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Cheerleading has long been synonymous with "spirit" because of its traditional sideline role in supporting school sports programs. In recent decades, however, cheerleading has become more athletic and competitive—even a sport in its own right. This essay is an ethnographic exploration of the emotional dimensions of cheerleading in light of these changes. We argue that spirit is a regulating but also flexible concept that is deployed in order to manage and uphold ideologies of emotion, and that these ideologies are central to the ways in which cheerleading reproduces racialized gender difference. On the one hand, the performance guidelines for spirit stabilize the emotional dimensions of cheerleading in the face of the activity's shifting priorities. On the other hand, the performance framing encourages participants to distance themselves from cheerleading's emotional script, allowing them to abdicate responsibility for it. The ambiguity surrounding the performance of spirit—whether it should be read as "real" or "play"—facilitates this dynamic.

Keywords: Cheerleading; Gender; Race; Emotion; Performance

Introduction

There is currently a tension between tradition and change in contemporary cheerleading, which has shifted from a primarily female, sideline activity geared toward supporting school athletics to a more gender-mixed, competitive activity that,

in some cases, transcends the traditional school context altogether. Each year, ESPN broadcasts more than a dozen cheerleading championships to national audiences (Brady) and the cheerleader-as-athlete has been featured on numerous news and reality television shows. In "all-star" cheerleading, participants train in private, for-profit gyms for the sole purpose of competing with other all-star teams. Most estimates put the number of cheerleaders in the US at four million (Pennington), with roughly half a million attending cheer camps each summer (Brady).

The continuing popularity of cheerleading in the post-Title IX era, in combination with the shift toward competition and athleticism, has attracted the attention of scholars focusing on the activity's history (Hanson), gender dynamics (Adams and Bettis; Bettis and Adams; Davis) and efforts to be recognized as a legitimate "sport" (Grindstaff and West). This essay builds on previous work by analyzing what is arguably still the defining term of cheerleading: spirit. We trace the shifting modes and meanings of spirit as it is understood and performed by cheerleaders themselves, focusing primarily on college-level participants. College cheerleaders tend to have accrued considerable experience and, if they compete, they typically do so in addition to fulfilling sideline obligations—either literally on the sidelines of athletic events or metaphorically by leading pep rallies or serving as ambassadors of the school. What is the status of the emotional dimensions—the "spirit"—of contemporary cheerlead-ing? In exploring this question we bring together three categories of analysis: performance, emotion, and gender (as it intersects with race). These categories resonate to the extent that emotion has been theorized as gendered (Hochschild *Managed Art*; Shields; Stearns), and both emotion and gender have been theorized as performative (Lofland; Orzechowicz; Reddy; Turner and Stets; Butler; West and Fenstermaker; West and Zimmerman).

Social constructionist approaches emphasize how the feeling and expression of emotion are shaped by cultural codes and expectations; emotional expressions are understood as mediums of exchange and the rules governing such exchanges as fundamentally social and performative in nature (Lofland; Orzechowicz; Reddy; Turner and Stets). Gender, too, has long been conceptualized as performative (Butler; West and Fenstermaker; West and Zimmerman), and race increasingly so (Bettie; Carter; Perry; Willie). In lieu of seeing gender or race as an essentialized identity or stable "role," social constructionists view social identities as the result of ongoing, everyday microperformances that respond to incentives and threats stemming from the existing cultural order. Actors reproduce race and gender difference through their own performances; even when not explicitly "on stage," they are aware of potential audiences for their behavior (if only themselves), and therefore the possibility that they will be held accountable for their behavior in terms of its cultural appropriate-ness. But while scholars have rightly emphasized the ways in which gender and/or race, as social constructions, are performative in nature, we argue that cheerleading helps us understand a somewhat different point: that the notion of performance itself has come to characterize, if not define, "normal" ways of enacting femininity.

Emotion and gender come together in the sense that emotion is often theorized in terms of gender difference. Shields, for example, contends that emotion has an

inescapably "gendered cast" in that emotion helps to define gender and gender differences while, in turn, "beliefs about gender are recruited to further define emotion and value" (11). In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild argues that women are considered simultaneously less emotionally stable than men and more adept at managing the emotions of others. The seemingly "natural" tendency of women to be more adaptive and co-operative is especially pronounced for dependent women of the middle classes, for whom emotion work is a resource traded for male economic support. Men are not immune to emotion work, but middle-class men are more likely to manage feeling in order to persuade, enforce rules, or secure compliance, whereas women often manage feeling in the service of "making nice" (Hochschild *Managed Heart*; see also Cline and Spender; Pierce; Williams). Spirit, with its elements of expressivity, compulsory smiling, supporting others, and unfailing enthusiasm, is best understood within a framework of feminized emotional expression that communicates deference: deference to those being supported and to the social norms that dictate the terms of acceptable feminine expressiveness.

Race and class also structure aspects of the cheerleading performance and its reception. Emotional norms for people of color and white, working-class women work both similarly and differently. Members of these groups may also be required to "make nice" in certain contexts—performing domestic work, low-wage customer service, and/or everyday interactions with others of higher status—and in doing so they may undertake feminized emotion work. The difference, however, is that "making nice" is often assumed to be at odds with how such individuals "naturally" are. Historically in the US, African-Americans and the white working classes (Irish, Italian, or Polish immigrants, for example) were seen by the emerging white cultural elite as primitive and uncivilized, as evidenced, in part, by their emotionally-expressive speech, manners, music, dance, and forms of worship. Whereas respect-ability was associated with restraint, incivility was associated with emotional and physical excess, particularly in the public realm (Kasson; Levine). Still today, African-Americans and the white working classes are seen as "naturally" more physical (and sexual) and less capable and/or willing to curb and manage their emotions (Bettie; Bogle; Grindstaff; Kasson; Levine). Transposed to the realm of cheerleading, this means that people of color and working-class white women are less likely to be perceived as "naturally" suited to cheerleading because unrestrained emotional expressiveness *per se* is less the goal than adherence to the particular (middle-class, white, female) rules and standards of emotional expression that regulate the performance of spirit.

