

A Review of the Distinctive Genres of Adolescent Folklore

Sue Samuelson

Edited and Introduced by Simon J. Bronner

Sue Samuelson (1956-1991) served as vice president and secretary-treasurer of the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society and often let her colleagues know her opinion that the rubric of "children" should be modified. Her view came out of her scholarly work documenting legends and beliefs among teenagers, and their contexts in slumber parties and school gatherings. She felt that categorizing adolescent lore under childhood misrepresented the transitions culturally and physically that occurred to teenagers. Although she recognized the connection of folklore used by adolescents to forms established in childhood, she noted that the emphasis on groupness and spirit in the American high school experience added an organizational difference to the American adolescent experience and distinguished it from categories of childhood, adulthood, or even college life. She agreed with Gary Alan Fine's usage of the analytical terms "preadolescent" and "adolescent" to represent cultural patterns associated with coming of age (see Fine, *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987]). She was indeed an appropriate figure to discuss adolescent folklore in a project surveying the field of children's folklore sponsored by the Children's Folklore Section. She prepared a draft on the subject in 1983 when she was teaching at Penn State Harrisburg but was stricken with cancer a few years later when the project began moving forward. She was not then in a position to prepare her work for publication. The results of the project will appear in 1995 as *Children's Folklore: A Sourcebook* published by Garland. It was a project she promoted and would have wanted to see in print, but sadly, she died in 1991.

Sue's paper on adolescent folklore had a significant message to offer about the need for consideration of folklore genres that characterize adolescence as a distinctive phase of life. It also contained a review of literature that had appeared in this fledgling field. In fact, she traced serious treatment of adolescent folklore to the shockingly late date of 1963, but pointed out that substantial progress had been made on consideration of the special functions that folklore held during the transition years of adolescence. She was especially drawn

to psychological studies of folklore, because of the mentoring of Alan Dundes while she was an undergraduate at the University of California at Berkeley. She went on to study folklore and folklife at the University of California at Los Angeles (MA) and University of Pennsylvania (PhD), where she delved more deeply into the perspectives of performance, social context, and organization as guiding principles of study. Although many publications described legends without relating the significance of the age of tradition bearers, she insisted in articles such as "The White Witch: An Analysis of an Adolescent Legend" in *Indiana Folklore* (1979) and "European and American Adolescent Legends" in *Arv* (1981) on making specific reference to the "adolescent legend" and by extension "adolescent folklore." Her work was often cited when, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, more scholarly attention turned to the teenage years and its age-related folklore. In publications and at meetings, folklorists Gary Alan Fine, Bill Ellis, Jay Mechling, Ronald Baker, and Linda Dégh, among others, were especially active in pointing out the context of adolescence in narrative performance. Thorny issues remained of associating adolescent folklore with childhood and synthesizing collected folklore from teenagers into a folkloristic perspective that took into account interdisciplinary contributions on aging from psychology, education, anthropology, history, and sociology.

After discussions of such issues at the 1994 American Folklore Society meeting, members of the Children's Folklore Section recalled Sue's draft and suggested that it would provide a good background in *Children's Folklore Review* for efforts now being pursued in the field. I undertook the task of revising the prose, and added a conclusion drawn from her observations in "European and American Adolescent Legends" in *Arv* (1981) and "Notes on a Sociology of Folklore as a Science" (*New York Folklore* 9 [1983]: 13-20). I also had notes on hand from her papers donated to the Center for Pennsylvania Culture Studies at Penn State Harrisburg. In some instances, especially her discussion of functionalism, I expanded on her statements for the sake of bringing her ideas across more thoroughly. As her friend and colleague in the American Studies Program at Penn State Harrisburg, I relied on my memory of conversations with her about ideas not found in print for my elaborations of the text, but as much as possible I let her words remain intact. I left her bibliography as she compiled it to represent the literature from which she drew her observations.

As a supplement to her survey of works, I can mention many significant additions that have appeared during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Perhaps the greatest growth on the folkloristic bookshelf related to adolescents has been in the area of narrative and legend-telling. Sequels to Jan Harold Brunvand's *Vanishing Hitchhiker* have appeared, including *The Choking*

