

# Interviews in the Field: Cheering Squads and Performances of Visability Stanley Thangaraj

## EVOKE

### About the Ethnographer

I am a first year PhD student in socio-cultural anthropology. I have played and coached sports on the collegiate level and thus this project proved interesting to me.

## EXPLORE

### Question

#### **What questions is your inquiry contingent upon?**

Inquiry Page

As a result of my interest in sports and the negotiation of identity through the body, I looked at the narrative for the cheerleading squad posted on the sports page for the University of Illinois. In addition, I also examined the narrative concerning the "History of Extension" and its application to a land-grant program such as the one that benefited the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. These narratives interested me as a result of my love for sports but also my experience in the social service world; specifically my previous employment at Director of Community Services at LaGrange College. Although the main focus of my proposal concerns the cheering squad, I wanted to first examine the compatibility between these two narratives [a good exercise]. Did they have similarities concerning college life? Do they view the University as having the same purpose? When I read the narrative on the "History of Extension," this particular quote really stood out for me:

The three primary missions of land-grant universities become undergraduate and graduate education, fundamental and mission-oriented research, and outreach programs that extend the knowledge of the university beyond its walls to enrich the lives of all citizens.

Emerging as a strong agricultural and technical university, there was an emphasis on applied education; what you learnt in the classroom had and required utilization in the world outside of the college. Furthermore,

Faculty and staff in U. of I Extension have advocated the philosophy of helping people help themselves by taking the university to the people.

Knowledge acquisition and the purpose of the university does not exist in a spatio-temporal vacuum; application of knowledge is stressed highly. Goals of student achievement that one can ascertain from this narrative consists of active engagement with the outside community, one learns in order to benefit the greater society. Knowledge, in this case, must be utilized for the benefit of society [yes, you are unpacking the assumptions/ideologies]. Yet, as a graduate student in Anthropology, other than TA work, there exists little or no connection between us and either the college community or the community outside the college. Active engagement no longer [you are assuming it did] exists on the same level as envisioned as our research and daily academic experience often does not transcend beyond our immediate department. [OK]

Active engagement, a critical part of the Extension and the founding of this university, does not exist; based on the sports web site for the University of Illinois; in the sports arena either. When reading the web page

(<http://fightingillini.collegesports.com/ot/cheer/ill-cheer-body.html>) dealing with U. of I collegiate sports, I investigated further the narrative found for the cheering squad. It listed their duties, functions, and rites of passage to full cheering glory. Yet there existed a vacuum of activism, active engagement, and dialogue with the greater community [OK,

focusing on what isn't there]. Structuring of responsibilities still left a void for relationships with the greater community that goes beyond financial relationships; sponsorships and items of this sort.

You might go further not only on omissions but on the assumptions/values of what is there.

## **Plan**

### **How will you go about answering your inquiry?**

Questions that I hope to explore deal with the body, sexuality, and gendered notions of self. As a result, I am looking at the unique space of cheerleading where male and female bodies interact in the same athletic space intertwined in the fabric of performance.

Similarly, I want to tie it into the notion of "Extension" and what services this group provides to the greater community. Here are some questions I hope to raise and have a sufficient ethnography to answer them. How did they view their bodies before entering the cheering squad? How has it altered their views of sexuality? How do they train their bodies in a multiply gendered space? What role do these bodies then play in the health of the community? What outreach exists for the cheering squad?

The unsure nature of my subject matter makes investigation a difficult point. I have two possible ideas for proposals and areas of study; they diverge in such a manner that very little intersection exists. Yet, I have pursued one of the ethnographic sites to a greater degree and have already collected data that I find very interesting. As a result, for this inquiry, I will provide information concerning the cheerleading squad at the University of Illinois. As a result of the popularity of the men's basketball team this year since they are #1 in the nation, getting tickets to the men's games proves difficult while tickets for the women's games are basically guaranteed. Whereas cheering squad members, in years past, had extra tickets to spare; that does not seem the case now as all tickets go first to family members even if it is family members of others on the cheering squad before going to friends. Thus, I have not secured any tickets to a men's basketball game to see the performance put forth by the cheering squad.

Unlike most anthropological work where there consists of a culmination of events that lead to a particular finalized ritual, I diverge from this method. Rather, I attempt to showcase the final ritual, performance of the cheering routine at the Varsity basketball games, as the beginning point. From here I hope to deconstruct the ritual performance by examining practices. Finally, I will examine the "try outs" in April as a means to gauge the expectations put forth by the cheering program at the University of Illinois. Although this backward movement can seem anachronistic, it proves advantageous as a result of the confines of time and space. Even though I will not be able to check out men's basketball games this year, this process of study will allow me to work cyclically thus presenting opportunities for observation.

The reason that I have mentioned both the men and women's basketball games consists of the particular rites of passage afforded to the cheering squad. Although Title IX calls for gender equality in the arena of sports de jure, de facto reality proves otherwise in this case. The novices to the cheering squad initially cheer for the women's basketball team while the senior cheerleaders work the men's basketball games. Thus, in order to understand the performance of cheerleading, one has to examine both the men and women's basketball team to see the process of development for new cheerleaders. As a result of witnessing the gendered basketball teams, I can also observe the means by which the different squads utilize their bodies in the performance.

In regards to the methodology utilized for these events, the methods will vary considerably by context. As an individual unknown to this genre of athletics and performance, I will have different types of observation and participant observation. I intentionally make a distinction here between the two terms. As a spectator in the crowd of a basketball game, I will observe as a participant observer. Yet, here lies a very

precarious construction of the participant observer. I participate in the dynamics of the crowd and audience in their own stage but never get onto the stage of the sports floor where the basketball players and cheerleaders participate. As a result, I am a participant observer as a sporting events spectator but an observer in this field of study since I do not participate with the cheering squad. Rather, I participate as a fan engaged in the performance of the sporting event alongside the cheering squad.