Cheerleading is thus a culturally sanctioned space for a certain type of emotion work in which certain groups seem to belong more naturally than others; it is a site where different emotional scripts associated with different groups of actors conflict. How audiences—and participants themselves—make sense of the conflict depends partly on the interpretive frame through which cheerleading is read and understood. As Bateson and others have noted with regard to performance, there are at least two frames operating at any given moment: there is a performance frame, in which everything is interpreted as "play" or "not real," and there is a reality frame associated

with the broader life-world in which the performance is embedded. We argue that, in the case of cheerleading, the performance frame functions simultaneously to feminize cheerleading and to provide an alibi for accepting that feminization. Specifically, because contemporary cheerleading is highly ritualized (incorporating theatrical elements such as make-up, costumes, props, a delimited performance space, the presence of spectators, etc.), it can be demarcated from everyday life as "mere spectacle" or "just a performance"; this demarcation then serves as a buffer protecting cheerleaders from the stigma of femininity associated with the emotional performance of spirit.

At the same time, the question of where the performance frame ends and real life begins persists, for there must be some connection between the two for a performance to have cultural resonance. The slippage between frames ("play/performance" versus "real") creates a potential gap between what the emotional script of cheerleading presents and what participants themselves think and feel, resulting in differing degrees of performative sincerity, or what Hochschild calls "deep" versus "surface" acting (*Managed Heart*). Cheerleaders experience the emotional performance demands of cheerleading differently depending on their previous training, the rewards and incentives at stake, and how they have been hailed by emotional scripts in the past, determined largely by their race, class, and gender identities. We argue that the disciplining of spirit in cheerleading masks the play of emotional ambiguities behind the scenes, ambiguities produced by differing views of how to frame the emotion work of cheerleading and differing understandings of the relationship between the "performed" and "real" emotions of cheerleaders themselves.

Drawing on Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics, we suggest that the continued emphasis on spirit in cheerleading reflects the desire, not always successfully realized, for a certain degree of "fusion" between performer/text, meaning, and audience. As the contemporary successor to ritual, performance retains ritual-like elements but is also subject to processes of rationalization and differentiation in which the various elements of performance—actors, scripts, audiences, critics, etc.—become separated and independently variable; this in turn threatens to de-fuse or disarticulate the emotional alignment between elements, creating a sense of inauthenticity. In cheerleading, as spirit becomes disarticulated from a specific cheerleader identity—that of young, white, middle-class girls and women who wish to support their peers in athletic contests—in the face of demographic changes in participation and the increased focus on athleticism and competition, so the performance of spirit must be continually re-emphasized (and more carefully managed) in order to be ritually effective, both for audiences and for cheerleaders themselves. In Alexander's words, "performances in complex societies seek to overcome fragmentation by creating flow and achieving authenticity. They try to recover a momentary experience of ritual, to eliminate or to negate the effects of social and cultural de-fusion" (548).

In this essay, then, we track the production of spirit as a crucial ingredient in the effort to achieve an "authentic" cheerleading performance. In what follows, we

consider official definitions and manifestos about spirit generated at the institutional level, the way that spirit is both practiced and performed, and what cheerleaders themselves say about the meaning of spirit. We investigate the division of labor when it comes to spirit and how this stems from and then reinforces ideologies of "emotional difference" in American culture. Through an examination of the racialized gender politics of spirit in cheerleading, we consider how different intersections of identity articulate with the dominant emotional ideology of cheerleading. We then contrast deep actors of spirit, or "true believers," to surface actors, or "technicians" of spirit, exploring why cheerleaders adopt different emotion-work strategies. Finally we consider the cultural meaning that the emotion work of cheerleaders produces in the public sphere, regardless of whether cheerleaders themselves are engaged in deep or surface acting.

An ethnographic study of cheerleading can contribute to the field of performance studies by highlighting the empirical connections between the performativity of lived reality and performativity as a broader analytic construct. For girls and young women in the US, cheerleading has arguably been a dominant site for performing ("doing"/ enacting) race and gender for many decades. And yet the status of the category "performance" is very much contested within this cultural field. We draw primarily on sociological and anthropological scholarship that considers performance in everyday life as well as performance as contemporary ritual, in order to explore this contested status. Our examination of cheerleading underscores Victor Turner's notion of performance as a border or margin. Historically, cheerleading has literally been positioned on the border between crowd and field; today, more figuratively it exists between sport and performance, athleticism and artistry, masculinity and femininity, ritual and real life. As such, its contested emotional core has much to demonstrate about emotional ideologies in American culture more generally, as well as how the performance frame is implicated in the (re)production of these ideologies.

Methods

We have been conducting research on cheerleading on and off for almost 10 years in the form of observation, participant observation, and interviews. For a period of one year each, we observed three different co-ed college teams: "Stanton" is an east-coast team with a sideline orientation, although the team competed in the past and hopes to again; "Fairview College," located on the west coast, is a sideline-only team well-known for its school spirit; "Delta State University," another west-coast squad, is a competitive team with sideline duties. At each school we watched practices, attended games, and interviewed coaches and team members. We interviewed 44 cheerleaders and four coaches associated with these three sites; we gave pseudonyms to all participants as well as the teams themselves, as per standard ethnographic practice. One of us [Laura] simultaneously joined an adult performance team in order to gain first-hand "insider" experience with the emotional and physical demands of cheerleading. From 2002–2006 she was a member of "California Spirit" (also a

pseudonym)—one of a nationwide network of "gay-friendly" teams that perform at community and gay-pride events.

