CHEERLEADING AS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: COGNITIVE, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF AN AMERICAN DANCE FORM

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Cheerleading as Cultural Communication: Cognitive, Social, and Political Aspects of an American Dance Form

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Through communication, individuals learn a culture—the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior a group shares. Through communication they also contribute to the dynamic ever-changing phenomenon of culture. But humans do not communicate by words alone. Non-verbal behavior, including dance, is part of the calculus of meaning. Communication is the mechanism providing the interface between the individual and the group. Dance is a conceptual natural language with intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, and interrelated rules guiding performance in different social situations.”

-- Judith Lynn Hanna

Introduction

Cheerleading is a uniquely American cultural phenomenon. Like jazz and baseball, cheerleading originated in America. Soon after cheerleading’s inception, the cheerleader became a nationally recognized symbol invested with cultural significance. Cheerleading represents both positive and negative values in American culture. In fact, cheerleading has become central to American mainstream culture because the positive values it portrays. For example, during a September 11 memorial, a New York City cheerleading squad was asked to perform. Audience members wept during the routine, and the announcer kept repeating “beautiful” as the squad performed. It may seem strange that cheerleaders would perform a memorial tribute in response to a terrible national tragedy; however, the inclusion of cheerleaders in this memorial service represents an American spirit and emphasizes our uniquely American character and identity.

Cheerleading is also a social and political form of dance: a form of human thought and behavior performed by the human body for human purposes. According to Hanna, “dance interweaves with other aspects of human life, such as communication and learning, belief systems, social relations and political dynamics, loving and fighting, and
urbanization and change” (1987: 3). Cheerleading is an American dance form that embodies these social, political, and cultural dimensions. Cheerleading is a ritualized dance performed in a public forum that has a communicative intent.

Cheerleaders are American icons who communicate in three ways. First, cheerleaders individually organize their thoughts and actions performed in their cheers, stunts, and dance routines mentally. First, cheerleaders use spatial and temporal thought organization and also the rhythm of the dance and music to guide their movements. Secondly, the icon of the American cheerleader communicates cultural values primarily about proper social behavior and gender. These cultural values have changed over the last century, however the icon of the cheerleader has communicated these values from cheerleading’s inception. Lastly, cheerleaders communicate to their audience, school, and each other using language in cheers and through body movements.

Although a fairly new phenomenon within American culture, cheerleading has nonetheless had a major impact on many communities throughout the United States. As a social scientist, I am writing this ethnography on cheerleading to show cheerleading’s impact on American culture as a highly symbolic American dance form. The focus of my analysis is the cognitive, social and political communication that takes place within and surrounding modern day cheerleading. I begin my analysis of cheerleading with background information on this American cultural phenomenon. First, I define cheerleading as a dance form and as a form of communication. I then discuss the cognitive aspects of cheerleading. Next, my ethnography traces cheerleading from its origination to modern day difficulties plaguing cheerleaders. Furthermore, I examine two key social aspects of cheerleading: issues of gender and race. Lastly I describe the
politicals of cheerleading and cheerleaders, and address the meanings, values, and symbolic communication associated with cheerleading.

My examination of the complex communicative aspects in cheerleading started with introspection. Throughout part of my middle school and high school career, I was a cheerleader. Although I loved cheerleading, I was frustrated over the lack of respect cheerleaders received in comparison to other school sports. After earning second place in a national competition, and still receiving minimal school support and appreciation, I hung up my pom-poms forever. After I left the squad, I noticed the complexities of cheerleading that I had not noticed before. The behaviors of pettiness and shallowness, which were not seen on other athletic teams, seemed to proliferate in cheerleading. There was also a great amount of athleticism that went into performances; however, cheerleading is still mainly seen as an activity, not a sport. The complexities in cheerleading, coupled with the communicative messages in the performances and embodied in the cheerleaders themselves led me to my investigation of cheerleading culture and communication.

This paper is a culmination of literature, personal experiences and information provided from interviews with other cheerleaders. I interviewed nine females and two males that had experience cheerleading. Please turn to Appendix A to see what questions I asked my informants. All of my informants brought to my attention that they appreciated that someone was "taking cheerleaders seriously."
A Definition of Cheerleading as a Highly Communicative Dance Form

Communication is a social process involving two or more people that evokes either a verbal or non-verbal response to a verbal or non-verbal stimulus. Communication occurs when a sender sends a message to a receiver. The receiver decodes the message and sends feedback to the sender depending upon their understanding of the message (Verderber and Verderber 2003: 1-9). A diagram of the general communication process and the communication process seen in cheerleading can be found in Appendix B. Cheerleading is a dance form that communicates affectively through non-verbal expression using body movements and verbally using motivating shouts.

The English language does not differentiate between forms of “dance.” Our word, “dancing” embraces individual exhibitions and stylized muscular movements. For example, we refer to “mating dances” between animals such as the sea horse. Additionally, we refer to honey bee communication of a new food source as a dance (McNeil 1995:13). The definition of dance as seen in cheerleading occurs through purposely selected and controlled rhythmic movements, and “the resulting phenomenon is recognized both by the performer and the observing members of a given group” (Hanna: 22). Hanna continues by saying that dance is an effective mode of expression which requires both timing and space. It employs motor behavior in redundant patterns, which are closely linked to the definitive features of musicality. Furthermore, dance, and especially cheerleading, is a cognitive mode that can convey concepts similar to communicating through verbal language. The meaning in cheerleading is found in the unique stylistic and structural manipulation of the performer’s space, rhythm, and control over the physical body. The cheerleader’s style is part of a cultural code and pattern. The
rhythm the squad follows is always intentional, and it refers to the patterned elements repeated at recognizably related intervals. Cheerleaders pattern their interactions to categorize their thoughts, movements, language, and experiences. They keep the beat by chunking movements into segments. Additionally, cheerleaders memorize combinations—smaller dance segments within the routine—by categorically organizing their motions in accordance to their special position within the routine, music counts, and occasionally mnemonic devices.

As the crowd follows the cheerleaders’ attitudes, movements, and formations throughout an athletic game, they establish and maintain cultural patterns. Cheerleading movements generate crowd enthusiasm and alert the crowd to be aware of the game as the cheerleaders lead them in adapting to the exciting competitive environment. In the case of cheerleading, dance symbolizes support for the team and repulsion towards the opposition through repetition of cheers and solid, strong body movements. Within American culture, these non-verbal communicative processes of cheerleaders facilitate interaction and responses within the sports arena. The type of cheerleading I have examined is the most common form of modern day American cheerleading: squads associated with academics or competition.
Movement and coordination, of both an individual and the group, are key components of cheerleading. While executing these movements, cheerleaders do not talk about what comes next. When they learn these movements, there are ways in which cheerleaders must recall the movements in the correct sequence. The cognition of cheerleaders is an interesting phenomenon.

Throughout my research, I found nothing directly describing cognition and cheerleading. However, I did find sources that discussed action and thought in ways that related to cognitive processes of cheerleaders. Gatewood (1985) discusses "making a set," or the work of putting in a net, holding it open to attract fish, then retrieving the equipment, in salmon purse seining. Like cheerleading, salmon purse seining involves coordinating the efforts of multiple group members. Additionally, "the phenomenon involves breaking down a process into events or episodes.....In seining, very few temporal phases of the work are encoded in a collective jargon....Each crew member constructs his own cognitive representation of his work (including its segmentation into episodes), and these personal constructs only partially correspond with those encoded in the collective representations of the work" (Gatewood 1985: 201). Cheerleaders think through their actions in this same way—using an individualized inner speech that is not part of public discourse. In fact, you would not talk through a routine using these mental cues aloud, nor would you commonly discuss them with other cheerleaders. This is probably why through my interviews, I had great difficulty getting other cheerleaders to discuss their action and thought patterns. My insight into cheerleading cognition comes
from my own inner thought as a cheerleader, and relating my cognitive descriptions to
the cognitive descriptions of salmon purse seining and blacksmithing.

Dougherty and Keller (1985) and Keller and Keller (1996) discuss cognition and
tool use as seen through blacksmithing. Although there is a major difference between
blacksmithing and cheerleading—blacksmithing is almost always an individual activity,
cheerleading is almost always a group activity—there are also some key similarities. In
blacksmithing, like cheerleading, there is a degree of lexicalized knowledge; however
mental imagery and spatial organization are the main factors in active cognition. The
greatest commonalities between seining, blacksmithing and cheerleading are that they are
highly sequenced activities and they all involve shared group knowledge.

Gatewood (1985) asserts that anthropologists should focus on systems of action in
relating cognition to action, not just on cognition’s relationship to linguistics. Actual
cheers and the language of the cheers are crucial to the communicative aspects of
cheerleading. However, an individual cheerleader’s cognitive actions are seen through
their sequencing, timing, and coordination.

Dougherty and Keller (1985) and Keller and Keller (1996) discuss the
relationship between knowledge, practice, and structure regarding blacksmithing.
Although there are general linguistic classification themes in blacksmithing, Dougherty
and Keller, “discard the notion of basic morphological/linguistic hierarchy as central to
the cognitive organization of blacksmithing, and …examine the kinds of organization that
do make sense to blacksmiths at work” (1985:163). Blacksmiths organize information on
the basis of location of tools, the function of tools, and primarily on tool constellations:
each step requires a certain constellation of tools in association with materials, processes,
and a notion of the desired end point. More general knowledge structures can also be characterized through constellations of conceptual units that arise in response to the task at hand. “The basic principles of such organizations are functional relations” (Dougherty and Keller: 1985:165).