Doberman (1984), *The Mexican Pet* (1986), *Curses! Broiled Again!* (1989), and *The Baby Train* (1993). Gary Alan Fine, whose scholarship Sue greatly admired, has included essays on adolescent legend in his book *Manufacturing Tales* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992). Many of the articles on legend she cites from the journal *Indiana Folklore* have been reprinted in the book *Indiana Folklore: A Reader*, edited by Linda Dégh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980). While Sue points to the special place of articles on adolescent legend in *Indiana Folklore* and *Midwestern Folklore*, I would add the periodicals *Contemporary Legend*, *FOAFTale News*, and *Western Folklore* since the late 1980s to her list. A special issue of *Western Folklore* devoted to "Contemporary Legends in Emergence," edited by Bill Ellis (January 1990), for example, includes his study of satanic cult rumors among high school students, "The Devil-Worshippers at the Prom: Rumor-Panic as Therapeutic Magic" (27-49). In addition, several proceedings of conferences on "Perspectives on Contemporary Legend" have appeared with studies of legends collected from teenagers, without making reference, however, to the "adolescent legend." An exception in *Western Folklore* by S. Elizabeth Bird refers to "adolescent legend trips" in her article "Playing With Fear: Interpreting the Adolescent Legend Trip" (53 [1994]: 191-210). Other excellent discussions of the adolescent legend-trip can be found in "Adolescent Legend Trips as Teenage Cultural Response: A Study of Lore in Context" by Patricia M. Meley (*Children's Folklore Review* 14 [1991]: 5-24), and "Legend Tripping in Ohio: A Behavioral Survey" (*Papers in Comparative Studies* 2 [1982-1983]: 61-73) and "Legend-Trips and Satanism: Adolescents' Ostensive Traditions as 'Cult' Activity" (in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. James T. Richardson, Joel Best, David G. Bromley [New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991]), both by Bill Ellis. Ellis also refers to "adolescent horror legends" and legend-trips in "'The Hook' Reconsidered: Problems in Classifying and Interpreting Adolescent Horror Legends" (*Folklore* 105 [1994]: 61-76).

Other genres associated with adolescence such as "sick" jokes and drinking games have been covered in a number of publications, but it is fair to say that they have lagged behind the interest generated by "contemporary legend." Alan Dundes collected his essays on "sick jokes" in *Cracking Jokes* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1987). It includes essays on "the dead baby joke," mentioned by Sue, and others circulated by adolescents such as jokes about quadriplegics and Jewish-American princesses. I discuss a regional joke cycle that began with adolescents in "Political Suicide: The Budd Dwyer Joke Cycle and the Humor of Disaster," *Midwestern Folklore* 14 (1988). Several interesting references have meanwhile appeared about drinking games, mostly in health journals. See Sylvia Grider, "Reversal of Compe-

tence in College Drinking Games," *Play and Culture* 3 (1990); Paul Douglas, "Bizz-Buzz, Turtles, Quarters, and One Horse Club: The Role of Drinking Games among High School and College Students," *Alcohol Health and Research World* (Summer 1987); Willy Pedersen, "Drinking Games Adolescents Play," *British Journal of Addiction* 85 (1990); Janet Crawford, "The Role and Function of Drinking Games in a University Community," *Journal of American College Health* 39 (1991). An analysis of games using the source of the Human Relations Area Files is "Adolescents at Play: A Cross-cultural Study of Adolescent Games" by Alice Schlegel and Herbert Barry III in *The Content of Culture: Constants and Variants*, ed. Ralph Bolton (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1989). See also the cross-cultural examination of rituals for puberty and adolescence in *Transitions: Four Rituals in Eight Cultures* by Martha Nemes Fried and Morton H. Fried (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980). A suggestive study of slang used by gang members—constituting adolescent subcultures—is Thomas Murray's "The Folk Argot of Midwestern Gangs," *Midwestern Folklore* 19 (1993). The "slumber party" and "spooky activities" (e.g., seances and levitations) often related to it are covered by Shaari Freed in "Spooky Activities and Group Loyalty," *Children's Folklore Review* 16 (Fall 1993); see also Elizabeth Tucker, "Levitation and Trance Sessions at Preadolescent Girls' Slumber Parties," in *The Masks of Play*, ed. Brian Sutton-Smith (New York: Leisure Press, 1984). Adolescent rites of passage as well as gender roles are studied in *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* by Ray Raphael (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) and *Rites of Passage in America: Traditions of the Life Cycle* organized by the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies (1992). Although more sociological than folkloristic, *The Material Child: Coming of Age in Japan and America* by Merry White (New York: Free Press, 1993) and *Coming of Age in New Jersey* by Michael Moffatt (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989) cover the teenage "coming of age."

