**Cheerleading at Northwestern University: A Case Study of Institutional Failure**

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**Abstract**

This paper describes the sexual harassment, race discrimination, and endangerment experienced by Northwestern cheerleaders during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years and investigates the University’s response to multiple complaints. To understand the case, this paper presents evidence based on interviews with cheerleaders, the design of which was approved by the University’s IRB.

Supplementing the case study is a close textual analysis of the University’s long, inconsistent, and disorganized Title IX Policy. The analysis highlights the disorienting interactions had by those accessing the Policy and seeking help from the University’s Office of Equity. These interactions occurred under the guise of the Office serving as a resource for students. I also review recent scholarship addressing Title IX implementation limitations and its impacts on those who report.

This analysis advances two conclusions in tandem. First, it demonstrates that the abuse and other problems detailed were not the result a single bad actor but were widespread and persisted after multiple formal complaints to NU’s Title IX administrators. Second, it demonstrates that the University’s Office of Equity exercised its discretion in ways that prioritized the University’s interests and excluded cheerleaders from participating in the disciplinary process.

The University’s Policy resulted, intentionally or not, in a power imbalance between students trying to access resources articulated in the Policy and Title IX administrators in the Office of Equity. This power imbalance gave administrators excessive control, discretion, and personal protection when responding to complaints of harassment and discrimination.

*Cheerleading at Northwestern University: A Case Study of Institutional Failure* shows that decisions of great consequence for both individuals and the University were made by individual administrators with great discretion and little oversight. The case of Northwestern cheerleading detailed in this thesis is an exemplary case of institutional failure. Students were told the Office of Equity exists to support them. Support is not what they found there.

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**Introduction**

*Cheerleading at Northwestern University: A Case Study of Institutional Failure* describes the harassment suffered by Northwestern cheerleaders during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years, describes the University’s official policy for dealing with harassment and discrimination and explains how the policy was applied in this case. The paper is both a story of institutional failure and also a cautionary tale—one that tries to explain the factors and pressures that led Northwestern University to first condone the mistreatment of female cheerleaders and then, in response to cheerleader complaints, to respond to the mistreatment in ways that put the University’s interests ahead of those of the cheerleaders’

The paper is not about a single bad actor. It is instead about how university structures, policies and people failed to protect cheerleaders from having to endure sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and physical endangerment—some of which occurred in plain sight of the University’s highest levels of leadership. As such, firing the coach or hiring a new head of the Office of Equity, while important, does not fix the problem. This paper documents a past case but it is about a problem that is ongoing. It urges a response to a problem not yet adequately acknowledged nor grappled with.

Part 1 provides a brief overview of the methodology employed to gather evidence and then presents an account of the experiences of harassment, discrimination and endangerment suffered by Northwestern cheerleaders. The conduct described includes instances of University-sanctioned sexual violence, discrimination against Black athletes, and acceptance of overtly dangerous coaching and administrative practices.

Part 2 examines the written text of the University’s Title IX policy. I highlight key deficiencies. I show that the policy is long, poorly organized and, at times, contradictory—making it extremely difficult for students to understand. I further explain that the Policy gives the Office of Equity tremendous discretion that enables its officials to stall, stop, or hide from view serious allegations and investigations. This thesis theorizes that by creating a structure where “experts” are the only ones who can understand the Policy, Northwestern was able to orchestrate a coverup to silence Northwestern cheerleaders and to protect the University from bad publicity and accountability by hiding the report.

Part 3 analyzes and assesses the Office of Equity’s application of the Policy to the cheerleaders’ allegations and address related scholarship on factors that impact Title IX Office’s performance and its relation to those who interact with the Office. I focus on the ways in which the Office repeatedly exercised its discretion to disempower and exclude complainants—and to protect the University from scrutiny.

This case study demonstrates vividly the importance of transparency in the Title IX process. This paper serves those actively wanting the full truth.[[1]](#footnote-1) In a petition dated February 15, 2021, Northwestern faculty members requested that University Leadership provide a “report” on this case to the NU community. Unfortunately, it appears that any investigative “report” undertaken by the University will not be made available to the NU community—or even to those who participated in the investigation. This should change.

**Methods**

The design of the research plan and questions used in interviews were submitted to IRB for review and approval. IRB approval was secured on December 1, 2020. The IRB study number is STU00213737. Appendices provide details.

I contacted twenty-nine Northwestern cheerleaders/mascots[[2]](#footnote-2) via email to participate in the study, with the study information and necessary IRB privacy statements. Interviewees were identified based on their status as members of the Spirit Program at Northwestern. It was impossible to contact every team member since Coach Bonnevier's appointment to the program, as the University does not offer a publicly available roster dating back more than the past two years. Identifying athletes to contact involved reviewing the two rosters available on Instagram and through word of mouth. Not having publicly available documentation on the team means that for many, their experiences cannot be heard.

Two contacts declined to be interviewed, stating concerns about anonymity in speaking out and possible retaliation of some sort. Nineteen did not respond to interview requests. The nonrespondents are to be expected because of the traumatic nature of the experiences to be addressed and how they have been allegedly handled in the past. One participant even noted the pain past interviews caused, and their hope that this time, the interview will mean something. Ultimately, I conducted eight interviews in Winter 2021. These interviews were made anonymous.[[3]](#footnote-3) For those who came forward, the resounding reason given was, “So that Northwestern’s actions come to light.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The interviews with cheerleaders followed a list of open-ended questions,[[[5]](#footnote-5)](#A1) generating the most information regarding their experiences on the team and their interactions with the Office of Equity. A comparison between the interviewees’ experience with the Office of Equity and University’s Title IX policy makes clear the breadth of the University’s discretion in applying its Title IX policy and its incentive to exercise this discretion to protect the University, not students.

I also sought to interview people in the Office of Equity to help me better understand the University’s Title IX policy. TiShaunda McPherson, Northwestern University’s Associate Vice President for Equity—who oversees the Office of Equity—denied my request for an interview.[[[6]](#footnote-6)](#A2)

**Part 1**

**Cheerleading at Northwestern–**

**Sexual Exploitation and Discrimination, Anti-Blackness, and Endangerment**

In Part One I present an account of the experiences of the cheerleaders based on my personal experience and the information collected in the interviews.I found evidence that they experienced sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and disregard for their health.

*Sexual Exploitation and Discrimination*

Cheerleaders at Northwestern were treated not as athletes, but as sex objects. This treatment was perpetuated not merely by the Coach, but by the University’s top administrators who used cheerleaders to entice alumni to donate. Recruitment efforts hid from incoming cheerleaders—who were serious and accomplished athletes—the extent to which they would be explicitly sexualized and victimized for University gain until after they joined the team. As soon as practices began, school sanctioned sexual violence against cheerleaders was actively normalized.

Once offered a position, Coach emailed them the [*Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract*](#A3). This contract stated practice and game attendance policy and included the tailgating clause “any events deemed necessary by coaches/administration.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Cheerleaders were required to return to campus a week before the first football game for preseason training. In preseason, the team practices stunts, advances their tumbling, and is taught team conduct. Coach Bonnevier used preseason to lead team conduct discussions to normalize tailgating.

As one cheerleader explained: “During preseason, Pam sat us down and told us ‘fans are going to be weird’ and it just is ‘what it is.’”[[8]](#footnote-8) “Weird” was groping and sexual advances by donors and fans. To normalize this, she continued, “Our Coach told us to go around and share our experiences with creepy fans, [and] what was traumatizing for other girls.”[[9]](#footnote-9) This experience taught new cheerleaders what the veterans had already learned: succumbing to sexual ogling and sexual assault was what the University expected. The message was clear: the University knew and did not care. “It was hard as a first year,” one cheerleader explained, “when Pam told us it is going to happen, period. There were seniors that laughed and said it happened to them, so you just feel helpless in the matter.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Coach Bonnevier not only knew that cheerleaders were groped by fans, but she also deliberately and continually placed cheerleaders in positions where such conduct was most likely to occur. “[She] expected [cheerleaders] to take photos with fans”[[11]](#footnote-11) which would guarantee close contact. There was never discussion about preventing or leaving these sexually charged environments, “Pam told us fans expected us to take photos with fans. There was no option not to.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Cheerleaders were to place fan happiness before their safety, “Don’t upset the fans even if they are upsetting you. Don’t defend yourself.”[[13]](#footnote-13) One cheerleader noted the only advice she was given: “[Coach] told us to be careful, whatever that means.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Gamedays were exceptionally long for cheerleaders filled as they were not only by the football game but also Northwestern’s scheduled hours of sexual harassment. Tailgating was a time where cheerleaders were to mingle in packed parking lots, in full cheerleading apparel, with no supervision or system of accountability for their safety.[[15]](#footnote-15) Cheerleaders were to “Go out there and mingle, look pretty.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Mingling was extensive. “We were to visit all of the tailgating lots in the East and West lots”[[17]](#footnote-17) and opposing fans got this special treatment too. As one cheerleader noted, “We were in [with] a lot of the opposing team’s fans, and we had to still mingle.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

Cheerleaders were told to walk alone, rather than in groups, and were required to smile and be polite—no matter what. As one cheerleader explained: “We would go and greet them, ‘happy Saturday,’ sometimes there were longer conversations, others would hit on us.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Illicit drugs were also a fan favorite, “People offered us drugs a lot. Which was not what we wanted.”[[20]](#footnote-20) At times cheerleaders were lucky and “would be allowed sometimes to walk around in groups of two, maybe three.”[[21]](#footnote-21) There was safety in numbers, but groups were not always ok with Coach. On one occasion, for example, “While we were talking to someone’s parents, Pam approached us and told us to split up, so we could come across as thrilled to socialize with these drunk fans.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

Fans were regularly sexually aggressive toward the cheerleaders required to mingle with them. One interviewed cheerleader explained that “Fans feel entitled to act how they want to act when you are walking into their personal space.”[[23]](#footnote-23) One cheerleader felt that fans, “looked at us like pieces of meat.” [[24]](#footnote-24) Another noted that during these interactions at tailgates “There’s always inappropriate touching and lingering.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

The abuse was widespread and common. “People grabbed inappropriately at tailgating events. I had to take the picture and then just walked away. We were expected to smile and ‘possibly get out of the situation.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Cheerleaders found tailgating scary. One said, “My first tailgate I had no idea what was going on, so I clutched on to my senior teammates. […] It evolved to be a very uncomfortable situation that I didn’t look forward to at every game.”[[27]](#footnote-27) This behavior stemmed from how the team is viewed: “we are there to entertain them and that includes that people think they can sexually touch us.”[[28]](#footnote-28) Fans apparently felt so entitled that they attempted to extend the interaction. One explained, “I was given so many business cards and told to send them pictures of me afterwards.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Coach was not concerned about the inappropriate fan interaction. After they finished up visiting all the tents Coach directed them to endure more of it. “Pam would tell us,” one reported, “Alright, circle around again.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

Cheerleaders also experienced [sexual harassment](#SexualHarassment) in more exclusive settings. Indeed, abuse played a role in University fundraising events at the highest levels. Coach Bonnevier selected cheerleaders she deemed to be “the most talented,” but which seemed really to be the ones she thought would be most sexually appealing to alumni. After they tailgated, Bonnevier would take them to the prestigious Wilson Club. The Wilson Club is reserved for Board of Trustees, other major donors, and senior administrators. Access is highly restricted.

According to Northwestern’s marketing materials, the Wilson Club is “focused on bringing the best elements of gameday to an inviting club atmosphere and provides the ultimate opportunity for experiencing Northwestern.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Apparently, the best elements of gameday included an up-close visit from the Northwestern cheerleaders, and Northwestern’s elite enjoyed their exclusive access. One cheerleader recalled that “Grabbing came mostly [from] Northwestern big donors. There were people like that in the [Wilson] Club all the time. The [Wilson] Club was the biggest place of sexual harassment.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

When traveling, cheerleaders did not tailgate, but would be sent to Northwestern-run alumni events. As one cheerleader explained, “if it was an away game, we were to go to whatever donor events, no questions asked.”[[33]](#footnote-33) At the Holiday Bowl, for example, cheerleaders first mingled at a high donor event and then “went into the open bar in our skirts.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Cheerleaders, many of whom were underage, were surprised the University sent them into a bar. As one expressed: “A majority of our team is underage, and we were going into bars. They couldn’t get in as a normal person, why is it okay once [we] were in a Northwestern outfit?”[[35]](#footnote-35)

During the games, cheerleaders were still not safe from sexual harassment. At a 2018 football game, a fan threw a dildo at the cheerleaders, which was later joked about in a staff meeting.[[36]](#footnote-36) For cheerleaders, such conduct was scary, not humorous. One cheerleader vividly recalled her fear on the sidelines: “I cheered at the away Iowa game and there were two fans heckling me. They were blowing kisses at me and making sexual innuendos. I had to dance in front of them for the entire game. My Coach was laughing about it. It was getting scary; they were telling me they wanted to see ‘what was under there.’ My Coach told them ‘okay that’s enough.’ They then start yelling really mean things at my other teammate telling her they saw her on “Farmers Only,” [a dating site “to find a farmer, rancher, cowboy, cowgirl.[[37]](#footnote-37)”] My Coach only asked me if I was okay post-game.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

Cheerleaders on the sidelines were a captive audience for sexually harassing fans and no measures were in place to protect them. Willie the Wildcat, a full fur costume, was similarly captive inside the suit. One interview reported, “People grabbed Willie and whispered in our ear ‘I hope you are a girl in there,’ ‘this ass is so tight and nice,’ or the occasional ‘I hope you are a boy in there.’”[[39]](#footnote-39) These statements are terrifying because fans see a furry cat costume and process it as a trapped young man or woman who must tolerate their assault. One interviewee commented, “People forget mascots are real people inside.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

Northwestern condoned and benefitted from the harassment—and they ignored cheerleaders’ pleas for help. As one cheerleader explained, “I was degraded by the University throughout my season. The university benefited off inappropriate behavior and didn’t do anything about it.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Tailgating was intentionally unmonitored and the pleas to stop it were ignored by administration. Pleasing fans became the important part of cheerleading at Northwestern, even though, as one put it in an interview, “None of us wanted to do this.”[[42]](#footnote-42) Even though cheerleaders felt, “It was really creepy,”[[43]](#footnote-43) the University’s direction was, as one stressed, that “we were to ‘never let it seem like there is an issue, grin and bear it.” [[44]](#footnote-44) Other similar comments in interviews included, “We just had to like put up with it, because it was like our job”[[45]](#footnote-45) and cheerleaders “aren’t supposed to have an emotion, you are supposed to be okay with whatever fans wanted.”[[46]](#footnote-46) From the cheerleader’s perspective, the University sanctioned these events. As one said, “This behavior was seen, and it was just like fingers-crossed nothing happens.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Cheerleaders were treated first and foremost as sexual objects, not athletes. Their sexuality was exploited when it was beneficial to the University and it was constrained when it was not. For the cheerleaders, both the exploitation and the constraint were dangerous and degrading. And both denied female cheerleaders equal treatment to male athletes.

