

# *Cheerleading and Body Image: Exploring the Relationship between Confidence and Health in College Women through Cheerleading*

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**Abstract:** This study delves into how cheerleading as a physical activity plays a unique role among college women, especially in terms of building confidence and improving body image. By conducting a comprehensive survey and analysis of the effects of cheerleading on physical health, psychological well-being, and social interaction among female students, this paper reveals the importance of participating in physical activities for enhancing personal self-esteem and body satisfaction. The study indicates that cheerleading not only has a positive impact on participants' physical health, such as improved fitness and cardiovascular health, but also brings significant psychological benefits, including increased self-confidence, enhanced self-efficacy, and improved mental state. Additionally, the research finds that cheerleading, as a team sport, greatly promotes participants' social skills and team spirit. In the training and performance of cheerleading, students learn effective communication and cooperation within a team and establish solid social networks and friendships in the process of pursuing common goals. This social experience gained through sports activities is crucial for enhancing students' social adaptability and interpersonal skills. As a physical activity, cheerleading positively impacts the physical, psychological, and social health of college women, playing a role not only in their campus life but also laying a solid foundation for their future personal development.

## **1. Introduction**

Cheerleading, as a comprehensive physical activity, is gaining increasing attention globally, especially in colleges. It is not only a sport showcasing physical strength and skills but also an activity that promotes team spirit and social interaction. Particularly for college women, cheerleading provides not only a physical exercise opportunity but also a platform for self-expression and personal skill development. With the current high emphasis on comprehensive development and healthy lifestyles for women, exploring the impact of cheerleading on college women is especially important. This study aims to understand the positive effects of cheerleading on physical health, psychological well-being, and social skills of college women, and how these effects synergistically promote their overall development.

As physical education continuously evolves, cheerleading has become an integral part of college sports activities. Its uniqueness lies in the perfect combination of physical training, dance

performance, and team cooperation, offering a stage for comprehensive development. This sport challenges students' physical limits while also fostering their psychological growth and social skills. Therefore, this study, through a comprehensive analysis of the impact of cheerleading at different levels, aims to provide a new perspective for college physical education and empirical support for promoting the holistic health and personal growth of female students.[1]

## **2. Cheerleading and Physical Health**

### **2.1. Physical Activity and Health**

Physical activity plays an indispensable role in maintaining and enhancing health, especially for college students. Regular physical exercise helps strengthen cardiorespiratory functions and improve immunity, and it is effective in preventing various chronic diseases. For college students, particularly women, who are under academic pressure, physical activity is also an effective way to relieve stress and enhance mood. Engaging in sports allows students to reduce anxiety and tension, thereby promoting overall health and well-being.[2]

The positive impact of physical activity on psychological health is equally undeniable. Regular exercise helps students relieve stress, improve mood, and can alleviate mild depressive symptoms. This is particularly important for college women experiencing academic and life pressures, as physical activity provides a viable means to cope with these stresses. By participating in sports, students not only improve their physical health but also receive greater psychological support and comfort.

In addition to physical and psychological health improvements, continuous physical activity significantly enhances quality of life. By boosting physical strength and endurance, students find daily tasks easier and enjoy more leisure activities. Moreover, regular exercise improves sleep quality, which is especially crucial for energetic college students.[3] Good sleep quality directly affects daytime vitality and learning efficiency, thereby further enhancing life satisfaction.

Group sports activities, such as cheerleading, provide exercise opportunities and promote social interaction. Through teamwork and collective training, students not only improve physically but also have the chance to form new friendships and enhance team cooperation skills. This social interaction is crucial for improving students' social skills and team spirit. In such an environment, students learn mutual support and joint effort, skills valuable for their future social and professional lives.[4]

Ultimately, fostering a habit of physical activity during college is vital for students' future healthy living. Healthy habits formed during this period accompany them throughout life, helping to maintain long-term physical and psychological health. Therefore, colleges should encourage students to participate in various sports activities, especially comprehensive sports like cheerleading, to help students establish a long-term healthy lifestyle. Through these activities, students benefit not only during their college years but also lay a solid health foundation for their future lives.

### **2.2. Fitness Effects of Cheerleading**

Cheerleading, as a comprehensive physical activity, has significant effects on enhancing physical health. It is a well-rounded sports activity combining aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises, offering participants an opportunity for comprehensive physical conditioning in one activity.[5] The diverse forms of movement in cheerleading are highly effective in enhancing cardiovascular functions, muscle strength, and endurance. Additionally, its dynamic and rhythmic nature allows participants to enjoy the fun of exercise while effectively burning calories, aiding in maintaining a healthy weight and physique.

