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DECONSTRUCTING THE “WINNER’S CIRCLE”

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Masters of Arts

in the Department of Sociology

University of Mississippi

By

TAYLAR N. BOLDS

August 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research has investigated black women in mass feminized sports cultures and spaces such as gymnastics, beauty pageants, and cheerleading, finding patterns of hegemonic ideals and the preference for “white” standards. I expand the narrative to include the twirling culture by investigating how female twirlers, and in particular black female twirlers, perform and embody femininity and whiteness. Using data from ten (10) semi-structured interviews and observations of three baton-twirling competitions, I investigate how female baton twirlers competing in one of the largest American baton twirling organizations embody femininity, as well as negotiate raced and gendered criteria in what I call the “Winner’s Circle”. I further explore how blackness, sexuality, and gender are mediated and negotiated in and through women’s bodies within the arena of baton twirling.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

A black American twirler competed in the Beginner Pageant Winner of America competition on July 20<sup>th</sup>, the first day of the National competition. One of two national judges included, Kris, a white female in her early sixties who has been involved in twirling world for over 40 years. During her competitive career, Kris was one of the first to twirl in the Miss America pageant after winning her state beauty pageant. The second judge was Jackson, a black male in his early forties known as a trailblazer for male twirlers. Jackson was the first male twirler at his University, as well as also being the first black American twirler. Jackson has always been an advocate for Black American twirlers throughout both his twirling and judging careers, as he is one who recognizes the disparity of black American twirlers in the advanced level as a serious problem.

Jackson described the following incident:

“Kris and I began to judge the beginner division. One of our first competitors was a dark skinned black American twirler and when she leaps to salute, I saw Kris tense up and stiffen her back. I assumed it was because of this little girl’s braids but I could not be sure until she told me what was on her mind. As she performed an element, her braids would graze the floor. The customary way to style one’s hair is that all twirlers compete with their hair in a bun; however, this girl did not conform to the expectation. I saw no problem with it, even though I myself prefer girls to twirl with a bun during competition.

Kris was fixated on the braids and could not focus on anything else. During the entire solo, Kris continually complained about the braids, how they reminded her of a mop and the fact that the braids were extremely distracting. Kris struggled with an appropriate way to phrase her displeasure with this twirler's braids on the score sheet and finally worded it in similar words as she would write on a white girl's score sheet, 'the hair was a bit distracting, perhaps a bun for more security. Kris placed this little girl near the bottom just because she reviled her braids so much'.

Jackson stated, "[I was] surprised that someone who has black students could focus on something so trivial, but then again I remembered the lack of diversity in the twirling world in general".

Whether she meant to or not, this twirler challenged the perceived notions of beauty, and because of that, she was marked down for not subscribing to dominant cultural standards. Defining the division between black and white twirlers, her hair failed to measure up to the normative standard, she caused discomfort among the judges, as twirlers are regulated to the appropriate and white beauty standard. Through Jackson's narration of the black twirler's hairstyle, it is possible to see the uneasiness that an black Americans' hair, beauty, and gender performance signifies, providing a critical analysis of cultural dominance and identity, suggesting that white beauty paradigms impact black female identities. Socially constructed norms and behaviors communicate acceptable beauty identities and uphold a paradigm of acceptable appearances that are often read through the lens of whiteness (Robinson-Moore 2008: 66). For example, non-normative hairstyles challenge assimilationist notions of beauty; perceived expectations and unwritten rules of what is accepted in National Baton Twirling

Association (NBTA) culture become the norm that twirlers learn very early and adhere to during the rest of their twirling careers.

I will examine how colorism, prejudice, the heterosexual standard, and emphasized femininity, as a form of femininity that is based on women's compliance with men (Currie, Kelly, and Pomrantz 2005: 229), both structures and organizes the sport of baton twirling. I will be using active interviews and observations to investigate how women baton twirlers, competing in one of the largest American baton twirling organizations, reflect dominant ideals of race, gender, and sexuality to negotiate their place in what I call the "Winner's Circle".

My research questions are:

1. How do dominant ideals and values connected to race, gender, and sex become embedded in baton twirling performance?
2. How do those who do not ostensibly reflect these ideals and values negotiate their place in the arena of baton twirling and during competitions?
3. How does the organization of baton twirling enable and constrain diverse racial identities and practices?

Baton twirling has grown tremendously over the years, with white competitors remaining in the majority of NBTA. Over the last 18 years involvement in the association, I have seen five (5) biracial or black twirlers in the advanced division out of hundreds. It is more common to see the black and biracial twirlers in the novice, beginner, and intermediate divisions. The black American twirlers who make the final Top Ten in the advanced division are overwhelmingly light skinned and have hairstyles similar to white beauty standards, embodying the racialized

culture of the sport. The sport seemingly reinforces and reflects the social boundary space between the groups. Many black twirlers are unable to cross the social space into the advanced division and spend years working to enter the “Winner’s Circle”, but unfortunately, to no avail.

Beauty and aesthetic regulation set the tone in the beginning years of a twirler entering the baton world and the competitor is able to fit and adjust to the “mold” in her early years of competing. Beauty is socially constructed, yet standards are a way of social control and those who do not adhere to the dominant beauty standards are castigated (Robinson-More 2008: 67) Unfortunately, the unwritten white standard of beauty continues to marginalize women who are not able to adhere to NBTA norms. Black American twirlers feel the pressure to conform, and many times the stringent regulations still hinder their ability to enter the “Winner’s Circle”. Both in formal and informal control, a competitor could receive comments on her score sheet about how a judge would like to see her hair and make-up or the judge could even speak with the coach if there are immense modifications they would like to see on the twirler. By emulating white hairstyles and beauty ideals, black twirlers have to convince judges in NBTA culture that they belong in the advanced division and have the ability to be a role model and “Winner’s Circle” member.

The dominantly defined beauty standards in NBTA were created and maintained by the culture’s elite. Reproducing the ritualized convention that hair, beauty, and gender is a performance; work must be exerted to achieve the ideal. Beauty cannot be quantified (Saltzberg and Chrslar 1997, 135) yet, because the standards of beauty in baton twirling are white, slim, and hyper-feminine; black women work overtime to measure up to such standards. Present in baton twirling and other forms of feminized cultures, racially defined beauty standards are oppressive for black women as they exclude skin color and hair types that many black women have

((Gaskins 1997; St. Jean and Feagin 1998; Taylor, 1999; Wolf, 1991) (Robinson-More 2008: 68)). White beauty paradigms communicate that lighter skin tones and long, straight hair is the standard for perceived female beauty, thus perpetuating a valuation of both skin color as well as hair texture among black Americans (Robinson-More 2008: 76). I was unaware of the problem because I was not only immersed in the sport but I also blended in perfectly. I'm light in color, my hair can be styled any way I choose, and the tights I wore matched my skin tone. Taking the stance as a black twirler within the larger culture of competitive baton twirling, in this thesis I identify the maintenance of racially defined beauty standards that are present in baton twirling. The performance of the white ideals for beauty and aesthetics has relegated black American women to maintain an unrealistic standard of beauty.

Beauty is subject to the social conditions of racism, sexism, and classism (Owens Patton 2006: 30) and, because NBTA is focused in large part on a beauty pageant, very few black and biracial twirlers have the ability to attain such nebulous standards. The color and hair hierarchy suggest that the more white one's features are, such as having a light skin tone and straight and long one's hair, the greater one's social value is. The social value of a twirler is based on her ability to demonstrate the white ideal and is seemingly marked by the dominant nature of baton twirling. I contend that such a "color caste hierarchy" promotes those who are more similar to the white ideal, hindering the darker skinned twirlers from being placed higher within their respective competitive divisions. Black and biracial twirlers within the baton culture style their hair or extensions for the "whitest" look possible and seemingly are rewarded for having it long and straight; the black competitor from the vignette violated one of the unwritten standards of baton twirling and wore her hair in plaited braids. While many biracial and black twirlers attempt to fulfill the defined beauty standards, the high cost of the various beauty regimens excludes

many women who cannot afford the emotional and financial cost of NBTA's accepted racialized gender performance.

Only the few privileged women, who are a part of the "beautiful club", are those who also win the Miss Majorette of America pageant. The work a twirler puts into her *bodywork*, demonstrates that she is a master of baton culture and is able to adhere to the norms and regulations. The work that the social actors do to their bodies to fit into the NBTA culture includes, but is not limited to, tanning salons, hair straighteners, gym memberships, diets, new costumes, and such work to fit into the dominant ideals and field becomes an embedded performance. *Bodywork* in NBTA culture is embedded in social symbols and status that supports and justifies the racial inequalities among female twirlers. Concern for beauty plays a role of how women are socialized, and by the twirler demonstrating she can do *bodywork*, NBTA culture is paramount, promoting the white, elite, hyper-feminine and sexualized ideal. The work a twirler puts into her gendered bodywork is performative, both in her twirling abilities and beauty and hair presentation, all to adhere to the NBTA standard.

What I call *bodywork* in this research combines what twirlers understand as body work in baton culture and the aesthetic effort a twirler put into their bodies to be as visually pleasing. The embodied work that twirlers perform in NBTA is all encompassing; what the dominant aesthetic is, is the same for all women in the cultural context, regardless of race. However, the experiences of biracial and black twirlers are unique because of the narrow nature of the sport. Black Americans see white skin tones and hair textures/lengths as a standard measure of beauty in NBTA culture, resulting in a light skin and long hair bias that has become inherently evident in black U.S culture ((Morton, 1985: Taylor 1999) (Robinson-Moore 2008)), as well as baton twirling. Gendered and racialized bodywork explains how white twirlers "fit" into the social

construction that is NBTA culture but also how biracial and black twirlers exert agency. Similarly to the twirler with the plaited braids, black women resist the dominant ideals and provide their own narrative of their bodies and performance. Gender, femininity, and sexualized performance provide a rationale for practice in NBTA culture; creating a relationship between social practice and the institutional structure that is baton twirling, ensuring inequality and domination over a certain type of women.

Baton twirling, like other areas in and outside of sport, offers a unique lens through which to view the dynamics of racial, classed, and gendered play and performance. In supporting the ideology of racism and sexism, white bodies are seemingly superior to black bodies, indicating one type of beauty is superior over another (Owens Patton 2006: 36). Those who adhere to the standardized model of gender and beauty have a better chance of entering the “Winner’s Circle” and maintaining the current dominant order. The production of femininity and masculinity for both men and women twirlers are dynamic social processes.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT IS BATON TWIRLING ANYWAY?

When baton twirling was first established, it was primarily isolated to majorettes in the parades; however, it is now a sport that has evolved from competitors manipulating a simple metal rod in their hands to a body coordinated routine consisting of intricate practices. Now, many advanced twirlers are able to twirl three to four batons at a time. There are various explanations of what baton twirling entails. Many commonly explain baton twirling as “spinning and throwing of a metal stick”, yet, very few know the difficulty and minutiae that actually makes up baton twirling. The World Baton Twirling Federation website does explain baton twirling as a sport that “manipulates a metal rod”, so in some ways the general public is correct. Conversely, as well as manipulating the metal rod, the body is coordinated in routine and performs moves similar to rhythmic gymnastics (World Baton Twirling Federation 2007). For a twirler to excel, he or she must create a visual and aesthetically pleasing image executed with “dexterity, smoothness, speed” twirling the baton both around the body, as well as with the baton released into the air (WBTF 2007). The expression of the body and the incorporation of gymnastics created elements of risk and excitement (WBTF 2007). Baton twirling blends all the characteristics of grace, beauty, and strength coded in race and gender, for a discipline aesthetically pleasing.

Baton twirling has become physically demanding and artistic in skill, encompassing the stamina and agility of ballet and gymnastics. Baton twirling combines many forms of dance and

gymnastics with technical baton movements for a most exciting performance. Utilizing time and space for artistic expression, athleticism and aesthetics are seen both on the field and on a competitive twirling competition (WBTF 2007). Baton twirling is an expression of the body and talent through dance and movement, showcasing the twirler's strength, finesse, beauty, aesthetics and harmony to their routines and music through the manipulation of the baton (WBTF 2007). The work of the body in baton twirling is all encompassing, combining the technical skill of the sport, demonstration of performance, and the work of their body to become the NBTA ideal. Accordingly to WTBF criteria, baton twirling is not only sport but also art.

### **Origin of Baton Twirling**

The origins of baton twirling are somewhat unknown and because of that, the exact invention is difficult to pinpoint; however, it was thought to have started at festivals in Eastern Europe and Asia (World Baton Twirling Federation 2007). Dancing to the sound of the music, people twirled knives, guns, and torches, feeling the rhythm of sound. Making its way into the armies, men would twirl their rifles to the army march, and when the army was parading, the rifle "twirler" was out in front (World Baton Twirling Federation 2007). The mace was imbalanced and easier to twirl, later replacing the rifle at the front of the band. Following World War II, popularity drew mace twirling to the United States with the help of the America Legion Bands and Fireman's Bands (World Baton Twirling Federation 2007). Mace twirling gained momentum and underwent a series of changes to make twirling it even easier, resembling the batons seen today. By elongating the mace, the hallowed and light baton allowed for the inclusion of women (World Baton Twirling Federation 2007).

Women's role moved into the public sphere and the turn of the century paved way for the modern drum majorettes. The World Baton Twirling Federation (WBTF) claims that baton twirling came to the United States after the father of modern baton twirling, Major Millsap, established the sport in Mississippi (1890). Returning home injured and on the losing side of the Civil War, Major Millsap founded Millsaps College (millsaps.edu) and introduced baton twirling to his students. Major Millsap called his majorettes "lady athletes" and the origin of the high-stepping majorette came about (Atwater 1964). Millsap's calling his "lady athletes", majorettes, was perhaps the first use of the word, as majorette was also the female derivative of the term drum major (Atwater 1964). Striving for equal rights during the Progressive Era, college educated women such as the ones at Millsaps College worked for political rights and became prominent patrons of culture (Macleod 1993: 291). The gendered expectations for women in the band defined their musical participation, and, for the most part, are still in place today. There were only certain instruments that men saw fit for women to play not wanting them to sweat or play and march, women were limited to instruments that could still be seen as delicate and graceful (Macleod 1993: 292). However, further worrying about the aesthetic of women, most of the time, male directors felt discomfort watching women play an instrument and girls in the marching bands were often shunned to baton twirling and flag-waving (Macleod 1993: 291). With the growing inclusion of women in bands, batons were modified to be even smaller, and lighter. The longer and lighter batons provided more accuracy and helped progress the sport throughout the world (WBTF 2007).

### **Twirling's Aesthetic Extension: The Baton**

Baton's now come in numerous sizes, weights, and styles. Twirling teams across the world have

specific baton preferences for a better ability to do higher tricks or smoother roll movements. Baton lengths depend on height, and the style depends on the balance partialities. Twirling batons include an elongated shaft, and two rubber balls, or tips at the end for balance so the baton does not roll away from the twirler (Hale and Miller 1972). To keep the audience entertained, and deter from the embarrassment of a twirler chasing after his or her baton when dropped, the weights in the tips established a center of gravity. For twirling improvement, batons not rolling away during a parade, football, or competitive performance, the uneven weight in the baton end tips provides ground and surface that brings the baton quickly to rest. In competition, a twirler not only loses points for dropping but also when the baton rolls out of the twirlers reach, it can affect their timing as well as the twirler's limited boundary; the baton modification was the solution for error of dropping (Hale and Miller 1972). Changes to the baton ball allowed for easier roll twirling, fewer injuries with the rubber on the ends, and higher tosses because of the weight differences thus improving the sport of baton twirling.

### **Organizational Histories**

No baton twirling organization has been formed to regulate the sport for its entry into the Olympics. All organizations are still operating today, although some have been absorbed or disseminated. Drum Majors and Majorettes of America (DMA), World Baton Twirling Federation (WBTF), World Twirling Association (WTA), Amateur Athletic Union (AAU-Baton), National Twirling Association (NTA), and Twirling Unlimited (TU) are just some of the few organizations that have taken baton twirling above and beyond.

## **The World Baton Twirling Federation: WBTF**

As the popularity of baton twirling increased throughout the world, its success brought about the formation of the World Baton Twirling Federation (WBTF). While many member countries have their own organizations, the WBTF governs the sport of baton twirling on an international level. In 1977, the President of the WBTF, Mr. John Kirkendall from Michigan, and leaders from around the world formed to develop and standardize the sport (WBTF 2007). This meeting between baton twirling national members in London England brought together many countries around the world (WBTF 2007). Following the initial meeting, the by-laws of the Federation were approved and debated by each representative, and in October, the Federation representatives met in Paris to finalize all organizational plans (WBTF 2007). Working to establish close affiliations with new countries, WBTF conducted the first World Demonstration of Baton Twirling in 1979 in Venice, Italy. It is said the crowds were outstanding, with an estimated 10,000 spectators watching the competition. All spectators watched in awe of the complicated routines, performed with precision and grace (WBTF 2007). WBTF wanted to create an environment where healthy competitions showed off the twirlers strength and worked to bring together teams of twirlers from ten countries to compete (WBTF 2007). Hosting its first stateside World Championship in 1980, the competition in Seattle, Washington was put on to show the athletic spirit of baton twirling. As WBTF gained its triumph, each year, one member country was able to host the championships.

The success of the WBTF paid off with new and developing countries; with countries additional involvement, close affiliation with the Federation allowed for later membership and status in the Federation (WBTF 2007). Pushing for baton twirling recognition in 1991, the official WBTF Constitution was signed by 14 member countries, completing the set of by-laws,

rules, and regulations (WBTF 2007). The main events of the World baton Twirling Championships were first Freestyles and Compulsory Moves, later adding teams and pairs in 1981 and 1993. To provide fairness, growth, and equality, new age divisions were included as well as provisional membership and affiliate memberships, encouraging participation (WBTF 2007). In 2005, the very first International cup was held in Minnesota, and events such as 1-baton, 2-baton, and team/group were offered Cups for their winnings. This competition in the United States was also when the age divisions were established; however, grouping was later changed for a fairer competition. A standardized judges training programs and Master Exam was established for all WBTF events, similar to what prospective judges in NBTA participate in (WBTF 2007). In 1993 baton twirling was presented to the public as a “promotional sport” to expand the sports reach, first performing at the World Games in Netherlands (WBTF 2007). The WTBF is committed to fairness, and the Board of Directors worked hard on specific focus areas that have standardized the sport of baton twirling through testing and development (WBTF 2007). Many twirlers, coaches, and parents see WBTF as inclusive, democratic, and honest, and the epitome of baton twirling excellence (WBTF 2007).

### **The United States Twirling Association: USTA**

The United States Twirling Association (USTA) was founded in 1958 as the first baton twirling organization to be run democratically (USTA 2017). USTA is also the only organization that remains to elect its own board of Directors through membership, run by a governing Board of Directors: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, four other board members, and five Honorary Board members (lifetime members) (Orr 1981). The United States Twirling Association has been a leader and innovator, known for design and implementing the set system at competitions,

regardless of twirling organization. USTA created the use of Olympic scoring judging and used a qualifying round for State, Regional, and National Competitions (USTA 2017). USTA created Dance Twirl and 3-Baton in 1976 and has opened its competition doors to athletes of all ages since 1974 (USTA 2107). USTA always uses more than one judge on state, regional, and national events; similar to how the National Baton Twirling Association, Twirling Unlimited and Drum Majorette of America organizations judge competitors.

USTA worked in their right to increase fairness and implemented the point system of tabulation, similar to how most other baton twirling organizations calculate scores (USTA 2017). The United States Twirling Association was also the first to develop comprehensive professional training programs for coaches and judges, and select athletes to represent the United States in World championships (USTA 2017). Though the National Baton Twirling Association now has World competing twirlers, USTA was the first to send a team of competitors to the World Championships in 1980. The United States Twirling Association and the National Baton Twirling Association has overlap with twirlers competing in both, USTA has more of a voice at the International level, and Japanese twirlers have found a home in this organization. United States Twirling Association's goal is to provide opportunities for members to participate in both recreational and competitive twirling by allowing gymnastics at competitions, thus better preparing twirlers for high school and field twirling (USTA 2017).

### **Drum Majorettes of America: D.M.A**

Drum Majorette of America (D.M.A) is a twirling organization that promotes the sport of baton twirling, both individual and group twirling alike. DMA is one of the largest and most active twirling organizations in existence, founded in 1947 by Victor Faber, acting director through

1960 (D.M.A Twirl 2017). In 1960, Mr. Faber names David R. Faber as National, Executive until retirement in 1998, and Doris Faber took over until her passing in 2014 (D.M.A Twirl 2017). Drum Majors and Drum Majorettes of America were similar to when twirling first began with more boys than girls anticipating in baton twirling. D.M.A was the first to separate categories of beginner, intermediate, and advanced level, such divisions that all twirling organizations use now, as well as later adding Special Beginner and Elite level (D.M.A Twirl 2017). To improve the appearance of the contestant, DMA established Best Appearing, an event where twirlers compete, and interview their modeling, not in a dress. Including this type of modeling event allowed for the twirler to showcase her “Circle T modeling ability” without the hindrance of a dress; the twirler had to perform not only her style but also her ability within the style. The D.M.A organization was focused on pageantry, and the selection of the “Majorette Queen of America, and “America’s Most Beautiful Majorette” was crucial to the National competition in the summer. D.M.A was the first to have a national contest in which contestant showcased one event and traveled to location, competing in person (D.M.A Twirl 2017). D.M.A has been known to have one of the largest team competitions and pon-pom lines, something that still to this day is solely done by Drum Majorettes of America (D.M.A Twirl 2017).

