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College Chorus “Girls:” Drag at Male College and University Campuses During
the Progressive Era

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education

by

Danielle Mireles

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College Chorus “Girls:” Drag at Male College and University Campuses During the Progressive Era

Introduction

In the summer of 1920, the heading of the *Boston American* read: “2 HARVARD MEN DIE SUDDENLY.”¹ The article was referring to the sudden and recent deaths of two Harvard students: Cyril Wilcox, an undergraduate, who had committed suicide in the beginning of May after withdrawing from Harvard on medical leave, and Eugene R. Cummings, a graduate student, who had committed suicide in June. Around this same time, Joseph Lumbard Sr., the father of Joseph Edward Lumbard, Jr., received a letter from Acting Dean Chester Noyes Greenough of Harvard: it read:²

Your son, though we believe him to be innocent of any homosexual act, is in the following ways too closely connected with those who have been guilty of these acts... The acts in question are so unspeakably gross that the intimates of those who commit these acts become tainted, and, though in an entirely different class from the principals, must for the moment be separated from the College.³

This letter was not unique to Lumbard’s father and a handful of other parents would receive similar letters demanding that their children leave Cambridge following their expulsions from the university.⁴

¹ Amit R. Paley, “The Secret Court of 1920, Cont.,” *The Harvard Crimson*, November 21, 2002, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/11/21/the-secretcourt-of-1920-part-two/>.

² William Wright, *Harvard’s Secret Court: The Savage 1920 Purge of Campus Homosexuals* (London, UK: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 2006).

³ Wright, *Harvard’s Secret Court*, 176.

⁴ Wright, *Harvard’s Secret Court*.

Shortly after Cyril's suicide in May, his elder brother, George, had received two letters from students about his younger brother's participation in an underground homosexual community at Harvard. Perturbed by this revelation, George met with Greenough who responded by organizing a court comprised of five members to spearhead a massive purge of suspected homosexual students on campus. Over the span of two weeks, 30 interviews were clandestinely conducted with students, faculty, and community members. In the end, the court found guilty: eight students, a recent graduate, and a faculty member. Students were expelled and the graduate and assistant professor had their associations with the university severed. On June 11, following the court's final interrogation, Cummings checked himself into Harvard's Stillman Infirmary where he used his medical knowledge from the dentistry program to overdose.⁵

Aside from the *Boston American* article, the court's existence would remain secret until 2002 when Amit Paley, a *Crimson* reporter, discovered a file labeled "Secret Court, 1920" in Harvard's archives.⁶ The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and ABC News released articles about the discovery.⁷ Over eighty years after the purge, the victims of Harvard's secret court received the media attention they deserved. In 2006, William Wright

⁵ Wright, *Harvard's Secret Court*.

⁶ Paley, "The Secret Court of 1920, Cont."

⁷ "Harvard Secret Court Expelled Gay Students in 1920," *Washington Post*, December 1, 2002, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A57942-2002Nov30.html>; "In Harvard Papers, a Dark Corner of the College's Past," *New York Times*, November 30, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/30/us/in-harvard-papers-a-dark-corner-of-the-college-s-past.html>; "A Harvard Secret Court Expelled Gays in 1920s," *ABC News*, January 6, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=125439>.

published *Harvard's Secret Court: The Savage 1920 Purge of Campus Homosexuals*. In his book, he discusses how Harvard's administration attempted to regulate sexuality and gender through the secret court.⁸ Although Harvard is the first recorded college to purge homosexual students to maintain the image of the university it is not the first campus to actively regulate sexuality and gender.⁹

Universities and colleges throughout New England had begun explicitly regulating gender and sexuality during the Progressive Era. At the campuses of Yale, Columbia, and Princeton, administrations sought to place bans, limitations, and restrictions on drag. Following the 1894 *Joan of Arc* performance, "the officials of... [Columbia] college [stopped female impersonation] on the ground the exhibitions were not manly."¹⁰ However, this ban was only temporary and by 1896 male students resumed producing plays.¹¹ In 1908, Princeton faculty opted to reduce the number of out-of-town trips of the Triangle Club, an organization that utilized female impersonation in their performances. According to the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* reporting on this incident, Princeton faculty felt that female

⁸ Wright, *Harvard's Secret Court*.

⁹ "College Athletes Act Best in Skirts; Columbia and N.Y.U. Doubt Yale Idea That Impersonations Cause Effeminacy. Harvard Opinions Vary Prof. Barker Sees Only Bad Acting In the Impersonations;- Prof. Winter Opposes Them," *New York Times*, December 12, 1915; "Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.; Student Actors May Impersonate Women for Single Season Only," *New York Times*, December 11, 1915, <http://query.nytimes.com>; "Skirt Dancing by Young Men: Students of Two Brooklyn Institutions Rehearsing. In View of Columbia's Action, Its Propriety Is Being Discussed Across the River," *New York Times*, February 19, 1895, <http://query.nytimes.com>.

¹⁰ "Skirt Dancing by Young Men."

¹¹ Henry B. Machen, "Columbia Dramatics," *Columbia Alumni News*, March 16, 1911, <https://books.google.com>.

impersonation “does not leave with the audience an impression of that manly quality they like to ascribe to our students, a quality developed by sound minds in sound bodies.”¹² In 1915, Dean Jones, of Yale University, banned male actors from impersonating females for more than one season in succession. The *New York Times* reported that “the faculty believe[d] that constant training in female parts ma[de] the undergraduates effeminate.”¹³

The purge at Harvard as well as the restrictions on drag across northeastern campuses elicit important questions. What prompted college and university campuses to become concerned with the gender presentation of their male students? How did college faculties and administrations define effeminacy? Why was effeminacy perceived as negative and why did colleges go to such extreme measures to extinguish this behavior? In this thesis, I seek to answer these questions to better understand how tragedies such as the Secret Court occurred. I look at male participation in drag on college and university campuses during the Progressive Era. For the purposes of my thesis, drag is defined as instances in which men donned female clothing. More specifically, I look at instances of drag in the context of a white middle and upper-middle classes’ “crisis of masculinity” at the turn of the century.¹⁴ Although scholars have looked at drag extensively during this era, few have examined drag on college and university campuses.¹⁵ Those that have looked at

¹² *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, October 28, 1908, 86, <https://books.google.com>.

¹³ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

¹⁴ Jay Mechling, *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Kathleen B. Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man: Race and Gender Benders in American Vaudeville* (University of Tennessee Press, 2015); George Chauncey, *Gay New*

drag on campuses have not thoroughly examined its relation to constructions of collegiate masculinity during this era.¹⁶ In this thesis, I argue that some male college students at northeastern campuses perceived and presented drag as a masculine activity that was congruous with the collegiate masculinity that college administrations were trying to promote.

This thesis relies heavily on online newspaper archives, photographs in multiple collections, and secondary sources. Due to regional differences in male student participation in drag, the majority of my examples come from colleges in the New England area. I was not able to find information on drag at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), so my examples focus on participation by white European males. However, this is not to say that race was not a factor. For example, students at Princeton donned blackface and drag during a minstrel performance in 1887.¹⁷ Less overtly, masculinity during this period was highly racialized and revolved around constructions of

York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York City, NY: Basic Books, 1994); Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (Psychology Press, 1997); Sherrie Inness, "Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls: Cross-Dressing in Popular Turn-of-the-Century College Fiction," *Journal of American Culture* 18, no. 2 (July 1, 1995), 15; Sharon R. Ullman, "'The Twentieth Century Way': Female Impersonation and Sexual Practice in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 4 (1995), 579.

¹⁶ Simon J. Bronner, *Campus Traditions: Folklore from the Old-Time College to the Modern Mega-University* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2012); Garber, *Vested Interests*; Inness, "Girls Will be Boys;" Margaret Nash et al. "'Mattie Matix' and Prodigal Princes: A Brief History of Drag on College Campuses from the Nineteenth Century to the 1940s" in *College Life* (forthcoming).

¹⁷ *The Princetonian*, March 14, 1887, <http://theprince.princeton.edu/princetonperiodicals/>.

whiteness as will be discussed later in this thesis.¹⁸ Furthermore, although not discussed in this paper, drag was not restricted to male student participation. Female students during this period also participated in drag both at women's colleges and coeducational facilities.¹⁹

I begin by offering a brief overview of masculinity and gender impersonation during the Progressive Era before the historiography. In doing this, I hope to better contextualize my thesis since information formally published on the subject of collegiate drag is limited, and what does exist focuses primarily on on-stage examples such as student plays performed on and off campus.²⁰ Nonetheless, these works and their authors have heavily influenced my understanding of drag during this era and were crucial in framing my work.

In the first part of my thesis, I discuss both off stage and on stage examples of drag across various campuses. In this section, I look at the various ways in which male students across and within colleges and universities utilized drag. In the second section, I explore administration and faculty reactions. Lastly, I look at media accounts of these events – specifically their constructions of white middle and upper-middle class masculinity in the

¹⁸ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Margaret Nash et al. "Mattie Matix."

²⁰ Garber, *Vested Interests*; Sherrie Inness, "Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls," 15.

