URBAN LEGENDS: WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE THEM?

By

MARY DIANE CANTRELL

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES
May 2010
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Approved By:

John Llewellyn, PhD, Advisor

_____

Examining Committee:

Ananda Mitra, PhD

_____

John Petrocelli, PhD

_____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. John Llewellyn for his willingness to serve as my advisor on this thesis. His guidance and assistance were invaluable and are greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank the MALS program at Wake Forest for the opportunity to pursue areas of interest outside of my profession and for their support and assistance to all students in the program.

Finally, I want to thank my family and friends who have been a great encouragement to me throughout my latest academic endeavor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Cantrell, Mary Diane

URBAN LEGENDS: WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE THEM?

Thesis under the direction of
John T. Llewellyn, PhD, Associate Professor of Communication

This study answers questions about why some people believe urban legends and why these legends continue to thrive in today's society. Despite displaying the tell-tale signs of an urban legend and the number of websites and other sources available for a quick check of the legitimacy of a legend, new stories are often believed and passed on with little afterthought. It is not necessary to believe a legend to pass it on nor is an urban legend necessarily false, although the majority of them are untrue. The targets of legends are often businesses, particularly market leaders, and politicians or other prominent individuals which makes urban legends particularly attractive to the general public. Urban Legends provide an outlet for people in a number of different ways. For the person who does not believe a legend he has received, participating in the distribution of it will fulfill another need: breaking boredom, providing a social outlet or allowing the sharer to feel helpful. For others, believing in a particular legend is an emotional response. Legends can feed into the fears, anxieties, and biases a person may feel toward the subject matter or society in general thus providing them with emotional gratification.

INTRODUCTION

Open just about anyone's email and you are likely to find a warning of dangers

lurking in everyday products or situations, rebellion against greedy corporations, or tales

of injustice.   These tales of woe, collectively known as Urban Legends, are commonly

shared via email in today's society but may also be shared through other avenues of

communication.   These legends generally come with statements such as "I don't know

about you but I'm never going to shop at Wal-Mart ever again," "I can't believe

Congress is getting away with this," or "I don't know if this is true but just in case . . . ."

At some point in life, just about everyone has fallen for an urban legend.   How many

people believed as children that Pop Rocks and soda would explode in their stomachs?

How many believed that a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet once served a fried rat? It is

easy to see why impressionable children in particular would believe these stories.   Why

would otherwise judicious adults let reason fall to the wayside and embrace

wholeheartedly an anonymous warning? What compels that person to communicate

these stories to others? What is it that makes these stories proliferate throughout

society? Why do some survive years of scrutiny?

In order to determine the answers to the questions posed, a study of several

theories will be used. After first defining what an urban legend is and detailing their key

components, an exploration of rumor and social theories will be made to explain the

human response. It will be found that legends in and of themselves may fill no real

purpose as far as the stated action (do not use a certain product, for instance) to many

people but will fulfill emotional needs. They provide validation of fears and thus can

relieve anxiety by giving it a tangible target. Some find comfort in having their beliefs

confirmed, even if they are negative while others enjoy "proof" of their biases.

Alternatively, a person may not necessarily believe a legend is true but may relish the

social interaction or group bonding that sharing the story brings. Next, social theory and

epidemiology models will be explored to help explain why urban legends spread and

endure despite withering scrutiny of their rationale and truth. It would be reasonable to

believe that once a legend such as the Kentucky Fried Rat is debunked it would go away.

Nevertheless it has endured for over 30 years now.   Ignoring truth and efforts to explain

why a story is not true, some people simply want to believe something and will hold

onto it. Additionally, just as in epidemiology, new non-immune audiences are exposed

to re-circulated urban legends so old narratives can become new again.

DEFINING THE HALLMARKS OF AN URBAN LEGEND

Urban Legends are a popular form of modern folklore in today's society. They

are often intriguing tales of woe and corporate misdeeds with appalling details that

excite - and sometimes incite- their audience. While often containing just a shred of

truth, or perhaps none at all, they are generally accepted as factual and enjoy rapid

dissemination. Having relied upon word-of-mouth in the past, in today's electronic age

there are varied methods of instant communication, enabling a wider audience to be

reached. These legends are often embellished and tailored to fit a particular region or

situation. Looked at with a bit of skepticism, legends allow one to identify tell-tale signs

that a legend is not true – at least not completely as communicated. Despite the signs

and, at times, an individual's doubt, they are often passed on to others. Studying

common characteristics of urban legends helps break these tales down into specific

components to explain why one would believe a story and why urban legends tend to

endure the twin tests of time and reason.

There is no single specific reason why people believe legends or why particular

legends survive scrutiny and time. However, there is a simple common thread that

seems to tie all the possible reasons together.   Urban Legends often speak to the

anxieties, fears, and the changing conditions of society and in so doing tap into

emotions. They provide a means of validating fears, proving to the audience that an

entity *is* cold and uncaring just as he thought, or addressing any number of anxieties. It

is through the review of rumor theory, social theories and epidemiology models that

one can delineate how urban legends easily and completely grasp their audiences and are perpetuated through time.

Before attempting to outline the answer to questions regarding belief in and tenacity of urban legends, it would be helpful to define what is meant by "urban legend" and the common characteristics of these tales. Merriam-Webster.com defines an urban legend as "an often lurid story or anecdote that is based on hearsay and widely circulated as true." Variations of the definition exist and will be shared in subsequent discussions of theories. There are certain elements, topics and themes that are shared among urban legends. In his book, The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story, Jan Brunvand neatly categorizes these elements. First, there are the hallmarks of the modern urban legend. These are some of the tell-tale signs that help identify a story as an urban legend: 1) insistence on the truth of the story, 2) attribution to friends of friends, 3) age of story, and 4) variations in detail (Brunvand 2). Some of the common topics addressed in urban legends are: 1) cars, 2) death, 3) crime, 4) family emergency, 5) pets, and 6) commerce (Brunvand 6). The topics are not mutually exclusive and legends discussed in this study will often carry a combination of these elements in their context. Once the "facts" of the legend are established, a theme will become evident. Some of the most common themes in urban legends are: 1) misunderstandings, 2) poetic justice, 3) business rip-offs, and 4) revenge (Brunvand 6).

For an urban legend to interest its audience, it is helpful if not completely necessary to include specificity and plausibility. One key tipoff to a legend is also a reason people are susceptible to believing them: they are presented as being from a

dependable source. A story will often start off as having been heard from an

unidentified friend of a friend (commonly referred to as a FOAF), from a police officer,

or "on the news." The exact source may not be named; rarely is the legend passed on

from the first person account. This vague source does not seem to matter because "a

friend" would not lie.   Followed by the anonymous but reliable source are the

additional details that lend credence and make the story relevant to the audience.

These details include such information as a specific street name, town, business or

school name, and even the name of a news source. In the evolution of a legend, local

rumors are often woven in to lend additional detail to the narrative. Comparing the

following stories, one can see why the second is more likely to be believed and more

readily passed on than the first.

Legend Version One

A lady in a local store was looking through a pile of blankets. As she stuck her
hands in the pile, a snake bit her and she died.

Legend Version Two

My aunt's best friend's cousin was shopping at the JB Whites department store
on Stratford Road, just off Interstate 40. As she was feeling the texture of a pile of
blankets, she was bitten by a snake curled up in the folds. Despite being rushed to
Baptist Hospital, the woman died. It turns out the blanket came from Africa. A
poisonous snake had made the trip with the cargo. Since the snake was from Africa, the
hospital didn't have the right kind of anti-venom. My aunt said she thought she read in
the Winston-Salem Journal an article about it in which the hospital said had she been
bitten by an indigenous, poisonous snake, they could have easily saved her and she
would have made a complete recovery.   I don't know about you but I'm definitely
always going to buy American!

A person is likely to be more skeptical of version number one than version

number two. The deficiency of details and relevance to a specific place, person, or event

lacks the foundation for the number one tale of woe to be shared and spread. Even if

the audience believes it to be true, the anonymity and lack of character gives little

reason to remember, much less share, the story.   In the second story, all the salient

details required to draw in a person are present. A person predisposed to believe it,

due to a fear of snakes or concerns regarding merchandise from overseas, has all the

information needed in version two. Not only does version two provide a good story to

share, it validates existing anxieties and prejudices.   With legitimate news reports of

tainted merchandise from China in recent years, this legend would play into the fears

some Americans may have developed over the safety of foreign-produced merchandise.

Although the detail in the legend states the blanket came from Africa, the storyteller

could easily change it to China or Taiwan or whatever region is the target of relevance.

It is not uncommon for the details of urban legends to be modified to fit the needs of

the storyteller and to make it more relevant to his or her audience. In fact, many

legends exist in multiple localized forms. A common story unique to a campus may in

fact turn out to be "unique" to many campuses across the country or around the world.

The "Campus Halloween Murders" is a legend that recurs every few years in multiple

schools around the nation, dating back to the 1960s (Mullen 102). According to the

legend, a psychic (often named as Jeanne Dixon but sometimes, and since her death,

just "a psychic"), on a talk show (varies – and usually was taped but not aired as the

legend goes) has predicted that in association with Halloween a specific number of

students will be murdered at a specific time by a specific person.   The legend appears

with different clues such as the first letter of the name of the college or the town it is

located in, a geographical description of where on campus it will occur (e.g., where a hill

and a building meet, in a sorority house, in a coed dorm), or some other vague detail is

given that can be applied to numerous colleges across the country. Sometimes the

legend says an escaped convict or mental patient will be the party responsible for the

multiple murders – other times it is said to be a professor or student. This legend has

been most common in the Midwest but has spread nationwide (Snopes.com).

