"Take Another Look At 'Em": Passing Performances of Gender in the Junior-Freshman Weddings of Florida State College for Women, 1909-1925

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“Take Another Look at ‘Em”: Passing Performances of Gender in the Junior-Freshman Weddings of Florida State College for Women, 1909-1925

by

Sarah Lynne Jünke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

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Dedication

To Abby, who is deeply missed.
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# Table of Contents

List of Figures .......................... ii

Abstract ................................ iii

Chapter One: Introduction .......... 1

Chapter Two: What Are Mock Weddings? 7
  Some Early Examples ............. 7
  North American and Canadian Prairie Weddings 11
  Southern U.S. Womanless Weddings 14
  Eleanor Boarding House All-Female Mock Weddings 17
  Discussion of Junior-Freshman Weddings 19
  Summary .......................... 22

Chapter Three: Contextualizing Junior-Freshman Weddings 28
  Progressive Era Cultural Gender Shifts and Conflicts 28
  College Women and Female Intimacy 31
  Women’s Colleges and Campus Culture 35

Chapter Four: Finding Meaning in Junior-Freshman Weddings 39
  Social Drama ........................ 39
  Ritual, Citation, and Liminality 49
  Gender, Citation, and Passing 54
  Summary .......................... 57

Chapter Five: Conclusion .......... 59

References ........................... 61
List of Figures

Figure 1. 1919 FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Party ........................................... 2
Figure 2. 1920s FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participant ...................................... 14
Figure 3. FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participant ............................................. 21
Figure 4. MSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Party .................................................. 22
Figure 5. November 1917 FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participants ................... 25
Figure 6. 1924 Bride and Groom, FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding ........................... 27
Figure 7. Nell Carroll Long Jumping During Field Day 1920 .................................... 36
Figure 8. 1922 FSCW Cotillion Club Members ....................................................... 37
Figure 9. Bride, Louise Grumbles and Groom, Slim Williams .................................... 46
Figure 10. Bride, Edith Wilkinson, and Groom, Bara Gunn ..................................... 47
Figure 11. 1920s FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participants ............................... 48
Figure 12. 1925 FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participants ................................ 49
Figure 13. Groomsmen .............................................................................................. 53
Figure 14. Stylized Acts ............................................................................................ 55
Figure 15. 1920s FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Groomsmen ............................... 57
Abstract

Junior-freshmen weddings were all-female mock weddings that were performed as annual traditions on college campuses throughout the U.S. in the early part of the twentieth-century. In the weddings, college women played both the men’s and women’s roles, and were joined as husband and wife by their college administration. This thesis focuses on the junior-freshman weddings of Florida State College for Women during the years 1909-1925 and argues that the weddings expressed the conflicted cultural contexts that college women in the Progressive Era confronted, but that, significantly, this expression was done through passing performances of gender. The women’s choice of passing performances in the junior-freshman weddings allowed them to appropriate metaphors of masculinity as their own, thereby challenging a dominant gender ideology that limited their roles within society and their relationship with structures of power. In their performances of gender, play is the language they used to express this challenge.

Because there were no existing scholarly studies of junior-freshmen weddings, it was necessary to comparatively examine analyses of other types of mock weddings. Through this examination it was possible to elucidate a working definition of what mock weddings are, which helps to understand not only junior-freshmen weddings, but also provides a framework from which to investigate the many other types of mock weddings that are as of yet unstudied.
Chapter One:
Introduction

An article in the Florida State College for Women's student newspaper in November 1919 announced the upcoming wedding of two of the college's students. Calling it the "first great social event of this season," the brief article contains nothing that would suggest that the wedding between freshman Louise Grumbles and junior Mr. Slim Williams is anything out of the ordinary.\textsuperscript{1} Following the wedding, a second article proclaimed, “never before this year was Conradi Chapel so beautiful as… when Miss Fresh, ’23 (Miss Louise Grumbles) was united in marriage to Mr. Odd, ’21 Junior, (Mr. Slim Williams) by Rev. Edward Conradi.”\textsuperscript{2} The traditional ceremony commenced with a “lovely musical program,” followed by “the strains of Lohengrein’s ‘Bridal Chorus’”\textit{(sic)}, as the bridesmaids, “lovely in evening dresses and carrying arm bouquets of roses,” were “escorted” by the groomsmen down the aisle.\textsuperscript{3} The bride, “in her wedding gown of white satin and with her bridal veil,” recited her vow to “take thee… to my wedded husband to have and to hold from this day forward,” and the groom vowed to take her as his “wedded wife.”\textsuperscript{4} The author writes that upon being pronounced “man and wife” by Rev. Conradi, the newly married couple joined their junior and freshman

\textsuperscript{1} “Junior-Freshman Wedding,” \textit{Florida Flambeau}, November 15, 1919, 1. “Mr. Slim Williams” is a pseudonym for junior Elizabeth Williams.


\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.
“relatives and close friends” in the college’s gym for a “reception and party,” ending the night with the bride’s bouquet toss and departure “for [the] bridal trip.” Figure 1 is a photograph of the bridal party, complete with flower girl and ring-bearer in the front—the photograph reinforces the article’s description of the traditional and formal nature of the event. What these articles and photograph playfully conceal is that both the bride and groom, as well as the entire bridal party, were female.

Figure 1. 1919 FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Party. (Courtesy Marion Laura Stine Collection, 1917-1921, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)

In the early part of the twentieth-century, many young women on college campuses across the U.S. were annually joined together in “holy wedlock” by their college faculty and administration. These women were participants in a type of mock wedding called a junior-freshman wedding, an event that joined together members of the

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5 Ibid.
6 “Beautiful Junior-Freshman Wedding,” Florida Flambeau, November 9, 1918, 1.
junior and freshman classes. American mock weddings have occurred in many different contexts with various orchestrations, including up to the present day, yet as a type of cultural performance they have not been thoroughly studied. The scholars who have studied mock wedding types have primarily focused on overtly parodic performances of femininity by men. There has been little attention paid to analyzing women’s performances in mock weddings, particularly those found in all-female types. Junior-freshman weddings are an example of an all-female type of mock wedding, and they appear to have not been the subject of any in-depth, scholarly analysis. This thesis will analyze Progressive Era junior-freshman weddings as cultural texts, shedding light on their meaning and significance in the lives of college women.

The focus for this analysis will be on the junior-freshman weddings of Florida State College for Women (FSCW) in Tallahassee, Florida from the period 1909-1925. FSCW’s junior-freshman mock wedding, an annual tradition, was similar to the junior-freshman mock weddings that occurred at other U.S. women’s colleges during the late Progressive Era. All were official college events that symbolically created a “union”

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7 Junior-freshman (or freshman-junior) wedding is the name used consistently in college yearbooks, newspaper articles, and student scrapbooks to refer to the event.
8 Primary sources for this study consisted of photographs, student newspapers, yearbooks, and student scrapbooks. From the sources that could be located for this thesis, it appears that junior-freshman weddings were an activity pursued by white women. Because of this, the use of the term woman/women throughout refers then specifically to white women.
10 Some of the women’s colleges that had official annual junior-freshman weddings during the period of 1900-1925 were Judson College, State Normal School for Women in Virginia, Westhampton College, Simmons College, Shorter College, Mississippi State College, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Blue Mountain College, and Florida State College for Women; co-educational Cornell University in New York also had a junior-freshman wedding tradition for its female students. Many other women’s colleges had less formalized, unofficial all-female mock weddings (including Miami University, Carleton College, Smith College, and Vassar College), but the focus for this thesis is only on the official junior-freshman variety.
between the female students of the junior and freshman classes.\textsuperscript{11} The participants were all female (the exception being the officiant, who was typically a member of the faculty or administration), with the groom’s party members cast from the junior class and the bride’s party from the freshman class. The weddings were elaborately staged and included invitations for the students and faculty, formal wedding attire, organ and choir performances of wedding music, wedding vows, decorations, photographs, and celebratory parties. They occurred in the fall semester, typically around November, and often coincided with other annual class-based events, such as sports competitions that pitted the odd and even year classes against one another. Beyond these similar features, the junior-freshman weddings are also notable for their “passing” performances of gender, in which the young women playing the male roles could be seen convincingly by spectators as being men.\textsuperscript{12}

The passing performances of the junior-freshman weddings are perhaps their most intriguing and perplexing feature; they complicate the question of what the weddings meant for participants and audience, and set them apart from other types of American mock weddings that employ overtly parodic and caricaturized performances of gender reversal. The existing studies of other types of mock weddings cannot completely explain junior-freshman weddings. While those studies identify mock weddings as a mechanism

\textsuperscript{11} “Beautiful Junior-Freshman Wedding,” \textit{Florida Flambeau}, November 9, 1918, 1.

\textsuperscript{12} This usage of “passing” has been borrowed from Elizabeth Drorbaugh, “Sliding Scales: Notes on Storme DeLarverie and the Jewel Box Revue, the Cross-Dressed Woman on the Contemporary Stage, and the Invert,” in \textit{Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing}, ed. Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993), 130. By Drorbaugh’s definition, passing means: “women who appear wholly as men and hence ‘pass’ for men… she is seen as a man. This example derives from [Peggy] Phelan’s sense of seeing as a kind of passive kind of perception which, when seeing nothing that is markedly different or out of the ordinary, sees ‘nothing.’” When perception becomes more active, and a performance is “read,” the woman becomes “at once seen as a man, and read as a woman. The tension between seeing a man and reading a woman passing as a man is usually so acute that spectators commonly marvel at having been fooled.”
for expressing conflicted feelings towards socioeconomic structures, their focuses on the meanings of parodic performances limit their applicability towards understanding how the passing performances of junior-freshman weddings functioned to create meaning for participants and audiences. This thesis will argue that junior-freshman weddings did express the conflicted cultural contexts that college women in the Progressive Era confronted, but that, significantly, they did so through passing rather than parodic performances of gender. The women’s choice of passing performances in the junior-freshman weddings allowed them to appropriate metaphors of masculinity as their own, thereby challenging a dominant gender ideology that limited their roles within society and their relationship with structures of power.