Although Sue neglected material culture in her study, some recent essays have examined teenage fashions as part of the process of tradition. For friendship bracelets and other adornments, for example, see my *American Children's Folklore* (Little Rock: August House, 1988), Catherine Klutz, "Friendship Bracelets," *Children's Folklore Review* 12.1(1989): 4-5, and Ariane Sains, "The Latest Teen Rage? Embroidery," *Children's Folklore Review* 13.1 (1990): 23-24 (for an Austrian study of teenage clothing preferences that invites comparison, see Michael Martischnig, "Schöner Vogel Jugend: Kleidung und Verkleidung Jugendlicher heute," in *Gegenwartsvolkskunde und Jugendkultur* [Vienna: Österreichischen Akad. der Wiss., 1987]. Although Sue's review mainly covered folklore from the United States, it is worth mentioning some comparative studies from other

countries that focus on adolescent culture. For folk song from adolescent females in Canada, one can consult "Theorizing Music's Affective Power" by Jennifer Giles and John Shepherd in *Ethnomusicology in Canada*, ed. Robert Witmer (Toronto: Institute for Canadian Music, 1990), and for religious beliefs in Finland, one can read "Religious Attitudes, Values and World View: A Study among Contemporary Young Finns" by Helena Helve in *Ethnologica Uralica* 3 (1992): 31-38. Several essays in the Austrian publication *Gegenwartsvolkskunde und Jugendkultur*, edited by Klaus Beitzl and Eva Kausel, discuss research methods and historiography related to the study of adolescents.

The organizational context of schools, camps, and churches and their influence on adolescent life is the focus of several studies in *Inside Organizations: Understanding the Human Dimension*, edited by Michael Owen Jones, Michael Dane Moore, and Richard Christopher Snyder (Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1988). Among the titles relating to adolescents are "The Paradox of Functional Dysfunction in a Girl Scout Camp" by Patricia Atkinson Wells, "Dealing with Organizational Stress: Lessons from the Folklore of Mormon Missionaries" by William Wilson, and "Organizational Festivals and the Uses of Ambiguity: The Case of Picnic Day at Davis" by Jay Mechling and David Scofield Wilson. Students as part of an age and an organization receive consideration in Jay Mechling's "Mediating Structures and the Significance of University Folk" in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*, ed. Elliott Oring (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1989). My study of folklore collected from students appeared as *Piled Higher and Deeper: The Folklore of Campus Life* (Little Rock: August House, 1990); it extends the collection *American Children's Folklore* (Little Rock: August House, 1988), which covers the school years between the ages of 5 and 17. Considerations of gender relations that especially concerned Sue are "Some Differences in Male and Female Joke-Telling" by Carol Mitchell (in *Women's Folklore, Women's Culture*, ed. Rosan A. Jordan and Susan J. Kalcik [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985]) and "'This is a True Story': Roles of Women in Contemporary Legend," *Midwestern Folklore* 20 (1994).

And for information on Sue Samuelson's life and career, see my essay, "Sue Samuelson (1956-1991)," *Journal of American Folklore* 104 (1991): 341-44.

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Adolescent Lore

Popular descriptions of the transition from childhood to adolescence often include one of two paradoxical viewpoints. The first is the sentimentalized "overnight wonder" experience: one day the children are contented with dressing dolls or climbing trees and the next they are buying prom clothes, asking to borrow the family car and telling stories about crazy killers with hooks instead of hands. This image is more often the production of advertising campaigns (e.g., the Kodak montage of photographs of "misty yester-years") than the actual experience of people in daily contact with children. The other viewpoint covers a slower but more realistic transition that features physical changes (especially puberty), improving social skills, and intellectual development. Even the most rapid course through puberty still takes more than a day to complete the journey.

No clear boundaries differentiate childhood from adolescence (or adolescence from adulthood). This seamlessness helps explain the scarcity of folkloristic studies that treat adolescent culture apart from more clearly demarcated age categories of childhood or adulthood. That is not to say, however, that adolescence, sometimes referred to roughly as the "teen years," doesn't carry meaning as an age category. Typically, it is treated as a period of transition, and interpretations often seek to find the functions that folklore plays to mature children or move them into adulthood. Folklore collected from adolescents often overlaps with the cultural expression of the preceding and succeeding periods of life. Adolescents unconsciously retain (or consciously mock) elements of the folklore which played such an important role in their childhood years. Jumprope rhymes, cootie catchers, and the like are filed away for later use when children become parents, aunts and uncles, or teachers. Occasionally, the items are jarred back into consciousness when one is babysitting or reads magazine articles that appear periodically as reminders of younger days. Still, many cycles of childhood games or customs disappear completely as youngsters move on to new interests.

If demarcations of adolescence are vague, especially in modern industrialized society, then folklore helps identify distinguishing characteristics of the period between childhood and adulthood. In addition to testing the process of transition, adolescent folklore, much of it short-lived, creates social separateness. By "folklore," I mean forms of traditional expressive activities, attitudes and material objects passed on by word of mouth and through imitation which serve as a format for communicating fears, feelings, problems, and goals of individuals and the groups of which they are a part. A partial listing of genres that are especially evident during adolescence are: legends, slang, ceremonies, customs, pranks, games, parties, special clubs,

verbal dueling, automobile activities, foods, songs and cheers (and their parodies) and autograph and yearbook verses.