Conceptualization and production in blacksmithing through knowledge and practice is central to Keller and Keller (1996). Through the analysis of blacksmithing, they recognize the significance of conceptual representations and processes for understanding human behavior. Like cheerleading, blacksmithing is an activity that, “constitutes an activity system incorporating knowledge, readily observable behaviors, and tangible materials; it is performed by a group that shares values, information, and goals” (Dougherty and Keller 1996:18). Therefore, like blacksmithing, cheerleading is also the manifestation of the socially derived conceptual organization(s) of the actor(s) involved.

Both Gatewood (1985) and Dougherty and Keller (1985) and Keller and Keller (1996) support how human knowledge is stored and executed through action in their fields of expertise such as salmon purse seining and blacksmithing I have had four years of experience on middle school and high school cheerleading squads. Like Gatewood (1985), I will relate knowledge and action in anthropological accounts as I describe in short form a cheerleader’s basic cognitive organization of an action system. My narrative will provide an example for how I organized cheerleading routines in order to know what to do next, and to complete complex stunts involving many people.

Cheerleaders must learn, remember, and perform sequences of movement. While learning and forming a memory of these movements, there are several ways cheerleaders
can organize the movements and commit them to memory. The first is by categorization of such movements. Cheerleading is a dance form heavily reliant on a well-defined set of body shapes and movements. Cheerleaders categorize such movements into body movements, arms, legs, jumps, kick-lines, stunts and formation changes. These are the major categories, but there is plenty of room for variation and sub categories. For example, if a movement requires a special head movement, that would add another category.

When a cheerleader learns a routine or cheer, it is first demonstrated for him or her. Then, the cheerleader will learn segments of the cheer—this is generally how the cheerleader will recall the movements and organize the routine. However, before the routine can be recalled from its segments, cheerleaders must learn the steps and sequence that makes up each segment. This is where the categorization comes into play.

Cheerleaders usually first learn the general body movement of the cheer, for example, "pivot right." Then, other movement categories are added, for example, "Pivot right, arms in daggers, legs in a lunge." Cheerleading, like ballet, has a well defined set of highly lexicalized commonly used names and terms. For explanations of the most common cheerleading terms and for other examples of cheerleading movements in these categories, please turn to Appendix C.

Cheerleaders usually always originally learn the routine through a series of movements with names attached to them. However, once segments of the routine are initially learned, a cheerleader runs through the routine in seven different ways. These methods for continuing to learn, remember, and perform the routine vary for each individual cheerleader. Additionally, these methods are not mutually exclusive. Many
times a cheerleader will use a few of these methods in conjunction with each other over the course of a particular cheer.

The first way cheerleaders can think about the movements are with names. These names do not encompass every motion of a particular movement, but rather they give the cheerleader the overall idea of the move. For example, “march-and-clap-and-march-and-clap-and-punch-and-punch-and-kick-and-down,” is a way that a cheerleader might remember a part of a segment of a routine. I call these portions of segments of routines “combinations.” I performed this combination in approximately three seconds. Therefore, it is easy to see that in many instances, names and words are only used to remember the combination in the initial stages of learning the routine, because it is simply not economical. Memorizing one word for each individual movement and step is not efficient when compared to the other six methods.

The naming method can be used in conjunction with or substituted by a more economical method: counts. These counts usually are counts of eight, but occasionally vary depending on the routine and music. It is also important to note that “and” signifies a half count, for example, a combination might coincide with such counts as “1 and 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, 7, 8.” I spoke with 11 informants who are cheerleaders in order to gather information about cheerleading. All 11 informants were in consensus that the counting method was the method they used most of the time to remember parts of routines.

In addition to names and counts, non-words can be used to learn and recall movement. An example of a non-word is “dah-dee-dah—dah-dee-dah-dee.” This method of learning and recalling combinations most often substitutes for counts, or is used when counts do not fit the routine. Using non-words is a highly personalized schematic. This is
evident when you consider how a choreographer teaches a cheerleading squad how to perform a routine or a stunt. Whereas a routine might be taught using words to remember a combination, and is almost always taught using counts, a routine is never taught using non-words. Non-words are very personalized mnemonic devices individual cheerleaders construct to remember routines.

The first three forms of organizing movement involve some sort of rhythmic mental cue with a linguistic name. Names/words, counts, and non-words all use a non-verbal mental cue with a title. The remaining four types of organization are even more spacial and temporal. The first uses the feeling of the movement. For example, while performing a stunt, there are hundreds of muscle movements involved, and you’re coordinating efforts with multiple people. Also, someone is the “flyer,” meaning the person who will be elevated or tossed into the air. Although counts may guide the stunt, the best method for the organization and successful execution is through the feeling of the movement. Other combinations, especially jumps, might also be learned, remembered and performed through the feeling of the movement.

The fifth way to organize movement is through the basic rhythm or music. In cheerleading, this method is especially prevalent because many squads use mixes in their routines. A mix means that the actual music switches in a 2-3 minute routine. Music cues and rhythm changes are central to such things as formation changes and stunts. In addition to rhythm and music, two types of imagery help cheerleaders learn, remember, and perform sequences of movement. The first type is visual imagery. These images can be of the coach, the captain, themselves, or other members of the squad performing the movements. This sort of organization is especially helpful in kick-lines and formation
changes. Originally, the way cheerleaders often memorize their positions in kick-lines and formations is by who on their squad is next to them, in front of them or behind them. While getting to the position, they visualize the formation.

The last way to learn, remember, and perform routines is through picturing everyday images. For example, my squad performed a cheerleading move that cause the performer to spiral their arms while pushing upwards. I memorized this movement as, “helicopter going up.” This is different from the words used for memorizing steps in the first example. Instead, this technique uses a mental image as a visual mnemonic device. The visual mnemonic devices are used to recall a constellation of movements, not the lexicalization of each individual movement or step.

The best example of how these techniques are used in combinations is seen in a stunt called a “carousel.” My squad created this stunt to use in national competitions in 1998. The stunt required forming a circle of a smaller stunt holding a girl elevated to shoulder level in a split, and directly next to that stunt is a much larger stunt where a girl is held as high as two other girls can raise her. This girl is on one leg (called a liberty) and is lifted up and down along with the music. The entire group rotates as the girls in liberties are moving up and down. All together, this is called a carousel. Obviously, imagery is used to describe the entire constellation that involves approximately 35 girls executing highly synchronized, complex movements. In addition to the imagery used by the group, there is a lexicalized shared group knowledge of terms. Although there is shared knowledge of terms such as “liberty,” each individual squad member had to coordinate their own timing. Although the music was a synchronizing element, the synchronization has to be recalled mentally by each individual member using the seven
cognitive techniques. Individuals may vary in how they use these techniques, but all cheerleaders think through their movements and must organize their routines using such techniques.

A Brief History of Cheerleading

Cheerleading began in the late 1800's. The first “cheerleaders” were injured athletes. Instead of sitting on the bench during the game, the injured players would lead the crowd in “yells” to cheer on the team. The concept of a “yell” leader formed, and Universities throughout the United States saw unofficial “yell” leaders leading the crowds at athletic games. These yell leaders were always male, and held very prestigious positions as the yell leader at university athletic games.

Official spirit groups, known as pep clubs, were formed later in the 1800s. The first pep club was established at Princeton University in 1865, and the following decade brought about the first organized yell with multiple yell leaders. At a Princeton football game, Thomas Peebler gathered six men to lead a yell on the sidelines in front of the student body. The spirited yell was

"Rah rah rah
Tiger Tiger Tiger
Sis sis sis
Boom boom boom
Aaaahhhhh!
Princeton! Princeton! Princeton!"
In 1884, Peebler reportedly took the yell to the University of Minnesota campus and on November 2, 1898, a yell-leader named Johnny Campbell got so excited that he jumped out in front of the crowd. Johnny Campbell became the first official cheerleader. The University of Minnesota was having a pitiful football season. One fan decided to write a letter to *The Ariel*, the official paper of the University of Minnesota and complain. The fan wrote, "Everyone's been crying, 'Keep up your spirits, and we will have a winning team bye and bye.' I say give us a winning team and our spirits will take care of themselves" (Froiland 1993: 13). Everyone agreed that something had to be done and soon a meeting was called of all University of Minnesota students and faculty before the game with Madison, Wisconsin. One of the University's professors presented a brilliant scientific thesis on fan support. He stated that the collective stimuli of several hundred students focused on sending positive energy in the team's direction would help the team win. The professor concluded with a rousing cry: "Go to Madison! Go to Madison! Apply the summation of stimuli!" The game came and went, and the Gophers got killed 28-0. The cheer didn't work. It just didn't roll off of the tongue the right way. Something different had to be done to get the Gopher fans riled up. (Adams and Bettis 2003: 11-14)

Johnny Campbell, a then first-year medical student, stepped in and officially became the first cheerleader. He explained that someone needed to lead the yells with organized cheering, and there needed to be variety in the cheers to get the crowd going. At the next game, Campbell led the crowd:

"Rah-Rah-Rah!

Sku-u-mar! Hoorah! Hoorah!"
The early 1900s saw the popularization of the megaphone. The first cheerleader fraternity, Gamma Sigma, was also organized in the 1900s. School spirit was gaining popularity around the country, as seen in the first "homecoming" game that was held at the University of Illinois in 1910. In 1920, "yell leaders" brought in drums and noisemakers. Football's popularity increased in the United States, and along with the rise in the sport, yell-leading became more popular.

