Once Upon A Time...

Module 2 - Groups
Folk Groups

What is your definition of “folk” group?

Do you picture people living in mostly rural areas, poor and uneducated?

Perhaps it brings to mind primitive, less advanced societies from long ago.

Or even a group of entertainers at a festival singing and dancing traditional folk songs.

If you answered yes to any of these descriptions, you may have fallen victim to some of the many misconceptions about folklore and folk groups.

What we do know is that the concept of folk group has evolved drastically over time.
Module 2 Objectives

- Describe some of the ways in which folk groups work and the factors that influence group membership.
- Identify initial factors that bring groups together to form folk groups.
- Identify the ways that informal expressive communication works to connect members both within and outside the group.
- Explain how beliefs, present in almost every folk group and across cultures, can be expressed in a multitude of ways.
- Identity legends and their connection to historical events and/or locations.
- Identify tall tales as an American form of folklore.
What Do We Mean By “Folk” Groups?

Because of the many misconceptions related to the term folk group, folklorists tend to shy away from that word and use the broader term "group" instead.

Either way, the focus is on the people and the folklore that they share every day as a means of communicating and strengthening their group’s identity.
Module 2 Key Terms

- Artifacts
- Cultural
- Evolution
- Dyads
- Esoteric-Exoteric Factors
- Proximity & Interaction
- Self-Identification
- Belief
- Legends
- Performance Approach
Emphasizes the shared informal contacts between people and that a folk group may be as small as two people who share a close, ongoing relationship: such as longtime friends or life partners. These pairs are referred to as dyads.
Toelken

Emphasizes the importance of proximity and interaction in creating and maintaining groups. People who interact tend to create folklore.
Folklorist- Ideologies

Bauman

Considers a folk group to be any group of two or more who share a common factor. All of us are members of folk groups. It is in folklore that folk groups are defined.
Noyes

Uses a wider lens to define folk groups by integrating the ideas of performance theory into the definition. His focus is on performance considers the relationships between groups and between audience and performers.
As we have learned, group identity does not just depend on communication within the group, but also outside the group as well as through interaction with other groups.

These esoteric-exoteric factors help provide certain groups with a sense of groupness and a way to express their intergroup values toward outsiders.

Examples of this we have seen in the past are hippies, punk rockers, and goths. Each one of these groups expressed their groupness to outsiders in a variety of ways, most notably in their appearance.
Why Are Groups Formed?

Groups are formed out of:

- Proximity
- Necessity, obligation, or circumstance
- Regular interaction
- Shared interests or skills

Can you identify with a group that you belong to in each one of these areas?
As we just stated, proximity plays an important role in the formation of groups. Traditionally this has been geographically defined; but with the creation of the Internet and social media, we can no longer define it so rigidly.

Nowadays “online settings can created kind of virtual proximity that allows members from distant locations and diverse backgrounds to come together” (Sims and Stephens 39) to form groups via Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, to name just a few.
## Social Media Stats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>User Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any Social Network</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29, women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>Women, adults ages 18-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29, African Americans, urban residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Women, adults under 50, whites, those with some college education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29, African-Americans, Latinos, women, urban residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumblr</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Adults ages 18-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Internet has also opened up more opportunities for those who wish to choose or self-identify with groups that convey an identity they want to create for themselves.

This is quite different from expressing an identity we already have, due to our family and ethnicity, for example. Or even joining a group because of shared interests.

This is taking a position by joining a group to demonstrate “who I am” no matter how strange or unusual it may be.
Now that we have identified some types of groups and how they can form, look at what is present in almost every group – belief. Belief is “one of the types of cultural information most often communicated within groups and can be expressed in a multitude of ways” (Sims and Stephens 61).

Of course, one of the first things that comes to mind here is religion. I think most people would agree that religion involves belief. But there are additional ways beliefs can be expressed by groups, such as shared superstitions, myths, home remedies, and proverbs.

What is important here is not that you actually believe that spilling salt is going to give you bad luck, but that you still take part in the practice of throwing salt over your shoulder, an expression of belief that is shared with other members in your group or community.
A more contemporary form of belief is the urban legend. This type of legend “usually has a very high belief component, with the tellers or listeners expressing, even insisting on, the veracity of the tales” (Sims and Stephens 66).

A good example of an urban legend is the story of Bloody Mary. It is said that if you stand in front of a mirror at midnight and chant her name three times she will appear.

Sasquatch is also another urban legend with which most of us are familiar.
Functions of Legends

Six possible functions you may see in Legends:

A) Poetic justice, in which a wrongdoer is punished in some bizarre way;
B) Anxiety justified, evidence to justify anxiety people may be ashamed of;
C) "I am in the know," the tellers have special knowledge that has been hidden from the rest of us;
D) Normal behavior in inappropriate settings, allowing for the breaking of social taboos (farting, being nude, sex play) by showing others performing these actions at the "wrong" time.
E) Expressing inappropriate feelings when they must be hidden in public (finding misfortune funny, no sympathy for the dead, etc.)
F) Permanent representation of feelings, supporting and objectifying our instincts that the world is "different" than we knew.
Similar to the folktales of legends is tall tales. Tall tales are mostly identified with early frontier life in America, and, like legends, they are a combination of history, myth, and fact.

Just like Pecos Bill, the early settlers “created heroes who were the mightiest, strongest and most daring lumberjacks, railroad men, coal miners, riverboat drivers, and steel workers possible” (Gulda and Cullinan 142). These real people and their improbable stories made them larger than life.
Characteristics of Tall Tales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Characteristics:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Language of “folks”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of hyperbole and exaggeration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vivid details and dramatic descriptions</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Characteristics:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Detailed with realism</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Set in specific regions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Boisterous actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Likeable protagonist who performed impossible feats with ease</td>
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<tr>
<td>• May be fictionalized or historical characters, animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Physical strength emphasized</td>
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Plots:
• Dramatic, action-packed adventures
• Length and complexity vary

Adapted from Goforth & Spillman 194
Telling Stories