Specific examples might include slang expressions about parts of the body or articles of clothing (such as "boulder holder" for bra) or jokes and stories about sexual experimentation. Such genres reflect teenagers' interest in their changing bodies. Another example from the realm of speech play is the adolescent's use of proverbs. From a Piagetian perspective, the adolescent has reached the stage of formal operational thinking. That is, his or her thought processes can consider the possible as well as the real. The folklorist is interested in the impact of these changes on expressive performance. The abstract applications of proverbs often cannot be understood by children but will make sense to adolescents whose cognitive capabilities are more developed. On the other hand, older children find the simplicity of riddling to be less humorous (although riddling persists in adult repertoires to some extent).

Cultural awareness of adolescence appears to be a twentieth-century phenomenon. Descriptions of traditional adolescent activities can be found in the late nineteenth-century collection of children's games by William Wells Newell (1883), in Paul Brewster's studies of games and customs in the 1950s, and in Iona and Peter Opie's books on English children's games from the 1950s and 1960s. These works tend to present teenage customs as an extension of children's behavior. Martha Dirks' "Teen-Age Folklore from Kansas," the first American treatise to consider adolescent folklore separately, appeared in 1963. Dirks examined four main genres: humor, slang, customs/beliefs, and verse/song. She appeared to be unaware of the plethora of "scary stories" whose popularity with teenage storytellers extended back to the 1930s, if not before. The main repository for texts of these kinds of narratives is the journal *Indiana Folklore*, which ceased publication in the early 1980s. Taking its place as an outlet for studies of adolescent folklore is *Midwestern Folklore* (formerly *Midwestern Journal of Language and Folklore*).

With the establishment in 1968 of *Indiana Folklore*, the study of adolescent folklore made great progress. In the journal's first years it was a rare volume that did not include at least one article on *adolescents' legends*. Readers became familiar with widely told stories such as "The Boyfriend's Death" (Dégh) or "The Hook" (Dégh) as well as more localized legends about haunted houses, bridges, and tunnels (see Sliney). While the bulk of this work concentrates on Indiana materials from the late 1960s and early 1970s, the obvious enthusiasm for collecting and interpreting the narratives is reflected in the publication of similar articles in other journals and in *Indiana Folklore's* expansion to include material from outside of the Midwest (see Samuelson, "The White Witch"). Jan Harold Brunvand's *Vanishing Hitchhiker: Ameri-*

can Urban Legends and Their Meanings (1981) and its sequels provide a review of legends popular with adolescents and college students (and with other age groups as well).

Studies have been made of events related to adolescent legends such as visits to haunted sites or pranking activities that draw on a store of common knowledge about local ghosts or strange happenings (see Koss, and Hall). Such occasions often result in even more storytelling events or are recalled after they occur as a form of vicarious enjoyment. Other locales for legend-telling, such as slumber parties (see Simons) and summer camps (see Leary, "The Boondocks Monster of Camp Wapehani," and Mechling, "The Magic of the Boy Scout Campfire"), have also received analytical treatment.

After narrative studies the most common genres for scholarly folkloristic inquiry are *rites of passage* and *verbal dueling*. The former is a rather vaguely defined area. It includes ritual-like activities such as high school graduations and their associated events (e.g., proms) that signal the beginnings of transition into adulthood. College interview stories are another example (see Stephanoff), along with the all-important driver's license, "an especially apt embodiment of a rite of passage attuned to the spirit of a secular and mechanical society. . . [it is] a transition via testing and training, and finally incorporation into a new way of life with its concomitant opportunities and responsibilities" (Thompson 154). Studies also exist for intra-adolescent initiations such as induction into a club or high school sorority (see Schwartz and Merten) or athletic teams (see McCann). Associated with this genre are items such as pep rallies (see Burnett), practical jokes (e.g., toilet papering the houses of athletes to wish them good luck or honor them for a strong performance), cast parties following dramatic productions, and yearbook signings.