Progressive Era. In the final section, I look at Princeton's restriction on tours and Yale's one-season ban as case studies for analysis.²¹

“I am not gay, I just like pearls:” Masculinity in Progressive Era America

During the Progressive Era, the United States was undergoing a major cultural shift in its perceptions of gender, race, and other social constructs. As rural workers were pushed into industrial jobs, immigration experienced a massive influx, and the “New Woman” emerged as a “dominant female icon,” Americans flocked to vaudeville houses to understand and cope with the social changes taking place around them.²² It was during this period that female and male impersonators emerged as headlining performers of vaudeville houses; some performers even reached national and international fame for their performances.²³

The popularity of such performances can easily be understood when examining the changes in perceptions of gender and sexuality taking place during the Progressive Era. It was during this era that sexologists such as Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis attempted to describe and define differentiation in gender identities, which they described as sexual inversion, and labeled such individuals inverts.²⁴ Other figures, including former president Theodore Roosevelt, educator and psychologist G. Stanley

²¹ Meredith Heller, “Is She He? Drag Discourse and Drag Logic in Online Media Reports of Gender Variance,” *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 3 (May 3, 2016): 445–59, doi:10.1080/14680777.2015.1114004.

²² Kathleen B. Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, xix.

²³ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

²⁴ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

Hall, and Protestant leaders, were more specifically concerned with the overall feminization of American boys and men.²⁵ In lieu of this fear, Roosevelt believed men needed to reclaim their “primitive manly sides” through activities such as “imperialist wars, hunting trips, boxing matches, and collegiate sports.”²⁶ He referred to this lifestyle as “the strenuous life.”²⁷

The strenuous life emerged from the fear that Catholic nations such as Ireland and Italy were taking political power from White Anglo-Saxon men.²⁸ Organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Boy Scouts of America were born in direct response to this fear. These organizations focused on strengthening boys and young men to ascend into social leadership positions - positions that had “traditionally” belonged to White Anglo-Saxon men. Participation in sports such as basketball and volleyball as well as summer camps, became spaces where Christian men participated in a new movement: Muscular Christianity.²⁹

Historian Andrea L. Turpin explains Muscular Christianity as “working hard at interpersonal ethics more than relying on God to transform individuals. Likewise, it emphasized active volunteer work in the community more than passive reflection on a

²⁵ Mechling, *On My Honor*.

²⁶ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 6.

²⁷ Andrea L. Turpin, “The Chief End of Man at Princeton: The Rise of Gendered Moral Formation in American Higher Education,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15, no. 4 (October 2016): 449, doi:10.1017/S1537781416000268.

²⁸ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 449.

²⁹ Mechling, *On My Honor*.

sermon in church.”³⁰ In response to this crisis, Protestantism shifted from its evangelical roots to a new modernist spirituality. According to Turpin, this new spirituality, unlike its predecessor, placed men on a horizontal plane with God rather than a vertical one. Whereas a vertical plane placed man below God, modernist spirituality shifted this relationship to a horizontal plane, emphasizing personal relationships between individuals. As a result of this shift, more emphasis was placed upon “traditional” gender roles. Protestant women were expected to take a subservient role that aligned with more “traditional” biblical interpretations of women. Rather than focusing on their individual relationship with God, Protestant men were focused on enhancing their social leadership capacities. In response, Protestant leaders began focusing on cultivating a more masculine Protestant identity that sought to meet this need. This movement came to be known as Muscular Christianity. At college and university campuses, this new movement focused on “ethical training... forming in students the moral traits specifically associated with elite men and their unique social roles in the community, be they national political leaders or influential local businessmen.”³¹ This new emphasis intended to prepare men to assume social leadership roles in their communities – roles that were in peril due to the increased presence of women and immigrants in the Protestant church, the workplace, and in higher education.³²

³⁰ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 454.

³¹ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 464.

³² Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

As some young boys and men were reclaiming their masculinity through the Muscular Christianity movement, others were constructing masculinity through drag. Vaudeville houses and drag balls became prominent liminal spaces where discussions surrounding gender, between performers and audience, could take place. Both female and male impersonators communicated messages about gender norms and behaviors to vaudevillian audiences. By exposing gender as an “illusion,” or social construct, rather than natural differences between men and women, impersonators reinforced “traditional” gender roles while also exposing them as artificial.³³ Such performances “inspired uncomfortable introspection” that “forc[ed] audiences and critics to question their own complicity in such supposed perversions.”³⁴ Inadvertently, impersonators left themselves vulnerable to the same criticism and speculation that they inspired.³⁵

Many gender impersonators were forced to lead transparent private lives in order to successfully continue their careers. One tactic employed by impersonators to dismiss accusations of inversion was to openly express their disdain for drag and to insist on the ephemeral nature of their gender impersonation as a stepping stone to more legitimate acting careers. Another method employed by impersonators was utilizing “props” of masculinity or femininity during magazine spreads and photoshoots in ritual displays of their hyper-masculine or hyper-feminine off stage identities.³⁶ Julian Eltinge, a female

³³ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way,” 579.

³⁴ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 49.

³⁵ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*; Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way.”

³⁶ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 43.

impersonator who went to great lengths to secure his hyper-masculine off stage identity through boxing and farming photoshoots, was rumored to have said, “I’m not gay, I just like pearls.”³⁷ Whether authentic or folklore, this statement is emblematic of the ambiguity gender impersonators inspired; however ambiguous gender impersonators appeared on stage, impersonators were careful to ensure that this ambiguity did not permeate into their private lives.³⁸

Transgressions, or suspected inversion, in the private lives of citizens could have serious societal, and even legal, ramifications. According to historian Sharon Ullman, at the turn of the century, gender performance, or “public gender performance,” was increasingly being linked to “private sexual practice.”³⁹ During the Progressive Era, it was believed inversion could be detected through dress, behavior, and other ritual displays of gender presentation. Although this theory was initially developed by sexologists, as Ullman and Casey suggest, popular culture played a prominent role in substantiating such widespread beliefs.⁴⁰ These popular beliefs also informed municipal city laws in regards to cross-dressing, further stigmatizing individuals perceived as inverts as well as gender impersonators.⁴¹

³⁷ “Julian Eltinge Biography,” accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.thejulianeltingeproject.com/bio.html>.

³⁸ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way”; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

³⁹ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way,” 574.

⁴⁰ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way”; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

⁴¹ Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Duke University Press, 2014).

According to historian Clare Sears, in the second half of the nineteenth century, thirty-four cities in twenty-one separate states passed anti-cross-dressing laws. Although no federal or state laws were passed that directly restricted cross-dressing, California and New York passed statutes that prohibited concealing one's identity.⁴² In addition to regular police raids in many homosexual establishments in cities in the United States, police in Long Beach, California in 1914 and the U.S. Navy in Newport, Rhode Island in 1917 conducted undercover operations to investigate immorality and sexual deviancy in suspected underground homosexual communities.⁴³ These witch hunts uncomfortably resembled the purge of students and faculty suspected of engaging in homosexual activity at Harvard University in 1920.⁴⁴

Although drag was seriously condemned in some spaces, drag balls organized by both black and white social organizations were spaces where such activities could be sanctioned. The most well-studied balls were those in Harlem.⁴⁵ However, Casey found that both black and white citizens participated in these events and "several different organizations sponsored smaller costume balls, many of which awarded prizes for the best

⁴² Sears, *Arresting Dress*.

⁴³ Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way;" Wright, *Harvard's Secret Court*.

⁴⁴ Sears, *Arresting Dress*.

⁴⁵ Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

male and female impersonators.”⁴⁶ Like gender impersonators on stage, patrons of drag balls participated in discourse surrounding gender off stage.⁴⁷

By the end of the 1920s, vaudeville’s popularity was rapidly declining. During the 1920s, radio and motion pictures had emerged as popular forms of entertainment replacing vaudeville.⁴⁸ The Great Depression would also have a significant impact on the leisure expenditures of working and middle class families, and attitudes concerning drag became less flexible.⁴⁹ However, drag would not entirely dissipate from American culture and found other spaces including the army and colleges and university campuses.⁵⁰

Historiography

The current historiography examines a range of diverse communities that utilized drag from the mid-to-late 1800s through the 1960s. Although drag is commonly associated with the LGBTQ community today, historians agree that heterosexual and homosexual audiences previously enjoyed watching drag– and some heterosexual males and females even donned drag themselves.⁵¹ As drag grew in popularity, however, it also became

⁴⁶ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 97.

⁴⁷ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

⁴⁸ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

⁴⁹ Esther Newton, *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Garber, *Vested Interests*; Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire* (New York City: NY: Simon and Schuster, Inc.: 2000).

⁵¹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

increasingly controversial.⁵² For the most part, historians agree that Americans' preoccupation with drag began at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵³ As historian Nan Boyd states, "audience members... seemed fascinated by the idea that femininity could be so convincingly constructed by a man."⁵⁴ Historian Sharon R. Ullman echoes this perspective when she states that "female impersonators could be said to offer a more authentic representation of femininity [than women could]."⁵⁵ This fascination with "illusion," or female impersonation, would manifest on vaudeville during the Progressive Era.⁵⁶

Historians Kathleen B. Casey and Sharon Ullman both examine drag in the context of the vaudeville stage. Ullman focuses on the link between gender performance and sexual deviance; Casey looks at the relationship between gender performance and race.⁵⁷ According to Casey, gender-bending and race-bending performers forced vaudevillian audiences to open a critical eye that challenged their beliefs surrounding race and gender as static phenomenon.⁵⁸ Similarly, Ullman suggests this critical eye was also turned

⁵² Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way"

⁵³ Daniel Harris, "The Aesthetic of Drag," *Salmagundi*, no. 108 (1995): 62–74; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*; Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way."

⁵⁴ Nan Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (University of California Press, 2003), 35.

⁵⁵ Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way," 579.

⁵⁶ Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way," 579.

