAIN SPRINGS CHEERLEADERS PERFORM A CULTURAL STEREOTYPE

As discussed in detail in chapter five, the stereotype of the cheerleader as a beautiful, heterosexual female is ingrained in American popular consciousness and pervades cultural representations of cheerleaders. Although the cheerleader also holds other, less interesting roles, such as the vapid boosterism the Spartan Cheerleaders displayed on *Saturday Night Live*, it is the hyper-(hetero)sexuality of professional cheerleading that is responsible for a mainstream standard of beauty and femininity in cheer – a slender, fit, attractive, heterosexual female. The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue cheerleaders have internalized this cultural stereotype and consciously perform it through their appearance and behavior.

CHEERLEADING AS PERFORMANCE

The concept of performance applies to Mountain Springs cheerleading in two ways. First, in the sense of spectacle or entertainment, as Hanson relates: "At present, cheerleaders do set routines and acrobatic stunts which are independent of the actions of the game on the field. Squads continue to lead cheers, but they also present highly polished, self-contained performances."[407] In the case of Mountain Springs, this is especially pertinent, as the squad's participation in the cheer competition required the

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players and spectators. Steve Waksman talks about the function of female groupies in rock culture in much the same way. See Waksman, "Heavy Music: Cock Rock, Colonialism, and Led Zeppelin" in *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 237-276.

[407] Hanson, 88.

cultivation of a two-and-a-half minute routine complete with two cheers, two dances, tumbling, and stunts. One Mountain Springs cheerleader specifically identified this performative aspect as her reason for cheering: "I like being a cheerleader because it's fun and I like to go out in front of everybody and just show my stuff." The second way in which the concept of performance applies to Mountain Springs cheerleading is in the theatrical sense of assuming a specific role, and it is this notion of performance this section explores in greater detail.

In her book *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, Sarah Banet-Weiser describes the beauty pageant as "a highly visible performance of gender, where the disciplinary practices that construct women as feminine are palpable, on display, and positioned as unproblematically desirable."[408] Cheerleading is similar to the beauty pageant as a performance of gender and, more explicitly, a performance of femininity. Expanding upon Judith Butler's theories of gender and performance, Banet-Weiser concludes, "a performative theory of gender proposes that the enacting of gender produces gender […] Gender is not outside of how women dress, act, and speak but is instead constituted by these and other practices."[409] Following Foucault, Banet-Weiser refers to such techniques as appearance and behavior as "disciplinary practices,"[410] and it is the totality of such practices that constitute a specific performance of gender or femininity.

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[408] Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.
[409] Banet-Weiser, 11-12.
[410] For more on Foucault's use of the term and Banet-Weiser's employment of it, see Banet-Wesier, 215, n. 23.

Adams and Bettis note the performative similarities between the Miss America competition and cheerleading:

> To win the coveted title of Miss America, contestants must engage in a variety of tricks to ensure their female perfection, from duct-taping their breasts together for greater cleavage, to applying hair spray on their buttocks so that the bottom of the swimsuit will not move during that phase of competition. Cheerleaders, even when competing in physically taxing routines, must also employ a few tricks to ensure they exude femininity – keeping rollers in their hair until seconds before their squad is called to the mat, purchasing synthetic curls to make sure their spiral ponytails are perfect, applying bright red lipstick to accentuate their mouths, and, yes, even spraying their bloomers with hair spray to keep them from moving during the competition.[411]

Although the Mountain Springs cheerleaders did not engage in such "tricks" as spraying their bodies with hair spray or wearing artificial hair, they did utilize certain "disciplinary practices" in creating their cheerleader personas. These practices included their dress, hair, makeup, and certain behaviors such as suggestive moves in dances and cheers. The difference between the cheerleaders' appearance and behavior at practices and at football games and competition highlighted the performative aspect of these actions. Their descriptions of cheerleaders and responses to questions such as "what does it mean to be a cheerleader?" also indicated their conscious performance of a cultural stereotype. In their appearance and behavior, the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue cheerleaders

[411] Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 133.

performed a specific feminine ideal – that of the cheerleader as the standard of beauty and femininity in America.

APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR – FORMAL VS. INFORMAL

All cheerleaders and mascots in the Mountain Springs Pop Warner organization wear the same uniform, which means that girls as young as five dress exactly the same as thirteen-year-olds. The uniforms are in keeping with contemporary cheerleading trends[412] – short, flat-front skirts and fitted sleeveless tops (sometimes called "shells") with two-inch straps that cross in the back (Figures 6.7 and 6.8). Skirts and tops are made of polyester to allow for maximum movement. The girls also wear a pair of nylon briefs with elastic leg openings to aid in mobility and for practical purposes – to cover themselves should their skirts lift when they jump or tumble. They purchase shoes specifically for cheerleading. These are leather athletic sneakers that feature notches in the heels, sculpted arches, and fingergrips on the outer soles, all to facilitate stunting. One Mountain Springs mother noted that the only reason her daughter returned to cheer a second season was because she threatened to get rid of the uniform: "At first she wanted to [cheer] because she enjoyed it and they wore cute uniforms. This last year she only cheered because I was going to sell her uniform and she loves the uniform." For this participant, the uniform alone created the cheerleader persona.

[412] For a more complete discussion of the evolution of cheerleading uniforms, see chapter four.

Figure 6.7 – The front of the Mountain Springs uniform: flat-front skirt.

Figure 6.8 – The back of the Mountain Springs uniform: flat-front skirt with slits on the sides, halter top with straps that cross in the back.

When in uniform, the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue cheerleaders wore their hair in ponytails and wrapped with matching ribbons that were then tied into bows. They wore their hair in this manner for the local cheer competition, and some girls' mothers also used hot rollers or curling irons to style their hair. The girls also employed more hair

spray than usual at competition. For the Mountain Springs cheerleaders, hairstyles went hand in hand with wearing their uniforms. Anytime they were in uniform – at football games or competition – they knew their hair should be in ponytails and wrapped with the appropriate ribbon. Competition brought a heightened sense of attention to detail because appearance was one of the criteria the judges used to score the squads. The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad made minor adjustments for competition, including curling their ponytails and applying excess hair spray. Other squads went much further in altering their appearances.

Another Pop Warner association I will pseudonymously refer to as Oak Meadow seemed to take competitive cheering to an extreme, and their cheerleaders' appearance was the most visible evidence of this. In Oak Meadow, parents of cheerleaders gathered to take classes on how to style their daughters' hair for competition.[413] Each cheerleader wore her hair in a tight ponytail with spiral curls. When the girls moved, their hair moved only slightly due to the massive amounts of hair spray applied. As a result, all of Oak Meadow's cheerleaders, by far the largest group with over one hundred participants, looked remarkably similar to one another.

Oak Meadow and other groups also accentuated their appearance by using what might be referred to as stage makeup – bright blue eye shadow, heavy black mascara, bright pink blush, and bright red lipstick. The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad did not engage in such practices. At their last practice before competition, some of the cheerleaders inquired as to what type of makeup they should wear. Their coach, Donna,

[413] An Oak Meadow coach provided this information during an informal conversation at the cheer competition.

told them she did not want them to wear any makeup because they were too young for it and did not need it. However, she did allow them to wear what she deemed "natural" shades of blush and lipstick. The girls who participated in the local championship the previous season knew what to expect from their competitors and intimated that not wearing makeup might negatively affect their score. To this Donna replied, "Your families love you before you compete and they're going to love you afterwards. The journey is what's important, not the outcome." Donna stressed that while the girls should wear clean, pressed uniforms and style their hair appropriately, they should not go to any unnatural extremes in their appearance at competition. They were to compete on the strength of their routine alone. My observations of the cheer competition suggest the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad was in the minority in this respect; most of the other squads employed the homogeneous approach of tightly curled ponytails and stage makeup favored by Oak Meadow.

The advent of championship competitions in the 1970s brought about a combination of cheerleading and dance in competitive routines. Standards differ between governing organizations, but competition routines usually last from two to four minutes. For the local Pop Warner competition Mountain Springs participated in, routines could be no longer than two-and-a-half minutes. Most competitive cheer routines are a fast-paced combination of cheers or chants, dances, stunts, and tumbling with music incorporated. Hanson notes the impact of trends in music and dance on cheering:

> The dancing, jiving rhythm and motion of soul cheering differed from the straight-arm style and standardized cadence of mainstream cheerleading. From

"rhythm-nastic" cheering in the 1940s to jazz and hip-hop in the present, contemporary dance forms have influenced cheerleading style.[414]

Consistent with current trends in music and dance, cheerleading often involves suggestive or provocative moves. The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad's repertoire of cheers included some that involved hip-rolling, and the dance segments of the competition routine contained a few sexually suggestive motions. One Junior Pee Wee squad at the local competition danced to music with the lyrics "I love the way you move," and the cheerleaders – approximately eight, nine, and ten years old – thrust their hips to the beat. The crowd of cheerleaders went wild, screaming and cheering them on. "The more sexy it is," one mother commented, "the more the cheerleaders yell for it." Not only have the girls internalized the notion of sexually provocative dancing as necessary to their performances as cheerleaders, they reinforced the importance of such behavior by responding enthusiastically to their peers' use of sexuality.