The University of Minnesota cheerleaders began to incorporate gymnastics and tumbling into their cheers in the 1920s. Women did not become active in cheerleading until the 1920s when many universities would place attractive women in front of the crowds to lead yells. Female cheerleaders in the 1920s increased in popularity when the first flash-card cheering section was directed by Lindley Bothwell at Oregon State University.

High school cheerleading was first initiated at Lincoln High School in Los Angeles, California in 1916. The cheerleaders also started as yell leaders when Ethel Percy Andrus became principal at the high school and wanted to build the school’s athletic enthusiasm. Andrus had students teach the game of football in a school assembly using a megaphone. This lead to the institution of male yell leaders. It is unknown as to exactly when females first served as high school cheerleaders, but their presence was noted in the press as early as a 1924 Ohio high school football game. (Hanson 1995: 20)
After this, high school cheerleading followed the same patterns that trickled down from collegiate squads.

In the 1930s, universities and high schools alike began performing pom-pom routines and using paper pom-poms, which are still the most widely recognized cheerleading prop. In the early 1940's, when men went to war, women not only went to work, but became the primary members on cheerleading squads nation-wide. It was during the World War II years that cheerleading became dominated by females. When the men returned from war, new twists and turns were added. Gymnastics were always done by men, while the girls danced. This sexual division of labor gave rise to dance teams.

In 1948, Laurence "Hurkie" Hurkimer, founder of the spirit industry, organized the first cheerleader camp at Huntsville's Sam Houston University with just 52 girls in attendance. The first cheerleading organization, the National Cheerleading Association (NCA) was founded by Hurkimer, and created spirit slogans, ribbons, and buttons to raise spirit and money.

In the 1950s, college cheerleaders began conducting cheerleading workshops to teach fundamental cheerleading skills. The modern vinyl pom was invented by Fred Gastoff, around 1965, and introduced by the International Cheerleading Foundation. The "Bruin High Step" style of pom-pom routine was developed by UCLA cheerleaders and the International Cheerleading Foundation. In 1967 the first annual ranking of the "Top
Ten College Cheer Squads" took place, along with the initiation of the "Cheerleader All America" awards by the International Cheerleading Foundation.

Beginning in 1954, the Baltimore Colts organized the first professional cheerleading squad in history. The squad members were volunteers from the local high schools that would march around the field and do pom-pom dances during the game. Up until the formation of the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders, high school squads were used on the sidelines to promote spirit. In 1972, the sensational Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders emerged and created an unprecedented pure pom-pom "Broadway-style" of dance entertainment for the crowds (Adams and Bettis 2003:72).

Throughout the 1970's cheerleading continued to increase in popularity following the recognition of cheerleaders in the professional sports arena. In addition to cheering for the traditional football and basketball teams, cheerleaders began supporting all school sports, sometimes selecting several different squads to cheer for wrestling, track and field, and swimming. The first nation-wide television broadcast of the Collegiate Cheerleading Championships on CBS-TV in the Spring of 1978, was initiated by the International Cheerleading Foundation. In 1976, the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders performed at Super Bowl X and started an evolution of "dancing cheerleaders." The 1970's also saw the beginning of collegiate and high school cheerleading competitions.

In 1980, universal standards were established and safety guidelines precluded many dangerous tumbling moves and pyramids. National cheerleading competitions for junior and senior high school as well as collegiate squads took place across the U.S..
I.C.F. Training Course for faculty cheerleading 'sponsors' and coaches was offered at locations nationwide.

Today, collegiate pom and dance is a fast growing segment of the cheerleading industry. Partly in response to the internationalization of basketball and American football, cheerleading is now itself international, with Japan, Europe, Australia, Canada, and Mexico involved in cheerleading.

**Gender Issues, Sex Roles and the Division of Labor Involved in Cheerleading**

Through analyzing cheerleaders over the last 135 years, the evolution of gender roles in the United States over the past century becomes clear. Originally, women were excluded from becoming cheerleaders. Currently, many women involved in cheerleading fight against the sexualization of cheering. Additionally, the role of men in cheerleading has drastically changed from its beginnings.

As late as 1939, females were barred from becoming cheerleaders. During the 1920’s commercialization of feminine beauty, some collegiate squads began to admit female members. The main reason behind banning female cheerleaders was that they were not supposed to participate in gymnastics and other spectacles of athletic ability that the male cheerleaders and yell leaders performed. In addition to the 1920s sexploitation of women, sororities gained popularity and became huge forces in campus life throughout this time. Cheerleading squads reflected the rise in sororities as females were becoming more prevalent on squads and college campuses.

Women began to dominate cheerleading on college campuses in the 1940s with the advent of World War II. Men left their jobs and opened the door to Rosie the Riveter,
they also left college and allowed females to fill their slots on the cheerleading squad. Following the war, women prevailed in cheerleading and became to dominant members on squads across America.

As the role of women changed over the decades, so did the role of the cheerleader. As sexuality became more commercialized in the United States, so did eroticism in cheerleading. The female role of both collegiate and professional cheerleading originated to support professional football, and both brought a sort of entertainment and pageantry to the spectator sport (Hanson 1995: 49). The development of professional cheerleading was molded by the mass entertainment and promotional demand of the professional sports industry. These demands caused the role of the female cheerleader to change and become more sexualized, while paradoxically trying to avoid the appearance of sexual impropriety.

In the 1950s and 1960s, professional football teams occasionally used volunteer high school cheerleading squads to cheer at the games. In 1961-1971, the first group of professional cheerleaders were organized to cheer at Dallas Cowboy Games. They were called “The Belles and Beaux,” and were high school-aged collegiate style cheer groups. The original idea was to cast models as the cheerleaders, but that idea was rejected because, “models knew nothing about cheerleading” (Hanson 1995: 50). The Official Dallas Cowboy Bluebook noted that these “Belles and Beaux” went practically unnoticed throughout the years.

As professional football teams began to establish themselves in the medium of television, they began to notice the coverage attractive drill-team members and majorettes received. By 1973, twenty-one of the twenty-six clubs in the National Football League
employed groups of young women for promotional and public relations appearances. Established in 1970, the San Francisco 49ers Nuggets were the first sexualized team prototype that segued to the role of the eroticized professional cheerleader. The Nuggets were groups of attractive young women hired to “sell” the 49ers. They served as “white-booted ambassadors,” whose “primary duty was to look sexy, and at that, they were a complete success” (Hanson 1995: 52).

From the 1950s to the early 1970s, the presence of high school cheerleaders, drill teams, and promotional groups in professional football helped set the stage for a phenomenon that captivated the National Football League in 1972—The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. Texie Waterman, a Dallas native and successful Broadway choreographer was hired to bring New York styled jazz dancing to the fifty-yard line. Waterman’s hot-pants wearing, midriff bearing ensemble, considered risqué in 1972, became so popular, that the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleader’s uniforms have remained virtually unchanged for over twenty years. The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders became a national sensation and set a standard soon to be imitated by every NFL team. The Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders also came to symbolize the essence of professional cheerleading: glamour, sex appeal, and celebrity.

The sexuality in the professional cheerleading arena trickled down and became a staple image of high school and collegiate cheerleaders. In the Universal Studios motion picture, “Bring It On,” about rival high school cheerleading squads in southern California, the opening cheer says:

“I’m sexy, I’m cute
I’m popular to boot.
I’m bitchin’, great hair,
The boys all love to stare.
I'm on it, I'm hot, 
I'm everything your not.
I'm pretty; I'm cool.
I dominate this school.
Who am I? Just guess.
Guys want to touch my chest.
I'm rockin'; I smile
And many think I'm vile.
I fly; I jump.
You can look, but you can't hump.
I'm major, I roar.
I swear I'm not a whore.
We cheer and we lead
We act like we're on speed.
Hate us cause we're beautiful,
But we don’t like you either.
We’re cheerleaders.
We are cheerleaders.”

Sexuality in cheerleading, and the stereotypes associated with it, has caused some young girls to believe that they are trying out for womanhood when they try out for cheerleading. Many associated with cheerleading at the middle school, high school and collegiate levels have tried to eliminate this sexual image of cheerleading. In 2002, the Universal Cheerleading Association dealt with the concern of sexuality in cheerleading by writing a new policy that penalizes cheerleaders and cheerleading squads that perform overtly sexual moves. Vice President of Operations and Development for the Universal Cheerleading Association, Bill Seely, addressed parental criticism of the sexual nature of cheerleading. “It’s something we’ve put on our score sheets. The Sportsmanship Clause, and it’s 5 percent of their score. If there are suggestive moves, they will get penalized”

(Adams and Bettis 2003: 83)

The penalization of sexually suggestive moves in cheerleading is a double-edged sword. Although professional cheerleading exploits the sexuality of women, banning any sort of sexually suggestive moves in cheerleading teaches many young women to
remove, suppress, or ignore any evidence of sexuality or sexual desire. “Desire is never discussed in sex education literature, particularly female sexual desire. There are also prohibitions against allowing desire to enter school spaces, even in student-driven avenues such as the school newspaper....Cheerleading allows the erotic to enter into school-sanctioned space, in fact it is one of the only school spaces in which girls can play with or try on the identity of the All-American nice girl next door and the sexually provocative woman simultaneously” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 83). A prime example of this is that cheerleaders are allowed to wear very short skirts and tight-fitting, midriff-bearing vests which often violate school dress codes. They are not allowed to dance in sexually-suggestive ways, yet, are allowed to dress sexually suggestive in accordance with the school’s dress code.