While cheerleaders were required to tailgate in their minimalist uniforms, when traveling with football, cheerleaders needed to wear sweatpants on the plane because, “[w]e can’t wear leggings because we are on the same flight as football, and we can’t be trying to distract them.”[[48]](#footnote-48) On these flights, their makeup was also regulated, “We were to appeal to the male gaze. During travel we were supposed to wear light makeup because she didn’t want us to be ugly but also not be too much.”[[49]](#footnote-49) Northwestern put the burden on cheerleaders for male perversion by stating that they may be trying to distract the male football players, but they also wanted them to please the male coaches and players on board by being pleasant to look at. We must pause to recall that these are 17-to-22-year-old women. All these restrictions were in place only for cheerleaders and only to regulate what men would see when the cheerleaders walked to their seats at the back of the plane, next to the toilets, and far away from the football players, who were seated in first class. “We are supposed not to be distractions for the football players. Cheerleaders are just seen as in the way of football,”[[50]](#footnote-50) one commented.

Football players’ sexual perversions prevented cheerleaders from receiving medical attention. A cheerleader remembered a painful gameday saying, “After we had finished tailgating […] I went up to my coach and asked if this was an appropriate time for me to get treated by the trainer. This was after the football team had arrived. She told me, ‘that should have happened before the football team showed up.’ Her reasoning was that I couldn’t get treated because the football team had showed up and we weren’t allowed to be seen by or talk to them.”[[51]](#footnote-51) This cheerleader then endured a three-to-four-hour game in pain, without treatment.

Practice apparel was also a source of contention. It was not be “too sexual. It was alleged by Coach Bonnevier that the wife of Athletic Director Phillips did not want the team wearing sports bras as practice gear. She preferred they wear t-shirts. Sports bras are necessary because the form fit makes stunting and tumbling safer. But they were banned because, as one interviewee explained, her view was that “Cheerleaders are already too sexy.” The interviewee continued, “We have to tone down our behavior because of other people.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Cheerleaders in closed practices could not wear a sports bra, yet, as one observed, “[f]ootball entirely posted on twitter about warming up shirtless at a game in Minnesota. We can’t do the safest option for our practice gear though because we are going to be sexualized.”[[53]](#footnote-53) The football players were in a public stadium with thousands of people and yet being shirtless was completely acceptable, so acceptable that it was put on the school-run Twitter account.

*Anti-Blackness*

In this section I detail the way Black members of the cheerleading team were subjected to discriminatory policies, harassment by Coach Bonnevier, and exclusion from certain team functions all to make the team’s members fit a specifically white image of the “All-American girl next door.” One cheerleader explained while commenting on the experiences of Black teammates: “I feel like [Coach Bonnevier] was acting on behalf of administration—they wanted an All-American look.”[[54]](#footnote-54) This rhetoric of the “All-American look” was used to justify, literally, whitewashing Black cheerleaders—requiring them to change their hair, makeup, and bodies.

Northwestern University purports to take pride in “redressing the persistence of inequality and promoting policies, procedures, and practices that mitigate structural inequities.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Yet Northwestern’s own contract with its cheerleaders included provisions that discriminated against Black cheerleaders based on immutable race-based characteristics.

The [*Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract*](#A3)—emailed by Coach Bonnevier after tryouts were finalized—singled out Black appearance as conflicting with the desired look of the team. The contract prescribed: [“Team members will not have extreme high or low lights, extreme ombre color, or braids.”[[56]](#footnote-56)](#A4) This policy is incredibly problematic because Black women frequently wear their hair in protective hairstyles—ones to ensure that their hair will not break due to its natural texture—and braids are a popular protective hairstyle. Black cheerleaders were expected to spend hundreds of dollars to sew a wig into their scalp.[[57]](#footnote-57) Natural Black hair was viewed as a serious problem. One cheerleader recalled, “Black teammates were physically assaulted by [Coach] because they had long curly hair.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Another cheerleader alleged Coach Bonnevier pulled a Black woman by her hair in the 2017-2018 season, to the point yanking her head back, telling her that showing up to a football game with her natural hair was disrespectful. Apparently, natural Caucasian hair was not disrespectful. “White women who had long curly hair weren’t brutalized the same way,”[[59]](#footnote-59) noted a cheerleader.

The administration knew full well about Bonnevier’s abuse towards Black women. The earliest report was about the 2017-2018 hair yanking incident reported to Polisky at that time. The cheerleader whose hair was yanked back told her mom about the incident during a family phone call. Unbeknownst to the cheerleader, her “mom contacted [Polisky] [...] about when Pam pulled my hair […] she requested that Mike keep it confidential, and he said ‘Yea, I don’t know if I can. You’ll just have to tell me.’ [He] told my mom that […] it was ‘on her daughter to handle it and talk to the coach, I’ve worked with Pam […] and that’s just her sense of humor.’”[[60]](#footnote-60) Instead of removing Bonnevier, administrators chose to delegitimize and push the cheerleader address Coach herself.

Black women who refused to wear a wig or straighten their hair were banned from high-level events and subsequently cut from the team. “For those of us who didn’t abide by Pam’s whitewashing, we didn’t go to the high-level donor events or games,”[[61]](#footnote-61) one cheerleader explained. The Wilson Club, travel privileges, and private donor events were decided by Coach Bonnevier and were based on appearance. Appearance was critical because the events served a single purpose: sexualizing cheerleaders to please donors. Apparently, Northwestern’s big donors preferred White, blonde, and blue-eyed cheerleaders therefore Black women were “never invited to go to the [Wilson Club,] only the White girls went. No Black women were invited to this event.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

Whitewashing improved the status of Black cheerleaders in the coach’s eyes and opened institutional opportunities for them. As one Black cheerleader explained: “Once I got a wig, I was being bussed around to all of these other alumni events. I went to the Big Ten championships. I believe this is because of the sacrifices I made with my hair.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Another Black cheerleader recounted a similar experience: “Ultimately, I got a wig, and it completely changed my experience. I was happy because I was finally able to be on par with other cheerleaders and travel to games.”[[64]](#footnote-64) A cheerleader who had accommodated the contract but went back to her natural hair faced “retaliat[ion] […] for looking Black. I didn’t travel my second year and she made hateful embarrassing comments about my Blackness.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Those who refused, were cut. As one cheerleader explained: “It never happens, cheerleaders aren’t kicked off the team, but my friend who was Black and didn’t listen to Pam’s hair and makeup policies was cut from the team her second year.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

At the events Black women were allowed to attend, they were subject to special rules designed to protect the “optics” of the team.The desired “optics” were complicated, requiring that the team appear racially integrated but not too Black. “For tailgating, Black women weren’t allowed to walk together because of ‘optics.’” [[67]](#footnote-67) As a cheerleader explained, Coach Bonnevier separated Black athletes because “she didn’t want our team to seem segregated. White girls who walked together were never a problem.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Another cheerleader concurred, explaining that Coach Bonnevier “always split up the Black people because she didn’t want the team to look segregated, even though it was.”[[69]](#footnote-69) For important pictures, Black women were directed to stand in the back because “Pam didn’t want Black girls in the picture.”[[70]](#footnote-70) During an important marketing event, “We did Spice versus, a show on Big Ten network, and during the filming it was all Black people to the back.”[[71]](#footnote-71)

Black body size and makeup were also an issue. Black women were frequently ridiculed for not wearing enough makeup.One Black cheerleader explained: “I had to wear a face of makeup I wasn’t comfortable with.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

The “White cheerleader mold” carried over to body size as well. Northwestern Athletics Marketing used thin, petite White women to project their image of All-American cheerleaders. The Athletics Department stereotyped full-figured Black cheerleaders as hyper-sexual. One Black cheerleader remembered being humiliated during uniform fittings. “During uniform fittings,” the cheerleader recalled, “the Coach hands out gear she thinks will fit you. She goes down the line in front of the whole team, mind you, and the crop top uniform you cannot wear a bra with because the back is complicated, and we were not allowed to have bra straps showing. I bought a specific bra because it is not feasible for me to exercise without one. Coach specifically pulls me out of the line up and says in front of everyone: ‘This is way too much. The cleavage is out of control. You really need to tone it down.’ I told her I was wearing a bra already and she told me ‘okay wear two.’”[[73]](#footnote-73) This cheerleader received the message of her not fitting into the White All-American mold loud and clear. “My breasts were too big. It sounds counterintuitive,” she explained, “but it was me not fitting into the white thin cheerleader stereotype.”[[74]](#footnote-74)

The Athletics Department treated White bodies not only as more aesthetically pleasing but also as more deserving of care and attention. White athletes’ injuries were taken more seriously and acted on by both the trainer and Coach more reliably. One remarked that, “There is an expectation that Black women are strong, that they don’t feel pain.”[[75]](#footnote-75) A Black cheerleader recalled suffering from severe upper-body pain and Coach Bonnevier’s response. “When I told Pam,” the cheerleader explained, “she told me to work out more. I have muscle, this is not the problem. Meanwhile, my White teammate had back pain and she was never harassed to work out more.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Another Black cheerleader experienced a similarly racially disparate response to her injury. “Pam yelled at me for having issues with injuries,”[[77]](#footnote-77) the cheerleader recalled. “I have been an athlete my whole life, I know pain versus soreness. The trainer just told me I was strong, clearly because I am a Black woman.”[[78]](#footnote-78) She noted that a White athlete with a similar but less severe injury was encouraged by the trainer and Coach to rest during practice. For Black cheerleaders, the message was clear: “Northwestern doesn’t care about Black people unless we were serving the University mission.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

*Endangerment*

In this section I detail the ways in which cheerleaders’ safety was endangered by unqualified coaching and inadequate oversight. My findings can be summed up by the following comment from an interview: “The lack of safety protocols in Northwestern cheerleading is f\*cking insane. It’s absurd.”[[80]](#footnote-80)An indifference to safety concerns marked the appointment of Coach Bonnevier, as administrators ignored lacking safety certifications when they hired her.

Coach Bonnevier’s experience was limited to 2009-2020 Spirit Squad Coordinator[[81]](#footnote-81) and two online courses.[[82]](#footnote-82) It was common practice to stunt in unsafe ways because of incompetent coaching, “Pam kept putting people in harm’s way […] in positions where they weren’t comfortable.”[[83]](#footnote-83) Failure to maintain safety standards carried over to performance environments.

Dr. Jeffrey Mjannes, the Director of Sports Medicine and Head Team Physician for Northwestern Athletics, published research on cheerleading safety: “[stunting] and tumbling, should not be performed on hard […] wet, or uneven surfaces or surfaces with obstructions. No cheer events should take place on […] concrete, or asphalt.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Yet, the Northwestern sidelines were (and remain) uneven and cracking concrete. The hazards of the gameday lead to injury: “[while warming] up our stunts, one of my teammates hit her head on the cement and we had to call the on-field medics. Our coach wasn’t there.”[[85]](#footnote-85) The cheerleaders did not have their own concrete sideline, they shared their performance space with University President Morton Schapiro’s entourage, rolling media lifts and camera crews. Cheerleaders performed for three-to-four hours in this environment, dodging drunk high-level people, motorized lifts, and craters in the concrete. Wet climates never changed cheerleading performance expectations. It often rains or snows on Northwestern gamedays, rendering it unsafe to stunt and tumble. But even if it was downpouring, Northwestern cheerleaders still stunted with wet shoes and tumbled on soaked grass. When snowing, cheerleaders—in multiple layers—were still stunting. One cheerleader noted “we should never have been stunting in 7-layers of clothing with gloves on and wet shoes.”[[86]](#footnote-86)

An extreme case of the unsafe performance environments happened during the tour of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, a nuclear-powered naval aircraft carrier. Before touring, “the sailors told us to be super careful walking because if we fell down, the texture of [the floor] could rip the skin off of our hands.”[[87]](#footnote-87) But Coach thought the team should conclude this event by stunting on the wet and serrated runway. Cheerleaders raised safety concerns and Bonnevier silenced them by shouting “5-6-7-8.” One cheerleader recalled, “The sailors were shocked when we did this.”[[88]](#footnote-88) This was dangerous because of the surface of the carrier and because, “we were wearing loose clothing, the wrong shoes, and we weren’t warmed up.”[[89]](#footnote-89) Nevertheless, Coach deemed it essential that the team commemorate this event by stunting on the wet and serrated runway. Coach forced them to perform—libs—"[libs] were our highest skill.”[[90]](#footnote-90)

If practicing in unsafe environments was not bad enough, cheerleaders were also required to put up stunts that were inconsistent, unpracticed, and unsafe. Stunt groups were left to their discretion to perform and, under the pressure of Coach Bonnevier to put up an exciting stunt, put themselves at risk to entertain. Frequently heard on the sidelines, “We did it once this week in practice”[[91]](#footnote-91). One spirit squad member commented that “Young adults are not capable of determining which stunts go up; [it] is the responsibility of the Coach to be making sure those in her charge are safe.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

Bonnevier did not judge the safety of stunts. This may be because she was not qualified to do so. There is no publicly available record of Coach Bonnevier’s employment history or professional credentials and qualifications as a cheerleading coach. On the *National Federation of State High School Associations* website, Bonnevier was certified online in *AACCA Spirit Safety* in 2013 and *Concussion in Sports* in 2014 during her tenure at Lake Zurich High School.[[[93]](#footnote-93)](#A5) These courses amount to 6 hours of education.[[[94]](#footnote-94)](#A5) It does not appear that Northwestern required any certifications or training as a part of her employment at the University. This conflicts with the recommendations of Dr. Mjannes who stressed “requiring coach training and certification.”[[95]](#footnote-95) Failing to certify Bonnevier put cheerleaders at significant risk, “cheerleaders supervised by coaches with the most […] training had a nearly 50% reduction in injury risk compared with […] coaches with the lowest […] training.[[96]](#footnote-96) B1G schools send their cheerleading programs to Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA) camp to receive education—stunting techniques, training practices, and fundamental safety drills. Despite being made aware of this, Northwestern elected not to send their team to this camp.

