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Slumber Parties as Rites of Passage

ALINA MANSFIELD
UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Children's supernatural based activities such as M.A.S.H, Bloody Mary, Ouija board experimentation, and "Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board" comprise a traditional repertoire of paranormal and divinatory rituals to be drawn upon many times throughout a series of friends' birthday parties or sleepovers. This article investigates the cognitive and ritual functions of such supernatural play as performed by American pre-adolescent girls within the liminal context of the slumber party. Though characterized as children's play, this is ritual behavior in two senses: in its direct confrontation and thrilling exploration of the supernatural, and in its trance-inducing, ceremonial qualities. Such play is often structured and performed as traditional ritual and can invoke aspects of rites of passage, especially when undertaken cumulatively throughout adolescence. Drawing upon fieldwork in consultation with the collections of University of Oregon's Mills Northwest Folklore Archive, the Utah State University's Fife Folklore Archive, and children's folklore scholarship, this article explores such spiritualistic play as a vernacular process of adolescent individuation.

I don't remember doing "Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board" this night, but I can't imagine that we didn't do it either. Because I feel like we just always did that at slumber parties (Christian 2016).

A good slumber party inevitably leads to the supernatural. Supernatural and divination-based games such as M.A.S.H., Bloody Mary, Ouija board experimentation, and Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board comprise a complex of interlocking pre-adolescent slumber party activities in persistent and enduring affiliation with each other. Each one tending to trigger the suggestion to play the other, such games provide children with a traditional repertoire of paranormal and divinatory rituals to be drawn upon many times throughout a series of friends' birthday parties or sleepovers. Though characterized as

children's play, these activities demonstrate genuine ritualistic behavior in their direct confrontation and thrilling exploration of the supernatural, and in their trance inducing, ceremonial qualities. Such play is often structured and performed as traditional ritual and can invoke aspects of rites of passage, especially as performed cumulatively throughout adolescence. To investigate the functions of such play, particularly within the liminal context of the slumber party, I interviewed twelve women who participated in these supernatural traditions as children. I also consulted the extensive and rich collections in the Randall V. Mills Northwest Folklore Archive and in Utah State University's Fife Folklore Archive. Drawing on Alan Dundes' analysis of Bloody Mary (1998), and Elizabeth Tucker's analyses of both Bloody Mary and Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board (1984), as well as my own archival research and fieldwork, I propose that such spiritualistic play is a vernacular process of adolescent individuation.

HISTORIC PRECURSORS

Bill Ellis situates contemporary adolescent supernatural play within a long, venerable history of occult rituals in children's folklore, recorded as far back as medieval times:

Traditions surrounding Stone Age monuments in Great Britain and Brittany repeatedly allude to customs involving trips by courageous youths to challenge the power of the supernatural. Thus we can trace a lengthy history of occult play activities like Ouija boards and séance rituals (2004, 12).

Noted children's folklore scholars Iona and Peter Opie report a levitation game being performed by children as early as 1665 (1960, 454), and Ellis additionally notes that it was the conducting of séances in 1692 by a group of adolescent girls (age ten through eighteen) that triggered the infamous and tragic Salem Witch Trials (1994, 62). But it was the founding of Spiritualism, launched into the mainstream zeitgeist by the spirit rapping séances of the young Fox sisters, that caused divination activities to explode in popularity in America in the 1840s. This led to the popularity of séances and the development of

spirit contacting devices out of which evolved the commercialized Ouija board so popularly associated with slumber parties.

It is not clear how contemporary versions of older, spiritualist practices became so embedded in the vernacular social activities of adolescent girls, particularly girls' birthday parties-- but it is perhaps related to traditional and popular associations of women with the supernatural, as well as their reported tendency towards more intimate and collaborative types of play (Kayser 2009, 91; Mechling 1989, 97-98). In fact, divination activities were at one time commonly performed by young women in Europe and America on liminal calendrical dates or in conjunction with a transitional event such as a wedding, usually revolving around the divining of a future spouse through mirror gazing or other methods (Ellis 2004, 159; Knapps 1976, 253; Tucker 2005, 190).