Junior-freshman weddings have not been the subject of a focused study before, so this thesis will draw on studies of other types of mock weddings to comparatively build a definition of mock weddings that can serve as a model for analysis. Building a definition of mock weddings is necessary because no such definition currently exists. Chapter Two provides a short history of American mock weddings during the nineteenth-century, and then moves to discussing three types: North American and Canadian prairie weddings, womanless weddings, and all-female Chicago boarding house weddings. The chapter ends with a summary of what has been gleaned from the discussion, and a modeling of a working definition of mock weddings in general that can be applied to junior-freshman weddings. Within this model, Victor Turner’s conceptualization of play helps bring light to how mock wedding performances function as covert challenges to social realities.

The junior-freshman weddings of FSCW took place during the latter half of the Progressive Era, and an analysis of them must consider this cultural context in order to
understand the conflicts that women would have been experiencing and responding to in their wedding performances. Chapter Three discusses Progressive Era gender shifts and resultant social conflicts, and its effects on female intimacy and college campus culture.

Chapter Four begins by introducing Victor Turner’s concept of social drama and exploring how junior-freshman weddings fit within it. Within the context of social drama, the wedding performances served to integrate young college women into unfamiliar roles within the campus culture. Turner’s concept of liminality helps to explain how the junior-freshman weddings would have provided women with the possibility of imagining alternatives to social structures, a subject the other studies of mock wedding do not address. Discussion of Judith Butler’s theory of gender and its performative nature brings an understanding of how liminality and gender performance posed challenges to societal structures and produced empowering experiences. Through the work of Turner and Butler, the passing cross-dressing performances of junior-freshman wedding participants emerge from the shadows of parodic performances found in other types of mock weddings, and are shown to be empowering and meaningful challenges to dominant societal conceptions of gender that limit women’s roles and identities. Chapter Five offers concluding thoughts and suggestions for future research.
Chapter Two:

What Are Mock Weddings?

Some Early Examples

Mock weddings have been performed in the U.S. in various forms and settings since at least the mid-nineteenth-century.\(^{13}\) The weddings, characterized in articles as fun affairs, served as entertainment at public and as well as private events; examples abound in mid-late nineteenth-century newspapers of mock weddings occurring in diverse settings such as private homes, community fairs, and churches. The widespread reports of mock weddings as found in nineteenth-century newspapers, suggest that from the 1860s onward, they became increasingly common forms of entertainment. There were sometimes public objections to mock weddings on the grounds that they were socially inappropriate or potentially legally troublesome,\(^{14}\) but, overall, contemporary newspaper

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\(^{13}\) An article from page 2 of the *Springfield Republican* on April 4, 1864 (“Sacred Comedy”) mentions mock weddings as, “very similar [to the] ‘goings on’ at tin, silver and golden weddings,” suggesting that mock weddings were an established form of entertainment and celebration by the 1860s.

\(^{14}\) Authors of newspaper articles sometimes criticized what was seen as making a farce out of something sacred. Articles also frequently brought up the question of whether the ceremonies between men and women produced legally binding marriages; this was a real concern as newspaper articles reveal that sometimes the supposedly “mock” minister turned out to be authentic and the marriage was legally seen as valid. Even when the minister was not authentic, the newspaper articles relate that questions about the legal validity of the marriage remained based simply on the participants’ recitation of the marriage vows. In some cases the weddings led to legal troubles as couples sought annulments and divorces, or dealt with persistent “mock” spouses. Occasionally people discovered they were accused of bigamy based on their participation in a mock wedding decades earlier. Examples of problematic mock weddings include: 1) From a June 30, 1889 article in the *St. Louis Republic* newspaper, a Ashland, Kentucky mock wedding that “was intended simply to furnish amusement for a party of young people… turns out to be a legal ceremony… it never occurred to anyone that it was binding.” 2) A September 18, 1890 *Critic Record* newspaper article, entitled “The Fool-Killer Was Not Present,” tells of a similar mock wedding in Keyport,
articles portrayed the weddings as innocent sources of entertainment for young people, or at the worst, “in questionable taste... but there was really nothing wrong nor sacrilegious” about them. Mock weddings persisted in popularity into the twentieth-century and as late as into the 1950s, they were mentioned in newspaper articles, most frequently as entertainment at engagement or anniversary parties. Their occurrences are still found in America today, particularly as community-centered celebratory events.

The earliest examples found in nineteenth-century newspapers are of mock weddings between non-cross-dressing men and women, each fulfilling their socially prescribed gender role in the ceremony. In the last decades of the nineteenth-century, articles began to appear describing mock weddings staged by groups of exclusively young girls and women in both public and private venues. An 1893 article, which appeared in newspapers as far away as Michigan, Tennessee, and South Carolina, tells of “twenty prominent ladies” of West Pittston, Pennsylvania and their staging of an all-female mock wedding in the family home of one of the participants. Calling the women

New York that occurred at a picnic—the mock minister revealed to the participants after the ceremony that he was a pastor at a church in Kansas City, thus making the marriage valid. 3) A June 21, 1879 Oregon State Journal article tells of a young woman who participated “in sport” in a mock wedding “to an unprincipled acquaintance” who had employed a real Justice of the Peace to perform the ceremony. The “temporary bridegroom” was so persistent that “he would not permit her to be married to anyone else,” and a year later a police officer had to guard the entrance to the church when the woman was married to someone else. A similar report of this example appeared in the Indianapolis Sentinel on February 1, 1879—the article was entitled, “Mock Marriages: An Amusement That Had Better be Avoided.”

15 “Sacred Comedy,” Springfield Republican, April 4, 1864, 2.
a “jolly crowd, [who] are compelled by the lack of young men to amuse themselves to a great extent,” the article reveals that half of the participants played male roles and wore “men’s suits, three being in full dress.”

A common pattern that many early Progressive Era all-female mock weddings followed was to reenact actual, well-known weddings of celebrities. An 1895 front-page article from the *New York Times* recounts details from an all-female mock wedding that took place at Vassar College that November. The senior class put on for the junior class a wedding, reenacting the recent real-life wedding of the Duke of Marlborough and Consuelo Vanderbilt. Five years later, female students at the Women’s College at Baltimore reenacted the same Marlborough-Vanderbilt wedding. This “brilliant burlesque,” included “pretty college girls gathered from the country at large and all parts of the civilized world” playing the roles of choir boys, ushers, flower girls, President McKinley, the Prince of Wales, Queen Victoria, and the Duke of Marlborough and Miss Vanderbilt. The wedding included not only traditional wedding features such as “the wedding march from “Lohengrin” and decorations which “were profuse,” but also alterations such as the bride’s vow of “Yum yum” instead of “I do,” and the groom’s vow of “You bet.” Female students at the co-educational Bates College in Lewiston, Maine held a enactment of the 1906 wedding of Alice Roosevelt to Nicholas Longworth; this particular celebrity wedding apparently was so compelling to the young women that they

19 Ibid. This identical article appeared in at minimum Michigan’s *Jackson Citizen Patriot* and *Kalamazoo Gazette*, Tennessee’s *Daily Journal and Journal and Tribune*, and South Carolina’s *State Paper*. The articles state that the women conducted their mock wedding in secret, but were discovered by local boys who revealed their activities to the community, much to the women’s embarrassment.


22 Ibid.
held their mock wedding three days before the real-life wedding took place.23 Another Roosevelt-Longworth reenactment wedding was held at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio in 1907.24 The Wittenberg wedding, celebrated with “great pomp and ceremony,” included “an absurdly large set” engagement ring, wedding presents of “everything from a meat fork to a piano,” “joking reference[s]” in the vows, as well as “borrowed dress suits from fathers and brothers.”25

From newspaper article descriptions of early examples, it becomes apparent that these mock weddings all exhibit a degree of “play.”26 Participants replicated the traditional wedding ceremony while also introducing creative alterations; “cabbage head” bouquets, joke gifts, altered vows, cross-dressing, and other revisions all involve the participants playing with familiar wedding structures to create new meanings.27 To understand junior-freshman weddings it is necessary to begin with a comparative look at some of the other studied types of mock weddings. The discussion that follows examines the most prominent arguments about various types of mock weddings, including North American and Canadian Prairie mock weddings, Southern U.S. womanless weddings, and

23 “Mock Longworth-Roosevelt Wedding By Bates College Co-Eds For Revenue,” Boston Journal, February 14, 1906, 6. Additional articles from page 6 of the February 18, 1906 Dallas Morning News, entitled “Girls Are in Trouble,” and page 1 of the Boston Journal, entitled “Mock Marriage Causes Dean to Resign,” follow up on the Bates College Longworth-Roosevelt mock wedding and reports that it caused “considerable scandal and gossip.” Though the article does mention that the female participants “dressed in men’s clothes” for the performance, this does not seem to be the cause for the scandal. Instead, it claims that the wedding was “said to have been sacrilegious because of dance which followed ceremony” (Dallas). The issue was resolved by “prohibiting dancing by the girls after all future entertainments,” which prompted the resignation of the faculty member who had overseen the wedding (Boston).


25 Ibid.

26 Henry Bial, The Performance Studies Reader, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 115-116. Bial writes that within performance studies, “play is understood as the force of uncertainty which counterbalances the structure provided by ritual... play stresses innovation and creativity... play is contingent... all performances, even rituals, contain some element of play, some space for variation” (115). The concept of play will be returned to in the Summary section of Chapter Two.