Isolating the team from outside coaching and supervision on top of hiring an untrained coach intentionally put cheerleaders at risk. Coach Bonnevier, based on available information, has no formal education in athletics or cheerleading coaching experience. “Pam was not super involved”[[97]](#footnote-97) in actively coaching stunting or tumbling and for mascots, “when stunting and tumbling we didn’t have any supervision.”[[98]](#footnote-98)

Coach selected gear that led to both body shaming and safety concerns. Northwestern cheerleaders were prohibited from practicing in a sports bra with no shirt—common practice for other Northwestern sports and high school cheerleaders—because Bonnevier thought it would be too sexual if other coaches or administrators saw. Sports bras provide safety in stunting and tumbling, because of the contact with skin and form-fitting nature. If Coach spotted tumbling—which was rare because Northwestern tumblers coached themselves—she would spot using the t-shirt to whip them over. Flyers—cheerleaders in the air—depended on those below them to catch their moving and uncoached body while wearing loose clothing. Ill-fitting apparel is a danger because it inhibits those spotting from being able to contact flyers and catch them before they hit the ground.

Bonnevier used gear to pressure cheerleaders to be petite. She did not advocate for the team to have strength training or nutrition. Cheerleaders’ weight and looks were enforced by Coach to fulfill Northwestern Athletics Marketing’s desires of what I would term “fun gameday girls.” Pressure to be petite was met with consequences for those who did not meet this standard. Traveling privileges, top games and special events were based on favoritism. One commented that “Pam’s favorites were entirely based on looks, these girls could have no talent and they would be chosen.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

Coach used uniform fittings to evaluate the “attractiveness” of cheerleaders’ bodies, and bullied cheerleaders to become “attractive.” One recalled, “Our uniforms did not fit us. Pam sized us by looking at us. We give a form that is our preferred size, Pam throws it out the window. […] She prefers […] more smalls.”[[100]](#footnote-100) One commented that Coach Bonnevier used gear to force cheerleaders to become petite: “You wear gear that doesn’t fit you. She wants people to be smaller on her team.” [[101]](#footnote-101) A cheerleader recounted, “I wore a medium skirt when I needed an x-large. She said she didn’t have the right size, but I know she did. I was expected to lose weight.”[[102]](#footnote-102)

Either Coach was negligent and did not stock uniforms in appropriate sizes, or she intentionally withheld sizes to force cheerleaders to diet. Allegations support that Bonnevier intentionally restricted sizes; when new uniforms were ordered—the team’s first crop tops—Bonnevier, who had full control over the order, did not have the right sizing for the team. As one recalled, during a fitting “Pam told us […] ‘if we didn’t like the way we looked, we should lose weight.’ We had heavier girls and […] petite [girls] thinking they really needed to lose weight.”[[103]](#footnote-103) At another fitting, a cheerleader “asked for an x-large” and reports being told, “we do not carry x-larges.”[[104]](#footnote-104) Forcing cheerleaders to lose weight to wear their required gear perpetuated a dangerous diet culture, encouraging body dysmorphia and eating disorders which were rampant on the team.

Bonnevier also fostered cheerleaders’ unhealthy relationships with food in other ways as well. A gameday was typically an eight-hour ordeal, with no flexibility for cheerleaders to seek out food. Since Bonnevier was in control of food, gamedays were often days where cheerleaders went hungry. Coach did not organize meals for the cheerleaders. During the 2018–2019 season, cheerleaders were dependent on a friend of Bonnevier’s to feed the team at their tailgate. Bonnevier on occasion took away the primary source of food. One said, *“*If we did something bad at a practice, Pam would tell us we […] wouldn’t eat.”[[105]](#footnote-105) Cheerleaders with allergies or dietary restrictions would have no food because what was provided by the school—Papa John’s pizza—is not gluten or dairy free.

Problems also occurred while traveling. “At the Holiday Bowl Pam never gave us times we would be able to eat, sleep, or use the bathroom. We had no idea what the schedule was at all.”[[106]](#footnote-106) Instead of resting, showering, or eating, cheerleaders were bussed to various meet-and-greets and tourism events. Keeping the schedule a secret allowed Bonnevier full control over the cheerleaders.

Concerns about eating disorders, body-shaming, and inattention to human needs went unheard because, as one cheerleader put it, “The focus of our team was not the athleticism.”[[107]](#footnote-107) It seemed to them that since athleticism did not matter to the Athletics Department, the cheerleaders did not need to be well-fed, rested, or strong. It was expected that, “You […] sacrifice your body for Northwestern.”[[108]](#footnote-108) It should be obvious that good nutrition and cardiovascular exercise are necessary to be fit to perform serious stunts that include lifting other cheerleaders.

Northwestern did not take any measures to actively combat the dangers that are part of the practice of cheerleading, from not having conditioning coaches to fostering an environment in which athletic trainers were inaccessible. The team’s athletic trainer was not trained for cheerleading and was reportedly not contracted to supervise cheerleading. This seemed evident from her detachment from the wellbeing of cheerleaders. Bonnevier did not work with the trainer and prevented cheerleaders from seeking medical care. Bonnevier withheld medical care on at least one occasion. The cheerleader recalled, “I got kicked in the head and I was spinning, my teammate ran to get the trainer and [Pam] told her not to.”[[109]](#footnote-109) The trainer should have been aware and involved herself in the situation, but “Cristina was on her phone during our practices because she didn’t care if anything happened to us.”[[110]](#footnote-110) If the trainer did become involved, “[Coach] shoos away the trainer.”[[111]](#footnote-111)

Bonnevier had control in the trainer/coach dynamic. One noted that, “It felt like Pam had more authority than the trainer with injuries. The trainer didn’t advocate for us, she just said ‘up to you if you want to practice’”[[112]](#footnote-112) and continued, “Pam scolded people who got injured”[[113]](#footnote-113) in front of the trainer, who did nothing to advocate for the cheerleader. A spirit squad member recounts retaliation from receiving medical care, “I had whiplash and I asked the trainer if I should do shoulder stands, the trainer said no. Pam asked me why I asked the trainer, that she ‘told me to do shoulder stands’ and the trainer didn’t interfere.”[[114]](#footnote-114) Without support of the trainer, the retaliation escalated, “If you don’t do shoulder stands you don’t travel to the game.”[[115]](#footnote-115) While traveling and on home gamedays, there was no medical trainer for the cheerleaders.

The University did not resolve problems associated with lack of access to medical and training help, coaching deficits, and sexist views on the athletics of cheerleading. The team was unable to get treatment because of the environment of distrust. As one cheerleader bluntly said, “I don’t trust Cristina.”[[116]](#footnote-116) As the trainer was allegedly not compensated for taking care of the cheerleading team, the team was passed around from trainer to trainer. One cheerleader noted, “Our athletic trainer wasn’t getting compensated for taking care of us, so then we just got a flurry of various trainers.”[[117]](#footnote-117) In this flurry, the cheerleaders did not even know the new trainers’ names. They became even less of a priority and were viewed as a nuisance by the trainer. Cheerleaders recall being told, it was “their turn to take one for the team.” These trainers knew nothing about cheerleading or the cheerleaders’ medical histories.

The post of Spirit Squad Coordinator was a seasonal hourly employee responsible for coaching and administrative matters for all three teams: cheerleaders, mascots, and the official “hype squad.” The cheerleading program was also dependent on volunteer coaches to provide a substantive part of the coaching of the team. Cheerleaders’ reports include comments such as “strength and tumbling coaches, [were seen] once or twice”[[118]](#footnote-118) and “There were other coaches, but I forgot their names. He was supposed to be a coach, but he was never there. It wasn’t his priority.”[[119]](#footnote-119)

No other department under Northwestern Athletics employs an hourly coach and relies substantively on volunteer coaches. The volunteer coaches were to compensate for Coach Bonnevier’s deficits in skills needed to advise stunting, tumbling, and conditioning. This practice of volunteers providing fundamental coaching to a team was dangerous and inadequate, as they are not vetted for coaching safety or knowledge. What’s more, the volunteer coaches rarely showed up and so unqualified Coach did in fact supervise the team’s stunting, tumbling, and conditioning.

Administrative oversight was non-existent. The administrators for the team were Heather Obering and Mike Polisky. One cheerleader on stated that the Athletic Director at the time, Jim Phillips, “pretend[ed] to care about our program. […] he invites us to his house ‘you’re so welcome’ and then never thinks about our program again.”[[120]](#footnote-120) The entire scope of the Athletic Department clearly did not care about the cheerleading team, and this lack of supervision and neglect, allowed individuals like Bonnevier to make decisions with no accountability.

As one team member expressed, “Cheer was never the Athletics Department’s priority. We weren’tmaking them money.”[[121]](#footnote-121) Being unsanctioned by the NCAA allows for each university to run their programs however they choose. Unfortunately, knowledge about the specific needs of these athletes is not commonplace. Specialists need to be brought on board. Northwestern has decided not to implement a program that recognizes cheerleaders’ athletic needs. Northwestern’s actions are out of step with peer institutions. Other B1G schools—Rutgers, University of Michigan, Nebraska, Michigan State, Purdue, Ohio State, University of Illinois, University of Iowa, University of Maryland, University of Minnesota, University of Wisconsin, and Penn State—all support their cheerleading teams with multiple employed coaches, coordinators and detail strength and conditioning requirements. Rutgers, for example, recruits cheerleaders as full athletes and offers the same level of support to cheerleaders as their other athletes. Northwestern’s program appears designed for alumni enjoyment rather than for athletes’ development. Northwestern’s program allowed the University to reap the rewards of having alumni interactions with cheerleaders without having to fund cheerleading as an athletic program.

**Part 2**

**Northwestern’s Promise–From Lofty Rhetoric to Flawed Policy**

In this part I examine Northwestern’s 2019 written *Comprehensive Policy on Sexual Misconduct* (Policy). I first provide a general overview of the Policy, and then focus on several of the Policy’s shortcomings. The Policy is supposed to be intelligible to a reasonable student without requiring the student to seek professional legal advice to decipher the text. It is supposed to provide clear guidance for students. It does not. Its 36 pages do not give detailed instructions regarding what constitutes a substantive violation, nor does it explain what procedural steps the Office will follow in response to a complaint. Instead, the lengthy document is confusing and even seems designed to obfuscate. The Policy is not only unclear in its writing style but also internally inconsistent. Such poor drafting would be problematic for any university policy; it is particularly problematic in this context.

**A. Policy Overview**

This section provides an overview of Northwestern’s *2019 Comprehensive Policy on Sexual Misconduct*, the policy in effect when the conduct described in this paper occurred.[[122]](#footnote-122) I have divided the Policy into five subsections—*1) Roles, Jurisdiction, and Policy Format; 2): Burden of Responsibility & Party Rights;* *3) Ambiguity in Complainant Participation*; *4) Informal Action’s Scope and Limitations*; *5) Formal Investigative Process and Results.* These subsections do not map directly onto sections of the Policy itself but pull together relevant portions of the Policy to make it coherent and comprehensible.

*1. Roles, Jurisdiction, and Policy Format*

Northwestern staff and professors are [mandated reporters](#MandatedReporter)—individuals obligated to report sexual misconduct to the Office of Equity.[[123]](#footnote-123) A [complainant](#Complainant)—victim of misconduct[[124]](#footnote-124)—may disclose (1) to a [mandated reporter](#MandatedReporter); (2) to the Office of Equity; (3) to police; (3) or not disclose. Disclosure to the Office may be done directly or anonymously through the NU webpage [EthicsPoint](https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/7325/index.html). If directly, the Office of Equity will offer [complainant](#Complainant)s a meeting. If anonymously, the Office may or may not investigate. The criteria that the Office uses to determine which reports to pursue are not published or available.

The Policy's geographical jurisdiction encompasses University environments and ones that impact University environments, on or off-campus.[[125]](#footnote-125) If the [respondent](#Respondent) is unaffiliated with the University, the Office is unable to act. The Office "strives to resolve all cases in a prompt and timely manner, the timeline varies based on the circumstances of the case.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Possible disruptions to the timeline include: (1) the academic calendar; (2) the availability of [parties](#Parties) and [witnesses](#Witness); (3) the size of scope; (4) an unforeseen circumstance; (5) a leave of absence; (6) a need for additional action.[[127]](#footnote-127) “The [parties](#Parties) will be periodically updated on the status of their case.”[[128]](#footnote-128)

The first 21 pages list [complainant](#Complainant) counseling services, preservation of evidence, and contact information for various organizations. The sexual misconduct resolution process first comes up on page 22 out of 36.