BELIEF AND FEAR

Though degrees of belief and participation in these forms of vernacular spiritualism are diverse and individualistic, girls often take these games very seriously, treating them as true rituals. Discussing *Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board*, Elizabeth Tucker writes:

The persistence of certain symbolic elements, over a wide span of time and space, creates a sense of ritualistic potency. As in many rituals, the order of events must be faithfully maintained, the tone must be solemn, and the outcome is expected to be something almost miraculous; so the word 'game' does not do justice to the nature of what is happening (1984, 126).

The Ouija board in particular is approached with awe and fear of its numinous power. Stories of its use at slumber parties tend to follow a similar pattern: children begin by asking fun and entertaining fortune telling questions, until contact is made with something perceived as sinister, and the game takes a turn to the dark side. The participants may then ask for a sign, and in response an object moves or acts paranormally, validating the presence of a spirit or perhaps even "Satan." In many cases, parents intervene and warn their children not to use it again, and the adolescents then

tell stories to warn each other. But rather than being deterred, this numinous attraction often becomes all that more enticing to users:

Anyway, we were 'talking' to someone and we kept asking for a sign. My dogs started barking and freaking out, and then eventually all the dogs nearby my house were barking and howling. It felt like it went on forever which woke my mom up. I felt really scared and started crying and told my mom that I thought it was the Ouija board that caused the dogs to bark. I was expecting her to not take it seriously, but instead she got upset and took the board away and said, 'You guys shouldn't be messing around with that!' Which further freaked us out. But I'm pretty sure we did it again like a week later (Barkman 2016).

We were asking it a lot of stupid questions about who were we going to marry and who we really liked and so on, and a lot of embarrassing things came to light.

It took a while for the spirit to start working, but gradually we could feel the spirit and the pointer was flying across the board. Just then my parents came back from the show and gasped because they could feel the spirit that was in the house...Everyone was frightened and took off and my parents told me not to do that again. But of course this was the kind of thing everyone wants to do again so the next week we met at another friend's house (Tometich, 1968).

She was trying to convince me that Ouija boards are influenced by Satan, and I should not have anything to do with them. I believed the story, but it didn't stop me from using the Ouija board (Hardy, 1984).

Another interviewee, Mary Kupsch, when asked whether she sincerely believed in the reality of the supernatural as a child participant, explained that she did not necessarily truly believe, but felt it advisable to exercise caution around the Ouija board, "just in case." She claimed that after joining others in Ouija board play at a slumber party she had felt "weird and scared" for weeks afterwards (2016). Despite this fear and discomfort, she persisted in undertaking another related ritual--the summoning of Bloody Mary in a bathroom mirror. Mary recollected that she had felt the need to affirm her bravery-- to herself and others--as well as to find out for herself what it was everyone

else had experienced by participating in this frightening ordeal (Kupsch 2016). Others similarly describe a genuine fear involved in the invocation of Bloody Mary. As Jamie Jensen recalled, "Fear was mounting; we had to talk each other into continuing. Finally we built up the courage to say in sync, 'Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary' (2000). Rachel Prisbrey reported being too afraid to attempt Bloody Mary, citing parental warnings and religious beliefs, and she correlated belief in the ritual with her lingering fear of the bathroom mirror (1993).

In many accounts, the invocation of Bloody Mary is similarly reported to be undertaken as a test of bravery, curiosity, and peer group allegiance (Langlois 1980, 196, 201-203; Tucker 200, 115; Leonard 2001), it's widespread ubiquity suggesting its potency as both an adolescent initiatory rite and a sincere spiritual investigation of the true nature of the unknown. Jessica Duong, a 23 year old University of Oregon student, recalled that one girl in her group of friends, was designated "the scaredy-cat" (2017), when they performed supernatural rituals at age nine, while another took on the mantle of ritual leader. As the designated, "skeptic," Jessica was often blamed for blocking their various spiritualist explorations from working. As Bill Ellis points out about the Ouija board: "However game-like it is, then, its earnest referent is the shamanistic quest, in which individuals or small groups seek out their own personal definitions of the mythic world, often in the face of priestly institutions" (1994, 83). He finds that adolescents who participate in the ritualistic role play of the Ouija board séance are acting from a genuine religious impulse to test spiritual reality. By encountering threatening figures within the safe and playful container of the traditionally structured Ouija ritual, adolescents often enact the mythic narratives of their religious and cultural beliefs (1994, 83-85).