Some anthropologists contend that in contemporary Western cultures little or nothing is done in the way of ritual or ceremony to create changes in social status, particularly in regard to initiation into adult roles (Gluckman 35-38). Religious rituals such as confirmations or Bar/Bat Mitzvahs lack a broad base of support and the importance of high school and college graduations tends to be downplayed as well. These are "specialized ceremonies of initiation, which-indeed like weddings and funerals-mark changes of status, but they do not involve any ideas that the performing of prescribed actions by appropriately related persons will mystically affect the well being of the initiands" (Gluckman 137). One study by Jacquetta Hill Burnett, however, strongly portrays the significance of the elaborate ceremonial cycles that are performed in high schools across the United States. Burnett carefully acknowledges the difference of these rituals from the more magico-religious ones practiced in tribal societies. She is also aware of the impact of

variations in social structure to be found in communities and high schools that are to be expected in heterogeneous society. But Burnett is adamant in stating her belief that ceremonial activities associated with sports, dances, homecoming, and so on as a part of the annual school cycle and a four year age-grade cycle are significant ways of marking changes "in the character of interaction, in the configuration of relationships, and in the nature of activity" (4). Anyone who has participated in a high school graduation ceremony or a prom or functioned as an "interested bystander" (parents; younger, and envious, siblings) knows that these are very important occasions. If they do not actually change the "character of interaction," they certainly make a contribution by marking significant points in the socialization process. Because they do not explicitly *cause* a change in status, however, they might be better labeled rites of aging rather than of passage.

Most of the articles on *verbal insults* deal with "the dozens," "a verbal duel played by Negro males, the object of which is to better one's opponent by deriding him with defamatory insults about his family. The content of the insults principally describes reputed sexual misdeeds of the opponent's mother" (Ayoub and Barnett 337). As early as the late 1930s the use of dozens by black youths received attention in psychological journals. It was Roger Abrahams' folkloristic studies, however, that made the genre a prominent area of cultural investigation. In the 1970s, studies of contests-in-insults among whites complemented Abrahams' significant investigations. The meanings of verbal dueling depend on many variables, including the race, class, and personality of participants, but several interpretations have been raised. The earliest study suggested dozens as a means of coping with aggression (see Dollard); later studies suggested a search for masculine identity (see Abrahams), peer-group definition (see Ayoub and Barnett), and status enhancement via the debasement of basic societal values (see Bronner). Articles by Simon Bronner explore the cohesive functions of ritual insults for small male groups in urban areas, particularly for boys in a fringe stratum of society. Psychological factors also enter into the analysis, such as the "aggressive character of competition, rejection of authority, and manifestation of sexual behavior" (see Bronner, "Who Says?" 54).

Affiliated with the examination of verbal insults are studies of *adolescent language*, such as group designations (e.g., nerd, hood, dooper, greaser), states of being (e.g., with it, cool) (see Schwartz and Merten, and Parker). Other forms of language behavior (e.g., jokes and riddles) have been touched upon, often with some penetrating comments on their functions. Thomas Peck's comparison of male and female dirty joke-telling notes that "both the male and female joke-tellers tend to place their own sex into a superior position in the creation of their jokes. . . [and] that many of the objects used as the source

of humor are not used by the opposite sex." Furthermore, girls are affected (at least during the early 1970s) by social ideals that they should not appear to be too "crude." Thus their "creative genius of [dirty] joke inventing is. . . going to decrease" as they mature (103). Peck's comment is a little overstated, especially since considerable changes in the social interaction patterns of females has occurred since his study was made. As David Hufford notes in his editor's preface to the special issue of *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* on folklore at a Pennsylvania prep school (the issue in which Peck's article appeared), *obscene materials* often are collected from adolescent boys and girls, "the group which is most often singled out as needing shelter from such things. . . . Obscene material is of great interest to adolescents and forms a very significant part of their repertoires" (55). In addition to obscene jokes and language, stories set in lover's lanes (e.g., "The Boyfriend's Death") or about boys who put aphrodisiacs in their date's drinks (e.g., "Drugged and Seduced") abound with sexual references (see Greenberg). *Beliefs about pregnancy and birth control* (e.g., cola as a douche, using plastic wrap as a condom) forms another category with sexual references common among adolescents (see Fish). These forms of expressive behavior reveal adolescents' great interest in sexual matters, which should not be unexpected considering their physical and social development. Courtship is a highly anticipated and greatly discussed part of adolescence. Especially in legends such as "The Boyfriend's Death" or "Drugged and Seduced," the "power struggle which almost invariably accompanies dating" is expressed (Schwartz and Merten 466).

Pranking activity among adolescents often revolves around the use of the automobile, so *car lore* may be considered another genre of folklore among adolescents. The automobile is "the site of bull sessions, drinking bouts and necking parties. In all, the car provided a mobile parlor, clubhouse, dining room, and bedroom. It was at once the setting and symbol of much adolescent deviant and non deviant sociability and sexuality" (Licht 46). Car lore also includes stories of buying and maintaining cars, the slang expressions used in referring to them (or their parts), games like "Chinese Fire Drill" or "Chicken," and just plain "cruising." A psychoanalytically oriented article by Charles Yohe examines an adolescent "folkway" known as "pantsing" or "mooning" wherein a teenage passenger in a car drops his (it is usually a male activity) pants and presents his buttocks to (or through) a car window to passing motorists. Such activity can occur elsewhere (cf., a school dance in the movie *Grease*), but it is most commonly practiced in automobiles. Yohe believes mooning is not the deviant act that some adult authorities claim; it functions as a reasonable release for exhibitionistic tendencies.