⁵⁷ Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way"; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

⁵⁸ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

outward as Americans began examining their neighbors for markers of sexual deviance, such as inappropriate dress and behavior. Ullman asserts that gender performance and sexuality were being linked during this period. In some communities, such as Long Beach, California, this led to the persecution of suspected homosexual individuals.⁵⁹

Through the 1930s and 1940s, this same attitude also extended to homosexual communities in San Francisco and New York City during the Progressive Era.⁶⁰ Historians George Chauncey and Nan Boyd examined individual cities with large homosexual populations.⁶¹ According to Chauncey, homosexual communities in New York began taking shape in the early Progressive Era and were in full fruition by the 1920s. Over the next two decades, gay individuals gained prominence in their local communities as the primary organizers of social life during the Prohibition Era. Despite constant policing of homosexual establishments, homosexual individuals continued to perform drag at local establishments and organized drag balls during this period.⁶² Similarly, Nan Boyd analyzes the homosexual community in San Francisco, California from the turn of the century to the 1960s. According to Boyd, bars and taverns also acted as sanctuaries for gay community members and frequently featured drag performers. However, these same establishments

⁵⁹ Ullman, "The Twentieth Century Way."

⁶⁰ Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*; Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

⁶¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*.

⁶² Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

also functioned as sites of resistance and political activity in response to the policing of homosexual communities in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶³

Drag was not condemned in all public spaces, however, and during the middle of the twentieth century drag would find new spaces. The works of historians Bud Coleman and Allan Berube examine spaces in which drag continued to thrive after the 1940s.⁶⁴ The Jewel Box Revue, a touring drag show, was established in 1939 and inspired several imitation shows including the all-black Pearl Box Revue in New York City and the Powder Box Revue.⁶⁵ During this same period, U.S. soldiers during World War II donned drag in what Berube refers to as “GI drag.”⁶⁶ However, the military became concerned that the public could interpret their performances as “condon[ing] effeminacy or homosexuality” and with help from the media found ways to present drag as a heterosexual activity.⁶⁷

Collegiate drag is much less studied and mainly focus on stage examples. Historians Marjorie Garber, Sherrie A. Inness, Simon J. Bronner, Margaret Nash, and Nash et al. have all looked at drag in the context of college campuses during the late nineteenth and twentieth century.⁶⁸ Historian Marjorie Garber’s analysis focuses on Harvard’s Hasty

⁶³ Boyd, *Wide-Open Town*.

⁶⁴ Bud Coleman, “The Jewel Box Revue: America’s Longest-Running, Touring Drag Show,” *Theatre History Studies* 17 (1997): 79–91; Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*.

⁶⁵ Coleman, “The Jewel Box Revue.”

⁶⁶ Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 67.

⁶⁷ Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 68.

⁶⁸ Bronner, *Campus Traditions*; Garber, *Vested Interests*; Inness, “Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls;” Margaret Nash, “Don’t Tell Omaha: Campus Drag, 1900-1950”

Pudding Club, a theatrical organization, whereas historian Simon J. Bronner more broadly examines drag on and off stage in the context of a few colleges over the span of the twentieth century; however, both make similar assertions concerning the function of drag on college campuses. Garber asserts drag was “a class act to be acted out, and acted up, by the members of a certain class.”⁶⁹ The class she is referring to is individuals belonging to middle and upper-class backgrounds. According to Garber, traveling with social clubs allowed for networking opportunities as well as mixing opportunities with female audience members that could increase their prestige and status despite donning drag.⁷⁰ Bronner makes a similar claim in his book that “such ritual displays [of drag] reinforce[d] male dominance, especially in tense situations or ones where threatening changes are about, by directing attention to the absurdity of men taking women’s roles.”⁷¹ In this sense, drag served to perpetuate male hegemony by constructing the other.

Historians Sherrie A. Inness, Margaret Nash, and Nash et al. also examine drag on college campuses, but provide more emphasis on the Progressive Era.⁷² Rather than looking at students’ participation in drag, Inness looks at depictions of drag in student

(paper presented at the annual meeting for the History of Education Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 6-9, 2014); Nash et al., “Mattie Matix.”

⁶⁹ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 60.

⁷⁰ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 60.

⁷¹ Bronner, *Campus Traditions*, 204–206.

⁷² Inness, “Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls;” Nash, “Don’t Tell Omaha;” Nash et al., “Mattie Matix.”

fiction.⁷³ She found that male student participation in drag in these stories frequently reinforced male privilege through male-bonding.⁷⁴ In a conference paper presented by Nash in 2014, she discusses drag in the first half of the twentieth century with emphasis on three case studies: Company D, a group comprised of members of the Army Specialized Training Program; Riverside Junior College, and the University of Wisconsin's Haresfoot Club. She found that student participation in drag contradicted rather than conformed to the current historiography. Nash argues that the current historiography places the decline of female impersonation in the 1930s – burlesque becoming more popular for drag performances. She finds, however, that female impersonation continued past the 1930s at one college campus.⁷⁵ In Nash et al.'s study of drag during the nineteenth century to the 1940s, they found that both male and female students engaged in multiple uses of drag on college campuses that bore similarities and differences observed on vaudeville.⁷⁶ With the exception of Nash and Nash et al., the former three historians agree in their analyses that drag in the context of male students largely functioned to perpetuate male privilege and hegemony on college campuses.⁷⁷

⁷³ Inness, "Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls."

⁷⁴ Inness, "Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls."

⁷⁵ Nash, "Don't Tell Omaha."

⁷⁶ Nash et al., "Mattie Matix."

⁷⁷ Bronner, *Campus Traditions*; Garber, *Vested Interests*; Inness, "Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls."

The current historiography addresses drag on the vaudeville stage, in the military, at drag balls, but, although drag has been discussed on college campuses, few have explored the relationship between masculinity and drag on these campuses during the Progressive Era.⁷⁸ By examining drag through this lens, I aim to uncover the ways some college students negotiated collegiate masculinity and drag. In the next section, I discuss masculinity on college and university campuses during the Progressive Era.

Masculinity on Progressive Era College and University Campuses

In order to understand how college and university campuses came to oppose drag, we must understand the political climate of campuses during the Progressive Era as well as the larger climate of American society. These changes primarily occurred in three domains: the workplace, institutions of higher education, and the Protestant church. First, America was experiencing a massive increase in the number of immigrants entering America. This created competition for already sparse working class jobs. American men became concerned that working class immigrant men posed a significant threat to their status and could potentially replace them in the workforce.⁷⁹ Second, women were perceived as invading what men considered “traditionally” masculine spheres. These spheres included male-dominated occupations as well as higher education.⁸⁰ Although

⁷⁸ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*; Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*; Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Garber, *Vested Interests*; Inness, “Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls.”

⁷⁹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

⁸⁰ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*; G. Stanley Hall, “The Question of Coeducation,” *Munsey’s Magazine*, October 1905, 588, <https://books.google.com>.

women were not new to institutions of higher education, their matriculation numbers increased throughout the Progressive Era.⁸¹ As early as 1905, educators such as G. Stanley Hall warned the public about the “feminization of education” which he perceived as a threat to men.⁸² Third, Protestant leaders became concerned with the low attendance of men at church. They warned of the feminization of Protestantism if male attendance did not increase.⁸³ At college campuses, this fear manifested into a new focus on training that emphasized the social leadership capabilities of their potential and current students.⁸⁴ These factors all contributed to what has become known today as the turn of the century “crisis of masculinity.”⁸⁵

As college admissions become more rigid and older institutions, such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, sought to distinguish themselves as more elite research universities, many administrations shifted their priorities and “drew on [newly formed] elite gender ideals to lay out how these students should use their education to serve their future communities.”⁸⁶ However, preparing college and university students to assume social leadership roles was only one of many changes occurring at colleges during this period.

⁸¹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*; Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

⁸² Hall, “The Question of Coeducation,” 588.

⁸³ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

⁸⁴ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

⁸⁵ Mechling, *On My Honor*, xv.

⁸⁶ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 449.

Although women had been attending colleges, primarily normal schools, as early as the antebellum era, the Progressive Era experienced an increase in women's attendance and matriculation, an increase in minority attendance, and a general increase in Anglo-Saxon men's attendance as well. Simultaneously, some previously male-only education facilities became coeducational facilities. Many of the universities that decided to remain male-only such as Harvard and Princeton had opened separate women's colleges near their main campuses.⁸⁷

It was during this era that new religious organizations that promoted masculinity began materializing on college and university campuses across the United States – especially in the older northeastern institutions. For example, in the 1890s, membership increased in the Princeton's Philadelphian Society, a chapter of the collegiate YMCA, making it one of the most popular organizations on campus. Many of its members “conformed to an elite male ideal” by “giving its sports stars the most press” and using them to represent their organization on deputations.⁸⁸ The Philadelphian Society, and others like it, believed that religion could instill the qualities of an ideal masculinity in college men and used markers like athleticism to do so.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Christine A. Ogren, “Rethinking the ‘Nontraditional’ Student from a Historical Perspective; State Normal Schools in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Higher Education* 74, no. 6 (November 1, 2003): 640.

⁸⁸ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 461.

⁸⁹ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

This new masculinity exuded and projected by college men became a marketing point to increase the enrollment of men at college and university campuses. As Turpin discusses, universities such as Princeton that chose to stay male-only sought to attract an elite student body and to produce students with moral traits associated with what they perceived to be prominent men, those that held social leadership roles and were pillars of their communities. Hence, masculinity at such campuses became an *exclusionary* masculinity that promoted and manufactured a new “educated manhood” only accessible to white Anglo-Saxon males.⁹⁰ This new manhood denied membership to minorities and women while enhancing the status of white males.⁹¹

In addition to religious organizations, college campuses saw an increase in other extracurricular clubs and organizations as well. These included athletic organizations, Greek and literary societies, and dramatic clubs. Drama in the form of theatrical endeavors was popular in many Greek, language, and literary societies, and some students sought to establish their own organizations exclusively for the production of plays.⁹² College men were interested in theater for several reasons, ranging from entertainment available on campus to a method of fundraising for newly-founded sports teams.⁹³ With rationales that

⁹⁰ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 464.