With regard to cheering practice, there do not exist many other options than observing as a non-participant. This perspective and vantagepoint of ethnography truly limits my study of the body in a dual gendered space of cheerleading. This limitation would call for interviews with the cheerleaders so as to understand their thoughts on this space that has the potential of being sexualized. If I had participated in this space, it would severely alter the dynamic of their interactions since my body has not been normalized to this space, in my unfamiliarity with this performance, I would attribute greater sexuality to it. Therefore, as a fly on the wall, I would observe their interactions and then use the method of interviews to gauge a deeper understanding of this material. Furthermore, this limited participant OBSERVATION would require extensive research on cheerleading squads to as to diminish the limitations of greater levels of observation;Xand limited participation. When interviewing the two individuals;Xone male and one female;Xthat I know well, I would not resort to any prepared questions or prompts. This level of preparation and utilization of prompts, I believe, will facilitate an artificial conversation and severely restrict the possibilities of ethnographic data. As Emerson et al mentioned, one should not go into the field at all times with prepared questions and seeking data to conform and confirm one;s theories. One should begin to theorize based on observation and participation. As a result, with familiar persons, vernacular conversation in a comfortable setting will enhance the ethnographic detail and provide stronger, diversified vignettes that illustrate the complexity and contradictions of characters. For example, if I had limited my time with these two individuals to prepared questions, I would not have known the intricacies of they program and the differences between cheering and other sports on this campus. Looking for only specific clues will create a myopic ethnographic work that will not demonstrate the multiple links and influences on this space of cheerleading.

For interviews with the other cheerleaders and the coaches, I would need to focus on the proper tools of interviewing and approach each interview with a structured agenda of questions. Or else, the unprofessional nature and unprepared nature will considerably constrain the possibilities of the interview. Since these individuals do not know me as comfortably, they might not be willing to converse freely. The conversation might not have a fluid characteristic thus needing prompts to keep up a uniform path of knowledge. I would also have to prepare with scholarly work on this material in order to talk effectively and gain some kind of respect from the cheering squad as well as their coaches.

Finally, in order to overcome some of the limitations of an ethnography constructed through limited characters, I would have to interview those outside of the cheering squad as well as those that work with the cheering squad to gain better knowledge of the cheering squad. This kind of analysis will present a more complete picture and allows for a contextualization of structure in the formula of this performance.

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### Change in investigative method after fieldnotes

As I read through my initial ;§Investigate; section of my Inquiry Page, I saw that my project had expanded in certain ways which kept in spirit with the initial idea while invading new spaces of analysis. Although I still emphasize the notion of ;§gendered bodies; I do this in a different realm now. My focus has shifted to ;§performances of

visibility; that looks not so much on sexuality associated with gendered bodies as it does on how bodies are managed in various spaces of visibility. Thus, a shift to spaces and performances of visibility call for slightly different investigative approaches to create a polished project.

With this shift to the thematic foundation of ;visibility; , I need to approach this concept with increased utilization of surveys. Whereas surveys had not seemed as important in my previous point of analysis, it would now prove instrumental in this new project.

Through the utilization of surveys, I would be able to gather pertinent information on how the cheerleading bodies are ;read; or ;made visible; during their performances at Varsity basketball or football games. By having members of the audience participate in some of these surveys, it would allow for the spectator;\_s gaze and their relegation of the cheering squad to spaces of visibility. It would establish somewhat, the visible items for their gaze and how the cheering squad then fits into that particular notion. In addition, I could also provide my own insight as a spectator;\_s realm of participant observation;\_s into the spectacles thrown out for visible consumption during the intervals of the varsity game.

Surveys also prove important in gauging how the various players;\_s football players, female basketball players, and male basketball players;\_s gauge the visibility of the cheering squad. This allows for an examination of how these Varsity athletes either integrate them or segregate them from the space of collegiate athletics. How then would the cheering squad perform and use their bodies for increased visibility both on the athletic court and in the sports;\_s program at the University of Illinois? Do Varsity basketball and football players integrate the cheering squad into the very visible space of collegiate sports? Would the women;\_s basketball team view the squad in the same way as the men;\_s team?

Another aspect of instrumentality of the survey would consist of asking other groups that either perform or share the space of the court or field with the cheering squad. This would consist of surveys for the dancing squad, the PR staff, the event set-up staff, and various other organizations. The question that most intrigues me in this case consists of how would I construct and alter the survey to make it effective for the various populations and spaces? Should it be uniform? How would gender be constructed into the survey?

With regards to visibility and the performance of it, this thematic area allows me to be a participant observer in my role of a spectator. I would still not be able to practice and work with the team in most realms but I have the added asset of being a spectator thus allowing for an analysis of that space.

## **OBSERVE**

### **What observations, or findings are you encountering in your research?**

Interview with Ges (Graduate engineering student)

Drizzling away any kind of outdoor amusement, Champaign weather did not prove conducive to good outdoor fun. I decided to meet some friends of mine at Boltini;\_s in downtown Champaign as they catered to a slightly older crowd. As I stood inside Boltini;\_s, having escaped the depressing weather, the dynamics of the crowd intrigued me; people had come in groups and I seemed to be the odd one out. None of my friends had showed up and I sipped on a delicious bottle of Samuel Smith;\_s Oatmeal Stout. Monotony of techno disturbed what would be in my mind a great social setting, yet I sipped my beer alone waiting for my friends. Even the individual I am an instructor made an appearance with a young woman thus taking away a little bit of my masculinity; I still sipped alone. I checked the clock on my cell phone periodically making sure I had managed my time properly and giving reasons to be a little bit annoyed at tardiness. During one of my checks, I noticed that I had missed a call. I went outside to attend to that when my friend came to the door. She was a graduate Engineering student and also

someone I played volleyball with, a friend in many of my social circles. The pseudonym I have chosen to give her will be Ges, I guess that can be short for graduate engineering student. Ges always has a great disposition and seems to embrace life, she gave me a great smile and we proceeded inside Boltini's. With drinks in hand, we conversed about various topics including our recent volleyball games as well as the party last night. Among the chaos of the crowd and the disembodied techno, a table opened up next to the DJ and the speakers, a blessing and a curse. As we sat down, we had to raise our voices while hoping it would drown out the waves of awful music. At this moment I realized that Ges would prove a great person to interview concerning their reasons for picking UIUC as a graduate school. Even though I hope to do my proposal on the cheering squad at the UIUC athletic teams, this I hoped could provide an interview foundation from which to base my proposal. Clamoring from the speakers continued as I asked Ges, "Why did you choose to come to UIUC?" Ges smiled with acknowledgement of a funny story waiting to be told. Here, I am retelling the story as I remember it from our conversation. The twinkle in her eye assured me of something interesting awaiting me. Ges had done her undergraduate studies and graduate studies at RPI (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), a small college in Northern New York with a student body of 5000. Although Minnesota was home, she studied at RPI (which I asked comically if it stood for "Runs Per Inning"). Although most people go straight to the industry and private sector following school, Ges had some of those thoughts but a try at teaching proved too addictive. She had tried her hand at teaching at RPI, the clarity of this experience proved great as her grin widened greater while her eyes lit up; her face demonstrated the excitement this realization had had for her. Industry and the private sector did not attract her post graduate interests as did teaching and scholarship. As a result, Ges applied to many schools for a Ph.D. so as to entering the collegiate teaching profession soon afterwards.