SLUMBER PARTY GAMES AS FEMININE RITES OF PASSAGE

Theresa Vaughan points out that girls in North America tend to engage a series of rites, rather than a single ceremony, to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood (2009,

600). One series of events that marks a young girl's transition into adulthood is participation in various slumber parties, including one's own-- a common celebration of a girl's birthday:

Young American girls' slumber parties, within the roughly defined 'pre-adolescent' phase from about age eight to twelve, are times of great fun and experimentation. The girls may play all their favorite records, try on make-up, make prank phone-calls, stuff themselves with junk food, and valiantly try to stay up all night: but they are also very likely to experiment with some kind of supernatural game-playing (Tucker, 1994, 125).

The gathering of young girls of the same age together for a slumber party is reminiscent of certain cross-cultural and historic initiation ceremonies or rituals--"often in the case of females the ritual consisting of some form of enforced seclusion" (Dundes 2002, 84). Collectively sequestered and somewhat unsupervised (in that the parents are usually in another room or asleep), slumber party attendees usually stay up later than usual, sometimes all night--transgressing usual temporal boundaries and moving into liminal time. The very name of the event--slumber party--emphasizes its celebration of communal liminality.

Ritual Features of the Slumber Party

Supernatural activities performed at a slumber party activate the functions of ritual through rhythmic and collaborative actions that may transport a cohort of friends into a state of trance and *communitas*, a distinguishing feature of a rite of passage:

Rhythmicity has long been recognized as a key feature of transition rituals (rites of passage) that carry an individual or group from one social state or status to another. Rhythmic, repetitive stimuli (especially in safe, relaxed settings) coordinate emotional, cognitive, and motor processes and synchronize them among the various ritual participants. This process called "entrainment," may be experienced as a loss of self-consciousness, a feeling of flow. Ritual entrainment can lead to transpersonal bonding, a sense of the unity and oneness of the group, as in for example the collective and

polyphonic ritual funeral wailing practices of Warao women in Venezuela (Chapman and Davis-Floyd 2009, 605).

Such repetitive synchronization is evident at slumber parties in the rhythmic chanting of “Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board,” the commonly required trebling of “Bloody Mary,” and the rhythmic spiral drawing used to divine in M.A.S.H. It is this collective rhythmic behavior, often in conjunction with dim lighting and kinesthetic tricks, which allow the transformative effects of the games to operate alchemically on the minds of the participants. For instance, after chanting “Bloody Mary” in the dark and then turning on the lights, or using a flashlight, a distorted apparition can appear in the mirror. Though likely a result of the cognitive “disassociated identity effect” (Caputo, 2010, 1007-1008), such activity provides a canvas for a girl’s ritual encounter with the distorted feminine, the mirror’s close connection with identity making it “appropriate for enactment of complex self perceptions” (Tucker 2005, 190). Likewise, the seemingly successful supernatural levitation of another girl, though probably based on kinesthetic illusions arising from mismatched sensory inputs (Barker and Clairborne 2012, 455-458), endows the game with ritual significance. “Because the verbal components of the variant have already set the stage for a visit from the supernatural, all of the participants feel as though—they believe—the actor is floating” (Barker and Clairborne 2012, 457). Masterfully employing such props and effects as candles to create a supernatural ambience with which to summon spirits via the Ouija Board, girls know how to activate the patterned ritual context so firmly entrenched in the popular imagination.