27 “Girls Burlesque a Wedding,” 1; “Mock Wedding at Vassar College,” 1.
all-female Chicago boarding house weddings. From this discussion, themes emerge revealing that mock weddings involve play as a creative force, one that is used both to express participants’ feelings toward the social structures that impose on their lives, and to challenge them. As a form of play, cross-dressing performances emerge as a significant means of expression and challenge.

**North American and Canadian Prairie Weddings**

Folklorist Michael Taft has studied modern-day cross-dressing in mock weddings of “Canadian prairie provinces and the northern plains of the United States.” He places the prairie mock weddings within “a larger North American dramatic tradition” of mock weddings, which he defines as “dramatic parod[ies] of liturgical wedding rituals,” and includes cross-dressing as “the salient feature of.” Taft writes that the scripted weddings of the prairie communities are “characterized by cross-dressing, bawdy behavior, ad-libbing, and general carousing” by the men and women who participate in them. In these mock weddings, which are typically performed to celebrate wedding anniversaries, Taft argues that participants use their performances of gender as a form of release from built-up social tensions.

In a 1997 essay on the prairie mock weddings, Taft focuses on the men’s performances and endeavors to understand why men participate in the weddings—why they “dress as women and behave in a decidedly unmanly fashion.” From his analysis

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
he concludes that the men’s performance of gender serves as a way of asserting their masculinity and social dominance. Taft situates the prairie mock wedding as a “Brechtian type of performance” that uses parody of gender to create an alienation effect for actors and audience. The men in the weddings “make no attempt to become women… they play clownish and distorted women,” and their costumes remain costumes as their performances “invariably reveal the ‘true man’ beneath the dress, wig, and mask.” Taft argues that the male mock wedding participants, “by taking on femininity and braving humiliation… accentuate their masculinity and receive the heightened manly status which accompanies such acts of bravery.” Taft further argues that the men make “a mockery of femininity… they are not playing the roles of women, but playing with the roles of women.” He calls the men’s parodic performance of gender a “commentary by men upon women,” which “not only asserts the power of masculinity but which attempts to lessen the power of femininity.” In the context of the communities Taft studied, “sociological and economic factors work to disempower men while they extend the power and control of women.” Taft argues that the men feel that they “are under siege,” and though their performances in the mock weddings do not change this, they do offer the men an opportunity to “re-assert their power and control”

33 Ibid., 134.
34 Ibid., 134; see also Elin Diamond, Unmasking Mimesis, (New York: Routledge 1997). Diamond writes that the alienation effect is a “technique of defamiliarizing a word, an idea, a gesture so as to enable the spectator to hear it afresh… in performance the actor alienates rather than impersonates her character, she ‘quotes’ or demonstrates the character’s behavior instead of identifying with it… if the performer remains outside the character’s feelings, the audience may also” (45). This alienating performance does not appear to apply to junior-freshman weddings.
36 Ibid., 135; Taft, “Folk Drama.”
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 136.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
through performances that both proclaim their own masculinity while also portraying women as absurd.\textsuperscript{42}

Taft’s conclusions about the women’s parodic performances in the weddings are different—in his 1989 article, “Folk Drama on the Great Plains: The Mock Wedding in Canada and the United States,” he briefly argues that the women use the wedding as a way to “express their ambivalent and conflicting roles as farm wives.”\textsuperscript{43} These roles include performing work on the farm that traditionally would be considered “men’s work,” as well as traditional domestic duties. Taft argues that the women can “turn the tables on the men” during the wedding, making the men “also explore this issue, at least viscerally if not intellectually.”\textsuperscript{44}

Taft’s analysis of the prairie mock weddings is a useful starting point for understanding junior-freshman weddings. Both types occur within conflicted cultural contexts, and both play with gender roles through cross-dressing performances.\textsuperscript{45} The primary difference between them is the parodic performances of the prairie weddings versus the passing performances of the junior-freshman weddings. The junior-freshman wedding participants, even when pictured laughing in photographs while performing a masculine role, still lack the “clownish,” “bawdy,” and “distorted” qualities that characterize the male and female performances in the prairie mock weddings (fig. 1).\textsuperscript{46} Taft thoroughly analyzes the motivations of the male performers, but his discussion of the women’s performances lacks the same depth and theoretical backing. He does not

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Taft, “Folk Drama,” 22.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{45} The cultural context of junior-freshman weddings will be explored in Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{46} Taft, “Folk Drama,” 16; Taft, “Men in Women’s Clothes,” 135.
address whether the women’s performances subvert the gender ideology that the men’s performances work to reinforce.

Figure 2. 1920s FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participant. (Courtesy State Archives of Florida.)

**Southern U.S. Womanless Weddings**

Historian Craig Thompson Friend has researched womanless weddings, particularly in the South, and has written that they “seem to have emerged from late nineteenth-century community festivals during which the event was occasionally, spontaneously, and rather informally performed by men assuming the male and female
Friend argues that womanless weddings are part of the Western tradition of “carnivalesque ‘rituals of inversion’” in which “the participants were from the lower classes, and their targets were the status and pretentions of the upper class”; in these types of rituals the “ridicule” of the upper class was “accepted... and [seen] as a much-needed ‘safety valve’ to release social tensions in harmless ways.” In womanless weddings however, Friend discusses how participants inverted the inversion and “featured upper-class men of any given community parodying women and the lower classes”; in public performances, the participants “lampooned their wives, families, neighbors, and the very community standards that they represented.” The womanless weddings became the “safety valve” through which upper-class, white men could release their tensions—tensions that resulted from “socioeconomic changes that threatened the familial ideal” and the men’s position of dominance in their communities. According to Friend, through the parodic mocking of the people that seemed to threaten the upper-class white man’s privileged status—women, black men, and the lower classes—the womanless wedding offered its participants a chance to mock these threats both literally and figuratively.

The men’s gender performances in the womanless weddings, similar to Taft’s prairie mock weddings, depended on exaggerated, parodic performances. Friend writes


48 Ibid. Friend seems to have indirectly referred to Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of carnivalesque; he references his statement to historian Peter Burke’s Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, in which Burke does discuss Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalesque, and how it can be applied to the study of popular culture. Friend does not develop the idea of carnivalesque in his argument, and instead argues that American traditions of inverting the carnivalesque informed practices of womanless weddings.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.
that the actors “took liberty to ‘ham it up,’ kissing audience members of both genders, flashing garter belts, adjusting whatever passed as breasts, and in general just being naughty.” Friend emphasizes that the gender inversions of the womanless weddings ultimately “replicated and buttressed” an idealized “reality” internalized by the male actors. Their performances of gender relied upon an acceptance of gender norms and parodying of gendered identities, and in turn reinforced communities’ conceptions of gender.

Friend briefly discusses a type of womanless weddings other than those performed by white, upper-class men; African American communities in the South sometimes performed similar womanless mock weddings. These events were held in African American venues, primarily churches, which were removed from the direct control of their respective white communities. Friend argues that for oppressed Southern African American people, “the very opportunity to perform beyond the eyes of the white community [in African American churches] was the social inversion, empowering participants and audiences alike.” Friend argues that these mock weddings had the “intent to inspire not only entertainment but pride,” and goes on to state that the weddings were empowering for participants and audiences through their “affirmation of community norms.” The empowerment that Friend alludes to is poorly explained or documented in his analysis; his conclusion about the wedding’s empowering nature seems to hinge on

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52 Ibid., 226.
53 Ibid., 227.
54 Ibid., 233. Supporting Friend’s argument is an example (“Irreverent, Hostile Police Pinch Mock Wedding Party; Go to Work, is Court Order,” Fort Worth Star Telegram, May 8, 1921, 8) of a womanless wedding occurring in Chicago in 1921 at the Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church. This wedding was a church fundraising event and the participants were black men. Interestingly, this wedding is the only instance the author has yet found of police stopping the ceremony and arresting the participants. The judge in the case ordered that the participants must return to court after one month and “if on that date each and every one could not report himself a wage earner, each and every one of them would go to jail.”
the “beyond the eyes” aspect of the wedding performances, which is an interesting and useful concept, but it does not account for how the parodic performances of gender, and the subsequent “affirmation of community norms” would have contributed to empowerment and “community building.” Friend’s discussion of African American womanless weddings as empowering for the community differs from his portrayal of their white counterparts as patriarchal exercises in maintaining oppressive social structures. While these characterizations could be accurate, it is impossible to know from the comparative evidence and analysis that Friend has provided.

Friend’s analysis provides some generalized conclusions that corroborate some of Taft’s, and further construct a coherent model of mock weddings. Both have identified mock weddings as mechanisms for addressing community tensions that develop from shifting socioeconomic realities and resultant challenges to community norms. Both argue that their respective examples express these tensions, as well as respond to them in some manner—primarily through reinforcing dominant ideologies. They also both correlate parodic performance of gender by those in positions of power within a community with this reinforcement. Play and participants’ positions within power structures thus are aligned in both kinds of mock wedding performances.

**Eleanor Boarding House All-Female Mock Weddings**

In the article “Between Two Worlds: Business Women in a Chicago Boarding House 1900-1930,” historian Lisa Fine discusses numerous all-female rituals that were practiced by single career women living in the Eleanor Boarding Houses in Chicago. Fine uses ritual theory, relying on Barbara Myerhoff, to analyze these all-female rituals, which

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56 Ibid., 233.
included kid parties (women acting as children), mock funerals, spinster parties, mock proms, and mock weddings. She suggests that the rituals helped women to adjust to the “changing role of women in society” and negotiate for themselves “new meaning in life changes, and the relationships of the individual to his or her society.”

