Urban Legend or Tragic Tale

The story of Amy Lynn Bradley and her supposed cruise ship abduction into sex slavery raises many questions and even if she did go missing, the events after her disappearance as well as the spreading of her story have transformed the tragedy into quite the urban legend. Amy was on a cruise somewhere near Colombia with her family and after a late night out with one of the ship’s band members, was never seen again. Years passed and her family never heard from her, although multiple sightings of Amy, including one from a Navy Seal, were reported and Amy was thought to be a sex slave around Venezuela.

Bradley’s story has become an urban legend because it has been repeated by countless people who may have seen the report of a girl going missing on a cruise ship on the news, or read about it online. This allows for multiple spins on one story because each news source has different ways of going about reporting the events. The fact that Amy was out partying on a cruise ship and was hanging around a member of the band on the boat, then goes missing, raise questions about her morals, something that is very apparent in many common urban legends. Ben Bardon, interviewee, was very removed from this story, not knowing exactly where he heard the legend when I asked him. This vaguely follows the friend of a friend rule that classifies stories as urban legends. The legend does not necessarily appear if you stopped right after she was abducted and left it at “… and she was never seen again,” but Ben went on to explain that there had been multiple sightings of a women that looked like Amy, matching tattoos and all, in a
brothel in Venezuela as well as website that showed pictures of sex slaves. These reports came years later and add an extra layer to the mystery that is Amy Lynn Bradley.

The most apparent issue in this urban legend, like most urban legends we have looked at, is the young women looking to cut loose and possibly experiment with her sexuality. We see this in legends like *The Roommates Death* or *The Lobster Tail Pregnancy*, legends that punished a woman for stepping outside the social norms that the world has placed on the female population. Amy Lynn Bradley, a seemingly normal girl, does not show signs that she would do anything crazy like jump off a moving cruise ship or run away when the boat was docked. She was a college age girl with a basketball scholarship which gives the impression that she intended to live a long life. When she disappears after spending the night with a cruise ship band member, we are lead to believe that things got intimate, which is what makes her vanishing a little more intriguing. The band member may have figured out that she was looking for sex and then sold her into sex slavery, or she may have gotten drunk and stumbled upon someone who did, we will never know unless Amy resurfaces to tell her truths, cementing this story as a legend.

After asking the group of guys I interviewed, Ben responded with this story of Amy Lynn Bradley. He did not explain why he chose this legend to share with us other than the fact that it was the first story he thought of that might be considered an urban legend. There is little to know situational context to analyze because Ben’s thoughts were guided to think about urban legends. Vice News, a news station that focuses on a lot of hot issues in the world, was playing on the television in the room but the volume was almost completely off. This is worth noting because maybe Ben saw the television flash images of other countries and all the problems that surround the world, causing his mind to think of a story where something goes wrong in a foreign country. Ben is a college student and comes from a family that can be compared easily to Amy’s family,
explaining why the story of Amy’s disappearance stuck in the back of Ben’s head. The anxiety of hearing about a girl his age disappearing on a family vacation resonates with Ben because he would be scared to go on a cruise knowing the dangers that could await. Amy’s story can be looked at in a deeper way because she was a woman who got taken advantage of because of her body parts. With the recent presidential race coming to a close America has had to look closer at a lot of the morals we hold as a country. It seems that to a lot of people the election of Donald Trump calls for a step back in rights for minorities such as foreigners and women. This story could now be told as a cautionary tale as to why we should not trust anyone that is not from the United States, saying that Amy was abducted because she was in foreign waters where everyone is a criminal. Her reason for being kidnapped could also be because she was a young woman who indulged in actions that are not acceptable by society. Because Ben was able to give me the name of the woman who was abducted as well as the seriousness of his voice when he told the story, gives the legend a feeling of authenticity, leading me to question how much of a legend this story may be. The context that Ben told the story made it difficult to look at Amy’s disappearance as just a story and not a tragic tale of a girl my age.