Whatever the specific details, as in the previous illustration of snake-infested blankets,

simply adding specificity adds relevance and local uniqueness to the story.

The characteristics outlined by Brunvand and Mullen provide a formula for urban

legends. Plausibility, specificity, reliable source, and a moral, ironic twist or act of

revenge equals a good story to share. This formula is a basic blueprint of legends and

variations as previously outlined are common.

URBAN LEGENDS AND RUMOR THEORY

In 1972, Patrick B. Mullen wrote of merging the study of rumor theory with folklore to explain urban legends.   While the study of urban legends often falls under folklore, they are not precisely the same type of story. Folklore is primarily defined by Merriam-Webster as "traditional customs, tales, sayings, dances, or art forms preserved among people" (Merriam-Webster.com).   Merriam-Webster adds an additional description of folklore as "an often unsupported notion, story, or saying that is widely circulated."   The definition given by the same site for urban legend is "an often lurid story or anecdote that is based on hearsay and widely circulated as true."   Folklore may be a story or other element passed down through generations for the sole purpose of entertainment. An urban legend is commonly thought of as a form of modern folklore. They, however, are typically cautionary tales or are meant to stir up emotions – usually, but not always, fear and anger. At this point, it would be helpful to define rumor. Another check of Merriam-Webster.com finds the definition of rumor: "talk or opinion widely disseminated with no discernible source." The two characteristics-- wide dissemination and no discernible source-- mesh with the urban legend characteristics of being widely circulated and based on hearsay. Mullen states, "One of the social concepts about the relation of rumor and legend has to do with origin: legends are merely conventionalized accounts of what was originally a rumor" (Mullen 96). Mullen believes that rumor theory reveals more about the structure and spread of urban legends than about their origins. He emphasizes that while legends and rumors are often related because they both carry a connotation of being unsubstantiated, both can actually be true. Not only can they be rooted in truth; but, even when false, they have plausibility (Mullen 98).

In his journal article, "Modern Legend and Rumor Theory," Mullen identifies two functions that the ambiguity of rumor and legend- producing situations serve: emotional and cognitive. He believes that ambiguous situations like natural disasters or unusual events produce anxieties and tensions. Through the emotional discharge function of an urban legend, these anxieties are eased by creating validation for those feelings and giving people something to which they can attach their anxieties (Mullen 105).

Building on Mullen's foundation, a more in-depth look at rumor theory further develops the explanations of urban legends. In his book, Rumor in the Marketplace: The Social Psychology of Commercial Hearsay, Frederick Koenig discusses the specific areas of rumors in the corporate world. Koenig defines urban legend as a type of rumor. A rumor as defined by Koenig starts with Webster as "a story or report current within any known authority for its truth" (Koenig 2) and continues to be defined as unverified and in general circulation.   As noted previously, an urban legend is not necessarily devoid of truth just as an unverified rumor is not *necessarily* false. Koenig theorizes that rumors thrive under "conditions of social trauma and personal threat" (Koenig 3) and further associates rumors that thrive with what he defines as the "three Cs." These pivotal elements are crisis, conflict, and catastrophe (and he notes that commerce could be included, expanding to four Cs).

Initially, for a rumor to catch on, it must be relevant to the person who hears it in order for that person to pass it along. The next person must also find it relevant to continue the spread of the rumor. The case of the rumor in 1978 that Wendy's, and subsequently McDonald's, put red worms in their hamburgers is used to illustrate this point. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, this rumor spread fairly quickly and citizens often

heard it from multiple sources. On August 15, 1978, Wendy's received the first call in regard to this rumor. The caller erroneously insisted she saw the story on 20/20. As the story spread, calls flooded in with people insisting they saw it on shows such as 20/20 and 60 Minutes – which never happened. The story eventually targeted McDonalds with insistence from multiple sources that it was confirmed on TV news magazines (it was not).   As sensational as this story was, it would have never spread had it not been relevant to those who heard it and shared it. Had the rumor been shared with persons who found worms to be an acceptable and positive additive to hamburger meat, there would have been no incentive for them to pass it on or to gain attention. However, Americans do not find worms to be acceptable in their hamburgers and those hearing this rumor felt duty-bound to pass it along.

There are other reasons a person may participate in spreading a rumor or urban legend. These reasons are not necessarily mutually exclusive as several may operate simultaneously. In addition, there can be situational reasons for a person to participate in rumor spreading when they normally would not (Koenig 22). The actual subject matter may not be as important to the teller as the attention the telling may bring.   Some people may pass on stories to feel important or for attention. If positive reinforcement is received, there is reason for the story to be shared. Schacter and Burdick found that rumors are spread more between acquaintances than friends. Perhaps sharing the rumors is an attempt at social bonding. In tracking a "death of Paul McCartney" rumor, Rosnow and Fine found that "rumormongers" were usually less socially active and looking for acceptance. Those individuals with a rich social life were usually the "dead enders" of a rumor (Koenig 35). Meanwhile, there is some evidence of other personal characteristics

that render some people more likely to share. The Taylor Manifest Anxiety scale

measures a person's anxiety level. Those who scored the highest level were more apt to

share. The Dutch psychologist Chorus added what he called "critical sense" (Koenig 34).

The higher a person's critical sense, the less likely he is to pass on a legend.

Additionally, the level at which a person wants to participate plays a part. This principle

goes back to the idea of relevance. If a person harbors a negative opinion of a particular

company, for example, even though they may have high critical sense, they may still

participate since that particular legend speaks to their biases.

Interestingly, containing frightening or grotesque details can make a story more

gripping and, consequently, promotes its being passed on. In fact, these traits can often

push a story forward more readily than a positive story. If a person has a pre-existing

bias, a negative rumor that reinforces those biases may be extremely compelling to the

person hearing a rumor and then passing it on.   Koenig believes that people with higher

anxiety are more prone to relate rumors. For some people, Koenig posits, rumors can

provide a source of validation for their anxieties. Despite the frightful warnings often

accompanying legends, some people find a sense of security in having their worst fears

confirmed. The belief in the tale allows fearful individuals the comfort of knowing they

were right to be concerned and gives them the ammunition to prevent disastrous

consequences that could, they believe, otherwise befall them.

An urban legend does not have to be relevant to the audience if it meets other

needs. For instance, in Koenig's theories, a rumor can sometimes take hold simply

because something different from the norm can be entertaining. With an urban legend,

the story, even if it is not believed to be at least partially true, can be passed on for its

entertainment value. In these types of scenarios, the story does not have to be relevant or even important to the audience; it simply needs to be interesting and a departure from the *status quo*. In situations where there is a mundane routine with little activity or information, what constitutes "interesting" can be quite different from other more exciting environments. As Koenig states, it is relative to the context of the situation and a "rumor can be only mildly interesting and still be picked up because of the unstimulating atmosphere" (23). In situations like the military where there is a great deal of idle time or wartime where there is a lack of information, rumors provide entertainment, meaning, and structure (Koenig 23). Again, the interest depends on the context of the situation. In questioning his students regarding the rumor that Tab contains 86 calories instead of the 1 calorie advertised, Koenig found that most students had heard the rumor through what amounted to be social small talk (23). While that tidbit of information may have been interesting at any time for those who were watching their calories, for most it was just interesting enough to pass along in a social situation.   In this case, it was interesting to the students as a way to pass time and bond socially but not *important* to most of them (Koenig 23).

Participating in the process of sharing a legend can be a socially rewarding experience. Despite often being negative in connotation, the sharing of "news" is generally accepted as a positive action.   This type of reinforcement encourages the sharing of information notwithstanding the fact that the legend may not be remotely or entirely true or that it may be disheartening. It may provide the person telling the story the feeling of being "in the know" and helpful to others. The person hearing the story

may feel that they are being brought in on valuable information that makes them important to the storyteller.

A legend can bond a group that has like thoughts and beliefs by providing a common context in which like minds can feel validated. Conspiracy legends particularly take advantage of prejudices and fears toward specific groups of people, organizations, the government, religious affiliations, and any other grouping that neatly packages a perceived threat. In a search on www.Snopes.com, using the keyword "conspiracy," there were 66 results. Appearing among the results was a dizzying array of conspiracies ranging from faked moon landings to the CIA introducing AIDS (an experiment gone really wrong). There were many legends tapping into the fear of terrorism, a natural consequence of the events of September 11, 2001. One legend, however, stood out in particular because it combined the hot topic of "9/11" with a particularly disturbing hatred of Jews. Anti-Semitism is certainly nothing new and those who possess these beliefs do not seem to have trouble finding reasons to hate and to spew forth all sorts of Jewish conspiracies. A particular legend found would be a perfect fit for those who are biased against Jews and believe they have nefarious plans for achieving their goals. The following is one of the shorter examples of emails circulating about the Jewish role in the events of 9/11. Snopes.com titled this particular legend "Absent without Leave."

> It has been confirmed by the US Government and the FBI that at the time
> of the accident, there were 4,000 Jews who MIRACULOUSLY never
> came to work [at] the World Trade Center building at the time of the
> accident. This means the Jews knew and were pre-warned about the
> accident that the WTC was going to be hit . . . . WHY??????
> In every crime you look at who has the most to benefit from the act. In this
> case, this crime has been a disaster for America, for the world, and also for
> the Arabs and the Muslims. The only people who benefited from this act
> of terror are the Jews. This is not the first time Israel and the Jews have
> done something like this in the name of someone else to further their own

selfish needs. They have even resorted to killing their own people to win public sympathy and support. This act is not beyond the capabilities and evil deeds of Israel. In this case it seems that it is clear to all that the Jews/Israel has most to gain and should be considered a possible source behind this act.