Fine argues that the women of the Eleanor Boarding Houses were able to “live relatively fulfilling, independent lives,” while they also “clung to strong emotional ties with other women to ease the transition from home to the world of work.” Their rituals can be seen as “suggesting that these women perceived that their present life was a sharp departure from their pasts,” as well as indicating that they saw two future life paths, “spinsterhood and marriage.” Unfortunately, Fine’s analysis of the weddings is vague in its description of the ceremonies, as well as how the mock wedding rituals would have functioned to give the participants “new meaning.” Her argument makes unsupported claims such as, “if these women had any doubts about leaving their single independent lives in the Eleanor Clubs, these rituals would have helped them to act out and resolve these doubts” (emphasis added); much of Fine’s argument about the efficacious doubt-eliminating nature of the Eleanor boarding house mock weddings derives from a brief discussion of the weddings’ “interrupt[ion] by the appearance of the asylum inmate.” This interruption and its resolution through the inmate’s removal by a female “guard,” indicates for Fine a resolution to any doubts about a participant’s real-life impending wedding. Whether Fine’s conclusions about the Eleanor boarding houses mock weddings

58 Ibid., 514.
59 Ibid., 515.
60 Ibid., 516.
61 Ibid.
are accurate is unclear due to her lack of evidence. These gaps in Fine’s analysis are unfortunate since her study appears to be the only one on all-female mock weddings.

Though Fine’s analysis of these mock weddings needs better support for her conclusions and is thus limited in its direct usefulness for studying junior-freshman weddings, it does offer some general insights into mock weddings. Fine has provided an all-female example of mock weddings that appears to support Taft and Friend’s contentions that they are expressive of socioeconomic shifts and conflicts, as well as possible vehicles for resolving resultant tensions. She has also introduced a discussion about the ritual-like nature of mock weddings that can be returned to and further developed when analyzing the junior-freshman weddings in Chapter Four. She characterizes the weddings as involving a large degree of play, or “fun,” indicating that once again play is involved in mock weddings’ expressive nature. Unfortunately Fine does not address how the female participants performed masculinity—how they played—only that they did so, which hampers the comparative usefulness of her study.

**Discussion of Junior-Freshman Weddings**

Junior-freshman weddings have not been the subject of in-depth analysis before, but they have been discussed as evidence in support of larger arguments. An example is found in Catherine Shrout’s dissertation “What Every Girl Dreams of: A Cultural History of the Sacred in American White Weddings, 1840-1970.”

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62 Ibid., 517.
Shrout’s discussion of junior-freshman weddings is brief—it comprises just one page and consists primarily of descriptions of the dress and demeanor of wedding participants as seen in photographs from FSCW. Shrout discusses the “playful quality” seen in the women’s “winking” performances of masculinity, and notes that this play was by nature non-parodic. She argues that, “their clothes were plausible imitations of wedding costumes, not exaggerated or skewed for comic effect… [and the wedding] photographs… were indistinguishable from photographs of an actual wedding.”64 Figure 3 shows one of the photographs that Shrout discusses—it illustrates the difference between the parodic performances of gender that appear in prairie and womanless weddings and the passing performances found in junior-freshman weddings.65 The woman in the photograph appears as a “plausible imitation” of masculinity, her performance does not “invariably reveal” that she is a woman, but instead allows her to pass as a man.66 Passing performance is also evident in a photograph from Mississippi State College for Women’s 1922 junior-freshman wedding (fig. 4). In an example that typifies junior-freshman wedding photographs, the junior-freshman wedding party poses with poise and decorum, contrasting sharply with the “bawdy” and “clownish and distorted” parodic performances described by Taft and Friend.67

Greig discussion conflates the junior-freshman wedding with various other all-female types, and uses only one piece of evidence that directly relates to it. This evidence, humorous vows from an unspecified ceremony, is taken from a 1908 Ladies Home Journal article, and from it the authors argue that the weddings were a “parody of marriage” (135). This weakly supported contention fails to consider what theorist Elizabeth Freeman calls “a productive nonequivalence between the institution of marriage and the ritual that supposedly represents and guarantees it.” Elizabeth Freeman, The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), xv. Smith and Greig overlook other meanings that could be created through iteration of the wedding ritual in different contexts. Also overlooked are the passing performances of the junior-freshman wedding.

64 Shrout, “What Every Girl Dreams,” 79.
65 Ibid.
In her brief discussion of the FSCW junior-freshman weddings, Shrout has identified an important characteristic that sets them apart from previously discussed types of mock weddings—they all are examples of playful iterations of both the wedding and of gender, but in junior-freshman weddings the participants pass in their assumed roles, rather than parody them. Shrout too neatly implicates this insight though in her conclusion that the junior-freshman mock wedding ultimately expressed “devotion” to the marriage ritual itself. How Shrout has come to this conclusion remains unstated. Shrout fails to consider the cultural context in which the college women of FSCW lived.
and the relationship between this and their performances of gender. She has instead overlooked their passing performances as having any deeper implications, and has shaped the junior-freshman weddings to fit into her larger argument regarding white weddings.

Figure 4. MSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Party. (Courtesy Mississippi University for Women. Orr Archives, 1922 Meh Lady. http://web2.muw.edu/index.php/en/womens-research-resources.html.)

Summary

The foregoing discussion of various examples of mock weddings in has elucidated several features that can foundationally be used to construct a model for analyzing junior-freshman weddings. To begin, Taft’s contention that “the salient feature of mock weddings is gender reversal” needs to be examined.68 This statement can only be true if non-cross-dressing mock weddings, of which there are numerous examples, are

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excluded from the model. Other than the fact that these examples complicate Taft’s model, there seems to be no logical reason for their exclusion. The non-cross-dressing mock weddings occur in many of the same contexts as cross-dressing examples—engagement and anniversary parties, fundraisers, and community events, and they too use play in their enactment of wedding ceremonies. A simple rephrasing of Taft’s statement may solve this dilemma: the salient feature of mock weddings is whether they include gender reversal. This rephrasing not only leaves non-cross-dressing examples within the framework of mock weddings, but it also repositions the importance of mock wedding cross-dressing. If mock weddings are understood to include both cross-dressing and non-cross-dressing options, then their performances can be seen as representing a choice on the part of those involved—to cross-dress or not to cross-dress. The participants and planners of junior-freshman weddings chose to include cross-dressing in their performances, and this choice has significant implications, particularly when considered as an example of play.

The mock wedding examples discussed in this chapter were all infused with elements of play, which Victor Turner identified as a “dialectical dancing partner of ritual.” According to Turner, play “makes fun of people, things, ideas, ideologies, institutions, and structures… there is no sanctity in play.” Play is creative—it is, “in the subjunctive mood… it refers to what might be… the domain of ‘as-if’ rather ‘as-is.’”

Play in performance gives people opportunities for “protected” challenges to social structural elements, and in so doing it allows them to channel the creativity of play into

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70 Ibid., 168.
71 Ibid., 169.
imagining alternatives. Taft, Friend, and Fine have each concluded that the mock weddings they have respectively studied exhibit two interrelated and crucial features: they are expressive of underlying socioeconomic shifts and conflicts, and they provide participants (and possibly audiences) with a way to resolve the tensions these conflicts manifest. Play is what drives this relationship—it “draws its materials from all aspects of experience, both the interior milieu and the external environment,” and it responds to this material in a liminally subjunctive mood. Play gives mock wedding participants the ability to make fun of the aspects of culture they find troubling, and in so doing they open up the possibility for “restructuring…what [their] culture states to be reality.” As a salient aspect of mock wedding play, the choice to cross-dress or not is thus, in part, related to the cultural aspects participants find troubling, and it affects the nature of the liminal states they pass through.

Turner refers to play’s “clown’s garb” as protecting it “in the world of power struggles”; play, ranging from light-hearted humor to overt mocking, allows mock wedding participants to covertly engage in cultural discourses involving power dynamics. According to Taft and Friend, this is what the male mock wedding participants are doing in their respective examples—the participants focus their performances of gender on making fun of women, and thereby voice their frustrations with how they perceive the real-life roles of women as encroaching on their own. Women’s performances in the junior-freshman weddings differ from the men’s in womanless weddings, as well as the

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72 Ibid., 170.
73 Ibid., 169. Turner’s concept of liminal as a reflexive “betwixt and between” state is a vital aspect of ritual performances (168). Liminal will be discussed further in Chapter Four.
74 Ibid., 168.
75 Ibid., 170.
76 Taft, “Men in Women’s Clothes,” 135.
men’s and women’s in prairie weddings. In photographs from FSCW junior-freshman weddings, the women do not seem to be making fun of men. Their performances instead convey an embrace of their assumed masculine roles. Figure 5 displays this—the groomsman in the photograph confidently leans into the bridesmaid’s personal space and exhibits an ownership of the masculine gaze and its assertiveness.\(^{77}\) Absent from the photograph is any note of parody, the woman playing the role of groomsman does so without caricature and instead is convincing in her performance.\(^ {78}\) The groom in figure 6

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\(^{78}\) This photograph is directly responsible for this thesis—the shock of discovering that this convincing “groomsman” was not really a man is what prompted the author to investigate junior-freshman weddings.
conveys a similar sense of masculinity as she plays her role with a seeming earnestness, and lack of derision. In junior-freshman weddings, the play is in the women’s assuming of masculine roles without parody. Their play makes fun of a gender ideology that limited the role of women in society and proscribed certain behaviors as being only acceptable for men. The women assumed the roles of men and, playfully, challenged the boundaries of these roles.