The parameters imposed on cheerleading and other dance forms often indicate a culture’s moral sentiments linked to sexuality and the regulation of women’s bodies. Cowan (1990) spotlights dancing as the site for the construction and negotiation of social relationships and social identities. Cowan focuses on gender roles and the cultural politics of dance. Dance is often an ambiguous and problematic venue for women to express themselves since it exhibits contradictory and ambivalent attitudes regarding female sexuality. In northern Greece, female sexuality is seen as both pleasurable and threatening. Dancing encourages women to put on view their skills and energy as well as their beauty, sensuality and even their seductive prowess. As the women display these aspects of their femininity, suspicion is simultaneously cast down upon them for failing to uphold self control and for making a spectacle out of themselves (Cowan 1990: 189-191). The ambivalence of body movements through dance creates a confusing boundary,
for there is no consensus on what gestures are legitimately sensual, and what movements are shamefully out of line. Most female cheerleaders in the United States must also walk the fine line of "pure and pious," and "fallen and sinful."

This dichotomy is not only evident in the penalties cheerleading squads face for sexually suggestive movements, but in the world of professional cheerleading as well. In the 1970's the demand for attractive, sexy, and scantily clad dancers on the sidelines swept the NFL. Television producers and directors capitalized on the seductive squads on the sidelines. ABC television sports director Andy Sidaris was even characterized by the *Los Angeles Times* as, "the man who brings T&A from the gridiron into your home" (Hansen 1995:49). Despite the provocative outfits and blatant sexuality that these professional cheerleaders were encouraged to bring to the games, professional cheerleading squads such as the Denver Bronco's Pony Express girls and the San Diego Chargers' Chargerettes were disbanded after the women posed for *Playboy* magazine.

Jackie Rohr was a Chicago Honey Bear who was fired for posing. Rohr took note of the inconsistency in the team official's attitudes, and therefore the ambiguity in her role.

"When they took our pictures for a poster shoot, the Bears' office told us to wear pushup bras, show lots of cleavage, and really schmaltz it up. When they heard I'd posed nude, they called *that* distasteful," Rohr said in a 1981 interview (Shister 1981: 166). The sexual sell was promoted when sanctioned by team management, but the cheerleader's individual freelancing and promotion of her own sexuality was prohibited. According to Reed (1998), the most intense opposition to dance is focused on the alleged or actual sexual immorality of dancing, or its environment. The professional cheerleading squads
of the late 1970s were penalized not for their obvious display of sexuality, but for the environment in which they were on display.

In the face of the growing commercialization of sex in American culture over the past decades, modern cheerleading went a different direction in most high school squads and competition teams. Cheerleading today is more difficult and requires greater athletic skill than ever before. Over the last two decades, the emergence of an intensely physical genre of cheerleading reveals the increasing importance of athleticism in females in the United States. In the 1960s and 1970s, a wave of feminist activism came about that initiated such policies as the 1972 Title IX of the Education Amendment Act, which prohibited any program receiving federal aid to discriminate on the basis of gender. Therefore, public schools, colleges, and universities had to provide more opportunities for girls and women to participate in athletics. Also in this time, new ideas emerged about the roles and expectations of women. Cheerleading started to change. The idea of an athletic cheerleader that did more than chant on the sidelines and do an occasional cartwheel arose. Tight athletic motions, difficult jumps, pyramids and other stunts as well as fast paced, difficult dances to music became prevalent in cheerleading throughout the 1980s. Additionally, a cheerleading industry began to develop and profit off these new cheerleading techniques that required girls to be trained in very difficult moves. The new cheerleader had to be strong, agile, well-coordinated, and above all, an athlete. The changing female role in cheerleading is also reflected in other sports such as soccer and basketball as more and more women became athletes throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

Cheerleading today has become even more athletically strenuous. Tryouts have become increasingly difficult. The prerequisites to try out for Middle Tennessee State
University Squad includes being able to complete a standing back handspring, standing back tuck, standing handspring/back tuck, running tumbling series, toss-extension, a liberty, and an optional stunt of your choice. These difficult gymnastic feats must be done in addition to a cheer and dance, which is taught at tryouts, as well as an additional cheerleading dance that is choreographed by the person trying out. Once a cheerleader makes the team, they must commit not only to staying in shape through weight training, stamina building, and endurance exercises, but in many places, they must also commit to daily cheerleading practices lasting two to three hours.

With the recent rise in athleticism in the cheerleading world, female cheerleaders are usually caught between the cheerleading stereotypes of being a soft, subtle lady supporting her team, and that of being a fierce, energetic athlete. There has been an ongoing battle to define whether or not cheerleading is a sport. At the start of the 2003-2004 school year, the University of Maryland became the first university to declare cheerleading a varsity sport and give full scholarships to worthy cheerleaders. However, cheerleaders must often fight the stereotype that, “cheerleading is a sport for the men who watch it.” The original intent of cheerleading was to support interscholastic athletics. This traditional role of cheerleading as supporter upsets many proponents of cheerleading as a sport. The traditional role of cheerleaders as supporter is seen by many as a throwback to when women were supposed to be subservient to men.

Additionally, in many arenas, female cheerleaders assume the role as mediator rather than that of athlete and competitor. An example of the “mediator” role is seen at school games and cheerleading camp. The role of good sportsmanship is taken to another level. At school games, female cheerleaders often create a sort of gift jar for the visiting
team's cheerleaders. Rather than displaying the competitive attitude the school's athletic team demonstrates, the cheerleaders must become friends with the opposing team's cheerleaders. In addition to the gift jar, the home team's cheerleaders often go watch the visiting team's cheerleaders routine at half-time and cheer on that squad. Unlike the usually all-male athletic team they are cheering for, the cheerleaders are forced to assume a more "lady-like" role and become "buddies" with the competing squad. Cheerleading camps enforce this same policy. By helping out rival teams, cheerleaders earn "spirit points," and the squad with the most spirit points receives the coveted Spirit Stick at the end of the week. Although other athletic teams emphasize sportsmanship, it is not usually to this extent.

Cheerleading, like dance, reveals gender identities in a culture. "If we accept as a given that gender is not an essential quality or characteristic but one that is largely performative, it is evident that dance studies have much to contribute to research on gender identities. In comparison to other performance forms such as theatre, dance has been one of the few sites where women can legitimately perform in public.....Dance is an important means by which cultural ideologies of gender difference are reproduced. Through movement vocabulary, costuming, body image, training, and technique, discourses of dance are often rooted in ideas of natural gender difference....Movement lexicons of males and females often demonstrate the ideals of gender difference in action" (Reed 1998:516). Cheerleading is a clear example of a dance form that reflects standards in American culture. In a coed squad, the men are the "bases," for they represent masculinity and strength as they flip and twirl the female cheerleaders into the air during stunts. In cheers, men have different roles than women as well. The image of
the powerful, athletic female has gained popularity in American culture, and therefore the role of an athletic cheerleader has become more acceptable. Although many female cheerleaders have had to fight against the hyper-feminine and sexualized role of the cheerleader, male cheerleaders today are also often marginalized for their position on the cheerleader squad despite their masculine role they assume on cheerleading squads.

Like the female cheerleader, the role of the male cheerleader has also changed. Unlike the original yell leaders, male cheerleaders today must grapple with issues of sexuality and often face questions about their sexual orientation. As cheerleading became feminized, males who participated in cheerleading were often subjected to questions about their masculinity. Male cheerleaders today often experience two reactions. First, many male cheerleaders are called homosexual names. The second most common reaction is to be asked questions about what it is like to be touching the thighs and buttocks of the attractive and athletic female cheerleaders. Even amid today's expanding gender definitions, the male cheerleader faces the stigma that says boys like him must be sissies or queer. "Any guy's going to get that, but after the first couple of weeks you're just, 'I don't care; call me gay.' Football players, they practice hard with guys and go shower with them after. I practice with a bunch of girls," said Barrett Cassidy, a male cheerleader at Platt-Maloney High School in Connecticut. "I went to a cheerleading camp and there were 300 girls and two guys. I like that ratio." "A lot of people were like, 'why are you cheerleading?' Well, let's see, while you're hitting other guys I'm lifting girls into the air," said Orlando Rivera of Platt-Maloney. "I'm secure because I really could care less what people think about me. I enjoy it. If they want to say anything about it, let them come out here and do it. I don't see them doing flips or splits" (Niles 2003). Many male
cheerleaders do respond to the threats to their masculinity by discussing their involvement with female cheerleaders and discussing that they do not care about the flak they get from others (Adams and Bettis 2003: 86).

Jason Crostin, a former male cheerleader at Eastern Washington University, said that he was originally enamored with his role lifting attractive women into the air. However, he said that cheerleading was so physically and psychologically demanding that he has no time for sexual thoughts about his female counterparts until practice is over (Niles 2003). There has been an increase in men on cheerleading squads over the past few years. “It should be of little surprise that the return of men to cheerleading has paralleled the redefinition of cheerleading as a sport. As the image of cheerleading has changed from pretty, popular girls performing cheers and cartwheels to the gymnastics-oriented stunting that many teams now incorporate, men have increasingly turned to cheerleading and found a niche” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 86).