A commonly recognized but understudied genre of adolescent folklore is the *kissing game*, such as "Spin the Bottle" and "Post Office." Such games are mentioned in some children's folklore collections (see Newell, *passim*; Brewster 152-56; and Opie 1969: 169-170, 263-267, 270-272), but the most thorough study is "The Kissing Games of Adolescents in Ohio," an essay by Brian Sutton-Smith in which he describes 53 adolescent kissing games, their settings, origins, and functions. Sutton-Smith interprets the functions of the games by observing that they "have prospered and developed in the modern world because they are appropriate to the parlor settings in middle and upper-middle class homes and because they satisfy the desire of adolescents for increasing heterosexual experience, but at the same time safeguard them against too open a commitment to, or too much intimacy with, the other sex" (216). Contemporary teenagers are much more open about their sexual activities in the 1980s than the adolescents that Sutton-Smith investigated in the 1950s. Although kissing games might be acceptable to some adolescents, particularly younger ones, they can seem a bit outdated. *Drinking games*, though, are quite popular, even among late adolescents (especially the college crowd). They have been the subject of a master's thesis (see Young), but relatively few publications. In addition, games involving the use of drugs may draw upon the drinking game tradition, but public references to this sensitive material is scarce (see Dorson).

Two late articles of the 1970s explore adolescents' use of *graffiti*. Gelman concentrates on postal graffiti, such as SWAK (Sealed with a Kiss), an envelope sealer, but the author's promised interpretative comments on the presentation of self and revelation of group identity are minimal. A study of high school bathroom graffiti conducted by three sociologists (see Perelti, et al.) reveals five main areas of concern: sexual maturation, self-identification, idealism, iconoclasm, and rebelliousness. Sexual maturity was the number one topic for both sexes while girls appeared to be more concerned with the next two topics and boys were more involved in iconoclastic writings. Both sexes scored equally on items involving rebelliousness.

Some of the genre-oriented articles focus more on the organizational setting than the item of folkloristic performance, particularly when they assess the high school as the primary social base of activity for teenagers. One of the most thorough surveys of adolescent legendry asserts that the school "is the main setting for establishing and maintaining personal relationships; it is also the center for many community activities" (Thigpen 141). Various articles have discussed school spirit (see Miracle), conflicts between teachers and students (see Davis), and the general types of behavior at a high school such as classes, customs, and after-school activities (see Burnett). Outside of the school setting only a few of the possible contexts for activity have been

analyzed: play behavior in the Boy Scouts (see Mechling "Sacred and Profane Play in the Boy Scouts of America"), mock ordeals at summer camps (see Ellis), and work sites, especially the fast-food restaurants that frequently employ large numbers of teenagers (Bronner, "Who Says?" 57-58).

Except for analyses of contests-in-insults called "the dozens," the majority of the studies of adolescent folklore have focused on white, middle-class, suburban and urban American teenagers (see Samuelson, "European and American Adolescent Legends," for a brief report on adolescent legends told by Europeans). Furthermore, the studies mainly have looked at normal, non-delinquent teenagers, although some of the marginal groups—ethnics, drug users, delinquents—could be valuable sources of information to provide contrasting data to the middle-of-the-road groups studied thus far (see Hawes). Kenneth Thigpen, for example, discusses the existence of two groups within the adolescent population he studied in Brown County, Indiana. One group consists of traditional stereotyped teenagers. Members are politically, religiously, and socially conservative, rebellious against authority as it pertains to them personally but not against the system, and primarily use beer and liquor as symbols of maturity. The other group, called "counterculture," is politically apathetic but leans toward liberalism, is religiously apathetic but shows an interest in the occult, and uses wine and marijuana as a means of titillation (209).

A few studies of adolescents expand on the context of social interaction that fosters folkloric production. James P. Leary's "White Guys' Stories of the Night Street" examines some of the linguistic behavior of a Bloomington, Indiana, group of late adolescents who hang out at night in a supermarket parking lot. Their greetings, taunts, proverbs, jokes, toasts, and parodies center on matters of immediate concern—getting drunk or stoned, driving and its associated technology, fights and contests, women, "crazy" behavior, and visiting "scary" places. Leary finds pattern to this behavior. One kind of interaction reports and comments on relations with in-group males; others respond to dealings with females, with outsiders and their material extensions, and with the supernatural world. Such an interpretative scheme might provide considerable comparative information if applied to other kinds of teenagers, both marginal and "normal." This is a point made in Simon Bronner's "Who Says?"—a study of white ritual insults. Marginal groups do not just give contrasting data. They should be studied also because they magnify the concerns and tensions of the mainstream.