⁹¹ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 464.

⁹² Lucien G. Price “American Undergraduate Dramatics,” *The Bookman: A Magazine of Literature and Life*, September-February 1904.

⁹³ *The Princetonian*, November 24, 1882, <http://theprince.princeton.edu>; *The Princetonian*, March 18, 1889, <http://theprince.princeton.edu>.

varied within and across college campuses, men in these productions would assume female roles. Although some organizations cite a lack of female students as the reason for male students donning drag, many coeducational institutions insisted on men playing female parts. Furthermore, drag was not limited to the formal stage. Drag also appeared in a multitude of settings and events on college campuses during the Progressive Era such as parades, mock trials, and textbook burning rituals.⁹⁴

Although gender impersonation was considered wholesome family entertainment by American society at this time, at college and university campuses, it directly contradicted the new mission of administrations at such institutions.⁹⁵ Initially, drag on college campuses occurred out of sight of both the administration and surrounding communities and so remained unregulated by college faculties. However, as organizations like Princeton's Triangle Club, the Cornell Masque, Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club, the Pi Eta Society, and the Yale Dramatic Club began touring, some colleges began regulating

⁹⁴ 1882 Nov 16 - *Anna Lytt*. November 1882, Burning their books, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, accessed October 10, 2016, https://www.flickr.com/photos/amherst_college_archives/8270579582/; 1882 Nov - *Anna Lytt Funeral Pagent*, November 1882, November 1882, Burning their books, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, accessed October 10, 2016, https://www.flickr.com/photos/amherst_college_archives/8270583998/; 1883 Nov 9 – *Mattie Matix*. November 1883. Burning their books, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, accessed October 10, 2016, https://www.flickr.com/photos/amherst_college_archives/8269517413/; 1883 Nov 9 – *Mattie Matix*. November 1883. Burning their books, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, accessed October 10, 2016, https://www.flickr.com/photos/amherst_college_archives/8270579786/; Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁹⁵ Coleman, "The Jewel Box Revue"; Turpin, "The Chief End of Man."

drag. These colleges actively sought to place restrictions on the number of tours, female impersonation, and other factors in their productions that they argued made college men appear effeminate.⁹⁶

Drag on College Campuses

Although historians have explored why gender impersonators on vaudeville participated in drag, few have explored the appeal of drag for male college students during the Progressive Era. Some evidence suggests that part of the overall appeal of theatrical organizations, in general, was the ability to go on tour and leave campus.⁹⁷ According to Henry E. Cottle in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, “out of town trips, taken by almost all the more important college dramatic clubs, heighten the desire to be assigned to a part, and in his college town the college actor is by no means without honour (*sic*).”⁹⁸ This does not fully explain, however, why some students chose to wear drag for such performances.⁹⁹ In this section, I explore some of the reasons why drag may have appealed to college men during the Progressive Era.

Sherrie Inness is one of the few historians to have examined in-depth why male students donned drag across college campuses during the Progressive Era. In her article,

⁹⁶ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing;” “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

⁹⁷ Henry E. Cottle, “Dramatics at Harvard,” *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, September 24, 1913, <https://books.google.com>; Price. “American Undergraduate Dramatics.”

⁹⁸ Cottle, “Dramatics at Harvard,” 294.

⁹⁹ *Columbia Spectator*, March 23, 1903, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/>; Price. “American Undergraduate Dramatics,” 373.

she offers two possibilities to explain the appeal: (1) drag as opposition toward college administration (2) and as taboo.¹⁰⁰ In terms of drag as opposition, she suggests that drag, as a form of rebellion against college administrations and faculties, corresponds with a larger tradition of rebellion on college campuses.¹⁰¹ However, historian David F. Allmendinger Jr., who has looked at student rebellions in his work, places rebellions in the mid-eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century – fifty years before drag began occurring on some campuses and over a hundred years before the beginning of the Progressive Era.¹⁰² At Harvard, there were a series of rebellions in 1766, 1768, 1780, and 1805, while Yale was engaged in a ten-year rebellion spanning from 1756 to 1766 against President Clap and his administration. Hence, it is unlikely that drag fits into older student traditions of opposition; it is possible that drag fits into a new form of opposition aimed at a different group on campus – women.¹⁰³

As discussed in the previous section, college women, or coeds, had been matriculating in higher numbers on college campuses – a space that had been considered “traditionally” male.¹⁰⁴ According to historian John R. Thelin, female students at coeducational institutions were frequently excluded from participating in extracurricular

¹⁰⁰ Inness, “Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls,” 19–20.

¹⁰¹ Inness, “Girls Will Be Boys and Boys Will Be Girls,” 19.

¹⁰² David F. Allmendinger, “The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life,” *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 1 (1973), 75.

¹⁰³ Allmendinger, “The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life,” 75.

¹⁰⁴ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

activities including dramatic organizations.¹⁰⁵ Sometimes this was the decision of the students to exclude women, other times the faculty ruled against men and women performing alongside each other. For example, although the National Deaf-Mute College in Washington, D.C. was coeducational when it established its all-male dramatic association, the administration, not the students, forbade female students from performing in plays alongside male students.¹⁰⁶

In some organizations, male students chose not to extend their female parts to coeds or outside women. For example, a number of Harvard's student clubs and organizations, such as the Hasty Pudding Club, the Pi Eta Society, and the Dickey's theatricals, opted to have men play the female parts. Since these organizations performed mainly comedic burlesques, the intent of men taking the female parts was for comedic effect. In contrast, Cornell's Masque, an all-male dramatic club, did choose to open their female parts to coeds at the turn of the century; by 1903, however, men resumed the female parts once more after "dissatisfaction... on the part of the men of the university."¹⁰⁷ It is unclear what this dissatisfaction was, but it appears the male students themselves chose to remain same-sexed and opted for men to take the female roles instead of women.

Regional and religious differences at colleges also influenced whether or not men assumed female parts in plays. At western coeducational institutions, it was less common

¹⁰⁵ John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (JHU Press, 2011), 98.

¹⁰⁶ Lois Bragg, *Deaf World: A Historical Reader and Primary Sourcebook* (NYU Press, 2001), 286.

¹⁰⁷ Price, "American Undergraduate Dramatics," 373-388.

for plays to be performed by only members of the same sex. This differed from Catholic colleges, such as the College of St. Francis Xavier in New York City and St. John's College in Fordham, where faculty forbade men from wearing women's clothing and chose to eliminate female characters in their plays altogether. Although drag was more common at northeastern colleges and universities, it varied greatly across and within campuses. Some theatrical organizations at Harvard allowed outside females to audition for female parts; however, this did not happen until after the turn of the century. The first organization to admit women at Harvard was the Dramatic Association in 1908.¹⁰⁸

In addition to student plays, men also donned drag off stage. Harvard, Amherst, and Princeton have rich histories of students wearing drag in rituals and traditions. These included mock trials at Harvard, textbook burnings and mock funeral processions at Amherst, and alumni parades at Princeton during the Progressive Era.¹⁰⁹ In the next sections, I delve deeper into male students' participation in drag at northeastern colleges and universities. I begin with drag on the college stage before further exploring drag in campus rituals and traditions.

"Handsome Heroines:" Drag on the College Stage

The Progressive Era saw an influx of new student organizations and clubs as campus life evolved to include new forms of student entertainment. These new

¹⁰⁸ Cottle, "Dramatics at Harvard;" Price, "American Undergraduate Dramatic."

¹⁰⁹ 1882 Nov 16 - Anna Lytt; 1882 Nov - Anna Lytt Funeral Pageant; 1883 Nov 9 - Mattie Matix; 1883; Nov 9 - Mattie Matix; Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*; Anthony Calnek, *The Hasty Pudding Theatre: A History of Harvard's Hairy-Chested Heroines* (Milan, Italy: A.D.C., 1986).

organizations included sports such as football, basketball, and baseball as well as dramatic associations. Although some organizations had produced plays prior to this period, the majority of those organizations were not exclusively theatrical clubs.¹¹⁰ As early as the 1880s, college students began organizing their own theatrical clubs through grassroots initiatives that were not regulated by faculty.¹¹¹

Undergraduate dramatics at universities varied in the types of plays they produced, the audiences they performed in front of (private or public), and in their popularity on campuses. At Harvard, the Pi Eta Society and the Hasty Pudding Club, which mainly performed burlesques and operettas, found success on the professional stage.¹¹² At Princeton, the Triangle Club, known for their musical comedies, went on tour in Chicago, Cleveland, Newark, New York and Philadelphia for their play in 1900, *The King of Pomeru*.¹¹³ At Yale, fraternities, including Psi Upsilon and Delta Kappa Epsilon, gave plays as part of initiations in their “tombs” and were only for fraternity members.¹¹⁴ The Yale Dramatic Association, established in 1900, gave public performances at the campus including at their bicentennial.¹¹⁵ Across and within campuses, female impersonations in

¹¹⁰ “Senior Dramatics: Outline of Amherst Senior Dramatics,” *The Amherst Student*, 1899, <https://www.myheritage.com/>.

¹¹¹ Cottle, “Dramatics at Harvard.”