Because cheerleading is not confined to educational settings, we conducted more episodic fieldwork at summer training camps and cheerleading competitions. Typically lasting for three or four days, camps provide teams with hands-on instruction and training for their upcoming athletic seasons and/or their schedule of competition. We attended nine cheerleading camps for high school and college teams: five in California, one in Kentucky, two in Massachusetts, and one in Texas. Competitions are the high point of the year for many cheerleaders. Since 2001, we have attended twelve competitions spanning California, Florida, Georgia, and Nevada.

Besides generating copious field notes, these sites gave us access to a broader range of cheerleaders, coaches, and industry professionals than our research with the three college teams provided. We interviewed 94 additional people representing different types of cheerleading squads (all-girl versus co-ed, all-star versus scholastic, high school versus college, cheerleading today versus cheerleading in the past) and different regions of the country. Overall, between both our main field sites and other research contacts, we interviewed 96 women and 48 men; 96 white cheerleaders and 40 cheerleaders of color; 91 cheerleaders who identified themselves as heterosexual and 33 who self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. Of the people we interviewed, eight are industry representatives—that is, men and women employed by the cheerleading companies that organize and run camps, competitions, and the sale of equipment and uniforms. We focused on the two largest and highest profile companies: the National Cheerleaders Association (NCA) and the Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA).

Collaborative ethnographic research remains relatively unusual. Traditionally qualitative—and particularly ethnographic—research has been cast as the preserve of the lone anthropologist/sociologist immersed for long periods in a single site. By contrast, we have undertaken fieldwork collectively across multiple sites and we have worked collaboratively on the analysis and writing. In this essay, we track the concept of "spirit" across different kinds of cheerleading, across multiple performance venues, and across different kinds of cheerleaders in order to build a multidimensional, nuanced analysis. Our exploration of spirit has been inductive. As we identified different dimensions of the concept of spirit, we coded (both separately and together) incidences and/or discussions of it across our field notes and interviews in order to build a "thick" understanding of spirit. This understanding has arisen dialogically through our interactions with informants in the world of cheerleading as well as between ourselves.

What is Spirit?

Spirit is arguably the defining concept of cheerleading, distinguishing it from other activities that might seem similar, such as gymnastics or dance. And yet its meaning is not completely stable or consensual across time or place. Rather, spirit is a regulating

but flexible concept that is deployed in order to manage and uphold ideologies of emotion.

Cheering in the US began as an all-male, all-white activity connected to the emergence and growth of college football in the mid-1800s, serving to intensify, focus, and discipline spectator involvement (Hanson). Cheerleaders—or "yell leaders," as they were then called—were "charismatic, highly visible, solo performers who emerged or were selected because of their popularity, personality, or perceived leadership abilities" (Hanson 12). Cheerleading remained predominantly male at both black and white colleges until the 1940s, at which point the wartime mobilization of men opened up new opportunities for female participants. The activity became increasingly associated with girls and women through the 1950s and 1960s and by the mid-1970s the process of "feminization" was largely complete; consequently, the "masculine" emphasis on leadership was often overshadowed by concerns with attractiveness, sex appeal, and popularity—criteria that, at deseg-regated schools, tended to favor middle-class white women (Grundy; Hanson). At the same time, the spontaneous, individualistic approach to rousing spirit common to male yell leaders in the early days gave way to standardized team performances emphasizing precision and synchronization. This transition coincided with the rise of cheerleading associations, starting with the NCA, formed by Lawrence Herkimer in 1948. Although cheerleading is feminized in the public imagination, having been dominated by women and girls for many decades now, boys and men do participate, and, at the college level, co-ed teams are generally considered the most elite.

The preferred institutional meaning of spirit is perhaps best captured by the "origin story" of the spirit stick, a traditional award given at cheerleading camps. This story—which we first encountered on NCA's website—centers on a squad attending camp in the summer of 1954. Although technically unskilled, the squad was the "backbone of the camp": the first to arrive in the morning to class, the last to leave, always cheering other teams on (Gamble). "They represented the pure essence at the very core of cheerleading; they stood for spirit in every sense of the word" (Gamble). However, at the time, the NCA had no specific award for spirit; they had only ribbons for technical excellence. So, Herkimer, in a prescient act of spontaneity, broke a twig from a tree and presented it to the squad, declaring it the official "spirit stick." Today, so the story concludes, no first-place ribbon is complete without a spirit stick.[1] Spirit in this context is explicitly separate from skill, since the most spirited individuals and squads are not necessarily the most athletic or technically sophisticated. To this day, participants at cheerleading camps are expected to show spirit at all times, whether they are cheering, socializing, watching others perform, or receiving evaluations from instructors.

This conceptualization of spirit was originally associated with scholastic settings, where it has served the goal of school administrations to foster participation, loyalty, and pride among students while simultaneously channeling youthful energy into socially acceptable forms (Terzian). For some cheerleaders, the rise of competitive opportunities does not, and should not, eclipse the primary spirit function of cheerleading. Indeed, some cheerleading associations require school-based teams to

incorporate a crowd-rousing component into their competition routines. Madison, a white college cheerleader on a competitive Florida team, insisted that the high school cheerleaders she coached "exist first to be ambassadors of the school, second to promote school spirit and bring people to the games, third to support their teams—every team, not just the football team, not just the basketball team, but every team—and then finally to compete." Here, cheerleaders are supposed to demonstrate selflessness by putting the needs and desires of others before their own. Like other feminized occupations, cheerleaders are expected to perform emotional labor that positions them in a mothering or caretaking role (Pierce; Williams).