If one were trying to gain a sense of mid-twentieth century American adolescence from folklorists' reports, no clear picture would emerge. Most of the articles contain good descriptions of folklore and often some analysis, but little has been done in the way of synthesizing the material for an overview

of adolescents' attitudes, behaviors, and social relationships, and the ways that folklore can reveal significant features of this stage of development or of adolescents as a cohesive social group. When one assesses the various analytical comments in the studies available, some trends emerge. One finds adolescent concerns with sexuality, a sense of adventure and discovery, a need to test alternative forms of reality, and to express independence.

When examining *sexual activity* as a major theme in the folklore adolescents, it is important to remember who is telling the story or joke, using the slang expression, or playing the game. One generalization often put forward is that while folklore research overall has tended to use male informants, adolescent folklore research has favored the expressive behavior of females (Fine and Johnson 120). This situation partly owes to the boom in studies of contemporary legend, many gathered from high school and college women. Especially conspicuous in interpretations of this narrative material is the suggestion that among women coming of age sexual behavior induces caution at best and fear at worst. Sexual connotations in women's narratives, however, are less clinical in detail than the few male narratives which have been examined. "Typically sexuality in the legends of adolescent girls is symbolic rather than overt," Fine and Johnson observe (120). Most feminine stories emphasize the negative consequences of sex; they are cautionary tales rather than forms of wish fulfillment (see Dundes "On the Psychology of Legend"). The reverse is more the case for male legend-tellers although they occasionally tell or listen to specifically female-oriented stories.

In addition to recognizing the ethnicity and locale of the person telling stories, folklorists increasingly consider the narrative viewpoint in relation to gender. An example is Fine and Johnson's analysis of "The Promiscuous Cheerleader," a legend about a female cheerleader who offers herself sexually to an entire football team. From the boy's perspective, the narrative details of the cheerleader are appealing because they represent relief from the embarrassment of sexual maneuvering and possible rejection. But they also illustrate the male's potentially negative opinion of a female in a sexually aggressive role. The same kind of issue is mentioned by Jay Mechling in his discussion of a Boy Scout game, "Poison Pit," a tug-of-war-like activity played over a pit filled with mud and watermelon rinds and seeds. Mechling argues that "the game of poison pit is a ritual literalization of metaphor, with the pit symbolizing a vagina. Much linguistic evidence supports the interpretation of the game, which was a ritual addressing the boys' anxiety about female sexuality, and consequently, their own" ("Male Gender Display at a Boy Scout Camp" 156).

Although such psychological analysis is often defensible, folklorists must be careful that the connection of sexuality to adolescence, especially in

the period around puberty, does not obscure other lessons. For instance, sexually oriented folklore can be also analyzed in terms of political issues. The cycle of "grosser than gross" jokes (involving tampons, toxic shock syndromes, and pantyhose, among other topics) reveals the impact of the women's movement on new items of folklore. The teenage boys who tell such jokes, according to Simon Bronner, "are becoming aware of women's political rise at the same time they are recognizing girls' rapid physical development. As such, the jokes signify certain male discomfort with, or female pride in, the advancing adult maturity and socialization by girls" (1985: 41).

Another approach to the sexual themes in adolescent folklore emphasizes the potential outcome of sexual behavior—babies—and the social ramifications of teenage sex. Alan Dundes, for example, looks at the recent "dead baby" joke cycle and concludes, "the cycle provides a means for adolescents and young teenagers to try to relieve their anxiety about impending parenthood" ("The Dead Baby Joke Cycle" 157). Biologically, adolescents can have children while they are still technically children themselves, not having completed the cultural or social transitions into adulthood. Even with sex education and increased availability of contraceptives and abortions adolescents still have babies, and sex drives, "but in theory society insists that they postpone such activities." The result is guilt and anxiety which are "clearly a factor in the generation and transmission of dead baby jokes" (157). There is more to the use of sexually oriented folklore by adolescents than a release of psychological tension; they also indicate a desire for increased socialization and entertainment among age-mates. As Bronner notes in regard to the adolescent penchant for "sick" jokes (including the dead baby joke cycle):

Supposedly, the sick jokes are especially appealing because of that age's [adolescence's] rebellious spirit which matches the shocking, rebellious content of the jokes. In addition, however, I note that many adolescents often anticipate the conflicts and tensions of society, since they are in the process of socializing into it. Therefore they often prefigure such societal conflicts and tensions by symbolically confronting them in folklore. [1985: 41]