Play in the mock wedding can be seen as being about power, and a person’s relative position to it. The college women of the Progressive Era lived in a patriarchal society that limited their access to power. The play in junior-freshman weddings is thus related to of the real-life contexts of the participants—their places within a socioeconomic structure, and their perceptions of and satisfaction with those contexts; play is the language with which the mock wedding participants express their relationship with their contexts.
Figure 6. 1924 Bride and Groom, FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding. (Courtesy Jewell Genevieve Cooper Scrapbook, circa 1924-1930, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)
Chapter Three:
Contextualizing Junior-Freshman Weddings

Progressive Era Cultural Gender Shifts and Conflicts

The FSCW junior-freshman weddings took place within the context of the Progressive Era—a period that is regarded as a time of changing and conflicting attitudes about women’s roles in society. In Disorderly Conduct, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg discusses the emergence in the early Progressive Era of the “single, highly educated, economically autonomous New Woman,” and how she “challenged existing gender relations and the distribution of power” in American society.\(^79\) Her “social and sexual legitimacy” was contested by men and women, and “through her they argued about the ‘naturalness’ of gender and the legitimacy of the bourgeois social order.”\(^80\)

Progressive Era gender discourse was directly influenced by leftover threads of Victorian Era gender ideology that had prescribed a limited role for American women, confining her to the realm of home and family. This ideology espoused and depended on a view of women as inherently different from men in significant ways; women were viewed as intellectually, mentally, and physically inferior from men. Stimulation threatened them—more specifically it threatened their reproductive systems and hence their biological imperative to reproduce. Activities outside of domestic and spiritual

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
pursuits were believed by many men and women to divert women’s energy—of which they had a limited supply—away from their reproductive systems, leading to a withering and decay of these organs and consequently their womanhood. This ideology served to legitimize women’s subservient place within the social structure by linking it with biology and nature. Among many other activities, this ideology precluded women’s pursuit of higher education.\textsuperscript{81}

Smith-Rosenberg argues that women did not languish in this limited sphere, but that they forged their own thriving “loving world of women,” built on deep emotional bonds and relationships between women.\textsuperscript{82} This world sustained women and gave them strength from which to struggle against their oppressive roles.\textsuperscript{83} Pursuit of higher education, of knowledge, became one of the ways that they framed this struggle—it was, as Smith-Rosenberg says, “their first self-conscious demand.”\textsuperscript{84} As more women entered colleges in the 1870s and 1880s, the acceptability of educational pursuits increased. From 1900-1920, the number of American women attending college grew from 2.8 to 7.6 percent, more than five times the growth of the preceding twenty-year period.\textsuperscript{85} Higher education for women was transformed, from the point of view of “parents and male college administrators,” into a “socially contained ritual that prepared the young woman for the predictable and conventional role of educated wife.”\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} Smith-Rosenberg, \textit{Disorderly Conduct}, 35.
\textsuperscript{83} Joan Marie Johnson, \textit{Southern Women at the Seven Sister Colleges}, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008); Smith-Rosenberg, \textit{Disorderly Conduct}.
\textsuperscript{84} Smith-Rosenberg, \textit{Disorderly Conduct}, 53-76, 247.
\textsuperscript{85} Johnson, \textit{Southern Women}, 3.
\textsuperscript{86} Smith-Rosenberg, \textit{Disorderly Conduct}, 253.
In the “The Gibson Girl Goes to College,” historian Lynn Gordon argues that the fictional “Gibson Girl” helped to make the college woman seem more acceptable to American society. She writes that the Gibson Girl, though portrayed as a “modern woman, unencumbered by bustles and convention,” was actually a “conservative image of American womanhood”; the popular image of the Gibson Girl at college “largely ignored the serious and purposeful aspects of women’s colleges experiences… focusing instead on their more frivolous, frolicsome, and playful pursuits.” This popular culture linking of the Gibson Girl with the college woman “demonstrated social anxieties about the New Woman… [and] seriously distorted both campus and postgraduate realities but quite accurately demonstrated the consternation with which most Americans regarded women’s changing status.”

The reality of college women’s lives was that many were “drawn out of their mother’s and grandmother’s domestic mindset” by their experiences at college. According to Smith-Rosenberg, during the Progressive Era “between 40 and 60 percent of women college graduates did not marry, at a time when only 10 percent of all American women did not.” This reality alarmed social critics who saw this behavior as a “selfish” disregard for women’s reproductive role, and a disruption of socioeconomic

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87 Gordon “Gibson Girl,” 211.
88 Ibid., 213. The acceptability of women’s frivolity is echoed in newspaper articles. One example, “What College Girls Are Doing,” *New York Herald*, November 25, 1895, 11, comments that, “women too often run the risk of taking themselves over-seriously, and it were well, while hearing from Bryn Mawr and Smith—where the altruistic tendency most does flourish—to also listen to some bits of nonsense like Vassar’s mock wedding and Barnard’s peanut hunt or an ostensibly frivolous club like Radcliffe’s Idler.”
90 Smith-Rosenberg *Disorderly Conduct*, 253.
91 Ibid.
structures. Attempting to confine these cultural changes, critics turned their attention to the unmarried women whom they saw as the instigators. These women they argued, in their rejection of heterosexual marriage and family, were social and sexual deviants. Implicated in this discourse of deviancy were the supportive, intimate female relationships that were integrally woven through the “world of women.”

**College Women and Female Intimacy**

Insular all-female college campuses allowed women to develop deep companionate relationships with other women, but these relationships were not unique to the college environment. These “romantic friendships in which bourgeois girls and women made passionate commitments to each other within a gender-structured world,” were common and accepted into the late-nineteenth-century; these relationships were the threads from which the “world of women” was made. Victorian Era gender ideology characterized these relationships as “platonic and romantic” and said they were healthy and acceptable. Married women wrote loving letters to other women, had them spend the night in their beds, and pined for them, and this was all considered evidence of “one

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96 Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 53-76.
97 Ibid., 39.
of women’s noblest characteristics”—her capacity for love.98 Were these relationships platonic? The answer is likely yes and no, depending on the individuals involved. But Smith-Rosenberg argues that these relationships need to be understood not for their sexual meaning, but for their role in “a larger world of social relations and social values,” including “the structure of the American family and… the nature of sex-role divisions and… male-female relations, both within the family and in society generally.”99 Estelle Freedman similarly argues for the “need to historicize… inherited categories, particularly those—such as homosexuality—that derive from modern, Western notions of self, identity, and politics.”100 Physical and emotional closeness between women was part of a world of female rituals, which “bound together… women who, offering one another aid and sympathy, shared… stressful moments” that accompanied life changes such as marriage, childbirth, and death.101 In the Progressive Era, these bonds were “used… to forge a network of women,” who as social-justice reformers, “amassed greater political power and visibility than any other group of women in American experience.”102

Smith-Rosenberg links the social order challenges posed by the Progressive Era New Woman with attacks by social critics and medical professionals on intimate female relationships. She writes that beginning in the 1890s, critics “shifted the definition of deviance from the New Woman’s rejection of motherhood to their rejection of men.”103 Sexologists and doctors re-conceptualized women’s sexuality, and argued that these intimate relationships could be sexual, and that deviant women pursued them in place of

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98 Ibid. 39; see also pages 30-77.
99 Ibid., 54.
101 Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct, 71.
102 Ibid., 255-256.
103 Ibid., 265.
healthy heterosexual relationships. The deviant woman was said to seduce “normal” women into aberrant sexual relationships, and hence intimate relationships between women were potentially dangerous for normal women to engage in. According to Smith-Rosenberg, U.S. critics echoed the writings of European physician Kraft-Ebing; in the late nineteenth-century Ebing had “linked women’s rejection of traditional gender roles and their demands for social and economic equality to cross-dressing, sexual perversion, and borderline hermaphroditism.”

Love between women became suspect as critics related it to “crime and insanity,” and assailed it in the public discourse. Women’s college campuses, where these types of intimate and increasingly suspect relationships were known to flourish, came under scrutiny by conservatives. 

Despite these conservative pressures, a degree of female intimacy was preserved between women students on campuses into the 1920s and 1930s, particularly on Southern campuses such as FSCW. At Southern colleges, campus culture was characterized by a “twoness” of “national and regional philosophies and practices,” which “both reinforced and challenged regional” gender ideology and affected women’s college experience. Though Southern college women lived within a socially conservative society that still adhered to “antebellum views of women’s sphere and nature,” Southern Progressivism’s conservative constraints on women’s behavior were balanced by its preservation of traditional “bonds of sisterhood” between women. Southern administrators in the early

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1900s were less affected than their Northern counterparts by criticisms of women’s intimate relationships, which allowed these bonds to persist longer within the confines of the Southern college campus.\(^{110}\) These relationships were a source of strength for college women, and they helped to “prepare women for working together in single-gender clubs and organizations and for dealing with the prejudices of a segregated society.”\(^{111}\) Historian William A. Link has argued that women’s participation in club and organization-based social reform work was foundational for the suffrage movement “in the South, and probably in the rest of the country.”\(^{112}\)

The influence of women faculty members, those who had been part of the first wave of women college graduates in the late nineteenth-century, appears to have also played a role in maintaining the college campus as a place that tolerated close relationships between women.\(^{113}\) Women faculty often played a part in scripting the junior-freshman wedding ceremonies, and their influence can be seen in the ceremonies’ emphasis on “union” between the women, as well as “permanent friendship” and “intimate friendship.”\(^{114}\) The junior-freshman weddings were part of a campus structure that nurtured, through “comforting practices,” bonds between women.\(^{115}\)

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 157.
\(^{111}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{113}\) Duggan, “The Trials,” 807-808; Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*.
\(^{114}\) “Beautiful Junior-Freshman Wedding,” *The Florida Flambeau*, November 9, 1918, 1; “Unite Sister Class In Impressive Event,” *Richmond Collegian*, November 7, 1924, 5; “Junior-Freshman Joined In Wedlock,” *Richmond Collegian*, October 31, 1924, 1; Bridget Smith Pieschel, e-mail message to author, March 29, 2011. According to Pieschel, the junior-freshman wedding at Mississippi State College for Women existed as a “burlesque” before a female faculty member took it over in 1920 and altered the ceremony to make it a “genuine bond of affection.”
\(^{115}\) Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 250
Women’s Colleges and Campus Culture

Within the conflicted societal milieu of the Progressive Era, the campuses of women’s colleges were relatively insular and special places for women—“little Edens of liberty” compared to the world outside. In her discussion of women’s college fiction from the Progressive Era, Marchalonis observed that this literature portrayed the campus as a “woman’s space that nourished community.” Similarly, Horowitz has written that for young college women, campus life “absorbed them” and that campus ceremonies and rituals were important to the acclimation of students to campus life, the creation of bonds between students, and the reinforcement of structures of campus culture. How was campus culture different than the outside world? Scholars of Progressive Era women’s colleges have argued that college campuses did exactly what conservatives in society were afraid they would do—they allowed women to explore aspects of their identity outside of the strict gender roles dictated by society. In women’s colleges, women had more freedom to pursue activities that were culturally defined as masculine. Women competed against one another in sports such as basketball and track and field (fig. 7), filled student government positions, excelled academically, and boldly expressed their opinions.