### **The National Baton Twirling Association: NBTA**

Over the years, with increasing popularity numerous organizations have emerged. One of the leading institutions within baton twirling, and the largest group in the world, is the National Baton Twirling Association. NBTA will be the organization I will focus on, and it was established in 1947, the first attempt to organize baton twirling gave way to the birth of the National Board of Technical Advisors (NBTA) led by the editor of *Drum Major Magazine*, Don

Sartell (Sartell 1965; Sartell 1999; Orr 1981). Sartell gathered some of the top twirling authorities of the time to organize the sport and to take part in testing and approving baton products by giving them a seal of approval where previously there was little or no regulation (Sartell 1999). Sartell would go on to teach more national champions than any other coach, host multiple national and world competitions, create an annual “Who’s Who in Baton Twirling” publication for outstanding twirlers, and founded a baton company for reliable twirling supplies (Orr 1981; Sartell 1999).

NBTA’s national competition, America’s Youth on Parade (AYOP), has been held every summer since 1970 at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana (though national competitions had been held for a number of years prior) (Sartell 1999). During this weeklong competition, contestants compete for national championship titles. The two biggest titles are the Grand National Twirling Champion (separate titles for men and women) and the Miss Majorette of America pageant. Miss Majorette of America (MMoA), founded in 1945, is an all-around competition in which the combined scores include modeling/interview (20 percent), twirling (40 percent and strut routines (40 percent) (NBTA 2015). Strut routines in NBTA are done with a floor pattern in the shape of an X (sometimes called “Super-X” or “Fancy” strut) and include both basic marching steps and free style portions; the baton may not be lofted or twirled (NBTA 2015). Strut is both an individual event, as well as a portion in the Miss Majorette of America pageant and because men do not compete in the pageant, they are also barred from the event all together. Men are not allowed to compete in any of the Miss Majorette of America or Grand National events, but rather compete in all-male individual events (solo events) and coed events (two-baton and three-baton).

The public only sees twirling settings such as parades, football half-time shows, and

basketball games; however, it is the NBTA organization and the local and National training sites that serve as the focus of my study.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**THERE SHE IS: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MISS MAJORETTE OF AMERICA**  
**WINNER**

**Theoretical Framework**

In this chapter I analyze the pressure of being athletically feminine as well as the demands that women twirlers have to negotiate to be masters in the twirling community. I investigate whether this feminized culture reduces gender and sexual inequalities to further conceal gendered power and privilege. In general, baton twirling has influenced how individuals perform race, gender, and femininity, specifically, the culture and habitus of baton twirling has socialized the social actors in accordance with the institutional settings. Bourdieu's concept of habitus encompasses how and why social actors perform to fit the dominant ideals and field they're embedded in. I will use concepts of hegemonic and emphasized femininity to understand how black bodies are out of place, specifically, how their gender and attempted feminine performance is perceived in the NBTA culture. For black and biracial twirlers, the hegemonic ideal is a vehicle of oppression, signaling their inferior status within the twirling habitus. Adhering to the dominant aesthetic is imperative for women to be seen as fundamentally feminine (Forbes et. al 2007: 266), referring to the gendered belief, values and practices that is required for the "Winner's Circle". The strict beauty standard serves to maintain gender inequality and unfortunately, many twirlers' bodily form is called into question. Gender, race and the feminine ideal is paramount in

bodywork, specifically, showcasing how women of color fare in the Nationals Baton Twirling Association.

### **The Greatest Female Athlete: Women in Sport**

In 1971 Title IX was passed: the federal law that guaranteed women and girls the same access to sports as their male counterparts (Hardin et al 2007: 212). Title IX was a part of the Education Amendment to the 1964 Civil Right Act, banning gender discrimination in educational institutions that are federally funded (Stevenson 2010: 2). Women jumped at the opportunity to enter the sporting arena; even today, participation still continues to break records (Hardin et al 2007: 212). In 1971 there were less than 300,000 girls involved in athletics, which is about 5% of high school women participating in school sports (Hardin et al 2007: 212). The number of women participating in sport rose from 1 in 27 women in 1972, to 1 in 4 by 1978 (Stevenson 2012: 2). Though it would take a decade for women and men to achieve the same participation rate, the passing of Title IX was a win for U.S youth. In sports, the visible gender controversy for the past 30 years was fought and won to open doors for women athletes. Title IX ties gender relations to some of our culture's most powerful institutions, not only sport, but also education, and economics ((Lane, 1998) (Hardin et al 2007: 212)). Athletic participation is associated with higher employability and increased ambition. Specifically, later in life, high school athletes show a positive relationship between educational attainment and wages (Stevenson 2010: 5). Women's ability to enter the sporting arena establishes their ambitious desires as well as leadership skills (Stevenson 2010: 5). Athletes have skills that are later valued by the workforce.

Women in sport, as compared to men, have little screen time on television; even now women sports are not viewed as widely as men dominated sports. When Congress passed Title

IX in 1971 it received little attention, and it took years for the media to cover the Title IX issue (Hardin et al 2007: 213). Title IX was met with resistance because of the requirements to fund women sports and defund sports such as basketball and football, sports that were thought to provide the most revenue and benefits to the school (Hardin et al 2007: 213). Women sports were expected to operate with lower budgets, poorer faculties, and less attention and Title IX was termed the “gender quota law” by opponents (Hardin et al 2007: 213). Women’s sports were destined to fail and pitted against men’s sports in the battle for finances. The decision of Title IX deemed women’s sports second-tier, and at many turns, Title IX was fought for repeal. In 2004 and 2005 there was a Supreme Court challenge of Title IX. Fortunately, because of Sandra Day O’Connor’s vote the law protections were preserved ((Hardin, 2005) (Hardin et al 2007: 215)).

In the beginning years, Title IX was framed as a “war” on men’s sports, and many misunderstood the roles and implications of what the law did. Title IX forced a narrative of the interplay between sports and education in the US. There are many assumptions about sports and gender relations; however, this fight for equal rights was at the forefront of civil rights legislation, pushing for a better understanding of the law, and impact on both high school and collegiate athletics (Hardin et al 2007: 233). Baton twirling was one of the ways women could get on the playing field (Trejos 2001).

While Title IX required equal treatment of men and women sporting teams Title IX, unfortunately, had a loophole. Women’s and men’s sports teams did not have to have the same services and many times women are discriminated against in terms of the locker rooms, recruitment, and publicity (ncwge.org). Women lack the resources for uniforms, practice and game facilities, as well as overall funding for school-sanctioned sports, limiting their sporting performances to out of school activities. Schools are not proactively satisfying women’s interests

in sport, leading women to turn to recreational activities such as gymnastics, dance, and cheerleading. Women were limited in their participation; however, the Title IX opened up competitive sports to women as well as transforming those who twirled, from majorettes into athletes. Women were moved from the sidelines to competitive sport, both feminized and contact sports alike. The progression of women into sport is critical in understanding how women in sport were represented, and how women are still assumed to act. The idea of gender as a system of satisfaction was important in the 1980's, however, moving towards the 1990's and post-Title IX, the conceptualization of gender became more dynamic and the performance of gender evolved (Holman 2015: 15). Gender as a social structure (Risman 2004) and institution is seen in baton twirling, particularly in the NBTA organization.

Baton twirling is a sport that many women, and to a lesser extent, men have dedicated years of their life to. Many twirlers begin twirling at five or six years old, twirling through high school and college, learning the norms and standards that allow the twirler to excel in the NBTA organization. Over the years, baton twirling has become a "gender- appropriate" sport with a limited number of men twirlers, catering more so to women. The gendered boundaries of baton twirling allow for the critique of the construction of gender and performance. Gender is deeply embedded in society. Not only does the social structure act on the individual but also the individual acts on the social structure. The interpretation of the twirling culture is reflexive in the social actor's interactions, meaning, so much of the culture has been taken for granted that many times they will not articulate or even consider why they act in such a way. The cultural meaning goes beyond verbal justification and seemingly becomes routine.

Women participating in sport have increased from the passing of Title IX and though many women do play sports such as softball, basketball, or golf, many women are frequently

drawn to feminized sports (Musta and McGann 2016: 102). Girls fled to cheerleading and gymnastics, activities that have combined “feminine” performance and prestige, encouraging participation because the respect these sports received (Grindstadd and West 2006: 500). Such feminized sports began as a way for women to show their athleticism; however, with small changes over the years, athletic activity came to only function for social consumption (Sewart 1987). Performing for social consumption, the spectacle of sport became bigger and more extravagant. Athletes in commodified sports thrive on having the best equipment and uniforms, signifying their status. In baton twirling, specific status factors (Fitzmaurice and Comegys 2006: 287) such as having picturesque pageant dresses and sparkly costumes, communicates their status to coaches, fans, and most importantly to the judges.

The nature of baton twirling includes both the cult of winning (Sewart 1987), the Miss Majorette of America “star”, and the exciting athletic talent of the twirler. Over the years, the costumes have become more extravagant, the tricks are more difficult, and the sport of baton twirling is seen as commodified entertainment. In competitions, twirlers entertain the judges, and on the high school and college football fields, twirlers entertain the parents and fans that come out. The NBTA culture of baton twirling is entertainment that puts tremendous pressure on the twirlers to please the judges. Certain events draw larger crowds, such as College Day and Miss Majorette of America Day. Twirlers in these performances know the more the audience cheers for them, the more likely a judge is able to remember them in a group of 60 girls. The “WOW” award and the “Presentation” section on the score sheets, emphasizes the twirlers expectation to entertain and they are penalized if they falter. Winning Miss Majorette of America comes with a crown, bragging rights for years to come, celebrity status from other twirlers, and being in the limelight where everyone knows your name. The spectacle and theatricality of NBTA has lured

many to doing the Miss Majorette of America pageant, dedicating ten plus years to the sport. Over the years, the spectacle of winning and being a part of the “Winner’s Circle” has modernized NBTA into a sport that symbolizes their social membership. I used the “Winner’s Circle” as a metaphor for the winning placement that is only accessible to a select few. Becoming the Miss Majorette of America winner, in any age division, is a bond for twirlers alike as well as an honor for years to come.

Baton twirling is centered on artistry, dramatic marvel, and interpersonal relationships, all seemingly crucial to a twirlers identity. Baton twirling as sport has symbolic communication that social actors practice while learning the written norms and ideals. Baton twirlers learn how to do their hair, what tights to wear, how to choose a pageant dress, and what is an acceptable costume for each age division through trial and error. Parents and coaches of the twirlers learn by watching what is done in the NBTA culture and many times when they perform the “wrong” aesthetic, they are penalized in their score. The NBTA culture provides solidarity, sociability, and the desire to be a part of the select few who are in the “Winner’s Circle”. In sport and baton twirling, social behavior is shaped by values and ideals informed by subjective communication of the habitus rather than technical nature (Best 2011). Specifically, the twirlers technical perfection of routine is focused less on the athleticism of the twirler but instead how well they visually look when performing.

Baton twirling, like other feminized cultures, encourages the amplification of femininity in the sporting context. The ideal twirler has been constant over the years; physical appearance and the idyllic body, regardless of the twirler’s specifics (Braun et. al 2007: 256). The time, energy, and emotional efforts to fit into the physical standards of the feminine ideal are encouraged. Grace and poise are accompanied by demeaning beauty characteristics for women,

their bodies are habitually scrutinized and it is clear that physical appearance and overemphasized feminine traits is of great importance. In baton twirling, gender and femininity is done in two ways, first by the choreographed gender embedded in the baton routines, and secondly, by how well the twirler presents their gender and femininity (Holman 2015: 16). Twirlers who succeed at both are seen as masters of the culture, and are able to enter the “Winner’s Circle”.

### **Do I Belong here?: Identity Movement and Social Capital**

Gender in this research refers to the embedded structure of the individual, and interacting as a dimension of society (Risman 2004: 429). Gender as a structure is embedded in all social processes of a baton twirlers life and as argued by gender, as a modern institution, constructs women as a group to be subordinated to men ((Lorber 1994) (Risman 2004: 431)). Specifically, for twirlers, social interactions with peers, judges, and coaches emphasize the accountability of others and the focus of “doing gender” correctly reproduces inequalities. “Doing” gender “appropriately” is structured in discourse, and the language of baton twirling is widely shared by the social actors within the habitus.

To understand how gender, femininity, identity, and later, how bodies out of place operate in baton twirling, these theories must be examined in relation to Bourdieu’s work of habitus. Baton twirlers’ motivations, as well as desire to win the Miss Majorette of America pageant is explained through the baton twirling habitus. The identity of any twirler can be understood by the habitus of NBTA culture, reinforced by the field and capital he or she has obtained. The constraint and collective life of baton twirling impose norms and standards, meaning their actions are purposive, and the field as a social structure coerces social actors to

maximize their self-perception. (Risman 2004: 432). An individual's field is in relation to the structure of difference, meaning the differences between groups and individuals is in relation to the institution as well as the position of the social actor, based on their possession of capital (Husa 2013: 265). For baton twirlers to move throughout the field they must possess social capital, for example, twirling qualifications and pageantry titles. The social space of baton twirling provides the possibility to consider the expressive aspects of different movements (Husa 2013: 256), specifically into the "Winner's Circle". Husa articulates that field and habitus cannot be understood separately (2013: 267). In baton twirling, the field is linked to the ability to access the advanced division, the aspiration to win Miss Majorette, and the expectation to look aesthetically pleasing.

The identity movement refers to the social movement based on identity, with respect to gender, race and the feminine ideal (Husa 2013:256). The toolkit of field, capital, and habitus informs the movement of certain twirlers, as well as their social position. Specifically, for many twirlers, their movement is limited from the advanced social space because of their identity. The twirlers ability to do gender, race and femininity "correctly" becomes a political point of departure (Husa 2013:256), framing the possible opportunities and obstacles for social movement. The Bourdieu framework explains interrelatedness in relation to social position and takes into account movement, action, and social spaces. The social position of a baton twirler is explained by the practice of identity management, gender regimes, and power-related concepts, proving insight to the relationally of the twirling habitus.

The power of gender has the ability to divide human beings into different types. For men, and specifically for women, there are role expectations that are attached because of their gender

category (Risman 2004: 432). Bourdieu's field and societal processes in the baton twirling culture have established the structure of power, leaving a lasting effect on twirlers in the field. The behavior of social actors and the larger gender disposition is better understood using Bourdieu's habitus; contributing to the fluid relationship between gender and sport (Mennesson 2012: 5). The construction of gender is seen through symbols and power relations; the model of representation, as well as the implicit and physical forms of pressure, is present at every societal level (Mennesson 2012: 5), including in the baton twirling culture. Rather than theorize how gender differences are constructed, Connell provided a model to understand gender dynamics (Mennesson 2012: 5). According to Connell, and similar to Bourdieu's work, "the presence of structure becomes an active structure by practice" (Mennesson 2012: 5). The structural level is not prioritized over the individual level to understand gender, but instead how state of gender relations is expressed in different contexts. According to the situation, gender is structured, meaning that without notice social actors internalize ideas and practices and the gendered social relations are governed without conscious control.

Building upon what Bourdieu introduces as habitus, the individual construction of gender is conceptualized by the internalized manners of the body as well as taking care of it. People's habitus governs their practices and ideas, all without the individual knowing they are being unconsciously controlled by it. Social actors embody the manners and actions to maintain membership in the culture and to advance within said culture (Mennesson 2012: 6). The habitus is constituted within a certain social space and social, cultural, and economic capital enables access to power. The social actor's field of difference implies "a set of objective relations between positions" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 16). Providing opportunity for social actors, an individual's precondition factors are based on their possession of social capital, gender,

their ability to adhere to the feminine ideal, as well as their race. Those who adhere to white, feminine characteristics are seen as trajectory agents (Husa 2013:266) and have the possibility of movement into the “Winner’s Circle”. The baton twirling habitus is embodied and internalized by the social actors. Baton twirlers “do” gender and femininity through practice and representation of their structural position; their perceptions, expressions, and actions have become situated through the system of reproduction (Husa 2013:266). For baton twirlers, they adapt the language and conduct of the objective structure and while black twirlers aspire to be appreciated by the habitus, many times they fall short because of their preconditioned social background. Gender, femininity and social capital are interconnected in the NBTA habitus in relation to sports capital, and who has the ability to win Miss Majorette of America. To understand baton twirling, we must first understand how gender has been historically constructed and reproduced, accommodating the white, hyper-feminine women who win Miss Majorette of America.

Baton twirling began as a sport dominated by men and the culture sprang from a militarized and patriarchal influence. Organized by and for men, baton twirling still privileges men even though they are now the minority; their twirling is seemingly more exciting, giving men twirlers celebrity status. Many times men place higher than their women counterparts in combined events, and the men in baton twirling are known by a first name basis. The limited number of men in baton twirling allows for fans to get to know them on a personal level; many going out of their way to watch their performances. Baton twirling has socialized the men and women twirlers in opposite ways. Women are trained to be graceful, poised while subtly portraying their athleticism, men on the other hand are meant to be strong and powerful, struggling to place well if they twirl “like a girl”. However, women athletes in feminized sports

are also socialized differently than women athletes in more aggressive sports, and the theory of habitus and field is used to understand identity politics for women in general. The construction of gender cannot be understood without the institutional context, and in baton twirling, there is a complexity between twirlers and their form of femininity and gender. Baton twirling is organized based upon hegemonic femininity; twirlers are there to please the dominant men, suppressing women twirlers to be seen as passive and judged based on their looks.

Baton twirling has made its mark, catering to both men and women twirlers, yet baton twirling is pivotal in maintaining distinctions between the sexes. There are events, tricks, even costume preferences that become the unspoken rules of what twirlers can and cannot do based upon gender. Men hold the positions of power in most every organization in baton twirling and control the development of women twirling practices. Reinforcing the isolation of women twirlers, gender dictates how women twirlers must look and the bodily appearance of the twirler is fundamental to her identity. The demands for femininity are explicit and trigger conformity. Twirlers strive to master the NBTA standard to display their heterosexuality and femininity, attempting to justify they are authentic. Placing substantial value on physical appearance, baton twirlers who conform to “proper” femininity, and those who demonstrate their gender “correctly” are favored within the NBTA habitus. Baton twirling is multifaceted, different divisions have different rules; however, there are still written and un-written rules to succeed in NBTA in general. The possibility of moving through the divisions to one day win Miss Majorette of America is the driving force of twirlers dedicating their lives to baton twirling. In NBTA particularly, those who possess the most are those who adhere to the norms and standards set forth. For the most part, twirlers know that to win in NBTA your hair, makeup, and overall look must be a certain way. The social capital for those who are able to adhere to the norms and

standards means movements and networks, all of which are institutionalized relationships of mutual recognition (Husa 2013: 269).

Black twirlers assume a taken for granted position in the field of baton twirling; limited by their mobility, they are not able to accrue more capital and they lack the ability to promote their talents in NBTA. Respect in baton twirling, gymnastics, ice skating and other feminized sports is earned through blood, sweat, and tears (Onset 1995) and while for many years only men within each sport had access to symbolic capital, the increase of women athletes demonstrating skill, courage and commitment have earned many to gain culture status (Thrope 2009: 494). However, femininity is, in fact, a potential form of cultural capital. Within baton twirling, through the recognition of one's bodies as feminine, and capitalizing on their womanness (Thrope 2009: 495), many twirlers are able to receive higher results. The women who choose to privilege their slender and elegant bodies similarly to the white beauty standard are rewarded in terms of their score sheets; however, the twirlers who are muscular and stockier in build experience ideological constraints and/or never win the Miss Majorette of America title.

The epitome of social structures and racial classification today is common. People routinely catalog individuals and leave the configuration of the habitus to be reinforced (Brubaker et al. 2004: 33). While some women twirlers are able to negotiate space within the baton-twirling arena; accumulating symbolic and gender capital and who does bodywork correctly is determined by the white and men valuation system ((Anderson 1999, Thrope 2005) (Thrope 2009: 499). Bourdieu's concept of habitus-field complex and the emergence of baton twirling as sport offers a more detailed account of how lived bodily practices open up a theoretical space for a more "complex understanding of the interplay of social structures or fields, individual agency, and the creative evidence in the reproduction of identity" ((McNay

1999, Powell, 2008) (Thrope 2009: 510)). Bourdieu's work of embodiment in sport and physical culture sheds light on the some of the omission and gaps between and across the field of feminized cultures and sport. Bourdieu's concepts have the potential to highlight the uneven and discontinuous nature of changes in the gender identities of young women (Thrope 2009: 510).