Despite its centrality, the concept of spirit harbors a fundamental ambiguity exacerbated by the changing nature of cheerleading—is spirit something cheerleaders perform through specific techniques, or is it an inner state or personality that cheerleading, as a vehicle, expresses? Just as the recruits in Hochschild's study of flight attendants were screened for a certain type of middle-class sociability, cheerleaders spoke repeatedly of the "cheerleader personality." The coaches and industry representatives we interviewed saw this personality as both natural and learned. According to Jim Lord, a former veteran UCA employee, the ideal cheerleader is "somebody who's interested in the welfare and success of the [athletic] program" and therefore interested in/able to develop genuine rapport with spectators, but is also willing to learn the specific skills "that make [cheerleaders] more successful in what they do." "Without both of those things," he said, "I don't think you've got an all-around cheerleader." He acknowledged that teaching spirit was not easy: "it's a lot easier for me as a coach to teach someone how to do a liberty [a type of partner stunt] than it is to teach someone to get an entire section up on their feet."

This logic underlies squad codes of conduct, which position cheerleaders as role models for other youth, and which therefore address behavior both on and off the athletic field. The handbook for California Spirit, for example, mandates a "positive attitude and professional demeanor" at all times and forbids smoking, drinking, and swearing while in uniform. Consistent with this dynamic is the persistence of certain "spirit traditions" that extend beyond the actual performance space.

Several interviewees recently graduated from high school spoke of decorating the boys' locker room for homecoming and/or making good-luck posters and cookies for the male athletes. These are, in effect, significant elements in the overall effort to authenticate the cheerleading performance for female participants, to "fuse" off-stage and on-stage displays of spirit and help align the doing of femininity in everyday life with the doing of femininity in cheerleading.

Although prized for its genuine exuberance, the actual, physical expression of spirit is often quite formulaic, expressing the contradiction between structure and spontaneity at the heart of cheerleading's emotional logic. This is true not only of formal cheers, chants, and dance segments, which are obviously synchronized and rehearsed, but also of the seemingly spontaneous gestures of spirit witnessed at practices, games, and competitions. Thus, when cheerleaders break formation with an extra jump, rush the crowd with a yell, or launch into a joyful back handspring, they draw from a routinized set of expectations that became increasingly visible to us as

our fieldwork progressed. Even facial expressions, an important part of communicating spirit to spectators, are standardized, with different types of cheerleading adhering to different styles of "facials" (a cheerleading term for the exaggerated expressions that capture the attention of spectators).

Ambiguities surrounding the emotional expression of spirit aside, there are notable continuities between spirit and feminine emotional styles in American culture. Although representatives of the cheerleading industry characterize spirit as a timeless, universal quality that any cheerleader, anywhere, can embody, there is a patterned gender politics to the performance of spirit. This politics functions to keep women and men in their "place"—albeit imperfectly—in co-ed contexts, and it also shapes the meaning and status of cheerleading in the wider culture.

Who's Got Spirit?—The Gender Politics of Spirit

If the cheerleader is an all-American icon, it is first and foremost an icon of white, middle-class femininity, and to this day white, middle-class cheerleaders constitute the majority of cheerleaders. In many ways, spirit has a "natural" fit with what Connell has termed "emphasized femininity," meaning a traditional cultural script for women emphasizing their status as the supporters and subordinates of men (183). Cheerleading literally reproduces the gendered division of labor characterizing traditional, heterosexual unions in which men occupy center stage in the realm of work and politics and women support their public endeavors by tending to hearth and home—the "real-world" equivalent of the sidelines. Indeed, Hochschild uses the phrase "conversational cheerleader" when characterizing women's ability to enhance other people, usually men (*Managed Heart* 168).

For "all-girl" squads, the gendered division of labor is apparent between cheerleaders and athletes. On co-ed squads, the gender politics of spirit play out through a division of emotional labor that places a greater burden for performing spirit on women compared to men. The division of physical labor on co-ed squads selects for "big guys" and "little girls," thereby exaggerating the image of a heterosexual pairing in the course of producing impressive, flashy stunts. This division of labor extends to the greater responsibility that women have to deliver a convincing emotional performance of spirit, including what we call "informal cheerleading": bouncing from one foot to another, rustling poms, yelling, and executing jumps—all in addition to the more formal, synchronized cheering and chanting. The male cheerleaders also expended considerable energy during games, showing enthusiasm and determination in their efforts to rouse the (often apathetic) crowds, but they smiled less (sometimes not at all) and were not in constant motion. During practices, with no spectators to woo or judges to impress, we routinely noticed coaches hounding female cheerleaders to smile and be spirited, while the men got away with a half-hearted effort. As in other feminized occupations, men have more flexibility in determining the extent to which they conform to the explicitly "feminine" dimensions of the job (Pierce; Williams).

Although spirit has an expansive repertoire, the leitmotif of the emotional performance of spirit is the smile. As more than one of our interviewees observed, to wear a "game face" in cheerleading means wearing a smile. Some coaches reportedly keep participants smiling by putting Vaseline on their teeth. The former coach of Laura's adult squad had a slogan she used when the team took up its position at the start of a routine: "Hands on hips, smiles on lips! Hands on hips, smiles on lips!" Female interviewees with all-star experience described working on smiling and other facials during team practices, sometimes in a circle so the girls could monitor each other. They practiced at home as well, "in the mirror for fifteen minutes before bed," according to one participant. Smiling no matter the circumstances—no matter the difficulty of the stunt, or how badly the game is going—is a key way that cheerleading mirrors and exaggerates social expectations for normative femininity. The smile signifies "niceness" (see Cline and Spender; Dodd et al., Pierce; Stiles et al.). Like cheerleading itself, smiling supports and enhances the efforts of others; it communicates co-operation and goodwill. The opposite of expressing anger or resentment, smiling is a common way for subordinates to make themselves appealing and nonthreatening to others of higher status (Cline and Spender; La France and Hecht; Pierce).

