

# Identity and Identification in Campus Lore

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**Abstract:** As a form of modern urban legend, school legends have become a symbol of campus culture and are spread through the internet and orally. These school legends, which are based on some real historical elements and are mixed with a bit of spirituality and spooky atmosphere, are not only entertaining anecdotes for the students and teachers living on campus, but also become an important part of the school culture, contributing to their perception of individual identity and group identity.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The meaning of "Campus Lore"

Legends are a unique form of narrative, not only important in everyday life, but also influential in independent functional communities - campuses - because of their unverifiable mystique. The "campus legend" is one of ten categories of urban legends distinguished by the American scholar J.H. Brunvand, such as the "one-word exam question".<sup>[1]</sup> In fact, they have become an important part of the current campus culture and have been widely told and disseminated among the university students.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the context of a narrative based on the school environment and premised on an atmosphere of suspense, the stories that are derived can only be understood by those who have spent time here, and behind them is precisely the identification and belonging of the students within that school to a unique identity. By categorising the more common school legends currently found in online societies, it is easy to see that the elements in these stories can be applied in different school environments, and although they rely on different buildings and accidents, they can always be projected to a certain location and have an impact on the student body. However, when all students are confronted with the same established, unchanging building and a recorded history, why do differences emerge in the process of recall and discussion? Furthermore, what significance do these campus legends highlight for students at different times?

### 1.2 The identity of "Campus Lore"

On this basis, and leaving aside the 'unexplained' part of school legends, and considering them as a performance in the current oral transmission process, how do current students 're-enact' these legends? And, furthermore, how are we to understand the individual in their 'performative' behaviour? The answers to these questions revolve around the subject of speech, in other words, this paper aims to examine the recurring 'I' of students in the oral transmission of school legends.

## 2. The text being communicated

### 2.1 What is the "text"?

As a symbolic complex, the formal and structural characteristics of the text constitute its "textuality", which can only be interpreted if it coincides with the "The textuality can only be interpreted when it coincides with the context, in order to obtain its "coherence".<sup>[3]</sup> What we should make clear here is that the meaning of "text" is not just characters, chapters and bibliographies, but can also be dialogues, acts, environments, and so on. When 'text' is given more elements, the content it refers to becomes more complex. So, whether a school legend is published online or transmitted orally, we can see it as a communicated text. When trying to understand this text, then, we should first analyse its own elements and then examine its formal meaning.

### 2.2 The context of the "text"

It is well known that both on campus and in society contain a myriad of networks of relationships. In a given historical and cultural context, we are bound to have

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inseparable relationships with our surroundings. Of course, different forms of communication have their own programmes, such as piecing together and interpreting fragments through known histories. However, as the influence of history itself becomes weaker, we begin to try to construct our own perception of the campus and affirmation of our identity in different legends.

In terms of why campus legends occur, they can mostly be attributed to historical factors, i.e. they evolve from something that happened here in history. However, when we searched the internet, there were some discrepancies between the results and the interviews obtained from the fieldwork. For example, there is more continuity in the descriptions on the internet, and the author focuses more on telling the whole story. However, because there are more interviews or conversations in the fieldwork, it is more like the free recall of the narrator. If both are considered as ways of telling, then "storytelling involves a demonstration of the ability to grasp the way in which the story is told, and the way in which the storytelling is accomplished becomes the object of evaluation"<sup>[4]</sup>.

So the two contexts then take on different meanings. For people who talk face-to-face, when faced with a concept that they cannot clearly define, they choose what is more acceptable and lean in the direction that the other person takes as an expectation. This means that in the framework of communication aimed at a particular sphere, people will first choose their entry point within the sphere of the experience they have shared with the person they are communicating with. However, for those who communicate on the internet, they do not know the identity of the people who see the content and are more diverse in their descriptions, quoting professionals to prove the veracity of what they say. In summary, all the narrators are proving their narratives, but choose different perspectives.

### **2.3 The meaning of "text"**

Whether communicated directly or through texts on the internet, these expressions have become a one-off performance. We see the act of performance as situated behaviour, which takes place within the relevant contexts and conveys the meaning associated with that context<sup>[5]</sup>.

But how does this concern shape and establish the identity of the teller and the receiver? We believe there are two aspects. First, the narrator or writer establishes a temporal continuum in which he relates linear time in the traditional sense to himself in the present. In this overlapping of mechanical and recollected time, the ambivalence of the narration emerges, as the audience needs to fully mobilise past perceptions in order to respond to it. Then, on the basis of a certain exchange, both parties feel a sense of identification from time and unify their identities on this basis. In summary, both parties to the communication have a synergetic

atmosphere of expression and empathy, which provide the basis for identity.