Although male and female cheerleaders both have equal parts on a squad, and both genders must wrestle with sexuality issues, there is a clear division of labor in coed cheerleading squads. Males and females are assigned different roles on cheerleading squads. While women engage in sexualized dance moves, men tend to stand back, and only be involved in major strong arm movements and stunting. Men are there to provide the strength and power in many instances. The women provide the beauty and grace. According to a former male cheerleader, Justin Carter, “Basically, the guy is the frame. The girl is the piece of art” (Niles 2003).
Female cheerleaders also must grapple with issues of sexuality and fitting in to the stereotypical cheerleader mold. The emphasis on femininity in cheerleading makes it very difficult. In 1998, Amber Gutierrez complained to Denver Public Schools that her coach and cheerleading squad harassed and discriminated against her because of her bisexuality. The harassment included the other girls on the squad giving her the wrong practice information so she could not attend practice, and the coach having a talk with the squad about Amber’s sexuality without her attending or having any knowledge of the discussion. Amber eventually quit when the cheerleading squad mocked her publicly at a school basketball game. (Illescas:1998) To help cheerleaders cope with issues of sexuality, some regions of the country such as San Francisco and New Orleans have formed gay and lesbian cheerleading squads. San Francisco’s squad, called CHEER San Francisco, promotes diversity and acceptance as it cheers and performs at events all over the country.

Issues of homosexuality in cheerleading are especially difficult to deal with because of the two popularized versions of what a cheerleader should be. One archetype is the wholesome icon of the cheerleader solidified by social standards and norms. The other identity the stereotypical cheerleader assumes is that of the hyper-sexualized sideline dancer reinforced by the professional cheerleading community as well as some of the cheerleading uniforms many squads wear. These cheerleading prototypes became quite clear to me when I asked a class of Introduction to Anthropology students what a cheerleader symbolized to them. Two words were shouted out by various students in the class; the first was “virginity,” the other was “sex.” Gender and sexuality issues play a
major part in the politics of cheerleading. However, there are other aspects to the physical, cultural and social politics of cheerleading.

**Prejudice and Pep: Discrimination and Cheerleading Squads**

"U-G-L-Y,
You Ain’t Got No Alibi,
You’re ugly, Yeah Yeah, You’re Ugly!
P-U-S-S-Y,
You Don’t Even Have to Lie,
You’re Pussy, Yeah Yeah, You’re Pussy."

I was a cheerleader from middle school and until my sophomore year in high school. My freshman year of high school, I cheered for the basketball team in the winter. That winter, there was a basketball tournament in a near by town. In addition to the basketball tournament, the cheerleaders for each basketball team had a coinciding cheerleading competition. My squad thought the competition was a great way to practice for Nationals, so we entered. The winner of the basketball tournament was a team from a school in Oakland, California. They had a cheerleading squad that also participated in the tournament. Their cheerleading squad consisted of all African-American girls. Their style and cheers were very different than my all white squad. The African-American squad was much less rigid and more relaxed; they used a smooth, impromptu style of cheering. They stomped their feet in rhythm in addition to clapping their hands. Additionally, the above cheer, U-G-L-Y, was one of the cheers they performed in competition. After they performed, the Oakland squad was disqualified for their “sexually suggestive moves,” and using the above cheer, which contained the profanity, “pussy.”
Cheerleading has long been predominately a “white girl thing” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 91-110). One glance at the cover of the Universal Cheerleading Association’s 2004 National High School Championship cover shows the all-white championship squad. Although no official statistics are kept on the racial composition of cheerleading squads in the United States, a visit to almost any cheerleading camp, a glance through American Cheerleader, and most cheerleading brochures promoting camps and cheerleading products are disproportionately white (Adams and Bettis 2003:92). In certain cases, it has been brought to the school boards attention that the schools cheerleading squad is racially unrepresentative of the school. For example, in 2001 in Columbiana, Alabama, at Columbiana Middle School, 31 students tried out for the cheerleading squad. Of those 31, 7 aspiring cheerleaders were African American. In the final squad, only one African American girl was chosen, the other nine squad members were white. Several of the African American parents voiced concern with the school board, for the squad was unrepresentative of the tryout demographics. The school resolved the issue by offering everyone who tried out for the squad a position (Adams and Bettis 2003: 95)

In the Columbiana Middle School Case, issues of racial discrimination in cheerleading surfaced when the unfair practice of having a racially unrepresentative cheerleading squad became clear. Unfortunately, race and ethnicity do play a role implicitly in discussions about who should be a cheerleader; for example, there are racist assumptions and discussions about who should cheerlead. “There are whispered comments about differences in styles of cheerleading based on race and ethnicity, such as the lack of smiles of Native American cheerleaders, the militaristic moves of white squads, and the suggestive moves of African American cheerleaders. These simplistic
characterizations speak to both national stereotypes and cultural and historical differences among racial and ethnic groups” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 96). In a recent dispute in Chatham County, Georgia, a father of a Johnson High School cheerleader complained that some of the squad’s moves were too sexual, and that they communicated the wrong idea. The squad members were told to eliminate hip movements from their routines. The parent that complained is white, and Johnson High School is predominately African American. A former graduate of the high school, Lisa Wilkins, said that the controversy was not about generational differences in acceptable movements, but stylistic differences, “When we shake, as African-Americans—because we’re so healthy—it’s going to shake a little harder than any Caucasians. What are you going to tell me to do, square dance?”

African Americans were integrated into the white cheerleading arena four years after The Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1964, racial discrimination in federally funded programs became forbidden, and African American athletes became accepted at predominately white universities. In 1967, the Black Student Action Committee at Purdue demanded African American representation on the cheerleading squad. Purdue had 16 black football players at the time. However, the 1968 cheerleading squad had 10 members, selected by a panel of administrators and previous cheerleaders, who were all white. The Black Student Action Committee’s pressure resulted in the addition of two black women being added to the white squad. At the International Cheerleading Foundation’s competition, held in Madison Square Garden, Lou Lillard, a black member of Purdue’s squad, was named one of the six All-American Cheerleaders. At an interview during the competition, he said that one reason there were so few black cheerleaders at integrated colleges was that there were stylistic differences in black and white
cheerleading. "The type of cheering at black high schools is more of a stomp-clap-soul-swing thing. At white schools, the traditional cheers are straight-arm motions," Lillard said. Most white secondary schools emulated the more traditional style that had developed in predominately white colleges (Hanson 1995: 33-34). In my cheerleading competition at the basketball tournament, Oakland’s African-American squad was disqualified for not following the traditional cheerleading methods seen in many white squads. The judges obviously had preconceived notions of what a cheerleader should be, and could not see past the traditional cheerleading mold into the ideal characteristics of a cheerleading team that Oakland’s cheerleading squad expressed: overwhelming unity and enthusiasm for their winning team.

It is very important to recognize different and diverse styles of cheerleading. Although a squad may adhere to a different style, cheerleaders still communicate the same things: optimism, support, unity, enthusiasm and strength through their cheers and movements.


“This is not a democracy, it is a cheerocracy. And I am captain.”

- Bring It On

Dance is a political activity. Spencer’s (1985) themes of dance support that dance is an institutionalized activity seen in all cultures at some point in time. In fact the only
time dance does not appear in a culture’s traditions is when it has been banned. Spencer discusses dance as a type of social control in two ways.

First, Spencer (1985) cites the educational role of dance and the transmission of sentiments in societies. Spencer’s examples display the different educational values learned in different cultures. In his first example, he discusses an eighteenth-century British debutante rigorously trained to take the floor and perform a minuet. In this situation, everyone watches her, for the minuet epitomizes the etiquette and sense of values that is maintained by England’s elite. In fact, Reginald St. Johnston suggested that the minuet was not a dance, but rather one of the finest schools of courtesy and deportment ever invented. Spencer also gives an example of dance teaching cultural norms and values through the informal Samoan children’s dance seen in Margaret Mead’s studies. “In the European example, the dance was regarded as a mould that produced standardized products, whereas in Samoa, Mead regarded it as a device that separated adept from inept children, preparing them respectively for success or failure later in life. Through their dancing, keen children were held to develop an adult grace, proficiency, and confidence, whereas clumsy and stupid children were rebuked by their peers and lost confidence; in this way the more precocious children cultivated adult values that discriminated against clumsiness, while the less skilled came to accept their inferiority” (Spencer 1985). In both of these examples, dance is a vital instrument to a culture’s cohesion between members. Dance is a catalyst for communicating socially acceptable behavior in a society.

Traditional cheerleading keeps by very similar standards. It was developed as a method to control a situation—to cause the crowd to verbally show unity and excitement.
in rooting for the home team. Although cheerleading began as a spontaneous form of youthful expression, it has become a more formal mechanism that can instill both positive and negative cultural values among audiences. Cheerleaders have become social and cultural icons to follow in America. The respected elite "all-American" men were the first cheerleaders, and although there are exceptions, the favored females in the community are often on squads throughout the United States. In professional cheerleading, the squad members represent the physical ideal for beauty and are highly desired in America. Additionally, pop-culture movies, such as *American Beauty, Sugar and Spice, Bring It On,* and *Grease* depict female cheerleaders as epitomizing beauty, popularity and effervescence. These depictions reiterate the image and social values of the stereotypical cheerleader. Since the stereotype of the all-American cheerleader embodies such desirable characteristics, cheerleaders have become role models. For example, the Lehigh University bookstore sells out of miniature Lehigh cheerleading uniforms for toddlers every football season. Many visitors dress their pre-school age daughters, granddaughters and nieces up as Lehigh University cheerleaders. If the image of the cheerleader was not idealized in American culture, three-year-olds would not be donning these ensembles. "Cheerleading is an American invention with roots in the institutions of sport and education. The cheerleader is a nationally recognized symbol that has become a staple in American culture" (Hanson 1995: 1). Cheerleaders are American cultural icons ranking with baseball, apple pie, and jazz.