Making sense of the arena of baton twirling, our experiences of persons and actions carry with it expectations and a perceived "knowledge" about how each individual of said category characteristically behaves. These beliefs are embedded in persons, narrative, and discourses, as well as institutions and organizational routines, such as the habitus of baton twirling (Brubaker et al. 2004: 38). Organized hierarchically through mundane interactions, baton twirlers learn and embody the habitus through context cues (Brubaker et al. 2004: 38). The definition of baton twirling and feminized sports may be infinite; however, through an introductory set of observations, the concept of habitus is central to how race, gender, and sexuality inequalities become embodied.

Over time, gender and sport have encompassed sports femininities, specifically to explain how social and political changes have developed both in and outside sport (Scraton and Flintoff 2013: 96). With the critical engagement of the feminine discourse, complex arrangements of gender, race, age and even sexuality explain how gender relations are not static; expressly, differences in sports stem from socialization practices carried out by the institutions (Scraton and Flintoff 2013: 97). Structural power relations are the result of the male patriarchy (Scraton and Flintoff 2013: 97) and fundamentally, the agenda of sport underlie the governing bodies. Gender and the centralized feminine ideal becomes the site of social and sexual control over women. Social institutionalization is the defined norm for individuals within the twirling habitus, meaning the dominant aesthetic is the only legitimate way to do gender and femininity.

### **Defining Hegemonic Femininity: An Avenue for Analyzing the “Ideal”**

Sports allow women to embrace power and aggressiveness, yet in many feminized sports, women’s athleticism as has been normalized to mirror the “acceptable” form of femininity. Hegemonic femininity, as defined by Musto and McGann (2016: 109), is the pattern of practices that emphasizes the subordination of women and femininity to men as well as reinforcing the notion that men are “supposed” to be masculine (Messerschmidt 2012: 60). Women in baton twirling are expected to be graceful and artistic while showing off their athleticism. There is a tension between woman twirlers being too athletic and seen as girly. Feminized sport reproduces gender and ideology (Musta and McGann 2016: 101), and twirlers are expected to be athletic in ability; yet feminine in overall appeal. The Miss Majorette of America pageant in NBTA leaves out athletically built twirlers and illuminates the “situatedness” of gender (Musta and McGann 2016: 101). The link between “doing” gender and beauty gives added importance to the process of constructing the hierarchy of femininities (Musta and McGann 2016: 103). Twirlers who do not adhere to the NBTA ideology find that their athletic femininity is not valued.

In sport, women who are intrinsically feminine are valued, but to understand gender and sexuality, we must first deconstruct sporting bodies that have been reproduced since the late 1800’s (Musta and McGann 2016: 101). Much like baton twirling, men are supposed to be fundamentally masculine, and women are assumed to be feminine, further naturalizing gender relations. Hegemonic femininity in sport encourages to women to be passive, take up less space and twirlers are no exception. Sport normally is incompatible with womanhood, and baton twirling has valorized a new type of sporting body, one that fits into a pageant dress, but has the strength to leap bounds across the floor. Those twirlers whose athleticism is obvious are coined “stocky” and “built”, suspected of having deviant sexuality. Constructing these women as

deviant contradicts the ‘heterosexual opposites’ (Musta and McGann 2016: 101). This formation of women athleticism limits such twirlers from ever winning Miss Majorette of America. Sport further reconstructs gender, as well as naturalizes women’s athleticism in which there is a feminine hierarchy. By constructing oppositional differences between men and women, distinctions among women are repeated.

Masculine twirlers are “others” in regard to the ideal twirlers and have a much harder time navigating between athleticism and mannishness, faltering when it comes to the pageantry, an event that has a large part in NBTA. Striving for toned and lean bodies is critical in baton, as well as having long hair and having your make-up perfect. It is all part of self-constructing and the unsaid regulation of the feminized culture. The NBTA norms become standard and internalized, translated by the many interactions with peers, judges, and coaches. The hierarchical binaries (Schippers 2007; Musta and McGann 2016: 103), are predictable in baton twirling, binding both men and women twirlers to masculine and feminine relationships. Gender plays out differently in sport and “doing” gender is not consistent across all settings. In basketball, soccer, or softball, the women’s athleticism is at the forefront; their power and aggressiveness are embraced through contact (Musta and McGann 2016: 102). While women’s athleticism has been normalized, there is still tension between hegemonic femininity. In sports such as cheerleading, ballet, and baton twirling, gender relations are very similar, and athletic femininity for such activities is focused on the feminine. Taking up less space to be seen as passive become strategies to navigate the cultural signs of womanhood (Musta and McGann 2016: 102); women’s sporting bodies are self-regulated. These sports with no body contact facilitate femininities that adhere more closely to the cultural standard. The women self-stabilize

the symbolic gender order, further translated through interactions with peers, judges, and institutions.

The twirling narrative, similar to society, shapes how women “do” gender, femininity, and race. Though women’s sports are post-Title IX, there is little variation in women’s athletic femininity. There is a marked dynamic between “natural” differences, and what is reinforced to heighten the binary. Understanding gender is critical in baton twirling and provides another narrative to the imagery that undermines the women’s body as weak, fragile and inferior to the men’s body (Musta and McGann 2016: 102). Though women twirlers are graceful and poised, they are also powerful in their own right.

### **The Chains of Emphasized Femininity**

Multiple femininities are produced ((Collins, 1991; Connell, 19871; Ezzell, 2009; Schippers, 2007; Sterk & Knopper, 2009) (Musta and McGann 2016: 101)) and in the sport of baton twirling, there is a hierarchy of femininities in relation to each other. Emphasized femininity as coined by R.W Connell is “a form of femininity, that is at the level of social relations, and is based on women’s compliance with men” (Currie, Kelly, and Pomrantz 2005: 229). While all forms of femininity are contrasted in the context of men, the characteristics attributed to white women are hegemonic and emphasized femininity is defined around subordination of black women to white women (Schippers 2007: 87). “White, middle-class, and sexually normal” is the most accepted form, the hegemonic ideal (Musta and McGann 2016: 102). The dominance of hegemonic femininity depends on marginalized and subordinated femininities, specifically, empathized femininity. Black women have to emphasize their femininity at the symbolic level in relation to white women. Wearing their hair long, maintaining the ideal body, and exuding

confidence, black twirlers consider the characteristics of the white ideal, attempting to align with white hegemony.

A pattern prevalent for many is women feel pressured by societal norms to perform beauty at all times. In baton twirling, twirlers are pressured to perform gender, femininity, and beauty “correctly” to win over the judges. Twirlers define themselves in comparison to other twirlers and judge’s score based upon this hierarchy; who has the best and most flattering costumes, the perfect make-up and most toned body. The twirling culture is grueling, and the physical and emotional energy women twirlers exert to fashion their identities hints at the desire to be seen as aesthetically pleasing to the judges. Hair, make-up and even the heels twirlers wear is part of emphasized femininity, a powerful symbol that positions girls into what is seen as mainstream baton culture.

In baton twirling, there are unstated rules. Learning at a young age how to look, dress, and act, those who adhere to these combined features are Miss Majorette of America pageant winners; recognizing that is a certain kind of person who can enter the “Winner’s Circle”. To become a known baton twirler within the NBTA culture, you must express particular beliefs, demonstrate the technical knowledge about baton, display the risk while exuding confidence, and portray yourself in a certain way. Emphasized femininity is linked to racial differences, and those who adhere to the NBTA culture are rewarded with Miss Majorette of America titles. How twirlers “do” beauty, gender, and femininity is highly visible in baton twirling, providing imagery as well as a narrative to better understand the construction of the women’s body within the habitus.

## **I have to have the “look”: The Subjective Experience of Aesthetic Labor and bodywork**

For a man or woman twirler to be a master in the NBTA, they must create beautiful visual images showing creativity with dance moves, technique, and execution. Combining what twirlers understand as body work in baton culture, and the aesthetic efforts a twirler puts into their bodies to be as visually pleasing is what I will call *bodywork* in this research:

“The embodied work of social actors in performing the dominate aesthetic of a given culture context”.

The term bodywork as understood in the baton twirling habitus is expanded upon from the sociology of the body and aesthetic labor. Aesthetic labor is concerned with the stylization of the body as requirements, embodying the attributes “to look good sounds right” ((Warhurst and Nickson 2009) (Holla 2016: 476)). The sociology of the body recognizes the work put into one’s body, including mundane tasks has largely been ignored (Barbalet, Kang and Wolkowitz 2007: 1). Previously studied bodywork, and *bodywork* in this research focuses on gender and the gendered processes that become the backstage body work required to maintain acceptable standards. As a baton twirler, *bodywork* perfected on the score sheet, as well as the embodied work essential of the twirler becomes integral to their success. *Bodywork* and body work, as similarly studied in the sociology of the body becomes discipline; baton twirlers are conscious of how superiors see them, specifically their judges and coaches. The presentation of their body is based on costuming, hairstyles as well as weight (Barbalet et al. 2007: 4). *Bodywork*, aesthetic labor, and body work, as studied by Barbalet et al. perpetuates the subordinated position within the gender hierarchy (2007: 6). The physical and emotional efforts that become expectations are

deemed socially appropriate because the Miss Majorette of America winners reinforce such expectations. Bodywork is similar to aesthetic labor; baton twirlers have to be seen as winners, and twirlers all over the country adapt their appearance to be seen as the standard within NBTA culture. Women twirlers bodies must be toned, but not too muscular, and we must have the look of being hyper-feminine and elite. Many twirlers achieve this through intense workouts and diet, working to slim down our bodies for the summer to transform into the dominant aesthetic. The decision regarding diet and exercise is based on physical looks; however, twirlers still have to have the right costume, tights, hair and make-up to have the right look. The effort to justify, and maintain a coherent self, twirlers personal lives have also been guided by the NBTA imperatives. The demand to fit into NBAT culture is demonstrated through unwritten criteria, similar to the modeling industry, which is sometimes not easy to adhere to. As formally studied in modeling, in the habitus of baton twirling the twirlers sense of self is many times jeopardized.

The style of baton twirlers has changed over the years; beginning with white socks and slicked back hair to extravagant hairstyles and tights to match the skin tone. Without notice, the style can change and twirlers are expected to fit and change without missing a beat. Twirlers are required to maintain their bodies, and though this is an unwritten norm, malleability is required on a neutral basis. Models engaging in aesthetic labor have to meet the basic requirements; meaning thinness, and professional involvement, and while baton twirling requires the same amount of commitment, there is no client giving orders. Baton twirlers with the help of their parents and judges have to perfect their own envisaged image. The “job” baton twirlers want is to be considered for is Miss Majorette of America; maintaining a certain aesthetic surface involves producing a certain type of self, personality, and body. To keep up appearances baton

twirlers engage in both emotional and physical efforts and discipline to fit to be the product deemed appropriate by NBTA.

Both models and baton twirlers can not take off their aesthetic costume, (figuratively speaking) they can not walk away from the product because they are the product (Holla 2016: 477), and how well they've sold the market of beauty is determined by the job they get or if they have become a part of the "Winner's Circle". The relation between body, work, and self has become salient, and in the modeling industry and baton twirling culture there is no real space for self-definition. The habitus of baton twirling "assigns" the look that wins Miss Majorette of America, and twirlers have become passive in their overall look. Controlled by the hegemony, a baton twirlers look is not her own, and twirlers are required to always be "on". Aesthetic labor is organized by work, deemed what is appropriate by the habitus they are immersed in. The twirlers personal, and baton twirling appearance has become entangled, leaving little room for their own self-hood. Similar to models, baton twirlers follow a specific path if they want to be seen as the "model" twirler. Aesthetic labor is highly gendered, and similarly to the twirling habitus, the repertoire is shaped by context and constrained by contextual legitimacy.

### **THE ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF BODYWORK: WHY IT MATTERS**

Furthering research in the sociology of the body, body work as understood work place, modeling, and everyday life is the body/appearance work of any person (Barbalet 2007:2). While there are many similarities of aesthetic labor and bodywork, *bodywork* as understood in my research, understands the beautiful pictures baton twirlers are judged on to achieve a high bodywork score on their score sheet. Their twirling, and bodies must communicate they are enjoying their performance. Baton twirlers are rewarded if the work put into their bodies, both

mentally, physically and emotionally, conveys to the judges their excitement and empowerment of themselves. Women in the modeling industry and baton twirling culture embody such capacities to have the look, and those who do are organizationally mobile. In baton twirling that means a twirler moving through the divisions, to eventually be a part of the “Winner’s Circle”, both twirlers and models have to engage in training, management and regulation (2006, 791) (Holla 2016: 478). In the NBTA, there is already an appropriate style of service and it is reproduced when the twirlers enter the baton twirling world, leaving behind a superficial product of work on the twirlers body. The entire self/body is involved to keeping up appearances, and both twirlers and models have to adapt their lifestyle and embody their entire self. Producing the aesthetic value linked to their aesthetic labor, as acknowledged in the context of the habitus, the judges in the baton twirling culture recognize the discipline the twirler has for maintaining the “look”. If they are seen as masters of the dominant aesthetic, they have the ability to enter the “Winner’s Circle”. Disciplining the character of aesthetic labor is seen through self- surveillance as well as cultural discipline; if a twirler is not “managed” to best of her ability she is talked about by her peers, and she loses points during the competition. Aesthetic labor challenges emotional management and twirlers as well as models cannot falter in the competitive nature of her field.

Both in baton twirling and modeling, a youthfulness and slenderness are crucial, and twirlers are more profitable if they have such characteristics (Holla 2016: 480). Recognized notions of beauty are seen in baton twirling and when judges can identify the idealized forms of aesthetic labor, the twirler prospers, many times entering the “Winner’s Circle”. The beauty game is worth playing, building up social capital and defending twirlers right to aesthetic logic; and all twirlers are subject to experience how aesthetic labor is experienced in relation to their

selves (Holla 2016: 481). To exist, and produce aesthetic labor within the context of NBTA, baton twirlers reproduce aesthetic labor practices without questioning how much work is put into managing their “bodily capital”. Much like modeling culture, the conventional standards of slenderness and whiteness applies to all twirlers, and when one does not adhere to such criteria, they work overtime to perfect their body practices.

While the sociology of the body does research on body work, the difference between aesthetic labor and bodywork is that aesthetic labor is a picture perfect idea, one stand still frame and bodywork requires your body to be an active demonstration of your accomplishments. The model and fashion industry uses women of color to sell images of the exotic, seemingly providing opportunity for women of color to move throughout the hierarchy, yet the habitus of baton twirling is dominated by the white ideal hegemony. Twirlers are expected to look like the white, hyper-feminine, and sexualized ideal and if they don’t, their placement in the division and pageant suffers, resulting in a less than diverse group of winners. Models present themselves as a clean slate, one that can be painted, molded, and pressured to fit what the client envisions; however, twirlers perform grace, poise, without such direction and are awarded for their ability to look the part, act the part and *be* the part. Every aspect of baton twirlers has been canonized; the movement that makes them a baton twirler, and their pragmatic “twirlerhood” is a fluid motion of continually embracing the twirling habitus. The culture of baton twirling demands for intensive bodywork and to thrive in the NBTA the relationship between body, self, and work is negotiated.

Baton twirling has yet to be studied in the politics of cultural production. Baton twirlers engaged in bodywork have to always be on; how they are perceived on the floor, in social media, and in person, baton twirlers are always in motion. Aesthetic labor examines the practice in

regards to other actors; however, such cultural production does not explore how labor affects their sense of self. The basis of baton twirling is the high level of dexterity, smoothness, and speed; twirlers bodywork must possess the ability to create beautiful images with their body, as well as be beautiful. For a twirler to excel at bodywork, their body expressions must show strength and grace, risk and excitement, and aesthetic labor does not encompass the artistic dimension that baton twirling needs. Aesthetic labor focuses on the work that goes into looking the part, and bodywork focuses on the work it takes to be the part.

Baton twirlers have become a product of the NBTA habitus; their costumes have become more extravagant, an announcement for those who made them, new and clean shoes every competition, and twirlers have to broadcast they have the right look each competition to win. Baton culture is structured upon the movement of a twirler; their lines, dance moves, and technique they have worked to execute for their self-made advertisement becomes the right type of “product” they can never take off. The modeling portion shows that the twirlers are aesthetically pleasing to look at, the interview shows that the twirler “sounds right” and the twirling portion of the competition becomes the way a twirler shows off the self, prevailing in the NBTA context. The body is highly central to the twirlers selfhood; however, forever reshaping the body affects the selfhood and twirlers never learn how to turn off the politics of twirling in the outside world. Twirlers have become a demonstration for the sport of baton twirling, embracing their identity as a twirler, first and foremost, continually portraying the perfect role model. Twirlers in their later years are still “retired” and “former” twirlers, citing how the baton twirling culture shaped them into how they are in the outside world; taking hours to do their makeup, having the nicest clothes, and speaking with the utmost grace. A baton twirlers selfhood has become enmeshed into NBTA habitus and many twirlers continually

convey how bodywork is relevant in their lives. The dominant aesthetic in baton twirling is white, hyper-feminine, elite and sexualized, yet black twirlers do not possess the body to perform the dominant aesthetic. They have trouble competing in the NBTA habitus and their chances of entering the “Winner’s Circle” are limited. Black bodies have to work overtime to fit the “look” twirling culture wants to see.

### **Reflecting Black: Discovering the Out of Place “Other”**

Women over the years have taken over the men-dominated sport and have expanded the culture to make norms and culture their own; however, these resources have not encompassed the black twirlers who have entered the baton world over the years. White women have embodied the traits of femininity as seen in society into the baton twirling culture, and black women have attempted to mold themselves into capable twirlers, with little success. Black twirlers have to go above and beyond to show their technical competence, strength, and poise to participate in baton twirling culture. Black twirlers are compared to white women twirlers who are solely perceived as embodying hegemonic femininity; black twirlers are many times repelled from mainstream culture, which in NBTA is the Miss Majorette of America pageant.

The aesthetic plays an important role in the baton twirling culture. Being a visually appealing twirler is important in mediating athletic femininity, and in some instances, it is what takes a twirler from second to first place. The talent of a baton twirler provides the basis for judging: however, how the twirler performs and interacts with the judges while she performs is most significant. The discernible boundaries of a black twirler limit her ability to not only enter the advanced division but also enter into the “Winner’s Circle”. Because black twirlers’ emphasized femininity does not adhere to the hegemony their place is usually limited to the

novice, beginner, and intermediate divisions. These “places” of lower divisions of twirling act as a proxy in the social hierarchy of NBTA. Social actors’ positions in the baton twirling habitus become engrained in the minds of the twirlers, coaches, and judges, reproducing the segregated pattern in baton twirling. Place, as traditionally constructed, possesses physicality and for some bodies, they have the right to belong while others are marked as outsiders (Harris Combs 2016: 536). Conceptually, black bodies are out of place in the advanced division and the racial stratification continually thrives in the NBTA organization.

The tension between athleticism and hegemonic femininity persists and is much stronger for black twirlers. The “natural athlete” racial ideology constructs black athletes as more masculine than whites (Musto and McGann 2016: 102). This negative stereotype of being “mannish” echoes the racial formation of black women, perpetuating the gendered order. Constructing black women as subordinate and the masculine “other”, the habitus further naturalizes the conception of race that underscores the gender order ((Carrington, 2013; Collins 1991, 2005; Schipper, 2007) (Musto and McGann 2016: 102)). While black twirlers attempt to move into the advanced division, the hierarchal boundaries bind them to their “place” of subordination, aligning baton twirling with the predictable and “natural” way of order. Many black women attempt to fit into the hegemonic ideals (Collins, 2005; Musto and McGann 2016: 102), and many times slip between muscularity and “blackness”. This relationship between femininities operates within the racial ideology. In baton twirling, to serve the interest of men dominance, the feminine standard is white, hyper-feminine, and sexualized women. The inequalities between black and white women are not based on gender hegemony, but instead racial hegemony (Schippers 2007: 88). The configuration of femininity deemed normal and desirable cannot be taught or learned, no matter how hard the black twirler tries, she will always

be subordinate to hegemonic femininity. For the most part, black women rarely win the Miss Majorette of America pageant; her body is subordinate based on size, color, and gender performance, seemingly out of place in NBTA culture.