*2. Burden of Responsibility & Party Rights*

In the Policy, accepting responsibility and the investigative process come before informing [complainant](#Complainant)s or [respondent](#Respondent)s of their rights during an investigation. This structure is problematic because it buries these rights towards the end of the Policy and may persuade [parties](#Parties) to take uninformed action.

Rights held by the [parties](#Parties) are: (1) the right to an [advisor](#Advisor) (support person)[[129]](#footnote-129); the right to accept responsibility; and the right to withdraw a complaint.

In cases of sexual violence, stalking, or domestic violence, an [advisor](#Advisor) may be an attorney. Although they are attorneys, they cannot act in this function; they are only there for support.[[130]](#footnote-130) If the [advisor](#Advisor) is an attorney, a member of Northwestern General Counsel may attend investigative proceedings.[[131]](#footnote-131)

[Respondents](#Respondent) have the right to accept responsibility.[[132]](#footnote-132) A [respondent](#Respondent) may accept responsibility until the findings portion of an investigation. Acceptance concludes the formal investigation, and a report is issued summarizing the allegations and statement of acceptance.[[133]](#footnote-133) Once one accepts, they cannot findings of responsibility are. [[134]](#footnote-134)

[Complainant](#Complainant)s have the right to withdraw their complaints.[[135]](#footnote-135) Once a [complainant](#Complainant) withdraws, the Office may close the case or open an Office investigation.

*3. Ambiguity in Complainant Participation*

It is unclear the extent to which a [complainant](#Complainant) must participate in an investigation. “Most situations will require the [complainant's](#Complainant) participation."[[136]](#footnote-136) and identity disclosure. In cases where a [complainant](#Complainant) requests anonymity, the Office will: (1) close the case; (2) investigate with an anonymous [complainant](#Complainant); (3) open an Office investigation without the [complainant](#Complainant).

Office-based investigations will occur if “it is possible to move forward with a case without the […] [complainant](#Complainant)”[[137]](#footnote-137) or if the Office is “concern[ed] for the safety or well-being of the University.”[[138]](#footnote-138)

*4. Informal Action’s Scope and Limitations*

Informal action does not find “responsibility or result in sanctions”[[139]](#footnote-139) and is limited to education, training, or advisory letters. This process occurs when the [complainant](#Complainant) does not want to pursue a formal investigation, or not enough information is available.[[140]](#footnote-140) The Office will not use informal action when a disclosed [complainant](#Complainant) desires a formal investigation.[[141]](#footnote-141)

Informal action takes the allegations and reports, and, under an undisclosed inquiry process, the Office determines corrective action.

*5. Formal Investigative Process and Results*

Formal investigation occurs when a [complainant](#Complainant) requests it or the Office determines it necessary. A formal investigation may result in a finding of responsibility and sanctions against the [respondent](#Respondent).[[142]](#footnote-142) I describe the process for a formal investigation in detail below to contrast it with the vague process used for informal actions.

In a formal investigation, there is an extensive process used to understand the claims. After the Office receives a report, investigators take an *initial inquiry*, where the [complainant](#Complainant) describes the allegations and provides evidence.[[143]](#footnote-143) The Office then sends notice to the [respondent](#Respondent), which includes: (1) the allegations; (2) the identity of the [complainant](#Complainant); (3) the alleged violation. The next step is *discovery*—investigators interview the [parties](#Parties),[[144]](#footnote-144) collect evidence,[[145]](#footnote-145) and develop a [witness](#Witness) list.[[146]](#footnote-146) The Office may or may not contact [witness](#Witness)es.[[147]](#footnote-147) Following, the Office sends a *preliminary* *report* to the [complainant](#Complainant) and [respondent](#Respondent), including (1) all relevant information; (2) any [witness](#Witness) testimony; (3) the collected evidence.[[148]](#footnote-148) [Parties](#Parties) may provide additional information or request other steps. The Office then makes a *finding*, issuing a final report with: (1) the outcome; (2) the findings of Policy violations; (3) the Office’s rationale for findings.

The [respondent’s](#Respondent) home office administers sanctions.[[149]](#footnote-149) Possible sanctions for staffers range from a verbal/written warning to termination.[[150]](#footnote-150) The Office may take measures to “remediate the effects of a violation on the impacted [parties](#Parties) and others.”[[151]](#footnote-151) There are no examples of remediating efforts.

If the Office does not find a violation, the [complainant](#Complainant) may appeal the findings. If the Office finds a violation, both [parties](#Parties) may appeal on findings or sanctions.[[152]](#footnote-152) The Office or department will only review appeals based on (1) new information not available during the investigation that may "materially" change the outcome; (2) procedural errors that "substantially" affect fairness; (3) an outcome "manifestly" unreasonable and unsupported.[[153]](#footnote-153) The Office sends notice usually within (7) calendar days of a decision.[[154]](#footnote-154) The Office reserves the right to deviate from the timeline based on the scope and unforeseen circumstances.[[155]](#footnote-155) [Parties](#Parties) may not appeal the outcome of an appeal further.[[156]](#footnote-156)

**B. Policy Shortcomings**

The problem with Northwestern’s 2019 *Comprehensive Policy on Sexual Misconduct* is not simply poor drafting. The most critical issue with the Policy is that it fails to protect students' rights under Title IX adequately. In this section, I focus on four areas of particular concern*.*

First, The Office holds those external to the Office to strict timelines, whereas for itself, it provides plenty of flexibility. Second, the distinction between formal investigation and informal action is not clear in the Policy and it is not explained or highlighted in the reporting process. A thorough and standardized explanation of the requirements and remedies offered by formal and informal is critical for a [complainant](#Complainant) to make informed decisions. Third, [complainant](#Complainant) confidentiality requests are available but are not a [complainant's](#Complainant) right, creating an unnecessary risk of harm. Fourth, pattern and practice claims are not available because of the Policy's current structure. Only claims identifying wrongdoers are recognized.

1. *Debilitating Investigative Timelines*

Unclear procedures and disruptive timelines indirectly silence [complainant](#Complainant)s. The Policy goes into great specificity about the period of time that [parties](#Parties) have to respond in the investigative process. Office timeline: “strives to resolve all cases in a prompt and timely manner, the timeline varies based on the circumstances of the case.”[[157]](#footnote-157) The Policy makes clear a double standard for [parties](#Parties) and the Office. The Office striving to be "prompt and timely" is a drastically different language than [parties’](#Parties) response allowance of up to 5 pages and evidence, 15.[[158]](#footnote-158) The Office’s freedom to “strive to be timely” allows significant discretionary power: the power to control investigative progress and the power of knowledge.

Excluding explicit language for a timeline and even the Office's responsibility to update the [parties](#Parties) allows the investigation to remain ambiguous. With lax Office timelines, [parties](#Parties) have no standard. Without a standard, it is the [parties](#Parties)’ responsibility to actively contact the Office to seek the status of their case. The [parties](#Parties) cannot act as a check to the Office to ensure the pursuit of a case.

“The timeline for a case may be affected by”[[159]](#footnote-159): (1) the academic calendar; (2) the availability of [parties](#Parties) and [witnesses](#Witness); (3) the scope; (4) unforeseen circumstances; (5) a leave of absence.[[160]](#footnote-160) “May be affected” means that a case may also not be affected. What case qualifiers may lead to a case freeze versus progression? Would they not be equally disrupted by the calendar? The Office may inequitably apply its discretion among cases where there should be no discretion. The Office should not "cherry pick" which cases are “may be affected” and which will not be. The Office commits during this period to “periodically update on the status of their case.”[[161]](#footnote-161) “Periodically” is intentionally unclear, allowing the Office to update as they see fit.

1. *Critical Distinction Between Formal Investigation and Informal Action*

Failing to know the differences in investigative types may result in [complainant](#Complainant)s making uninformed decisions. Such a decision may be a [complainant](#Complainant) electing for informal action under the advisement of the Office, not knowing that it will not result in sanctions or findings of responsibility.

[Complainant](#Complainant)s have the right to determine case type. “Informal action is not used when formal resolution is desired by a [complainant](#Complainant).”[[162]](#footnote-162) If the Office ignores the stated desire of the [complainant](#Complainant), they violate their Policy. Informal action is taken by the Office when the [complainant](#Complainant) requests or when there is not enough information for a formal investigation.

In formal investigations, the Office may “remediate the effects of a violation on the impacted [parties](#Parties) and others.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Examples of remediating efforts are not available. There are no criteria available for cases that qualify for remediating actions. Because of this, [complainant](#Complainant)s cannot challenge if the Office does not enact remediating efforts.

1. *Unguaranteed Confidentiality and its Risks*

Anonymity is crucial for many to pursue a case because fear of retaliation is so great. Despite the Office’s claims to protect against retaliation, their assurances are not always effective.

The Office can provide anonymity, but requests for anonymity may or may not be honored. “Most situations will require the [complainant’s](#Complainant) participation”[[164]](#footnote-164) and this “most situations” language allows for exceptions. The Policy does not offer details that would exclude situations.

[Complainant](#Complainant)s’ rights to pursue a formal resolution when their "identity is known"[[165]](#footnote-165) creates a question of to whom their identity must be known. It is unclear if the Office is only required to know or if the [respondent](#Respondent) has this right. The Office determines to what extent a [complainant](#Complainant) must be known. This policy then dictates whether they are entitled to their rights in an Office investigation.

In a case where a [complainant](#Complainant) refuses to disclose their identity to the [respondent](#Respondent), the Office may conduct an Office-based investigation. There is no outline for what an Office investigation is, what the rights are of the anonymous [complainant](#Complainant) or the Office's responsibilities. An Office investigation can sanction and find responsibility, inferring a process like a formal investigation.

1. *Impossibility of Bringing Pattern and Practice Claims to Address Systemic Forms of Discrimination or Harassment Due to Structure*

If a report addresses systemic discrimination or harassment due to University policies and practices, there is no existing accountability system. In pattern and practice claims, there are often multiple [complainants](#Complainant) because the structure impacts many individuals. For cases where there are multiple [complainants](#Complainant), “In its discretion, the University may consolidate for investigation and sanctioning multiple complaints involving the same [respondent](#Respondent).”[[166]](#footnote-166) There is no statement as to how the Office consolidates.

Imagine for example, that the Office receives complaints from 5 different individuals against the same [respondent](#Respondent). In outcome one, the Office may investigate with all five [complainants](#Complainant) listed. With this outcome, information is not provided for the next steps if the consolidated [complainants](#Complainant) desired different proceedings, such as three requesting a formal investigation and two wishing for informal action.

In outcome two, the Office removes the case's [complainants](#Complainant), making them [witnesses](#Witness), and the Office opens an investigation. In this, all five [complainants](#Complainant) lose their rights, such as (1) notification of updates on the case's timeline; (2) investigative report and ability to clarify and suggest information; (3) receipt of the report and findings; (4) appeals.

**Part 3**

**The Complaint and the Office of Equity Response**

In this section, I describe how the Office of Equity responded when cheerleaders reported their concerns and sought help. Overcoming fear of being ignored or of retaliation, cheerleaders reported the abuse they were suffering. Their fears became reality. Administrators who had obligations to help ignored their pleas and the coach retaliated. Additionally, they encountered a shocking response from the most unlikely source. The Office of Equity—their “advocates”—took active steps to exclude cheerleaders from the investigations they had initiated and to hide both the process of the investigation and the results of the investigation from them. After discussing the way the Office of Equity acted in the NU case, I review some scholarship to put the problems at NU in a larger context. That scholarship addresses the systemic problems of implementation of Title IX on college campuses generally and both identifies factors that impact Title IX Offices’ performance and explains how the system impacts those it is intended to serve.

Many factors combined to discourage, even prevent, cheerleaders from complaining about sexual harassment. One was the behavior of the coach. Coach posted on the team Facebook a story about a defunded cheerleading program and said “complaining” about inequality, racism, and sexism will get the team defunded.[[[167]](#footnote-167)](#A6) As one cheerleader put it, “We were supposed to accept this stuff [harassment and racism] because we got dollar store gloves, cheap bows, and maybe two or three t-shirts every year.”[[168]](#footnote-168)Cheerleaders were expected to feel grateful to be on the team and not complain. One said, “If a fan is touching you inappropriately Pam was like ‘you should just be appreciative that you get to be here’”[[169]](#footnote-169) and that cheerleaders “have it good” being able to fly with the football players.