Not surprisingly then, the smile requirement of cheerleading is felt most sharply by male cheerleaders. One of the white women on the Delta State squad put it this way: "guys don't want to smile. They don't enjoy it or want to smile. Most guys, they've done other sports before cheerleading and they're not used to having to smile when they compete. So it doesn't come naturally." Of course, many female athletes aren't used to smiling when they compete either; nevertheless, male cheerleaders tend to seek out, and are generally allowed to embrace, a less feminine, "gender-appropriate" mode of performing spirit, which rejects constant motion and smiling in favor of waving flags, yelling through megaphones, and employing body language that is commanding and/or "cocky" rather than peppy or enticing. Such adjustments help to "guy-a-cize" cheerleading for men, to borrow a term employed by a veteran NCA instructor. Indeed, male cheerleaders are assisted in this ideological project by coaches and by the cheerleading companies who institutionalize the standards for performing heteromasculinity in college cheerleading. At UCA and NCA college summer camps, entire seminars for coaches are devoted to sideline training, and here it is widely acknowledged that the men are less adept at—and less enthusiastic about—sideline material and thus require more patience and encouragement. To quote Bryan, the captain of the male cheerleaders on the Stanton squad, "nobody's looking for us to be bouncing up and down and smiling and waving our hands and stuff. That's not what anybody expects." Simply put, the demands of the performance of spirit clash with normative emotional styles for hegemonic masculinity in American culture, at least in its more mainstream incarnations (Connell; Messner; Stearns).

Another thing that bothers male cheerleaders about the emotional performance of spirit is its routinization, an important aspect of its feminization. Male yell leaders of the past seemingly had greater autonomy and independence of emotional expression than do their contemporary counterparts. John, a white freshman and a first-time

cheerleader on the Stanton squad, lamented the conformity required of him as an official member of the team compared to his experience of being a fan and "natural leader" of cheers in high school. As he told it, "in high school, I used to be the kid in the . . . I would be the one starting the cheers in the stands. Starting the chants, I'd be going nuts up in the stands. I'd be going crazy." But now that he was on a squad, positioned out front, he felt reluctance. Specifically, John said he disliked the rehearsed, routinized elements of the cheerleading performance such as running with flags, doing arm motions, clapping, and yelling cheers. When asked why he felt this way about his new role despite having been a "spontaneous" cheerleader of sports in the past, he responded, "I don't know, I'm just in front of the crowd. Now it's like, I'm supposed to do it, so I don't want to. I mean, if I did it now, I'd look like a fruit." John resists the emotional performance of spirit because it situates him, in a highly structured way, as a feminized subject exposed to the gaze of others; in a culture that commonly conflates gender nonconformity with homosexuality, this in turn implies that he is gay. Indeed, male cheerleaders are commonly stereotyped as gay (see Grindstaff and West; Adams and Bettis; Anderson *Orthodox*; Davis), and gay men do have a significant presence in contemporary co-ed cheerleading (Grindstaff and West; Anderson *I Used to Think*, *Orthodox*). They are also expected to conform more "naturally" to the tenets of cheerleading given their supposed feminine orientation (Grindstaff and West). But John also resists the emotional script of cheerleading because it is standardized and required, rather than voluntary. As Leidner argues in reference to service workers, routinized emotion is more likely to be interpreted by men as a threat to their autonomy and therefore to their masculinity because, compared to women, they are less often subjected to the demands of these sorts of feeling rules in everyday life. When one's lack of emotional autonomy is publicly performed, the threat to a heteronormative construction of masculinity, not normally associated with deference, increases dramatically.

We emphasize the gender politics of cheerleading for two reasons: first, to demonstrate that despite the inclusion of men, the performance of spirit in cheerleading is still primarily associated with, and shouldered by, women. Second, the different ways in which women and men enact spirit highlights how deeply performances of emotion are enmeshed with heteronormative gender scripts. Nevertheless, the formalized instruction and routinization even for female cheerleaders highlights the performative nature of the emotional dimensions of cheerleading, and the way in which it builds on the emotional scripts for femininity found more broadly in American culture.

Who's Got Spirit?—The Racial Politics of Cheerleading

The 2000 Hollywood film *Bring It On*, with its conflict between white/suburban and black/urban cheerleaders, formally acknowledged what has been long apparent in the world of cheerleading—that this iconic American activity reflects racial tensions extant in American culture. As an activity self-described and broadly recognized as "all-American," cheerleading is nevertheless implicitly white and its history reflects

the racial segregation that has long dominated American schools and colleges (Grundy; Hanson). The extent to which cheerleading is still considered a "white" activity is a matter of some controversy among cheerleaders across racial categories, and is not a topic we explore in depth here. More relevant to our discussion of spirit is how people of color approach the required and expected performance of spirit in cheerleading given its articulation with middle-class white femininity.