Mechling notes that children are already a marginalized class (1989, 97), and as they are in a constant transitional and liminal state of not yet being adults, they often employ folklore to “create a feeling of egalitarian community” and to experience the “homogeneity and comradeship that they see in certain cultural rituals (1989, 103). The slumber party framework, where girls may relish in their independence from the authoritative hierarchical structures of parents and school, may further deepen a sense of

solidarity and bonding that the ritualistic entraining behaviors often produce. This liminal social container may produce what Victor Turner termed *communitas*, "a direct, total confrontation of human identities which is rather more than the casual camaraderie of ordinary social life, it may be found in the mutual relationships of neophytes in initiation..." (Turner and Turner 1982, 205). The emblematic image of the slumber party pillow fight represents this reality in popular culture, television and film.

During a slumber party, girls engage in many intimate, collaborative activities, including more seemingly solemn rituals like Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board. Such games play around with death and resurrection themes, and--by placing the girls in a trance and one of the girls in the role of corpse--imitate the death and rebirth experience of a neophyte in an initiation ceremony. The girls play at being socially resurrected by others, as they combine their intangible power and strength and put their hands together in mutual affiliation-- literally and figuratively supporting and lifting each other up. Tucker, in her analysis, feels that trance activities like these reflect that girls this age are "keenly aware of the need to reach out: to grow, change, and develop new social roles for themselves" (1984, 130). She adds that the ritual aspects of levitation play (especially in the case of the actor) tell a symbolic story about their adolescent social structures: "Being lifted is not just an experiment with victimization, but also a symbolic submission to peer pressure...as a dramatic rendition of social adaptation, then, levitation is an activity that has quite a lot of ritualistic potency" (1984, 130). Likewise, in other trance inducing and spirit contacting play such as the mirror gazing of Bloody Mary, and the hypnotic automatism of the Ouija Board and M.A.S.H, girls confront their anxieties and concerns about the unknown together--death, their futures, the boundaries of reality, their vulnerable status--using their strength in numbers and mutual affinities within safe, ritual frameworks to envision their futures and transcend into adulthood together.

Within the liminal space of slumber party rituals, I would argue that girls present socio-cultural and spiritual *sacra* to themselves in many forms. Victor and Edith Turner describe three kinds of *sacra* that are transmitted during an initiation rite, as categorized by classical scholar Jane Harrison: exhibitions, actions, instructions (Turner and Turner 1982, 204). *Sacra* may form “a central cluster of ideas, images, feelings and rhythmic interactions which constitute a kind of symbolic template or master pattern for the communication of a culture’s most cherished beliefs, ideas, values and sentiments” (Turner and Turner 1982, 204). While playing M.A.S.H., girls are presented structurally with cultural norms about what it means to be a woman in our society--“M.A.S.H. both reflects and inculcates American ideologies regarding traditional gender roles, class status, and heterosexual values related to courtship, marriage, and lifestyle” (Kayser 2009, 98). Like their historic teenage predecessors, girls who play M.A.S.H. gaze into a surface waiting for the image of their future spouse to appear, around whom the rest of their imagined future life unfolds. This imagined life is playfully conjured in various iterations by populating the structural slots of the game, reifying on paper for the participants a hand drawn microcosmic model or “master pattern” of normative American life. This accretion of ideals and values into a composite image of desired masculine qualities reflects the transmission of more abstract features of society in a graspable form.

Additionally, when young girls test themselves by summoning Bloody Mary, they encounter an archetypally resonant, symbolically rich, iconic figure-- a seemingly mythical symbol of womanhood in both its stigmatized, rejected and powerful aspects. In fact, in archival accounts and interviews I conducted, she has been conflated with various other powerful and brutally victimized feminine figures, symbols and legend characters: the tragic and abusive anti-mother La Llorona, the executed Mary Queen of Scots, the suffering Virgin Mary, a burned “witch” victim of the Salem Witch Trials, and

various other female victims of abuse, murder, insanity, or self-afflicted tragedy. She tends to subsume all female ghost and witch-related motifs and figures as she appears in a proliferation of variants (Bronner 1998, 168; Christian 2016; Flinspach 2016; Klintberg 1998, 160; Langlois 1980 210-219; Leonard 2001). Notably, many accounts of Bloody Mary's origin emphasize her injured face. Jamie Jenson explained that Bloody Mary "tried to mangle their faces because her own face was burned or distorted by some sort of accident (2000), while Rachel Prisbrey similarly recounts, "One day she had a terrible accident and her faced was scratched so badly that she bled to death. But her spirit could not rest" (1993).