¹¹² Cottle, “Dramatics at Harvard;” Price, *Undergraduate Dramatics*.”

¹¹³ Cottle, “Dramatics at Harvard.”

¹¹⁴ Price, “Undergraduate Dramatics;” Coleman, “The Jewel Box Revue.”

¹¹⁵ “Joan of Arc in Burlesque.; Clever Musical Extravaganza by Columbia College Boys.,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1894, <http://query.nytimes.com>.

undergraduate dramatics varied considerably in terms of their performances – ranging from serious impersonations to camped up portrayals.¹¹⁶

At Harvard, seven undergraduate organizations presented plays annually or periodically by 1913. However, the majority of these organizations did not exist solely as dramatic associations. Their productions included annual musicals, plays by foreign language clubs, revivals of Elizabethan plays, and original plays.¹¹⁷ The majority of these organizations utilized drag during some point in the Progressive Era. Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club began including female impersonators in their plays as early as the 1840s and began publicly performing by the 1870s.¹¹⁸ Pi Eta Society, the rival of the Hasty Pudding Club, also produced musical shows with male students in drag. The foreign language organizations, *Deutscher Verein* and the *Cercle Français*, at the turn of the century, also utilized female impersonators in their performances; however, by 1913 they had opened their female parts to women.¹¹⁹ Lastly, Delta Upsilon also utilized impersonators in their annual Elizabethan productions, but sought plays “which contain[ed] enough humor to offset the danger arising from men's taking women's parts.”¹²⁰ This danger was most likely the association between drag and effeminacy.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Price, “American Undergraduate Dramatics,” 380.

¹¹⁷ Price, “American Undergraduate Dramatics,” 373-388.

¹¹⁸ Calnek, *The Hasty Pudding Theatre*.

¹¹⁹ Price, “American Undergraduate Dramatics.”

¹²⁰ Cottle, “Dramatics at Harvard.”

¹²¹ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

Other campuses with organization(s) that utilized drag include Princeton, Columbia, Yale, Cornell, the University of Pennsylvania, and the National Deaf-Mute College. Princeton's Triangle Club, originally organized in 1882 as a dramatic association, gained renown following their first musical comedy in 1890. At Columbia, students produced their annual "Varsity Show."¹²² In an article in the *Columbia Spectator* in 1903, *The Mischief Maker* cast is described as "rather above the average of amateurs, especially the masculine maidens, who are dainty, charming and captivating, and might easily deceive the expert were it not for their husky voices and mannish walk."¹²³ Although the National Deaf-Mute College became coeducational in 1877 on an experimental basis and was firmly established as a coeducational institution by 1889, when students founded their all-male Saturday Night Dramatic Club in 1891 they cast men in both male and female parts.¹²⁴

Instances of cross-dressing on male-campus were not limited to on stage examples during this era. Students engaged in drag in a variety of settings off stage as well. Unlike drag on college stages, off stage participation in drag almost always had an underlying comedic effect. Prior to becoming a theatrical organization, Harvard's Hasty Pudding Club was a debating society and staged mock trials that frequently featured drag in the late 1830s.¹²⁵ At Princeton, students donned drag for their annual Alumni Parades at

¹²² Price, "American Undergraduate Dramatics," 380.

¹²³ "Varsity Show To-Night," *Columbia Spectator*, March 23, 1903, <http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu>.

¹²⁴ Bragg, *Deaf World*, 286.

¹²⁵ Calnek, *The Hasty Pudding Theatre*.

the turn-of-the-century.¹²⁶ Students at Amherst College had a tradition of textbook burning for over thirty years, which began incorporating cross-dressing in the 1880s. In these settings, male students' participation in drag demonstrates that the appeal of wearing women's clothing transcended the stage.¹²⁷ In this next section, I examine drag in student rituals and traditions. Unlike on the stage, drag in these settings occurred in other settings on college campuses.

Separate the (Wo)men from the Boys: Drag in Student Rituals and Traditions

According to historian George Rugg Cutting, Amherst students began the custom of textbook burning in the 1860s. These burning quickly evolved into funeral pageants that involved students dressing in the parts of mourners, devils, and other characters. The evening of the ceremony, students clandestinely distributed invitations to their classmates. The "deceased" of the funeral pageants was usually personified disliked subjects, such as mathematics, or the author(s) of these arduous subjects.¹²⁸ These rituals included the burning or burials of mathematics textbooks during a late-night ceremony and the event an effigy given by a student about the deceased, a bonfire, and a band.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 11–12.

¹²⁷ 1883 Nov 9 - *Mattie Matix*; 1882 Nov - *Anna Lytt Funeral Pageant*; 1882 Nov 16 - *Anna Lytt*; 1883 Nov 9 - *Mattie Matix*.

¹²⁸ George Rugg Cutting, *Student Life at Amherst College. Its Organizations, Their Membership and History* (Amherst, MA: Hatch & Williams, 1871): 16–17, <http://archive.org/details/studentlifeatamh00cuttrich>.

¹²⁹ Kim Marra, "Clyde Fitch: Transvestite 'Metteur-En-Scène' of the Feminine," *New England Theatre Journal* 3 (1992): 22-23; Cutting, *Student Life at Amherst College*.

The first documented instance of cross-dressing occurred during an Amherst textbook burning ritual in 1882 and was titled “The Funeral Pageant of Anna Lytt.”¹³⁰ According to historian Kim Marra, Clyde Fitch, a notorious female impersonator during his undergraduate years at Amherst College, modified the title figure, which had previously been personified as male, to female. Marra describes the spectacle: “between two and four a.m. one chill November morning marched a procession led by the town band with horse-drawn floats bearing Anna's ghost (Fitch in drag), orators armed with original verse, and a commemorative tombstone.”¹³¹ Fitch was accompanied by ballet dancers, devils, and virgins. He would resume the female lead in the following year as “Mattie Matix.”¹³²

In another surreptitious tradition, Harvard’s Hasty Pudding Club began hosting mock trials in the dorm rooms of club members in the early 1800s. The court put on the stand historical figures as well as contemporary figures or entities for prosecution – including a trial prosecuting the Harvard college administration. Members continued this tradition for nearly fifty years with murder trials, cases of adultery, and breaches of promise as some of the most popular choices for mock trials. In 1837, the club staged the case of *Abby Roe v. Richard Doe*, in Hollis 11, the dorm room of a club member. To the surprise of club members, James Russel Lowell arrived to the trial in drag for his part as “Abby” –

¹³⁰ *1882 Nov - Anna Lytt Funeral Pagent; 1882 Nov 16 - Anna Lytt*; Marra, “Clyde Fitch.”

¹³¹ Marra, “Clyde Fitch,” 22-23.

¹³² Marra, “Clyde Fitch,” 22–23.

establishing a tradition of drag in the Hasty Pudding Club and inspiring several other students to do the same in their organizations and clubs.¹³³

Other traditions on campuses involved alumni rather than current students. According to historian Alexander Leitch, the Alumni Parade of Princeton formally began in the 1890s. Originally, alumni would wear patches with their class year during the procession, but as the event progressed, students began organizing class themes and wearing costumes.¹³⁴ Many of these themes were humorous in design. In 1909, the class of 1900 would “parade in long gowns as suffragettes, with the former football player, “Big Bill” Edwards, leading on horseback, as an improbable Joan of Arc.”¹³⁵ The *Princeton Alumni Weekly* recaps the following week:

In the pee-rade on Saturday, the Class of 1900, costumed as suffragetts (*sic*) in an importation of gowns from the Rue de la Paix, were the admiration of man and envy of woman. The cohorts were led by “Bill” Edwards mounted upon a fully accoutered palfrey. He impersonated Joan of Arc, the leading suffragette of her day, and his squire at arms was Bummie Botch, who, as Annie Oakley appeared to have just galloped from Buffalo Bill’s Far West Show to let the girls know she wanted a fair count of the ballot. “Freddie” Scott was Salome, in Salome’s disarray, and danced behind the head of John the Baptist, kindly loaned for the occasion by “Beef” Heffefinger, whose decapitated corpse was not in evidence. A suffragette undergoing the horrors of an English jail, was the subject of a realistic fleet in which “Ferd” Wilcox and “Harry Langenberg and “Jim” Sloane featured with great success, the pageant was completed by a hundred odd wives of Brigham Young.¹³⁶

¹³³ Hasty Pudding Club et al., *The Thirteenth Catalogue & a History of the Hasty Pudding Club* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1907), [¹³⁴ Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 11–12.](http://archive.org/details/thirteenthcatalo00hast; Calnek, <i>The Hasty Pudding Theatre</i>.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

¹³⁵ Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 12; “The Decennial Reunion,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, September 29, 1909, <https://books.google.com>.

¹³⁶ “The Decennial Reunion,” 614.

Not only did the pageant include men in drag as Joan of Arc and suffragettes, it also included men dressed in drag as the wives of Brigham Young, the founder of the Mormon Church. Later that night, during an alumni event in “the tent,” students engaged in some sort of battle featuring students in drag. “Miss Jeffries” challenged and defeated males from the suffragettes display in “a red gauze ballet skirt and pink tights.”¹³⁷ It appears that even after the parade ended some men remained in costume the rest of the day.

In these contexts, drag did not deviate far from the masculinity ideal colleges sought to project during this period. First, the former two events were not regulated by faculty and thus were unlikely to receive scrutiny.¹³⁸ At the Princeton Alumni Parades, these were not students but former students of the university.¹³⁹ Second, all three examples were intended as humorous. Both the suffragettes display and the challenge in the tent served to reinforce gender roles and to advance a public display of unshackled masculinity.¹⁴⁰ Third, in much the same way as sports established an outward heteronormative standard, drag could also serve a similar function. Whereas collegiate football players cultivated a masculine ideal through athleticism, drag cultivated a masculine identity by constructing *the other* -

¹³⁷ “The Decennial Reunion,” 614.