Hegemonic femininity locates women in baton twirling within a racial hierarchy, and many of the athletic feminine ideals are easier for white women to attain than black women. Black bodies are out of place, and the radicalized gender performance is seen in the inequalities among the women, demonstrating there is, in fact, a hierarchy of femininities (Schippers 2007: 88). However, the particularized form of white and hetero-feminine standards of appearance privileges a certain type of athlete in sport. In baton twirling femininity is signified as white (Musta and McGann 2016: 109), and societal gender styles are enacted within this culture, many times refusing to acknowledge perceived subordinate forms of “pariah” femininities. Athletic femininity is taken for granted, and while many twirlers are lean and toned, there are still new images and narratives that have the possibility of disrupting the oppositional gender construct. The idea of conventional femininity writes out black twirlers; however, I will re-center the feminized culture of baton twirling to investigate how they perform and embody whiteness and femininity.

## CHAPTER 4

### BEYOND METHODOLOGY: BATON TWIRLERS AS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

#### Research methods

This project's methodology contains two synergetic components: **(1)** qualitative interviews with baton twirling competitors, judges, coaches and parents; and **(2)** observations of baton twirling competitions in which I explore the dominant agency that occurs in competitive baton twirling. Observations and interviews were coupled with relevant theories in the areas of gender, habitus, femininity, aesthetic labor, and race to discuss the common themes previously seen in other areas of entertainment, performance, and sport. In order to analyze race, gender, and bodywork, specifically the embodied work of social actors in performing the dominate aesthetic of a given culture context, I ask questions that indicate the twirlers experiences within the arena of baton twirling. To answer my research questions I draw upon qualitative interviews and participant observation to gain insight of performing gender, race, and femininity.

My research questions are:

1. How do dominant ideals and values connected to race, gender, and sex become embedded in baton twirling performance?
2. How do those who do not ostensibly reflect these ideals and values negotiate their place in the arena of baton twirling and during competitions?
3. How does the organization of baton twirling enable, constrain, and narrate diverse racial identities and practices?

Throughout this section, I acknowledge my position as a retired twirler in the NBTA organization in order to contextualize the process and approach to analysis. To answer my research questions, I did participant observations for six (6) hours at two (2) regional competitions and for a combined twenty (20) hours at Nationals. The three (3) locations were state and regional competitions in Ohio and the national competition (A.Y.O.P) in South Bend Indiana, at Notre Dame University. I also conducted ten (10) in-depth interviews with competitors both current and former, judges, coaches and parents. Providing a difference of perspective, age, race, gender and sexuality ranged for my participants. My open-ended questions were semi-structured, combining multiple qualitative research methods (Johnson, B., & Turner, L. A. 2003: 297). Observing interactions between coaches, parents, and students provided a unique perspective of possible contradictions of what may be said and what is done. Using multiple research methods to study the social practices enabled for a more comprehensive picture of the baton twirling habitus. The ethnographic case included black, biracial and white women and men competitors, judges, and coaches who were involved in the twirling community. The participants were from all over the nation, competed in the advanced division, and have been immersed in the twirling world for at least five years.

### **Considering bodywork and the Self**

For baton twirlers, their social, emotional and cultural experiences are connected in the outside world. Baton twirlers have embraced bodywork as their own, reshaping their bodies to fit the hegemony of any institutional context. Taking an ethnographic approach, I analyze the baton twirling culture to comprehend what twirlers think, feel, and obsess over. To represent the baton twirlers experience, an inter-subjective point of view comes from my immersion into the habitus;

exploring the emotional and motivational forces of the culture (Levy and Hollan 1998: 313). In doing so, this type of approach allows me to see what it is like to be an active and competing baton twirler. The perspective forms from the subject's point of view, focusing on their subjective practices and interactions (Holla 2016: 481). Through semi-structured interviewing and observation, I investigate the complex interrelationships (Levy and Hollan 1998) between the twirlers and their social, material and symbolic context. I ask questions to analyze how baton twirling and pageantry compare, how the interviewees define femininity and what the ideal Miss Majorette of America winner "looks" like.

For social actors in baton twirling bodywork has become engrained; written and unwritten practices are applied to manage a baton twirler's body and well-being. I interviewed as well as observed the NBTAs social space to better understand how twirlers embodied the baton twirling habitus. Involving a small number of participants, I was able to conduct in-depth and open-ended interviews (Small 2009: 5). However, while the sampling was small, I was able to identify many of the techniques that twirlers do when performing gender, race, and bodywork, as well as how the baton twirling habitus has become interrelated.

Participant observation was useful to see how twirlers "do beauty," and how they perform their own version of aesthetic labor and bodywork. Understanding the standard of what is "right", a glimpse and sample of the habitus of baton twirling is considered. I studied interactions of twirlers, coaches, and twirler's peers to see bodywork in action. Coaches many times told their students what a judge liked to see, how they liked make-up or showmanship to be, and other twirlers spoke with their peers about how to perfect their own bodywork on the floor. Observing and speaking with twirlers from my past yielded insight to the bodywork twirlers participated in during the hours of competition. Volunteering my time as clerk, I had a

behind the-scenes-view of how judges saw twirlers bodies, commenting how well their bodywork was. Many times a judge would comment that a twirler was overweight, or that her bodywork was less than appealing; however, on the score sheet, judges instead guides the twirler to do gender and femininity “correctly”. When clerking for a judge, the clerk marks for the correct and incorrect apparatuses on the twirler’s score sheet; check marking, circling, and commenting on the score sheet, the clerk assists the judge in guiding the twirler to the correct bodywork and twirling technique. At all the competitions I kept a low profile, watching how twirlers worked and labored over their appearances. When observing at the competitions, I sat by myself and had limited interaction with competitors about what my study entailed. Focused on minimizing bias, I only spoke to competitors, judges and coaches in passing about what I was researching. I kept my research topic short and said I was studying baton twirling, specifically the Miss Majorette of America pageant.

The use of the multi-method research design is intended to add depth and complexity in examining the breadth for members of the baton twirling culture. Baton twirling season begins in the summer when classes and school are out for younger and older twirlers alike. The three baton competitions were selected based upon accessibility and importance.

## **Recruitment**

Recruitment was based on word of mouth. During my state, regional and national observations, people inquired as to why I was present this year. Many volunteered their services to be a part of my study, but those who were very interested provided their numbers and information so I could get in touch with them after IRB approval. I hoped for my study to be diverse, including both parents and former twirlers to share their experiences and thoughts. Not all parents had

previously twirled; however, parents were also active in helping their daughters perform bodywork; retired and former twirlers were aware of doing bodywork, even in their everyday lives. Including parents, coaches, and past and present twirlers started a conversation of performing gender, race, and bodywork. I clerked and observed twirlers who participated in the younger age divisions; however, participants had to be at least 18 years of age to be interviewed. Because of the age differences in my participants, many were able to speak of the changes in the history of twirling, as well as from a male and female perspective. All interviews and observations were transcribed, and participants had to agree to be recorded. Direct quotes were used in my findings, as well as recordings and reconstructed conversations to support my hypotheses and research questions. Recruitment was done based on convenience sampling; I created relationships with interviewees at the local and National competitions, as well as those who made themselves available when planning interview times. Interviews were scheduled over text and email, depending on how they asked me to reach out to them. All consent forms were signed electronically (some printed, signed, and scanned back). No identifying information was kept and as an added level of protection twirling organizations, certain events, locations, and citations have also been given pseudonyms.

### **Participant Observation and Qualitative Interviews**

This project included participant observations of competitors, coaches, and parents at a State, Regional and National competition, as well as interviews analyzing issues such as race, gender and bodywork. Participant observations at these competitions allowed me as a researcher to discern incidents of what some of my interviewees may have said in comparison to what they do, the comments that I heard, and how parents and coach helped prepare the twirlers for a certain

judge. The interviews follow what Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 16) term the active interview technique; the method of interpretive practice involving respondent and interviewer as they articulate what Garfinkel (1991) calls “practical reasoning” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, 16). By doing active interviews, as the researcher I took part in a situated co-constructed interview of meanings and memories. For this research, I recognized my role in the interview and moved away from seeing participants as “informational commodities” and data as merchandise to focusing on both the told and untold (Gemingnani 2014). Utilizing the theoretical approach and perspective of active interviewing, I was able to be more critical of my responses. As a retired baton twirler of the NBTA organization, it was my aim to converse with the respondents in such a way that the full range and complexity of race, gender, and bodywork are reproduced, rather than a more traditional practice where meaning-making is often confined by the researcher’s predetermined agenda (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 17). The use of purposive observation reflects the specific agendas in comparing baton twirling’s seemingly diverse rhetoric to the themes identified throughout the arena of baton twirling.

I conducted informal field interviews of the baton twirling habitus in June and July of 2016. I spoke to individuals in the NBTA setting I was studying; however, I provided no incentive. With these conversations, individuals provided comments on my study and thoughts on the culture of baton twirling. These were preliminarily conversation starters, seeing who was most interested and who could provide insight into the habitus. To keep consistent, all interviews were conducted over the phone. The average interview lasted an hour (60 minutes) and ranged from forty-five minutes to just over two hours. The interview schedule (Appendix A) was organized into several categories: General Demographics, Twirling Demographics, Personal Background and Family Involvement, Femininity, Questions for Research, Race, Opinions and

Final Thoughts. Certain individuals only answered some questions, i.e. some questions were aimed to understand how judges judged, how twirlers prepared for certain judges, and what changes former competitors or coaches have seen over the years. The interview guide included several questions that were changed for clarification or elaboration purposes. Some questions were eliminated due to time constraints or reception by the interviewee. Many participants were State, Regional, National, and World champions, and by covering the titles each participant won, they were able to tell of their travels and competitions won in the different organizations. Such achievement questions gave the participants the chance to talk about their accomplishments. Many participants were the first to twirl at their colleges, or won Miss Majorette of America in all but one age division; these questions were used to acclimate them to the interview process.

Many twirlers had different experiences when entering into the twirling world, and the questions on personal background were used to delve into how and why the twirlers were introduced to baton twirling and NBTA, to be exact. Such questions asked about familial influences and type of influence they had on their twirling careers. Some participants were actually discouraged from entering the family business (family members all twirled) and some started twirling because of the lack of access to after -school programs, so the community started a group to keep the children entertained. The inclusion of these questions was utilized to assess the degree of family support in the participants' twirling careers. These questions were asked to make the participant comfortable to later talk about femininity, race, and limitations of baton twirling.

The next questions were based on femininity, how each participant defined what femininity was, and who they saw as the "ideal" twirler. Some interviewees specified and named twirlers they saw as the embodiment of baton twirling and femininity, while others used

adjectives to describe what they looked for in twirlers they felt were ideal. I asked questions about the “masculine” qualities of female twirlers in which participants stressed the twirlers athleticism over aesthetic, and how the Miss Majorette of America pageant was an indicator of doing gender and femininity “correctly”. It is through bodywork that I develop my theories of gender maintenance, doing race in the predominately white space, and how femininity might look in baton twirling. My theory of bodywork is emphasized in each section of questions, how social actors embody and perform the dominant aesthetic of a given culture context. All coaches, twirlers (past and present), and judges acknowledge they perform bodywork both inside and outside the baton twirling culture. These questions were used to examine the effects of bodywork in the pageant, and the lasting effect twirlers felt later in life. This section prompted the participants to discuss how learning gender, femininity and bodywork at a young age was carried on.

My questions for research asked about gender-specific events and how gender was performed differently for men and women. These questions were used to better understand how men and women were expected to twirl and the different forms, movements, and tricks men do. Specifically, participants were asked to give an opinion about how they thought men and women were seen outside the twirling world. Ideas of femininity and masculinity in society have been embodied in baton twirling, and all participants recognized the assumptions of heterosexuality, doing gender “correctly”, and the expectations to succeed in the habitus of baton twirling.

There were few questions asked about race, but because of the predominantly white space of baton twirling, these questions were asked to understand how those active in the twirling community saw black and brown bodies. Many had never thought about the lack of black America twirlers, the prevalence for them (black Americans) to be in the beginner and

intermediate divisions, and the painted shoes/tights many wore to match their skin tone. These questions were in reference to black Americans' out-of-place bodies, and how participants thought they (black Americans) negotiated their place in baton twirling culture. My "Opinion" questions asked how baton twirling compared to beauty pageants; how has the emphasis on beauty, sparkle, and costumes changed the culture of baton twirling and if, and or how any twirler felt a male or female judge had judged them differently. Male competitors were asked how they prepared their aesthetic for the competition floor, and judges were asked if comments on twirler's score sheets were different when considering the competitor's gender, i.e. comments such as "pretty smile" are never included on male twirlers score sheets. Questions about diet and work out regiment were to analyze how women prepare their bodies for national competition. Striving to be seen as the feminine athletic ideal, all participants recognized most diets began in the summer, and heavy working out was to tone their bodies, striving to be seen as the feminine athletic ideal. This bodywork is done in preparation for competing in the Miss Majorette of America title, but most retired and former twirlers were conscious of doing it even after they had ended their twirling careers.

"Final Thoughts" were for the participants to add anything I had not asked about in previous sections. Many times after Nationals, participants take to Facebook and social media to voice their concerns, thoughts, and ideas they would like to see for next year. This section was for them to do it from an educational standpoint and speak on how to improve the sport moving forward. These questions also touched upon how former and current competitors chose their costumes, the aesthetic standards and changes they have seen over the years, and if there was a way to have a more inclusive "Winner's Circle". These questions allowed for participants to expand on any question we might have touched on, or give thoughts on the organization that they

might not have been comfortable sharing publicly.

Interviews were constructed then analyzed according to thematic analysis, and grounded theory. The methodology of my study was expanded upon after my data had been systemically gathered and examined (Strauss and Corbin 273). In addition to collecting new data, I built upon existing theories of doing gender, bodies out of place, aesthetic labor, and habitus to create bodywork. Grounded theory led me to bodywork, a theory that evolved during my research and became continuously involved between the analysis and data collection.

Using my taped and recorded interviews, coding was done through an Excel sheet, relying upon patterns found in my interviews and observations. Quotations and recounted conversations were used to discover the six (6) themes that coincided with my research questions. By combing through my interviews to find a certain set of codes, my research indicates a relationship with the data. My grounded theory of bodywork was integration into existing research of doing gender, how race is done, but specifically, the racialized work different bodies do.

### **Characteristics of participants**

Race	
Percentage (%) White	Percentage (%) Black
60%- 6	40%- 4

Gender	
Percentage (%) Men	Percentage (%) Women
20% -2	80%- 8

Education					
Did not go to College	Some College	Bachelors	Masters	Ph. D	Specialty Schooling
1%	1%	40%	40%	20%	1%

\* Percentages overlap because some participants are graduated but are currently working towards another degree

### Table of Respondents

Respondents in no particular order	Status/Role
Interviewee 1	Former twirler, current judge
Interviewee 2	Former twirler, coach, current judge
Interviewee 3	Former twirler
Interviewee 4	Judge
Interviewee 5	Former twirler
Interviewee 6	Former twirler, coach, current judge
Interviewee 7	Former twirler
Interviewee 8	Parent to a former twirler
Interviewee 9	Former twirler
Interviewee 10	Current twirler

The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 60 respectively. Many remembered changes in the NBTA's aesthetic standard and were able to speak on gender, race and socio-cultural changes in the twirling community. As an extra measure to preserve confidentiality,

participants' will be referred to by age range. Overall, all participants had started twirling by the time they were ten, only one quitting in the early stages of her twirling career. Twirling careers lasted ten years on average, many times with twirlers taking a year or two off for personal reasons. In denoting "off breaks", twirlers sometimes took off time from baton twirling to focus on their education, to heal their injuries, or to alleviate the stress of competing. All participants were active in the twirling community either judging, as parents, or as a coach; only one participant was competing, representing his college at Nationals.

In regard to race, four (4) participants were black, and the rest were white. I reached out to other non-white twirlers and judges; however, they did not communicate in a timely manner before the closing of recruitment. This pattern of participants seemingly represents the population of twirlers as a whole due to the white nature of the sport among all baton twirling organizations. In an attempt to classify socioeconomic status, participants were also asked to report their highest degree obtained ranging from less than high school to a Ph.D. The participants were from all over the continental United States; four (4) were located in the Midwest, three (3) were located in Southern states, and three (3) resided in the North.

### **Researcher position**

My narrative as a light skinned black woman and former competitive twirler in some ways coincides with the current participants in NBTA culture. Much like my peers in the twirling world, I have fallen victim to white, hegemonic feminine standards and have been trained to do gender a certain way. Adhering to the white beauty ideal, I wore my hair straight and long, I purchased the sparkly costumes, and learned how to speak and act according to the NBTA standard; embodying the twirling habitus to be seen as a Miss Majorette of America role model.

That being said, analyzing the twirling world is aided by my vested knowledge of the sport. Sharing commonalities in regards to gender, being as a female baton twirling, being active in baton twirling for ten (10+) years, served to inspire a deeper analysis of the twirling habitus. Acknowledging the dynamic between my positionality as a researcher and past participant, I am an “insider”, offering me a degree of social proximity. My position increased my awareness of the interactions between the twirling structure and its participants.

My “insider” status allowed for me to be accepted into the culture and because of that, I had to negotiate the realism that said status gave me, recognizing the ties that both bind and divide me from current twirlers (Ganga and Scott 2006: 2). The insider-outsider status required reflection; there were complexities of being involved in the twirling culture while also analyzing how the habitus shaped those in it. While I have been a part of the twirling community, because of my recent retirement, I had assumptions and a greater awareness of my biases. I became a different type of researcher because I have knowledge of the twirling world that enhanced my experience as an “insider” and some of the opinions and perspectives I shared. My status as an “insider” allowed for me to understand the language of the culture and terminology, as well as the examples my participants used to provide example of the social divisions of the twirling community.

Being an insider, my awareness of the social subtleties that divided the twirling community was raised in this process of qualitative data collection. My position was multi-faceted; as a former solo competitor, current team member, and first black Miss Majorette of America, I had to construct a rapport that was critical but also indulgent. I have intimate knowledge of the rules and structure of the twirling world, yet I had never had a conversation about gender presentation, doing femininity and racialized divisions, so this topic was new for

my participants. Many thanked me for asking the questions I did, volunteering their availability if and when I needed to delve deeper into the subject. My membership status did not seem to affect the participants negatively; however, it did raise an important issue. I am a researcher who was once an active member of baton twirling, and studying the twirling habitus as a retiree, I am able to understand the depth of the community (Dwyer 2009: 57). Because of my experience, I was aware of how sensitive the topics of gender and race would be.

### **Analysis**

My research provides no statistical evidence; however, my sampling constitutes a space to maximize logical differences in the twirling habitus. Through an inductive approach, I was able to collect and analyze data and develop a theoretical analysis (Charmaz 2008: 155). Theories of doing gender, habitus, aesthetic labor and identity management informed my data collection. Grounded theory as an open-ended analysis technique encouraged analytical thinking, and I was able to interact with my data and nuanced theories.

As a researcher I was prompted to reach beyond the inductive, generating my theory of bodywork. Grounded theory involves creative problem solving, as well as imaginative interpretation (Charmaz 2008: 156). Through the analysis process, grounded theory became a series of checks and refinements. My data analysis went through multiples phases of collection; observation, behind-the-scenes clerking, and in-depth interviews. All methods of my data collection informed each other, rendering my research more reliable and valid. The process of analysis and development of my coded categories became the emphasis, rather than the results of inquiry (Charmaz 2008: 156). Going back and forth between data collection and the emergent theory of bodywork, my research furthered flexible engagement with the data.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS: DECONSTRUCTING THE “WINNER’S CIRCLE”

The narratives and interviews from the various social actors in NBTA iterate the ideals that twirlers embody to enter into the “Winner’s Circle”. Those who do not adhere to such ideals are penalized. I used the “Winner’s Circle” as a metaphor for the winning placement that is only accessible to a select few. Becoming the Miss Majorette of America winner, in any age division, is a bond for twirlers alike as well as an honor for years to come. The experiences of twirlers who have, and have not entered the “Winner’s Circle” showcase the bodywork twirlers must do to succeed in the baton twirling habitus, giving visibility to twirlers who are seen as the epitome of the standard. Bodywork, and the structure of NBTA is organized in terms of: **1)** aesthetics over athleticism, **(2)** how twirlers do gendered and raced bodywork and **(3)** the written and unwritten rules that reinforce the baton twirling habitus.

Based on interview responses, judges look for poised, personable, and aesthetically pleasing women based on their ability to do “correct” raced and gendered bodywork. Unfortunately, black and biracial twirlers are not seen as such and are repelled back to lower divisions because of their racially coded bodies. Limited by written and unwritten norms of the baton twirling habitus, black and biracial twirlers do not have the ability to enter the “Winner’s Circle”.

In the twirling world, both women and men twirlers experience structural gender bias; men are coached to twirl powerfully and women are trained to be athletically feminine. As stated

by Jackson:

“...Even as something as simple as free hand (twirling term), I was coached to put mine in a fist, and my female counterpart was coached to make her hand “pretty”. Now when I judge and coach, I will comment on the score sheet if a male twirler has a “pretty” hand because it looks effeminate, it’s like how the girls are supposed to twirl”.