The biggest connection Amy’s story has to the legends we looked at in class would be a woman being punished because she decided to go home with a random guy in a band and sleep with him, we can make this assumption based on Ben’s slightly sarcastic tone when he says “went off and uh” when he explains the events in the story. Amy was looking for a good time with this band member that night and it turned into years of being a sex slave as the story suggests. This is a little bit of poetic justice because she did get the one thing she was looking for on her wild night on the cruise ship, but she got a more horrific and much larger dose of what she intended. It was not until I looked back at the story and applied my knowledge of urban legends
when I saw the poetic justice, because the story feels too real to think that Amy was sold into sex slavery just because she had a one night stand. This proves that the story is believable because the elements of a legend are rather low key and harder to pick out.

The Emotional Selection Hypothesis is very present when it comes to believing in this legend. Because Amy’s name was stated and she was never really heard from again makes the listeners feel her pain. She was the same age as the people that were a part of the urban legend discussion I held making each participant think about the likelihood of them going out one night on a cruise and the possibility of something terrible happening. The story would be a lot less believable if it was about a middle age man being sold into sex slavery because he went home with a girl in the ship’s band. A young girl such as Amy herself is looked at as a symbol for innocence so when people hear about innocence being taken away in trade for an ongoing struggle as a sex slave, they likely repeat the sad story. The multiple sightings of Amy after her abduction also add more to the emotional response, giving those who have heard the story a small glimmer of hope that Amy Lynn Bradley might still be out there. People will share this story in hopes of one day turning on the news and seeing Amy’s picture with a caption about how she has finally been found, giving said people the opportunity to say, “Hey remember that story about the girl on the cruise ship… she was found!”

There are two moral warnings about the dangers of having sex outside of the societal norms, the first being Amy’s night with the band member, the other being the Navy Seal who Amy meets and reaches out to for help. Amy went off with one of the band members and her punishment was to be forced into sex slavery for years to come. Her action of opening herself up to a man she had met only hours before is frowned upon by society because society tells young women to meet a nice man, date him, get married, and then start having sex to start a family and
because she defied the status quo, she was punished by the one thing she wanted to do in the first place. The Navy Seal’s interactions with Amy in the brothel where she was trapped in give the same moral warning, but this one reaches out to more men rather than Amy, who’s warning was directed towards young women. Amy told the Navy Seal that she was an American who needed help, but the man felt like he could not tell anyone he met her because of where he was and the activities he was participating in. The Seal went to the brothel looking for a shortcut to a good time, but instead he found Amy and was left with the knowledge that she was there against her will and there was nothing the Navy Seal was going to do about it.

Looking at how gender expectations effect this story, we can see that the men in the story, like men in most stories, are not judged as much due to their open sexuality and women are supposed to be these innocent little things that would not dare experiment with sex. The Navy Seal goes to a brothel looking to pay someone to have sex with him, an illegal act in most places not to mention completely immoral, and all he is left with is a crisis of conscious knowing he left Amy there and was not going to get her help, something that may not even effect some men. Amy decides to have a night of passion with the band member she met on the cruise and is taken advantage of and sold into sex slavery where she is trapped indefinitely. Amy’s decision to go home with the band member can be seen as morally wrong, but it is an action that is seen as typical for college aged people. We see that the man participated in a far worse act and received a minute, if any, punishment for his actions, whereas the woman broke a moral code that is starting to slip away, and was punished by one of the worst things imaginable. This fits with the gender expectations set on men and women today because it is seen as a proof of masculinity when a man has sex, but women are supposed to save themselves and stay pure, so when the two
have sex women tend to be judged harsher and it is almost praised when a man can say he had sex.

Amy Lynn Bradley’s story falls somewhere in between an urban legend and a tragic tale of a young woman sold into sex slavery. Regardless of the label you give the story, we can use the tools learned in class to evaluate the events and make connections to characteristics found in urban legends. The situational context that the story was told as well as the emotions inflicted when hearing what happened authenticate the tale, making it easy to pass on again and again. Because Amy has supposedly been seen years after her disappearance, the story resonates with its recipients while also diving deeper into the mysterious conditions of Miss Bradley’s vanishing.