At this point in our conversation, I was simply astounded by the similarity with which we had reached the decision to pursue graduate degrees. While listening to her tell her story, my own experience was woven into the fabric of this interview conversation. I kept reminiscing to my own process of realization of my vocational goals and how I had come to the conclusion to pursue graduate study while teaching "African American Social Movements" at LaGrange College in Georgia. Thus, at this point in the dialogue, I knew that my experience had infiltrated the framework of this interview, for good or for bad I am not sure.

Ges informed me that she applied to several schools that consisted of Berkeley, Brown, UIUC, University of Michigan, and a couple of other institutions that I seem to have forgotten. She had been accepted at Berkeley but had to decline because the funding there proved insufficient. This makes sense as San Francisco and the Berkeley area has inflated prices. As a result, she waited for the other places. Here her frustration in the process showed in her body language, the way she moved in her chair. It also came through in her facial expression and slightly lower tone of voice. Ges's application process hit a wall with Brown University. They, she claimed, did not even consider her application in that she did not even hear back from them. Although Brown represented one of her top choices, she had received no consideration; she is what she thought. One of the explanations Ges offered was that her application was immediately tossed. I found this difficult to swallow especially since she had been accepted elsewhere including Berkeley. I told her I was shocked to hear of this; simultaneously I thought through my own application process and the difficulties I myself had encountered during the process. However, I did not share this with Ges as the conversation flowed freely without much attempts to create comfort, sympathy, and empathy. Proceeding from her explanation of the Brown experience, Ges told me that she called them up to ask the status of her application since no letter of any kind was received by her. Ges then asked for a refund of the application fee since they had, she said, obviously not processed her application. Here I noticed her now leaning away from the table and leaning away from me to the back of

her chair. Her smile gave way to some dismay in her voice and facial expression. This encounter with Brown does not seem to have been a good one for her. Quickly her smile returned, she laughed a little cynically when recalling the fact that Brown University sent her a letter of rejection a short time after that phone call. All I could think of was the capitalistic and business structure of the academic institutions and why academic institutions privilege those with privilege.

Conversation continued smoothly as Ges and I already have had social interactions that does not make this setting alien and unwelcoming. Before arriving at UIUC, Ges spoke of her experience at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Though I consider Michigan an excellent academic institution, the weather does prove daunting. However, I do not recall Ges mentioning the weather. Rather, she spoke of her visit to the Michigan and the meetings with the department there. The quite mechanical presentation of a body of a car proved very simple and boring. In addition, she had been put in the "miscellaneous group." I looked at her with skepticism in my eyes. Ges read my facial expression and we talked about how the category "miscellaneous" could not be a good thing no matter what. Everyone else was put into certain specific discipline groupings while Ges moved with the "miscellaneous" crowd. I asked her, "Did they show you just the car?" She replied with sarcasm that they worked on cars in the state of Michigan and that that proved surprising. Similarly, I responded with "Cars being made in Michigan? No, really?" Laying out such a simple project did not appeal to Ges; from what she stated to me, this project and department did not seem on the brink of innovation. She told me that she did a lot of traveling and even went to check out the University of Minnesota in addition to the University of Michigan.

Having Minnesota as her home state, Ges told me that she hesitated in even applying to the University of Minnesota. I could not longer hold in my surprise and bewilderment, I let out my thoughts like a broken dam. "Do you not know how great of a school Minnesota is?" Without hesitation she replied that she just did not want to be caught in the same state so close to home. I could definitely understand that as I too have moved to various places for school and work. Yet, I still tried to convince her of the quality of scholarship at the University of Minnesota. When I had finished with my little verbal rampage, Ges informed me that she had been surprised by the quality of scholarship at the University of Minnesota and was pleasantly surprised with their offerings. However, Ges still had placed other institutions higher than the University of Minnesota and that included the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

At this point, I stated how she had really made her way across the country. I shared my own stories of visits to the various schools, especially my visit to University of California, Santa Barbara after six months in China. I went the very next day after I got to San Francisco and drove there. Jet lag hit me hard on the way back and I told Ges about my stop over at a Home Depot parking lot only to wake up from a nightmare and imagine myself in a strange car in what I was thought was a Home Depot in China. Yes, I provided amusement with my story.

I also told Ges how I got to the University of Illinois, both the campus in Chicago as well as the campus at Urbana-Champaign. Ges told me that she flew into Champaign, this contrasted with my experience where I took the bus from Chicago. Flying over Champaign proved distressing for Ges who lived in scenic and contoured landscapes in Minnesota and New York. On the contrary, the flight over Champaign showed a landscape that was not appealing. However, Ges informed me that she came in with two other applicants, another woman and a man. Projects offered at the University of Illinois seemed much more interesting and innovative. Furthermore, there was departmental specificity for her area of interest. It was not lumped into one big category like some other schools. Faculty and graduate students were working on things that had a greater dynamism compared to the University of Michigan. The graduate student who showed the three around seemed charismatic. I then asked a question already embedded in my experience with the visit I made to campus, I asked Ges whether the interactions with

people such as that graduate student convinced her of the suitability and compatibility of this match. She thought it over for a second and the conversation that followed showed that it did help in narrowing down her choices but still the overall departmental strengths determined her choice of UIUC.