## **3. Identified identity**

### **3.1 What is the "identity"?**

In understanding the actions of others, there is always a preference to include a specific episode in the narrative that relates both to the individual and to the context in which they act.<sup>[6]</sup> Regardless of the way in which the school legend is transmitted, the process is already symbolic of the metaphors extracted from the school being implanted in a group and thus forming a link between school culture and self-expression, which is, of course, necessary for a particular school culture. According to Duan Yifu's distinction between 'places', the campus is a 'place of care' that is populated with students' memories and emotions. All the things they experience and all the information they receive on campus are silently integrated into their perception of the campus, full of rich and stable emotional meaning. In their way of expressing themselves, each student who has spent time here is no longer an individual, but a collective associated with the school.

What is identity? Identity in a narrow sense refers to your origin and status. However, with the transformation of society and culture, the scope of our definition of identity has gradually expanded. Identity is no longer the established identity of the language user under the variant sociolinguistic paradigm, but a dynamic concept constructed by the interacting parties through various means and resources of interaction and negotiation of meaning in the process of interaction.<sup>[7]</sup> For the purposes of this study, identity is the understanding and identification with the culture to which one belongs. This identity is different from acceptance and change on a material level and is not acquired purely through external means. Rather, it is a dependence on a fixed place that arises from being in an area that is familiar to us. Over time, the place becomes part of one's identity. This awareness is built on the expectations of the campus culture and is transformed in each individual, culminating in a collective, stable evaluation.

### **3.2 The meaning of the 'identity'**

This identity appears in expression when we need to present it to the outside world, i.e. the externalisation of identity. The externalization of identity depends on two factors in the communicative environment: the self-identification of identity and the joint identification of the self and others with their identity in the communicative environment.<sup>[8]</sup> And we try to make ourselves more easily understood by other groups, even if only in a "virtual community". Eventually, this

identification unconsciously becomes the criterion that distinguishes us from the Other.

In this way, it is the 'campus' that materialises itself through the 'legends', and the students participate in the continuation and re-creation of the content of the legends from one generation to the next. In this process, the school legend becomes one of the vehicles for the learned experience of school life. The act of understanding, performing and appreciating the 'text' becomes a representation and a medium through which we all acquire a certain identity, a medium of continuity with our past.<sup>[9]</sup> The unique cultural symbols constructed make it possible for people to understand campus culture.

We can say that the transition from individual to collective, from perception to identity, is a transmutation of identity, a transformation from a single to a composite status. The 'messages' given to students by school legends not only provide them with another perspective on school culture, but also expand the scope for students to entertain themselves. These messages are not scary or absurd, weird or funny, they are just one of the elements that make up an identity. So the campus legends that have developed on campus epitomise the exchange and fusion of history and modernity. These drum stories, the value of their existence and the breadth of their circulation reveal their own unique sociological value.

## 4. Concluding remarks

### 4.1 The social value of the 'identity'

As a part of society, the campus is one of the most important places for individuals to build interpersonal relationships. Campus legends are another way of learning about the school as a source of entertainment and conversation. The 'locality' of school legends makes it possible for only those who have lived there to understand some of the content of the stories. This contributes to a shared campus culture and a similar identity between different students, and thus a rich sense of belonging. This continuity of identity then allows individuals to continue to disseminate these campus legends and to distinguish themselves in this way, away from the campus environment.

Whether it is a 'classic version' with a few core elements or a fictionalized version made up by others, these legends can always be applied in different campus settings. If the subject is a school with a history of over a century, our definition of campus lore will overlap with pieces of campus history. In this case, there is a more subtle relationship between the 'real' and the 'told' or 'recorded' history of the school. It should be noted, however, that in different communication contexts the identities of the narrators are multiple. Each communicator's identity is a combination of both individual and social aspects, and the process of possessing these identities is an ongoing process of acceptance, absorption and determination. These

identities symbolise the cultural identity of the school on which the identities themselves are based.

### 4.2 The communication value of the 'identity'

Another element that contributes to this identity is the way in which it is communicated. From simple conversational communication to the present day, with the spread of information technology, online communication, which can be found everywhere, is invariably used to create situations through sharing and construction in an attempt to create a shared memory between the two parties. This type of textual interaction, which is not limited to time or place, has changed the single experience of information extraction. When we analyse it in depth, we can see the entertainment component and cultural representations that point to the core of this text - 'identity'. Even after the students have graduated, they can extract representations of belonging to the school from their own memories, descriptions of representations that come out of the sidelines after they have placed an image of themselves in the campus environment. In this way, they are no longer individuals, but a collective associated with the school.

In short, every piece of school lore, whether or not it is actually associated with a particular period of history, is a piece that cannot be erased from the students' perception of the school. In other words, it is difficult to change its 'archetypal status' in the minds of the students. This school culture is very different from the culture of society, but we cannot deny the validity of the school legend itself. It is because everyone forms a group identity from it, and it provides a temporary habitat for the social identity of many students.

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