¹³⁸ 1882 Nov - *Anna Lytt Funeral Pageant*; 1882 Nov 16 - *Anna Lytt* 1883 Nov 9 - *Mattie Matix*; 1883 Nov 9 - *Mattie Matix*; Marra, “Clyde Fitch;” Charles Theodore Russell, “The Hasty Pudding Club,” *The Harvard Register*, May 1880, <https://books.google.com>; Calnek, *The Hasty Pudding Theatre*.

¹³⁹ Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 11–12.

¹⁴⁰ “The Decennial Reunion,” 614.

specifically, women.¹⁴¹ In the next section, I examine how the media – despite resistance from college faculties and administrations – assisted students with constructing masculine personas while performing in drag.

“Mannish Qualities:” Masculinity and Drag on Northeastern Campuses

Drag during the Progressive Era was considered a wholesome family activity, so male students donning drag was not necessarily suspect;¹⁴² however, beginning in the early 1900s, northeastern college and university campuses beginning enacting bans and restrictions on collegiate drag – almost two decades before drag became suspect in the larger American society.¹⁴³ Many college faculties and administrations cited effeminacy as being their primary concern. While some believed that participating in drag could turn men effeminate, the majority of colleges appeared more concerned with students being *perceived* as effeminate or unmanly. For the newly minted research institutions, drag stood in direction opposition to the exclusionary elite masculinity they wished to promote amongst their student body.¹⁴⁴

As discussed in the introduction, Columbia, Princeton, and Yale all took steps toward limiting drag on their campuses. In the 1890s, the Columbia faculty banned men from assuming female roles “on the ground that the exhibitions were not manly.”¹⁴⁵ This

¹⁴¹ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

¹⁴² Coleman, “The Jewel Box Revue.”

¹⁴³ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way”; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

¹⁴⁴ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts;” “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

¹⁴⁵ “Skirt Dancing by Young Men.”

ban, however, only lasted one year and men began resuming female parts once again.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the Princeton faculty opted to reduce the number of out-of-town trips of the Triangle Club in 1907. According to an alumnus covering the ban, “it requires a very liberal interpretation of the purposes of a college course to include the cultivation in a young gentleman of that taste which finds its expression in appearing in public in the costume and character of a ballet dancer.”¹⁴⁷ It is unclear how strictly this was enforced by the administration. In 1915, Yale’s faculty enacted a one season in-succession cap on students assuming female roles in school productions. This meant that men were required to take a season off between assuming female parts. If they wanted to participate in a play the following season, they could only take male parts.¹⁴⁸ This ban continued through the 1920s until the Dramat – Yale’s Dramatic Association – opened their female parts to the women at Vassar College in 1931.¹⁴⁹ In all three instances, faculties directly or indirectly cited effeminacy as the key concern of men assuming female parts.¹⁵⁰

Although the actions of administrations of Yale and Princeton seem to suggest college students were perceived as effeminate for impersonating females, articles from newspapers during this period suggest otherwise. Rather than focusing on the effeminacy

¹⁴⁶ Machen, “Columbia Dramatics.”

¹⁴⁷ *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, September 30, 1908, <https://books.google.com>.

¹⁴⁸ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

¹⁴⁹ Gerasimos Tsourapas, “Dramat History,” *Yale Dramatic Association*, April 2004, <http://dramat.org/dramat-history>.

¹⁵⁰ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts;” “Skirt Dancing by Young Men.”

of men who played female parts, articles frequently highlighted the masculinity of collegiate female impersonators on and off the stage.¹⁵¹ One way of achieving this was emphasizing the athletic prowess and builds of female impersonators; frequently, these students were portrayed not only as athletes, but the *top* athletes, showcasing their “mannish” qualities.¹⁵² For both vaudeville and collegiate impersonators, medias carefully constructed off stage identities as hyper-masculine.¹⁵³

For male collegiate female impersonators, their status both privileged and protected them in their endeavors in drag. Furthermore, the media played a pivotal role in both sanitizing and normalizing drag on the college stage. The media accomplished this by portraying collegiate female impersonators as “playing at” rather than “living gender variance” and emphasizing their “real bodies” as white, athletic, and masculine.¹⁵⁴ However, gender theorist Meredith Heller states that the “use of drag terms and ideas to characterize... gender variance, can [also] be a disciplining speech act.”¹⁵⁵ In much the

¹⁵¹ “The College Chorus ‘Girl’; How a Young Athlete Is Able to Carry Off a Clever Female Impersonation.,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1910, <http://query.nytimes.com>; “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”; “Princeton’s Athletes Win in Stage Roles: Sophomore Barbee’s Dances Aid ‘The Pretender’s’ Success. Collegians’ Music Catchy Triangle Club’s Visit Calls Forth Representative Gatherings at Waldorf -- A Student Production.,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1905, <http://query.nytimes.com>.

¹⁵² “Princeton’s Athletes Win in Stage Roles.”

¹⁵³ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way”; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

¹⁵⁴ Heller, “Is She He?,” 447.

¹⁵⁵ Heller, “Is She He?,” 448.

way administrators sought to enact restrictions and bans on female impersonation, the media may have been acting in a similar role by policing acceptable gender variance.

In articles on collegiate performances, the *New York Times* lauded collegiate female impersonators while simultaneously reinforcing their masculinity. In a 1905 review of the Triangle Club's comic opera *The Pretenders* in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, "Sophomore Barbee" is described as both "graceful as a tiger and charming as a girl" as well as a "mannish man."¹⁵⁶ The review continues: "He had picked up all the feminine tricks of arranging his back hair pins and dropping them. His skirts were managed with skill equal to that with which he can handle his fists in a rough-and-tumble."¹⁵⁷ Another impersonator in the same performance, W.C. Motter, a pole jumper, is described as having "muscular arms and calves" that suggested he would be "the sort of maiden who might rule a household without the need of a stick."¹⁵⁸

The media, as well as the actors and their peers, would rely on tropes of masculinity when describing impersonators. In the *The Pretenders* review, Barbee and Motter were able to encompass femininity and masculinity simultaneously but also as separate identities. Although Barbee was described as an attractive girl, in the same breath, the article lauded his manliness, and described him as "good with the foils, clever with the gloves, handy with the tennis racquet, and not stupid in his studies."¹⁵⁹ In regards to other

¹⁵⁶ "Princeton's Athletes Win in Stage Roles."

¹⁵⁷ "Princeton's Athletes Win in Stage Roles."

¹⁵⁸ "Princeton's Athletes Win in Stage Roles."

¹⁵⁹ "Princeton's Athletes Win in Stage Roles."

stage ladies, “*athletes* [emphasis added] threatened to split their splendid stage clothes.”¹⁶⁰ Although the author does not specify their sport, they found sufficient to again play on their athlete identities. Since athleticism was seen as masculine, the authors were able to allude to their masculinity through direct references to involvement in sports.¹⁶¹

In an article in the *New York Times* in 1893, a review titled “Joan of Arc in Burlesque.; Clever Musical Extravaganza by Columbia College Boys,” also emphasized the masculinity of the female impersonators. Joan of Arc was played by Donald McGregor, “a young giant of 6 feet 3 inches” who led an army into a football game as opposed to a battle.¹⁶² According to the *Times* article, “half a dozen young athletes, who were more at home on the football field than on stage, were dressed as dancing girls, and were as supple, as light of foot, and as graceful as many female coryphées.”¹⁶³ By invoking imagery of the football field, a giant, and an army, the journalist was painting a picture of ideal Progressive Era masculinity.¹⁶⁴

Columbia University even inspired students from Adelphi Academy and Polytechnic, private schools for boys located in Brooklyn, to produce their own original farce-comedy with skirt dancing and female impersonation in 1895. According to the *New*

¹⁶⁰ “Princeton’s Athletes Win in Stage Roles.”

¹⁶¹ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way”; Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

¹⁶² “Joan of Arc in Burlesque.; Clever Musical Extravaganza by Columbia College Boys.,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1894, <http://query.nytimes.com/>.

¹⁶³ “Joan of Arc in Burlesque.”

¹⁶⁴ “Joan of Arc in Burlesque.”

York Times, Columbia University freshman and sophomore donated their skirts to the schools after officials stopped performances at the college “on the ground that exhibitions were not manly.”¹⁶⁵ Parents of the private schools that were interviewed opinions ranged from “[female impersonation] does not put the students in a manly light” to “If I caught my boy in short skirts, I’d warm him with a lath.”¹⁶⁶

An article published in the *New York Times* in 1910, titled “The College Chorus’ Girl: How a Young Athlete is able to Carry off a Clever Female Impersonation,” visually documents the transformation of J. Sloat Fassett Jr., a member of the Cornell Masque, an all-male dramatic club, and son of a New York congressman.¹⁶⁷

The first picture shows a husky young college student entering his dressing room before a Cornell Masque. This broad-shouldered, athletic young man proposes to make himself into a captivating sample of the fair sex. A glance at the last picture, in which the college student is completely transformed into a ravishing “chorine,” will show how cleverly and thoroughly the transformation has been effected.¹⁶⁸

Similar to articles that visually documented Julian Eltinge’s transformation from man to woman,¹⁶⁹ the article stressed the athletic build of the “husky college student” and the

¹⁶⁵ “Skirt Dancing by Young Men: Students of Two Brooklyn Institutions Rehearsing. In View of Columbia’s Action, Its Propriety is Being Discussed Across the River.,” *The New York Times*, February 19, 1895, <http://query.nytimes.com>.