The persistent endurance of the need to encounter Bloody Mary is perhaps fulfilling the ritual need for what the Turners describe as an exhibition of "relics or images of deities, heroes, ancestors, or saints" such as sacra "connected with myths about the agrarian mother-goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone" (Turner and Turner 1982, 204). Elizabeth Tucker noted the analogy between Bloody Mary and an African initiation ritual:

I find the process of daring and testing-an initiation of sorts-to be even more significant. An older woman, a mirror witch, puts children through a fear test that may result in a painful scratch. Like the women in charge of certain girls initiation ceremonies in Africa, the mirror witch inflicts pain when it is appropriate to do so (2005, 3).

One interviewee even reported that Bloody Mary was said to appear in the mirror holding out an apple (Kuan 2016), a symbol surely inextricably intertwined with feminine mysteries and cultic knowledge, whether it be the forbidden knowledge extended to Eve, the agent of powerful transformation handed to Snow White by another witch, or in the apple's ancient use in Celtic divination rituals (Santino 1983, 10). Could Bloody Mary entail a ritualistic confrontation with a displaced mother goddess, a Wise Old Woman archetype, or the grotesque expression of the abject feminine self? Or is she perhaps

operating as the Proppian style donor figure in a ritual drama, such as Alan Dundes observed is activated structurally by other children's games (2007, 156-166)? Victor Turner found that encounters with disfigured and monstrous sacra functioned in adolescent initiation ceremonies to startle neophytes into transforming and thinking about their world in new ways (1964, 52-54). While cognitive scientist Giovanni Caputo concluded that mirror gazing at a low illumination level can be a tool for integration of unconscious contents, which are usually projected, toward individuation of the self (2013, 10).

Slumber party neophytes also receive instruction during their games. They receive advice about the future, and are informed implicitly via contact with spirits of the Ouija board and the mirror that there is, reassuringly, continuity of identity after death. They may attempt to contact historical figures of mythical stature, such as Abraham Lincoln, culturally renowned for his great wisdom (Christian, 2016). One group of teenage girls even asked the spirit of a great aunt if they should go to college right away, or go on a mission:

Then my friend and I who had been debating about whether to go on missions that summer or whether to go to the University for a year decided to ask the spirit what we should do. Instead of a yes or no answer the spirit spelled out: 'for all intents and purposes you may as well wait a year because the people you will come in contact with will all be there a year from now.' After that answer we felt pretty good and that maybe we'd sign up for school (Tometch, 1968).

Or, as reported in other accounts, after a frightening Ouija experience participants may receive mediating religious instruction from parents, missionaries, or a priest (Blackwell, 1965; Hardy 1984; Tometch 1968). The Ouija board may even relay religious symbols:

A few girls were playing with a weegy-board [sic] and one of the girls had a real funny feeling. The girls looked out and up on the mountain they could see a light in the shape of a cross (Woolfenden, n.d.).

In addition to playing around with personas during a slumber party by trying on each other's clothes and applying each other's makeup, girls experiment with rearranging cultural symbols and social patterns during supernatural rituals, exhibiting another feature of ritual as described by Victor and Edith Turner, *ludic recombination*:

The analysis of culture into factors and their free, playful ('ludic') recombination in any and every possible pattern however deviant, grotesque, unconventional or outrageous. This process is quintessentially liminal, and, in a disconcerting way, makes excellent sense with regard to the new state and status that celebrants or neophytes will enter (1982, 204-205).