Other reasons for their reluctance to come forward included the environment in the Athletics Department. Northwestern punished cheerleaders for trying to protect themselves in sexually charged environments. One reported, “I would have gotten in trouble for leaving because someone was harassing me, by the administration and Coach.”[[170]](#footnote-170) Fear of retaliation led many to accept the abuse. As one put it, “We never told anyone about the [Wilson Club] If someone was grabbing my butt in a picture, I just let it happen.”[[171]](#footnote-171) Cheerleaders let it happen because, as one said, they were not “ready to take on the whole Athletics Department, I was still a student and I was trying to get my degree”[[172]](#footnote-172) and, as another said, because “When the leadership is not altruistic and things are skewed, you think these things are normal.”[[173]](#footnote-173)

*Complaints*

Despite their fear, cheerleaders did report the abuse. They reported abuse to medical staffers—athletic trainer, doctors, and psychological services— who were hired to care for them. Nothing happened. Healthcare professionals only addressed the mental and physical health consequences of the abuse for the cheerleaders; they did not take steps to ensure that the University stopped the abusive conduct. One interviewee said, “The team doctors were fully aware of what was going on. They just addressed the mental health issues because of it, never the systemic problems.”[[174]](#footnote-174) Cheerleaders were sent to be cared for by Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) of where there are doctors who work specifically with athletes. One cheerleader states, “CAPS should have done something, they list an exception to privilege being ‘if someone is harming you’ and they didn’t address the issues with the department.”[[175]](#footnote-175) By all accounts it appears as though cheerleaders reported but healthcare professionals neglected to address the abuse and focused only on the immediate health consequences. All of these professionals work in close contact: coaches, administrators, psychiatrists, and doctors. There are regular meetings to update staff on the status of athletes. Cheerleaders reasonably expected coordinated help. As one cheerleader put it, “We thought going to the team doctors was doing something.”[[176]](#footnote-176) But that is not what they got. Instead, as this athlete continued, “it really was just shouting into a dark void.”[[177]](#footnote-177)

The abuse was reported to administrators in the Athletics Department. In response, the administrators expressed sympathy for Coach and minimized the cheerleaders’ complaints. In January 2019, two cheerleaders reported that they had concerns to Heather Obering, Associate A.D. for Marketing, when they saw her at a basketball game. Obering told the cheerleaders to gather information that would be reviewed before a meeting would be committed to. Making as holistic of a case for the administrators as possible, 16 anonymous testimonies were collected by the two cheerleaders. These cheerleaders coordinated a meeting with a group of their teammates to discuss the team’s issues and write the testimonies as a group. After giving these letters to Obering, it is unclear who, if anyone read the statements. On a Zoom call on February 24th, 2021, Janna Blais—Deputy Director of Athletics and Deputy Title IX Coordinator—recalled that she received the letters and just “handed over the letters to the Title IX Office.” Ultimately,“Heather handed over the problems to Mike, where we just got shutdown.”[[178]](#footnote-178)

On January 24th, 2019, a meeting took place with two members of the cheerleading team, Heather Obering, and Mike Polisky. Obering and Polisky are both *responsible employees*—required to report all allegations of sexual misconduct. It is not appropriate for *responsible employees* to determine the report’s merit. During this meeting, Obering took notes while Polisky worked to discern whether the statements provided were true.

At this meeting, Polisky asked the cheerleaders if they thought it was “fair that Pam be accused and not know who her accusers are.” They were asked to meet with Pam to talk through the allegations, to which they declined stating fears of retaliation. Polisky asked how they could then verify these statements, “how do we know you both didn’t just write these up?” The cheerleaders suggested conducting interviews with everyone and asking standardized questions. Polisky and Obering never did this. The cheerleaders in attendance, one Black and one White, were used as comparison for Polisky when challenging that the part of the contract that was discriminatory. The contact states: “Team members will **not** dye their hair an unnatural hair color (ie: pink, purple, burgundy). Team members will not have extreme high or low lights, extreme ombre color, or braids. **Do not cut or color you hair without checking with the coach**. Hair & Makeup must be worn in the assigned manner.”[[[179]](#footnote-179)](#A4)

Polisky did not understand the braids ban, as he responded, “what like French braids?” The Black cheerleader explained the difference between Black and White braids. Arguing how absurd it was that Black cheerleaders felt pressured to wear wigs, Polisky stated to the Black cheerleader, “Your hair doesn’t look any different than [White cheerleader’s].” This reinforced the point that Black women were to whitewash themselves, as she was wearing the sew-in wig that Coach required. Addressing tailgating, Polisky asked if “your age group is just upset about this” and “what did you expect as cheerleaders?” Concluding this, Polisky referenced how pleasant this meeting was. He commented that both women had shown up in business professional attire, and he was glad there was. “no whooping and hollering, making a commotion.” Obering never interceded. [Obering’s narration of the meeting is included as an Appendix.[[180]](#footnote-180)](#A7)

The two cheerleaders from this meeting reported back to the teammates who had made statements (and whom they had promised to keep anonymous). One of the anonymous cheerleaders recounted, “We stepped up as a team and wrote the letters and we got smacked down by [Northwestern] that what we said wasn’t true and they weren’t going to do anything about.”[[181]](#footnote-181) The University knowingly ignored those who reported and facilitated a structure that was inaccessible, “There should have been a chain of command […] there was no one I could go to do anything.”[[182]](#footnote-182) In response to reporting and being ignored, one said, “I felt the worst on the team was before we wrote the letters, we felt dejected and powerless.”[[183]](#footnote-183)

Following the Mike Polisky, Heather Obering, and two cheerleaders meeting, then Athletic Director Jim Phillips showed up to a cheerleading team practice. He had not done this before. Phillips was playing basketball during the cheerleading practice, disrupting it to say, “how appreciated this team is.” He never addressed the issues of racism, sexism, or endangerment. Cheerleaders gathered that, “Mike decided not to communicate the problems to Jim Phillips, to squash the problems when it was in his hands.”[[184]](#footnote-184) Polisky and Obering either did not communicate the issues brought forward to Phillips or Phillips chose not to acknowledge the concerns. If the latter is true, he was complicit in allowing Polisky, Obering, and Bonnevier to torment the Northwestern cheerleaders in their charge.

*Investigation 1*

Finally, the cheerleaders complained directly to the Office of Equity. Investigation 1 got under way. The Office of Equity spoke with the two cheerleaders, during which both cheerleaders insisted on a formal investigation. These initial talks occurred in February and March of 2019. Both cheerleaders asked what they needed to do to have a formal investigation, explained that Coach could not be reeducated, and insisted she must be fired, or they would face retaliation. No formal investigation occurred as far as any of the cheerleaders know. Coach Bonnevier was “reeducated” according to the Office of Equity, and the cheerleaders knew that Pam had met with administration because, as one explained, “Pam put it on our team calendar.”[[185]](#footnote-185)

Concluding Year 1, the Office met with the cheerleading team. The Office notified them that tailgating would no longer be allowed and encouraged them to reach out to the Office with any concerns. As one cheerleader put it, “In these situations that Office portrays themselves as advocates.”[[186]](#footnote-186) During this meeting, the team felt as though they had been heard by someone and they were hopeful that the Office would act. Reality was starkly different. One disappointed cheerleader said, “The University had the Title IX Office come in to talk to us to give off the perception that they cared.”[[187]](#footnote-187) It was a façade, in the view of the team. One said, “Title IX came in acting like they were going to save the day. We were so hopeful. They didn’t do anything.”[[188]](#footnote-188) The Office portrays themselves as fierce student advocates when their role is to protect the University. Portraying themselves as student advocates allows them greater access to information, as cheerleaders felt they would be safe talking to the Office. The Office is then able to use the information they gathered as they see fit.

After complaining to the Office of Equity, the cheerleaders faced retaliation from Coach. Coach ensured that cheerleaders would be punished for complaining about tailgating by depriving them of food on gameday. She also devised tactics to figure out who reported. Despite the termination of tailgating, Coach held team meetings to address how cheerleaders “would make themselves useful.” Coach had cheerleaders come up with a list of things they could do instead of tailgating, because if not doing that, “just cheering the game” would not be useful enough to the school. Bonnevier tried to get the cheerleaders upset about “losing tailgating” by emphasizing the negative consequences: (1) they would be unable to eat at the tent that fed the team on gamedays and (2) “how sad the tailgaters would be not having us anymore.”[[189]](#footnote-189) Bonnevier retaliated when these tactics did not work. One cheerleader reported that Bonnevier said, “If we don’t tailgate anymore, then you guys aren’t going to eat.” [[190]](#footnote-190) Even though tailgating was not permitted, Coach made the team vote on tailgating. Either Coach hoped to pressure the team to tailgate again, or she hoped to find out those not in support—the ones who had reported her.

Once tailgating was removed from the cheerleading gameday, the gameday schedule did not change. Donor events continued, despite the concerns raised about the Wilson Club. For an 11 am game, “we still had to be ready at 7 am. […] we had to do the [Wilson Club], we would greet specific donors, girls had to hand out raffle tickets at the gates. A lot of time was spent doing nothing, so we were there early as a punishment.”[[191]](#footnote-191) It is not clear if the Athletics Department communicated to Coach that she would need to find something to make the cheerleaders “useful” or if this came from her fear of losing her job. For several of the games, there was nothing that the cheerleaders could do to replace the two and half hours that tailgating had originally filled, so, Pam basically punished them for speaking out about tailgating. As one reported, “We had to sit in a room with 10-person occupancy with 25 us packed in a room doing nothing because we weren’t tailgating.”[[192]](#footnote-192) The call time did not change from being four hours before the game began, which is hours before the football team arrived themselves.

Coach abdicated her responsibilities, leaving cheerleaders to take on team management, supervision, and disciplinary responsibilities themselves. The result of Coach’s reeducation performed by the Title IX Office is described by one cheerleader as “[implementing] don’t be racist and sexist as don’t do my job as a coach, but still be racist and sexist.”[[193]](#footnote-193) To create space between Bonnevier and the team, Athletics Administration formed a leadership council of cheerleaders who would act on Coach’s behalf. Leadership council members acted as intermediaries between Coach and the team and created a hierarchical environment on the team. The leadership council was pressured to “lead the team” by ordering their teammates to change their makeup, be on time, or condition more. Coach did not make it clear that the members of the leadership council were to be listened to or respected. Thus, animosity grew, cheerleaders ignoring the only coaching they were receiving which was from their teammates, and the leadership council was soon ignored.

The new policy was detrimental because, as one stated, “they had us govern ourselves. They put the coaching responsibility on the team.”[[194]](#footnote-194) The additional responsibilities included “cheering games, buying makeup, learning how to do your makeup, working out in your free time. We had to hold our teammates accountable because Pam said that was our responsibility.”[[195]](#footnote-195)

Being unable to turn to coaches, administrators or doctors for help, the only leadership came from the team. Unfortunately, teammates often did not trust each other. “There is a culture of mistrust on the team. People older than you would use anecdotes as leverage to better themselves in the Coach’s eyes.”[[196]](#footnote-196) The corrupt and self-serving team environment bred into the athletes themselves. Being exploited by Coach to protect her job and by the administration to please donors, athletes bought into the self-serving team dynamic. To control the team, Coach would look for information into athletes’ personal lives. To receive better treatment, some athletes chose to serve as Coach Bonnevier’s mole. The result was that there was no protection for athletes, not even from their own team.

In Year 2, when Bonnevier was relieved of leadership obligations, she was still unable to improve her technical coaching. One cheerleader said, “Pam’s [..] involvement [was not] productive.”[[197]](#footnote-197) There is no record of Coach receiving training for stunting or tumbling. Her involvement was a feeble attempt to appear to the outside as if she was “doing her job,” yet, because she had spent her coaching career bullying cheerleaders to submit to her beauty standards, she had no technical coaching skills.

*Investigation 2*

With the core problems both unresolved and unacknowledged, and retaliation unchecked, cheerleaders complained again to the Office of Equity. One cheerleader sent an email sent to Jim Phillips saying she needed to address “other legal violations against Title IX and HIPPA”[[198]](#footnote-198) Phillips reported the email to the Office of Equity and concluded that he and the cheerleader would not meet until the conclusion of the Offices’ investigation.

At the same time, current and former Black cheerleaders sent a petition to the Office of Equity, Human Resources, and the Northwestern Athletics Department. The petition called for Coach’s firing. The cheerleader spearheading the petition recalls its dissemination: “HR didn’t know what Pam was considered so they asked me to figure it out”[[199]](#footnote-199) and that “Title IX told me that it wasn’t up to them to hold Pam accountable. They all pointed the finger at other people, and no one did anything. Not HR, not Athletics, not Title IX.”[[200]](#footnote-200) Cheerleading, not directly supervised by any department, was treated as no one’s responsibility.

The Office of Equity not only kept cheerleaders in the dark about any investigations (1 or 2, as delineated in this thesis), but they made deliberate decisions designed to formally exclude cheerleaders from the process and deprive them of the rights they would have as Title IX [complainants](#Complainant).

In June 2020 (during the pandemic), Coach was furloughed, resulting in the team being led by Obering and the leadership council. Throughout Summer 2020, the Office of Equity conducted interviews for Investigation 2. No statement was released acknowledging what the Office was investigating. Communication was limited to sporadic individual contact—a random list of [witness](#Witness)es, those involved in the Phillips report and petition, and those referred by interviewees. Not being aware of what the Office was investigating, no one I interviewed understood their role in the investigation.

Failure on behalf of the Office to make clear their reasons for contacting athletes impacted individual ability to discern for themselves whether they wanted to be involved. This confusion may have been intended to dissuade athletes from interviewing, reducing the evidence against the University. One cheerleader explained, “I got an email from Title IX in 2020. I didn’t think I was personally implicated, so I didn’t respond to the email. Honestly, I still don’t really know what the investigation is about.”[[201]](#footnote-201) It was inferred that “they sent the email to everyone”[[202]](#footnote-202) and because of this, the cheerleaderdid not think the Office was contacting her because she had been mentioned by her teammates. It is unclear if in the investigation, the Office lists non-responses in its final report, which would mean that non-responsive athletes were still listed in the investigation.

Interviewees allege that the Office did not honor the Policy, “The Office asked me if I wanted to be a [complainant](#Complainant) and I said 100 percent yes. […] [After] six months […] they told me that because I was not here during the time they were investigating that I wouldn’t get it.”[[203]](#footnote-203) At the time of Investigation 2, this cheerleader was a Northwestern graduate. While no longer a member of Northwestern, the jurisdiction’s phrasing alludes to the necessity of membership belonging to the [respondent](#Respondent). If the [respondent](#Respondent) is not a part of the Northwestern community, Northwestern cannot sanction them.

If they were not going to be classified as a [complainant](#Complainant), then the Office should have immediately notified the cheerleader once they decided that they could not be a [complainant](#Complainant). It is disingenuous for the University to use cheerleaders to gather facts under the understanding that they would receive the report as a [complainant](#Complainant) would. The cheerleader believes that the Office prevented her from being a [complainant](#Complainant) under malicious intentions. They said: “They made this up on the fly because they don’t want me to have the report.”[[204]](#footnote-204) No cheerleaders report being a [complainant](#Complainant) in Investigation 2.

