

# *Cheerleading and Gender Equality—Exploring Male Students' Participation and Contribution in Cheerleading*

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**Abstract:** Cheerleading is a popular sports activity often perceived as female-dominated. However, in recent years, an increasing number of male students have been actively participating in cheerleading, contributing significantly to the sport's development and innovation. This study aims to explore the involvement and contribution of male students in cheerleading and its impact on gender equality. Through interviews with male cheerleaders and literature research, we found that their participation not only enriches the diversity of the sport but also promotes the advancement of gender equality. This paper analyzes the roles and challenges faced by male participants in cheerleading, along with the positive changes they bring to the sport. Finally, we propose recommendations to further promote gender equality and encourage more male involvement in cheerleading.

## 1. Introduction

Gender equality has always been a significant issue of societal concern. As part of social culture, sports activities also come under scrutiny regarding gender equality. Cheerleading, as a popular sports activity, is traditionally seen as a female-dominated domain. However, in recent years, an increasing number of male students have joined cheerleading, playing active and positive roles. This phenomenon has sparked new considerations regarding gender equality and sports diversity. This study aims to delve into the involvement and contribution of male students in cheerleading and its impact on gender equality.

## 2. Cheerleading History and Gender Bias

### 2.1. Origin and Development of Cheerleading

The history of cheerleading can be traced back to the late 19th century in the United States, initially originating from college sports events as a performance activity. The earliest cheer squads were composed of males whose task was to provide enthusiasm and motivate the audience during sports competitions. These early cheerleaders typically wore traditional school uniforms matching the team colors and enhanced the atmosphere through various movements and chants.[1]

As time progressed, cheerleading evolved into an independent sports activity, no longer merely a side act for sports events. During this evolution, females actively began participating in cheerleading,

becoming an integral part of the activity. In the early 20th century, females gradually took over the dominant roles in cheer squads, a trend that continued throughout the entire century. Female cheerleaders, through outstanding performance skills and teamwork, turned cheerleading into a highly popular and respected sport, contributing significantly to the progress of gender equality in the field of sports. Thus, the history of cheerleading vividly illustrates the evolution and changes in gender roles in sports.

## **2.2. Connection between Cheerleading and Female-Dominated Sports**

There exists a close connection between cheerleading and female-dominated sports, a connection that became particularly prominent in the early 20th century. During that time, females started playing crucial roles in university and high school cheerleading squads, marking the emergence of female sports. The roles of cheerleaders demanded not only athletic skills but also the ability to demonstrate collaboration, performance, and motivation, aligning with traditional values associated with female sports.[2]

Female participation in cheerleading extended beyond winning competitions; it included bringing energy to schools and teams and the responsibility of encouraging the audience. This active form of participation provided females with an opportunity to showcase strength and leadership, simultaneously driving progress in gender equality within the sports domain. The characteristics of cheerleading make it a crucial medium for female sports, shaping a new image for women in sports that transcends traditional gender role stereotypes. Therefore, the development of cheerleading has played a significant role in promoting gender equality within female-dominated sports.[3]

## **2.3. Gender Bias in the Sports Field**

Gender bias has been a significant issue in the sports field, with far-reaching impacts in various aspects. Firstly, the marginalization of women's sports is a prominent manifestation of gender bias. Historically, women's sports activities have received less attention, and resources and support have been relatively limited, posing greater challenges for female athletes in terms of opportunities, sponsorships, and widespread recognition.

Another manifestation of gender bias is the excessive emphasis on men's sports. In certain situations, men's sports are considered more valuable and popular, evident in resource allocation and media attention. This tendency to excessively emphasize men's sports may lead to the neglect or lesser consideration of women's sports, exacerbating gender inequality.