The contribution of cheerleading to improving coordination and flexibility is also noteworthy. The

sport requires high coordination and flexibility during movements, thereby enhancing muscle and joint flexibility and improving bodily coordination during training. This training benefits not only cheerleading performance but also assists students in everyday life and other sports activities. For instance, students involved in cheerleading often perform better in daily activities requiring flexibility and coordination.

Regular participation in cheerleading can significantly improve personal body image and confidence. Continuous training leads to improvements in physical strength and appearance, often resulting in higher body satisfaction. Especially for college women, cheerleading helps shape a good physique and, more importantly, enhances their confidence and satisfaction with their bodies. This positive body self-perception is crucial for the psychological health of adolescents and young adults.[6]

Cheerleading also emphasizes the combination of endurance and strength. The dance and challenging maneuvers in the sport require a strong foundation of strength, while continuous training further enhances endurance. This improvement in strength and endurance not only makes students excel in cheerleading performances but also brings more vitality to their daily lives. Whether in studies or daily activities, a good physical condition allows students to perform better.

Lastly, as a team sport, cheerleading also invisibly strengthens students' team cooperation consciousness and social skills. Through joint training and performances, students improve their fitness levels while learning to collaborate with others to achieve common goals. This team cooperation experience positively impacts individual social skills and future career prospects. In summary, cheerleading, as a fitness activity, showcases its unique value and effectiveness in enhancing physical health, coordination, and team cooperation skills.

### **3. Cheerleading and Psychological Health**

#### **3.1. Cultivation of Confidence**

Cheerleading, as a vibrant physical activity, plays a significant role in fostering confidence among college women. Through training and performances in this sport, students not only improve physical skills but also gain significant psychological achievement, a key factor in building confidence. Cheerleading, with its high-level performance and teamwork requirements, allows participants to feel pride and accomplishment after each successful performance and practice, significantly enhancing their self-efficacy. This cultivation of confidence is crucial for the overall development of adolescents and young adults, affecting not only their performance in school but also their future career and personal relationships.

Cheerleading also provides students with a platform for self-display and expression. Through choreography and performance, they have the opportunity to show their uniqueness and creativity. This opportunity for self-expression helps students better understand themselves, thereby increasing self-esteem and self-worth. Through cheerleading, students learn how to play their roles in a team and also realize their value and potential, which is highly beneficial for adolescent psychological development.

The training process in cheerleading is also an important way to cultivate confidence. As skills improve and mastery of movements is achieved, students' confidence grows accordingly. This sense of accomplishment gained through effort and continuous practice has a profound impact on their psychological health and self-perception. Cheerleading is not just a physical activity; it is a platform for learning new skills, overcoming challenges, and growing from them.

Additionally, as a team sport, cheerleading strengthens mutual dependence and collaboration among participants. Success within the team not only enhances individual confidence but also strengthens team cohesion. In this process, students learn mutual support, encouragement, and

collective celebration of success, experiences crucial for building personal confidence.

Overall, cheerleading plays a multifaceted role in fostering confidence in college women. It not only functions in improving athletic skills and teamwork but more importantly, helps students discover their potential, enhancing their self-worth, thereby promoting their psychological health. Through cheerleading, students gain not just physical skill enhancement but also substantial growth and development psychologically and emotionally.

### **3.2. Enhancement of Psychological Well-Being**

Cheerleading, as a highly interactive and collective physical activity, significantly enhances the psychological well-being of participants. The activity offers students physical exercise opportunities and brings many positive impacts on the psychological and emotional level. Cheerleading practice and performance provide an effective way for students to release stress, helping them maintain psychological balance amid academic and life pressures.

The team nature of cheerleading creates a supportive social environment for participants. In such an environment, students experience a sense of belonging and community support, vital for the psychological health of adolescents and young adults. Through joint training and performance, students not only improve in athletic skills but also gain emotional support and understanding. This social support plays an undeniable role in reducing psychological stress and enhancing overall well-being.

Cheerleading also enhances individuals' emotional states and psychological resilience. Regular physical activities have been proven effective in improving mood and reducing anxiety and stress. The rhythmic and energetic nature of cheerleading helps students release internal tensions and anxieties during exercise, achieving psychological relaxation and joy. With continued participation and training, students show greater psychological resilience and coping abilities when faced with difficulties and challenges.