I hope the FBI follows the smoking gun as no one will commit an act unless he has something to gain from it. Israel should be a prime suspect in this case.

This particular legend plays into anxiety of terrorist attack and takes it a step further and takes advantage of a hatred of Jews. (Although the author never says anything about hating Jews, it is obvious from the tone and content that this is a work of Anti-Semitism.) By providing details of a conspiracy – attacking a country that is actually one of your country's strongest and enduring supporters, placing the blame on someone else, and then making sure there are no casualties of your particular group – this legend gives plenty of material for bonding over the fear and hatred of Jews and Israel (para, Snopes.com). As Snopes.com puts it, it is so ludicrous it does not deserve a response. They do however continue to debunk this legend. It is not likely anyone who wants to have a reason to hate Jews would accept any explanation of the invalidity of this legend. It is purely a work of fiction and the perfect example of a conspiracy legend. Yet, there were enough people who believed it (or wanted to believe it) that it rapidly spread via email in 2001.

A large portion of Urban Legends are commerce-related and often tell stories meant to reduce the "big guys" to an acceptable size.   Koenig points to the frustration-aggression hypothesis which explains that when a person is frustrated, they develop an urge to take it out on somebody else through aggression (Koenig 31). The aggression is generally directed toward someone who cannot fight back. Telling a story about a corporation that is unfavorable is an avenue of releasing frustration. It is very difficult for companies to fight back as anyone from a corporation that has been the victim of a

legend could tell you (Koenig 31). These events tend to occur during stressful times and

help with the increased anxiety as well. He refers to two experiments where participants

were tested with the Taylor Manifest Anxiety scale. The scale uses a series of questions

the subject answers in order to determine anxiety levels by asking true/false questions

like "I am easily embarrassed" or "I have few headaches" which the person answers for

himself (Answers.com). The tests were done prior to the rumor simulation to measure

pre-existing anxiety. The results of the studies showed a strong correlation between

existing anxiety levels and the frequency of repetition of a rumor. Koenig concludes that

the anxiety the participants felt increased the need to reduce ambiguity. As discussed

previously, ambiguity is an incentive for the spread of rumor. A study call the

"Authoritarian Personality" took the process further by examining characteristics of

people who are intolerant of ambiguity and suffer high levels of anxiety. The study

concluded that people who "were subjected to harsh discipline in childhood suffer from

an anxiety and are intolerant of ambiguity" (Koenig 32).   According to Koenig, these

people tend toward extremes in their beliefs and often are paranoid and believe in

conspiracies. While harsh discipline as a child is not a prerequisite for someone to

believe an urban legend, an increased anxiety or paranoia can certainly set one up to

tenaciously hold onto a legend that corroborates one's fears or proves to them that one

cannot trust in anyone else or any institution regardless of its public stature.

In his work, "The Goliath Effect: Corporate Dominance and Mercantile Legends," Gary Fine specifically addresses legends related to the "big business" Koenig referenced. Urban legends referring to business and products are categorized by Fine as mercantile legend.   According to Fine, Mercantile legends link corporations to a negative event, exposing them as one of three types of corporations: evil, deceptive, or careless (Fine, "Goliath" 64).

An example of a consciously evil corporation (in legends) would be McDonalds. Legend has it, Ray Kroc, President, is a member of the Church of Satan. Other evil corporations, according to legend, include Uncle Ben's for donating money to the Palestine Liberation Organization; Proctor & Gamble for being owned either by the Unification Church ("Moonies"), a satanic cult, or a witches coven; and, Schick Razors for aiding Nazis in World War II (Fine, "Goliath" 64).

A deceptive corporation would be one that purposely taints its products. Examples of deceptive corporations would be McDonalds for putting worms in the hamburgers, Chanel for putting cat urine in perfume, or Bubble Yum for putting spider eggs in gum.

A careless corporation is one that does not care about its customers, just the bottom line. These corporations are not considered evil as much as they are considered disinterested in the customers, hiring apathetic employees who are careless enough to cause a product contamination.   The snake in the blanket would be an example of this type of corporation. Presumably, the blankets were purchased at a discount, making the corporation greedy and disinterested in quality (Fine, "Goliath" 65).

Regardless of type, these mercantile legends reflect American attitudes toward business, particularly big business. In 1979, Fine cited a Gallup survey of Americans' confidence in their institutions. At the time, only 32% of Americans had confidence in big business (Fine, "Goliath" 65; Gallup). A check of Gallup statistics reflects that a similar survey indicates that Americans now have a 16% rate of confidence in big business (Gallup 2009).

Fine further contends that mercantile legends disproportionately name the leading corporations in an industry, modifying for regional differences as needed, than would naturally occur ("Goliath" 64). The prevalent idea of The Goliath Effect is that people are ambivalent toward "bigness", making them suspicious of big business, and thus mercantile legends are skewed toward major corporations and market leaders at a rate too far in excess of market share. There are three basic premises to his theory:

1. A larger percent than predicted by chance refers to dominant corporations or products in the market
2. Legends naming the largest corporations will be more widely disseminated
3. Legends will change target from smaller companies/markets to those that are larger.

Regardless of the type, mercantile legends reflect the mistrust individuals have of businesses although Americans in general appreciate progress and growth (Fine, "Goliath" 65). The majority of legends that specify a particular company or product generally name the largest or most prestigious in the market. For instance, there are more legends naming McDonalds than Burger King or Coke than Pepsi. Fine proposes this is due to the Goliath Effect. He does not propose that the largest portion of *all* mercantile legends follow the pattern; but, rather the largest portion of legends that do specify a company. Some legends are nonspecific and excluded from his proposal. Additionally,

he states that the corporation does not have to actually be the largest or most prestigious; it just has to be perceived as being such by the person telling the story. As the market shifts, so do the legends. Fines' intent was not to prove his assertions but rather "demonstrate their plausibility by subjecting [his] data to interpretation based on human social psychology" (Fine, "Goliath" 66).

Through distribution of surveys to his students, Fine identified six legends in which a minimum of 10% of his student population indicated they were familiar with the story. The six legends were: 1) the mouse in the soft drink bottle; 2) the rat fried as chicken; 3) spider eggs in gum; 4) worms in hamburgers; 5) cat and dog food used in a pizza parlor; and 6) the car sold cheaply due to someone having died in it.   In the first five legends, 87.7% of respondents specifically named Coca-Cola, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Bubble Yum, McDonald's, and Pizza Hut, respectively (Fine, "Goliath" 67). In the instance of the car, the legend tells how someone was able to buy a car at a great bargain, unbeknownst to them, because someone had died in it. Evidently, the car developed an odor that the owner could not eliminate.   There were a variety of models named, most of them considered to be prestigious at the time (Corvette, Camaro, and Cadillac).   A secondary review of texts by Fine supported the notion that a disproportionate percent of Goliaths were specifically named in these negative legends.

Fine does indicate that in some cases a specific corporation is so dominant, it is synonymous with a product and takes on almost a generic name ("Goliath" 71). Examples would be Kleenex, Jell-O, and Xerox. It is fairly common for one to refer to any brand facial tissue, gelatin or copier with the brand names. In this case, the story may be relayed with brand names meant in a generic sense. The name is

"psychologically dominant" and thus used although not necessarily with intent to sully

the name of the specific corporation (Fine, "Goliath" 71). If the legend refers to a local

establishment, it is often because either that establishment is more dominant in the area;

or, the local establishment is perceived as having the same characteristics as the national

corporation (Fine, "Goliath" 74).

While not speaking specifically of the Goliath Effect, Fine discusses the

psychological challenge to consumers that innovation brings. While over time

innovations are accepted, appreciated, and eventually taken for granted, new technology

can often be a challenge to consumers. Legends in the past have indicated that a wet

child or animal has been placed in an oven to be dried. As technology advanced, the

oven was replaced by the clothes dryer, and then by the microwave.   The microwave was

also said to have been used incorrectly (door removed) and cooked the insides of a

restaurant employee over time. These versions of legends speak to the fear of the kinds

of danger new technology can bring (Fine, "Goliath" 74).

Some people have difficulty obtaining a luxury item. Take the Death Car legend

for example:

> Did you hear about the brand new Thunderbird which was selling for
> $200? Someone had died in it, and the body was not found for several
> weeks, and the smell was so bad and couldn't be removed that it was sold
> for only $200.

In the case of this "death car" legend, there is a "psychological tension, envy for those

who can own the car and an unconscious recognition that wealth does not prolong life.

The smell is perhaps not only of death but of filthy lucre. The prestigious sports car

symbolizes wealth; the legend suggests that the only way working class people can obtain

such a product is if it is defective – in other words, if it *stinks"* (Fine, "Goliath" 78).

19

Although a person may name the leading corporation in a mercantile legend simply because that is the name that comes to mind, given their predominately negative nature, mercantile legends symbolize the mistrust and fear society has of big business. "The social-psychological rationale of these attitudes seems based on the separation of the public from the means of production and distribution. Corporations are perceived as caring primarily about profits and only secondarily about the needs of consumers (Fine, "Goliath" 80). Because they know the owners as members of the community, people are less likely to extend this mistrust to local businesses. "These folk narratives are temporary outpourings of frustration" over the lack of control of the big business (Fine, 'Goliath" 80).

In their study of social problems, Joel Best and Gerald T. Horiuchi looked into urban legends related to Halloween sadism (Best and Horiuchi 488). Halloween sadism is essentially about people taking the opportunity to taint candy and other treats to harm children. These particular legends involve stories of razor blades in apples, heroin in candy, and other dreadful methods of turning a tradition enjoyed by children into another angst- ridden day for their parents. They traced these stories back to a beginning in the mid 1960s and early 1970s. The razor blade in the apple and other Halloween sadism legends in particular took hold because it met some criteria that Best and Horiuchi have identified are necessary to gain attention and spread. Specifically, these stories – mostly unsubstantiated - speak directly to general anxieties and the fear parents have for their children. Add on a general fear of crime and mistrust of others and you have the makings of a legend.