Lastly, gender bias manifests as the stereotyping of gender roles in sports. In the sports field, there might be preconceived notions about the gender roles of athletes, considering certain sports more suitable for men and others for women. These notions not only limit individual choices and development but also pose barriers to gender equality.[4]

Addressing gender bias in the sports field is a key task in achieving gender equality. This requires taking a series of measures, including increasing the visibility and investment in women's sports, reducing unequal treatment between male and female sports, and advocating for changes in the inherent gender stereotypes within sports culture. Only through collective efforts can we achieve a more fair and inclusive sports world, where everyone has the opportunity to participate and receive the respect they deserve.

### **3. Roles of Male Students in Cheerleading**

#### **3.1. Participation of Male Students in Cheerleading Squads**

In recent years, the involvement of male students in cheerleading has shown a gradual increase. They actively become members of cheerleading teams, participating in performances and competitions. This phenomenon injects new vitality and diversity into cheerleading as a sports activity. Male students bring different physical strength and skill advantages compared to female members, adding new dynamics and strength to the entire cheerleading squad.

The participation of male students makes cheerleading more inclusive, transcending traditional gender boundaries. Their presence not only adds more talent to cheerleading but also provides a new dimension to the sports realm. Collaborating with female team members, male students engage in joint practices and performances, promoting teamwork and unity within the team. This diverse team dynamic makes cheerleading more vibrant in both performance and competition, providing robust support for the advancement of gender equality in the sports domain. The active involvement of male students in cheerleading demonstrates that gender should not be a limiting factor for participation in sports but rather encourages everyone to pursue their passion for athletics.[5]

#### **3.2. Role of Male Students as Coaches**

Male students in cheerleading not only play the role of team members but also contribute significantly as coaches. In the coaching role, they provide professional guidance and training to ensure the cheerleading squad reaches optimal levels. Male coaches often possess extensive backgrounds and expertise in sports, enabling them to offer valuable insights in terms of technique and tactics.

The presence of male coaches not only aids in enhancing individual skills but also fosters collaboration and team spirit within the entire cheerleading squad. They focus on tactical planning and strategic guidance, ensuring the team performs exceptionally in competitions. Male coaches bring new coaching styles and methods, infusing fresh energy and creativity into the cheerleading training system.

Furthermore, the interdisciplinary background of male coaches brings a broader perspective and knowledge to the cheerleading squad. They may have expertise in different fields, providing more learning opportunities for squad members. The involvement of male coaches enriches the coaching team of cheerleading, driving progress and innovation in the sport. Therefore, male students as coaches play a crucial role in cheerleading, elevating the overall quality of the team and contributing to the realization of gender equality in the sports domain.[6]

#### **3.3. Contributions of Male Students to Innovation in Cheerleading**

Male students actively contribute to innovation in the field of cheerleading, injecting new vitality and creativity into this sports activity. Firstly, they bring new movements and skills, increasing the diversity of performances and attracting a wider audience. Secondly, male students contribute to music and performance elements, infusing more energy and innovation. Their creativity not only enhances the vibrancy of cheerleading squads but also inspires the entire cheerleading community. Importantly, the participation of male students sparks innovation among other team members, propelling continuous progress in cheerleading and maintaining its status in popular culture.

In summary, the creativity and contributions of male students play a critical role in cheerleading, enriching the expression of this sport. Their participation not only brings new elements to cheerleading squads but also injects fresh vitality into the entire cheerleading community. The

creativity and contributions of male students drive the development of cheerleading, making it more appealing and competitive, showcasing that gender should not be a limiting factor for sports development and creativity.

### **3.4. Challenges and Dilemmas Faced**

Despite the positive changes brought about by the active participation of male students in cheerleading, they also face some unique challenges and dilemmas. Societal biases regarding men participating in sports traditionally viewed as female-dominated still exist to some extent, leading to potential discrimination or questioning. Some individuals still hold traditional gender stereotypes, believing that men should engage in male sports and women in female sports, limiting the free development of male students in cheerleading.