The Office also used their position as a trusted confidant to influence cheerleaders’ decisions. A cheerleader recounted that she was never asked if she wanted to be a [complainant](#Complainant) and that the Office kept it intentionally vague to maintain power, “I was told that they were just going to do what they think is best to protect my identity.” [[205]](#footnote-205) The Office framed it in a way that made them seem like saviors, yet this is not their place to be making decisions. It was this framing that influenced many reporters not to question the Office, “Since I didn’t know the Policy, I just did what they told me.”[[206]](#footnote-206)

The cheerleader who initially reported to Phillips believed she was the initial [complainant](#Complainant) in the case. She said, “I was originally a [complainant](#Complainant) and the Office demoted me to a [witness](#Witness).”[[207]](#footnote-207) It is not clear in the Policy that the Office of Equity has the authority to dictate who is a [complainant](#Complainant) or [witness](#Witness). Communicating with the Office and giving detailed interviews about the trauma experienced is a very difficult undertaking and being told by the Office that the information provided does not make them a complainant makes those who report feel “like I was belittled.”[[208]](#footnote-208) This cheerleader alleges she was a [witness](#Witness) because, “The Office was protecting [Pam], not me.”[[209]](#footnote-209) It is easy to feel that the Office is protecting the [respondent](#Respondent), but it is a reflection that the Office is not in pursuit of justice or to either party. Therefore, it is more plausible that the Office acted to protect the University, not either party.

Other team members were not contacted at all by the Office, “I wasn’t contacted by the Office in 2020”[[210]](#footnote-210) and others received no follow-up to their initial report. A cheerleader reached out to the Office of Equity. She reported: “I sent them an email trying to get information from them and the first time I found out what my role was when they responded saying no, I was a [witness](#Witness).”[[211]](#footnote-211) Issues stem from the Office’s decision not to assign roles to athletes until after they interviewed them, and these roles were not communicated. Not assigning roles until after an interview allows the Office to gauge the information. If no one is a [complainant](#Complainant), the Office can cherry-pick information and do whatever it sees fit.

The conclusion of Investigation 2 was addressed via email to those who participated, but it offered no information or results regarding the case. The results of the investigation were communicated to the team on November 2, 2020 by Mike Polisky. As one cheerleader recalled, Polisky “beg[an] our team call reading this script about the Pam investigation.”[[212]](#footnote-212) When asked if Coach was found in violation of Title IX, Polisky refused to provide information and just says that what he has read is the “statement from the General Counsel.” There were no apologies for the treatment of the team. For those who are no longer on the team but participated in Investigation 2, they “heard from a teammate that Pam was fired.”[[213]](#footnote-213)

Coach Bonnevier’s dismissal from the University was essential; she was a poor coach and an active participant in the alleged violations. However, Bonnevier’s dismissal cannot be the end-all-be-all-solution that Northwestern has treated it as. As one interviewee put it, “Pam isn’t the full problem. Mike and Heather never apologized for not listening to us. They painted Pam as a scapegoat. They thought we could just move forward but we didn’t address the issues with Marketing, Athletics, or Title IX.”[[214]](#footnote-214) The Office of Equity was made aware of the systemic institutional concerns, such as the Athletics Department not hiring a full-time coach, the lack of supervision, and the inappropriate conduct from Polisky. During a meeting with the Office of Equity in 2020, it was made clear that neither investigation investigated Polisky or the Athletics Administration.

The Office of Equity’s handling of this matter caused additional damage to the team, which needs to be solved to continue with this program. Trauma occurs in the retelling of abuses and in this case was exacerbated by the Office’s inaction. Cheerleaders felt their “anecdotes were [not] enough, that it wasn’t that bad, that I got through it.”[[215]](#footnote-215) Failing to take initiative in the statements brought to the Office, making decisions in direct conflict with the wishes of the investigation’s participants, and not releasing investigative reports has created a culture of mistrust with the Office. The actions of the Office appear self-serving. As one cheerleader stated, “They fired Pam because they knew we weren’t going to stop complaining.”[[216]](#footnote-216) It does not come across that the Office made this decision based on the facts of the investigation as “they had all of the evidence the first year and they didn’t do anything.”[[217]](#footnote-217)

The fear instilled in the team members during Coach’s tenure at Northwestern and the Office’s opaqueness and failure to protect [witness](#Witness)es from retaliation persists now. One interviewee stated, for example, “I still don’t know what the Title IX case is about. I’m still in the mindset of what if [Coach] finds out.”[[218]](#footnote-218)

The University has still not effectively responded to or acknowledged the abuse, mistreatment, and discrimination that cheerleaders have faced. Coach Bonnevier has been fired, which was a necessary step in rectifying the abuse. But it is only a first step. The discrimination and harassment cheerleaders suffered occurred out in the open—at the Wilson Club, at tailgates, and in stadiums. It was not merely tacitly sanctioned; it was encouraged. Cheerleaders were objectified by the University for the University’s benefit. This conduct was not that of a rogue Coach acting alone. It was conduct expected and demanded by the University, for the benefit of the University. The institutional exploitation of cheerleaders has not been grappled with or responded to. Thus far, the University has applied its Title IX policy at every turn in such a way as to protect itself rather than its students.

*University Structural Relations and its Impacts*

Recent scholarly studies of the implementation of Title IX on college campuses identify factors that impact Title IX Offices’ performance and how the system impacts those who interact with it. In this section, I review findings to place the Northwestern cheerleading case in a larger systemic context.

In an article in INFOCUS, Sarah Brown reports that most Title IX coordinators do not have job security: most have been in their position less than three years,[[219]](#footnote-219) less than a fifth of schools offer full-time Title IX coordinator positions,[[220]](#footnote-220) and two-thirds of coordinators have additional responsibilities such as roles in legal counsel and human resources.[[221]](#footnote-221) Brown finds that the professional relationships of the role are difficult— 46% of responding coordinators indicate that they directly report the president of the University—coordinators and administration have a minimal degree of separation.[[222]](#footnote-222) Scholars writing in *Behavioral Sciences* (2018) urge that Title IX coordinators should have secure full-time positions to fulfill their responsibilities to the institution, students, and Title IX.[[223]](#footnote-223)

A study by Jacqueline Cruz in the *Journal of Higher Education* (2020) focuses on how Title IX arouses fears of personally and professionally costly media attention, damage to university relations, and legal liability issues.[[224]](#footnote-224) Brown finds disparity in how the Office markets itself and its missions—marketing itself as a student resource, yet, the role of a Title IX coordinator is that of a "neutral" factfinder for the University.[[225]](#footnote-225) Coordinators are not student advocates, and neutrality does not equal impartiality.[[226]](#footnote-226)

The Office and its Policy carry are impacted by the departments they work alongside—an important influence on the Office is its interactions with the Department of Athletics. The Athletics Department is unique because of the culture it fosters. Scholars writing in *Violence Against Women* (2017 and 2019) and *Aggressive Behavior* (2018) find that athletics sustains an environment that devalues women[[227]](#footnote-227) and these spaces foster abusive behaviors towards women.[[228]](#footnote-228) Male athletes are slower and less likely to intervene in misogynistic situations than their non-athletic counterparts.[[229]](#footnote-229) The studies also observe that male sports are extremely gendered[[230]](#footnote-230) and that because of this, the athletes and sports administrators exist to an extent in an echo chamber. For example, sports administrators are largely male and were in athletics themselves. These behaviors may carry over to administrative leadership and the acceptance of behaviors that are in violation of Title IX.

Athletics culture goes unaddressed because of the ineffective education and unknown Title IX reporting structures. Two 2018 studies, one in *The Journal of College Student Development* and another in *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, address the ineffective resource education and consent training. McMahon finds that student populations do not know about their campus resources, where, or whom to go in a sexual assault case.[[231]](#footnote-231) Emphasizing obtaining consent is not helpful when the student body does not understand it. [[232]](#footnote-232) With an ill-equipped student body, justice systems are playing triage with sexual assault cases. This flux of [reporters](#Reporter) uneducated on sexual violence leads to difficult to prove cases for police and the justice system. One result is that the Office or [reporters](#Reporter) end up routinely discouraging difficult [respondents](#Respondent) from reporting and pursuing legal recourse.[[233]](#footnote-233)

Smith and Freyd, in an article in *American Psychologist* (2014), introduce the idea of “institutional betrayal” to explain trauma some experience from reporting.[[234]](#footnote-234) They observe that the University is the "gatekeeper" of the resources and advocacy students may need.[[235]](#footnote-235) "Gatekeeping" can explain the pressures students feel when reporting. Students who report risk "othering"— differentiating the [reporter](#Reporter), creating community outliers, and validity denial[[236]](#footnote-236)—by the institution. " Universities do this as well to alleged violators, claiming that this person is a single bad actor.[[237]](#footnote-237) Institutions may deflect negative attention by relying on prestige to sow doubt and minimize negative impact.[[238]](#footnote-238)

A 2013 study in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* explains that the Title IX environment affects the abilities of students and administrators. A student reporting abuse can find themselves in an “against the system mentality” and distrust the university. For Title IX coordinators, receiving these disclosures—hearing multiple accounts from [reporters](#Reporter) about their assaults and seeing documentation and medical reports—can cause secondary trauma that persists past the workday.[[239]](#footnote-239) To combat secondary trauma, universities must take steps against complicity.[[240]](#footnote-240) The breakdown of institutional trust undermines the implementation of Title IX and exacerbates the abuse and its effects on reporters.[[241]](#footnote-241)

This review of some recent studies suggests that features of the NU cheerleading case form part of a larger pattern of problems with the implementation of Title IX on college campuses today.

**Conclusion**

This paper documents the harassment experienced by the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 Northwestern cheerleaders and the ways in which the University’s policies and reporting structures failed to either prevent or redress misconduct.

As I show, university structures, policies, and people not only failed to protect cheerleaders from sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and physical endangerment, but actively increased cheerleaders’ vulnerability to this harm and knowingly ignored their pleas for help. While the cheerleaders’ narratives are at the heart of this paper, it is the University’s conduct that is my true focus. This paper shows how the University’s Title IX Policy and its Office of Equity worked in tandem in the cheerleader case to discourage complaints, exclude those who did complain from the disciplinary process, and protect the University. This was done at the expense of fairness, due process, and accountability for students.

At core, I wrote *Cheerleading at Northwestern University: A Case Study of Institutional Failure* to ensure that the cheerleaders’ experiences—and my experience[[242]](#footnote-242)—will not be hidden, erased, or forgotten in the hopes that the institutional failure I describe here will not be repeated.

Throughout this paper, I have emphasized that the problems I describe are not the result of a single bad actor and cannot be fixed by simply firing or “reeducating” a particular person. To prevent similar harassment and abuse of cheerleaders in the future will require structural changes to the program. First and foremost, Northwestern must classify cheerleading as a sport. Cheerleaders must be viewed and treated as athletes, not as marketing assets or eye candy for male alumni and donors. Without this structure and protection, cheerleaders will not have the oversight needed for this team to exist safely. Northwestern must hire a full-time coach and a full-time coordinator for the team—rather than rely on one temporary and part-time employee—and the Athletics Department needs to actively oversee and be responsible for the program. Individuals still in the system are upholding the systematic sexism and racism, and these actors like—"Jana Blais [saying] ‘you expect us to have a whole administration just for this team?’”[[243]](#footnote-243)—and actors like these who belittle the legitimacy of cheerleading cannot be supported by Northwestern.

Yet the problems I identify in this paper extend well beyond cheerleading. They apply to the University’s handling of all student complaints of harassment and discrimination. The Office of Equity is an office of the University and its primary goal is to protect the University from liability. While this fact probably seems obvious to some, it is not at all obvious to students who are constantly told that the *Office exists to support them*. To genuinely protect the University community, Northwestern's Office of Equity must represent itself accurately—the Office must tell students clearly that the Office consists of lawyers hired by the University to represent the University—not students. Where students’ and the University’s interests diverge—as they often do in these cases—the Office’s allegiance is to the University, not to students, [complainants](#Complainant) or [respondents](#Respondent). Such a clear mission statement would remove a significant amount of the harm done by the Office. It would protect students who are looking for advocates from disappointment and disillusionment when the Office fails to act on their behalf. It would also make clear to students that if they want an advocate, they must look outside the University.

The Office must also revise and edit its Title IX Policy to make it clear, concise, and accessible to students. Other universities have drafted such policies, which can be used as a template for Northwestern. Substantively, the Office must remove discretionary loopholes, commit itself to procedural requirements and timelines in the same way it currently binds [parties](#Parties), and provide students with a written description and explanation of their role in the case—whether as claimant or as [witness](#Witness)—before mining them for information about a case.

My hope is that this paper will demystify for others how the Title IX process and the Office of Equity operate at Northwestern. More personally, as a member of the cheerleading team during the years described in this paper, my hope is that this paper will ensure that the experiences of the cheerleaders—the University-sanctioned misconduct they endured, and, even more importantly, the bravery and wisdom they demonstrated in fighting back—will not be forgotten. For those who feel so compelled, advocate in your community and use your voice to continue the call to action for (1) policy changes, (2) the University to acknowledge the harms it has done, (3) a committee to be formed to restructure the Northwestern cheerleading team safely.