With the smoke infiltrating this bar and the speakers blasting music that deserved a beating, Ges and I had to adjust our bodies and voices so that we could hear each other. We talked about the sheer ugliness of this landscape; both of us came from interesting places such as Minnesota and Georgia where there are numerous outdoor escapes. I prodded further about Ges's research interests and she mentioned her work with polymers. I told her and asked her for forgiveness in my absolute stupidity, as I knew so little about her field. I could see her brain through her facial expressions as she worked hard to simplify a subject matter so complex. After dialoguing, I came to understand that she works with polymers and capsules that work in "self-healing" cracks. In certain items, she mentioned submarines as one example as well as computer chips, a crack would alter the functioning of the entire system and it could stretch out the material. Ges works with a capsule that dispenses a liquid to the area of the crack thus immediately solidifying, this allows for it cover over the crack and maintain its structure. This was the healing of the substance by the liquid filling in the cracks. What a great subject matter! I would study this if not for my hatred of Chemistry.

As we continued talking, Ges mentioned that the three people she came to check out the campus with are her closest friends. I thought about that and how small my cohort was this year. Through this conversation that I just started randomly; but yet fit in with the overall discussion we were having; proceeded as smoothly as possible. Having a prior relationship with this person facilitated a particular comfort zone that allowed for us to talk about many things including her reason to attend the UIUC. However, I wonder as to what frequency this can be maintained with other subjects without a certain level of exploitation and discomfort. How can interviews be normal if not taking place casually like the one I had? Is it better to just have these numerous dialogues and then meet with the person afterwards to get their permission and polish up one's facts?

As a very social person with roaming eyes, the horrible music and the great conversation simultaneously allowed me to concentrate to a greater degree on Ges. However, would that be true if the environment were different? I still found this environment probably the most conducive for interviewing as the constant movement, noises, and smoke proved distracting at times. Yet, could this create the suitable environment for substantial interviews?

After this conversation, we met up with some other friends at Barfly and at this point I asked her if I could use our conversation as my interview paper. The subject of interviews had come up and I asked Ges, she complied with another big smile. Ges provided pertinent information that proved valuable in setting up my first interview data. I found myself even more intrigued in the happenings of the Engineering Department and Mechanics Department. The male to female ratio could represent an interesting foundation for a point of study. However, I still found myself drawn to ethnographic work concerning the cheering squad at the University of Illinois. Reservations did arise after my interview with Ges. I share a lot of things in common with her including stage in life, extracurricular activities, and some similar experiences; all of this facilitated easy conversation. I wonder whether this would happen with the cheering squad who I differ from in numerous ways. Furthermore, I cannot build the same kind of comfort zone with them as a result of differences and the inability for me to practice with them, perform at games with them, and be a part of their group. I do have a friend on the cheering squad, that would help greatly but can still limit my overall data collection.

If I had jotted down the conversation immediately or later on that night, I would have had more direct quotes from Ges. Emerson et al did prove helpful in providing that information. I do believe that if I had taken notes after the interview, my write up would have been much more vivid. Furthermore, it would focus my conversation interpreting

and jotting down abilities. Yet, the free flow atmosphere at Boltini's enabled Ges and I to talk freely about numerous topics including the reason she chose to come to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

#### Interview with transcripts (Interview with coach)

Tuesday had been a busy day and it made no promises of ending earlier or getting easier. Rather, I spent the day running from meeting to meeting, one event to another. Plus, I had received a message from Gordon (psuedonym) that one of the coaches of the University of Illinois Cheering Team might not be able to meet with me. Gordon mentioned that practice had been cancelled as a result of the chaos with midterms and so much academic work. Yet, the coach had not written back to me to cancel. Thus, after my meeting with ANTH 411 group, I ran to meet with the coach. I kind of expected her not to be there, people have busy lives and I was not going to be disappointed or angry if she did not make it. I found a great spot by Huff Hall and park my car, I looked at my watch and saw that I was almost 5 minutes late to meeting the coach. I grabbed my video camera and walked in. Unlike the other time I had gone for practice, the silence was quite haunting. I walked onto the main court and saw a young woman sitting against the wall on the other side of the court. As I walked that way hoping it was the coach, I saw that she was talking on her cell phone and did not want to interrupt in case it is the wrong person. As I got closer, she put her cell phone down and greeted me with a shake of hands as she stood up. Instead of making this interview so rigid and job like, I aimed to first chat with the coach without it being structured as an interview. Having done some prior research on the coach, it made it easier to talk to her and make this space of the interview a little bit more comfortable. It was the foundation to making an interview seem less rigid. For the purposes of this class, I am transcribing the initial part of the interview. I had expected the interview to last 5 to 10 minutes at most. However, we had reach a level of comfort that the coach talked to me for over 40 minutes. In fact, it was I who then asked to leave because I had a review session to lead. Here is the first few minutes of the interview that I recorded.

#### Legend

Underline- stressing a particular word which differs from regular speech

„\_ extending a word

\_ underscore emphasizes pause in speech

xxxx- not able to transcribe this, unknown words

[ speech contains two speakers in which their words overlap

S- the interviewer

C- the interviewee

S- Why did you choose to coach?

C- um \_ I actually was a cheerleader here for 3 years when I went to school here. So, I had cheered for 3 years and \_ a year or two after I graduated \_ the position came open um and I decide to apply\_ and ended up getting the job here and I've been here, this is my tenth season. So

S- [congratulations, wow,,\_

C- Yeah (she seems gleeful about this and smiles)

S- {Wow, um, how did you know ah \_ that there \_ there was a position open? Um

C- [It was actually,,\_ in the newspaper \_ so the Champaign News Gazette it was advertised and um just applied through that process. And \_ went through the interview process and got that job.