Additionally, some male students may experience psychological pressure, fearing that their involvement in cheerleading might be perceived as inconsistent with traditional male roles. Societal expectations and pressures on men may make some individuals feel uneasy, concerned that their participation in cheerleading could affect their image or be subject to societal scrutiny. This psychological pressure may limit the initiation of some potential male cheerleaders.

Addressing these issues requires broader societal acceptance and support. Educational and awareness campaigns can help change societal perceptions, emphasizing that gender should not be a limiting factor for sports participation. Encouraging the participation of male students in cheerleading and providing support networks to help them overcome potential psychological barriers is a crucial step toward achieving gender equality. Only through collective efforts can a more open, inclusive, and equal environment be created for male students in cheerleading, allowing everyone the opportunity to participate and fully unleash their potential.

## **4. Promoting Gender Equality**

### **4.1. Cultural Transformation and Diversity**

In the process of achieving gender equality, cultural transformation and diversity play a crucial role. The shift in societal perspectives is a primary task. We need to actively challenge traditional gender role perceptions, break stereotypes, and encourage male participation in sports traditionally viewed as female-dominated, such as cheerleading. Through extensive education, advocacy, and social discussions, we can gradually alter people's mindset, making them realize that gender should not be a limiting factor in personal choices. To create a more inclusive sports environment, inclusive policies and rules must be established. These policies need to explicitly oppose gender discrimination, ensuring everyone has equal opportunities to participate in sports. Establishing an open and inclusive sports community will help attract more males to engage in cheerleading, thereby advancing gender equality. Education and awareness campaigns also play a crucial role. Educational institutions can impart the importance of gender equality through curricula, encouraging males to participate in various sports. Meanwhile, media and social organizations can spread information about gender equality through promotional activities, emphasizing the positive impact of male participation in cheerleading, thus changing societal perceptions and values.

### **4.2. Positive Roles of Males in Gender Equality**

Males play important and positive roles in promoting gender equality. Their influence extends not only within the field of cheerleading but also has profound effects on society. Firstly, males can assume leadership roles in cheerleading. As captains or leaders, they can become advocates for gender

equality, setting a positive example. They can emphasize the importance of teamwork and gender equality, inspiring team members to pursue common goals. This leadership demonstration is effective not only within cheerleading teams but can also establish a gender-equality role model in society.

Secondly, male participation can motivate other males and females to actively engage in cheerleading. By sharing their success stories and experiences, they can encourage more people to break gender boundaries and bravely immerse themselves in this sports activity. The positive actions and behaviors of males can become role models, helping shatter gender stereotypes and providing more opportunities for people to participate in cheerleading.

Lastly, males can change societal perceptions through their actions and performances. They can challenge gender stereotypes, drive discussions on gender equality, and actively participate in gender equality advocacy activities.

Through involvement in societal change, they not only voice support for gender equality but also contribute to its realization. The positive roles of males in gender equality are beneficial not only to the field of cheerleading but also set an example for an inclusive and equal society.

## **5. Strategies to Promote Male Participation**

### **5.1. Education and Advocacy**

Education and advocacy have immense potential and importance in promoting gender equality. Firstly, educational institutions can actively impart knowledge and concepts related to gender equality through various courses and lectures. Students need to understand why gender equality is important and how to break traditional gender role boundaries. These educational activities can help students gain a deeper understanding of gender equality, sparking their desire to actively participate in sports.

Secondly, advocacy activities are powerful tools for changing societal perceptions and awareness. Through various media channels, including traditional and social media, we can disseminate information about gender equality. Emphasizing the positive impact of male participation in activities like cheerleading can change societal stereotypes about gender roles. Social organizations also play a crucial role in guiding societal awareness towards a more open and equal direction by advocating gender equality.

The power of education and advocacy lies in their ability to reach a wide audience, inspiring interest and participation in gender equality. Through education and advocacy, we can pave the way for the realization of gender equality and create a more inclusive and equal environment for male participation in cheerleading and other sports activities.