Additionally, as a performative sports activity, cheerleading also promotes students' self-affirmation and positive self-perception. After successfully completing training and performances, students experience significant improvements in self-worth and a sense of achievement. This positive self-perception not only boosts their confidence but also enhances their overall life satisfaction and positive attitude.

In summary, cheerleading plays multiple roles in enhancing psychological well-being. It is not only a means of physical exercise but also a source of psychological and emotional support. Through cheerleading, students not only improve their athletic skills but also achieve significant enhancements in psychological health and emotional support. These positive psychological effects have long-term importance for students' overall development and well-being.

## **4. Cheerleading and Social Interaction**

### **4.1. Teamwork and Social Skills**

Cheerleading plays a significant role in fostering teamwork and social skills. The nature of this activity requires participants to work together harmoniously within a team to execute complex movements and performances, which not only trains their physical abilities but more importantly, their capability to work in a team environment. The success of cheerleading depends on the cooperation and contribution of each member, prompting students to learn effective communication, negotiation, and problem-solving within the team.

Through the training and performances in cheerleading, students learn the importance of teamwork in practice. They not only learn how to find their place within a team but also how to rely on and

support other team members. Such experiences of teamwork are positively influential for personal social skills and future career paths. The interdependency and cooperativeness in cheerleading teams require each member to display a high level of responsibility and commitment, crucial for developing mature social abilities.

Cheerleading also provides a diverse social environment, allowing students to work with people of different backgrounds and personalities. In such an environment, students learn to understand and respect others' viewpoints and needs, important for enhancing their social adaptability and cultural sensitivity. As an inclusive sport, cheerleading offers an ideal platform for students to learn and practice social skills.

Beyond internal team interactions, cheerleading also gives students opportunities for broader community engagement. Through various public performances and competitions, students have the chance to establish connections both within and outside the school. This broader social interaction helps students build confidence and expands their social networks. In these activities, students learn how to present themselves to the public, handle pressure in public situations, skills vital for their overall social development and self-presentation.

Cheerleading has significant value in cultivating teamwork and social skills. It provides students with opportunities to work and grow within a team and helps them build confidence and skills in a wider social context. Through participating in cheerleading, students not only enhance their athletic skills but also gain valuable experience in social skills and teamwork, which profoundly impacts their future personal development and career.

## **4.2. Social Support Network**

Cheerleading offers a unique platform for building and maintaining a social support network. This support network extends beyond team members to coaches, school communities, and even broader social settings. In cheerleading practice, students learn not only how to establish trust and support within the team but also the importance of seeking and offering help in a wider community. The establishment of such a social support network provides necessary emotional and psychological support for students when facing academic pressures, life stresses, and various challenges.

Within cheerleading teams, members share the challenges of training and competition, which helps build deep friendships and mutual understanding. The mutual support and encouragement among teammates are not only motivational in terms of athletic performance but also rely on each other emotionally and psychologically. This close group connection provides a safe environment for students to feel supported and encouraged when facing difficulties and challenges.

Coaches and instructors play a key role in building the social support network. They are not only guides for skill training but also supporters and mentors for students' psychological well-being and life guidance. Coaches help students build confidence and face challenges through positive feedback, personalized guidance, and psychological support. This support from adult mentors is crucial for the psychological health and social adaptation of adolescents and young adults.

Cheerleading also provides students with opportunities to connect with other members of the school and community. By participating in school cheerleading performances, community events, or competitions, students not only increase interactions with individuals inside and outside the school but also have the chance to expand their social networks. This expanded social network provides more resources and support, aiding students in gaining valuable experience and guidance in academics, career choices, and relationship building.

In conclusion, cheerleading plays a unique role in building and maintaining a social support network. Through participation in cheerleading, students not only improve their athletic skills but also significantly develop in social interactions and emotional support. This social support network

has a long-term positive impact on their psychological health, social adaptability, and personal growth.

## 5. Conclusion

This study, by deeply exploring the multifaceted role of cheerleading in the lives of college women, reveals the significant value of this physical activity in promoting physical health, psychological well-being, and social interaction. As a comprehensive sport, cheerleading not only strengthens students' physical fitness and coordination but also plays a significant role in boosting confidence, establishing a positive body image, and enhancing psychological resilience. Additionally, by fostering teamwork and social skills, cheerleading provides a platform for students to build and maintain social support networks. These findings underscore the importance of integrating cheerleading into college physical education curricula and its key role in supporting the holistic development of female students. In summary, as a physical activity, cheerleading has far-reaching positive impacts on the physical, psychological, and social health of college women. These impacts not only enhance their performance in campus life but also lay a solid foundation for their future lives.

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