S- Wow,,\_ (I was amazed because I hoped my job search would be this simple).  
C- (She chuckles at my amazement)  
S- So, so, is it, is it possible even \_ even after you finished you were thinking about cheering? Hey, were you, work, working in other schools? High schools or anything like that? (I asked this question because of the way I had ended up coaching college basketball, it was a process).  
C- I had actually taken a position with one of the local high schools to coach their JV squad.  
S- [hhmm  
C- um and then just a couple months after this position came open, so,,\_  
S- [oh wow  
C-[I hadn't done it for very long but  
S- [Yeah  
C- I was looking to stay in it \_ \_ do something  
S- [Yeah  
C- extra outside it.  
S- wow  
C- work  
S- So, um, um (my eyes widen and my face lights up a bit), I mean, this is just intriguing \_ because \_ um for me \_ especially some of us athletes that finish (I see coach nodding her head in complete agreement as if we had converged on the known and could sense with the smile extending across her face that she knew what I was going to say. That made the process even more comfortable for the interviewer). For us, it's such a traumatic process, that when, when we are done, [I widened my eyes to stress this point] we just don't wanna have anything to do with it for a long long time. Um \_ um what were those highlights for you that made you \_ want to come back in this role?  
C- Well, um, I, I think the tradition here at Illinois is so,,\_ so large and so exciting. And,,\_ I was still living in Champaign, my husband and I had decided this is where we were gonna stay and,,\_ so were still involved in going to athletic events and being a  
S- [hm  
C- part of Illinois Athletics  
S- [hm  
C- So then it was kind of a natural extension of um what I already was a part of I guess \_ \_ to, to continue and coach the cheerleaders.  
S- [hm  
C- And \_ I was always interested in taking on that opposite role of what I was in \_ um and working with the program and building it up. And things like that.  
S- Um, and, and also Gordon (pseudonym) mentioned that you guys got service group of year too, a award last year.  
C- [Last year (she had originally been sitting on the floor and leaning forward but straightened out her posture and this smile overtook her, I believe she was excited about how her athletes won this award and that I knew that).  
C- Hhmm, um, they got a \_ they had a program called Hometown Heroes \_ um \_ and they um worked with schools in the community and uh \_ \_ went and talked to the students about why its important to stay in school and how  
S- [hm  
C- you balance the time commitment of athletics and \_ and schooling and all the different things the kids might have questions on. And um really focusing on why its important to \_ to to get your education and to do well in school. Um \_ and this \_ so they had the most points out of all the athletic teams last year and won the award. So that was exciting  
S- [Just so impressive (my voice is raised in enthusiasm)  
C- [Oh yeah, very exciting,,\_  
S- [So impressive  
C- [And that was their goal going in.

S- [Yeah

C- They knew that was the goal they wanted to meet and it was exciting when they won.

I had very real skepticisms about this process of the interview, it just seems so artificial to me. However, since our interview had gone over 40 minutes, I was very glad that I had indeed brought a tool for recording valuable information. It would never have been possible to grasp all the main points without it. I am glad I took the recorder but how do I manage to use it in the field and still make it seem invisible?

My analysis:

During the actual interview session with the coach, I felt privileged to get unique perspectives and analysis that would not have been possible if not for several factors. For one thing, I wonder how the dynamics would have changed if this same interview took place in a space different than a place for cheering practice. Furthermore, my familiarity with Gordon facilitated a space that I deemed as more intimate than would have been possible. Gordon approached the coach and proved instrumental in allowing me access to her time and also gave me a particular creditability and familiarity that might not have otherwise been possible. Thus, from the very onset, the interview did not seem artificial or overly contrived. From the body language of comfort of lying against the wall and ability to express herself bodily, I assumed a particular level of comfort for the coach. One of the realms that I had wanted to explore during this interview consisted of the notion of visibility; this paradigm of analysis kept coming back to me when I transcribed a portion of the interview. One of the subjects of conversation consisted of the web page and the visibility of the cheering squad in the realm of the college sports<sub>i</sub> space. With this being the 100-year anniversary of the Men<sub>i</sub>'s basketball team and the incredible success this season, the men<sub>i</sub>'s basketball team had been featured in nearly every single headline page of the sport<sub>i</sub>'s page. Yet, the cheering squad had not been featured on any of the sport<sub>i</sub>'s page accompanying the men<sub>i</sub>'s basketball team. What kind of integration and visibility do they maintain with regards to the sports<sub>i</sub> teams? This I thought seemed relevant since most institutions of higher learning have cheering squads that, according to Gordon, find a place either in the Public Relations Department or the Sports Department. Through association with the Sports<sub>i</sub> department, they have their web page on the sports<sub>i</sub> web page; there is a link to the cheering squad on that page. However, unlike other sports where there exists a distinction gender differentiation and specialization of web pages for those particular sports, the same web page is utilized irrespective of gender; Xa grouping under the rubric of cheering rather than gender differentiated sports. When discussing the web page with the coach, my point of interest consisted of the information provided and whether it was a deliberate attempt to gain visibility among the plethora of sports<sub>i</sub> teams. Specifically here I was interested in the way the cheering squad competed with other sport's web pages for legitimacy. Although she had understood what I was saying, the motives for the creation of the web page were different than what I had originally thought. Coach mentioned that by posting a web page, they had a much easier way to make the program visible to those enthusiastic about cheering for University of Illinois. Thus, it served as a visible information site not for highlighting the cheering squad and their achievements as much as it gave details of tryouts. The web page served as a protocol for tryouts and keeps the flow of cheering squad athletes coming in. It was a fairly new web-page and I think the lack of funding for the cheering squad forces the coaches and players to do tasks that other administrative positions would otherwise serve for the other sport programs. They maintain their own web sites and this can be daunting in regards to making it up-to-date, engaging, and highly visible. Furthermore, with regards to the web page, I had mentioned to coach and congratulated

her on winning the service award. The manner by which she leaned back and smiled demonstrated the great pride she took in having her athletes win that prize. It was, based on my analysis of the situation, an affirmation of the positive changes being made during this coaching tenure. However, none of this had been posted on their web page. When I mentioned the invisibility of this on the web page, the coach's eye opened wide in surprise and acknowledgement. She then stated that it is something does need to be put up on the web page. It was a means by which the Cheering squad, as one of the most minimally funded organizations under the rubric of sports programs, beat out the other competing programs.

One area that I should have prodded more now that I think about it consists of the changes the coach mentioned from the previous coach to her. The coach believed that there had been some very positive shifts that had taken place and she showed delight in the progress of her student athletes. At this juncture, I should have asked about how she had experienced the cheering program and how they were known then as compared to now. This question would have brought to light the various means by which the coach has intentionally worked towards altering their visibility, their spectacle, and their performances.