Those who twirl and perform according to the standard receive the prestigious awards and recognition as the best twirler in their age division. The NBTA organization seemingly enhances the gender differences, and the twirling world becomes a link to the social opinions of how men and women should act and perform, ultimately affecting the overall experience in the baton twirling habitus. Deconstructing the “Winner’s Circle” was done by combining observations and interviews, and using theories of habitus, “bodywork,” and bodies out of place to analyze the gendered and raced maintenance in the culture.

### **Finding 1: Aesthetics over Athletics**

The number of baton twirlers is likely to be in the hundreds of thousands when considering high school bands, twirling organizations, and the general public (Orr, Orr and Spees 2006). Athletes in baton twirling are required to perform dance, occasionally gymnastics, and baton skills, all while interpreting music. Baton twirling is not only a competitive activity, but it is also done for show and entertainment. While both men and women compete in feminized sports, certain characteristics in the feminized domain have traditionally been assigned, and a closer look at sport and physical activities reveal there are several gender differences regarding participation, physical self-concept, and values.

My first finding is that baton twirling prioritizes aesthetics over athleticism. The

hegemonic ideals of femininity governed the sport, further reproducing existing inequalities. In NBTA the focal event is the National Miss Majorette of America pageant in which the winners are defined by their feminine characteristics. Feminine sports, such as baton twirling are scored high on aesthetic features such as gracefulness and are seen as an art form. Twirlers who conform to the stereotyped expectations of femininity, such as white beauty standards and traits are able to enter the “Winner’s Circle”.

A twirler’s athletic talents are overshadowed by their ability to do the correct “aesthetic and bodywork. The National Miss Majorette of America pageant is trivially judged on the twirlers skills. Many times, those who are athletically talented, yet do not adhere to the NBTA ideal, rarely have the ability to enter the “Winner’s Circle”. The Miss Majorette of America competition, similar to the Miss America pageant, is about national pride, and efforts to sell itself as a legitimate public event. Both the Miss America and Miss Majorette of America competitions entertain crowds as well as being seen as much more than just pageants. The competition showcases amateur female talents in a symbolic form that demonstrates more than glamor and sexuality, but also sensible winners (Banet- Weiser 1999: 41). The competition is not about the talent of the twirler, but more so about the performance and spectacle. The pageant is based on the visual consumption of bodies, homogeneity, and femininity on display (Banet- Weiser 1999: 61). In the Miss Majorette of America pageant, the twirler must be athletically talented, but also aesthetically pleasing, and in many instances, the competitor’s twirling becomes background to her ability instead to embody the hyper-feminine, sexualized, and white ideal.

Jessica is a white female I grew up twirling with. From my hometown of Canton, Ohio, Jessica and I twirled on the same local team and she was my “Big Buddy”. As my mentor on the team, she taught me how to twirl, took care of me at the studio until my parents could pick me

up, and helped with my homework if need be. “Big Buddies” chose their “Little Buddies” for the year, someone they bonded with and saw as a little sister. The idea of Big/Little buddies was to bring the team closer together before Nationals and provide you with a support system for the week of competition. Jessica and I twirled together for over ten years until she moved away for college. She now lives in Memphis and I was able to reconnect with her this past year. She quit baton twirling her junior year of college; however, she remembers the strict emphasis on the feminine ideal now that she’s older:

“I’m a marathoner, I have a retaining plan so I’m pretty regimented. When I was twirling, I know I did a lot of restricting “in-season”. I did some purging. I had an intense diet cycle, but when it’s all said and done, it needs to be the best twirler and in the pageant [MMofA] it becomes so much more than about the twirling”.

The unwritten rules of baton twirling and the regressive notions of femininity and beauty are redeployed in this setting to fashion the fragile identities of young girls in baton twirling. The recognition that gender is consciously made and re-made on the body within a politics of appearance that is often reduced to a level of a degrading spectacle. Purging and restricting is just one of the ways that twirlers strive to look like the ideal; however, as mentioned by Jessica, the ideal can sometimes come at a cost, and the twirlers ability is still overshadowed by the aesthetic.

Paula is the talented woman who made all of my twirling costumes. Her family owns the company “Rainbow House Baton and Costume”, a business that supplies twirling, dance, and pageant equipment. Her company was present at all major competitions providing supplies (rhinestones, baton fringe, and tights), baton twirling shoes (cougars), and any other baton twirling supplies. While she only made my costumes, many competitors wore her designs. Paula and her Mom drew out costumes and supplied material for twirlers, becoming a staple in the

baton twirling habitus. Baton twirlers and mothers' alike know of Paula and her family business.

Twirling competitively for many years, Paula mentioned:

“ I learned fast and early on that when I was competing, you had to keep your weight down because you didn't want to be talked about by your peers and even your judges”.

The Miss Majorette of America pageant, in simplest terms, is a glorified beauty pageant. Focusing on the aesthetic more so than the “talent” portion, winners of the Miss Majorette of America pageant are talented twirlers but also ideal women. A beauty pageant, like the Miss America pageant, is engrossed on the winner being wholesome. Twirlers, like pageant winners have the image of being holier-than-thou, seemingly “untouchable”, and overall seen as a pedestal women (Banet-Wesier and Portwood-Stacer; 2006).

Jackson is my personal coach. I met him when I was eight (8) years old and he trained me to win the Miss Majorette of America Pageant. To this day we still talk and when we see each other at competitions I clerk for him. Jackson, as a current judge knows what to look for in the Miss Majorette of America pageant winners and mentioned:

“The Miss Majorette of America [winners] have to twirl as well as have personalities of excitement, you can feel the love of loving to do it, and it's definitely hard to teach but you recognize it when you see it, that mixed with being a technical twirler. Most are Christian, that's also fair that it's going to make sense it's a wholesome sport. Within the pageant system, the ultimate goal is to also serve as the role model, and for woman you have to be squeaky-clean, adhere to the standard and style, from your family, to your parents, your coach's, to you as the twirler”.

Pageantry has become intensely scripted and regulated, forcing many to do over the top diets, workouts, and beauty regiment to be seen as the archetype. Gender representation and performance seen by the winners of the Miss Majorette twirlers is measured by audience approval. That is not to say that the winners are not talented; however, winners do in fact

resonate with the fans and have the popularity appeal.

The definition of femininity has shifted over the years in baton twirling; a greater emphasis on hair and beauty ideals and twirlers are grasping what it means to be “ladylike” at much younger ages.

Jackson has observed over the years:

“In this stage in the game it’s about money and tradition. The money is every little girl wants to wear a crown, and to be made part of that brand, the Mom’s are going to write the check to win that crown.”

Jackson recognizes both the economic and emotional cost to look and be the part of the Miss Majorette of America Baton twirlers want to be a part of the brand, and “Winner’s Circle” and do whatever they can to make that happen. Adhering the feminine ideal can be costly; however, the pursuit of the crown is why baton twirling community participates. Cultural conditions of society and beauty pageants provide the opportunity to construct a particular version of femininity that has been reproduced and accentuated for years on end.

Jeff is a twirler I have known for years. We both competed in the early 2000’s and he is one of the few male twirlers still competing from my era of competition. Jeff is a current University Feature Twirler and clerk in the baton twirling habitus, working towards his judging license for the NBTA organization:

“For twirling, it’s a social thing, kind of like a sorority. All the girls are going to want to do it, gender roles in the household popped in my head and there’s not really a link necessarily but it goes back to femininity, the essential ideals of the 50’s but its still there and maintained by a lot of people. When you twirl you should still be pretty, graceful, effortless, and not break a sweat.”

Twirlers unconsciously and even consciously replicate the version of femininity that wins

the Miss Majorette of America pageant, focusing their efforts on personal transformations, while leaving out female empowerment. Pageant- defined femininity and claims of national representations are troublesome, leaving many girls out of the running to ever win the title. Many times the winners of the Miss Majorette of America pageant are the same twirlers winning over and over. Judges and fans of twirling are drawn to those who are poised, beautiful, and well-spoken, agreeing that Miss Majorette of America winners are not only talented, but also smart, and successful. The culture of NBTA has been modeled after society, and the Miss Majorette of America winner has not only establishes herself as a role model of respectability but is also the beauty queen.

Dawn is a black twirling Mom. Her daughter and I twirled together on the local team in Ohio for ten (10) years. Dawn twirled for a short period of time in her adolescent years; however, she never stuck with it. Dawn is from Canton, Ohio and fortunately I was able to reconnect with her at the state competition. She has been involved in baton twirling for many years and has seen how the sport of baton twirling is governed by the hegemonic ideals of white femininity, stating:

“To be [seen as] perfection you need to be a certain body type, certain hair style, certain tights, and if you’re not, if you don’t conform, you’re spotted right away”. “I’ve seen instances where black people, or people of color were highly skilled and performed at a very high level as compared to a white twirler, who should have actually beat them, and race probably came into play because the girls didn’t conform to what society thought they should look like. So all that really did come into play, I’m not blaming the judges, they were blinded to it”.

In the NBTA culture, contemporary notions of the ideal female twirler script the Miss Majorette of America pageant. Deeply vested in the feminized sport, female twirlers are expected to display their feminine identities. Searching months in advance for the perfect

modeling dress, traveling around going to competitions, and perfecting their routines all summer has become the expectation. Hair is colored and cut, eyebrows are plucked, and the diets begin; feminine identities for female twirlers in NBTA are reproduced year after year. The twirlers are talented, yet many times the competitors spend more time working to look the part because of the emphasis of the ideal.

Meredith is a black American twirler I know from our competitive years on the local team in Ohio. She did compete individually; however, she quit very early on and focused on team twirling. Meredith later twirled for her University Majorette line. Meredith and I grew up together yet had very different experiences. Meredith as a dark-skinned twirler noticed what was seen as the “ideal” twirler, later remarking she was not it:

“They have to exude femininity. I would also definitely say skinny, umm lots of rhinestones, the more you have the more successful you are, kind of like the most expensive the costume the better. And when they’re bigger they [judges] automatically assume they’re not going to do very well, so like when I’m saying skinny, long legs, they like long legs for strut, yeah I would say basically the hair has to be kept, umm, yeah that’s basically it, tall, skinny, most expensive costumes kind of thing”.

From the unwritten rules twirlers have learned over the years, Meredith is able to describe who has the ability to win the Miss Majorette of America pageant and who does not. From this quote, the athleticism of the twirler is not mentioned at all; instead it is based on who looks the part what aesthetic constantly wins in the NBTA organization. The social organization of NBTA stresses the importance of gender to young women’s everyday worlds, thus harnessed into a project of self-change. The sexual norms and codes appeal to female twirlers’ space of identity work and display, and the twirlers athleticism is only seen in the background. The feminine envelope is pushed beginning at an early age and the NBTA culture is expressed through both formal and informal institutional practices of seemingly traditional dynamics. The social rules of

the NBTA culture guide behaviors with comments on score sheets and remarks to coaches regarding poise and class. The baton world influences self-inquiry, reflexivity, and respectability, where the traditional white female is favored over individuality. In the NBTA culture, twirlers fall into the folds of consumption, self-invention, and refinement; communicating with costumes, hair, makeup and dresses for the pageantry. The sense of endless possibility prevails from mainstream media. The idea that that the perfect dress and most beautiful costume will help in winning Miss Majorette of America is seen in the way gender and femininity are displayed in the twirling habitus. The female twirler savors in the idea of doing gender and performing different sexual selves; however, the contraction between reinventing identities and the idea of endless possibilities is that a twirler's peers, judges, and their coaches continually find ways to steer them in the right direction of being the "perfect" NBTA twirler. Indicating the feminine ideal, those who have the ability to conform to the stereotyped expectations of femininity limits which twirlers are seen as masters in the culture, as well as being seen as the role model Miss Majorette of America.

Another way aesthetics is prioritized over athletics is how baton twirlers are judged in competitions. A majority of what twirlers are judged on is their appearance, both on and off the score sheet. The NBTA score sheet is easy to read, even for non-twirlers. A twirler has the opportunity to score up to 100 points based on a score beginning at 0. Receiving anywhere from a 0-20 in any category (that change according to the event) the twirler is scored on her athletic talent and aesthetic demonstration. There are five categories on every score sheet and depending on the event the twirler is competing in, the categories vary accordingly. Based on numerical rankings, check marks, and circling of need to work on areas the competitor is guided to exemplifying the NBTA ideal. On the score sheet scoring an 11 is low fair, 12 is fair, 13 is high

fair, 14 is low average, 15 is average, 16, is average, 17 is very good, 18 is excellent, 19 is superior and in rare cases, a twirler can score a 20. For the most part, no advanced twirler will score below a 15 ever. Judges checkmark within the category to indicate very good, a double check indicates the twirler was outstanding in that area, and when something is circled in the score sheet, the twirler was unsatisfactory and needs to work on said apparatus. What is most helpful for a twirler is when a judge leaves comments in the sections, allowing for a better understanding of the specifics they need to work on.

The three events that are in the Miss Majorette of America pageant are modeling, strut, and solo. In the modeling portion, the twirler is exhibiting her aesthetic through her dress and movements. Her walk and outward appearance becomes a visual aide of the cultural aesthetic, the epitome of the feminine culture. The competitor's strut is constructed as a work of art; with leaps and poses, the twirler works to appeal to the judge without letting the baton leave her hand. Lastly is the solo portion; a competitor's Solo is a two minutes and thirty second (2:30) performance of her best tricks and exciting apparatuses', seen as a visual representation of the feminine athlete. For modeling, there are three categories the judge scores before the interview. Beginning with "Appearance", out of 20 points the twirler is judged specifically on "attire, make-up, hair, and grooming". Next, the "Presentation" and the flow of the routine are criticized, considering if the twirler modeled with "smoothness, posture, and ability within the style". Lastly is "Poise and Projection." The twirler is judged on her "confidence, attitude, perfection, polish and eye contact".

The interview portions are divided by the "Content of the Response" and "Delivery of Response." In each category, the twirler is critiqued on her actual response to the question, "grammar, use of complete sentences, poise, confidence, personality and personal grooming."

For the interview, twirlers are coached on how to sit, hold their hands and not to fidget. A twirler learns early on not to say “yeah”, “umm” like” or “uhh huh”, in doing so the twirler is penalized harshly. The interview is judged upon the contestant’s ability to present herself in a public or private setting, and the judge is expected to leave comments that further help the twirler in her personal success (Banet-Wesier; 1999). The interview in the competition is intended to reveal the twirlers intelligence of world and national issues, as well as poise. Each category is out of 20 points, allowing penalties for under or over time, as well as incorrect model pattern. The twirler’s modeling is very much centered on the grace, beauty, and self-assurance of the twirler; however, many in the twirling world know that the interview portion for the twirler is what makes or breaks the twirlers placement. Only having two categories to judge the twirlers interview is flawed, and even with the understood emphasis on the interview, only 40 points attribute to the overall 100 point score. Highlighting beauty and grace reinforces that Miss Majorette of America has transpired to a beauty pageant emphasis.

The X-Strut score sheet is once again judged by five categories on a 0-100 scoring basis. The first two subcategories (Element, Choreography) are under the category of “Content”. The “Element” of a twirler is scored on their variety of balance, leaps, baton movements, as well as a variety of other twirls. “Choreography” is judged upon the “blend of elements, combination, and integration of body and baton movements”. These first two subcategories add up to 40 points for the actual content of the strut. Based on the category of “Execution” a twirler is judged on “smoothness, gracefulness, and technique, and the twirlers overall timing”. In the “Smoothness, Gracefulness and Technique” subcategory judges can score on “basic steps, the control of the baton movements, balance, posture, and body lines,” working to achieve the overall aesthetic of the routine and appeal to the judge’s eye. In the “Overall Timing” subcategory, judges score on

“basic in-step, phasing, hesitations, and synchronization of body and baton”. The “Smoothness, Gracefulness and Technique” category, and “Overall Timing” categories combine for a total of 40 points as well, adding to the overall possible 100 point score. Lastly is “Presentation”, a category on the Solo score sheet as well. The “Presentation” of the twirler is based on their “projection/showmanship, confidence, eye contact, attitude, carriage, and appearance”. This category is where many twirlers score the highest, attributing to the final 16-19 points in their final score. The judging for each routine varies; however, the same principle is seen and the visual appeal of the twirler is prioritized over the athletic ability of the competitor.

The Solo score sheets are a bit more complex, attributing to this event being arguably the hardest event in the twirling world. Breaking down the five categories into “Complete Variety”, “Difficulty”, “Speed and Control”, “Smoothness and Gracefulness” and lastly, “Presentation and Showmanship”. “Complete Variety” is judged on the twirler’s “connections and ambidexterity, side-to-side, aerials, release, receptions, novelty and multiple body spins”. “Difficulty” is judged on the “difficulty of tricks, difficulty achieved, attempted perfection/lacking, and potentially dangerous tricks”. “Speed and Control” is based upon the “rate of baton speed, general handling/technique, baton patterns and pattern changes”. “Smoothness and Gracefulness” is judged on “flow of baton, handling, body movements, and balance”. Lastly, the “Presentation and Showmanship” category is judged on the twirlers “posture, appearance, attitude, performance, finesse, projection, enthusiasm, and salesmanship”. The Solo score sheet has more opportunity for penalties for drops and breaks; however, it is obvious the score sheet is once again placing the emphasis on how well the twirler projects their passion of twirling whilst including difficult tricks and apparatuses. The score sheets are divided to give the twirler the chance to be judged in multiple categories, yet much of the emphasis is placed on how well the

twirlers excitement shows through with each routine. The final category, “Presentation and Showmanship”, includes categories such as “posture, appearance, attitude, projection, and salesmanship”. Many twirlers find this category to be easy to score well in and most competitors’ receive scores between the 16-19 scoring range; however, for those twirlers who do not adhere to the culturally defined aesthetic are penalized. The twirler with the plaited braids as mentioned previously received a low score of a 14 in the “Presentation and Showmanship” category, and during any individual twirling career, receiving a score lower than a 16 in that category is unheard of. Each category is seemingly focused on the technical; however, terms such as “confidence”, “body movements” and “smoothness and graceful” reiterate that while the twirler must be athletically talented, they must look beauty and poised while doing each event. Underlying each category is how aesthetically pleasing the twirler looks while performing their routines.

In any and all beauty pageants, women are judged according to several categories, and the judges are selected to ensure that the twirler and beauty pageant winner appropriately represents herself in the public eye. The winning contestant must serve as a proper representative of Miss Majorette of America. Twirling and beauty pageants acknowledge that beauty standards are constantly shifting; however, judging in the Miss Majorette of America pageant is subjective. Bailey is a former competitor and current judge. Her Mom was my personal coach and when she put together a team of her students, Bailey and I twirled together for three (3) years before injury forced me to retire. Now, Bailey and I clerk together when we see each other. At Nationals, Bailey mentioned to me:

“You [competitors’] need to look perfect all the time, but what is perfect, who is creating that. It’s a fact every judge is creating their own idea of what they want to see.”

While beauty pageant judging is somewhat different, the basic principle of assigning a numerical score to a contestant based on a routine is consistent. The subjective nature in which NBTA judges score is all based upon what a person thinks, beauty and talent are subjective. In NBTA, judges as certified through testing, rules, and regulations, meaning that the judges must indicate that he or she recognizes the appropriate markers of who is feminine, talented and does bodywork correctly. The categories “Poise”, “Confidence”, and “Appearance” are in multiple areas of the score sheet, for example, indicating that when interviewing, the twirler has confidence in her answers, or the twirler exudes confidence when she is twirling.

For the most part, the judges for Miss Majorette of America are diverse. There are approximately 15 national judges for any event, sometimes including an older white female, a young male, or one of the two black male judges; however, it is not uncommon for the same judges to judge two out of the three events. In doing so, if the same judge does not view the twirler as doing bodywork correctly or following the dominant aesthetic, the judge has the ability to decrease the twirler’s overall ranking, pulling her out of the Top Ten and visa versa. The judging panel is intended to be representative of the many generations of twirling, after all the winner must appeal to all ages; conversely, many times competitors fall to a judge’s subjective favoritism. In NBTA, the judge’s goal is for the Miss Majorette of America winner to adequately mirror NBTA as a whole, and beginning at a young age, the twirler is judged and guided on her performance of appropriate femininity and beauty. The Miss Majorette of America pageant continues to be a source for young women to learn the disciplinary practices of femininity, gender, and bodywork.

Similarly to the pageant industry, NBTA has gone to great lengths to establish itself as more than just a pageant; however, the focal event is still the Miss Majorette of America pageant.

The anticipation at Nationals builds all week until awards are announced on the last day of competition. The previous winners pass out awards throughout the week, their names are announced on multiple occasions, and before the previous winner passes on their crown, they ride out in a limousine. Open events and the Grand National Twirling champions are left in the dark with the focal point continually on the Miss Majorette winners. NBTA has established many rules that regulate respectability all while maintaining a particular construction of femininity and American womanhood. Baton twirlers in NBTA unconsciously know what they should and need to look like to win; the cultural dominant ideal has been continually reinforced.