In playing the divination game M.A.S.H, girls especially playfully mix and match cultural factors, selecting lives and life partners from both thrilling and grotesque possibilities. Nice cars, dwellings, and desired boys are placed in binary opposition with amusingly horrific choices such as the deadly Ford Pinto and Pee Wee Herman.

All of my collaborators remember that the game blended options that would seemingly provide for an idyllic existence and ones that would make them absolutely miserable, whether that be in a hierarchical form (low, mediocre, and high values corresponding to the types of shelter) or a strict dichotomy of desirable and undesirable choices (Kayser 2009, 100).

Supernatural play can additionally exhibit features of ludic recombination as it seemingly inverts and alters the shared cultural understanding of reality: "Being levitated means, in a symbolic way, being lifted up to a higher level of existence: in other words, rising into a supernatural realm where previously accepted laws are found to be reversible" (Tucker 1984, 130).

Adolescent neophytes may play with the boundaries of self during liminal activity, such as temporarily identifying with the abject, grotesque figure of Bloody Mary --"the use of the mirror in this symbolic transformation is double. In the first place, it literally reflects the identification of the participants with the revenant" (Langlois 1980, 202). Through trance and Ouija Board activities, they may also subconsciously project

personalities that express an experimentation with other types of gender, age, personality and social masks. Commonly, adolescents encounter contrasting negative and positive spirits via the Ouija board, perhaps mirroring symbolically the complexity of their own volatile moods, and allowing them to cathartically contend with and integrate the light and dark sides of their developing personalities. Bill Ellis, in his study of teenage Ouija board memorates reports adolescent frequently describing encounters with contrasting good and evil spirits (1994, 72). In my own recollections with my sister about our Ouija board adventures, we remembered a recurring communication with a spirit duo—“Todd,” a happy, positive, loving and playful male figure, and “Amy,” a very depressed female personality who usually cursed us, probably reflecting both of our own vacillations in mood at the adolescent ages of twelve and fifteen (Christian 2016).

Supernatural play can also invoke chaotic, antithetical, trickster personalities:

Finally they asked the question ‘is this the devil doing this?’ At this question the shot glass flew off the board and hit the wall (Cole 1971).

They asked the Ouija board for a sign. They heard all of this noise in the other room. When they walked into the next room, they found a table tipped over and lamps tipped over. Papers were all over the room (Butkus 1977).

And, one of the belts lifted up and started to float, like, like lifted up and starting floating out of the closet. And we both screamed...and jumped off the bed...and hid. And we were holding on to each other. And the belt fell down to the ground, as soon as we screamed. And when we got back on the Ouija, the Ouija board just went, ‘ha ha ha ha ha ha,’ as if it was laughing at us, and spelled out, ‘You guys are funny’ (Efstratis 2016).

For Carl Jung, the archetype of the trickster--a mythic carnivalesque figure who often serves a ritual, disorderly, ludic function--is characteristic of preadolescent supernatural play. “...It is not surprising to find certain phenomena in the field of parapsychology which remind us of the trickster. These are the phenomena connected with poltergeists, and they occur at all times and places in the ambience of pre-adolescent children.” (Jung

1959, 136). These encounters with destructive, disorderly, chaotic spirits who turn everything topsy-turvy, seem to be both an essential ingredient in children's folklore (Mechling 1989, 96-98) and in the ludic features of many religious and magical rites, historically and cross-culturally (Jung 1959, 140).

VERNACULAR PUBERTY RITUALS?

Oh! I remember doing it at my birthday party! And one of the things that it said, was, it like, threatened us, but then it said, it threatened us, and it was like, the threat was going to happen on a night when there was no moon. And I, snarkily was like, "Yeah right, there is never not a moon!" Because I was like 12 or 13, so I was like, "Yeah right, there is never not a moon." So, then we went outside and it was the day that there is no moon, which is when I learned that a new moon means no moon--that the moon's not out. But I didn't know that that's what a new moon was, I didn't even know it existed. So, like, to have the Ouija board say that, was like, "What!" We, like, lost it (Christian 2016).