Finally, on an interesting note relevant to the web page's initial main objective, as the weather got warmer more than just sexualized tanning bodies occupied the quad. In fact, several members of the Men's basketball team's cheering squad were on the quad. That would prove not important if it had not been for the fact that they did it prior to April 16th tryouts and that in this now sun induced visible space, they were performing their visibility. They did many of the stunts and shows of strength they offer at the games. I was amazed by the space of this performance and went to talk to them. They mentioned that since it was so close to cheering tryout time, they wanted to use this space and temporality to draw upon new recruits if at all possible. Thus, this was also an attempt to notify those interested in cheering about the tryouts. I should have asked them how they viewed this very visible space and their performance without the uniforms. There are lots of interesting tangents I could get off on.

Finally, the length of the interview with coach is very telling of the attempts of gaining increasing visibility for the program. Although we had assumed it would be only for ten minutes or so, the interview lasted over forty minutes. Here I believe this to be the case that any publicity is good publicity. The coach has been trying to get the word out about the program and her wonderful athletes. My ethnographic work represented another means of gaining visibility in the public space of sports.

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### Fieldnotes from a women's basketball game

I had imagined that during my first two years at University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, that I would have easy access to tickets to football and basketball games. With the football team achieving feats of mediocrity in a conference as tough as the Big Ten, I could have probably scored a few tickets for that. However, with women's volleyball running during the same season, I had no intentions of going to a football game. As a result, I did not ask Gordon, my friend and male cheerleader, for any tickets for the football games. However, with basketball season, I expected to get a few tickets to various games. I could not wait to participate in a Division I sporting even while constituting the student body of that same institution of higher learning. With such eager anticipation, I looked forward to the basketball season. Through Gordon I would have access to great seats as well as watch fantastic top tier Division I men's basketball. My first two years at UIUC would bring definite basketball bliss, that was my intuition.

Ease with which I had anticipated in getting tickets proved to be contrary to my belief. After the victory over number one ranked Wake Forest, that too a resounding victory, the chances of getting tickets to game diminished. The 100 year anniversary season of Men's basketball (already a very visible celebration of basketball) along with the team's number one ranking; that came about after crushing Wake Forest; led to such demand for tickets that I would not have access to them. Free tickets to the cheerleading squad had particular protocols in regard to its distribution. Only after demands by family had been met could the cheerleaders give away tickets to friends. Since the heightened demand for tickets from family proved great, the members of the cheering squad had to throw their tickets into the pool for use by relatives regardless of whether these people emerged from one's own family tree. Thus, Gordon would have to provide his tickets to family members of the other cheerleaders before he could provide for me. As one can see, no real opportunity existed for me to go and watch a men's basketball game and see the performances by the cheering squad. Yet, another option did exist.

Gordon could provide tickets to the women's basketball games easily. In addition to struggling for financial resources and funding, the women's basketball team also struggled to find crowd support. Very few people, especially in comparison to the men's games, attended women's Varsity basketball games. Since I had coached collegiate women's basketball for a year in the past, I still loved watching the game regardless of gender specification. Although I enjoyed the energy and speed of the men's game, I loved watching the fundamentals and game plays in the women's game. With joy I accepted two tickets from Gordon for the women's basketball game. Now I had to figure out whom I planned on taking to the game. I had made some calls but knew that Jewels would accompany me. Jewels worked on issues concerning sports in her graduate program, she would definitely join me. Plus, she knew about parking and all the other necessary stuff. I picked Jewels up an half-hour before tip-off and proceeded by car to the stadium. As I would soon find inside the stadium, the emptiness also reached out to the parking lot as well as we had numerous spots to choose from.

As we made our way to Assembly Hall, my heart started pounding in anticipation. The drums and music radiating outwards from the stadium seemed to drum up something inside of me as well. I got chills as if I was the athlete playing in this game. Pounding in greater intensity, the drums foretold of a great game. After going through security check as a result of my bag, we got to our seats that were diagonal with one of the baskets. We had such great seats! To my surprise, the crowd lay spread out sparingly and only on the floor level. Upper level seats lay vacant and the crowd probably numbered a couple of thousand fans or so. Similar to my prior experience with coaching collegiate women's sports, the turn out for the men's game almost always outnumbered the women's game regardless of how each team did during their respective seasons. Thus, the women's team had particular levels of invisibility even in the grand stage of Division I collegiate sports. In addition, Gordon had mentioned to me that the individuals cheering at the women's game consisted of first year or second year students, these cheering squad members thus cheered within a unique space of visibility and invisibility in opposition to the cheering squad for the men's game.

Having coached collegiate women's basketball and having participated in competitive basketball as an athlete, this ethnographic process proved quite unlike my normal sports gaze. As I sat there with Jewels, I had to alter my routine gaze and had to specify it. In a way, I had to create a particular myopia with my gaze so as to observe the performances of visibility put forth by the cheerleaders. By altering my own gaze, I observed how invisible the cheering squads had been in my own past. Other than the sexuality that emanated from their presence while in High school, I had never really configured them into the center of any particular sporting event. Now I had to make them

center stage to fully understand and document their body language and performances during the entire course of the basketball game.

The female cheering squad members had orange skirts that stopped at mid-thigh revealing very well defined legs. With the skirt they also had a vest on top with a blue long sleeve shirt that came out of the vest; I would consider this part of the traditional cheerleading outfit seen on the high school and college level. They also had blue ribbons in their hair. Male cheerleaders did not wear shorts; they wore warm-up pants in orange with a sweater like short sleeve top. Everyone had the same shoes on and there seemed a considerable flow of uniformity between the female and male members. Whereas the women had pom poms, the men carried the megaphones; I wondered what kind of gendered garb allocation and division of labor took place here. Certain men and women did tumbling routines on a consistent basis while the others did power routines of tossing and catching female cheerleaders. Jewels, who has done extensive work on collegiate sports, mentioned that there exists a "minimum tumbling requirement" for all those cheering for the Big Ten Schools. Although all the cheerleaders train to tumble and must know how to do it somewhat, there is a further specialization. Some of the females become "fliers" while the others constitute the "tumblers" with the first doing the acrobatic stunts in air while the latter constitute the ones partaking in gymnastic like routines with their tumbling runs.