The capitalized logic of baton and pageants and beauty pageants is intertwined with commercial culture, all through the idealized version of a nation. The winners of Miss Majorette of America many times look very similar, strengthening the relationship between pageantry and feminized morality. The typology that takes place in the Miss Majorette of America pageant has an assumption that the prevalent version of femininity seen in most beauty pageants is the only kind of competitor, unconsciously excluding many. The control and regulation that judges have over the winners have simplified what it means to be a woman to the smallest degree, leaving little room for those who are different.

During the interview Jeff mentioned:

“We [baton twirling] hold girls to a certain standard, beauty, and body ideals that not everyone can aspire too. There aren’t many twirlers of color and it’s not something I thought about so yeah, I’d say it’s controlling and beyond that, in the dance industry about tights for women of color, dance shoes have always been an issue and I think that translates to twirling, so yeah twirling has it’s own issues but it extends to other issues as well for other twirlers, but also beauty and media in general and while we are dated’ it’s a deeper problem, like we could update our rules and ideals”.

Baton twirling’s unwritten rules have been reproduced within the habitus of NBTA. The dance

shoes Jeff is mentioning are the color of “Suntan Nude”. The name alludes to a tan, white dancer or twirler, meaning that dark skinned performers have to wear shoes that do not match their skin tone. The tights twirlers wear are the same color, leaving out the black twirlers.

Jackson has a similar iteration of the “ideal” twirler:

“The ultimate twirler is ultra feminine. A whole lot of body work, aesthetically pretty, not so much needing to be white, but features being white. Stereotypical of what America deems as girl, costume flattering to the body, not too revealing, a bit of sexy.”

Mixed and African-American twirlers are left out of the narrative of what is valued, and are rarely winners of Miss Majorette of America; reinforcing the archetype they are not a part of the glamorous typicality and respectability. The crown in the Miss Majorette of America pageant is every little girl’s dream; the crown represents the American dream and the twirlers ability to be seen as embodying the standard. Winning the crown is the veil between the individual and the image, depicting an all-inclusive community that is seemingly within reach for those who try, but only achievable for those who display their feminine identities and have adapted to the NBTA culture. The body, as well as femininity is regulated throughout the Miss Majorette pageant, and the discourse of power functions to reproduce women’s bodies as passive. Female bodies are disciplined differently than male twirlers; behind the scenes female twirlers are ridiculed if they do not fit the typecast of the ideal NBTA twirlers, meaning the likelihood they ever win Miss Majorette is slim.

Meredith mentions a male judges ridicule of a twirler who did not adhere to the “ideal”:

“Tim was one of those judges who kind of made jokes about girls and how they looked. It was when we were clerking for Blue Sapphire, I always have to clerk for that, and, he doesn’t come anymore but he was like one of those judges who was like” Oh my gosh she needs to blah, blah, blah,” or “this girl isn’t going to be good” because of what they

looked liked. You know how some girls that are bigger have to wear their costumes and you know, he would be like “look at her coming out [of her costume] he would say stuff like that while he was judging. But on the score sheet he would be like “make sure, or try to not have your costume ride up,” something like that. He wouldn’t say get a costume that fits you but he would say, try to fix costume from riding up. It was like a micro-aggression, those are like micro-aggressions because it was like hmm, it makes you feel some kind of way but I don’t know if I can say anything about it because they’re being nice, or it’s also, do they really understand what they’re saying kind of thing.”

Sandra Lee Bartky stated, “Women make herself “objects and prey” for the man. In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment” (Banet-Wesier; 1999).

Jackson states:

“More of a cute-sexual objectified look of it [baton twirling], the men are the spectators now. Men are going to be the loudest voice, so it’s going to be a thing. It’s a man’s world”

In the Miss Majorette of America pageant, the body of the contestants becomes burdens of significance, focused on discipline and rigidity in competition. The most “feminine” twirlers are invited into the Winners Circle, negotiating their sense of self and womanhood in relation to other contestants. The competitor’s overall participation in the Miss Majorette of America competition is void of objectivity, and the female body is read as a marker for a particular kind of feminine subject. Constructing oneself in an embodied subject of the twirling world, the competitor’s body is read as a transparent statement of the inner moral qualities of the twirler.

Women in NBTA are reproduced through feminine practices; dieting, excessive workouts and other beauty practices are assumed as doing gender and femininity. Going to the extreme to be thin and beautiful is the norm and twirlers do bodywork to embody the hegemonic ideal to

indicate she can be a successful twirler. The practice has become a part of the reproduction and women competing in the pageant world see no problem with such practices because of the embeddedness in the Miss Majorette pageant. Twirlers are just coached on the disciplinary routines to prepare for competition; the correct attitude, dress, and how to act, working to demonstrate the white feminine ideal. Comment such as “shoulders back”, “suck in your stomach”, and “derriere tucked” are taught in both the beauty pageant world and twirling world, to glide across the floor with ease (Banet-Wesier; 1999). Model walk for twirling is the careful discipline of getting your body into place before you are judged; walking with ease without looking stiff, walking graceful and not breathing too hard is a seemingly difficult task twirlers have perfected over the years. Modeling is a way for twirlers to perfect their femininity, wanting to reflect the current feminine ideal and excelling in ways that can only be explained as healthy self-care. This strong discipline is seen in Miss America contestants, as well as NBTA twirlers, females working to resolve the ambivalence of what is desired from the winners (Banet-Wesier; 1999).

Twirlers and beauty pageant contestants are no different than most women in society; judged by their appearance and ridiculed if they do not look like the ideal. The feminine identity is produced with boundaries, structured by repetition and impulse. The feminine praxis (Banet-Wesier; 1999) dominates the way women in any pageant setting see’s herself; this practice of construction becomes so dominating that women go to extreme lengths to fit into the “Winner’s Circle”. Self-surveillance is controlling, the constant display of the female body becomes a matter of being. In pageants, an event that only woman can compete in, women are judged, objectified and fragmented, similar to how women are perceived in society (Banet-Wesier; 1999). The panoptic surveillance is obvious, when twirlers are judged, criticism becomes a large

part of the Miss Majorette of America pageant and later internalized. Contestants are constantly working to display their femininity in the correct way, careful to stay within the boundaries of pageant rules.

Bailey mentions:

“I think that Don (founder of NBTA), because he’s older, old fashioned and he’s been around for so long, he makes a big deal about the pageantry, and when I think pageantry, I don’t just think of Miss Majorette of America, I also think of collegiate [events]. Those are also pageantry, its flashy, it’s you know what I mean. It’s “razzle dazzle” and the essence of twirling, in some respect has really gone to the wayside, and it’s a shame, its not doing anything for our sport, like why aren’t we paying attention to that”.

bodywork is an embodied expression of the habitus of baton twirling and the standard regulates the twirler both inside and out of the twirling world. Her identity as a baton twirler in NBTA is done through articulating the dominant aesthetic, and the twirler’s self is fashioned through the subcultures membership. Through the cultural toolkit, the twirler articulates their bodywork as an embodiment of the NBTA identity and baton twirling habitus.

### **Finding 2: “Doing” the Baton Twirling habitus**

The habitus embodies social location, and social relations generate significance to individuals, so much in fact that the nature of the habitus embodies every aspect of the human embodiment (Shilling 1993; Thrope 2009: 499). Baton twirlers “do” and reinforce the baton twirling habitus continually, specifically through hexis (Thrope 2009: 499). Without notice, the manner and style with which competitors “carry themselves,” constructs identity and differences, giving social order to the competitive world. The habitus of baton twirling is imprinted and encoded in the early socializing stages of a baton twirler entering the competitive world. Through culture unconscious, Bourdieu (1971) states that one learns attitudes, aptitudes, knowledge, and problems acquired by a systematic apprenticeship (Thrope 2009: 499). Simply put, the longer

one spends within a feminized culture, such as baton twirling, the more ingrained the habitus becomes and the more readily one is able to adhere to undeclared rules.

As mentioned by Bailey:

“Baton is such an expensive sport, not just monetarily but also time- wise. You need to be able to dedicate massive amounts of time. You look at socioeconomic status, like people who work full-time jobs, aren’t able to take their kids to practice, but you have to be able to in baton twirling, it becomes your life”.

bodywork is the embodied expression of the habitus of baton twirling. As my second finding iterates, the habitus of baton twirling is how twirlers do gendered and raced bodywork. The identity project within the NBTA culture must be carefully navigated by the unspoken rules of perceived masculinity and femininity, sexuality, and the complexity of race.

Later going into more detail, Bailey iterates how bodywork becomes the standard in the baton twirling habitus:

“Everyone is heterosexual. As far as other stereotypes go women, are supposed to be [heterosexual] and feminine, and beautiful and skinny, any of those beauty standards are held up. I think that’s pretty prevalent, and an unspoken thing and weight is still a massive thing in twirling for people... I feel like people are looked down upon if there are even a little bit overweight, people feel entitled to comment on that”.

Race, class, and gender have continued relevance within feminized cultures, further explored through division mobility and competitive twirling placement. The distinct emotional performance of females and males in the NBTA culture focuses on the social mechanisms through which twirlers narrate and account for their experiences within the culture. Social differences help recreate the importance of race, gender, sexuality, and class outside of the baton world, better appreciating their adolescent selves and intersectionality (Best 2011).

The embodiment of the baton twirling habitus structures the moving body and how the

twirler takes care of it as such. Gender, femininity, and bodywork become forms of capital acquired by the individual and become interconnected as to who has access to power. A twirler's bodywork, as an embodied expression of the culture, is considered as a form of symbolic capital, reproducing a women-feminine- and hypersexual compulsory order of baton twirling. Performing the dominant aesthetic of being graceful, well-spoken, confident, athletic, yet feminine, becomes a response to gender-identity policies of baton twirling. The identity policies for NBTA include written and un-written rules, regulating the feminine bodily appearance and actions of the twirlers, and in doing so, the moral crusade of the organization are designed to marginalize and exclude twirlers from ever achieving success.

For twirlers growing up in the NBTA culture, their self and identity are treated as a developing feature of their interactions with judges, parents, and peers.

Jeff sees the way that twirlers have to always be "on" and iterates the pressure of being seen as a role model:

"The whole being a role model thing is always at the forefront of my mind, especially being a guy, a stand out. Both women and men alike, if we have a bad attitude, or come off the floor cursing, people are going to see it and form opinions about it, that not only going for physical behavior but also with how we dress, how we look, when I'm clerking or when I'm not twirling that day, or even have a break from twirling I pay attention to how I look and don't walk around in sweatpants, or my hair all over the place, although my hair is its own to control, so yeah, we've become very aware our presentation, which is very big thing and outside of twirling too, even at school, it's a part of our personality. That aspect of the sport really spoke to me and translated to who I am in my everyday life, that's what makes [baton] twirling a little business like too. Outside of twirling, I hold myself to a standard, and don't let anybody see me sweat. I save the tears for the pillow.

Seen as projects within the feminized culture, young men and women in NBTA are considered within a set of institutional relations. Discursive repetition, interpretation, and narrations materialize identities through symbols and practices. The "self" stands at the center of

contemporary social life; however, the twirlers' "self" is in relation the NBTA culture. Twirlers work to fashion their own identities and think of their "self" as a project of invention and refinement; however, it is unconsciously done without pushing the envelope of what the baton world wants.

Specifically, at the Pizza Party, Jackson looks around, observing who does bodywork correctly when no one is watching:

"The Pizza Hut party is the pivotal moment, in the societal way, how much do they [Winner's Circle" members] look like a Miss Majorette of America's in regular clothes, eating pizza, and around their friends. This changes twirlers somehow because if done right, they become a true contender and competitor".

The famous Pizza Party is held at Pizza Hut every year after the announcing of the Miss Majorette of America pageant. Each newly crowned "Winner's Circle" member invites a select few to attend the party. This party is a chance for twirlers to relax and catch up with fellow competitors at the end of the week, before many part ways for the year; it is a huge honor to be invited. Jackson recognizes the embodiment of the baton twirling habitus, outside of a twirling competition.

Navigating a range of material, historical, and ideological circumstance, baton twirling holds meaning organized by the twirlers. A baton twirler's identity has obligations and expectations for their behavior as a member of the NBTA organization. Conceptualized by "things we do" processes (Anataki and Widdicome 1998) (Best 2011), a twirler's identity is managed by social interactions and the performance is through interactive work.

Olivia mentions how she "did" the baton twirling habitus:

"You [twirlers] have to be able to talk and walk with poise. Over the years it became a thing in my head and I learned that you really have to show your best side, to get anywhere in NBTA".

In maintaining the distinction between those who have access to the “Winner’s Circle” and those who do not, the gendered and raced criteria leaves little room for abstraction. Rules and regulations limit certain twirlers from success in the baton twirling culture by marking them out of place.

### **Finding 3: Formal and Informal Culture**

My last finding illustrates how the habitus of baton twirling is reinforced by written, and unwritten codes of conduct. Race in the context of sport and feminized sport is not a marker of simple categorization, but rather a social narrative of race that is constructed within a sociocultural context (Bimper Jr. 2015: 225). Both white and black women’s involvement in baton twirling are shaped by the same patriarchal relations that underlie mainstream sports. Specifically, the relationship between culture, race, and gender indicates the trouble black women have achieving success in the twirling world. Black women’s bodywork is called into question in the twirling world through comments on their score sheets, and low placement in comparison to their peers; black women are seemingly out of place in NBTA. However, in many ways black women exert agency and resist the discourse that suggests their bodywork performance is incorrect. Black twirlers experience the challenges of negotiating their identities in a baton twirling culture that privilege whiteness, having to learn to manage prevalent and racially charged stereotypes. The grave underrepresentation of biracial and black Miss Majorette of America winners emphasizes the critical racial inequality that persists. Many African-American twirlers are limited in regards to twirling division and there is seemingly a hierarchy within the NBTA organization. Race and gender, all reveal their performative dimensions and shape the identity project within the NBTA world. For females, the highly stylized Miss

Majorette of American championship is superficially limited to white females, leaving out the narration of black females and their identity work within the NBTA culture.

Olivia is a black Miss Majorette of America winner, a “Winner’s Circle” member of the 10-12-age range. Olivia and I were fierce competitors back in the day of our competitive careers. Sharing a coach, (Jackson) Olivia and I were not only the same age but also the only black twirlers for many years in the advanced division. When Olivia retired our aversion grew to friendship and I rooted for her when she became the first black UCLA twirler. When I interviewed her, Olivia mentioned:

“I knew who all the black twirlers were because there wasn’t a lot, there wasn’t a lot of diversity, I was kind of used to it, my ethnicity being in the minority, it didn’t shock me, I feel like in the beginning stages, in the novice and beginning there is a lot more diversity.”

Racial and ethnic differences demonstrate how twirling identity formation is achieved differently. Achieved femininity, and the appearance of appropriately raced and gendered bodywork becomes the standard for pageants, such as Miss Majorette. Many NBTA twirlers are foremost twirlers, whether it is for their high school, college or competitive team; however, there is an important link between social identity and social inequalities. In the NBTA culture, twirlers lack development of racial consciousness, or are reminded time and again. The majority of twirlers identifying as white, expresses whiteness within NBTA as a cultural identity. Whiteness, as much as being a twirler has become a cultural style. Whiteness is “just normal” and social actors are unable to recognize the privileges they received (Best 2011: 913). NBTA is composed of racial dynamics that consider the racial association, as well as the physical proximity that play into the formation of a racial self-concept for white twirlers. Black twirlers have to navigate NBTA through a racially conscious lens in a culture that lacks diversity racially and ethnically.

Black twirlers seemingly reproduce their identity as twirlers; however, through their contact with white twirlers, have a different understanding of self. For white twirlers, whiteness remains invisible and an unnoticed aspect of identity; however, black twirlers are unconsciously encouraged to adhere to the same look, hair and tights, thus perpetuating failure in terms of placement and division. Black twirlers adopt a myriad of styles, as well as coping strategies to navigate the opposing cultural spheres of the baton culture.

The NBTA is largely under-studied, and even more so are race relations in feminized cultures. Black twirlers in the novice, beginner and intermediate divisions work to one day be a part of the “Winner’s Circle”, yet have difficulty even entering the advanced division. The majority of twirlers NBTA are white, maintaining the separateness and hierarchy (Omni and Winant, 1994) (Harris Combs, 2016) over black twirlers in the organization. Black twirlers seemingly token twirler, suppressed from the Miss Majorette of America title. “Bodies out of place” helps to illuminate the presence of systematic pushback against the advancement of black twirlers in the advanced division, as well as the “Winner’s Circle”, amidst the growing discourse of colorblindness (Harris Combs 2015). The black winners of Miss Majorette of America have been few; after the first winner in 2003, the black winners have been light-skinned and seemingly tokens. Black athletes, and in particular black twirlers, are “power” twirlers and intertwined with the racial ideology that black women are inherently more masculine. Grand Nationals is a separate competition from the Miss Majorette of America pageant. Baton twirlers qualify by placing Top 8 in the respective state or regional open Solo competitions. At Nationals, twirlers move from the Top 20, to the Top 15, to somewhere in the Top 6. Grand Nationals is for power solo twirlers, and those who thrive under pressure to do the “perfect” solo, every single time. “Naturally athletic” twirlers, such as the few black twirlers, only win Grand Nationals;

there is no pageantry, fluff, or performing gender or femininity in this event. Grand Nationals has always come second to the Miss Majorette of America. The winners of Grand Nationals are seemingly forgotten year after year and there is a lack of prestige with the title.

Kris was my coach during my solo career. She took me under her wing after I won Miss Majorette of America pageant and trained me to become an even better twirler before my retirement. During her interview, she mentions:

“I think historically, the Miss Majorette of American pageant have always been treated as most important. They [past winner’s] hand out awards and twirlers love a crown. Does that come from when we were little kids, why are we like that? I am not sure.”

There is a limited number of black twirlers in the advanced division and “Winner’s Circle”, reinforcing their assumed place as distinct from, and often passive to white twirlers. There is a social distance between black and white twirlers. Black twirlers attempt to adapt to the NBTA culture and the boundary between black and white twirlers is their entry into the advanced division. The boundary is not readily discernible and many social actors lack the ability to see that the novice, intermediate and beginner divisions operate as the proxy of black twirlers “place”. The social hierarchy has been ingrained into the minds of judges, many times commenting on tight color and hairstyle of black twirlers. Distinct racial and gender patterns keep black twirlers in their “place”, often perceiving them as dissonant bodies (Harris Combs 2016: 536). Social and political place in the formation of racial identity as well as racial relations can be employed within baton twirling to further explore how blacks are expected to “stay in their place” and out of the “Winner’s Circle”.

Many of the twirlers, coaches, and judges in NBTA would agree we are in a post-racial society, the baton twirling culture does not see color. However, some bodies are deemed to have a right to belong in the “Winner’s Circle” and others do not. Bodies out of Place theory, as coined by Collins is useful in understanding the racial stratification that thrives NBTA. As significant as bodies out of place in mainstream society, it equally thrives in the purportedly colorblind of the baton twirling culture (Harris Combs 2016: 536). It has become ingrained that black twirlers do not adhere to the norms and standards of NBTA and are never on par with white twirlers. Black and biracial twirlers are out of place because essentially black women are the antithesis of white beauty, femininity, and norms (Owens Patton 2006: 36). Black and biracial twirlers are called into question and become outsiders because of institutionalized differences.

NBTA greatly mirrors society, the majority of twirlers are white, coaches and judges are white, the head of the institution is a straight, white, male and the black twirlers who thrive, align with the “white” ideal. Bodies out of place are a continuation of colorblind racism and have become a dominant component in contemporary cultures, such as baton twirling. The colorblind frame in NBTA widens the racial divide, furthering micro-aggressions, and forged a link between the control of black bodies (Harris Combs 2016: 538) and maintenance of social order. Though seemingly unconscious, the policing of the black body from entering the “Winner’s Circle”, is achieved from the micro dynamic of power. According to Feagin and Feagin (1999), the elite maintenance of oppression from harsh judging and score sheet attributes becomes unspoken (Harris Combs 2016: 539). The white gaze has placed black bodies as the object, and operates as a weight on black twirlers. The culture may seem colorblind; however, black twirlers feel the burden of doubt early in their twirling careers becoming recipients of discord. Seemingly

innocent in theory, the panoptic view of baton culture keeps twirlers in their place, particularly black and brown bodies. With a false sense colorblind frame, the NBTA culture perceives proximity with social integration without understanding the lack of black twirlers in the “Winner’s Circle” as an issue. The gendered, classed, racial patterns of this feminized culture maintains the equilibrium (Harris Combs 2016: 539) that black twirlers do not have the social mobility to move past the novice, beginner, and intermediate divisions. Under the guise of natural order, bodies out of place operates at a macro level, but is evidently seen at the micro level of baton culture and the patterns are discernible. Bodies out of place are invoked through discourse, the unwritten norms and standards of NBTA laden with race-based attitudes become evident in how black twirlers are judged.