Not long after the 2004 local Pop Warner championship competition, such strong support for provocative music and dancing motivated a Texas state representative to introduce legislation prohibiting "sexually suggestive performances at athletic events and other extracurricular competitions."[415] Had it been approved, the bill would have reduced state funding to any school district that "knowingly permit[ted]" such actions.[416] Concerned about young girls watching inappropriate school-sanctioned performances, the legislator who introduced the bill saw cheerleading as just another example of the

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[414] Hanson, 83.
[415] April Castro, "Pompoms Would Be OK to Shake; Not Booties," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 18, 2005.
[416] Castro.

"culture of sexual openness [that] is leading to sexually transmitted disease and teen pregnancy."[417] Response to the proposed legislation was mixed; most cheer coaches acknowledged that cheer competitions already penalize for vulgarity, which made the bill at best unnecessary. At worst, critics claimed, it "insult[ed the] integrity" of cheer coaches and the principals who hire them."[418] Regardless, outside the world of cheer, sexually suggestive dance moves have become a contentious issue. Within cheerleading, a certain amount of provocation is allowed, as long as it does not cross over into vulgarity. As this controversy suggests, it is particularly difficult to define vulgarity. Yet as the failed legislation attempt also highlights, even scholastic cheerleaders are to be alluring only in the abstract; in reality, they are to be untouchable, much like their professional counterparts.

The general belief about cheerleaders is that they are naturally peppy and perennially perky. My observations of the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad suggest that this is not always the case.[419] When practicing their competition routine, the coach continually reminded the girls to smile, as smiling and facial expressions are one more area the judges score. Smiling, for these girls, was hard work, similar to the "emotional labor" flight attendants perform. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild studied flight attendants and found their smiles, an important part of company policy, were "*on* them but not *of*

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[417] Jenny LaCoste-Caputo, "Students May Have to Dance to Beat of State Drum," *San Antonio Express-News*, March 23, 2005.
[418] LaCoste-Caputo.
[419] Other researchers have made similar observations about their subjects. See Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 106-08; McElroy, 13; Swaminathan, ch. 7; and Donna Eder and Stephen Parker, "The Cultural Production and Reproduction of Gender: The Effect of Extracurricular Activities of Peer-Group Culture," *Sociology of Education* 60, no. 3 (1987): 200-13.

them."[420] Hochschild defines "emotional labor" as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display."[421] Furthermore, Hochschild explains, "This labor requires one to induce or suppress feeling *in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.*"[422] Cheerleaders, if they are doing their job correctly, motivate others to be equally spirited. In order to do so, they have to appear spirited themselves, which often calls for smiling regardless of whether or not they actually feel like it. The Mountain Springs cheerleaders were encouraged to smile as a way of masking their fatigue during hot games as well as when performing their competition routine, and it was never easy for them to do so. They often complained that it was "too hard" to smile while concentrating on performing the routine perfectly or cheering for hours in the heat. Smiling was a deliberate behavior the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue cheerleaders performed to create their cheerleader personas.

Those who observed the squad only at games or competition may not have realized how much of what they witnessed was a performance. Comparing the girls' appearance and behavior in public (games, competition) and at practices highlights the performative aspect of Mountain Springs cheerleading. These girls were active in sports other than cheering: the squad consisted of three volleyball players, two basketball players, one swimmer, and one diver; one was an equestrian and another was an accomplished martial artist. While their public cheer personas were consistent with the cultural stereotype of the cheerleader, these other facets of their personalities clearly

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[420] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 8, emphasis in original.
[421] Hochschild, 7.
[422] Hochschild, 7, emphasis in original.

influenced their appearance and behavior at practices. As they sometimes practiced in a school gymnasium, they often played basketball during water breaks or down time. They wore knit shorts and t-shirts or leotards to practice. At one of the earliest practices, the coach implemented a rule prohibiting tank tops or loose straps at practice. This was for two reasons: safety, as the straps could get caught when stunting, and practicality, as it was considered unnecessary to sport revealing clothing at practice. Although the girls usually wore their hair in ponytails for practical purposes – so as not to inhibit their sight or get caught in stunts – it was never as neatly groomed as when they were in uniform. They never wore makeup or hair bows at practice. Their faces betrayed the hard work of cheering at practice in a way their smiles obscured in public.