Best and Horiuchi theorize that the cultural environment during the times these legends were started added to the factors that made these stories believable to many and reportable for newspapers. During the era they identified as the beginning of these Halloween sadism related legends, they point out that there was a major cultural shift occurring – kids were rebelling, there was an unpopular war, the definition of acceptable behavior was changing – the country was in a cultural crisis. While these conditions are not directly related to the particular stories of tainted Halloween treats, they do portray a time when people felt uneasiness about the changes in society which perhaps provided an opportunity for one to place their fear in a specific issue. According to Alan Kerckhoff and Kurt Back in The June Bug, "Instead of simply having a feeling that something is awry, the belief in a tangible threat makes it possible to explain and justify one's sense of discomfort - instead of anxiety, one experiences fear, and it is then possible to act in some meaningful way with respect to this tangible threat rather than just feeling frustrated and anxious" (Kerckhoff and Back 160-61). The authors go on to point to Jan Bruvand's The Choking Doberman. Here, Bruvand cites the work of folklorists who trace legends as they evolve over centuries. They have found that legends are more likely to persist if they have "a general, underlying message (for instance, warnings about trusting outsiders) which can be tailored to fit new situations." As an example, they point to stories of cat meat in baked pies in the nineteenth century that are reflected in modern stories of fried rats at Kentucky Fried Chicken (or Church's) (Best and Horiuchi 494).

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in some ways encompasses the question of why people believe in urban legends and why urban legends continue to be shared whether or not they are believed. SCT in communication takes a rather straightforward

and simple approach. The first step in SCT is a shared fantasy by a group. Fantasy in this case is not meant to be mystical or erotic. It is, rather, meant to be a shared idea or experience among a group of people (Young 1988). As a group begins to share ideas, cohesiveness is formed.

For illustration purposes, assume there is a group of ten people who know each other but are not already in a bonded group who have met to work on a project at their place of employment.   The first step in STC is the sharing of the fantasy. A member may express their dismay over the fact he is taking his youngest child to her first day of kindergarten the next day. Nodding enthusiastically, six more members may share stories of taking their youngest child to kindergarten or the dread they feel for when the day comes for them. This second step is the fantasy chain reaction. By commiserating over a common experience or emotion, the group has begun to bond. In SCT, however, one experience is not necessarily going to bond the entire group. Take, for instance, the three people left who cannot identify with the kindergartner issue.   However, the next week, when the group meets again, one member of the remaining three may remark on a basketball game. Four other people, including one of the remaining two not in the previous week's group, enthusiastically join in on the fantasy chain reaction.   Five different members have now bonded via the fantasy sharing. In this case, it is not an entirely unique set of members from the project team. However, it is a different group from the previous week – some members are the same and some are different. Some members of the subgroup from the first week are not in the second subgroup. To wrap up this illustration, look at what happens in our illustration during the third week. Once again, the group is gathered to work on the project. Having now met two previous weeks

and bonded over fantasies, the group members are a little more at ease with one another. Prior to discussing the business at hand, there is some gossiping and sharing of fantasies among sub groups. The one person who did not join the fantasy chain reaction during either the first or the second week mentions how much they enjoyed working with employee X, whom everyone knows well but is not part of this group. A fantasy chain reaction is triggered and all members of the group talk about how much they really like the fellow employee. Now, all members of the group have shared a fantasy with other members of the group at least once, some twice, and some three times. As the group continues to meet, additional fantasy sharing will occur and the group will continue to bond.

When applying Symbolic Convergence Theory to urban legends, a pattern similar to that of Koenig's theory of rumor in the marketplace emerges. Both theories rely on a story being relevant to the person telling or hearing it for it to be retained and passed along. The theories also rely on some preconceived notions, although this fact is established more fully in Koenig's theory. Ultimately, both theories rely on the group of shared interests to propagate either cohesiveness amongst the group members or the belief and spread of a particular legend.

In "Emotional Selection in Memes: The Case of Urban Legends," Chip Heath, Chris Bell, and Emily Sternberg relate the results of their study into the significance of informational and emotional selection on the success of memes. A meme is a term proposed by biologist Richard Dawkins to label the cultural equivalent of a gene. As in genes, memes are individual components of culture that go through variation, selection, and retention (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1028). It is the selection part of memes where

23

there was focus. For the purposes of their study, urban legends, a kind of meme, were

used. Both the McDonalds worm enhanced hamburgers and the Halloween candy sadism

legends are specified as   false stories that were passed on as true. Instead of the idea that

legends survive because they "provide insightful social commentary about the cultural or

economic context" (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1029), the team went about the task of

showing that the types of memes as the urban legends mentioned above survive through

an emotional selection process based on a shared psychology versus a shared culture.

Legends are "selected and retained in the social environment in part based on their ability

to tap emotions that are common across individuals" (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1029).

The level of truth in an urban legend may be questionable but, like rumors, they are

generally believed to be true by those sharing them and a strong emotional appeal can

make them more successful than a legend with more actual truth.

The study team of Heath, from Stanford University and Bell and Sternberg from

Duke University examined psychological research on rumor theory and determined, as

did Mullen and Koenig, that it may be applied to urban legends. Despite rumors being

less complex and structured, they have in common with urban legends the types of stories

that are told.   Through the review of psychological analysis of rumors the team found

that the literature provided two explanations for the continuation of legends: information

and emotion. The informational explanation is pretty straightforward. The legends may

provide for useful, practical information or a social moral (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg

1029). The authors of the study concur with Koenig that rumors (urban legends) spread

because of the need for understanding of events or to make sense of complicated

situations. The informational need is met when legends generate a substitute for the news that is craved but missing.

The second explanation by the group is the emotional component of the legend which combines three general characteristics. First, they express relatively negative emotions. They diffuse emotions such as anxiety and fear. And, third, they tap into preexisting emotional state prompted by an event such as a disaster (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1029).

In the Memes study, the researchers hypothesize that the explanation goes beyond simple informational and emotional reasoning.   They find that the emotional reasoning, as described previously, is too limiting. Emotional Selection is a more open explanation which: "(a) ...allows us to explain memes that produce not only negative emotions but positive ones, (b) allows us to explain memes that not only respond to preexisting emotions but create new ones, and (c) allows us to explain why memes often involve not diffuse, generalized anxiety but specific, identifiable emotions" (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1030). They first address the widely held belief that for a legend to succeed it must be negative in nature. By using the wildly popular email that Bill Gates will send you money or free software if you forward an email they illustrate that a legend can have a positive connotation and still be successful. This particular legend is so popular it has been modified to name some of the world's most recognized brands including Nike, Disney, Coca Cola, and Honda. The mere thought that "just maybe, what if it really were true and not just a hoax" has pushed people to forward these emails on – hoping that maybe they are true.   What we see here is that while the legend does evoke an emotion; it is the positive rather than the negative that was presumed to be required.   By tapping

into people's belief that the world is essentially good and providing a little hope that just by forwarding an email you could get a desirable return, this legend type has continued to be successful without being negative.

The second condition they addressed is that an urban legend feeds into existing emotions. According to G. W. Allport and L. J. Postman who studied the psychology of rumor in the 1940s, "rumor activates and confirms pre-existing attitudes rather than forming new ones" (Allport & Postman 182). This theory goes back to Koenig's "three C's" – crisis, conflict, and catastrophe. What it does not do is allow that legends in themselves are capable of provoking strong emotions (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1030). What Heath's team proposes is that there does not need to be an existing emotion; rather an urban legend can create emotion in and of itself. Some people enjoy the provocation of emotion, and consume these experiences (legends) for what they make them feel. They further state that people may enjoy emotional consumption even if the emotion is negative – using people who choose to read a scary book or a watch a scary movie as an example. If this is the case, all a legend has to do is "tap into a common desire for good fortune" or "a common experience of fear" (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1030). Alternatively, a legend can be successful if it provides for social bonding. If a legend brings an emotion shared by a group, it may bond the group without the necessity of either enjoyment of emotional consumption or a response to a pre-existing emotion. If a group has a common hostility, a legend that brings forth shared anger can bond the group. What the team believes is important is not the pre-existing emotion, but the ability for emotional consumption and social bonding to produce a consistency in emotions across a

group of people – if fear or excitement, for instance, are not shared, then the legend will not succeed.

The third condition the team questions is that urban legends involve diffuse emotions. Emotional selection predicts that "ideas will be most likely to survive if they tap into a consistent emotional process that is shared across people" (Bell, Heath, and Steinberg 1031). Rather than a generalized anxiety, fear, anger or disgust are likely to be more consistently shared within a group of people. As the study explains, throughout the Dawkins' approach, a meme will remain consistent in emphasized emotion. As a story is relayed, the narrator may forget some of the specific details but will remember the emotions felt when he heard it. He may then relay the story with some details modified but still including the information necessary to describe and provoke the specific emotion will be provided.

To illustrate the point, we are asked to consider anger. A person may not enjoy the emotional consumption of anger or have a pre-existing anxiety toward a specific group. However, if an event should occur that involves that group, it could open the door for the person to buy into the rumor. For illustration purposes, take the story of a generic war and anonymous countries. Perhaps a citizen of country X hears that the citizens of country Y (a friend and ally) are not doing all they can do for the war effort. Maybe country X is rationing food and supplies to support troops overseas. The citizen hears the citizens of country Y are not rationing food and supplies in order to provide for their troops. Because country Y's citizens are not doing their part, the troops from country X have to share their supplies and the citizens are being asked to sacrifice even more. If enough people who previously were not feeling any anti-country Y feelings are angered

by this information, then it will succeed and propagate. While there may have been a generalized anxiety about the war, the emotional selection occurred because of the precise, collective anger over the citizens of country Y not making the same sacrifices.