Secondly, Spencer's (1985) themes of dance discuss dance as seen in a functionalist theory approach within a culture. A culture's interactions with dance maintain the cultural sentiments. A functionalist approach to the role of dance in society
is summarized in Radcliffe-Brown’s view-- that the basic conditions for an orderly social existence depend on the transmission and maintenance of culturally desired sentiments; and this leads us to not only imbue the young with such sentiments, but also to revitalize the sentiments of adults through dance.

Cheerleading squads in America often function to convey social standards to the student body. In the 1920s, cheerleading began to evolve into a formal institution. Formalization at school, community, and college levels was reinforced by a cheerleading industry, which developed not only to promote products and services, but standards. “Under adult supervision, cheerleading in schools, colleges, and community programs became a highly structured activity. Formal mechanisms developed to determine who would cheer, how they would learn to cheer, how they would behave, and how they would represent their respective institutions. 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” (Hanson: 29-30). Today, cheerleaders continue to be held to higher social standards than the average student. These high standards are applied to cheerleaders because school administrators believe that members of the cheerleading squad are highly influential individuals, and that the student body will emulate the social code upheld by the cheerleaders. For example, an informant I interviewed cheered for the Wyoming High School Activities Association’s (WHSAA) Spirit Squad. She gave me a copy of the social rules and regulations the WHSAA set by which her spirit squad should abide. The third rule states,
“Good sportsmanship is viewed by the WHSAA as a concrete measure of a group’s understanding and commitment to fair ethical treatment and integrity. *Cheerleading, more than any other activity, directly influences the behavior of others.* It is important the cheer coach, captain, and total squad be aware of the guidelines.”

Hanna (1979) also supports that dance communicates political thought and action. “Dance is power, a form through which life forces are made manifest and communicated. It seems, then, not unlikely that dance messages may significantly influence a performer’s mind and body, and an audience’s responses” (Hanna 1979: 126). Hanna’s concept of the relationship of dance to exercise power over others focuses on dance as symbolizing power relations and actual political strategy through the validation and recreation of leadership, competition for power, social control, coping with subordination and constraints on the exercise of power (Hanna 1979: 128). As cheerleading communicates power relationships and strategically plays a political role by validating and recreating leaders. This vehicle of competition for power, provides a way of coping with subordination, and is an agent of social control.

Hanna discusses dance as power over others. “One kind of power may be used to secure another through dancing. Dance articulates, creates and re-creates power relations: Frank Hatch (1973) argues that the function of dance is to control and organize social interactions” (Hanna 1979: 135). Dance affirms and re-creates leadership positions as body power exercised in dance communicates social and political statuses and roles. For example, Nafana men of the Ivory Coast assert their dominance with dance movement. In their dance, the political and economic power of a man is communicated. This is not so different from cheerleading. The squad’s sexualized body movements, pyramid stunts
that raise them above the crowds, and their position directly in front of the crowd emphasizes the cheerleaders’ influence in their community.

Cheerleading also becomes a powerful status symbol of social class in many communities because it is an expensive activity. The uniforms for practice, uniforms for competitions, and camp outfits, plus the costs of camp and competition fees can often run into the thousands. “Cheerleading is also elevated because of the enormous cost to participate. Many families make substantial sacrifices for their daughters to participate in a $1,000 a year activity” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 24).

Cheerleaders hold leadership roles. The cheers and movements in the cheers communicate to the crowds, and the crowds call back in return. Hanna (1979) asserts that dance provides affective security as a familiar experience for both the performer and spectator. Therefore, there is an emotional expectation that within a particular dance style, a dance element, such as rhythm or spatial patterning, will be recognized, repeated, and/or followed by a similar element. Cheerleaders, therefore, provide a secure, familiar experience to their audience. Cheers are almost always repetitive so that the crowd can follow along. The dance moves and cheer movements are also easy to recognize because of the rhythm repeating at recognizable intervals. This consistency, repetition, and synchronization builds the crowds’ emotions and usually generates an enthusiastic response. In my interviews, the two most common crowd responses were clapping to the rhythm and cheering along. The cheerleaders successfully lead the community through the non-verbal communication patterns exhibited in their body motion.

These large squads engage in dancing described as community dance. Modern day American cheerleading squads are involved in community dancing. Community
dancing occurs only among humans and is defined as a form of group behavior whereby an indefinite number of individuals start to move their muscles rhythmically, establish a regular beat, and continue to do so for the purpose of generating excitement shared by all participants and by onlookers as well (McNeil: 13). For example, soldiers marching and children playing “ring around the rosy,” represent types of community dancing. However, a soldier’s salute is not. Although a soldier’s salute generates excitement and follows a rhythm, there is no regular beat established.

The uniform, rigid body motions of a cheerleading squad emphasize unity and strength against the opposition. Cheerleading transitions from one formation to the next almost always involve marching and clapping together in time. This display is quite powerful. It is very militaristic, and military motion is meant to assert a force bigger than the individual members. The rigid movements communicate power and strength not only to the crowds, but to the participants who are keeping together in time. A cheerleader I interviewed said, “I go from one step to the next through what’s called a formation change. We keep to the beat and march to our next position. Our hands also clap tightly to the music as we march. Obviously, we don’t all march in the same direction, because we each have to go to a different position, but the key is to all be marching and clapping together in sync with the beat until you reach your next position and start that part of the dance or cheer. If everyone does it together, it looks really cool. But, if one person is off counting, then its really noticeable.”

McNeil (1995) describes his experience marching in the army and what effect it had on the soldiers. “Marching aimlessly about on the drill field, swaggering in conformity with prescribed military postures, conscious only of keeping in step so as to
make the next move correctly and in time, somehow felt good. Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual....Obviously, something visceral was at work; something, I later concluded, older than language and critically important in human history, because the emotion it arouses constitutes an indefinitely expansible basis for social cohesion among any and every group that keeps together in time, moving muscles together and chanting, singing, or shouting rhythmically,” (McNeil 1995: 2).

Cheerleaders, like soldiers, also build enthusiasm and power through synchronized muscular movements throughout the entire group. The emblematic prop of cheerleaders that is used to emphasize their rigid movements, the “pom-pom,” also demonstrates the militaristic themes in cheerleading. The word “pom-pom” is based on the word “pompon,” derived from the French word pompe which refers to ornamental tufts worn on soldiers’ caps and shakos (Hanson 1995: 4). The cheerleaders’ pom-pom is an extension of the decorative, ceremonial, and militaristic pompon and today it is used to bring attention to the strong, emphatic squad movements. Group movements, in unison and to rhythm, build enthusiasm and power within the group as well as for onlookers. Cheerleaders perform these dances to captivate crowds and to communicate pride and strength for their community and home team.

Keeping together in time has long been a way that many cultures have asserted their strength to defeat an opponent. Spartan, Zulu, and Aztec civilizations all developed very similar styles of rigorous military training that used muscular bonding through
rhythm to define the cultures identity and lead their militaries to many victories (McNeil 1995: 103-105). All three cultures required the young men who aspired to be soldiers to live apart from others according to age class. Each of these three distant civilizations combined dance with military drill to train the youths for war and provide order to the society and military associations. In the Aztec civilization, warriors asserted their rank and collective identity through formalized dance. Dancing became the way that warriors prepared for battle and dancing signified promotion after a warrior had been successful in battle. McNeil (1995) argues that since World War II, there has been widespread revulsion from everything associated with Hitler, and therefore rhythmic muscular expressions of political and ideological unity has been discredited in the western world. However, in America, sports activities and sport fans are the one main arena that muscular movements in unison and synchronized cheers are still used to generate loyalty and enthusiasm. Therefore, it is easy to see that cheerleading in the United States is a powerful way to create and sustain a strong sense of community, build tremendous enthusiasm, and have that community at your command. Therefore, cheerleaders hold extensive power as they communicate to their crowds verbally through cheers, and nonverbally through rhythmic bonding.

This cheering in unison and rhythmic bonding unites the community as it highlights the common identity shared by the crowd rooting for the home team. In addition to the unified rhythmic patterns of cheerleaders while they cheer and dance, squads often perform stunts that elevate members into the air and above the crowds. This position allows for complete control over the audience below, as the girls hoisted into the air (called flyers) lead the crowd in optimistic chants in support of the home team. Even
the title, "cheer-leader," reaffirms the leadership position a squad holds in their school and community.

Hanna (1979) also discusses that dance is an arena for communicating who is the most powerful. This entails a competition for power. Dance is used to compete for power through its value as a preparatory tool for competition, a setting for competition, and a competitive mode through which the winner, dancer, or dance sponsor achieves power. Most cheerleaders dance to compete for power. This is clear in cheerleading competitions and at cheerleading tryouts. Cheerleading competitions allow individual cheerleading squads to build up their status through achievement. Among the Venda, Tutsi, and Malawian cultures, competitive dance teams were the vehicle through which political figures competed for positions of power and authority. The group's size and the originality of the dance patterns were usual aspects of the contest. Competition for power through dance also occurs among the Kaoka speakers of Guadalcanal. The manifestation of social energies surrounding the dance indicates evidence of power (Hanna 1979: 138). Cheerleading tryouts allow individuals within a community to compete for positions that will lead the other community members. According to Adams and Bettis, "It is certainly disconcerting to many that whereas school orchestras are almost non-existent today, in many small towns, 85 girls will show up to try out for 12 slots on a cheerleading squad" (2003b: 25).