¹⁶⁶ “Skirt Dancing by Young Men.”

¹⁶⁷ “Fassett, Jacob Sloat - Biographical Information,” accessed January 10, 2017, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=F000042>; “The College Chorus ‘Girl.’”

¹⁶⁸ “The College Chorus ‘Girl.’”

¹⁶⁹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*; Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way.”

necessity of make-up in this transformation from boy to girl.¹⁷⁰ However, this transformation is not complete since the facial expression of the impersonator is “still suggestive of a masculine grin” and “masculine voice chuckling” behind the feminine façade.¹⁷¹ In addition to theatrical purposes, the writer asserts that male students enjoyed the pastime of “making up” and “dressing like handsome girls” to deceive “the would-be gay deceiver” off stage.¹⁷²

In this particular instance, the writer claims that students used drag to police heteronormativity and sexuality within their own peer groups. Unlike limitations and bans enacted by faculty, students at Cornell sought to unmask closeted homosexual students – thus, regulating each other for deviancy outside of official college sanctions. Furthermore, this particular instance of dressing in drag becomes sport. In the same manner that collegiate football players donned their jerseys to then tackle the opposing player with the football, Cornell students donned drag to identify gay-deceivers.¹⁷³

During the Progressive Era, gender was displayed and understood by markers such as dress and behavior.¹⁷⁴ By donning female attire on and off stage, collegiate drag essentially complicated gender divisions. However, by emphasizing the real bodies of

¹⁷⁰ “The College Chorus ‘Girl’”

¹⁷¹ “The College Chorus ‘Girl.’”

¹⁷² ““The College Chorus ‘Girl.’”

¹⁷³ “The College Chorus ‘Girl.’”

¹⁷⁴ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way.”

impersonators, the media presented drag as a nonthreatening activity to the public while also serving as gender policing for readers. Similar to vaudeville gender impersonators on stage, college students were presented as participating in “non-real play” by newspapers.¹⁷⁵ By separating their real bodies from their stage personas, the media played a critical role in sanitizing drag on the college stage and mediating an “ideological meaning-making process” about gender during this era.¹⁷⁶

In addition to presenting impersonators as athletes, at elite universities and colleges, female impersonation may have been mediated by middle and upper-middle class backgrounds. Although gender impersonation was not necessarily seen as deviant, the Progressive Era saw a shift in what was deemed acceptable performances. In the beginning of the Progressive Era, more serious performances were seen as legitimate; however, as the era progressed these performances were subject to scrutiny. As a result, comedic performances were viewed as more legitimate especially on college campuses.¹⁷⁷

According to historian Marjorie Garber, the Hasty Pudding Club, and organizations like it, “mainstreamed” and “legitimized” female impersonation, “establishing it as a class act to be acted out, and acted up, by members of a certain class.”¹⁷⁸ For example, famous impersonator Julian Eltinge “cultivated the myth of an upper class (*sic*) pedigree” including

¹⁷⁵ Heller, “Is She He?,” 456.

¹⁷⁶ Heller, “Is She He?,” 456.

¹⁷⁷ Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way.”

¹⁷⁸ Garber, *Vested Interests*, 60.

having attended Harvard and his life as a former member of the Hasty Pudding Club “to present [his female impersonation as] refined, high class art.”¹⁷⁹ Eltinge’s claim that his first female impersonation was at his freshman year at Harvard suggests that gender impersonation was possibly sanitized by an elite college setting. According to historian Kathleen B. Casey, his invented identity “lend[ed] credibility to the image he tried to cultivate of a normal, intelligent, young man, bred in an upper-class white family” with Harvard being essential to this image.¹⁸⁰

In the final section, I analyze the perspectives of female impersonators in the context of Princeton’s restriction on tours and Yale’s one-season ban. I look across campuses highlighting how students, alumni, and the media negotiated meanings surrounding drag and how this fit, or did not fit, into campus’ views of masculinity during this era. As we will see, drag could be both incongruous and complimentary to college ideologies of masculinity. I begin first with the climate at Princeton.

Effeminate Tendencies: Drag at Princeton

At the turn of the century, a large modernist Protestantism movement occurred on Princeton’s campus. As discussed previously, Protestantism was being repackaged as masculine with the intent of drawing more men back into the church. President Francis Patton marketed the university as a destination for potential students to obtain the new Christian ideal of masculinity which prepared students to assume leadership roles. By

¹⁷⁹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 114.

¹⁸⁰ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 40.

focusing on students' development of masculinity, he shifted attention away from the moral development of students that had previously been the focus of school. This ideological shift corresponded with changes in curriculum – namely from a classical curriculum that stressed Latin and Greek to a more liberal education with an elective system that closely resembled higher education in Scotland.¹⁸¹

Unsurprisingly, the Triangle Club students donning skirts for their traveling performances hardly conformed to the Christian ideal of masculinity Princeton was promoting. As discussed previously, the Progressive Era increasingly linked gender performance and sexuality during this time.¹⁸² Not only were colleges concerned that students were sending mixed messages concerning masculinity, students were also inadvertently sending conflicting messages about their sexuality. As the writers in *The Princetonian* and the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* will demonstrate later in this section, some individuals found these organizations and their impersonators to be deceitful and incongruous with the Princeton ideology of masculinity.¹⁸³

In many ways, the female impersonator was perceived as incongruous with the ideographic college man that some universities and colleges, such as Princeton, sought to produce. Around the time Princeton enacted its restriction on tours, the *Princeton Alumni*

¹⁸¹ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man.”

¹⁸² Ullman, “The Twentieth Century Way.”

¹⁸³ Howard Crosby Butler, “To the Editor of the Princeton Alumni Weekly,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, September 30, 1908, <https://books.google.com>; *Princeton Alumni Weekly*.

Weekly published a segment on undergraduate female impersonation. The alumnus suggested they “burlesqued the feminine parts” since the effect of successful “deception” was “incongruous to say the least.”¹⁸⁴ Essentially, the writer was implying that burlesquing the female roles, which was typically perceived as being more comedic, was more acceptable than male students playing the female parts straight. However, this opinion was not shared by all alumni. In a different article, another alumnus found little distinction between comedic and serious impersonations which he grouped into a single category.¹⁸⁵

In March of 1911, an anonymous alumnus of Princeton submitted an opinion article also expressing discomfort with collegiate drag. Commenting on a student who began dancing at a semi-public dinner at Princeton. It begins, “a natural and healthy instinct of men and boys leads them to despise with peculiar loathing any effeminate tendency in a male human being” and continues:¹⁸⁶

I have for some years heard many grumblings of disgust, which I fully share, at the annual spectacle which is offered by college "men" disguised as female dancers, in their musical comedies. A fashion extending over not a very long period has rendered this sort of thing tolerable even in our somewhat rude and plain-speaking community; but I reached my limit of endurance when, after a semi-public dinner in Princeton, I saw a slim, undulating youth, trained in one of these companies, rise and go through the sinuous mazes of a *pas seul*, with all the languid affectation of an Oriental stomach dancer. It was a sight to sicken any creature who possesses the natural right to wear trousers.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, 87.

¹⁸⁵ *The Princetonian*, March 7, 1911, <http://theprince.princeton.edu>.

¹⁸⁶ *The Princetonian*.

¹⁸⁷ *The Princetonian*.

In much the same vein as the former article, the writer makes it a point to state that these individuals are “disguised as female dancers.”¹⁸⁸ The incongruity between college student and female impersonator are made apparent in both articles, possibly because they inspired the same uncomfortable introspection many vaudevillian audiences felt watching female impersonators like Julian Eltinge on stage.¹⁸⁹

Although this seems to suggest that drag was generally perceived as unnatural and effeminate, many individuals perceived it be the opposite. In response to *The Princeton Alumni Weekly* author, the following week, Howard Crosby Butler crafted a lengthy response to the suggestion of burlesquing the parts. According to Butler,

Acting is chiefly the art of mimicry, and it is very provincial notion that a young man is lacking in manly qualities because he can mimic a girl's little mannerisms, burlesque or no burlesque. A man is often more unmanly in the prize ring than in petticoats upon the stage; but it is hard to make this clear to the provincial eye. I have followed the Triangle Club for fifteen years with keen interest and have personally known most of its principal actors. In all that time I have known of more than one or two instances in which a player of feminine parts was considered effeminate by his classmates, and they ought to know. Most of them are thought to be quite the reverse, and if your dramatic critic has heard of one instance of the other sort, he is certainly guilty of gross injustice when he condemns all for the faults of one.¹⁹⁰

As discussed previously, newspapers frequently presented female impersonators as masculine both during their performances (by describing physical features that were incongruous in their roles such as muscular legs or arms) and also highlighting their off

¹⁸⁸ *The Princetonian*.