When asked to describe a cheerleader, all of the girls pictured females first and foremost. Some replied that cheerleaders were "energetic," or "excited and happy and just really energetic." Others focused on cheerleaders' physical appearances as well as their personalities: "Tall, nice, probably blonde hair." Another responded, "When I hear [the word] 'cheerleader,' I think of a peppy girl wearing, like, cheerleading clothes wanting to cheer everybody up and just go out there and have fun." When asked what it meant for her to be a cheerleader, the same girl answered, "I *can be* that peppy girl going out there and making everybody have fun."[423] Implicitly contained in this response is the idea that cheering is a performance – she "*can be* that peppy girl," but is not necessarily the same girl outside of cheerleading.

[423] Emphasis added.

The members of the Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad had formed their own opinions about how cheerleaders should look and act. Perhaps tellingly, each girl on the squad (other than the mascot) had cheered at least one previous season, and one in particular had cheered for eight years. This one three-month season did not shape their beliefs regarding cheerleaders' appearance and behavior. However, even though the girls' conceptions of cheerleaders resemble the prevailing cultural ideas of cheerleaders as attractive, fit, energetic, and happy, their embodiment of this stereotype was a performance in important ways, especially when compared to their appearance and behavior at practices.

CONCLUSION

The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad is part of the Pop Warner organization, an adult-directed youth sports program. This represents an extracurricular opportunity for instruction and conforms to the standards for constructive leisure, with short- and long-term benefits. However, the potential exists for a shift from child-directed play to work, and my findings suggest that the coach's increased emphasis on placing higher at the local cheer competition contributed to that shift.

I found an official and an unofficial curriculum at work in the Mountain Springs cheer organization. The official curriculum endeavored to teach what the co-coordinator referred to as "life skills," or the positive consequences of cheerleading such as teamwork, responsibility, and commitment. Coach Donna's Positive Reinforcement Circles helped instill these benefits. The unofficial or hidden curriculum worked to

privilege football over cheerleading, though. The girls were physically sidelined at games, cheering not to football spectators but to their families alone on the opposite side of the field. Coaches, parents, and cheerleaders preferred cheering at football games to cheer competition. The cheerleaders, with the help of their families, engaged in multiple supportive roles, not the least of which involved chanting, "we are proud of you" for the players in many instances.

The Mountain Springs Pee Wee Blue squad engaged in disciplinary practices and emotional labor as they cultivated their public personas. A comparison of their formal and informal behavior and appearance suggests they consciously performed a specific cultural stereotype, that of the cheerleader as the heterosexual standard of beauty and femininity. Adding this to our constellation of cheer, especially in conjunction with the discussion of professional cheerleaders and sexuality in the previous chapter, offers a more well-rounded portrait not only of the lived experiences of cheerleaders but of the meaningful ways gender and generation interact with, inform, and construct the cultural icon of the cheerleader in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

Looking at the lived experiences of cheerleaders in concert with their fictional representations and the multifaceted industry that supports them helps us better understand the ways gender and power are refracted through the lens of American popular culture and on the bodies of American youth. Cheerleading's privileged nineteenth-century beginnings gave it deep connections to masculine ideals. A democratization occurred over the course of the twentieth century, and this allowed for the entrance of females, non-whites, and differently abled participants.

Because of its elite origins in single-sex, all-male private schools, cheerleading remains linked to insider status. Myths of popularity and perfection often accompany cheerleaders, real and fictional. The latter portion of the twentieth century saw an effort on the part of authors to explode such myths and, in the wake of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, a backlash that led to cheerleaders as victims. Victimhood was not a permanent state for fictional cheer protagonists, though. The third wave of feminism and its inclusive, non-gender-specific flexibility allows for the emergence of superheroines who embody empowerment, exercise subjectivity, and sometimes operate within a framework of collective action that serves to contain their power as it supports their struggle.