An increasing awareness of one's sexuality directly relates to another facet of adolescent behavior, a need for discovery and adventure. This is allied with changes in cognitive development, to be sure, and parallels similar behavior in early childhood when one starts to explore the environment. But adolescents have a far greater area to investigate; they feel that the whole

world is at their disposal. Besides sexuality the diverse experiences of intellectual, artistic, occupational, and religious spheres are open for investigation. This directly ties in with teenagers' desires to test the reality of the new vistas opening up to them. Alternative forms of reality are explored, particularly the supernatural. While children and adults know ghost stories and the like, the adolescent's repertoire of *scary stories* (see Roemer) and visits to haunted *sites* is impressive. Such activities often occur in groups so there is a great deal of mutual reinforcement and safety in numbers to help allay fears that something untoward will happen. The actual beliefs in ghosts, spirits, or abnormal creatures with whom most of the legends and legend-trips deal has yet to be adequately assessed. Some teenagers know that they are just playing along, having suspended their disbelief to enjoy the thrill of a good scare in much the same way that they take a roller coaster ride or see a horror movie. They know the real world still exists; now is the time to explore the possibilities of other types of situations.

Reality testing and a familiarity with the "real reality" of socialized adult behavior coincides with a desire among teenagers to express their independence. This, too, has precedents in earlier childhood, but adolescents want to make sure that authority figures know that teenagers feel they are nearing the time when they will be able to perform acceptably in adult roles. The stereotype of the "storm and stress" of adolescence fits in well here, but not every adolescent experiences the yearning for independence in this fashion. It is hard to say what a normal, or ideal, adolescence is. If anything should prevail from folkloristic (and other scholarly) observations of adolescents in a number of settings, it is that there is an incredible variety of experience. Many individuals have relatively calm teenage years (although they may compensate later in life with a delayed independence period following a major life crisis). Some persons are classic rebels, while others route their independence/adventurous/sexual striving into sports, clubs, and drama activities. They are not always eager to discuss their feelings either, and it is in such situations that an observation of their stories, jokes, customs, and games might help to reveal what is going on in their lives, how they are releasing and relating themselves through these forms of expressions. Bronner notes this situation in his article "A Re-examination of Dozens among White Adolescents." As mentioned earlier, the mother insults that form the core of most dozens activity are a debasement of basic societal values, but they function as a release mechanism for frustration over adult social patterns and expectations. The dozens also serve as expressions of creativity, competition, and camaraderie.

Studies such as Bronner's on verbal dueling exemplify those approaches that go beyond content analysis to provide interpretations drawn from the

context and performance of adolescent cultural expression. He documents the material and organizational environments in which duels occur, provides social backgrounds and physical descriptions of the participants, describes the positions of the participants and their movements during the event, records narrative exchanges and reflections of participants on what occurred, and interviews non-participants on their views of the events. To paraphrase Steve Bartlett in his article "Social Interaction Patterns of Adolescents in a Folklore Performance," the performance, rhetorically managed in relation to the social demands of the event, brings meaning to the words and gestures used. Repetitive patterns can be discerned within a narrative exchange as well as among several events. One needs to look at how, why, when, and where an item is presented and what the performers, the adolescents themselves, have to say about it. Not only the words *of* the story but the words *about* the story are vital components of the interpretative task of the folkloristic researcher. My experience in fieldwork has been that tradition bearers bring differing values and concerns to their interpretation of folklore, although patterns typically emerge among many teenagers with points that are emphasized. One has to be prepared, though, for informants who cannot or will not provide interpretative comments. In such cases material garnered from a thorough understanding of the social and cultural basis of adolescence, both in general and in a particular community, can still provide the stage from which one can "decode" the values, worldviews, and problems expressed in items of folklore.

The instability, the transition, associated with adolescence in Western society provides fruitful ground for research. The themes that teenagers want to express such as sexuality, sex roles, guilt in violating social norms, anxiety at assuming responsibility, and exerting more control over their lives are evident in adolescent lore. The genres of adolescent lore—especially legends, jokes, beliefs, rituals (such as slumber parties)—operate to communicate these themes and often function to alleviate tension and worry. Besides scholarly studies of adolescence produced by psychologists, educators, sociologists, and anthropologists, folklorists have made significant contributions. More attention by folklorists to adolescence as a separate phase of life with distinctive forms of expression will enhance the understanding, popular and scholarly, of the ways through their lives that people find of assuaging their loneliness, their fundamental separateness, by making connections to other people, connections over which they can exert some degree of control through performance.

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Distinctive Genres of Adolescent Folklore

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