Because cheerleading as a whole is associated with middle-class white femininity, so is its distinctive style of emotional performance; thus cheerleaders of color may have to navigate the perception that by expressing spirit they are "acting white." Indeed, in their study of cheerleading at a Midwestern middle school, Adams and Bettis found that girls of color self-selected out of cheerleading for this very reason. This issue came up in our interviews with several college cheerleaders. Keisha, a black woman on the Fairview squad, felt that other African-American girls on campus snubbed her because they viewed her participation in cheerleading as expressing a preference for white over black culture. Similarly, the coach of an all-black team in Louisiana said that even the female cheerleaders at all-black schools can be accused by peers of "acting white," particularly if the squad has replaced the "stomp and shake" aesthetic popular in some black communities with the more technical, peppy model of cheerleading promoted by the major cheerleading associations. That peppiness is at odds with certain cultural scripts for contemporary black femininity was memorably illustrated during one of Laura's practices with California Spirit, in which the coach asked participants to think up some wrong ways to demonstrate spirit. Two team members, both black women, performed a skit for the rest of the group. They sauntered nonchalantly onto the mat, one talking on her cell phone, the other filing her finger nails; they then did a cheer, out of synch, using exaggerated black English and defiant "talk to the hand" body language. Neither smiled (although there was much suppressed laughter). Here the women were burlesquing a particular and particularly stereotypical portrayal of working-class black femininity understood to be the antithesis of the wholesome, spirited cheerleader.

Men of color also experience a double-bind in terms of gender and race when it comes to the performance of spirit, but in a different way. Diego, an experienced cheerleader and long-time coach, acknowledged that being male and Latino defied cultural expectations for cheerleading: "friends who are not in the cheerleading realm definitely put pressure on you as a male and even more so if you're ethnic, if you're Mexican or black or Indian, you know, there's no, it doesn't fit in the culture." For black men, the "fit" with cheerleading is potentially more complex. On the one hand, there is an historic association of black men with singing, dancing, entertaining, and smiling (Bogle). On the other hand, the "cool pose" of contemporary black masculinity combines a sense of toughness and power with stoic indifference. This cool pose is theorized as a compensatory response to the lack of actual power and authority black men as a group experience in American society (Majors and Billson) and is no doubt also partly a reaction to the former image of entertainer who aims to please.

The black men we interviewed drew differently on these cultural resources to inform their individual performances of spirit. Ric, a cheerleader on a competitive college team, said that when he first started cheering he struggled to resolve his racial identity with his cheerleader identity because being expressive was the antithesis of being "cool" and "laid back." As he put it, "it was really hard to mesh that cool image with your in-the-face rah-rah cheerleading image. Your performance image. Because your performance image, I wouldn't say it's effeminate, but—you are, you do have to be expressive when you're on stage." Jamal, a Delta State cheerleader, was reluctant to embrace the performative aspects of cheerleading, especially dance, for similar reasons, despite being a very good dancer. "I can dance," he said, "I mean, I'm a black guy. I grew up dancing. I learned how to dance on the playground from my cousin in the ghetto with his friends' girlfriends." But free-style dancing in a club was cool, whereas choreographed dancing on a field or stage was "girly," according to Jamal. By contrast Bruce, Jamal's team-mate, said that he enjoyed the spirited aspects of cheerleading—including dancing—and described himself as "definitely a performer." Despite the stereotype, black youth may nevertheless cultivate these qualities as a way of simultaneously expressing their blackness and garnering status among peers (Clay). Indeed, for black men more than white men, being good dancers and "being cool" are not necessarily mutually exclusive. But the acceptability of dancing in a cheer routine for black men may depend on whether the individual cheerleader is comfortable with the routinization and synchronization required of team dancing (this aspect cuts across race—recall John's discomfort with the routinization of cheerleading as mentioned above). Moreover, the specifically emotional performance demands, such as smiling, are potentially more problematic for men of color than for white men because they evoke a history of performance styles (both on stage and in everyday life) structured by deference.

That most cheerleaders we observed insisted emphatically on the color-blindness of cheerleading and adopted the canonical performance of spirit regardless of race does not contradict the cultural construction of cheerleading as a white activity, necessarily. Rather, it reinforces the point that while a certain type of middle-class sociability is associated with whiteness, this sociability is not essential to whiteness. More importantly, it underscores the ability of cheerleading, like other forms of popular culture, to reproduce whiteness as an organizing principle even while denying its existence (Banet-Weiser; Gray; Lipsitz). In cheerleading, as in so many arenas of American life, diversity is flattened out and managed by color-blind ideology such that the difference of race/ethnicity is a difference that makes no difference; thus certain "mainstream" (middle-class) signifiers of femininity can cut across racial lines in the service of a generalized "American" identity. We argue that, in cheerleading, the formalization of spirit has facilitated this "flattening out" of identity in cheerleading. The more formalized, technical, and rehearsed spirit is, the more apparent the performance frame is to participants. This performance frame provides people of color a buffer with which they can distance themselves from what audiences might interpret as a performance of whiteness, just as women in general

use the performance frame to deny their complicity in reproducing retrograde images of women in the public sphere (more on this later).

Technicians and True Believers

As we have seen, cheerleaders are emotion workers par excellence, but is their emotion sincere? Are they really so spirited, or is it just part of the show? Are they engaged in deep or surface acting? As Hochschild argues, one basic appeal of the theater is that the stage decides for us the question of whether or not someone is acting. In her words, "what distinguishes theater from life is the honor accorded to illusion, the ease in knowing when an illusion is an illusion" (*Managed Heart* 48). To the degree that cheerleading is understood as similar to theater, with roles, costumes, and audience, the issue of sincerity is irrelevant because the theatrical frame is understood to be a special setting apart from everyday life. Yet to the degree that cheerleaders are considered ambassadors of their schools and role models for other youth, and to the degree that something called a "cheerleader personality" exists, cheerleading exceeds the illusion of theater and the matter of sincerity or authenticity creeps back in. In Alexander's terms, this is the tension between "de-fused" and "fused" performances.