¹⁸⁹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

¹⁹⁰ Butler, “To the Editor,” 104.

stage characteristics (specifically, their athleticism).¹⁹¹ Similarly, Butler claims that most impersonators are perceived as the reverse of effeminate (re: masculine) and even goes as far to claim that “a man is often more unmanly in the prize ring than in petticoats upon the stage.”¹⁹² In this instance, drag was perceived as being more masculine than fighting suggesting that drag could be perceived as a manly activity that could serve to reinforce ideologies of masculinity.¹⁹³

Most importantly, Butler makes a clear distinction between mimicry and effeminacy. According to Butler, mimicking females does not mean that an actor is effeminate whether the part is portrayed seriously or not.¹⁹⁴ This perspective was shared by students interviewed after the Yale one-season ban as well. Like Butler, these students did not believe that female impersonation made one effeminate nor did assuming female parts make that individual, or individuals, any less masculine.¹⁹⁵ Thus, the issue does not appear to be *drag* itself but rather drag in relation to masculinity and presentation.¹⁹⁶ In the next section, I discuss perceptions of drag and masculinity following Yale’s ban on female impersonation.

¹⁹¹ “Joan of Arc in Burlesque;” “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

¹⁹² Butler, “To the Editor,” 104.

¹⁹³ Butler, “To the Editor,” 104.

¹⁹⁴ Butler, “To the Editor,” 104.

¹⁹⁵ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

¹⁹⁶ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

“College Athletes Act Best in Skirts:” Student and Media Perceptions of Yale’s Ban

On December 10, 1915, the *New York Times* reported that Dean Jones of Yale issued a one-season restriction on Yale actors playing female roles. According to the *Times*, the faculty believed that “constant training in the female parts tends to make the undergraduates effeminate.”¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, “a rumor was current on the campus that the advice of an eminent New York specialist on neurotic and mental moods was taken before the Faculty decision was reached, but this was denied tonight by Dean Jones, who said that the order was issued simply for *variety’s sake* [emphasis added].”¹⁹⁸ Whether or not a specialist was contacted, the suggestion that effeminacy may require a neurotic and mental moods specialist is interesting as it is pathologizing effeminate behavior.¹⁹⁹

Three days later, Princeton’s student newspaper published an article covering the restriction at Yale. Although Princeton’s faculty declined to comment, the newspaper reported that the administrations at Brown, Columbia, and Pennsylvania did not agree with Dean Jones’ belief that playing female parts made men effeminate. A Harvard faculty member, identified as Professor Winter commented that “such roles serve to make more effeminate men who are already so inclined, besides impairing the voice [from strain].”²⁰⁰ According to Professor Winter, men could not become effeminate from imitating females,

¹⁹⁷ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

¹⁹⁸ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

¹⁹⁹ “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing.”

²⁰⁰ *The Princetonian*, December 13, 1915, <http://theprince.princeton.edu>.

rather, men were born effeminate. This particular assertion is interesting especially when taken with the possibility of a specialist being consulted concerning effeminacy.²⁰¹

Following the ban, the *New York Times* published another article titled “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts” which featured interviews with impersonators from Columbia and New York University following the Yale ban. According to the article, these students seriously doubted the validity of the claim that female impersonation caused effeminacy in college men.²⁰² Female impersonators of Columbia and N.Y.U. “recalled that the best ‘actresses’ in their shows the last five years had been among the best athletes” including “a 250-pound football tackle” and another student who was “one of the best swimmers and boxers” at Columbia.²⁰³ In an interview with one Columbia student, known as the “All-American ‘pony’ ballet girl,” the interviewer emphasized his cigar-smoking and foul mouth, suggesting not only a masculine persona but a hyper-masculine persona that was not susceptible to effeminacy.²⁰⁴

By emphasizing the athleticism and superhuman abilities of collegiate impersonators, the media dismissed any claims of effeminacy in students that played female parts in plays.²⁰⁵ According to one impersonator interviewed, the swimming and

²⁰¹ *The Princetonian*.

²⁰² “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

²⁰³ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

²⁰⁴ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

²⁰⁵ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

boxing student “held his hand in a peculiar way, like a girl trying to prevent a bracelet from falling off her wrist, or a man ready to punch someone (*sic*).”²⁰⁶ When it had been jokingly suggested that he should be thrown out of the frat house, “he pulled his 250-pounds to the centre (*sic*) of the room, crooked up an arm as large as the hind of a rhinoceros, and defied ten men in the room.”²⁰⁷ According to historian Kathleen B. Casey, it was not uncommon for female impersonators to be described as superhuman in their abilities to cultivate hyper-masculine identities.²⁰⁸ Whereas Julian Eltinge was said to have been forced into women’s clothing by six young Harvard men, this particular collegiate female impersonator was said to have challenged ten students in a fight.²⁰⁹

As the interviews demonstrate, students at elite universities did not believe that drag made a student effeminate nor did they believe that drag and masculinity were mutually exclusive. In many instances, female impersonators were considered not only masculine, but *hyper-masculine* when compared to their peers. In this respect, the media played a crucial role in presenting drag as a heterosexual activity – drag was presented as a legitimate pastime of college men who enjoyed “making-up” and “dressing like handsome girls.”²¹⁰ Despite this, college faculties and administrations were concerned that drag was

²⁰⁶ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

²⁰⁷ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

²⁰⁸ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

²⁰⁹ Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*, 40.

²¹⁰ “The College Chorus ‘Girl.’”

not congruous with the ideographic college male they sought to produce and enacted restrictions and limitations on drag.²¹¹

Discussion and Conclusion

In the beginning of the Progressive Era, drag largely went unregulated at northeastern college and university campuses. Male college students utilized drag in a variety of settings and ways, both on and off stage. Furthermore, drag on the college stage was not a requisite of an all-male student body. At some coeducational institutions, such as the University of Wisconsin, Cornell, and the National Deaf-Mute College, male students chose to assume both male and female parts.²¹² Similarly, some organizations and clubs at all-male universities, such as Harvard's Dramatic Association, and later, *Deutscher Verein* and the *Cercle Français*, allowed females to audition for parts in their plays while other organizations continued to have men assume female parts.²¹³

Not only were students and alumni wearing drag on the stage, they were also wearing drag off stage as a part of student traditions and rituals throughout the Progressive Era. From textbook burning rituals to mock trials to alumni parades, students and alumni at Amherst, Harvard, and Princeton organized events that incorporated drag. Sometimes drag occurred in private settings such as the dorm rooms of students, but other times it

²¹¹ "College Athletes Act Best in Skirts;" "Yale Limits Skirt Wearing;" "Skirt Dancing by Young Men."

²¹² Bragg, *Deaf World*; Nash, "Don't Tell Omaha;" Price, "American Undergraduate Dramatics."

²¹³ Price, "American Undergraduate Dramatics."

occurred as public spectacle in association with the campuses themselves. Regardless of setting, drag was a vital part of student traditions, rituals, and campus life for male students during this era.²¹⁴

Although students saw drag as non-threatening and congruous with their masculinity, college faculties and administrations at some colleges such as Yale, Princeton, and Columbia increasingly regulated drag.²¹⁵ As discussed previously, American society was undergoing significant changes in its political, social, and cultural structure. One of these changes was the increase of the presence of minority group members and women in “traditionally” Anglo-Saxon male-dominated spheres such as the workplace, the church, and institutions of higher education.²¹⁶ In response, campuses such as Princeton sought to produce an educated manhood: a new masculinity that sought to prepare college students for social leadership roles.²¹⁷

In interviews with the *New York Times* as well as in alumni op-ed pieces, some students and alumni defended drag against accusations of effeminacy – presenting collegiate drag as a masculine activity in much the same way as college sports like football or track were presented. With help from the media, drag was framed by newspapers as an

²¹⁴ Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*; 1882 Nov 16 - Anna Lytt; *College*, 1882 Nov - Anna Lytt *Funeral Pageant*; 1883 Nov 9 - Mattie Matix; 1883 Nov 9 - Mattie Matix; Calnek, *The Hasty Pudding Theatre*.

²¹⁵ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts;” “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing;” “Skirt Dancing by Young Men;” “Joan of Arc in Burlesque;” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*.

²¹⁶ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man;” Casey, *The Prettiest Girl on Stage Is a Man*.

²¹⁷ Turpin, “The Chief End of Man,” 464.

acceptable activity for male college students. Furthermore, many of the students that donned drag were also athletes which media outlets frequently highlighted in the titles as well as bodies of their articles. The athlete identity of female impersonators at college campuses was utilized to protect these students from accusations of effeminacy.²¹⁸

Drag on college campuses has not been studied in-depth in the current historiography. Male student participation in drag has a long and rich history across campuses that includes both stage and non-stage examples.²¹⁹ Although it shares many similarities with drag in other contexts at the turn of the century, it differs in important ways. One such way was the incorporation of drag into student rituals and traditions at Princeton, Harvard, and Amherst.²²⁰ Furthermore, attempts at controlling drag occurred earlier than in the larger American society such as the ban at Yale and discussions of limiting drag at other campuses.²²¹ Lastly, despite the association between effeminacy and drag purported by campus administrations, drag was perceived as a masculine activity by

²¹⁸ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts;” “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing; “Skirt Dancing by Young Men;” “JOAN OF ARC IN BURLESQUE.; Clever Musical Extravaganza by Columbia College Boys;” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*.

²¹⁹ Garber, *Vested Interests*; Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*, 11-12; 1883 Nov 9 - *Mattie Matix*; 1882 Nov - *Anna Lytt Funeral Pageant*; “Senior Dramatics: Outline of Amherst Senior Dramatics.”

²²⁰ 1883 Nov 9 - *Mattie Matix*; Leitch, *A Princeton Companion*; “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts.”

²²¹ “College Athletes Act Best in Skirts;” “Yale Limits Skirt Wearing; “Skirt Dancing by Young Men;” “JOAN OF ARC IN BURLESQUE.; Clever Musical Extravaganza by Columbia College Boys;” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*.

some students. For these reasons, colleges deserve further analysis in discourse concerning drag at the turn of the century.

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