The position of cheerleader is not coveted in every school across the country. However, competing for a position on the school cheerleading squad has become an image imbedded in American culture. Cheerleading tryouts signify a significant milestone in a young girl's life in America. For example, the cellular phone company, T-
Mobile, has been running advertisements advocating decreased phone bills and more "anytime" minutes with the company. The company's commercial shows a teenager sobbing in the middle of her high school and needing to talk longer to her mother on the phone so that she can be comforted since she didn't make the cheerleading squad. This young, aspiring cheerleader is incredibly relieved when actress Katherine Zeta Jones informs her that she can continue talking to her mother to calm down. T-Mobile was well aware of the impact this emotional appeal for more cellular phone minutes would have on the American consumer. This is because almost all Americans can relate to the image of a sobbing girl cut from the cheerleading squad and needing her mother's support. In addition to this image, Americans have adored Saturday Night Live's Spartan Cheerleaders, who were cheerleading rejects that didn't make their high school squad, but would not let go of the dream of cheerleading. Despite constant ridicule from the school's athletic teams and official cheerleading squad, the Spartans continued to cheer on the sidelines as "wannabe" cheerleaders. The two peppy, dim-witted characters played by cast members Cheri Otteri and Will Ferrell cemented the importance of cheerleading in America, and also parodied the cheerleading lifestyle of shallowness and the taxing search for "The Perfect Cheer."

The most extreme example of competition for a place on the cheerleading squad occurred in 1991 in Channelview, Texas. Housewife Wanda Halloway was arrested and found guilty of trying to hire a hit man to kill her former friend, Vema Heath. Wanda's jealousy stemmed from her high school days when she did not make the cheerleading squad, but Verna did. As the two women grew up in the town of Channelview, they both eventually had daughters of their own. When Verna's daughter, Amber, beat out Wanda's
daughter, Shana, for a slot on the cheerleading squad, Wanda attempted to find someone to kill Vema. Wanda believed that if Vema died, her daughter Amber would be too distraught to try out for the cheerleading squad that year, and Wanda's daughter, Shana, would certainly be selected instead (Mayer 1992). This sensational story made headlines around the globe. The Texas cheerleader murder plot perpetuated the perception that cheerleading is filled with narcissistic, shallow people (Adams and Bettis 2003). Additionally, it reinforced the notion that cheerleading mothers are living vicariously through their daughters cheerleading experiences. A hidden tape recorder recorded Wanda at her most malicious moment—plotting whether the hired hit man should take out Amber, her daughter's rival. Most of all, the Texas cheerleader murder plot displayed small-town petty jealousy and the significance of making the cheerleading squad in these types of communities. Cheerleading tryouts were literally cut-throat competitive in this Texan town, and this bizarre murder plot demonstrates that dance as an arena for demonstrating power through competition.

Cheerleading is an outlet, like dance, that provides a way of coping with subordination. Cheerleading neutralizes socially produced tensions and thereby performs a politically stabilizing function. This may stem from the feminization of cheerleading. Tannen (2001) purports that men use language for information and in contest, while women communicate intimacy and to build community. Female cheerleaders across the United States participate in the tradition of "bonding" with the opposing team's squad. Cheerleaders act as diplomats in this sense as they happily greet the opposing team's squad at the beginning of the game. In this greeting, they bring over a jar decorated and full of candy for the opposing team's squad. While the football or basketball players may
be yelling profanities at each other and acting aggressive, the cheerleaders are often the neutralizing party. Additionally, at cheerleading competitions and cheerleading camp, squads are recognized for building relationships with rival squads as a coveted “spirit stick” is often given out at the end of each day of camp, or at the end of a competition. The spirit stick is given to the squad that was the nicest and friendliest to all other squads while maintaining their spirit. In few other circumstances are rivals awarded for being sweet and friendly to each other in competition.

Dance is also instrumental in communicating social control, “since it may enculturate and maintain political and religious values, implement norms and enforce juridical functions” (Hanna 1979:138). Cheerleaders communicate political values. “Cheerleading is seen, by many, as a positive representation of the patriotic American, the good citizen, who exudes optimism even in the face of adversity” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 25). Even when the chips are down and when all obstacles are stacked against a team, even when a team is losing 45-2, the cheerleaders are expected to yell, “Go, Fight, Win Tonight!” In one of my interviews, a cheerleader said that she believed that this cheerleading “can-do” mentality is the heart of American idealism. “Cheerleaders go out there and say no matter what, we support our team, and we are going to cheer our hearts out for them no matter what happens. It does represent the American dream of never giving up,” she said.

Cheerleaders also enculturate values and norms, and this is most obvious in high school cheerleading squads. The social transmission of such values and norms becomes evident through the analysis of sanctions against cheerleaders. In a 1987 interview, a Connecticut cheerleader said, “corny as it sounds, cheerleaders do represent
their school, so we have to act properly wherever we’re likely to meet anyone who knows us in that capacity. Our squad works under a system of demerits, which are handed out for reasons, ranging from wearing too much makeup to smoking and drinking in uniform. A squad member who gets a certain number of demerits is automatically benched; if she gets too many she’s thrown off for good. So the girls become a very respectable bunch, which is sometimes misinterpreted as acting stuck-up” (Adams and Bettis 2003: 81). In this situation, cheerleaders represent the social norms the school wants disseminated among the students. Cheerleaders, among other athletes in high schools, are often used to communicate values and norms to the student body. An informant I interviewed talked about the sanctions against cheerleaders who did not follow the social values the school instilled upon her squad. In her squad in San Ramon, California, all cheerleaders had to sign a contract from the school to be on the squad. The contract stated that no cheerleader could drink, smoke, or use illegal drugs under any circumstances. She said, “Even if a cheerleader was at a non-school related party on the weekend and had a cigarette, if it got back to our coach, she would be kicked off the squad. After we won a national title in a competition in Los Angeles, three girls got in a lot of trouble. They met some boys in the hotel. The boys came up to their hotel room. The guys smoked in the room and brought up some alcohol. One of other girls on the squad heard what was going on and got the coach. The coach not only kicked the girls off the squad after that one incident, but banned them from ever trying out again.” This circumstance shows that schools transmit the social values and norms they want the student body to follow through the cheerleader.

This transmission of social values through student leaders was recently noted in a Pennsylvania Supreme Court case about drug testing students who participate
in extra-curricular activities through the school. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court told the Delaware County, Pennsylvania school district that it had failed to make a convincing argument for random, suspicionless testing of students who participate in extracurricular activities. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, in summarizing its objections to the Delaware Valley testing program, noted that students participating in extracurricular activities had been made subject to drug testing in part because they are student leaders and role models for other students. That makes it seem, the court concluded, that those students "have been selected for testing for symbolic purposes—i.e., their privacy rights are deemed forfeit so as to set an example for other students."

Adults, such as teacher, principals and coaches certainly want to maintain high moral behavior and values of cheerleading squad members, but many girls themselves have a stake in making sure that the image of the cheerleader is preserved. Cheerleaders who are sexually active, smoke and drink are expected to keep it a secret.

Merten (1996) explored what happened when a middle school member of the "burnout" click earned a spot on the cheerleading squad dominated by members of the "prep" group. Burnouts were kids who did not attempt to meet the adult expectations of good behavior in adolescence. They smoked cigarettes and marijuana, drank alcohol, and some were sexually active. The most important thing about their behavior was that they did not keep it a secret, in fact they told everyone about these activities. When a girl from the burnout squad was selected to become a cheerleader, several popular boys claimed that the squad was not only now made up of losers, but that the prep girls who had made the squad were decimated by the remark. The prized activity of cheerleading, which made girls feel special, was now tarnished.
Cheerleaders often follow explicitly stated codes of conduct from the school, but also adhere to a non-verbal social policy from within the squad. When Amber Gutierrez’s squad found out about her bisexuality, they socially excluded her by harassing her and making sure she could not participate by giving her the wrong information for cheerleading practices. Amber was ostracized because she did not follow the social norms of the “wholesome” cheerleader image. Amber’s coach openly discussed her sexuality with the other girls in the squad without her knowledge, and did not reprimand the other girls on the squad for harassing her. This shows that the coach was also interested in preserving the iconic and socially admired image of her cheerleading squad. Cheerleaders communicate through their dances, positions, social status as school role models, and cheers. However, because there are standards about how a cheerleader should act, behave, and cheer, stereotypes have raised issues in the cheerleading world.

Conclusion: The Many Messages of Cheerleaders

Cheerleaders communicate in many ways and communicate a wide array of messages. Their communication has meaning at many different levels. Sigmund Freud (Crick 1999) first coined the terms manifest and latent functions, however Merton (1957) applied the meaning to social behavior. The manifest function refers to the purposes of which members of society are aware. The latent function refers to the purposes of which members are not aware. “Since the occasion for making the distinction arises with great frequency, and since the purpose of a conceptual scheme is to direct observations toward salient elements of a situation and to prevent the inadvertent oversight of these elements, it would seem justifiable to designate this distinction by an appropriate set of terms. This
is the rationale for the distinction between manifest functions and latent functions; the first referring to those objective consequences for a specified unit (person, subgroup, social or cultural system) which contribute to its adjustment or adaptation and were so intended; the second referring to unintended and unrecognized consequences of the same order" (Merton 1957:61). Cheerleading has specified manifest functions, and innumerable latent functions.