In context, the black body is not visibly excluded, there is a duality; the body is accepted; yet the body out of place is rejected (Harris Combs 2016: 540). The stereotypes of black and brown bodies operate in the social order ingrained into the culture, and out of place bodies are patterned and perpetuated. The construct of place can be intrusive in understanding how the racial hierarchy of baton twirling systematically operates, oppresses, and is maintained in the NBTA institution. The “bodies out of place” theory highlights the role individuals in the institutions, and illustrates the assertions of colorblindness (Harris Combs 2016: 545). Bodies out of place shifts the focus from systematic oppression to looking at both structure and agency as co-existing dual processes (Sewell, 1992) (Harris Combs 2016: 546). In focusing on the body, we can better understand that agency is not in fact free will and maintaining status quo keeps bodies their place (Harris Combs 2016: 546). Looking at the larger context of bodies out place theory, there is a patterned manner with both social relationships and institutions operating in

America (Harris Combs 2016: 546). Utilizing bodies out of place, this theoretical lens reveals how white actors are socialized to respond to black and brown bodies perceive as displaced.

**CHAPTER 6:**  
**DISCUSSION: PRIVILEGES AND DISADVANTAGES**

Raced and gendered bodywork is embedded in the feminized sport of baton twirling. Beginning at a young age women learn how to do gender, race and femininity; however, there is an institutional disparity for those who do it “incorrectly”. Within the competitive twirling culture, and specifically what I call the “Winner’s Circle”, identity management is seen among women. In and outside the “Winner’s Circle”, female twirlers must construct a feminine identity through choreographed gender performance. bodywork inside the baton twirling culture can be further extended to other feminized cultures and sports wherein the social actors are encouraged to adhere to the hegemonic ideal. Moreover, my results support that those who perform the white, hyper-feminine, elite, and sexualized archetype benefit from group based privileges, specifically by entering the “Winner’ Circle”. Sanctioned discourse on race, gender and femininity both affirm and reproduce bodywork privilege, suggesting a hierarchy for twirlers who do it appropriately.

Structural inequalities are seen in the twirling culture as the explicit socialization of gender, race, femininity, and bodywork is upheld by the lack of critical reflection by social actors. The objective markers of race, gender, hyper-sexuality and bodywork act as a proxy for the NBTA twirler’s identity. While imposing a seemingly achievable standard for all twirlers, the ideal does not reflect the individual’s own understanding of doing gender, race, and femininity.

for those who do not adhere to the standard. Despite the culture's best intentions and claims of inclusiveness, these values and expectations silence subordinated groups. Feminized sports such as baton twirling highlight the hegemonic ideal of white femininity and the "appropriate" performances of gender and aesthetics; twirlers who embody this routine as their own are better perceived as Miss Majorette of America winners and role models.

Interviewee Dawn acknowledged how the baton twirling habitus reinforces the importance of doing bodywork correctly,

"Even though no one said it, it [the aesthetic ideal] was expected, and the reason I said it was known to be that way is because when you come into the competitive world you just watch and observe what it going on and see people who win and people who don't win, and of course you're going to mimic people who won, like you mimic people you know who have the potential to win at the national level, and traits..." "Because when you go to the competitions everybody pretty much looks alike, even in a group, you're supposed to look alike. I mean all the hair is alike, girls wear the same color tights, no matter what color skin they have and in competition, diversity is a hindrance, they are still expecting twirlers to look alike".

In particular, gender, femininity and bodywork reveal the mechanisms in which power is exercised and inequality becomes reproduced. The baton twirling habitus has been constrained by the white, middle class character (West and Fenstermaker 1995; 9) and the twirling culture is seen in tunnel vision. The dominant ideal, as seen in baton twirling culture, does not see black and biracial experiences as significant; judges, peers, and coaches privilege white femininity and an aesthetic standard that black women are not able to adhere to and consequently their existence in the twirling world is marginalized. The processes in which these conditions are internalized, and abstracted into existence, impact how baton twirlers approach bodywork. The baton twirling habitus is largely based on the unspoken norms, values, and expectations regulating who has access to social capital and opportunities, specifically in the advanced division. Every habitus

externally imposes limitations on behaviors (Sander and Mahalingam 2012; 114), and the lens in which baton twirling is seen guides the twirler's behavior resulting in socialization that reproduces as well as strengthens the culture. Discourse, in particular, reproduces the habitus and becomes an invisible framework in which gender, femininity and bodywork are enacted.

Bourdieu (1977) emphasizes that the role of discourse becomes taken-for granted behavior, reproducing lines out of the dominant ideal that further naturalizes and legitimizes the position of the most privileged (Sander and Mahalingam 2012; 114). In baton twirling the structurally powerful group are white twirlers. Those who can perform the ideal (white) standard for femininity and gender normalize the group status, making their privilege inaccessible for many twirlers. The lack of black twirlers, specifically in the advanced division, has rendered their experiences invisible. Black and biracial twirler's raced identity has value-laden character; however, similar to American society, baton twirling contributes to the status quo reproducing the indivisible discourse of privilege. Baton twirling has heavily silenced black and biracial twirlers because of their inability to adhere to the dominant ideal, and in doing so their experiences and bodies are out of place.

Using habitus as a guiding concept I am able to analyze the ways the white hegemonic ideal is heightened because of the twirler's performance; the twirlers choreographed routines as well as their gender performance contribute to raced and gendered bodywork. Analyzing the baton twirling habitus, I was able to understand how the tangible markers of gender, race and femininity are converted to social capital. The baton culture has unfortunately masked and normalized the existence of unearned privilege. The quality of privilege is seen as natural by repelling black and brown bodies back to their place. The baton twirling culture has naturalized the hierarchical structure. The embeddedness of social marginality limits the opportunities for

twirlers who do not adhere to the dominant aesthetic to ever win Miss Majorette of America. The focus on habitus puts particular importance on context and what shapes gender in multiple and unexpected ways. Race, gender and femininity in are linked to identity; they are simultaneously present, mutually reinforced, and salient, impacting how bodywork is done.

The hegemonic discourse in baton twirling habitus authorizes the way gender, femininity and bodywork is performed. As a verb, the way of being, knowing, and doing is internalized and appropriated by images, patterns and words. Score sheets and comments from coaches becomes a social constructed discourse that guide twirlers on what is accepted as instantiation of the ideal twirler. It is seemingly obvious that the social language and circumstances of the twirling habitus have fundamentally shaped baton twirlers development, specifically for women. However, for black women, there is a confluent and ongoing relationship among the heterogeneity that shapes black women's consciousness.

Raced and gendered experiences cannot be looked at separately; however, in baton twirling, the athletically feminine standard becomes central to the habitus. The controlling image of the ideal Miss Majorette of America winner is patterned and reproduced to make systems to inequality appear natural or normal (Harnois and Ifatunji 2011: 1007). In controlling who has the ability to enter into the "Winner's Circle", the baton twirling habitus justifies discriminations against twirlers who fail to measure up to the ideal twirler. The "archetype" twirler fails to account to the unique experiences of twirlers who repeatedly do bodywork inadequately. By documenting the importance of gender, race, and the feminine ideal, this research represents the first step in analyzing the intersectionality of many twirlers' identities. Women in the twirling habitus strive for the white, heterosexual, and feminine ideology as normative, and in context, black women's identities become a form of subordinated gender

construction. Typically regulated to the bottom of the gender hierarchy, their femininities never measures up to normative bodywork yardstick, influencing the interlocking aspects of their consciousness (E. Richardson 2009: 755).

Black women in baton twirling experience “double jeopardy” (Harnois and Ifatunji 2011: 1009), meaning that because their bodies out of place aesthetically, as well as the limited number of black twirler in the advanced division, black twirlers face differential treatment on the basis of race and gender. The location of black women in the twirling habitus is captured and their relation to the dominant ideal is subordinated. Black women are seemingly unassimilable to the discursive paradigm and standards for gender and race domination (Harnois and Ifatunji 2011: 1025). Black bodies are out of place and to exert agency, many twirlers make meaning to assert themselves socio-politically in their subordinated context.

### **Doing Difference**

Bodywork acknowledges the relationship between gender, race and the ideal feminine standard. Many twirlers have unique experiences in the baton twirling habitus, and there are obvious complexities to doing gender, femininity, and race; however, black twirlers are not able to “overlook” their race in the analyses of gender relations. In doing bodywork there are difficulties for many black twirlers resulting in their limited experience in the “Winner’s Circle”. In baton twirling, gender is not an individual characteristic; it both arranges the institution as well as justifies the most fundamental social division (West and Fenstermaker 1995:9). The way individuals do gender and bodywork reveals the way power is erected and produced, as argued by West and Fenstermaker, white sensibilities are privileged (1995: 10). The advantaged

viewpoint of those who have the ability to do white femininity, elitism, and sexualized ideal construct their self in comparison to the “other”.

Bodywork becomes a distinctive domain of social experience and is always relevant for how the social actor in the habitus organizes social life. Black twirlers have a marginalized position in baton twirling; lacking the aesthetic body to enter into the “Winner’s Circle” they become outsiders within the culture (Hill Collins 1986:14). The dynamic of power and inequality seemingly accounts for black bodies failing bodywork, and because so, black twirlers exert agency. While there are black and biracial twirlers, their position has become interlocked with the novice, beginning, and intermediate divisions, drawing a distinctive line between the insiders and outsiders in the culture. Black twirlers must assert themselves and carve out free space to make their own discursive practices. Making such resources, they have the ability to reveal engagement with the hegemonic ideologies and reveal their own definition of doing gender, race, and bodywork. A post-racial narrative in American society, as well as in baton twirling, signals the assumed increasingly proportional participation of persons of color, particularly black American’s within sporting venues. Engaging with a Critical Race Theory perspective is used to interrogate the racial consideration that shapes sport, and influences black twirler’s experiences.

### **The Hidden Figures: Black twirlers in predominantly white spaces**

The politics of hair and skin color parallels the politics of society; race and gender become products of culture hegemony and white supremacy (Brown White 2005: 297). Hair and skin color for black women not only defines who they are within society but also holds them to painstaking efforts to attain a standard of beauty that was not designed for them. Black

Americans see white skin tones and hair textures/lengths as a standard measure of beauty (Morton, 1985; Taylor 1999) (Robinson-Moore 2008), resulting in a light skin, long hair bias that has become inherently evident in black U.S culture as well as baton twirling. Common black American hairstyles such as dreadlocks, braids and knots carry signs of self-confidence, boldness and rebellion (Patton 2006: 30) and over the years, some black twirlers have come to challenge the white beauty ideal.

Judges and competitors have their favorite competitors, and Jackson (40's) a male judge, roots for those who challenge what is seen as the ideal baton twirler: "I do think there is the intention to root for the black girl, or the girl who isn't blonde".

While the "ideal" has become normalized, some black twirlers employ agency by their hairstyle, changing the color of their tights to match their skin tone or painting their shoes to match. There is no rule or penalty for wearing tights that match a twirlers skin tone, yet, all twirlers, regardless of race, wear "Suntan" tights. The commonly wore "Suntan" color poses problems for darker skinned twirlers, once again reinforcing their outside status and failure of bodywork.

Bailey comments on the social norm of wearing "nude" tights in NBTA, acknowledging the peculiar nature that more twirlers do not wear tights and shoes to match their skin tone:

"People think it's really weird, like people will comment on it on score sheet, and I remember talking to [a twirling parent], very outspoken women, but she talked about having to paint her [daughters] shoes weird colors because they don't make tights/shoes to match darker skinned girls."

However, many twirlers have to make changes to their costumes. Bailey went on to say:

"Some judges made comments on it, and people would say your shoes are way lighter than her tights so for freestyle they would always out her [the black twirler] in pants so she could wear black shoes. So yeah, I definitely think it excludes them [black twirlers],

like illusions, and costumes and stuff, it's just so much more work to find some that match your skin tone, even though it's called nude. It doesn't even match my skin."

One black competitor, Meredith recognized that because she challenged the white beauty ideal, she was penalized:

"The problem with that is if there was [judgment], they [the judges] were doing everything to make it look like it was not. I was competing with my darker skinned tights and I'm sure I lost points appearance wise".

Locating the raced and gendered discourses, these social conditions and interactions are reproduced and related to the broader social and political concerns (Richardson 2006: 756). Navigating their identities in the twirling habitus, black women are situated to speak, think, and act, adhering to the NBTA white feminine ideal. While black women may not reach the "Winner's Circle", their experiences are necessary to thwart the assault on their identities. The black and biracial narratives in the habitus illuminate how their self and consciousness is negotiated in these encounters (Richardson 2006: 758). Young black women must learn to oppose the construction of their selves through the bodywork standard. By challenging the white beauty standard, black women's discursive practices work to avoid the dominant hegemonic discourses to their gender, femininity and race. Black women, search to construct themselves in a habitus that has worked to annihilate them from ever succeeding. While many times their strategies of resistance are misinterpreted, they instead should be read as moves for agency (Richardson 2009: 758). Based on the white patriarchal market (Richardson 2009: 758), black and white women are judged inversely.

The white feminine ideal is how black and white twirlers are judged, and for black women, bodywork and the aesthetic perception are continuously reinforced, allowing for

inequality to be reproduced. Unjust social relations through scoring, comments from coaches, and lack of black twirlers in the “Winner’s Circle”, is re-enacted through such social practices further hindering the development of the twirling community.

Jeff finds a problem with how the culture of baton twirling has been reproduced:

“That’s part of beauty and sadness of twirling is that it hasn’t changed a whole lot from the 60’s in its heyday. Sure we got rid of the boots and white shoes, but beyond that what have we changed? In terms of racial makeup, class differences, and gender, so no twirling hasn’t changed. There are more guys, based on my own research, like in the early 90’s guys didn’t want to twirl because it was associated with the effeminate, and probably because of the AIDS epidemic, so yeah it’s changed a bit because male participation has increased over the years.”... “But nothing has changed. From year to year nothing changes, and every year there are the big complaints on Facebook for a few weeks after Nationals but nothing ever comes from it, and there have been small changes, incremental, but nothing that has added up to a whole overhaul of the sport.”

Identity, discourse, and ideology become embodied in knowledge and the response to the social world of twirling. Black women’s resistance is harnessed for self-empowerment in the twirling habitus and without their resistance and enactment of agency, the cycle of social inequality is reproduced.

## **CHAPTER 7:**

### **LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Gendered, and raced bodywork as a measuring stick**

Through 10 in-depth interviews as well as observations of three (3) baton competitions I present a theory of bodywork, related to gendered and raced performances amongst baton twirlers.

Because of the embodied work of social actors to perform the dominating aesthetic of a given culture context, many twirlers have the ability to enter the “Winner’s Circle”, while others are kept in their place of the novice, beginner, and intermediate divisions. The “Winner’s Circle” is once again referring to the group of twirlers who have won the Miss Majorette of America title.

The crown and banner are passed down from winner to winner each year, and each age division has a circle of winners. Inside, outside, and beyond the “Winner’s Circle”, twirlers perform bodywork in accordance with the written and unwritten standards of the baton twirling habitus.

bodywork can be further extended to occupations and other sports wherein the culture is dominated by aesthetics.

#### **Limitations and Future Research**

As with any empirical study, there are limitations, specifically in the form of generalizability and sampling. My findings are not generalizable due to the small sample size this research is based on; the qualitative nature and limited sample size provide for obscure findings of both black and

women twirlers in the NBTA organization. Due to time constraints, I was only able to interview ten (10) participants, limiting an overall exactitude of the baton twirling habitus as a whole. Nevertheless, my theory of bodywork is malleable enough to be applied to women in aesthetic dominated cultures beyond baton twirling. Conducting my interviews via phone was restrictive; some participants were on their way to work, had prior commitments or could only speak in between breaks. Unfortunately, some interviews were done in two (2) different phone calls and many interviewees “lost” their train of thought. Acknowledging they “forgot what they were saying before”, many times I lost “real-life” twirling examples because I was not speaking to my participants face to face. Because I did not do in-person interviews, gauging comfort level and body language was obviously difficult. With that being said, all participants thanked me for my study and admitted that I asked questions they had never thought of before. My position as a retired twirler was both limiting and beneficial. My “outsider within” status provided me the ability to deeply analyze the interviews because of my extensive knowledge of baton twirling and it’s complexities (Holden 2015; 141).

Many of the black participants I interviewed were retired or current judges in the NBTA organization. There are a limited number of black baton twirlers currently active in NBTA, and the two (2) I had previous relationships with were not accessible. One biracial twirler was under the age of eighteen (18) and the second biracial twirler was not at Nationals due to a family emergency. While none of the black interviewees were current baton twirlers, they were still heavily involved in baton twirling, and if they were not involved, they were not far removed. The

participants, who were not involved in baton twirling anymore spoke of experiences that led them to disassociate from the sport completely. Reasons included the stress of competitions, or stress from the strict dieting regiment, reiterating bodywork and the ideals and standards twirlers have to adhere.

In terms of race, I do believe that the sample I recruited is reflective of the NBTA twirling community. There is not specific demographic information for the baton twirling habitus; however, the limited number of black interviewees mirrors the lack of black baton twirlers in the NBTA habitus. While my sampling is small, I interviewed all but two (2) black, advanced individuals who have participated in NBTA during my ten (10) years of involvement. This limited number of black participants seemingly mirrors the lack of black twirlers in general, specifically during my 20-year involvement. I acknowledge that covert racism, socio-economic class, and social environment could have influenced the experiences of many black twirlers, a focus I did not include in my study. For example, the cost of travel, coaches, and high entry fees for regional, state and national pageants could be an economic strain for some twirlers. In sum, the experiences may be very different for black twirlers and white twirlers due to privilege and availability of resources.

As a further limitation, I did not include baton twirlers who competed in United States Twirling Association. There are many twirlers who cross over to the USTA organization and while I have not competed in the organization myself, many interviewees cited an even greater emphasis on the aesthetics over athletic ability. Interviewees spoke of the judges emphasizing weight loss, costume and appearance modifications after the twirler competed: bodywork at work to structure the twirler into what the judge wants to see.

For future study, I would widen my interview sample as well as adding a quantitative survey. In doing so, participants could answer questions on alleged prejudice, inequalities, sexual orientation, and socio-economic limitations, issues that I did not ask about. Asking these questions in survey form, participants may feel more comfortable talking about economic limitations or discrimination they've felt when interacting with judges and coaches when competing. With expanding my sample size and including a preliminary survey, I could gain a better sense of the population, as well as having the ability to reach a wider audience. I believe the elements of the "Winner's Circle" and bodywork can be further applied to dance, gymnastics, cheerleading, ballet and the color guard (flag spinning) because of their close correlation to baton twirling. All of these sports and activities are appreciated best by emphasizing their aesthetic athleticism; however, there may be the overlap of the athlete's aesthetic prioritized over the athleticism.

### **The Importance of the project**

Mills insists that the life of an individual cannot be adequately understood without reference to the institutions in which the biography is enacted (Lanuza 2011: 3). A sizable part of my identity today is as a baton twirler. I spent most of my childhood as well as part of my adulthood competing as a baton twirler; however, after my "retirement" I began to question the diversity of the sport. The National Baton Twirling Association was founded in 1945, and the first black twirler won the coveted Miss Majorette of America title in 2003. The society and culture of baton is a grand canvas upon which there are multiple biographies and histories that unfold the twirlers' inner dynamic. As a sociologist, I must understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external careers of the various competitions in the arena

of baton twirling (Lanuza 2011: 2). Winning the title at the young age of 10, I did not fully understand the significance of becoming the first black Miss Majorette of America, because as a light skinned black woman, I was never considered as such. I was able to “blend” in similarly to other twirlers, my hair could be styled to match the white beauty standard, and the tights I wore matched my skin tone.

I have been asked, “What are you?” multiple times. After I said that I was black, I was always told, I was not, and could not be black or, even that I did “not count.” It was clear that I did not fit into the box that “matched” the way I looked; I did not act or talk “black enough” to be categorized in that way. I did not understand racial issues the way darker skinner blacks experienced situations. I question now if it was because of the baton twirling culture and habitus I was so immersed in, and if my own bias and identity as a light-skinned black woman prevented me from seeing race as an existent issue. From realizing my colorblindness, I was inspired to do this research. Racial categories are top-down; the way individuals look and identify is formed from social constructions. From my understanding of Mills, as a competitor, the discovery of how familiar features of myself are socially patterned and implanted is because of my immersion within the arena of baton twirling (Lanuza 2011: 3). Within the society of baton twirling, as competitors, we become social actors and can further provide the “bigger picture” within a larger society.