**Figures**

Diagram

Description automatically generated**Figure 1.1 Title IX Process**

**Figure 1.2 Informal Action**

Diagram, schematic

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**Figure 1.3 Formal Investigation**

Diagram

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**Glossary**

* **Advisor -** support person who may be present to provide support to a [complainant](#Complainant) or [respondent](#Respondent) throughout an investigation and/or hearing.[[244]](#footnote-244)
* **Complainant -** person impacted by alleged policy violation and has chosen to participate in the complaint resolution process.[[245]](#footnote-245)
* **Hostile Environment –** judged on following criteria:[[246]](#footnote-246)
  + Judged objectively (based on a reasonable person) and subjectively (based on impacted individual).
  + Sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it unreasonably interferes with, limits, or deprives an individual from participating or benefitting from the University’s education, employment programs, or activities.
* **Mandated Reporter -** University employees (including student employees) and graduate students with teaching or supervisory authority, obligated to promptly report sexual misconduct of which they become aware in the scope of their work for the University to the Office of Equity.[[247]](#footnote-247)
* **Parties -** [complainant](#Complainant) and [respondent](#Respondent), collectively.[[248]](#footnote-248)
* **Reporter** **-** person impacted by alleged conduct violation, Office of Student Conduct.[[249]](#footnote-249)
* **Respondent -** alleged violator of University Policy.[[250]](#footnote-250)
* **Sexual Exploitation -** recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining another person for the purpose of sexual exploitation.[[251]](#footnote-251)
* **Sexual Harassment –** unwelcome sexual conduct, must meet both criteria:[[252]](#footnote-252)
  + Submission to or rejection of such conduct is made, explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of: employment, academic standing, or participation a program and/or activity (quid pro quo).
  + Conduct creates a [hostile environment](#HostileEnvironment).
* **Sexually Harassing Conduct -** anyunwelcome (1) sexual advances (2) touching (3) kissing (4) hugging (5) massaging (6) unnecessary references to body parts (7) sexual innuendo (8) sexual gesture (9) sexual humor.[[253]](#footnote-253)
* **Witness -** person who has knowledge related to aspects of a case.[[254]](#footnote-254)

**Appendices**

**Appendix 1.1 Interview Questions**

Interview Questions

1. What was your understanding before joining the team?
2. What are the responsibilities of the cheerleaders?
3. What is the relationship between cheerleaders and administrators?
   1. Who were your coaches and administrators?
   2. How often would you meet with them?
   3. What was their involvement with the program?
4. Did you sign a cheerleading contract?
   1. What was the implications of this contract?
   2. Did you ever witness any of your teammates being subject to discrimination based on their race?
   3. Did the contract require donor events?
5. What was preseason?
   1. Were you present for the 2018 preseason talk about fan safety?
6. What would your practices look like?
   1. What were you allowed or expected to wear to practice?
7. Did you have any experiences flying with the football team?
   1. Can you explain this in depth?
   2. What were you supposed to wear and how were you to look?
8. Can you tell me about what a home football game would be like?
   1. What was fan engagement like?
   2. How do you reconcile being the “face of the University” and these environments?
9. Were there concerns about safety during your time on the team?
   1. How was your food accessibility?
   2. Did you stunt on the USS Roosevelt at the 2018 Holiday Bowl?
      1. Were there any other safety concerns at the 2018 Holiday Bowl?
10. Did you write an anonymous letter in 2019 to administration?
11. Did you report concerns to the team doctors or CAPS?
    1. How were you received?
    2. Were you present for the Cristina and Pam meeting about safety in 2019?
12. What were you told were the corrective actions taken to stop these behaviors by Sports Admin?
    1. Who were these individuals?
13. Do you know what the Northwestern policy on Title IX is?
    1. Were you made aware of your rights and the policies at Northwestern?
14. What were your experiences with the investigation?
    1. Who did you speak to in the Title IX office?
    2. What happened?
    3. Were you asked if you wanted to file a formal complaint?
    4. Did they follow up with you regarding your concerns?
    5. How did this experience make you feel?
15. Do you feel informed?
    1. Were you made aware of the updates of your case?
    2. Do you understand what happened?
16. Did you see any changes after Pam’s reeducation in 2019?
    1. Did Pam change any behaviors?
    2. Was the contract removal helpful?
17. Were you contact by the Office of Equity in 2020?
18. What have been the impacts of the experience for you?
    1. Did you ever experience retaliation or feel pressured not to speak out?
    2. Who or what caused these experiences in cheerleading at Northwestern University?
19. What would you recommend as a corrective course of action?

**Appendix 1.2 Office of Equity Response to Clarification**

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**Appendix 1.3 Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract**

Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract

Rules for Cheerleaders, Spirit Squad and Mascot Team Members for 2018-2019

* PHILOSOPHY
  + A spirit squad member’s first responsibility is to his/her academic programs. Their educational progress should not be affected by participating in the spirit squad. If one cannot manage the commitment to both, one should not be a member of the spirit squad. The primary role of the spirit squad is to promote and uphold school spirit, and to develop a sense of good sportsmanship among the students and fans. Our squads will uphold, reflect, and project the goals, and ideals of Northwestern University. We are first and foremost representatives of our school. The secondary role of the spirit squad is to represent Northwestern University as an athlete. As athletes, team members are expected to treat their practices, performances and appearances as an athletic activity, and a priority. They are to always put their best effort forth at all practices and events.
* RULES/REGULATIONS
  + Team members are expected to abide by NCAA, Big Ten, AACCA, NU athletic rules and regulations, and abide by all State of Illinois laws (including, but not limited to drug and alcohol consumption laws). In addition, team members must abide by all guidelines in this contract.
  + CONDUCT/SAFETY
    - GENERAL EXPECTATIONS
      * Spirit members will conduct themselves properly at all times, in and out of school, as they are official representatives of the university. Inappropriate language will not be tolerated at any time. Spirit members will display good sportsmanship at all times. They will treat their teammates and their coaching staff with respect. Publicly arguing with a teammate or the coaching staff at a game or event will not be tolerated. Team members will follow all AACCA safety rules, and will practice safe stunting and tumbling at all times.
    - INJURY/ILLNESS
      * In the event of an injury during an event/practice, the team member must immediately notify the coach/trainer. It is the team member’s responsibility to follow the trainer/doctor’s direction. The trainer/doctor’s decisions regarding practice/participation are final. **In the event of an outside injury/illness, you must try and contact your trainer for guidance, first**. If you cannot reach your trainer in a timely manner, you may then proceed as you feel necessary; however you MUST notify your trainer as soon as possible. Members must follow all medical advice. All assigned therapy is mandatory. Missed appointments are unacceptable.
      * If a member of the team is ill and feels he/she cannot fully participate in an event/game/practice, the member should immediately email/text the training staff and the coach. The training staff and doctors’ decisions are final. If a contagious illness exists, DO NOT ATTEND the event. If the condition is not contagious, YOU MUST ATTEND the event – participation may be limited by the medical staff, however you MUST attend. If the medical staff has not been

notified of the condition, absence will not be excused. Excessive use of a medical excuse may alter one’s letter status.

* + UNIFORMS AND APPEARANCE
    - Uniforms and warm-ups issued to you are the property of the athletic department, and must be returned at the end of each year. All equipment must be returned in good condition. Damage to uniforms or missing pieces, will be charged to the individual. Care of uniforms is to be excellent at all times. Do not wear soiled uniforms to games. Uniforms are to be laundered only as directed.
    - All squad members must be in complete uniform at each game/event (this includes designated bow, shoes, socks, uniform, face tattoo, and make-up). Men must be clean shaven. Womens’ underarms must be clean shaven. Undergarments may not be visible. Only the assigned jewelry is allowed.
    - Team members will **not** dye their hair an unnatural hair color (ie: pink, purple, burgundy). Team members will not have extreme high or low lights, extreme ombre color, or braids. **Do not cut or color you hair without checking with the coach**. Hair & Makeup must be worn in the assigned manner.
    - **Any visible tattoos must be covered in a manner that does not draw attention**.
    - Attire on travel days will be designated by the coaching staff **–** This **may** include business attire, slacks/skirt and a nice shirt for women**.** This may include a shirt and tie for men**. No gym shoes, flip-flops, strapless tops, skirts should not be shorter than 3” from the back of your knee, no visible cleavage, no excessive skirt slits, and no visible belly.** Men must be clean shaven.
  + MEDIA POLICY
    - See APPENDDIX A at the end of this document.
* PARTICIPATION EXPECTATIONS
  + ATTENDANCE POLICY
    - **Returning letter winners** that plan to study abroad in the fall, **may** apply for a position on the team for the winter/spring, **if** there is a position available. Students that study abroad must cover extra events to make up for any missed events while they are abroad in order to retain their letter status. Study abroad/out of area internships are not considered academic excuses. First year members do not have a study abroad option.
    - PRACTICE
      * The team will hold mandatory practices for a maximum of 8 hours per week during the academic year. Practices will be held as dictated by the coaching staff. You will receive prior notice of practice times. All efforts will be made to limit any last minute changes to the practice schedule. Preseason/vacation practices will be scheduled as necessary by the coaching staff. These are **mandatory**. Each squad member shall be dressed in assigned practice clothing at the starting time of practice. This includes T-shirt, sports bra (for women) and cheer shoes. Shorts or pants are acceptable bottoms; as long as they do not interfere with performance. Under Armour is the official outfitter of Northwestern Athletics. You will be given Under Armour equipment (practice gear/shoes/warm-ups) to wear. Any personal gear that you choose to practice in must also be Under Armour or a non-competitor brand.
    - GAMES/EVENTS
      * The Spirit Squad season runs from Try-outs 2017 until Try-outs 2018. This includes any events deemed necessary by coaches/administration. Attendance at all home football games is mandatory; however, team members must have met the minimum level of skill required by the coaching staff, to be allowed to cheer football games. If a *member does not know the required material, they will sit the*

*game.* Away football, as well as home men’s and women’s basketball games will

be assigned by the coaching staff, and is required. (8 team members will travel to away regular season games). Coaching staff will do their best to limit conflicts, however only academic conflicts are acceptable excuses for failure to make oneself available for travel. Basketball games may be traded **only for academic conflicts**, and must be approved by the coaching staff, two weeks in advance. Additional events likely to occur: Soccer, volleyball, lacrosse. These events will be limited, but you should expect to have to attend one of **each** of these events. Other extra-curricular activities must not take precedence over your spirit squad commitment. If you cannot fully commit, you should not participate. Due to liability and supervision requirements, spirit members **must travel with the team**. All members are to be ready to board the bus at the assigned time. The bus will not wait.

* + - * Additional events may include, but are not limited to the following:
        + Home or away football games that occur prior to the academic year.
        + Special Olympics
        + Spring football scrimmage
        + All basketball or football games during Thanksgiving week and weekend
        + Games and events during winter break
        + All Big Ten basketball tournaments
        + All basketball games that occur during spring break
        + Any other events prescribed by the coaching staff
    - POST SEASON PLAY
      * Football post season play **WILL** affect your winter break. In the event the football team is granted a post-season appearance, the spirit squad will be expected to attend. This **WILL** take place during winter break. Housing and per diem will be provided.
      * The Big Ten Basketball tournaments occur on the weekend of Dance Marathon. This is not an excuse for being unavailable for the tournament.
      * Basketball post season play **WILL** impact your spring break. NCAA/NIT tournaments occur during spring recess. Spirit squad members are expected to attend each event (Men’s and Women’s). Any additional basketball post season play will be required. **Team members should not expect to go home during spring break**. We will provide housing and per diem during this time. In the event there is no post season basketball, you will be able to go home.
      * The number of team members requested for all these events varies, however all team members are expected to be available to attend, and are required to return to Evanston for practices prior to the event. The coaching staff will do their best to assign all break related events as soon as possible. When housing during break is not available, the fund will provide accommodations if necessary.
  + DISCIPLINE
    - Team members are expected to follow all the guidelines of this constitution. Team members are expected to attend all assigned events and practices. Missed practices or events may result in removal from the team. Team members must be able to manage their academics. Team members are chosen based on skill, appearance, ability to function as a part of the team, and ability to act as an ambassador of the University. If at any time a team member is not following the guidelines above, or performing to the level that is expected, they may be substituted by another team member or may be removed from the team. If the coaching staff becomes aware of anyone falsely using illness, academic conflict or a family emergency to excuse an absence, that person will be immediately removed from the team. Any conduct found to be in violation of the University’s Student Code of

Conduct can result in the immediate dismissal of the team member(s).

* + - Expenses such as camp, equipment, living expenses during preseason, game travel and meal money will be covered by the fund. **If you quit or are terminated from the team prior to the end of the contract, you will be required to pay back all the expenses you incurred. This is approximately $2,000-$4,000**. The season runs from tryout 2018-tryout 2019.
  + AWARDS
    - Awards are at the discretion of the coaching staff and administration. The coaching staff/administration **may** choose to provide a scholarship dollars to certain team members for various reasons, including, but not limited to: attitude, coverage of games during certain breaks, athletic ability, or financial need.
    - Spirit squad members **may** earn a varsity letter. All assigned practices, games and events are mandatory, unless otherwise indicated by the coaching staff. **Any team member not participating at more than 1 assigned game, 2 practices or 2 events, will risk losing their letter eligibility**. This includes academic, illness and athletic suspension. This does not include injury, if appropriate measures are being taken to insure a timely return to the team, and the injured person is still in attendance events, as allowed by the medical staff. **If at any time, it is determined that a member has not performed according to the terms of this contract, the letter award will be withheld**. Awards are as follows:
      * 1st year – Letterman jacket
      * 2nd year – Watch
      * 3rd year – Blanket
      * 4th year – Plaque

**Note: These are general guidelines and do not by any means cover all of the circumstances that may occur. All situations will be handled at the discretion of the coaching staff and administration**.

This document confirms an individual’s understanding that membership on the team is a privilege granted by the Northwestern University Athletic Department and the Spirit Squad Staff. The coaching staff and athletic administration retain the right to remove any member of the team if such actions are warranted.

I have read and understood the attached rules of the Spirit Squad contract for 2018-2019 and agree to abide by them.