One such example of the manifest and latent functions of cheerleading is seen through leading the school in cheers at athletic games. The manifest function in this circumstance is to support the team and school. The latent function is to build solidarity within the school and community. Another example pertains to cheerleading uniforms. "When objects become, like uniforms, obligatory and regulated, with implications of mass value, they are irresistibly fascinating" (Fussell 2002:1). Uniforms are worn by both major types of cheerleaders: athletic/scholastic and professional. "Regardless of the different appeal of the two types of cheerleaders, uniformity is indispensable" (Fussell 2002: 118). The uniforms provide uniformity—this is the manifest function. However, uniforms have several different latent functions. The uniforms symbolize the regimentation of cheerleaders, and the fact that they all follow rules and regulations. This becomes a latent function when examined through the double entendre of a cheerleader’s sexuality and virtue. The spirited uniforms promote virtue, while the skimpiness of them implies sexuality.

Cheerleaders communicate through verbal and non-verbal processes. Their communication is complex and interesting, especially in light of the manifest and latent
functions evident in such communication. However, there is another fascinating
dimension of cheerleading communication and the communication process. Bateson
(1972) uses short dialogues (called metalogues) to convey meaning to his readers. In the
metalogue, "Why Do Frenchmen?," a father and a daughter discuss the concept of non-
verbal communication. This discussion leads to a metacommunication—talking about the
multiple meanings associated with communication. Bateson coins the term
metamessages, which are key components in the communication process. (Please refer to
Appendix B for a diagram of the communication process.) The first step in the
communication process is when a sender sends a signal verbally or non-verbally. This is
a "stimulus, an elementary signal, internal or external" (Bateson 1972: 289). "Context of
a stimulus is a metamessage which classifies the elementary signal. Context of a context
of a stimulus is a meta-meta message which classifies the metamessage. And so on"
(Bateson 1972: 289). Throughout my ethnography of cheerleading, I have classified the
contexts of cheerleading's metamessages through the cognition, sexual issues, racial
issues, and political aspects of cheerleading,

Tannen (1990) notes that most communication has an obvious meaning, and at the
same time the communication contains metamessages regarding the attitudes, feelings,
and perceptions of the person giving the message. Cheerleaders have many different
metamessages, and the context of each will vary by community and cheerleader. The
multiple dimensions of meaning that each cheer, squad, and cheerleading conveys make
the institution of cheerleading culturally valuable to America. Additionally, the multi-
dimensional cheerleading culture is infinitely more complex and insightful than
prevailing general perceptions and representations of the activity have allowed.
Cheerleading has permeated American culture with more richly textured and strong underlying messages than stereotypes permit. This American dance form has become a fascinating aspect of American mainstream culture and subtly communicates strong social and political ideals.

Appendix A: Cheerleading Questionnaire

Name:
Age:
Gender:

Your cheerleading:

General Cheerleading Questions

1. How did you get involved with cheerleading?

2. Did you have any previous dance or gymnastics experience before you became a cheerleader?

3. What is your favorite aspect of cheerleading?

4. What is your least favorite aspect of cheerleading?

5. Describe the type of cheerleading you participate in? Do you cheer for sports? Do you cheer for a school, a college/university, or a separate league? Do you compete?

6. If you do compete, what competitions have you entered?

7. Describe how you think cheerleading is viewed by non-cheerleaders.

8. Do you consider cheerleading a sport?

9. Does your squad have?

10. How do you view male cheerleaders? How do you think non-cheerleaders view male cheerleaders? (What are some common perceptions.)
Appendix A- Cheerleading Questionnaire

The data collected from this questionnaire will be used in a senior thesis in Anthropology. All names will remain anonymous. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability, and as thoroughly as possible. Feel free to use the back of the paper if necessary.

Name:

Age:

Residence:

Years cheerleading:

General Cheerleading Questions

1. How did you get involved with Cheerleading?

2. Did you have any previous dance or gymnastics experience before you became a cheerleader?

3. What is your favorite aspect of cheerleading?

4. What is your least favorite aspect of cheerleading?

5. Describe the type of cheerleading you participate in? Do you cheer for sports? Do you cheer for a school, a college/university, or a separate league? Do you compete?

6. If you do compete, what competitions have you entered?

7. Describe how you think cheerleading is viewed by non-cheerleaders.

8. Do you consider cheerleading a sport?

9. Does your squad stunt?

10. How do you view male cheerleaders? How do you think non-cheerleaders view male cheerleaders? (What are some common perceptions.)
Appendix A- Cheerleading Questionnaire (continued)

Cheerleading: Body Movement and Cognition
1. Describe what you think about when you cheer?

2. How do you transition from one step to the next?

3. Does the music influence how you keep track of the steps?

4. Does the tempo influence how you keep track of the steps?

5. What happens if you mess up the routine?
   - Do you get back on track?
   - If so, how?

6. Have you ever heard of eight-counts?
   - If so, do eight counts help you remember steps?

7. How do you stay in sync with the squad?

8. How does your squad stay in sync during stunts and formation changes?

9. Is there a vocabulary for cheerleading terms?
   - If so can you give me some examples of cheerleading terms?

10. Does a cheerleading vocabulary help you learn your steps? Did this vocabulary help when you first started learning routines? Does this vocabulary help when you choreograph routines?

11. Go over a short section of a routine in your head. How do you do this? (ex: Verbally through terms, through counts, through visually enacting the routine in your head?? Etc.)
Appendix B – The Communication Process

1. The sender sends an encoded message to the receiver. (Also known as a stimulus.)

2. The message is sent through the sending channel. The message encounters noise along the way. Noise is any stimulus that interferes with the sender sending or the audience receiving the intended message.

3. The message reaches the receiver.

4. The receiver decodes the message and transforms it into ideas or feelings.

5. In two-sided communication, the receiver often sends feedback to the receiver.

6. The feedback is an encoded message from the receiver that encounters noise along its way through the feedback channel.

7. The original sender receives and decodes the feedback.
Appendix B- The Communication Process (continued)

Cheerleaders and the Communication Process:

1. Cheerleader sends an encoded message. Cheerleaders can send a message verbally (for example, through cheers) or non-verbally (for example, through actions and dance movements, or through uniforms).

2. Cheerleader’s messages encounter noise along the way. One example of this noise is the negative and positive stereotypes of cheerleaders.

3. The message reaches the receiver. For cheerleaders, the receiver is usually an audience. This audience can be an athletic team, a crowd at an athletic game or cheerleading competition, a coach watching a practice, or other cheerleaders.

4. The receiver must decode the cheerleader’s message. This could mean anything from decoding a cheer to decoding where other cheerleaders should be in a stunt or formation.

5. Feedback is sent. The most obvious way feedback is seen through cheerleading is an audience responding to a cheer, such as shouting along or applause. A less obvious form of feedback is if cheerleaders get preferential treatment in their local towns.

6. This feedback encounters more noise. For example, whether or not the crowd was paying attention to a cheer.

7. Cheerleaders decode the feedback, and respond accordingly. At a game, this might mean trying to stay optimistic even when the team is getting killed. In other facets of cheerleading, this might mean more complex, social responses.
Appendix C - Common Cheerleading Terms and Definitions

Arabesque One leg is down straight and the other is behind you almost at a ninety degree angle to your back.

Attack the crowd A technique used to get the audience involved in a cheer, dance or song.

Back Hand Spring Backwards jump onto your hands, then a quick push from your hands to your feet. Also known as flip-flop or flick-flack.

Banana This is when you arch your back and reach upwards. You usually only do a banana when you are doing a combination jump or riding up a basket toss.

Buckets Motion where you extend your arms out in front of you with your fists facing down.

Candle Sticks Holding your arms straight out in front of you, with your fists facing in towards each other.

Facials Cheerleaders can't compete with frowns on their faces! Facials help get the crowd excited and impress the judges big time! The goal is: make it look like your having the time of your life, even if you are so nervous or scared you want to leave. Facial tricks that score big with judges are: winks, cheesy smiles, occasional sticking out the tongue, and bobbing your head up and down. Hey it sounds stupid, but it helps in a competition or game!

Handsprint Springing from your feet to your hands to your feet again. Used alone or in conjunction with other skills. There are forward and backward handsprings.
**Heel Stretch**  A base holds up a flyer with one of her feet in both of the base's hands. The flyer holds the foot on her other leg, which is extended.

**Herkie**  A jump where your weak leg is bent towards the floor and your strong leg is out to the side as high as it will go. Some call it a hurkie. Named after Lawrence "Herkie" Herkimer.

**High V**  A motion where both arms are locked and hands are in buckets, both arms are up forming a V.

**Kewpie**  One base holds up a flyer with one hand. The bases arm is fully extended and both of the flyer's feet are in the base's one hand. Also known as a cupie or awesome.

**Pike**  The body is bent at the hips and the legs are straight out at a 90-degree angle.

**Pirouette**  A twirl done while standing on one leg.

**Roundoff**  A basic beginner tumbling skill. Once perfected it is used as a setup for combination tumbling skills (backhandsprings etc.)

**Scorpion**  While in a Liberty (flyer's leg held by both hands of a base) you grab the toe of your bent leg and bring it up to almost behind your head.

**Sell it**  A term used when facials or attitude is exaggerated to make the cheer, motion or dance step have more appeal.

**Toe Touch**  A jump where your arms are in a "T" motion and your legs split to the sides, toes pointed. Knees are up. Hands do not touch the toes, as the name implies, but instead your hands try to reach to the insides of your ankles.

**Tumbling**  Any gymnastic skill used in a cheer, dance, or for crowd appeal. Can be done as an individual or as a group in unison.
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