

Project description

This research project is related to magical practices and judgements of their efficacy. The magical practices of interest are those used to harm someone. Psychologists Paul Rozin and Carol Nemeroff demonstrated that magical beliefs/practices are based on the idea of contamination. As defined by psychologists and biologists, contamination involves transmission of a contaminated substance from a source (a person or an object), that is also “a vehicle” of this substance, to a recipient (another person or object). In some cases, contamination includes a medium that transfers a contaminated substance from the source to the recipient. This substance (essence) then becomes part of the recipient’s body (Rozin, Nemeroff 1990)

Contamination activates strong emotions of disgust and fear; any contact with contaminated things, however minor, is repulsive (Bloom, 2004). According to evolutionary psychologists, these emotions are an outcome of an evolutionary pressure that might keep humans from contact with toxic substances and objects that might cause disease. Although what is disgusting is partially influenced by culture, a widespread feature is that those substances that spontaneously trigger disgust are objects likely to contain infectious agents, including dead bodies, rotting foods, and bodily fluids such as feces, phlegm, vomit, blood, and semen, as it motivates proximal avoidance of such things (Tybur, Lieberman, Griskevicius 2009).



Research question:

What is the role (if any) of disgusting items (that trigger emotions such as disgust and fear) in magical practices?

Hypotheses:

H: Magical practices that include disgusting items will be perceived as more effective than those without it.

H1: Magical practices based on contact will be more effective than those based on imitation

H2: The most effective magical practices will be those in which a disgusting item is ingested.

H3: Among the magical practices, those with personal (disgusting) items (blood, hair, saliva etc.) will be perceived as the most effective.

H0: Disgusting items mentioned in described magical practices do not influence judgements of efficacy of those practices.

EXPERIMENT:

Material:

The series of randomly ordered vignettes are used and participants evaluate how effective they find described magical practices. Actions differ according to concrete items and methods.

Each vignette introduces a hypothetical problem and then a possible magical practice is described that has been used to solve the problem.

Stories vary according to key components (**independent variables**) based on the hypotheses: the presence of a disgusting item or non-disgusting item, contact or imitative magic, personal/or non-personal disgusting item, per oral/ non oral contact. The main dependent variable is **the efficacy evaluation**.

Procedure:

Participants are asked how effective they find a described magical practice on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 10 (strongly disagree).

The paranormal belief scale (Tobaczyk, 2004) is used to test participants’ religiosity/spirituality.

As activation of the emotion of disgust is important in this research, participants complete also the disgust scale (Olatunji et al., 2007) to see if there are any correlations among disgust sensitivity, the tendency for magic beliefs and judgements of magical practices’ efficacy.

Sample:

- a cross-national student sample - participants are recruited through the website Survey monkey (www.surveymonkey.net) and information about the survey are sent via social networks
- participants from an ecologically valid environment (Slovakia and Serbia), this population might be more familiar with described magical practices and therefore participants might judge them differently; however, if my hypothesis is correct there still should be some similarity among the participants choices



REFERENCES:

Bloom, Paul, 2004: Descartes’ Baby: How the science of child development explains what makes us human. New York: Basic Books.

Legare, C.; Souza, A.L.: Evaluating ritual efficacy. Evidence from supernatural. In: Cognition 124, p. 1-15.

Olatunji, B., Tolin, D.F., Sawchuk, C.N., Williams, L.N., Abramowitz, J.S., Lohr, J.M., Elwood, L.S., 2007: The disgust scale: Item analysis, Factor structure, and Suggestions for Refinement. In: Psychological Assessment 19/3, p. 281-279.

Rozin, Paul.; Nemeroff, Carol, 1990: The Laws of Sympatetic Magic. A psychological analysis of similarity and Contagion. In: Stigler, J.W.; Schweder, R.A.; Herdt, G.: Cultural Psychology. Essays on Comparative Human Development. Cambridge University Press

Sorenson, J., Lienard, P., Fenny, Ch., 2006: Agent and instrument in judgements of ritual efficacy. In: Journal of Cognition and Culture 6/3, p. 463-482.

Tybur, J.M.; Lieberman, D., Griskevicius, V., 2009: Microbes, Mating and Morality: Individual Differences in Three Functional Domains of Disgust. In: Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 97 (1), s. 103 -122.