In "Bloody Mary in the Mirror: A Ritual Reflection of Pre-Pubescent Anxiety," Alan Dundes unleashed a provocative exegesis of the Bloody Mary ritual, performed so commonly by prepubescent girls. Noting such signifiers that the setting is almost always a bathroom, that it involves the sudden, frightening but exciting appearance of blood, and that it is performed mostly by girls at the age they are beginning to be anxious about the impending onset of menses, he concludes that it may fulfill the function once provided by a formal puberty ritual, a marker of transition common in many societies historically, but absent from our modern American society (Dundes 2002, 84-92) Victor Turner describes a puberty ritual for Ndembu girls when they begin to receive breasts, where "a novice is wrapped in a blanket and laid at the foot white *mudyi* sapling," or what he calls a "milk tree," in order to symbolically enact the nurturing matrilineal lineage that the girl is now ready to assume herself (1967, 20-21). Barbara Tedlock, in her study of the neglected history of women shamans, described the supernatural and

divinatory components of the puberty rituals for young women of certain North American Indian tribes. For instance:

Historically when a young woman reached puberty in Hupa society, there was a celebration during which she lived in a specially constructed "moon lodge" with a holy woman. This woman sat with the girl, burning herbs and roots in a sacred fire. Then she covered the girl's head with a deerskin to help her focus her thoughts. While the young woman prayed for a vision, dancers outside the lodge sang songs in her honor. After two or three days of seclusion she emerged and ran to the river. There she asked the moon and her spiritual helpers, the water beings, to give her protection, wealth, strength, and long life. Upon returning to the lodge, she gazed into an abalone shell filled with water (2009, 181).

Are functionally similar puberty rituals being performed in a vernacular fashion, via the seemingly playful ritual setting of a slumber party? One positive indication may be the recurrence of certain motifs and themes that run through these modern slumber party games: themes about the future, fertility, and new social roles, as girls attempt to ascertain and imagine their future as procreating, working, married adults; themes of collectively supported transformation and elevation to a new position in the oft performed *Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board*; and the eruption of blood in tales of *Bloody Mary*, suggesting a preoccupation with life, sex, and death--concerns awakened by puberty. This may also explain the recurring motif of the color red which appears not just in the dripping blood of *Bloody Mary*, but in various accounts of her red eyes (McGinnis 1990; Pierce 1995), the blood she elicits through a scratch to the face, a knife, or other supernatural means (Dundes 2002; 82 Hancich 2017; Jensen 2000; Morgan 1985), and the atmospheric employment of red lights and red candles (Dundes 2002, 83; Lubeck 1968; Kuan 2016). Victor Turner finds that actors in initiation rites are genuinely hoping for a direct experience of the supernatural order, and use the symbolic activities of the rite to achieve an inward transformation of personality (1973, 214).

The endurance and widespread prevalence in America of the supernatural games discussed seem to suggest that they can be understood, for many of the girls who participate, to function as rites of passage--as ongoing traditional techniques for imagining their future adult roles and initiating themselves into that sociocultural and ontological reality—within the safe incubational space of a like-minded collective of their peers. Through slumber parties, girls collectively initiate and stage their own ritual transformation by confronting the supernatural in ways characteristic of the liminal stage of a rite of passage. Through these playful but serious rites, girls gaze into a mirror--of self and culture--and begin to divine their own futures.

Alina Mansfield has a Bachelor's Degree in Folklore and Mythology from UC Berkeley, and a Master's Degree in Folklore from the University of Oregon. As a master's student, Mansfield produced a documentary entitled, To Catch a Crown: Mardi Gras in Biloxi, and was a recipient of the Alma Johnson Graduate Folklore Award two years in a row. Mansfield was awarded a Summer Folklore Fellowship in 2017 at the Oregon Folklife Network, where she co-produced OFN's publication, Oregon Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Master Artists: 2012-2016. She is also a contributor to the Encyclopedia of Women's Folklore and Folklife (2008).

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