The Sociological Imagination supports the intersection of understanding individuals’ not as isolated fragments but as coordinate points within a field or system. The matters of doing gender, femininity and bodywork are evident within the larger province of public issues and link the self to the ongoing relation of diverse issues such as minority experiences within feminized cultures. This research is crucial not only to myself as a black American within the baton

twirling culture but also to the initial understanding of females involvement in mass culture and entertainment. The realm of entertainment remains a relatively untapped area of sociological research in many ways. This research seeks to contribute to the budding knowledge of the negotiations that not only black women experience but all female twirlers' understanding in regards to their inclusive identity formation.

### **Closing Remarks**

Based on the research I conducted, I have proposed 'bodywork' as an attempt to answer my research questions of the dominant ideals and values connected to race, gender, and sex as well as their embeddedness in baton twirling performance. I analyze how twirlers who do not ostensibly reflect the NBTA ideals and values negotiate their place in the arena of baton twirling as well as during competitions. Using the metaphor of the "Winner's Circle" at the NBTA national competition (AYOP) to evaluate the privileges and disadvantages of women in the twirling habitus, I specifically consider how the habitus enables and constrains diverse racial identities and practices. The sport of twirling is complex; because of an individual's early involvement, baton twirlers are put in a unique position with regard to identity management, and how to "do" gender, as well as femininity, and race.

Baton twirling has become an expressive sphere for both female and male twirlers and identity construction. Specifically, a twirler's identity is embraced as a fragmented dimension of their school, home, and other extracurricular experiences, sharing nuanced cultural repertoires (Best 2011). Navigating a range of material, historical, and ideological circumstances, baton twirling holds meaning organized by the twirlers. For black twirlers, many exert agency on a scale of resistance. Some acts may be small, painting their tights and shoes to match their skin

tone, or wearing their braids in plaited braids; however, some acts are large scale, such as removing themselves from the habitus. Quitting baton twirling is an example of recognizing the inability for themselves, as well as other black twirlers to do bodywork correctly. As mentioned by Meredith:

“I saw that Mary (an advanced black twirler) was not winning the titles and competitions she should have been and I didn’t want to put myself through that, so I quit. It just wasn’t worth it anymore for me”.

Despite black twirlers employing agency, these acts of resistance do little to combat raced and gendered inequalities. The baton twirling habitus functions as a site of stability. Assimilating differences through enforcement and regulation, which are racially coded as white, reinforces the display of body, gender, race, and femininity.

### **Recommendations**

The NBTA organization has potential to flourish for years to come; however, changes need to be made. The athletics of baton twirling has become background to the aesthetic and seemingly, so have Grand National Baton Twirling Championship. Grand National is an athletic event; only those who have the ability to perform near-perfect solos time after time win this title. However, this event and title does not have the same notoriety as the Miss Majorette of America pageant. Grand National twirling Champions deserve the same respect in the NBTA organization that Miss Majorette of America holds. Highlighting the winners in the same way Miss Majorette of America pageant winners are acknowledges that the athleticism of baton twirling is still valued. Interviews and observations have concluded that the essence of baton twirling has gone to the wayside and many events focus on the “flash” of the twirlers, unfortunately, limiting the

potential of baton twirling.

The events in the Miss Majorette of America pageant are fundamental, however, changing the appearance, and “razzle dazzle” of the costume could help focus back in on the athleticism of the baton twirler, instead of the aesthetic. Competitors should wear a business suit to for the interview portion, and plain black dress for modeling. Interviewing in NBTA has improved my interviewing skills. I have learned how to walk, talk, and sit from the many twirling pageants I have competed in. Interviewees alike commented that because of NBTA interviews, they are able to interview for jobs with confidence. Twirler learn how to sit without fidgeting, speak without saying “umm, like or yeah” and walk while exuding poise; however, if twirling dressed as though they were preparing for a job interview, it would allow the judges to focus on their interviews and posture instead of how aesthetically pleasing they looked. Modeling in a simple and plain black dress focuses on the walk of the twirler, and the model is not overshadowed by the dress. Many pageant dresses are more extravagant than others, and to keep judging fair and unbiased a simple black dress does not take away from the actual event of modeling. The cost of buying pageant dresses year after year is expensive, and many parents feel the economic pressure. Having a uniform dress for modeling levels the playing field and judges have to focus on the twirler, instead of how lavish the dress looks.

Black and brown twirlers unfortunately are disadvantaged in the NBTA organization and that will only change with a overhauling of how judges judge, as well as score sheets. The habitus of baton twirling has reproduced younger judges to judge in the same way as the older generation, and there can be no change until the judging style is improved. I would suggest a clinic once a month, every month beginning in May. During this time in the summer, judges could ask questions, and voice their concerns they had at local competitions to better prepare for

Nationals in July. All judges who are participating at America's Youth on Parade (A.Y.O.P) need to judge similarly, regardless of personal styles and favorites and this clinic would be the chance to go over how to do so. According to score sheet, how aesthetically pleasing the twirler is, is emphasized. The score sheets for strut and solo should be re-done placing a bigger emphasis on how the twirler twirls, not what she or he looks like. While the costumes and hair are a bonus, restructuring the score sheet allows for the judges, as well as the twirlers to further build our sport, focusing on what twirler do best.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## Interview Schedule:

1. **General Demographics:** Everyone
  - a. Current age:
  - b. Racially, how do you identify?
  - c. Where did you grow up?
    - i. Where do you currently live?
  - d. Education level (highest degree obtained).
  - e. Current occupation?
2. **Twirling Demographics:** Everyone
  - a. Age when started twirling:
  - b. How did you start twirling?
  - c. How long did you twirl?
    - i. If different, how long did you compete?
  - d. Who were your coaches?
  - e. Twirling organization(s) you participate in?
  - f. Where have you competed?
  - g. Titles
  - h. Are you currently active within the twirling community in any capacity (coach, judge, parent, etc.)?
3. **Personal background and familial involvement:** Everyone
  - a. Tell me about your family's involvement in twirling.
    - i. Mother?
    - ii. Father?
    - iii. Siblings?
  - b. Did your family members attend your practices or competitions?
    - i. What do they typically do at your competitions?
    - ii. Do you recall any particular practice or competition where they played a key role? What happened
    - iii. Why did you quit or retire?
4. **Femininity:** Everyone
  - a. Can you describe the "ideal" twirler?
    - i. What might they look like, dress like, what personality characteristics, etc.
    - ii. How about a female twirler you view as having more "masculine traits"?
      1. What is it about him that makes them more of a strong/masculine typed twirler?
      2. In what way do you think that the Miss Majorette of America pageant causes twirlers to play up their girly-ness?
      3. Do you (or did you) present yourself differently in the twirling world and the outside of it? And if so, how?
  4. Do you feel that competing, judging or coaching a student in the Miss Majorette of America pageant, such a pageant puts an importance on

beauty, attractiveness and ladylikeness at a young age that is carried on throughout the years?

5. How do you think twirling has changed over the years?
  - i. What do you attribute to such a change?

### 5. Questions for Research:

1. How are men perceived or greeted in baton twirling?
  - i. Can you give an example?
  - ii. What about outside of twirling? How do you feel twirlers in general are perceived?

What are the differences between a male and female twirler?

- i. What makes a male twirler effeminate?
  - ii. Are there events only women compete in?
    - b. Are there tricks specific to women or men?
  - i. How do you think having a male judge is different than having a female judge?
  - ii. Do you think you are judged more harshly by female judges or males?  
(Competitors only)
1. Why do you think twirlers have the reputation they do outside of the baton world?  
Can you give an example?
    - a. As a competitor, (Judge or Coach) have you noticed a great of diversity among twirlers?
      - i. If yes, can you provide an example and if no, why do you think that is?
      - iii. Why do you think that? Can you give an example?
    - c. In what ways do see societies stereotypes of how men and women should act, being embodied as such, within the twirling world?
    - d. Is there an assumption that all female twirler's, judges, and coaches are heterosexual?
      - ii. What characteristics would cause you to think otherwise?
    - e. As you may know, baton twirling began as a male dominated sport. Over the years, and even now, do you think that it has become such a sport that could be/is deemed only "sex-appropriate" for females?
      - i. Why do you think baton twirling has seemingly changed to accommodate more of a female audience?
    - f. Who set the standards on how to twirl? Men or women?
    - g. How are the standards set? When was the last time there has been a change in rules?
    - h. Have you ever been told to carry yourself in a certain way (poise, dress, etc.) to be better received as a future Miss Majorette of America winner? - Competitors only, past twirlers

### 6. Race:

1. Do you think race has ever been an issue in competition? If so, when? If not, why not?
2. How have the costumes and tights alienated certain types of girls? Or do you not see that to be true?

### **7. Opinions:**

1. How have some of the current costumes overshadowed some competitors twirling skills?
2. How would you compare beauty pageants to baton twirling?
  - b. What similarities' and differences do you see?
    1. Have we changed as a sport and put more emphasis on beauty/sparkle than talent?
    2. Have we become more of a beauty pageant then a twirling competition?
      - a. If yes, do you have a suggestion of what you would do so that the costumes don't become the focal point?
      - b. Many want baton twirling to become an Olympic sport, how do you think our sport has the lasting power needed to possibly become an Olympic sport? Have modernized?
      - c. For a male competitor, are there certain things that would cause you to be distracted from their overall performance? (Costumes, hair, beard etc.) - Judges only
      - d. Do you think the Miss Majorette of America pageant as the focal event has taken away from some of of twirlers who are much stronger in just one event? Solos and Grand Nationals for instances
      - e. What would you change so that both events have equal importance? Or do you think they both do right now?
      - f. How do you prepare your body for Nationals? Including diet, workout regiment etc.? – Competitors only
      - g. In the ways that you used to prepare for Nationals, do you find yourself still preparing in such a way, or even wanting too with diet, exercise etc? – Former twirlers, coaches, judges
      - h. How do you eat and workout “out of season”? Are there big differences?
      - i. Did you try to maintain that lifestyle when not in competition? Do they find challenges in doing so? If so, what challenges?

### **8. Final Thoughts:**

- ii. How did you, or your coach select your costumes?
- iii. Were they your, or more your coaches ideas?
- b. What did you like about them? What did you not like?
  - i. Have you ever catered your routines to a particular group (e.g. coaches, audience, judges)?
  - ii. Whenever you have had a male judge, have you ever done anything different than when you had a female judge? (Competitors only)

- b. When judging a male competitor, what are some of the things you write on their score sheet you would not put on a female competitor's score sheet?  
(Judges only)
- c. You have been involved in baton twirling for many years, what are some of the expected norms and ideals that you have come to recognize in NBTA? For example it could be hair and makeup styles, judges preferences etc.
- d. What have you written on a competitor's score sheet, (or had written) to steer you in the "right direction" of what was the norm in NBTA? In regards to hair, make-up costume, tights etc. (Competitors and judges only)
- e. Is there anything that you would change about NBTA? And if there were, what would you change in baton twirling so that more than just a certain type of twirler wins the Miss Majorette of America pageant?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

# CONSENT FORM

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## Consent to Participate in a Research Project Tentative Title: Deconstructing the “Winner’s Circle”

### Primary Investigator

Taylor N. Bolds, M.A  
Lamar Hall  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
The University of Mississippi  
(330) 280-0346  
[tnbolds@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:tnbolds@go.olemiss.edu)

### Description

This project is designed to investigate how female baton twirlers, competing in one of the largest American baton twirling organizations embody femininity as well as negotiates raced and gender criteria in what I call the ““Winner’s Circle””. To examine this impact, the investigator is requesting your participation in an interview, in which the investigator will ask you a series of open-ended questions on your individual experiences on a variety of social issues. Data on social practices, such as semi-structured interviews and participant observations presents open-research elicited and thus allows for reactive data.

### Risks and Benefits

You may feel uncomfortable talking about your personal experiences. However, it is hoped that anonymity will encourage you to speak openly and honestly. If you have questions or concerns about the risks of this project, please contact the primary investigator at the email address listed above.

### Costs and Payments

The total time requested of you for an interview is estimated to be no more than ninety minutes. In some instances, a request for a second interview may be made, but you are not obligated to grant this request. Participation in this project is completely voluntary. All participants will receive a letter of appreciation from the primary investigator for their time involved.

### Confidentiality

The only information that will appear in the research reports is basic demographic information (e.g. age, gender, race/ethnicity, position within NBTAs). All participants will be given pseudonyms.

### Right to Withdraw

If you provide consent for this project, but wish to later withdraw, simply notify the primary investigator at their email address listed above.

The primary investigator may terminate your participation in this project without regard to your consent and for any reason, such as protecting your safety and protecting the integrity of the research data.

**IRB Approval**

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. If requested, I will be given a copy of this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have received answers. I understand that by signing and returning this form, I am consenting to participate in the study.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C: MODELING SCORE SHEET



APPENDIX D: STRUT SCORESHEET



APPENDIX E: SOLO SCORE SHEET

**NBTA  
SOLO**

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PLACE

Checked - very good Circled - unsatisfactory	Weak 0-10	Low Fair 11	Fair 12	High Fair 13	Low Avg 14	Avg 15	Good 16	Very good 17	Exc. 18	Sup. 19	Score		
<b>COMPLETE VARIETY 20</b>	VARIETY BALANCE CONNECTIONS AMBIDEXTERITY VERT-HORIZ BLEND SIDE TO SIDE FRONT TO BACK PATTERN BLEND					ROUTINE CONTENTS	FULL HAND, including low flips AERIALS, higher than top of head RELEASE RECEPTIONS FINGER ROLLS ROLLS HORIZONTAL SECTION NOVELTY MULTIPLE BODY SPINS      Left      Right						
	<b>DIFFICULTY 20</b>	DIFFICULTY OF TRICKS DIFFICULTY ACHIEVED through follow-through intricacy & timing ATTEMPTED Perfection Lacking POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS					ROUTINE CONTENTS	FULL HAND, including low flips AERIALS, higher than top of head RELEASE RECEPTIONS FINGER TWIRLS ROLLS HORIZONTAL SECTION NOVELTY MULTIPLE BODY SPINS      Left      Right					
<b>SPEED 20 CONTROL</b>		RATE OF BATON SPEED SPEED VARIATION CO-ORD OF BATON SPEED & SPEED OF BODY MOVEMENTS (Rapidity)  GENERAL HANDLING - TECHNIQUE RELEASES      RECEPTIONS BATON PATTERNS      Vertical      Horizontal PATTERN CHANGES											
	<b>SMOOTHNESS 20 GRACEFULNESS</b>	FLOW OF BATON HANDLING RELEASES                              RECEPTIONS  BODY MOVEMENTS                      BODY LINES BALANCE USE OF FREE HANDS, ARMS, LEGS, FEET											
<b>PRESENTATION 20 SHOWMANSHIP</b>		POSTURE APPEARANCE ATTITUDE PERFORMANCE FINESSE  PROJECTION - EYE CONTACT ENTHUSIASM SALESMANSHIP											

**PENALTIES**

**TIME**

	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	5.0	5.5	6.0
Drops												
Fall												
	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.2
Break												
Off Pattern												
Out of Area												

ADV - 2:20-2:30  
INT - 1:50-2:10  
BEG - 1:30-2:00  
NOV - 0:30-2:00

UNDERTIME (.1 per sec)       IMPROPER SALUTE (.5)  
 OVERTIME (.1 per sec)       FAILURE TO SALUTE (1.0)


SCORE  
  
LESS  
PENALTIES  
  
TOTAL  
SCORE


see back of sheet  
for personal comments

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk's Initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
Judge's Signature

## VITA

### **Volunteer/Work Experience**

#### Teaching Assistant for Sociology 101: 2015 to graduation

I was in charge of grading essays, in-class assignments and tests for two (2) classes per semesters.

#### Assisting professors in research: 2017

I helped code essays from University students on the Ole Miss campus about race relations

#### Student Athlete tutoring: 2017 until graduation

The University, and the FedEx Center to tutor student athletes in the subjects of Psychology and Sociology hired me. I helped with homework, proof read their papers and helped them study and prepare for quizzes and tests.

#### Leap Frog: 2015 to graduation

I volunteered with my sorority as well as on my own at the Leap Frog Program. Leap Frog provides reading intervention tutoring and enrichment activities to first, second and third grade from Oxford and Lafayette public schools.

#### Horizons: 2016

I helped prepare for the summer program. Horizon's at the University of Mississippi is a key initiative in the McLean Institute for Public Service and Community Engagement's mission to fight poverty through education. Horizon's is a six-week, full-day summer learning program that provides academics, enrichment, and recreation to students from the LOU community. Horizon's offers a high quality learning experience outside of the traditional school year that supports academic achievement and healthy youth development.

#### Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority: 2013 until graduation

I pledged Theta and along with gaining an amazing group of sisters, I will also be volunteering my time to our philanthropy; CASA, Court appointed special advocates. In regards to this organization I will be the presence in the life of an abused or neglected child until they are placed in a stable and permanent household.

#### Phi Chi: 2014 to present

Psi Chi is the International Honor Society in Psychology, with the purpose of encouraging, stimulating, and maintaining excellence in scholarship of students. I joined this past year and it has been an amazing

experience, with connecting with other psychology majors and furthering my knowledge of the science of psychology in general.

Charity of Samaritan purse: 2013 to present

Supporting operation Christmas child in demonstrating the mission to show God's love around the world to needy children. Filling shoes boxes with gifts of love.

Library representative; 2012 to present

I will help with showing new students around and answering basic questions about the system and what the library has to offer.

YMCA -5K: Community Project; 2012

Participated in 5K run to help raise monies for the youth program at the local YMCA.

Breast Cancer Awareness; 2011-present

“Twirling for the Cure” is an organization started by my life-long, baton twirling coach and great mentor after his mother was diagnosed. I am overjoyed to say she is a survivor! I am active in this movement as it has brought a deeper level of awareness for breast cancer and raises money for the Susan G. Komen foundation. Its first participants were only from the twirling organization, close friends and families but are growing nationwide.

Pro-Life Walk; 2011

Went door to door raising monies and participated in the walk for life. This organization has great compassion for the unborn child and helping less fortunate, young mothers.

Vacation Bible School; 2011 to present

Being a leader at VBS is something I have done every summer since offered the position. I have led the children in games, crafts and many other activities. This has been a truly entertaining and rewarding activity.

Church Block Party Games Assistant; 2011 to present

I assist with the games portion of the block party that brings the less fortunate in our church community together for a day of fellowship.

Member for the Lions Club; 2011 to present

The Lions Club was the sponsor of the Peru trip; I became a member of the union. I had to raise the money for my trip by going door to door in the neighborhood. I was an American ambassador for the society in the country of Peru.

Peru Twirling Ambassador; 2011

My senior year of high school I was fortunate enough to be selected by the National Baton Twirling Association to travel with ten other baton twirlers to Peru, Trujillo and Manchu Pichu. We performed all over the country as well as visited girls' orphanages, nursing homes and provided the less fortunate with pairs of eyeglasses that I helped fundraise before I set to embark on my two week wonderful journey.

Senior Class Representative; 2011

As the specific representative for the senior class I was the voice of my peers. I was given the opportunity to exercise leadership and initiate change. I had to ensure that my classmates were properly represented and completely informed.

Visitation of the elderly program; 2010-2011

I visited the older members of the neighborhood every Saturday. Had great conversation, read to them and did household chores as needed. This was a pure joy to see smiles and hear their laughter.

Performed at Drug Free Rally; 2010

Being a successful baton twirler I am asked to perform at many events. On this particular occasion, I was asked to perform along with many other talented people. This event is an annual gathering sponsored by my church along with other churches and businesses in the community held in the community park system.

Hammer and Nails; 2010

My class and I helped build and paint homes in a local neighborhood. It was a very rewarding experience to partake in such a special activity that actually changed lives forever. Taking an active part helping this non-profit organization was an amazing experience

Church Community Dinners; 2009 to present

My church provides meals for the homeless and less fortunate on holidays. I volunteer my time to help serve dinners as well as talk with those who come in. It is a very humbling experience. I feel fortunate and blessed that I can give back to the community.

Ole Miss Feature Twirler; 2011 to 2015

This is an extremely important position as it gives me the opportunity to represent my school. I twirl at all home football games and at the Mississippi State game when it is away. Go Rebs! I travel to the bowl games and will perform multiple times at basketball games when the opportunity presents. In the springtime I work in band hall for my scholarship.

Pregnancy Support center; 2008-present

Our church is actively involved in fundraising activities to support the center. One of the activities is filling a baby bottle with loose change. I have filled a bottle every year.

Dance and baton twirling teacher; 2006 to Present

As a dance and baton twirling teacher I planned the days curriculum and help build the team to a greater competitive level. I worked with girls of many different ages and social/economic backgrounds.

Attendant Church Nursery; 2006 to present

This is a volunteer position that I dearly cherish. As a child psychology major I will pursue anything to realize my lifelong goal of helping the next generations succeed. Every Sunday I "work" with the children who are brought to the nursery. I do anything from playing, rocking to restroom duties for the child. The children range from newborn to the age of two. This is a position of high responsibility and trust.