As I struggled and worked to focus solely on the cheering squad, I recognized the various spaces and temporalities of visibility they occupied during the course of the game. The squad split up into two groups with equal numbers of men and women. One went to the visitor's side, both the men and women sat except during their entrant to perform on court or during timeouts. The half that performed at the home bench, next to me, had the men kneel with one leg with megaphone in hand. Women stood with pom poms in hand. Both sides had signs that the squad would show to the crowd to entice excitement and team support from the crowd. Unlike the men kneeling by courtside, the women exhibited a different bodily language. Having the college band play right behind them, the women's movements seemed much more fluid and rhythmically in-tune with the band. Their bodies wavered from side to side with heads bobbing in acceptance of the musical rhythm. Furthermore, the women did not stop moving at any point; their bodies always remain in motion unlike the men kneeling on the floor. The women had a particularly greater visibility for me, I just hope that was not the case because I was drawn more to the aesthetically pleasing sights of the female bodies.

Since the Varsity women's basketball team does not draw a big crowd, tables are set up and sold for parties. At halftime, the cheerleaders went to the tables; most of the patrons dressed in University of Illinois Orange; and interacted with the crowds. Most of the individuals who engaged with the patrons consisted of the female cheerleaders. Female cheerleaders also played with the kids at the table and seemed to really excite the little girls at the tables. The women, once again, seemed more visible and I wondered if the gendering of cheerleading as female led to this particular invisibility of the men. Yet, at the close of half time, the men led the charge in preparation for the second half of the basketball game. Two men had large flags spanning quarter length of the court and they waved it to the crowd to excite them. Such great weight exerted such pressure on their muscles and one could see their forearm muscles drawn out in an act of strength. This also set the way for the arrival of the controversial school mascot, the Chief. The cheering squad stood on both sides of the free throw box by the home basket and put their arm over the other in a "Native American like" fashion. Staring closely at the faces of the cheerleaders, I could sense that some smiled and expressed such joy in this event. It was an event that I found vulgar and refused to stand but continued to observe the cheering squad.

After the completion of rituals associated with the Chief, the cheering squad members finally had refreshments for the first time all game. They also took this opportunity to converse with friends and family members. While the basketball players had received refreshments during time outs and time on the bench, the cheering squad basically had to perform during the entire course of the first half and majority of the halftime period as well.

To usher in the second half, the cheerleading squad performed a task of greater visibility and remarkable athletic prowess. Two men, with the enormous flags in hand, led two lines in a charge up the stands. They sprinted with that enormous flag in hand to the second level and split up at the top going opposite ways in that circle. They sprinted full speed around the second level and passed each other at the halfway point, they converged at the initial starting point after having sprinted full speed. This did not however end here as they sprinted down back to the courtside space. Wow! They basically did a three hundred-meter sprint and took almost no recovery time to welcome in the basketball teams for the second half. I could see them gasping for air but recovered so quickly, I would have most likely have fainted halfway through the sprint.

Acrobatic stunts during halftime and during the course of the game had unique configuring of the bodies in the space of center court. For the women, they performed the majority of tumbling routines to set up the mid court cheer. Also, female cheerleaders, the "fliers", were the ones tossed during the routines. Looking closer at their faces and their own gaze, I realized that the women had their gazes always towards the audience, they maintained eye contact with the crowd. Male cheerleaders, on the other hand, had their eyes on the female cheerleaders, they performed the roll of tossers and catchers; they made sure they caught anyone who fell out of routine. With this note, I wondered if there consisted of a particular spot that female cheerleaders were asked to focus on. Also, the women chose to keep their bodies stiff during these feats of athletic and acrobatic wonder, a relaxed body would have proved difficult to control. This particular rigidity also played out as they stood on the sidelines, such a level of professional and discipline reigned. Furthermore more, female cheerleaders use their pom poms to dialogue with the crowd while only at certain times do the males use their megaphones to converse with the crowd.

With regard to conversing, I noticed that the cheering squad maintained full visual grasp of the game. At no point during the first half or the majority of the second half did they converse with each other. Only towards the end of the game did they even converse with each other and that too on a minimal level. I know that I could not have had that much discipline and would have chatted my way through the game. Only thing that stood out in a negative way for me consisted of the slightly lethargic affects coming from them. Although they performed their tasks with energy during the shows at halftime, the emotions on their faces did not fit what I imagined to be the case. For example, with the televised men's games, one could notice the hyperexcitement among the cheerleaders in front of the camera and the national audience. In this case, I saw something that resembled going through the motions without that much excitement. I wonder if that could be attributed to the cheering squad for the women's game facing physical exhaustion this late in the season, would it have been the same at the start of the season? Is this also the case since they are cheering for the less visible women's basketball team? Is this more of a training ground for bodily routines and not facial routines and expressions? Just some questions that came about to finish my experience of taking field notes during the women's Varsity basketball game.

Similar to the book on taking ethnographic field notes, I approached this setting with no big questions in mind. I made it a point to focus on the performances offered by the cheerleaders, I had to maintain that myopia. However, I did not let any specific questions frame the way I observed the cheering squad at work. This allowed for a data collection that seemed much more complete and not segregated to a specific realm of theory or notes. By not letting any questions frame my field notes, I truly privileged from having and collecting an abundance of data. Yet, maybe focusing a little bit more on some particular questions might have assisted me in highlighting specific activities over others.

## **DISCUSS**

### **Discuss your inquiry, taking care to separate speculation from fact or data**

I cannot believe how much my project has changed within the course of this class. As an athlete (or at least I like to call myself an "athlete"), I have always been fascinated with the human body in these performances of strength. Although I had originally wanted to work with issues of gender and invisibility within this co-ed cheering squad, the final day of class provided me with other profound ways. I have always wanted to find a methodological approach that had forms of activism behind it. By tying the notion of "invisibility" to gender and Title IX, my proposal all of a sudden has gained some tremendous political momentum for myself. The day we had to present our proposals really helped me shape my project and polish it out.

One of the things that I found very surprising in my findings that was not covered in the proposal was the prominence of the female cheerleader's body on national TV. During the men's very successful basketball season, they were featured on many media outlets. When they played in March Madness (college basketball playoffs), during timeouts and spectacular plays the camera would switch to the crowd or to the cheering squad. One saw female cheerleaders for the majority of the time and very rarely did the camera confine its view to show only male cheerleaders. The female cheerleaders gained tremendous visibility on the big screen, I speculate this is part of the process of gendering this sport as "feminine."