Containment also exists in the form of prescriptive literature, which the cheerleading industry offers via magazines, books, websites, and instructional videos. For an industry that began training cheerleaders commercially in the middle of the twentieth

century with camps and clinics, the commoditization of that enterprise was its natural evolution. Commercialization also occurred in the realm of professional cheerleading, and the effect of this was to create a hyper-(hetero)sexualized standard of beauty fetishized through the adult film industry and more mainstream commodities like swimsuit and lingerie calendars. The lasting impact of this standard is played out on the bodies and in the behaviors of youth cheerleaders who strive to be like the professional cheerleaders they see on television as they consciously perform the stereotype of the cheerleader as this ideal woman.

Due to the exacting standards many professional squads hold and the demanding athleticism of the activity itself, contemporary professional cheerleaders frequently fit within the confines of that physical mold. Historically, professional cheerleading has not enjoyed a particularly honorable reputation among feminists. However, the Science Cheerleaders defy the stereotype that professional cheerleaders have nothing to offer intellectually. Current and former professional cheerleaders with careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, the Science Cheerleaders travel the country promoting "science for citizens."[424] Founded by former Philadelphia 76ers cheerleader Darlene Cavalier "to unite the citizen's desire to be heard and valued, the scientist's growing interest in the public's involvement, and [the] government's need to

[424] The Science Cheerleaders include chemists, nutritionists, electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, industrial engineers, a NASA aerospace engineer, a university medical researcher who specializes in neuroimaging, a Doctor of Forensic Pathology, a Certified Public Accountant, a vascular sonographer, science teachers, nurses, and a Doctor of Physical Therapy, among others. See Science Cheerleader, "The Science Cheerleaders," http://www.sciencecheerleader.com/category/the-science-cheerleaders/.

garner public support," the Science Cheerleader initiative works to "change the tone of science and science policy" in the United States.[425]

In their public appearances, the Science Cheerleaders promote science education and introduce projects for citizen scientists, available on their sister website SciStarter.[426] From the home page, interested participants can navigate the Project Finder based on Activity (e.g. at home, at the beach, exclusively online, in the car, in snow or rain) or Topic (e.g. animals, astronomy and space, birds, computers and technology, food, geology, physics, sound). Most of the projects are offered by researchers, organizations, and companies; the site also includes a place for scientists to add new projects. On November 12, 2011, the Science Cheerleaders teamed up with Pop Warner Little Scholars, Inc., to break the Guinness World Record for the Largest Cheerleading Cheer. They succeeded in gathering "the greatest number of cheerleaders simultaneously performing a cheer in a single venue" when 1,278 youth cheerleaders performed a cheer that lasted over five minutes.[427] Cavalier proclaimed the world record-breaking event "a great way to learn how to set a goal and work towards it," and noted that the cheer for science helped further the organization's mission of "challeng[ing] cheerleading and science stereotypes and inspir[ing] the nation's 3-4 million cheerleaders to consider a career in science, technology, engineering, and math." Many of the Science Cheerleaders credit their involvement in the organization to their desire to reach out to girls, underrepresented in STEM fields.

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[425] Science Cheerleader, "About Us," http://www.sciencecheerleader.com/about-us/.
[426] SciStarter, http://scistarter.com/.
[427] The previous world record was set by China in 2008. See http://www.sciencecheerleader.com/2011/12/video-of-guinness-world-record-cheer-for-science/.

The Science Cheerleaders have appeared and performed at events such as the World Maker Faire in New York, the Las Vegas Science Festival, the USA Science and Engineering Festival in Washington, D.C., and the Hispanic Science and Engineering Festival at the University of Texas Pan-American in Edinburg, Texas, which is where I met and observed a cohort of them. Their uniforms consist of electric blue skin-tight, long-sleeve, v-neck rompers adorned with their signature water molecule patch (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Each cheerleader wears the pair of shiny white boots she retained from her days cheering professionally.[428] They wear thick makeup, accentuated with false eyelashes, and style their long hair so that it hangs down and moves around as they do.

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 – The Science Cheerleaders perform at the University of Texas Pan American's Hispanic Engineering Science and Technology (HESTEC) Week Community Day, October 1, 2011.

[428] The current Ms. United States, Laura Eilers, serves as Creative Director for the Science Cheerleaders. She choreographs their routines and designed their uniform but does not perform with the group, as she is not employed in a STEM field (though she is a former NFL cheerleader). In my interview with her, she indicated that professional cheerleaders end up with multiple pairs of boots upon retirement, and since the differences between each squad's designated pair is minimal, the Science Cheerleaders recycle their used boots as a way of minimizing cost.