As much as the performance of spirit in cheerleading reflects cultural beliefs about who is "naturally" spirited, we confronted a distinction between those who embrace the performance and those who keep it at arm's length, even among women. Drawing on Hochschild, we refer to these positions as representing "deep" and "surface" acting respectively. According to Hochschild, people may work on feeling by trying to change how they outwardly appear, primarily through nonverbal communication (the forced smile, the raised eyebrow, the controlled sigh). This is surface acting. Another option is deep acting, in which emotional display is the "natural" result of working on feeling (*Managed Heart* 35). In our research we encountered both deep actors, or "true believers," and surface actors, or "technicians" of spirit. Especially for the latter group, the notion of a performance frame, distinct from real life, figures prominently in squaring the emotional performance demands of cheerleading with their "real" identities and feelings.

True believers identify with and immerse themselves in the performance of spirit, even pointing to spirit as their chief reason for participating. For some true believers, cheerleading is an ideal outlet for an extroverted personality; for others, it affords the opportunity to cultivate a part of themselves not normally in evidence. Emma, a white woman on the Fairview team, was a talented gymnast and flyer who gave up competing for the sideline experience because of her attraction to its emotional script. As she put it, "when I put my cheer uniform on, I felt like I kind of had this right to be crazy. And still that's why I love cheering. I could just be silly and kinda myself in a way that I don't usually feel like I can." This comment, and others like it, suggest that embracing the cheerleading ideal of spirit in a "deep" way does not mean one's identity as a whole is defined by cheerleading necessarily or that cheerleading defines one's "authentic" identity; rather, some participants seemed to accept a

poststructural understanding of the self as fragmented and multiple, as assuming different (and differently "real") qualities in different contexts. True believers see cheerleading less as a performance before an audience and more as an interaction with other fans; it is less about being the object of a collective gaze and more about co-constructing, with spectators, a collective act. In fact, several cheerleaders spoke disparagingly of teams that made cheerleading a "show," a "spectacle," or a "performance," an orientation that has become more common with the growth of all-star cheer and that constructs audiences as witnesses rather than participants, "defusing" the ritual performer from the cultural meaning s/he produces.

In contrast to the true believers are the "technicians," or surface actors, of spirit. We found this orientation to be more common on squads that prioritize competition. Particularly when these squads are housed at schools with weak sports programs, they may adopt an instrumental orientation toward sideline activity as being "for themselves" as much as for the school. Consider the perspective of Lionel, the coach of a competitive team at an historically black college: "I tell my people, come on you guys, let's go down here and perform—and we actually use that football game as the backdrop. We, at half time—I don't even know what the score is because we are out there doing our thing." Similarly Reese, a white male cheerleader at Delta State, had a "grin and bear it" (literally) attitude toward the sideline part of cheerleading, saying, "as with anything in life, there's going to be people who enjoy [it] and people who don't and some people just put up with things to get through to, you know, the big reward. As for me, I don't really mind the sideline stuff because I take it as a practice [for competition]."

Although straight men consistently complained about having to perform spirit, some women did, too. One of the veteran Delta State cheerleaders, Ruby, a white woman, reflected on how difficult it was for her to learn facials after having been a gymnast where they are not required. "Like, I would think I was smiling, and I was not, at all. Like, I thought I looked happy and I looked scared out of my mind when I was flying. So it definitely was something I had to work at . . . something I had to train myself to do." It would be difficult to find a more emblematic statement of what it means to "manage feeling" (Hochschild *Managed Heart* 163).

Surface actors of spirit are more likely than deep actors to develop a business-like approach to the emotion work of cheerleading, viewing it as a taken-for-granted, inescapable part of the job. Lydia, a Latina sophomore on the Delta State squad, adopted this approach because, in her view, the energy/facials needed for a "good" performance makes surface acting largely inevitable. "It's fake, a lot of it's fake," she said matter-of-factly, referring to the facials. She acknowledged that "sometimes you're having fun" but much of the time putting on a smile is "like putting on makeup." It's simply part of "getting ready for the game" and "something you have to do." When Lydia compares putting on a smile to putting on make-up, she highlights the gendered nature of the performance. Similarly, Paula, a former college cheerleader of mixed race, explained spirit as the cheerleader's "job" and even compared it explicitly to service work: "the trick for me has always been to think of it as a job. And when you are on the job, whatever job it might be, you might not always feel like

being cordial or nice to the customer but you have to, 'cause that's your job. You just have to suck it up and do it." Paula believed that the image of the ever-vivacious, genuinely exuberant cheerleader was unrealistic and impractical, even while she agreed that it is the cheerleader's job to create that very image.

Although there is no necessary incompatibility between feeling genuinely spirited and orienting toward the performance of spirit in a businesslike way (indeed, the "ideal" cheerleader would do both), we found that the tendency to "professionalize" spirit served a distancing function, allowing squad members to understand/explain their emotion work in cheerleading as a property of the institution—and/or its performance frame—rather than property of the self *per se*. This makes sense, since the processes of institutionalization (including standardization, routinization, commodification, etc.) are what give the performance of spirit its job-like cast. That workers develop distancing strategies when the emotional requirements of their jobs conflict with their own self-images is well documented (Grindstaff; Leidner; Pierce; Williams). Less adequately theorized is how to think about the requirements of emotional performance when participants' distancing strategies are successful, for successful strategies not only leave the requirements intact, they further institutionalize them. In the case of cheerleading, still largely white and female-dominated, both true believers and technicians of spirit are "doing" spirit in ways that uphold and re-inscribe the existing gender/race order. For women, the greater the distance between their "real" emotions and those performed, the more "artifice" is invoked in the presentation of femininity. This may contribute to a broader, societal development in which cultural scripts for emphasized femininity are more and more linked to notions of performativity. For cheerleaders of color, participating in cheerleading may simultaneously reinforce the social expectations for performing whiteness as necessary for certain forms of "mainstream" success or recognition.