# Member Name Member Signature Date

# Parent Name (if member is under 18) Parent Signature Date

**Appendix A – Northwestern Athletic Social Media Policy**

As representatives of the Northwestern University Department of Athletics and Recreation, student-athletes should remember that they are held to a high standard of behavior. This includes any activities conducted on any social media websites, apps, programs or any other online site (e.g., blogs, personal websites, etc). While we support and encourage individuals’ freedom of expression and First Amendment rights, we are concerned about your safety, the well-being of all our student-athletes, and protecting the image and reputation of Northwestern University and its Department of Athletics and Recreation. Educating and protecting our student-athletes are our primary concerns.

If you discover any inappropriate information on the networking page of any Northwestern student-athlete, be a good teammate – talk with the student-athlete and express your concern. If you need assistance with the matter, reach out to a coach, your sport administrator, or any other athletics department staff member for assistance.

Social networking websites may be regularly monitored by a number of sources within Northwestern University (e.g., Athletics Department, Student Affairs, University Police) as well as sources outside of Northwestern (e.g., potential employers, internship supervisors). In addition to potential employers, an increasing number of graduate programs and scholarship committees also search these sites to screen candidates.

Northwestern student-athletes should be very careful when using online social networking sites and keep in mind that sanctions may be imposed if these sites are used improperly or depict inappropriate, embarrassing or dangerous behaviors. Those sanctions can include, but are not limited to: reprimand, suspension from practice or competition, dismissal from the program, and loss of athletics aid, if applicable.

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING GUIDELINES

The following information was developed to provide you with some guidance as to what type of behavior is appropriate relative to online social networking. These guidelines are not all inclusive; rather, they are intended to be used as a foundation for sound decision making.

1. Before participating in any online community, understand that anything posted online is available to anyone in the world.
2. Do not post your home address, local address, phone number(s), birth date or other personal information (e.g., class schedule, social plans).
3. Do not post any information that would violate Northwestern University, Athletics Department or student-athlete codes of conduct and/or state or federal laws.
4. Do not post any information, photos or other items online that could embarrass you, your family, your team, the Athletics Department or Northwestern University. This includes, but is not limited to, information, photos, quotes and other items that may be tagged to you from another user. Remember that you alone are responsible for the content that appears on your personal websites.
5. Do not add a “friend” unless it is actually someone you know. Many people are looking to expose student-athletes and/or gain information about your team that will assist in gambling activities or provide material for unsportsmanlike behavior from opposing fans. Be especially careful about allowing members of the media to “friend” or follow you, as well.
6. For tips and advice on positive ways to use social media, reach out to your athletic communications contact.

TEXT GUIDELINES

Words and/or phrases not permitted anywhere on your networking page, regardless of who posted them, include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. Any words or phrases considered to be harassing and/or discriminatory in nature on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation.
2. Any demeaning statements about or threats to any third party.
3. Sexually explicit language.
4. Curse words not permitted over the airwaves (e.g., George Carlin’s 7 words).
5. Words or phrases to describe excessive social activities ( References to tobacco, alcohol or drug use are not appropriate)
6. Words or phrases you would not want attributed directly to you should they be released publicly (e.g., newspaper, television story).

PHOTO GUIDELINES

Examples of inappropriate or offensive behaviors posted on social networking sites may include (but are not limited to) depictions or presentations of the following, regardless of who posted them:

1. Hazing, an activity that violates the Northwestern Student Code of Conduct.
2. Use of alcohol and drugs, regardless of age.
3. Lewd or lascivious behavior, including sexually explicit or revealing photos.
4. Photos meant to demean the individuals included in the photo.
5. Any photos you would not want publicly released on television or in a newspaper.

**Appendix 1.4 NU Spirit Squad Contract – Section on Appearance**

**Text

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**Appendix 1.5 Coach Bonnevier Certifications**

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**Appendix 1.6 Coach Bonnevier’s public response to the removal of tailgating**

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**Appendix 1.7 NU Meeting Notes from Heather Obering**

**Cheer Meeting – January 24, 2019**

Attendees:

NU Cheer: [redacted] and [redacted]

NU Admin: Mike Polisky and Heather Obering

**NU message:**

We care

We’re concerned

We will investigate

**Questions:**

Did you ask every member of the team to write a letter if they were interested?

-No – we went through the list of our teammates and we picked ones who we believed were capable and mature enough of this. Didn’t want Pam to find out. Anonymous was important

-Did not ask those who would sacrifice moving up to write them. Those individuals want to move up in the hierarchy

Other teammates say things behind Pam’s back, but they play the game. Sweet to Pam because they want to get what they want.

* [redacted] – doesn’t align with her values, so she doesn’t want to do it that way.

-countless conversations with both parents – how has this been allowed to go on for 10 years?

-biggest blow up – San Diego Trip – bar – didn’t tell us, didn’t prepare us. NAA/NGN event – at Barleymash. In theory only Northwestern people.

-Tailgating events – people touch us inappropriately. Pam laughs it off and says that’s just how it is. Team events – small winery event loved it. Loves Wilson Club. Bar that’s very packed – super crowded does not like that. Parking lots – walking around for an hour in the tailgates.

-controlled situations are fine vs. uncontrolled situations.

-tell Pam and it stops there. Never comes back to NU admins.

-Don’t’ get heads up on uniforms, agendas (seems wrong, but not in harms way).

-Don’t have schedule for next basketball game right now

[redacted]

-Pam’s attitude sometimes. Difference between being mean because you want them to be better, as opposed to be being mean just because you’re being mean.

-She wrote one letter

-Bus example in San Diego about going to the bathroom – being mean to be mean.

-Important people on the bus…..acts harsher when Heather’s around.

-

-Hair – [redacted] – has to have fake hair so she can look more like [redacted]. Perpetuated idea that she has ‘all-american’ look. Ask her if we can wear natural hair, she makes it impossible – can you get a wig, can you get hair.

[redacted] – All-Star cheerleading in high school. Practices are concerning – don’t stretch, don’t condition, don’t have drills. Feels like it’s unsafe. She got a concession. Fly a girl who has never flown before, she then stepped head/neck 15 times and she had a concussion. Couldn’t stunt/tumble at the Holiday Bowl.

-Teammates try to go to Cristina and she says ‘what are you doing?’. Pam shuts down when they ask.

Teddy Roosevelt – one legged extended stunts – not safe to do this here. Just ignored complaint and said just do it and counted it in.

Pam thinks unsafe situations are funny.

[redacted] – some girls afraid to come forward about injury. She personally convinces girls to try to go see Cristina. Pam discourages it.

-Girl’s face hit the ground and didn’t go to Cristina

[redacted] – three things really like

1. Personable – can have a convo with you. But then also has a business only relationship and doesn’t care about you as a person
2. Advocate on behalf at times (ie pre registration).

Does not find her to be educated in the cheer regard. Would be thrilled if she was a great coach and not a nice person, or a nice person and not a great coach. But doesn’t think she’s either

[redacted] -

Matt/Greg/Krissy – add value to the program but can’t commit their full time. But when they do come to practice, it enhances the practice

Greg there – does tumbling

Krissy – strength/conditioning

Matt – stunts

Can’t remember last time all three were there

[redacted] – only tumbled twice in practice since we’ve been here. Been here all year.

[redacted] – three things really like

1. Understands the culture. Why we need to be on a certain level as the #1 fans at a game. Embodies the passion that we have, and tries to persuade us to do the same. Matching her energy
2. Very energetic – louder than all of us if she could be at football games

Do you have fun being on the cheer?

[redacted] – I love my teammates. Have fun with my team.

-Gamedays – Pam is so flustered that it makes us flustered. Unprepared and then she screams

[redacted] – I am enjoying myself. I am a huge sports fan, so I’d be at the games regardless, but I’m the #1 fan. Enjoy it, enjoy performing, maintain during games the athletic ability. Like the energy. If you’re flustered/emotional, it catches on to me. Distracts self by being more involved in the game.

Basketball gamedays – [redacted]

-Pam doesn’t tell us what is going on during the timeout. Lack of ability to stretch and warmup pregame.

-Never know when we need to go out for halftime – frantic about the time to come out.

Football gamedays – [redacted]

-Organization not as severe – not any unpreparedness.

-First game is chaotic

Away football game uniforms –

[redacted] - Never find out what hotel they stay at

[redacted] - Never get an itinerary

-Minnesota – found out Wed/Thursday

Facebook – uses that to communicate

Tryouts – [redacted] sent in a video and that was standard.

-Heard from others that it’s not as professional or organized

-Nebraska – only takes 16 girls

[redacted] – tryouts – normal tryout – 20-25 girls outside of returnees who also re-tryout

-been on team and being 36 vs. 24. Haven’t seen a difference in my commitment

-been at tryouts when we haven’t taken everybody. It’s understandable why they are not on the team when we haven’t taken people

-doesn’t think a smaller team would necessarily be a benefit.

-still cheerleaders who are doing it only for the gear. Might be Pam’s favorite, or might have the all American look, or if they lack character

-those are the girls who weren’t asked to write letters

[redacted] – girls that do it for the gear and prestige only. Spirit Squad guys not included

Two letters from the spirit squad guys

[redacted] – conversations with Pam – this is why I do it.

-Pam would shut it down.

-Tailgating – she’d say ‘That’s just the way it is”

-hasn’t progressed in this way. Liberal diverse community at NU, and she’s not. She’s set in her ways

Option 1: Give pam opportunity to improve and re evaluate

Option 2: meet with Pam and the girls to talk with everyone

[redacted]- just don’t want the letters to go to Pam. Can stay in administration

-We don’t believe she can make the effective changes that are required. Issues that are deep seeded in her.

-She had a meeting with Cristina and Dr. Jain and they made recommendations

-If she can become a new Pam, that would be great, I just don’t know that could ever happen

-12 people in her apartment on Monday don’t think that.

[redacted] – in contract – why can’t people wear braids….extensions – why can’t people wear? She has not asked the question. Others have – response: why can’t you buys a wig?

[redacted] – thinks that if a Muslim girl tries out, Pam wouldn’t let her on the team. Pam can’t related to other cultures.

[redacted] – some people don’t understand cheerleading – Christina does understand – initiated warm up at the beginning of year but then it never continued

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1. I call on those who have taken a public stance on the Northwestern cheerleading case to continue to demand accountability from the University. There have been calls for “more information” in the Faculty Senate and in the *Open Letter to Northwestern Leadership and Community on Cheer Team Incidents.* If the faculty wants answers and this is not just virtue-signaling activism, then *Cheerleading at Northwestern University: A Case Study of Institutional Failure* is the most readily available and may remain the only source of information to answer these questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 seasons, the cheerleading team was all female, the mascots were all men. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I am not an anonymous interviewee. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Appendix 1.1 Interview Questions](#A1) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Appendix 1.2 Office of Equity Response to Clarification](#A2) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Northwestern University, *Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract,* 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. “Wilson Club,” Join the Cats*,* accessed March 24, 2021, https://www.jointhecats.com/seating-options/wilson-club.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Coach Bonnevier shared with cheerleaders that she and fellow staff members joked about the incident. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “FarmersOnly.com,” FarmersOnly.com, accessed March 24, 2021, https://www.farmersonly.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. “Diversity,” INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION, accessed March 24, 2021, https://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Northwestern University, *Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract*, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. “Pam’s expectation of darker women was to just wear a wig.” Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. “Pam explicitly [said] that I needed to wear a wig.” Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Linkedin, accessed March 26, 2021, https://www.linkedin.com/in/pamela-bonnevier-2a2a57153/. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. “Interscholastic Education, Made Easy,” NFHS LEARN, accessed March 26, 2021, https://nfhslearn.com/lookup/users/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&states%5B%5D=13&state\_name=Illinois&names%5B%5D=Bonne&schools%5B%5D=&commit=Search. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Cynthia R LaBella and Jeffrey Mjannes, “Cheerleading Injuries: Epidemiology and Recommendations for Prevention,” *PEDIATRICS* 130, no. 5 (October 22, 2012): pp. 969, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-2480. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. “Interscholastic Education, Made Easy,” NFHS LEARN, accessed March 26, 2021, https://nfhslearn.com/lookup/users/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&states%5B%5D=13&state\_name=Illinois&names%5B%5D=Bonne&schools%5B%5D=&commit=Search. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. “Cheer and Dance Safety Certification,” NFHS LEARN, accessed March 26, 2021, https://nfhslearn.com/courses/cheer-and-dance-safety-certification#crsFaq.; “Concussion in Sports,” NFHS LEARN, accessed March 26, 2021, https://nfhslearn.com/courses/concussion-in-sports-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Cynthia R LaBella and Jeffrey Mjannes, “Cheerleading Injuries: Epidemiology and Recommendations for Prevention,” *PEDIATRICS* 130, no. 5 (October 22, 2012): pp. 968, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-2480. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Cynthia R LaBella and Jeffrey Mjannes, “Cheerleading Injuries: Epidemiology and Recommendations for Prevention,” *PEDIATRICS* 130, no. 5 (October 22, 2012): pp. 969, https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2012-2480. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Athlete E (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Athlete E (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. The policy has been modified to comply with changes made by former U.S. Secretary of Education Devos. The Policy will likely be modified again based on the anticipated changes by now Secretary of Education Cardona. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. [Appendix 1.6 Coach Bonnevier’s public response to the removal of tailgating](#A6). [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Northwestern University, *Northwestern Spirit Squad Contract*, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. [Appendix 1.7 NU Meeting Notes from Heather Obering](#A7) [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Athlete B (former Willie) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Anonymous cheerleader email to Jim Phillips, screenshot message to author. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Athlete G (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Athlete G (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Athlete C (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Athlete F (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Athlete E (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Athlete D (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Athlete E (former cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Athlete H (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Athlete A (current cheerleader) in discussion with the author, December 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
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252. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Northwestern University, *COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
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