The uniform draws attention from adolescent and adult males as well as young females, as I observed. Their primary audience consisted of youth and their parents or teachers,[429] but inevitably after each performance, some adult males would ask the women to pose for photographs with them.[430] Along with photographs, the Science Cheerleaders offered to sign autographs and handed out playing cards designed to showcase their dual identities as scientists and cheerleaders (Figures 7.3 and 7.4).

Figures 7.3 and 7.4 – Science Cheerleader playing cards front (Figure 7.3) and back (Figure 7.4). The front of the card showcases the Science Cheerleader in her role as a professional cheerleader and in her STEM career. The back of the card lists her first name, hometown, cheerleading squad, higher education, and some information regarding her interest in science.

At the University of Texas Pan American's Hispanic Engineering Science and Technology (HESTEC) Week Community Day, the Science Cheerleaders shared a stage

[429] When asked how the UT-Pan Am HESTEC event differed from other Science Cheerleader events she had attended, one Science Cheerleader noted the overwhelming amount of children in comparison to the events in Las Vegas and New York. At least one area middle school, PFC David Ybarra Middle School, brought 250 students to the event.

[430] The Science Cheerleaders rely on their training as professional cheerleaders in these instances, especially when they encounter resistance from the photographer, who is often the (female) significant other of the fan. One Science Cheerleader told me that as professional cheerleaders they are trained to "get the wives or girlfriends on our side."

with Colorado State University's Little Shop of Physics, a hands-on science outreach program that teaches students to "do" science.[431] The two groups alternated performing for three hours. The Science Cheerleaders introduced themselves and explained their individual connections to STEM; discussed the importance of scientific research and community involvement;[432] performed a variety of dances and cheers over the course of the afternoon, some of which included crowd involvement;[433] and ended with the introduction of a UT Pan Am biology professor who then spoke about his own research and how citizen scientists could participate. The focus was on science throughout the presentation, but the organization's unique style – to promote intellectual pursuits such as biology, in this case, using a cheer with the line "Being smart is H-O-T hot!" – leaves one confounded.[434]

The Science Cheerleaders are not the only squad to use cheerleading as a medium for their unconventional message. The Queertastiks of Austin, Texas, a mixed-gender,

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[431] Between the first and second set of performances, the lead physicist from the Little Shop of Physics asked Cavalier if the Science Cheerleaders would rotate the direction of their stage forty-five degrees so as not to appear in front of the Little Shop of Physics banner. She described her employer as "family-friendly" and "wholesome," and said, "This is pushing the limits" in reference to the Science Cheerleaders' uniforms and routine. "We didn't know our sign would be displayed behind these beautiful…" she said, trailing off. Although she admitted the Science Cheerleader initiative "is in line with what Little Shop of Physics promotes because they [SciCheer] *do* science versus *see* it," she said her employer is very sensitive about the Little Shop of Physics name, even making the employees turn their t-shirts inside-out when they enter commercial establishments for anything other than official business. I witnessed one man cover his son's eyes during a performance, and though this seemed like it was done in jest, it does speak to the physicist's concerns.

[432] They tailored this part of the presentation to their location, emphasizing the underrepresentation of Hispanics in STEM fields, especially Hispanic females.

[433] The cheerleaders brought signs for their "S-C-I-E-N-C-E / Gooooo science!" cheer and recruited young children from the audience to come onstage and participate.

[434] One of the Science Cheerleaders who teaches middle school science told me part of her motivation in joining the organization (and in becoming a professional cheerleader originally) was to promote to her students the idea that one can do everything one wants to do, regardless of the perceived incongruities. Is this what Susan J. Douglas describes in *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message That Feminism's Work Is Done* (New York: Times Books, 2010)?

body-positive "glitter bomb squad" who describe themselves as "a spectacle in spandex," use cheer-based performance art as a tool for social justice.[435] Their diversity knows no bounds; they are inclusive, and they "want to work towards a future in which all identities and situations are valued." Their costumes vary based on personal preference but adhere to a similar color scheme (Figure 7.5). They cheer and dance, incorporating low-level stunts (Figure 7.5), simple motions, and pom pons.