Conclusion—Reading the Performance of Spirit

Regardless of how cheerleaders "really" feel, the emotional performance of spirit in cheerleading is supposed to appear a certain way. As Goffman notes, teams must co-operate to maintain a given "definition of the situation" despite potential diversity in members' individual interpretations (*Presentation* 85). That is, cheerleaders must present a more or less united front to audiences, even if they fail to maintain that impression before one another or themselves. In the end, cheerleading requires an acceptance of the act, rather than a perfect fit between the act and one's beliefs. The challenge here is that the greater the gap between act and belief, the less "fused" the performance may appear to others.

Alexander has observed that, "the very success of a performance masks its existence" (549). If true, then much of what occurs in the world of contemporary cheerleading would be considered unsuccessful, for audiences are generally aware that cheerleading is a performance of sorts. The extent to which the emotional dimension of cheerleading is considered performative, however, is less clear. Cheerleaders are generally frustrated with how outsiders perceive the activity because they believe

outsiders take the social implications of their emotion work too seriously. They tend to respond to criticisms of cheerleading—particularly that the activity is too "girly"— by calling attention to the notion of performance itself and what the performance frame signifies. Significantly, participants see the hyperfeminized elements of cheerleading as belonging to the fictive world of "play," within which messages and symbols are recognized in a certain sense as not-true. It is not the content of the messages or symbols per se that sets the performance apart from daily life; it is the frame itself, the frame being the key device enabling the fictive mode (Goffman *Frame*; Bateson).

Thus, when we asked cheerleaders to respond to a hypothetical critic who says cheerleading is demeaning to women, participants would construct cheerleading as a distinct realm whose meaning exists separate from the real world; in the words of a former Boston College cheerleader of South-Asian descent, "cheerleading is a different world than what's really going on in society." For her, as for most of her peers, the feminine elements of cheerleading, including the emotional dimensions of the performance, were simply a necessary part of entertaining audiences. Rather than question the meaning or content of the canonic performance of spirit in cheerleading, most cheerleaders questioned the primacy of place accorded the performance in communicating their "true" intentions. A performance should not be taken too seriously or read at face value because the performance frame itself signals unreality. In this way, cheerleaders use the activity's performance frame as an alibi for their own complicity in reproducing a retrograde and racialized gender script, or in performing a self that does not accord with their perception of their "true" self. When participants experience conflict between cheerleading's emotional script and their sense of self, they manage the discrepancy through emotion work. When engaged in surface acting, cheerleaders may succeed in distancing their sense of self from the performance of spirit.

However, there is no guarantee that audiences will appreciate or even perceive a similar disjuncture between performance and reality. Because of the ambiguity of the performance frame (is it play or is it real?) and the ambiguity in how we should read cheerleading (is it a performance or a ritualized expression of real feelings?), audiences may take the performance of spirit at face value. Unaware of what cheerleading might mean to participants as individuals, audiences are more likely to orient toward its more sociocultural implications—supporting athletes, performing care and nurturance, acting white. After all, cheerleaders are trained to make their emotional performances convincing, and at summer training camps they are actively discouraged from viewing cheerleading as "just a performance." Moreover, because of what theorists have termed the "binocular vision" (States 8) or "double negativity" (Schechner 97) of performance, performances are neither wholly real nor wholly illusory but share elements of both frames. Framing an action as performance or play never completely eliminates awareness that the people and objects involved are real and have a claim on actuality, despite the insistence of some cheerleaders that cheerleading is a "separate world."

It may be that the greater formalization or "professionalization" of spirit has helped open up the activity to more people, including men, who might not be viewed as "naturally" possessing the requisite cheerleader personality, but who can none-theless learn to perform it. The emotional training in cheerleading encourages young people to move beyond surface acting and become "deep" actors of spirit, but participants can (and do) cultivate an instrumental, technical, even quasiprofessional approach to displaying emotion while rarely questioning the social implications of the display.

However, the emotion work accomplished in cheerleading does not occur in a cultural vacuum; it draws on assumptions and ideologies of how emotion is, or should be, articulated with different axes of identity. In turn, it feeds back into these emotion ideologies, or "emotional regimes" (Reddy 55). In particular, given the image of cheerleading as a feminine activity, the smaller number of men who participate, and the gendered division of emotional labor on co-ed teams, the performance of spirit reinforces the image of girls and women as smiling nurturers in a culturally resonant, larger-than-life way. And when people of color are compelled to perform spirit according to the aesthetic requirements of the cheerleading canon, they may reinforce the activity's image as "white" despite their own racial identity.

We bear in mind Hochschild's argument that "rules for managing feeling are implicit in any ideological stance: they are the 'bottom side' of ideology" (*Commercialization* 99). As a form of popular culture, cheerleading may appear tangential to "real" political or economic concerns. But, as cultural theorists have so often observed, culture is good to think with. Just as the notion of performance itself is useful for the varied ways it contextualizes (and contributes to) reality, cheerleading helps contextualize and frame our understanding of the cultural rules, expressions, and sanctions that govern the politics of spirit—and, by implication, the politics of American emotional life more generally.

Note

[1]   The story of the spirit stick was originally viewed on the National Communication Association website, but has since disappeared. However, it appears virtually verbatim in other places, including in Gamble.

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