116 Gordon, Gender and Higher Education, 10.
117 Marchalonis, College Girls, 4.
118 Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Alma Mater.
119 See Gordon, Gender and Higher Education; Horowitz, Alma Mater; McCandless, The Past in the Present; and Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct for more discussion of the freedoms enjoyed on women’s college campuses.
On many campuses some college women also dressed as men on a semi-regular basis. At FSCW, the student members of “Cotillion Club” held monthly dances for which they assumed male names such as Slim, Bill, and Henry, and dressed as men to serve as dance partners for the young women they invited to the dances (figure 8). While this masculine behavior was tolerated, college administrators kept it within the confines of the campus. In her history of Florida State College for Women, Robin Jeanne Sellers writes that, “the administration endorsed Cotillion Club activities yet refused to allow girls who acted a male part in a play to appear onstage wearing trousers.” The difference

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120 “Cotillion Club Entertains,” The Florida Flambeau, December 7, 1918, 1. From the November 17, 1917 edition on page 5: “Cotillion Club Entertains: The atrium of Bryan Hall was the scene of a delightful dinner dance Saturday evening, November 10, introducing the new members, Messrs. “Slim” Williams [Elizabeth Williams – the groom in the November 1919 junior-freshman wedding], Bill Murphy, D. Carruth, Henry Farrington, L. Thompson, and “Early” Broward. It was the first of the usual series of entertainments to be given by the Cotillion Club this year.”

121 Sellers, Femina Perfecta, 59.
between these performances of masculinity appears to have hinged on who would witness them. When they performed masculinity “beyond the eyes” of society, it was acceptable to administrators, but when the women performed as men in public, “it was considered unseemly.”

Figure 8. 1922 FSCW Cotillion Club Members. (Courtesy 1922 The Flastacowo yearbook, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)

FSCW administration’s acceptance of student cross-dressing within the insular confines of the campus is evident in its active participation in the annual junior-freshman weddings. The tradition began in 1909 as “the first official student ceremony” at FSCW, and from 1910 onward the college “president or another faculty member officiated at the services.” The weddings continued as a popular student event until 1925 when a newly

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123 Sellers, Femina Perfecta, 29, 77.
appointed dean replaced them with a medieval “fealty” ceremony. Smith-Rosenberg has called college rituals, such as the junior-freshman wedding, “comforting practices… [that] in a strange and, at times, frightening environment… drew on traditional female expression of affection… [and] eased the way” for students as they transitioned through their college careers. The junior-freshman wedding, as an official student event that emphasized the bonds between women, reinforced the legitimacy of women’s intimate relationships, and helped women become members of the campus community.

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124 Sellers, *Femina Perfecta*. Sellers writes that Dean Mina Kerr made many other changes to campus life and that most of them proved unpopular with the students.
125 Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 250.
Chapter Four:
Finding Meaning in Junior-Freshman Weddings

Social Drama

As discussed in Chapter Three, women’s colleges had many traditions and rituals, “comforting practices,” that helped college women transition through their academic careers. Freshman students in particular needed an initiation, a “formal introduction… by initial ceremony into some… society, or to knowledge of or participation in some principles or observances,” to help them understand their place within the campus community. The FSCW student newspaper, The Florida Flambeau, contained numerous articles, jokes, and stories that portrayed freshmen students as silly, ignorant, “babies” who did not understand campus culture and were in need of guidance. The weekly “Flambeau Flickers” humor column frequently poked fun at freshmen; jokes such as “If a Freshman Says anything very Bright—we all Laugh,” “Teacher: Why are you so late? Freshman: Because I’ve just come in,” and “Freshman (writing a character sketch for English): ‘Everything in a character sketch has to point to some domineering

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126 Gordon, Gender and Higher Education; Horowitz, Alma Mater; Sellers, Femina Perfecta; Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct, 250.


128 “‘Green Caps’ in Luck,” The Florida Flambeau, October 6, 1917, 3.

129 “Flambeau Flickers,” The Florida Flambeau, October 11, 1919, 6. The enthusiasm of upperclassmen for making fun of freshmen seems apparent from another joke in this edition of “Flambeau Flickers”: “Joke Editor, approaching in desperation a crowd of new arrivals: ‘Say! Have any of you said anything funny yet?’”
characteristic,” all convey a sense that upperclassmen viewed freshmen students as naïve, and that they saw them as making frequent missteps within the campus culture. From the September 29, 1917 edition of The Florida Flambeau, “The Parable of the Two Freshmen” further reiterates this attitude that freshmen needed the guidance of the more senior students. In “The Parable,” two fictional freshmen students discuss the many rules that the Student Government has imposed on them, with the “first Freshman” arguing against the rules and the “second Freshman” arguing for them. In the end, the “first Freshman” goes against the rules and is asked to leave the college, living “in ignorance the rest of her days,” while the “second Freshman waxed strong and wise… and lived a life of usefulness and honor.” The “moral of this little tale” for freshman, was to “uphold the Student Government and put yourself in harmony with it,” and even when the “reason” for rules seemed elusive, to trust the wisdom of the upperclassmen and follow their lead. Freshmen students were frequently reminded in The Florida Flambeau that they had “the duty and joy of holding up the standards” of FSCW, “and raising them.” They were told that, just as “a child grows into maturity, he becomes stronger and more to be depended upon,” they too would be “given more liberties” of “self-government” at FSCW as they “develop[ed] individually” and matured as part of the “student body.” The freshmen were frequently “too green” to understand their place within the campus culture, and college rituals and traditions served the purpose of initiating them into their proper roles and relationships.

130 “Flambeau Flickers,” The Florida Flambeau, November 8, 1919, 6.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
135 “Growth of the Student Body,” The Florida Flambeau, October 11, 1919, 1.
According to Sellers, FSCW “students looked forward to the rituals as a source of security in their new environment.” One of the first rituals that freshmen students went through was Sophomore Week, during which they were subject to the dominance and whims of their sophomore classmates. Sophomore Week was first observed in October 1917 and was a means for “the older but wiser sophomores [to] introduce the new freshmen to their duties and responsibilities as neophyte collegians.” Freshmen students were made to wear “green caps” and were “expected to salute a Sophomore on meeting her; to stand at attention till the Sophomore passed… to obey Sophomores in such matters as carrying books, getting the mail… in short, to be courteous and attentive to Sophomores on all occasions.” Articles in The Florida Flambeau urged that such “deference and respect” towards more senior students should be part of everyday life on campus, arguing that it would add a “tone of stability to the school that could perhaps be secured in no other way.” This deference for upperclassmen was promoted through rituals and traditions like Sophomore Week, as well as Torchnight, Odd/Even sports competitions, and the junior-freshman wedding. Through initiating freshmen into campus culture and its class hierarchy, rituals such as the junior-freshman wedding resolved conflicts and tensions that arose from the annual influx of new, “green,” freshmen students.

Anthropologist Victor Turner developed the concept of social drama, “an eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life,” which can explain the process of conflict.

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137 Sellers, Femina Perfecta, 155.
138 Ibid., 156.
139 “Sophomore Week,” The Florida Flambeau, October 6, 1917, 1.
140 “Here Come the Seniors,” The Florida Flambeau, October 11, 1919, 6.
141 Sellers, Femina Perfecta.
142 “Flambeau Flickers,” The Florida Flambeau, October 11, 1919, 6.
and resolution that FSCW campus culture would have gone through each fall semester.