Figure 7.5 – The Queertastiks perform at Austin's Big Gay Variety Show, January 15, 2011

The Queertastiks adjust the content of their routine based on the venue in which they perform, but their material emphasizes acceptance. Take, for instance, this cheer, the first of many they performed at Austin's Big Gay Variety Show in January of 2011:

We're the Queertastiks

We're so fantastic

[435] I happened upon the Queertastiks at a screening of *Ready? OK!* at the Austin Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival in 2009. They were the opening act and performed onstage at the Alamo Drafthouse. After that, I sought out their performances. Quotes and images are from their performance at the Big Gay Variety Show, January 15, 2011.

We're here for the queers

We do it as we cheer

Some of us are fat

Some of us are not

We sure know

That we're pretty fucking hot

Aside from the curse word and oblique reference to sexual activity, this is a tame cheer for the squad, who foreground issues of queerness in all of their performances.

The Queertastiks combine gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer (GLBTQ) identity politics with social justice cheerleading, which can be read as the latest in a string of unconventional uses of the medium. Since 1980, the adult squad CHEER San Francisco has traveled the world fundraising for organizations that provide care for individuals struggling with life-threatening illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and cancer. The first LGBT-identified cheerleading team, CHEER SF is coed (though male-dominated). Their training includes attendances at annual collegiate cheer camps. They have won many awards.[436] Radical Cheerleaders describe their particular mix of social protest and performance "activism with pom poms [sic] and middle fingers extended."[437] In line with the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos of the Riot Grrrl movement,[438] Radical Cheerleaders often make their poms out of black garbage bags. They cheer at gay pride events,

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[436] See the CHEER San Francisco website: http://cheersf.org. Other cities boast affiliated CHEER squads. See also Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 31-33.

[437] See the Radical Cheerleaders website: http://radcheers.tripod.com/RC/index.html.

[438] For the genesis of this, refer to chapter three.

environmental protests, and in support of women's health issues, among other things.[439] New York City-based X-Cheerleaders are explicitly feminist former cheerleaders whose costumes mimic late-twentieth-century cheerleading uniforms. Their cheers address such topics as the wage gap and unfair expectations of women in a media-driven society. Take this cheer, for example: "Legs too short, butt too big / Get fake nails, buy a wig / Weight Watchers, Lean Cuisine / I gotta be what's / on the screen / Perfection! Perfection! Perfection!"[440] Along with performing at various venues, they hold self-esteem and empowerment workshops for pre-adolescent girls, "Cheering for Ourselves."[441]

All of these non-traditional cheerleaders find cheerleading to be a useful form for the distribution of their specific ideas. The Science Cheerleaders encourage a broader acceptance of science, while the Queertastiks promote an assortment of identity-related social justice causes. Neither squad has yet to reach the audience of Fox's breakout musical comedy *Glee*, which features a diverse cast and highlights the nontraditional identity vectors of its cheerleaders. Recently described as "serving up social progress in a miniskirt,"[442] the hour-long scripted television series, which premiered in the fall of 2009, is critically acclaimed and popular.[443] Set in Ohio's fictional William McKinley High

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[439] The documentary *don't let the system get you down..cheer up!* (directed by jen nedbalsky and mary christmas) chronicles the birth of the movement. Also see Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 36-39.
[440] See the X-Cheerleaders website: http://mysite.verizon.net/kim_irwin/.
[441] See also Adams and Bettis, *Cheerleader!* 33-35.
[442] Pandora Young, "Portraying Lesbian Cheerleader on *Glee* Wins Actress Accolades," May 24, 2011, http://www.mediabistro.com/fishbowlla/lesbian-cheerleader-naya-rivera-santana-glee-gay-visibility-b29660.
[443] According to Fox, *Glee* is the number one scripted hour among adults eighteen to forty-nine and eighteen to thirty-four as well as teens. It is the recipient of four Emmy Awards, three Golden Globe Awards including Best TV Series – Comedy or Musical, and has been nominated for two Grammy Awards. Beyond that, over thirty-three million of the cast's recordings have been downloaded, three of its albums have reached Gold status, and two have reached Platinum. See http://www.fox.com/glee/about.

School, *Glee* is the story of the New Directions show choir and its quest to win Nationals. The McKinley High School cheerleaders – affectionately known as the Cheerios – are national champions of their own, famous for their ESPN appearances. Part of the show's dramatic tension stems from the cheerleading coach's determination to rid the school of arts programs such as the glee club in order to increase the cheerleading budget, an ironic reversal of Title IX struggles to limit girls' participation in cheer.