Another thing that came about in talks I had with two of my informants yesterday, May 4th, was about the cheerleading tryouts on April 16th. They talked about how this was one of the best tryout years in a very long time. As we talked more, we finally came to the subject of the men's basketball team and their glamorous season. They finished the year as number 1 in the country and lost in the final game. As a result of this, we speculated, the number of people trying out for the team increased substantially. My informants told me that they had 50 women and 25 men tryout. They also mentioned that it had always been difficult to recruit men and now they had more than enough that they could actually cut some people. Thus, the success of the men's team directly impacted the success of cheering tryouts. Would this have been the same if the men's team had a horrible season? Would it have been the same if the women's team had a spectacular season? How do these gendered sports affect the success of the cheering team? How does this relate to Title IX? How should Title IX be reconstructed? These are just a couple of things that came up during the course of the semester.

## **REFLECT**

### **Link**

#### **Connect with other resources and materials.**

I think the fieldwork done by Eric Dangoy relates quite substantially to the my work, he

addresses another component of collegiate sports that deal with the mascot. As that is one area that I do not intend to deal with, out of ethical concerns, my subjects, his work can fill in the holes of activism in my work.

These are not specifically EOTU pages but these links can provide a great basis for understanding Title IX and its relevance to my project. One of my informants, Jewels, provided me with this list of web-sites.

[http://www2.ncaa.org/academics\\_and\\_athletes/education\\_and\\_research/](http://www2.ncaa.org/academics_and_athletes/education_and_research/)

You also might want to check out:

<http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/ge/>

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/TitleIX/index.html>

[http://www1.ncaa.org/membership/ed\\_outreach/gender\\_equity/general\\_info/facts.html](http://www1.ncaa.org/membership/ed_outreach/gender_equity/general_info/facts.html)

<http://www2.edc.org/WomensEquity/resource/title9/>

<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/issues/disc/article.html?record=955>

As someone who had already taken a method's course in the past, this proved a little bit more engaging than that previous class. However, my own personal struggles with the hyper-focus on methodology limited my enthusiasm for the subject matter. I could not engage fully with the readings in regard to theory so as to then assess methods. The validity of a particular argument also helps one understand the efficacy of particular methods and thus I would have liked to have chosen greater analysis of readings.

Research-wise, I felt that the particular documentation of interviews via a tape recorder or some other form of recording device proved extremely useful. Looking back on the interview I had with coach, I could not have caught all those specifics without the use of a recording device. Furthermore, this showed me ways to effectively use interview time without altering a space of comfort. If I had taken a notebook and was writing, talking, and listening, my notes from the interview would have really suffered.

The various methods demonstrated in class did enhance my own perception of ethnography, it gave me tools for better qualitative and quantitative research. One area of concern was the timing of this methods' course, I should have taken this in year two of the program instead of in my first year. I would have had better thematic structuring for my own proposal and my preliminary fieldwork experience could have enhanced my own understanding of the class.

I can see and reflect on my own methodological growth through the inquiry pages and I-lab, it is a very useful tool. Yet, I am not a computer savvy person nor do I have any intentions of changing that. As a result, this methodological technology proved limiting in that I quickly got frustrated with it and it altered the natural means by which I write. There was a particular disconnect for me since I no longer wrote in my notebook but rather in the inquiry page. Furthermore, as I aim to somehow integrate activism with methodology and academia, this space proves very limiting as it is not open to the larger community. The space of technology is itself an elite space. I am sorry but I just do not

enjoy computers and staring at the computer screen did leave me less motivated with my work.

## **OTHER**

### **A space for other notes, findings, comments, etc.**

I just want to address some concerns I had with the readings that I felt were not brought up in class or fully explored:

1. With regards to "Sidewalk," we explored the racial and class subjectivities that play out in the ethnographic work by Duneier. However, we limited our work to very specific groups and put artificial boundaries around these groups. Since Duneier had set out to study the poor inhabitants of the sidewalk, he kept his ethnographic eye and his subjectivity altered to fit their world so that he would not prove disruptive. Yet, these people live beyond their own groups of friends. They interact with the greater community outside of these classifications that Duneier has created. Thus, although Duneier might have created a comfort zone within this specific community, his presence, I speculate, would have altered greatly the space for those who walk by and see this very visible and awkward person. He would have disrupted the space for those who walk by and engage in this space in limited temporal contexts.
2. With regard to the reading on "Agoraphobia," I felt that we did not address a unique point brought up by Amy Firestone and the undergrad woman working with transfer students. They seemed visibly upset and did not appreciate the portrayals and ethnographic work done in this book. Instead of engaging with them to find out why, we, as the class, maintained this stances of informational authority and did not delve into a very methodological problem. What I mean is that they have lived and experienced daily lives with those suffering with agoraphobia, what is it about this methodological approach that did not suit them? They have intimate experiences, how would they have changed the methodology? What is it that they have experienced that the authors, in their role as outsiders, did not quite substantiate?

In regard to the I-lab and inquiry pages, the set-up and structure proved not too engaging. The bland nature and lack of pictures made this site myopic and limited in its rhetoric. For example, I have photos from the field but cannot put them up here in an easy manner. This written rhetoric, no matter how sophisticated, still falls short of a well rounded analysis when the visual rhetoric is absent.

It would be great if our subjects, who are members of the University of Illinois community, could sign the IRB forms via e-mail instead of us giving it to them. It would make the process a little simpler since we do everything else via the internet.

In regard to recommendations concerning the University of Illinois, I urge for greater financial support for the cheerleading squad and their coaches. Both coaches and players alike sacrifice so much, put forth extensive training, and perform on behalf of the school; they should be rewarded for that. Varsity athletes outside of cheerleading receive good budgets, scholarships, and various kinds of financial rewards; this should be given to the cheering squad as well. Assistance should also be provided to them to create a much more effective website and recruitment process, they represent athletes in every sense of the word and should receive proper validation of that. Also, the Chief as a mascot needs to be done with so that increasing numbers of non white students would choose to try out for the cheering squad. This, I propose, will bring another kind of much needed visibility-visibility concerning racial diversity. Finally, I would like to see the local media outlets find ways to integrate them into the news.