These arguments, taken from the study on emotional selection, have addressed the concerns of limitations placed on what have been widely accepted ideas of the success of rumors, applied to urban legends.

In "The Kentucky Fried Rat: Legend and Modern Society," Gary Fine takes a look at the impact of societal changes on folklore, specifically urban legends. The theory is that although legends have existed throughout the centuries, contemporary folklore mirrors the shifts in society. As our other theorists have noted, the urban legend helps people cope with changes in society. As previously noted by other study and theory authors, an "urban legend" is not necessarily something that takes place in an urban location and Fine further stipulates that "urban" should refer to a socio-psychological condition rather than geography (223). In order to explain how urban legends are established and why they are believed, Fine draws on the studies of sociologists to identify societal changes and their impact on folklore. He uses Roland Warren's "the Great Change," described in seven components:

1. *Division of Labor* As society evolves; people become more specialized in their skills and occupations. Because of this evolution, there is a lack of good general knowledge, creating ignorance in areas that do not fall under a person's specialty. Fine parallels this to the belief that an animal or baby exploded in a microwave. Should someone put one of these creatures in the microwave, if society were not so ignorant, it would know that while the being would cook, it would not explode.

2. *Differentiation of Interests and Associations*   While community was once defined

   by neighborhoods and proximity, it can now be defined by shared interests. In

   this case, a person can better know and rely on someone from work or a club they

   belong to but who lives many miles away than a person who lives next door.   The

   realignment of community based on shared interests has created an anxiety

   amongst groups that do not understand one another. "The grotesque story about

   the hippie babysitter who cooks a baby rather than a roast is characteristic of the

   diversity of lifestyles, and result of the anxiety that outsiders feel about this group.

   Differentiation of interests also permits the development of sub-cultural folklore

   traditions – such as the folklore of dieters – as folklore traditions develop within

   every group which strives to obtain a sense of community" (Fine 224).

3. *Increasing Systemic Relationships to the Larger Society*   In the past, most

   communities – and many families – were self sufficient. Community members

   provided the services needed amongst themselves. Local businesses and

   organizations have been replaced with national chains.   Community members

   may have a distrust caused by a feeling of loss of control. "Individuals feel they

   have little influence on decisions, and this psychological distance promotes

   'horror' stories which focus on the irresponsibility of these extra-community

   agencies. The accounts of McDonalds' hamburger meat being composed of

   worms or snakes found in imported sweaters sold in discount store chains are

   responses to this loss of community control" (Fine 224).

4. *Bureaucratization and Impersonalization*   The move from community-based to

   national institutions has shifted relationships between clients/customers and

organizations from personal ones to impersonal ones. The fact that a large

organization may require all people be treated the same is, in this illustration, a

negative. As Fine explains, individual needs may not be met, making the

organization look either inefficient or uncaring despite it being technically

efficient. According to Fine, "Routine processing is not recalled as competence:

however, isolated difficulties are long remembered and may be the basis for

personal experience stories about inefficient or hostile bureaucracies. Folklore

emerges which symbolically addresses the frustrations of encountering these

monolithic, uncompromising structures" (Fine 225). As Fine notes, consistent,

ordinarily efficient service is not remembered or commended. However, one

experience that is perceived as negative and one has the beginnings of a story that

will be told over and over. One sort of legend that will appear will be one of

bureaucracy and how it makes simple things more complex. Fine refers to the

rumor that the government has an extensive, complicated policy related to

cabbage. From Snopes.com:

Pythagorean Theorem - 24 words
The Lord's Prayer – 66 words
Archimede's Principle – 67 words
The Ten Commandments-179 words
The Gettysburg Address-286 words
The Declaration of Independence-1,300 words
The US Government regulation on the sale of cabbage-26,911 words

There is no narrative or story to go along with this information. The information

in these few lines tells a clear story without needing further explanation – our

freedom can be declared and delineated in 1,300 words but the government

cannot regulate cabbage simply.

5. *Transfer of Functions to Profit Enterprises and Government* Certain social functions that were traditionally addressed through local organizations have been assumed by government and profit-making enterprises. This component runs the gamut from how food was grown and prepared to health care to support of the disadvantaged. Whereas it used to be common to grow and prepare food at home, it is now equally, if not more, common to pick up prepared foods at a grocery store or restaurant. A large homemade midday meal has been replaced by a run through the drive thru restaurant. A house call from your family doctor has been replaced by a visit to a large clinic. Community services, in some cases, have been replaced by government agencies. Medicaid and welfare, among other social programs, have replaced communities working together to address these needs on an individual basis. Despite the "old way" not being perfect, the replacement by impersonal, bureaucratic entities is seen not as an efficient system but as another organization that does not care and treats all individuals as a number. Food contamination legends are almost always targeted toward major corporations (dog food in pizza at Pizza Hut and worms in burgers at McDonald's). Interestingly, there is at the same time another type of legend aimed at corporations that puts them in the role of caretaker. There is a particular type that indicates if you send in certain items (labels, box tops), click on certain links, or forward emails, the company will help a sick child or community in need. Unfortunately, these are often not true and put the company in a position of both disappointing the general public and being embarrassed (Fine 226).

6. *Urbanization and Suburbanization*   American residential patterns have changed from small towns and rural areas to urban and suburban living. The percentage of the population living in a town or city with more than 2,500 residents has risen from five percent in 1790 to approximately sixty-six percent in 1970 (Fine 226). According to Louis Wirth, a sociologist from the Chicago School of Sociology who focused on urban life, the change in society is not because of the geographical location changes but due to what he describes in "Urbanism as a Way of Life" as the five components of urbanism: 1) Anonymity, 2) Division of Labor, 3) Heterogeneity, 4) Impersonal and formally prescribed relationships, and 5) Symbols of status independent of personal acquaintanceship.   Wirth argued that these features of urban life alienated individuals and that residence affects social life (Fine 226).   Not all sociologists agree with these arguments; but, generally applied to urban life; Wirth's ideas provide that impersonal settings are fertile ground for legends of fright and dangers in the city.

7. *Changing Values*   A shift in emphasis from work to play, relaxed and more open sexuality, and an emphasis on consumption are hallmarks of the shifts in values over the decades. "These value shifts have unexpected effects, as members of a society cannot alter their basic mores without some ambivalence. This ambivalence, often not talked about openly, is expressed indirectly through folklore, which disguises the threat through the projection of the fear to a 'real' occurrence. Values tend to lag behind social change, and some conflict is likely" (Fine 227). Just as Mullen and Koenig have theorized, anxiety over the state of society leaves people open to urban legends as a way to cope with these anxieties.

Stories of indecent clothing (swimsuits) and sexual promiscuity (performing oral

sex on a team) with harrowing results (suit becomes transparent in water;

cheerleader has to have stomach pumped) address these fears indirectly.

The seven components explain how the change in community life has changed culture.

These changes in culture – denser populations, impersonal relationships between

businesses/government and the population, and lack of community in the traditional sense

(defined by neighborhood) -- have meant a willingness to believe tales of corporations

that contaminate food, alligators living in city sewers, and corporations being covers for

cults.

Food contamination is a common theme of urban legends. The worms in

hamburgers story is but one in a long history of food contamination-based legends. In

fourteenth century Europe, Jews were rumored to have poisoned local wells during the

Black Death (a pandemic believed to be the pestis plague); in the 1930s, Chinese claimed

Japanese put ground glass in food tins; during the Vietnam war, soldiers avoided Coca-

Cola due to rumors of ground glass placed in the drink by Viet Cong sympathizers; and,

more recently, there have been rumors of children dying from Pop Rocks and of spider

eggs in Bubble Yum bubble gum (Fine, "Kentucky" 228). One of the common elements

in contemporary legends is the specification of a major brand. Although the worms in the

burgers legend actually started regarding Wendy's, it did spread to McDonald's. In his

book, Rumor in the Marketplace: The Social Psychology of Commercial Hearsay,

Koenig explained that Wendy's quickly and directly addressed the rumor and squelched

it. McDonald's was slower to respond and the rumor held on longer. Fine adds that a

well-known brand may be instantly associated with rumor just by that brand's popularity.

For instance, a person may hear the rumor of "a" hamburger place putting worms in their meat. Passing on the story, the teller may naturally name the place as the largest commonly known corporation - what Fine termed The Goliath Effect. Further, the largest corporation or organization being the target of a legend is a fact that Fine believes is common enough to be an urban legend law. A search on <u>Snopes.com</u> seems to support his theory. On the particular day of the search, "Coke" or "Coca – Cola" was named in 84 legends with at least 34 of them pertaining specifically to Coke. The second leading soda brand, Pepsi, returned 43 results. Of these 43 results, some were the same legends that named Coke and other brand names. Seven of the legends appeared to apply strictly to Pepsi. A search for McDonald's returned 83 legends and 20 legends were returned for Burger King – some of which were the same as the McDonald's legends. In Fine's outline of social psychology and urban legends, he focuses on the tale of the Kentucky Fried Rat (KFR) to show how legends exist and persist.

There are multiple variations of the story but the basic story is that a person or group of people goes to Kentucky Fried Chicken to get a bucket of chicken. In the most common form of the story, a member of the party bites into what turns out to be fried rat. In some versions of the story, a person eats the chicken, falls ill, and subsequently dies from what turns out to be a poisoned rat erroneously fried with the chicken. In other stories, the person realizes when they try the "chicken" or just before biting into the chicken that it is not what it appears to be. The core or "kernel story" is that a rat found its way into the oil along with the chicken and ended up in the bucket.