The early episodes of *Glee* did not inspire confidence in the show's ability to depict cheerleaders in particularly new or interesting ways. Head cheerleader Quinn Fabray, a thin blonde, is a bully who reveals herself to be pregnant, promiscuous, and dishonest in an uninspired who-is-the-father plot; glee club leader Will Schuester is married to an equally conniving, dishonest (and also thin blonde) former head cheerleader who fakes a pregnancy and attempts to manipulate him. However, later episodes prove the series' inclusivity. In her introduction to *Filled with Glee*, Leah Wilson says the show "lauds the outsider."[444] Wilson is correct that this is the effect of the show at large, but it is true of the cheerleading squad in microcosm as well. In two and a half seasons, *Glee*'s Cheerios showcased a differently abled cheerleader (Down syndrome-affected Becky Johnson), an arguably bisexual or at the very least exploring cheerleader (Brittany Pierce), and a lesbian Latina cheerleader (Santana Lopez).[445]

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[444] Leah Wilson, introduction to *Filled with "Glee": The Unauthorized "Glee" Companion* (Dallas: SmartPop, 2010), 2.

[445] These cheerleader characters' storylines are integral to the narrative arc of the series. Based purely on visual representation, the Cheerios appears to be an even more diverse squad. For a larger discussion of diversity and William McKinley High School in comparison to the average Ohio population, see Janine Hiddlestone, "Minorities R Us: 'New Directions' in Diversity," in *Filled with "Glee*," ed. Wilson, 69-79.

The intellectual empowerment goals of the Science Cheerleaders and the inclusivity efforts of the Queertastiks and *Glee* reflect contemporary social and cultural movements and are, to varying degrees, examples of media produced for cheerleaders. In recent years, cheerleaders themselves have taken to the Internet, connecting on social media websites like CheerFriends.com (where "Cheer Friends are Best Friends"), producing and sharing videos on YouTube (tagline: "Broadcast Yourself"), and even creating their own web series.[446] Rather than consume representations of cheerleaders, these girls engage in self-presentation via media production. Media studies scholar Mary Celeste Kearney identified this trend of girls as cultural producers in the 1990s;[447] her work calls attention to the ways girls' cultural productions create a "girl's gaze," independent of and often times in contest with mainstream media.[448] In the future, a study of cheerleaders' media self-presentations in tension with cultural representations will offer more depth and insight into adolescent identity building and the power of cultural tropes.

I began this project with a quip from Erma Bombeck lamenting that failing to secure a spot on the cheer squad as an adolescent would negatively impact one's entire life. [449] But cheering is no longer only a young person's activity, as the increasing

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[446] "Jamie's Way," a teen drama created by Elena Moscatt and filmed digitally in Baltimore, Maryland, aired five episodes between 1998 and 2005. The fifteen-year-old actress who plays the show's title character wrote the fifth episode. See http://www.jamiesway.com/.
[447] Mary Celeste Kearney, "Producing Girls," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Grils'Cultures*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 285-310.
[448] Kearney, "Girls Make Movies," in *Youth Cultures: Texts, Images, and Identities*, ed. Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 32. See also Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
[449] See page 3.

visibility of senior cheer squads proves. The average age of Japan Pom Pom's members is sixty-six; their founder is approaching eighty. The group performs in their red and gold-sequined uniforms at charity functions and nursing homes, "to cheer people up."[450] Senior squads defy the assumption that cheerleaders must be young and they ask us to consider the cheerleader in new ways, especially with respect to generation. Literary examples of texts that examine the aging cheerleader include the poet Jeanette Lynes's *The Aging Cheerleader's Alphabet* (2003) and the title story from Alison Baker's collection *How I Came West, and Why I Stayed* (1993). Future work should contextualize these within the constellation of cheer and account for the aging cheerleader in a society focused on youth and beauty. The basis of constellation theory, as laid out in the introduction, is the opportunity to hold disparate objects in concert with one another and to inquire as to their meanings and associations. The constellation of cheerleading presented here offers the flexibility for future points of deviation and overlap; the cultural production and self-presentation of cheerleaders and the literary considerations of the aging cheerleader are but two such possibilities.

[450] Yuriko Nakao, "Cheering On an Aging Japan," *Reuters*, May 31, 2010, http://blogs.reuters.com/photographers-blog/2010/05/31/cheering-on-an-aging-japan/.

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Vita

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