Social drama proceeds through four stages, breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration or schism.\textsuperscript{143} These stages progress as follows: 1) a breach is formed as transgressions occur within a social group; 2) a crisis occurs as “conflicts… follow the original breach… [and] mount towards a crisis of the group’s unity and its very continuity”;\textsuperscript{144} 3) redress is sought through cultural performances, such as rituals; 4) if the redressive stage is successful there is a “restoration of peace and “normality” among the participants,” otherwise “an irreversible breach or schism” occurs.\textsuperscript{145} Turner states that social dramas “occur within groups bounded by shared values and interests of persons having a real or alleged common history,”\textsuperscript{146} and that they “reveal the ‘taxonomic’ relations among actors.”\textsuperscript{147} People simultaneously belong to multiple groups, “formal or informal, from the family to the nation or some international religious or political institution.”\textsuperscript{148}

The insular, or “bounded,” FSCW campus community can be seen as a scene of social drama.\textsuperscript{149} Each fall uninitiated freshman students entered the campus culture without a knowledge of the specific cultural practices that characterized campus culture. As frequently noted by the upperclassmen, freshmen were “green” and they lacked an understanding of their new environment. Instead, they brought with them their individual, outside-campus group memberships and loyalties, as well as the histories and “taxonomic relations” associated with those respective group identities. Sellers writes, that at FSCW,

\textsuperscript{143} Victor Turner, \textit{The Anthropology of Performance}, 90.
\textsuperscript{146} Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre}, 1982, 69.
\textsuperscript{147} Victor Turner, “Are There Universals,” 9.
\textsuperscript{148} Turner, \textit{From Ritual to Theatre}, 69.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
“as the number of students, particularly from out of state, increased, the young ladies were exposed to more divergent attitudes.”\(^{150}\) These divergent, outside loyalties, which may have included an embrace of gender ideologies that conflicted with campus practices, would have created friction within the campus community. Breaches would have occurred as freshman students unwittingly transgressed campus culture rules, and a crisis would have built, which the more senior students and women faculty members, “the group’s leaders, elders, and guardians,” would have attempted to find resolution for to preserve order and unity.\(^{151}\) Indeed this is what happened at FSCW—Sellers writes that, “to combat inescapable outside influences, the college continued to create and embellish insular campus traditions.”\(^{152}\)

Outside influences, particularly those brought by students from Northern states where Progressive Era criticism of women’s intimate relationships was strongest, also threatened the unique “twoness” of Southern college campuses such as FSCW.\(^{153}\) McCandless argues that while the “conservatism of Southern institutions” constrained the autonomy of college women, it also “created bonds of sisterhood that encouraged women to unite with other like-minded women to work for community improvement and social change.”\(^{154}\) The themes of sisterhood and unity were prevalent in FSCW student writings and rituals, including the junior-freshman wedding. The ring ceremony from the weddings reflects this: “Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of the whole company to join together this man and woman in classimation… signifying unto us the mysterious and mystical union between freshman and junior; which lovely estate is

\(^{151}\) Turner, “Are There Universals,” 8.  
\(^{152}\) Sellers, *Femina Perfecta*, 155.  
\(^{154}\) Ibid.
adorned and beautified by the presence of all sister classes."\(^{155}\) The supportive nature of these relationships between women is illustrated in a December 1918 article from The Florida Flambeau entitled, “Believe in Yourself.” The writer asks her fellow students, “have you ever thought of the fact that you as a college trained woman are facing a future that offers you anything you want?"\(^{156}\) She argues, “be glad that your age offers everything to its womanhood, from which she may take her choice… know that whatever you want to do you can do… with self-confidence you can put anything through… Believe in Yourself!”\(^{157}\) The campus culture of FSCW valued women’s close and supportive relationships with other women, and its rituals and traditions reinforced their legitimacy.

Rituals were also used to reinforce an alternative gender ideology that was fostered by students on FSCW’s campus, one that challenged conventional gender roles for women. While conservative administration policies sought to enforce “lady-like” behavior, FSCW students urged one another to pursue career and life endeavors that had once been out of reach to women.\(^{158}\) They told each other, “you must rise: Go up or you disgrace your hour of freedom… you are cheating yourself and still worse you are cheating the world.”\(^{159}\) The Florida Flambeau is replete with stories of students’ successes, whether in campus sports, scholastic achievement, student government, or post-college careers, revealing their drive to excel in public roles.\(^{160}\) The campus of

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\(^{155}\) Fresh ‘23—Odd ‘21 Junior,” The Florida Flambeau, 5.
\(^{156}\) “Believe in Yourself,” The Florida Flambeau, December 7, 1918, 2.
\(^{157}\) Ibid.
\(^{158}\) McCandless, The Past in the Present, 127.
\(^{159}\) “Believe in Yourself,” The Florida Flambeau, 2.
\(^{160}\) In “Here is the Class of 1918,” The Florida Flambeau, October 19, 1918, 1, only four students out of more than thirty listed are “at home” instead of working or in school. Professions of the former students, who had graduated earlier in the same year, include teacher, chemist, settlement worker, government service, graduate student, hospital dietician, and high school assistant principal.
FSCW, like other women’s colleges across the country, was a place that allowed women to act somewhat outside of society’s prescribed feminine gender roles. The expectations that students at FSCW placed on their classmates, that they would “overcome… timidity, reserve and such traits,” and “not hesitate to offer… opinion”\(^\text{161}\)—in other words, become self-confident women capable of leadership—created a culture that encouraged women to explore their potential, thereby challenging traditional gender ideology that put “woman’s place… in the home.”\(^\text{162}\) This aspect of FSCW campus culture is another area that could have affected by the divergent ideologies introduced by freshmen students, and rituals such as the junior-freshman wedding helped resolve resultant tensions.

Smith-Rosenberg writes that, “through literal body language and through physical metaphor and image, the body provides a symbolic system through which individuals can discuss social realities too complex or conflicted to be spoken overtly.”\(^\text{163}\) In a redressive cultural performance such as the junior-freshman wedding, the upperclassmen used play as a language for metaphorically conveying the complex knowledge necessary for freshmen to integrate into the campus cultural group. The convincing masculine performances of the juniors communicated to the freshman that there was flexibility in gender roles on campus, while the freshmen’s own performances of femininity in the bride and bridesmaids’ roles conveyed that they were not expected to immediately transform themselves in order to fit in. Figure 9 shows this dual lesson that physical metaphor would have given the freshman. In the photograph from the 1919 FSCW junior-freshman wedding, the groom Elizabeth Williams embraces the bride Louise


\(^{162}\) McCandless, *The Past in the Present*, 152.

\(^{163}\) Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 268.
Grumbles. Williams stands straight and tightly holds Grumbles as “he” stares boldly back into the camera with just a trace of self-assured smile. Conversely, Grumbles slouches to put her arms under Williams’ arms, pressing her head into Williams as she beams at the camera. The performances of masculinity and femininity seen in other FSCW junior-freshman wedding photographs are consistently similar to those of Williams and

![Figure 9. Bride, Louise Grumbles and Groom, Elizabeth Williams. November 17, 1919 FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding. (Courtesy Marion Laura Stine Collection, 1917-1921, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)](image)

Grumbles. Figures 10-12 illustrate this consistency. Women are seen positioning their bodies in relation to the men’s, leaning into or holding onto them, while the men remain as fixed anchors, rigidly standing squarely within the frame. The women’s faces convey more emotion, with open-mouthed smiles, while the men’s faces betray little of what lies
behind their closed mouths, and direct and confronting gazes. Through their performances of masculine and feminine roles, the junior-freshman wedding participants metaphorically communicated with one another and with their audiences about the gender role realities on their campuses. They used play as the language through which to convey this understanding to freshmen, and by so doing, could have potentially found redress from social drama tensions.

Figure 10. Bride, Edith Wilkinson, and Groom, Bara Gunn. November 7, 1925 FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding. (Courtesy Jewell Genevieve Cooper Scrapbook, circa 1924-1930, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)
The juniors would have caused breaches in campus culture as well; as they transitioned to a new position in the class hierarchy, they too would have lacked certain necessary knowledge and experiences that would have helped them understand their new roles as elders and mentors. The metaphor of masculinity that the juniors performed could have, in a liminal “as-if” way, helped them to perceive the lessening of constraint that accompanied their new position in the campus social structure, as well as their responsibility to their metaphoric wife, the freshman.

Figure 11. 1920s FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding Participants. (Courtesy Heritage Protocol General Photographic Collection, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)
Ritual, Citation, and Liminality

Through their previously alluded to genealogy as forms of amusement, mock weddings derive from the genre of leisure and entertainment, and thus are aligned with Victor Turner’s notion of liminoid genres of cultural performance. The mock weddings also obviously reference the traditional wedding ceremony, but its repetition in this leisure context has altered its meaning in the way that Derrida noted as characteristic of iterability—specifically, as “exploiting the logic which links repetition to alterity.”

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164 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*. Turner discusses cultural performances that lead to liminal-like “liminoid” states; these performances, such as aesthetic dramas, are those that occur in postindustrial societies and fall within the domain of leisure (32-35).

Turner echoes this notion of iterability when he says that cultural performances are “often orchestrations of media [song, dance, ways of acting, facial expressions, etc.]… [from which people] produce ‘messages’… full meaning emerges from the union of script with actors and audience at a given moment in a group’s ongoing social process.” The meanings that people derive from orchestrations are based on their own social “vocabulary and grammar”—their understanding of their culture’s socially constructed systems of signs. Actors and audiences can take any script/orchestration of media/iterable ritual, and alter its meaning through their performance and perception, as filtered through their own temporal and cultural context.

Junior-freshman weddings repeated the same orchestration of media as the traditional wedding ceremony—vows, rings, a minister, the wedding march, bridesmaids and groomsmen, flower girls, invitations, formal attire—they looked the same, but because of their specific participants, audiences, and temporal and cultural contexts, they produced different meanings. When FSCW college president Dr. Conradi, the “minister” in 1919’s junior-freshman wedding, said, “I pronounce that they are man and wife,” his words referenced a system of signs that represent the concept wedding, “a historically sedimented scene… of struggle among various institutions, and between these institutions and the subjects they engender, for control over the forms and meanings of intimate ties.” Whereas this discourse would traditionally have involved the relationship between men and women, junior-freshman weddings can be seen as part of a cultural institutional discourse involving the nature and legitimacy of women’s intimate

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167 Ibid., 23.
relationships with other women. The play involved in the juniors’ metaphoric performances of masculinity is the covert language that allowed them to challenge the conservative societal discourse against these relationships. The FSCW junior-freshman wedding communicated to participants and audiences that the college campus, and the institution of women’s colleges, was within the “world of women,” and that it was supportive of the bonds between women. Through the iterative orchestrations of the wedding, junior-freshman weddings created meaning that was relevant and specific to the cultural contexts in which they occurred.