### **5.2. Formulating Gender Equality Policies**

Formulating clear gender equality policies is a key step in achieving gender equality. These policies need to cover a wide range of areas to ensure equal opportunities for males in cheerleading and other sports activities. Gender equality policies should include regulations against gender discrimination, clearly stating that both males and females should have equal rights and opportunities, both in sports participation and other aspects of the sports domain. These regulations should emphasize equal treatment, not allowing gender to be a barrier to individual choices.

Additionally, policymakers should formulate inclusive rules and standards, explicitly opposing gender differentiation, and encouraging active male participation in cheerleading. The formulation of rules needs to be based on the principle of equality, ensuring both males and females have equal opportunities for competition and resource allocation. Finally, gender equality policies need to ensure that both males and females have equal access to resources and support, including funding, equipment, training, and educational opportunities. Governments, schools, and sports organizations need to work

together to ensure these resources are equally accessible to males and females, promoting gender equality in cheerleading. Through a clear policy framework, we can pave the way for equal participation of males in cheerleading and create favorable conditions for the future of gender equality.

### **5.3. Initiatives to Encourage Male Participation**

To actively encourage male participation in cheerleading, targeted initiatives can be implemented. Firstly, providing scholarships and financial support is an effective way to reduce the economic burden on males participating in sports activities. This can help address the financial issues associated with sports participation, providing more interested males with the opportunity to engage in cheerleading and promoting their development and growth in this field. Secondly, organizing gender equality events and workshops is crucial for establishing support networks and encouraging male participation. These activities provide males with the opportunity to share experiences, exchange perspectives, and build connections, helping them better understand the importance of gender equality and gaining encouragement and support to overcome potential obstacles.

Finally, schools and sports organizations can organize various competitions and events, actively encouraging male participation and providing them with a platform for development. These competitions not only offer males an opportunity to showcase their skills but also increase their experience in the field of cheerleading. This competitive opportunity can inspire more males to develop an interest, encouraging them to engage more deeply in cheerleading and contribute to the achievement of gender equality. Through these positive initiatives, we can create a more inclusive and encouraging environment for male participation, providing opportunities and driving the realization of gender equality in the field of cheerleading.

### **5.4. Steering the Future Direction of Gender Equality**

In steering the future direction of promoting gender equality, steadfast efforts are needed. The primary task is to conduct in-depth research into best practices for gender equality and carefully assess the effectiveness of implemented policies. This requires continuous reflection, identifying successful examples, and understanding areas that need improvement. Through the accumulation of experience, we can more effectively advance the realization of gender equality.

Continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of policies and measures is crucial. This includes monitoring the participation of males in cheerleading and other sports areas, as well as ensuring equal treatment in these fields. Through regular assessments, we can promptly identify issues and take corrective measures to ensure gender equality policies are genuinely implemented.

Additionally, there is a need to actively encourage males to pursue leadership roles in the sports field and participate in decision-making processes. This includes providing more opportunities for them to engage in the management and decision-making of sports organizations and teams. This not only helps ensure the full representation of gender equality considerations but also motivates more males to actively participate in cheerleading and other sports activities. Achieving gender equality is a long-term and complex task that requires steadfast cooperation and sustained attention from various sectors of society. Through continuous efforts and ongoing innovation, we can build a more equal and inclusive cheerleading community, providing equal opportunities for males and paving the way for the future of gender equality. This goal is worth relentlessly pursuing.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the involvement and contributions of males in cheerleading have a positive impact on gender equality. They enrich the diversity of the sport, drive cultural

transformation, and facilitate the realization of gender equality. However, there are still challenges to overcome in order to further promote male participation. By implementing appropriate strategies, we can continue to advance gender equality in the field of cheerleading, encouraging more males to join this vibrant sport. Gender equality is not just an ideology but should be tangibly manifested in sports activities.

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