Fine further breaks down the pieces of the legend to discuss its particular socio-psychological aspects. The first piece is locale. In this legend, as is typical, localization

occurred. He was able to track accounts to thirty-eight locations in fifteen states,

Washington D.C., and Canada. Focusing the story on a particular location is a way of

emphasizing the presence of a national, large corporation in the local community. This

narrative indicates the damage a large institution can have on the local residents and plays

into the anxiety about the encroachment of big business on the community (Fine,

"Kentucky" 231). In Fine's research, only 2 of 115 incidents reported were at *local*

establishments. In the past, before the omnipresence of fast food restaurants, the locale of

a food contamination story would have most often been related to an ethnic restaurant.

The evolution of the community has made the large corporation the "foreigner" in the

community to fear.   The second piece of the legend is the contaminant. Specifically in

the KFR story, the rat is believable because rats have been found in foods/food

production in the past and because it is an animal that could be mistaken for a piece of

chicken under the circumstances of being battered and fried. But, most telling, perhaps is

the symbol of the rat as a marker of urban and community decay. This incident could

occur because the employees of the national chain do not care about their employer

(versus the local restaurant proprietor who lives down the street) and the fact that the

chain does not care enough about the community to keep the property clean (Fine,

"Kentucky" 231).   The third piece of the legend is the Reasons for Contamination. Very

few of the accounts actually explain how the rats ended up being fried.   The form of

contamination falls into one of two categories: 1) sabotage; or, 2) carelessness in

unsanitary conditions.   In the cases of sabotage, human malice makes an employee or

group of employees believe it would be a great prank to slip some other type of animal in

with the chicken. The most common version has to do with rats; one actually refers to a

cat.   The whole idea is that the employees, as members of a large institution, do not feel any kind of loyalty toward the customers or their employer. In other variations, the cause is unsanitary conditions.   Perhaps the pressure the employees are working under to be productive at high levels causes carelessness. Because of the carelessness, filth has produced the perfect condition for rats. Not only is it so filthy there are rats; employees are far too busy to sort the rats from the chicken. This explanation seems a bit extreme. Fine believes this narrative comes from anxiety and guilt over going to the fast food chain versus consuming the properly prepared homemade meal   (Fine, "Kentucky" 232).

The next piece is the victim. In the vast majority of cases of the KFR, the victim was female. Assuming the preponderance of the female as victim is not because a significantly larger population of women than men eats at Kentucky Fried Chicken, we are left to consider that either women are perceived as more vulnerable to attacks or this is a statement of the changing role of women in society. The woman is the victim because it is she who has abandoned her responsibility as the food preparer of the family. She "helps destroy the family by permitting the transfer of control from the home to amoral profit-making corporations. Thus, the receipt of a rat is appropriate symbolic punishment" (Fine, "Kentucky" 233).

The next piece is the event. Event is meant to describe the attitude we have toward processed and fast foods.   Our disconnection from the preparation of food leaves us susceptible to stories of dubious origins and preparation methods. Like the couple who took the bucket of chicken to eat at the movie and was literally eating in the dark, society is also symbolically eating in the dark and the traditional meal is over. The

woman does not just play the role of the victim in this particular legend. She is also blamed for allowing this disconnect to occur by not carrying on her duties:

> There was a wife who didn't have anything ready for supper for her husband. So, she quickly got a basket of chicken and tried to make her dinner look fancy with the pre-prepared chicken. Thus, she fixed a candle-light dinner, etc. When her and her husband started eating the chicken, they thought it tasted funny. Soon to find out it was a fried rat (Fine, "Kentucky" 234).

The primary blame falls on the national chain restaurant but there is also blame placed on the wife and the decline of the traditional family meal.

The next piece of legend is the aftermath. The conclusion of the event is the summation of how American life has been harmed. Some versions of KFR end with the shocking details of the victim becoming ill or even dying. Other versions end with a story of a lawsuit, indicating that society has decayed to the extent that the court system has to come to the defense of innocent community residents against the mammoth corporate entity (Fine, "Kentucky" 235). Finally, there is belief and rationale. Fine posits that the context in which the stories are told helps strengthen the believability of the tale. Sharing the story of KFR while eating or deciding what to eat adds to the "anxiety about food technology" (Fine, "Kentucky" 236).

Through his discussion of the "Great Change" in society and the elements of legends integral to the Kentucky Fried Rat, Fine has outlined how societal changes create and propagate urban legends. There is fear and anxiety over the unknown and guilt over the relaxation in some values or the lessening role of family; the establishments in these

legends would not thrive if people did not accept them. Moral standards of society do not always keep pace with the changes that occur over time. Perhaps not everyone who passed on the story of KFR actually believes it. However, nearly 76% of respondents to a survey said they believed it could happen (Fine, "Kentucky" 235). This data confirms the central role of plausibility in ULs. By spreading the story, a person may be addressing a disconcerting thought, consciously or subconsciously "getting back" at the big corporation that has intruded on the community, or gaining validation for existing concerns.

Not all studies of urban legends are based on or for the benefit of socio-psychology. In the study "Urban Legends: The Word-of-Mouth Communication of Morality Through Negative Story Content," researchers D. Todd Donavan, John C. Mowen, and Coutam Chakraborty, reviewed urban legends in an attempt to gather an insight into marketing. In their study, they wanted to see the effect altering a legend has on the likelihood of its being passed on. They wanted to know if the central character being portrayed as altruistic or negative, the outcome being positive or negative, and the presence or absence of a brand name would impact the viability of a legend. They looked at diffusion processes, word-of-mouth in particular.

The premise of the study was the urban legend "Gucci Kangaroo," a legend that is particularly popular in Australia. The legend goes as follows:

Have you heard about the American tourists who were driving in the

outback of Australia? They had been drinking, and it seems that their car

hit a kangaroo. Thinking the kangaroo to be dead, the tourists decided to

take a gag photograph. They hastily propped the kangaroo up against a

fence and dressed it in the driver's Gucci jacket. They proceeded to take

the photographs of the well-dressed marsupial. Well, it seems that the

kangaroo had merely been stunned rather than dead. All of a sudden he

revives and jumps away wearing the man's jacket, which also contained

the driver's license, money, and airline ticket. (Donovan, Mowen, and

Chakraborty 23)

The study of the spread of urban legends, it was theorized, could provide useful

information about the spread of negative word-of-mouth communication in regard to

products. Second, understanding urban legends can assist the companies whose brand

names are mentioned in the legends. This finding is particularly relevant since, as the

group's study of a hundred urban legends found, ten percent of legends included brand

names, forty-five percent included products, and twelve percent involved some warning

about the hazards of new products or technology (Donovan, Mowen, and Chakraborty

24). Lastly, the legends help us understand consumer socialization.

The study was conducted to identify the factors that influence consumers to share

urban legends via word of mouth. The kangaroo legend above was modified to represent

combinations of positive/negative protagonists, positive/negative outcomes, and brand

names/non-brand names. There were eight different versions of the Gucci Kangaroo

story presented to 174 respondents in a class exercise at a large midwestern university.

The versions varied as: 1) positive intent/positive outcome/brand name, 2) positive

intent/negative outcome/brand name, 3) positive intent/positive outcome/non-brand

name, 4) positive intent/negative outcome/non-brand name, 5) negative intent/negative

outcome/brand name 6) negative intent/positive outcome/brand name, 7) negative

intent/negative outcome/non-brand name, and 8) negative intent/positive outcome/non-brand name.   The respondents read the story presented to them and answered questions that included a dependent variable scale (how likely were they to repeat the story), manipulation checks (greed versus altruism), and demographics. The results showed that respondents were much more likely to spread the story if the intent and outcomes were negative. The lowest scoring variable for likelihood of sharing was the positive intent and positive outcome so what might that finding mean?   As far as brand name, with the "no name brand condition," when the intent was negative, there was a higher tendency to share the legend (Donavan, Mowen, and Chakraborty 29). However, when the name brand was specified, there was no measurable difference between the positive and negative intentions. Brand name resulted in an increase in the intent to share if the intent was positive and a minor decrease in intent if was negative (Donavan, Mowen, and Chakraborty 33). For marketing, this finding would provide an incentive to build a strong brand name. In urban legends, it does not seem as clear that this finding is the case. Given the popularity of the brand name legends and the longevity of many, perhaps the interesting story takes precedence over intent. It is important to note that this study measured the intent to share a story, not the actual behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein found a correlation of .60 between intent and actual communication behavior. Singh found a strong relationship between intent to complain and actual complaining (Donavan, Mowen, and Chakraborty 33). It would be interesting to follow up the study to see how many of those who intended to share the positive legend followed through versus those who intended to and did share the negative legend. Another aspect to consider for future studies is recall information. The team suggests that a look at whether negative content

or brand name has impact on the recall as an additional component for future studies. If you consider the theories of Koenig, Mullen, and Fine, it would be reasonable to assume that brand name would have an impact although not necessarily because of the original story. As we have reviewed, people sharing legends tend to fill in with information that is relevant to them or that seems to fit. "A" hamburger place becomes McDonalds. A chain name not relevant to the region is replaced with a different chain's name. It would also be interesting to see if brand name were more relevant to the likelihood of transmission if it were the focus of the story instead of simply a detail.