Turner identifies the contexts of universities and colleges as “liminoid settings for all kinds of freewheeling, experimental cognitive behavior as well as forms of symbolic action.”¹⁷⁰ He argues that liminal behaviors and performances depend on a “subjunctive mood”¹⁷¹—the “picturing of people and things” not as natural but as products of culture and open to possibility and potentiality.¹⁷² This subjunctivity makes the liminal state of rituals transitive and reflexive—meaning that it allows people to “turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other sociocultural components which make up their public “selves.”¹⁷³ People “become conscious, through witnessing and often participating in such performances, of the nature, texture, style, and given meanings of their own lives as members of a sociocultural community.”¹⁷⁴ Cultural performances thus become “the eye by which culture sees itself,” allowing people to

¹⁷⁰ Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 33.
¹⁷² Ibid., 24.
¹⁷³ Ibid.
¹⁷⁴ Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 22.
“sketch… more apt or interesting designs for living.”

The reflexivity and subjunctive mood of the liminal state is what creates potential for this “sketching”—for cultural performance to become subversive to social structure and for it to become an “active agent of change.”

The junior-freshman weddings would have been liminally subjunctive experiences for women, and could have focused their reflexivity on their gendered relationships within not only the campus culture, but also within the larger social structures that colleges existed in. The FSCW junior-freshman weddings were thus simultaneously reinforcing to college campus social structure, and subversive to American societal social structure. It provided the participants and audience with new ways of conceiving women’s roles on campus, and by extension it allowed the possibility of the same reflexivity towards women’s roles in society.

The importance of the choice to cross-dress in a mock wedding relates directly to the power of the liminal reflexivity of the performance. As examples of play, cross-dressing performances are the language that expresses the actors’ relationships to power structures. The cross-dressing choices made by junior-freshman wedding participants frame this discourse specifically as one about the relationship of gender to power. Through their performances of masculinity, FSCW junior-freshman wedding participants were able to not only comment on this relationship, but to also “sketch” other possibilities outside of their prescribed gender roles. While men in womanless weddings or prairie weddings use their performances to assert their power over other groups of people, particularly women, women in FSCW junior-freshman weddings used their

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176 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 41.
performances of masculinity to assert their claims to power typically denied to them in society.

Cross-dressing itself can be seen as a liminal performance, one which allows for “multiple possibilities… exposing that liminal moment, that threshold of questioning, that slippery sense of a mutable self.” Cross-dressing can reinforce or subvert gender ideology—its performance can reify or dismantle notions of the naturalness of gender. The passing performances of the FSCW junior-freshmen weddings, such as in figure 13, clearly disrupt ideas about the innateness of gender, as women successfully assume the mantle of masculinity.

Figure 13. Groomsmen. 1920s FSCW Junior-Freshman Wedding. (Courtesy: Mary Cobb Nelson Scrapbook, 1923-1952, Heritage Protocol, Florida State University.)

Gender, Citation, and Passing

Judith Butler has applied the ideas of iterability and performance to the concept of gender and has argued that gender identity is “instituted through stylized repetition of acts” of the body—“gestures, movements, enactments”\(^\text{178}\) that are “sedimented as norms… over time producing a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes.”\(^\text{179}\) The “stylized acts” she discusses are performative acts that have been shaped by history and their repetition is, “at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established.”\(^\text{180}\)

This performance of stylized acts is clearly seen in photographs from the FSCW junior-freshman weddings. Figure 14 shows a woman dressed as a man for her role in the 1917 wedding ceremony. She is wearing clothes that imply maleness, men’s pants, a tie, and a sport coat. Her hair is combed back and close to the head, styled in contemporary men’s fashion. Beyond these tangible features, her air connotes masculinity as she, like many of the “men” in other FSCW photographs, confronts the camera with her confident gaze.

The citation of stylized gender acts produces identity, making a person “an object rather than a subject of [constituting] acts.”\(^\text{181}\) Gender identity thus is not part of “an interior self” but is an “act” that “constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority.”\(^\text{182}\) Cross-dressing, as it restyles a body in “non-normative and occasionally subversive ways” has potential for breaking down this gendered fiction of interiority.


\(^{179}\) Ibid., 407.

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 410.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 410.

\(^{182}\) Ibid., 412.
through the creation of reflexive and subjunctive liminal experiences.\textsuperscript{183} The disruption of the illusion of gender caused by these performances also “disrupts the causal logic whereby anatomy determines role… it also marks the body with signs that the meaning of “manhood” and “womanhood” are themselves historically contingent.”\textsuperscript{184} Gendered


\textsuperscript{184} Elizabeth Freeman, \textit{The Wedding Complex}, 35-36.
performances that are considered “passing” are those that are passively seen as “nothing… out of the ordinary,” or “(mis)read as ‘real.’”\textsuperscript{185} Passing requires that the “passing subject can acquire, master, and perform the appearances and nuances of the appropriated… gender.”\textsuperscript{186} Passing performances highlight the fictive nature of gender. The junior-freshman weddings engaged in this passing kind of performance as seen in the photographs discussed previously. Contemporary audiences seem to have had trouble \textit{reading} the women’s performances as evidenced by a photograph and caption from St. Petersburg’s \textit{Evening Independent} newspaper in 1923. The photograph, similar to that in figure 15, shows a photograph of FSCW juniors passing as groomsmen, with the headline: “Take another look at ‘em,” suggesting that upon first glance contemporary audiences \textit{would have seen} these young women as “dashing young lotharios… [who] prove that things are not always what they seem.”\textsuperscript{187} Robin Maltz argues that women’s passing performances “critique masculinity as being the privileged gender expression of males.”\textsuperscript{188} The passing performances of masculinity found in junior-freshman weddings thus are metaphoric expressions that allowed the women to lay claim to the power and privilege afforded by American society to men.

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\textsuperscript{186} Maltz, “Real Butch,” 277.
\textsuperscript{188} Maltz, “Real Butch,” 285.
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Summary

Progressive Era junior-freshman weddings can be seen as a form of cultural performance that created meaning through the repetition of symbolic acts—those of the wedding ritual and of gender—in a specific sociohistorical context, and provided liminal experiences for actors and audience, which in turn provided opportunities for reflexivity. The coupling of liminoid cultural performance and cross-dressing performance would have brought gender and its relation to social structure and the self to the forefront in the reflexive and subjunctive mood of junior-freshman weddings. Returning to the concept of social drama and the liminoid cultural performance as a source of redress, the reflexive experiencing of gender performances in the weddings would have allowed their participants and spectators to find a new understanding of everyday performances of gender and how they reciprocally structured and were structured by campus culture. This
understanding, if achieved, would have made the restoration of the group, the college campus culture, possible.

Were the performances of gender in the junior-freshman weddings subversive? From the evidence at hand it would seem the answer is both yes and no, depending on the context in which they are considered. Yes, because they were subversive to gender ideology that existed in Progressive Era America, and no, because they reinforced, rather than subverted, campus culture and its altered gender system. The weddings empowered women to become part of the discourse over their gendered identity, and they expressed an affirmation of the legitimacy of close female relationships. Rosalind Morris notes that potential for reflexivity and subversion in cultural performances of gender is tempered by “coercive structures” beyond gender—those of race, ethnicity, age, class, etc.—“identities that are gendered without being reducible to gender.” Smith-Rosenberg argues that appropriation of male metaphors lessens the effectiveness of female contestations of gender ideology. Because of these constraints on the performances in the junior-freshman weddings, it would be difficult to claim that they could by themselves provoke societal structural changes. What was a possibility through the weddings was a shift in perception of self and social structure, particularly as related to gender. In a period such as the Progressive Era, when women were struggling to be a part of the discourse over their gendered identities, such shifts in perception could be meaningful in their lives, both during and after college.

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190 Ibid., 583.
191 Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct.
Chapter Five:

Conclusion

What makes the mock wedding not “real”—an imitation? Using the junior-freshman wedding vows as an example and applying the Derridean concept of iterability and citation, the mock groom’s vow to “have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,” cites from the same system of signs as does the groom’s vow in a “real” wedding ceremony.\(^\text{192}\) This citation makes the mock wedding vows just as performative and thus productive—real—as those in a “real” wedding ceremony. The mock wedding and the “real” wedding could both be seen as imitations ("the adoption, whether conscious or not… of the behaviour or attitudes of some specific… model"\(^\text{193}\)), each in different contexts, drawing from the same system of socially constructed signs/orchestrations of media/scripts that convey the concept wedding. Why does this distinction matter? The “mock” weddings (which is perhaps a misnomer) to be understood, need to be seen as cultural performances in their own right—ones that reference and share orchestrations with another kind of cultural performance, but yet remain themselves a viable and meaningful cultural performance for actors and spectators.

\(^\text{192}\) "Fresh '23,” *The Florida Flambeau*, 5.

Junior-freshman weddings were meaningful. They were fun events for the students and faculty of women’s colleges, but beyond those most immediately accessible meanings, the weddings held deeper cultural significance. They reflected the conflicted world of Progressive Era college women and gave women a language with which to express their relationships within social structures. The weddings allowed women to play with gender and to envision possibilities outside of American society’s prescribed roles. Ultimately, they provided metaphoric challenges to existing structures in American society that delimited and diminished women’s access to power.

This thesis has introduced junior-freshman weddings to the world of academic discourse and has sought to illuminate this “mysterious and mystical union between Freshman and Junior.”194 This study of junior-freshman weddings has also attempted to produce a definition of mock weddings in general, one that accommodates both cross-dressing and non-cross-dressing forms, as well as parodic and non-parodic performances of gender. The building of a mock wedding definition gives rise to many other avenues for future research. An important question for study would be how do the non-cross-dressing mock weddings problematize the model that has been developed—do they fit or do they force it to expand?

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References


OED Online. "initiation, n.,” Accessed May 1, 2011.