The authors concluded "consumers are more likely to spread a story about a name brand when the central character acted altruistically rather than negatively. In contrast, when the central character acts negatively, word of mouth (WOM) is more likely when no brand name is mentioned. These results suggest that having a positive brand name may inhibit the communication of negative information that relates to a product" (Donovan, Mowen, and Chakraborty 33). It is interesting to see that the conclusion is that a brand name may cause a legend not to be shared. A quick scroll through business and product related urban legends on Snopes.com and UrbanLegends.About.com clearly shows that negative stories of specific businesses and products far outweigh the positive. While this study does indicate that perhaps one might "think twice" before believing and/or forwarding an urban legend if it has a positive view of the product, it does also illustrate that a negative story is far more likely to be shared than a positive one. The disconnect between this study and others reviewed would be that this story was conducted with a legend that is not relevant to the survey participants. It does not seem likely that many students in at a midwestern university will have a strong aversion to

Gucci or American tourists in Australia. Furthermore, although a brand name is specified in some versions, the jacket, again, is not the cause of woe. Maybe the effect of the Gucci jacket was because the students may aspire to owning one and not a personal belief in the goodness of Gucci. It would be interesting to see the results of the same study with a different legend. Perhaps the story of the Swiffer Wet Jet leaving poisonous residue behind on the floor would result in opposite scores. What can be taken away from this study, however, is that negativity is more likely to spread than positivity and that brand names do make a difference – albeit probably not the one the authors concluded it makes.

Why Urban Legends Thrive

Much of the review at this point has been devoted to why people believe and share urban legends. The next section will look at why certain urban legends persist.

Chip Heath, a member of the faculty at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University and co-author of the emotional selection article previously discussed, wrote along with his brother, Dan Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die. The brothers realized that they had been studying essentially the same problem for years just from different angles – how ideas stick. The "stick" term is borrowed from Malcolm Gladwell who wrote of "The Stickiness Factor" in The Tipping Point while explaining why some trends, such as the popularity of a particular shoe brand, catch on and others do not.   The Heaths had both found that sometimes bad ideas win in the marketplace while good or important ideas sometimes lose. What they wanted to find out is what differentiated the ideas.   Having studied urban legends, Chip knew that they are naturally sticky.   The Heaths, too, referred to the legend of tainted Halloween candy. Their research encompassed hundreds of sticky ideas; from it, they identified six principles of sticky ideas:

1. Simplicity – Ideas should be simple and profound. You can make multiple good points but people are not going to remember all of them. A good example of simple but profound: The Golden Rule – Do unto others as you would have done unto you (Heath and Heath16). It is not about "dumbing it down" but about getting to the core.
2. Unexpectedness – Have a twist; include something the audience is not expecting. However, simply surprising the audience is not enough. It has to be something that will generate interest and curiosity.
3. Concreteness – Make it clear. Ambiguity is meaningless.
4. Credibility – Make it believable.
5. Emotions – Make sure your audience feel something – tap into their emotions.
6. Stories – Provide a narrative.

To review, the Heath notion condenses to: Simple Unexpected Concrete Credentialed Emotional Story (SUCCESs). Now, test each principle in the case of the legend of tainted Halloween candy:

1. Simplicity – Parents want to protect their children. This is something even people without children can understand.
2. Unexpectedness – This happy childhood rite has been corrupted by sinister people. .
3. Concreteness – Razor blades in apples, cyanide in candy
4. Credibility – The story ran in national magazines and newspapers across the country, it also was featured on local and national news.
5. Emotions – Someone is trying to hurt innocent children. This is something anyone would find despicable.
6. Stories – Specific details of a child who was seriously injured or died from contaminated Halloween riches.

By applying the different components of the SUCCESs formula to the urban legend, the pieces illustrate how each plays its part in establishing a narrative that will stick. There is something shocking to grab interest, something to tap emotions, something to establish a moral stance, and enough information to lend credibility. The Halloween Candy legend is so sticky that hospitals have dedicated x-ray machines to scan candy and news reports routinely urge parents to take precautions to ensure the candy their children collect is safe.

In his work, "The transmission and persistence of 'urban legends': sociological application of age-structured epidemic models," Andrew Noymer draws a parallel between the spread and persistence of urban legends and the spread of communicable disease. Noymer addresses why rumors keep spreading well after the original audience quits believing the legend.   He does not believe that an ever-increasing population of people believes a particular legend but, rather, those who formerly believed it are replaced by a new group of people who do believe in it. He uses mathematical models in epidemiology to calculate his theory.   Noymer stipulates age as an important role in the

rumors he investigates. The assumptions he uses are that the young are more credulous than the old. Additionally, age is a key factor in vaccine-preventable diseases (Noymer 5).

The similarity between epidemic models and rumor diffusion models is paralleled using measles as the infectious disease. Measles are spread by airborne transmission between an infected person and a person susceptible to the disease. It is highly contagious. Rumors are also highly contagious, referred to by Shibutani as a "type of behavioral contagion" (Noymer 4). What Noymer says differentiates rumors from other information is that people have an irresistible urge to share rumors with others (Noymer 5). As in disease, there are types of immunity to rumors. A skeptic is not going to believe the rumor no matter how often it is heard. A person with acquired immunity previously believed the rumor but no longer does. For modeling purposes, Noymer has equated a belief in a rumor to the desire to spread it although that condition may not always exist. Disease and rumors are both spread via contact. Skepticism is to rumors what vaccines are to measles. The consistency across both disease and rumor is acquired immunity. However, Noymer recognizes that measles have a latent period (infected but not yet contagious) that does not exist in urban legends. Measles have an end – either recovery or death – while some rumors can last for years (Noymer 6). The modeling represents a rumor in the state of belief or not. The model is not taking into account the propensity of content to change over time nor is it considering how the ambiguity of rumors affects transmission.

In the epidemic model, those who do not understand a rumor are the equivalent of someone immune to a disease. The modeling program does not simulate individuals;

rather it models the ebbs and flows between peaks in urban legend belief. Continuing the analogy, the rate between susceptible and infected is the force of infection and varies over time not age. While children may spend most of their day with other children, they do see persons in other age ranges (siblings, parents) and will share an urban legend with those people. It is not any less likely that an adult will hear a rumor about pop rocks exploding in your stomach. However, he is more likely not to accept it – he is more likely immune from this sort of legend (Noymer 9). In the epidemic model, the force of the infection is of utmost importance as it determines the rise and fall of epidemics (periods when there is a high belief in the legend). Additionally, the mean age of infection determines the contagiousness of the disease. Like diseases that transmit quickly among the youngest members of society, urban legends will spread rapidly among the young – those who are less likely to be skeptical or immune (Noymer 12).

The model was run under two circumstances with the second one decreasing the recovery rate. The recovery rate in the case of legends is the amount of time it takes for people to quit believing the legend. What this model showed is that more people may be infected at the same time but the total size of the infected population does not grow. Basically, what happens is that the people believe the legend and then cease to believe the legend at a faster rate. There may be more people believing it over time but not during any one time period. The continuation of an urban legend may depend on the number of people who are less skeptical or immune over time. In the case of a measles epidemic, there is a large initial outbreak, once that outbreak is over; most people susceptible to the infection have recovered from it or built immunity to it. This cycle could continue until the population ages out and dies. Then, a new generation of susceptible people is born

and the epidemic peaks again. A close parallel to this lifecycle may be a legend on a college campus. As freshmen arrive, they are gullible and believe urban legends specific to the campus (astrologers' prediction of mass murder for instance). As the students proceed through the years, they become immune to the legend. The level of persons believing a legend could lessen for a few years and then rebound when that first group graduates and leaves (Noymer 16). Now the rumor may never completely go away, but the population who believes in it may dip for a while. There may be people who truly believe it who share it with the more susceptible. The rumor may completely die and have to be re-introduced into society (on a college campus) later. This type of life cycle has been documented to happen with measles (Noymer 17). While the assumption so far has been that susceptibility to believing urban legends belongs squarely in the age population that is young enough not be critical thinkers but old enough to understand, the model does show a level of susceptibility at all ages Rumors can be more pertinent to one age group than another. Noymer notes that gullibility depends on time as well as age, the age of vulnerability changes during the cycles of epidemics. Initially, the age of susceptibility is higher with a decrease in age as the epidemic completes multiple cycles (Noymer 19). A specific legend can be believed by multiple age groups at different times. A person in a particular group believing a legend may be contingent on the level of the group's vulnerability (Noymer 19). Just as a child is more likely to succumb to an infection if all of his schoolmates are sick, a person is more likely to believe a legend if his entire peer group believes it. It is a good time to note that "age" does not necessarily have to apply to a date on a calendar but to experience as well. A younger, more "experienced" person may not believe an urban legend and an older group may believe.

This fact points back to the multiple theories already discussed that indicate Urban

Legends are relevant to the person that believes them. Additionally, increased critical

thinking from "life experiences" could reduce the likelihood a person would be

susceptible to an urban legend.

The autocatalytic skepticism model is basically the same as the epidemic model

but with a change in the rate of decay. As Noymer points out, a person does not believe a

legend and then spontaneously cease to believe it. The change in this model is the

constant rate of belief. Also, the assumption that the number of susceptible people is

equally matched with the number of skeptical amongst the contagious is made.   In this

new model, the skeptic transmits their immunity to the contagious while the contagious

transmit the legend to the susceptible (Noymer 23). What is happening here is the passing

on of the rumor to a new group of people. One group never believed it, one changes from

believing it to not believing it, and the third believes the legend. Through time and shifts

in population, the groups carry on in the same progression. Of course, some people will

always believe a particular legend no matter what they hear to contradict it.

The conclusion of Noymer's modeling is that the belief in urban legends can be

easily modeled in the same manner as infectious diseases. A look at the similarities in

the course of a disease and the course of an urban legend shows two highly contagious

principles that persist but in shifting populations through the years. Noymer is

particularly interested in the legends that do not have a staying power within a

population. That is to say, if you look at a legend such as the one about Bubble Yum

being made of spider eggs or the one about pop rocks exploding in your stomach if you

drink a Coke with them, you see two urban legends that are likely to be believed within a

specific age group. However, as kids age, they discontinue believing these rumors. The

legends do not disappear, however, because a new population of gullible children has

been exposed to the legend in place of the older, now immune kids. By using models

from epidemiology, one can see how an urban legend will persist. As it turns out, they

have an infection rate, immunity rate, and recovery rate just as an infectious disease does.

CONCLUSION

Urban legends have been a commonplace part of society for decades. While having similarities to folklore and rumors, urban legends have their own niche in society. With the convenience and virtual instant communication of the internet, legends can spread farther and faster than ever before.

Taking the separate theories discussed as a whole, commonalities that explain why people believe and share urban legends can be identified. Legends provide a way for people to bond with one another. Even if a group is made up of people who do not know one another, sharing a story about how a local retailer refuses to support troops or how a local chain restaurant uses subpar ingredients in its dishes can make the group feel like a cohesive bunch. By sharing the outrage that Starbucks will not send coffee to troops in the Middle East, for example, is an easy way for the group to have something in common and to bond over. After all, who would not be outraged that a national chain with plenty of money would begrudge our troops, fighting against terrorism, the simple pleasure of some good coffee? Not only do the members of the group have the opportunity to share in the fantasy of the story, they also can bond over the outrage of a behemoth international chain that is so greedy they will not even donate some coffee to send to the troops – who asked for it (!) – overseas. Additionally, human nature may drive a member of the group who either does not believe the story or does not believe they are hearing the whole story not to voice disbelief as it could jeopardize their acceptance in the group. At the same time, the person who shared the story has not only created an opportunity for the group to converge but has also possibly met some

emotional needs by making himself feel important for breaking the ice and sharing the tantalizing information that others have responded to with strong emotion.

While there is no one answer that explains all legends and their continual popularity, there are elements from all the theories that match or overlap. They have a tendency to strike an emotional chord that will draw the audience in and sell an idea that is salacious enough to maintain interest yet plausible enough to be believable. As delineated by Brunvand, there are tell-tale signs that a story is possibly a legend. When emotions are tapped or some need is being met, these signs hardly matter and can easily be overlooked. A person who may think, "sure a friend of a friend is usually not reliable but *this* time it is." Perhaps the recipient of the information has strong opinions about a political topic and the story validates those opinions. Why would the person, now feeling better, possibly even triumphant about their stance rush to find out if what they are being told is actually true? Take a rumor that garments manufactured and shipped from foreign countries are infested with parasites that could potentially cause serious illness or even death in the humans that unfortunately purchased these goods.   While forwarding an email that says "I don't know if this is true but just in case," the person perhaps achieves positive emotions from feeling that he has helped others. Whether the payoff is allowing groups to bond, persons to feel important or helpful, allaying fears, striking back, or validating opinions, Urban Legends have a way of tapping into some emotional side of people that encourages the belief in and continuity of legends.

APPENDIX A

HALLOWEEN CANDY LEGENDS

Legend 1 – Police have reported that Halloween candy has been poisoned. It is best to only allow your children to trick or treat at the homes of persons that you know and trust (Best and Horiuchi 488).

Legend 2 – Police have reported that Halloween candies have had sharp objects inserted into them, causing harm to those who ingest them. Again, it is best to only allow your children to trick or treat at homes of persons you know and trust (Best and Horiuchi 488),

APPENDIX B

THE KENTUCKY FRIED RAT

Basic Legend: A person purchases a bucket of chicken from Kentucky Fried Chicken. While consuming the chicken, they discover that in place of an expected piece of chicken, they have a fried rat in their bucket.

Variations on Ingestion: The person notices before biting into it, the person realizes something is wrong once they bite into the "chicken", a person eats the rat and falls ill or dies due to the rat poison ingested via the fried rat, a person realizes they have a fried rat and has a heart attack and dies, or a person finds a hair and has it analyzed by the health department which claims it to be a rat hair.

Variations on Purchaser: A woman who does not have time to cook dinner for her husband and tries to substitute fried chicken for a home cooked meal, teens going to the movie, various persons eating in the restaurant (Fine, "Kentucky" 229).

APPENDIX C

THE DEATH CAR

There is a beautiful, low mileage Mercedes for sale at the local used car lot. A man who could never afford a new Mercedes takes advantage of the amazing deal the car lot is offering on the car. Having struck a great deal on the car, the man is disappointed as he realizes the disgusting odor in the car. Despite all efforts, the odor cannot be removed from the car. It turns out the original owner had died in the car. The smell is that of death (Fine, "Goliath" 78).

APPENDIX D

POP ROCKS

"A kid ate 6 bags of pop rocks at a party. He then proceeded to drink a six pack of Pepsi.
The two substances combined in his stomach and exploded, killing him horribly. That's
why Pop Rocks were taken off the market in the early eighties."
(http://www.snopes.com/horrors/freakish/poprocks.asp, April 12, 2010).

APPENDIX E

SWIFFER WET JET

"Wet Jet and the danger they cause

Just in case you have pets or small children around.

This is scary...

I recently had a neighbor who had to have their 5-year old German Shepherd dog put down due to liver failure. The dog was completely healthy until a few weeks ago, so they had a necropsy done to see what the cause was. The liver levels were unbelievable, as if the dog had ingested poison of some kind. The dog is kept inside, and when he's outside, someone's with him, so the idea of him getting into something unknown was hard to believe. My neighbor started going through all the items in the house. When he got to the Swiffer Wetjet, he noticed, in very tiny print, a warning which stated may be harmful to small children and animals." He called the company to ask what the contents of the cleaning agent are and was astounded to find out that antifreeze is one of the ingredients. (Actually he was told it's a compound which is one molecule away from antifreeze.) Therefore, just by the dog walking on the floor cleaned with the solution, then licking its own paws, it ingested enough of the solution to destroy its liver.

Soon after his dog's death, his housekeepers' two cats also died of liver failure. They both used the Swiffer Wetjet for quick cleanups on their floors. Necropsies were not done on the cats, so they could not file a lawsuit, but he asked that we spread the word to as many others as possible so that they do not lose their animals. This is equally harmful to babies and small children that play on the floor a lot and put their fingers in their mouths a lot.

PLEASE, EVEN IF YOU DO NOT HAVE BABIES, SMALL CHILDREN OR OWN A PET, PLEASE FORWARD THIS ON!"

http://www.hoax-slayer.com/swiffer-pet-death.html, April 14, 2010

REFERENCES

Barber, Mark. Project 2067: Urban Legends. Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2006.

Bartholomew, Robert E., and Jeffrey S. Victor. "A Social-Psychological Theory of Collective Anxiety Attacks: The "Mad Gasser" Reexamined." The Sociological Quarterly Vol. 45, No. 2 (2004): 229-248

Best, Joel and Horiuchi, Gerald T. "The Razor Blade in the Apple: The Social Construction of Urban Legends " Social Problems, Vol. 32, No. 5 (Jun., 1985), pp. 488-499

Brunvand, Jan Harold. The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Donavan, D. Todd; Mowen, John C.; and Chakraborty, Goutam. "Urban Legends: The Word-of-Mouth Communication of Morality Through Negative Story Content." Marketing Letters, Vol.10, No. 1 (1999), 23-34

Fine, Gary Alan. "The Kentucky Fried Rat: Legends and Modern Society." Journal of the Folklore Institute, Vol. 17, No 2/3 Special Double Issue: The America Theme in American Folklore (May 1, 1980), pp. 222-243

 Fine, Gary Alan. "The Goliath Effect." The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 98, No. 387 (Jan. - Mar., 1985), pp. 63-84

Gladwell, Malcolm. The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference. Boston: Back Bay, 2002.

Heath, Chip; Bell, Chris; Sternberg, Emily. "Emotional selection in memes: The case of urban legends." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Vol. 81(6), Dec 2001: 1028-1041

Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die. New York: Random House, 2007. Other entries put authors' names in different order— which is correct?

www.hoax-slayer.com, Last accessed April 14, 2010

Koenig, Frederick. Rumor in the Marketplace: The Social Psychology of Commercial Hearsay. Dover, Massachusetts: Auburn House, 1985.

Mullen, Patrick B. "Modern Legend and Rumor Theory." Journal of Folklore Institute Vol. 9, No. 2/3 (Aug.-Dec., 1972): 95-109

Noymer, Andrew. 'The Transmission and Persistence of `'Urban Legends': Sociological Application of Age-Structured Epidemic Models." UC Berkeley: Center for Culture, Organizations and Politics. (20010) Retrieved from: http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0rv3c82q

www.Snopes.com, Last accessed March 31, 2010

www.Merriam-Webster.com, Last accessed April 12, 2010

Young, Denise. "Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory." University of Colorado at Boulder: 1998. Retrieved from: http://www.colorado.edu/communication/meta-discourses/Papers/App_Papers/Young.htm.

VITA

Mary Diane Cantrell was born August 14, 1968 in Asheville, North Carolina. In 1990, she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Business and Economics at St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, North Carolina. After college, she returned to Asheville and then moved to Greenville, North Carolina where she worked for East Carolina University. She moved to Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1996 where she worked for Qualchoice of North Carolina until 2002 when she transferred to Wake Forest University Health Sciences where she is currently employed as a clinical reporting analyst.   She has actively volunteered with many charitable organizations throughout the years.   She pursued the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies out of a desire to expand her knowledge base in an array of subject matter.