Bear Spends Time in Our Dreams Now: Magical Thinking, Ritual, and Spiritual Considerations in Counseling Theory and Practice

Joseph E. Trimble, Ph.D.
Center for Cross-Cultural Research
Department of Psychology
Western Washington University
“Never look for a psychological explanation unless every effort to find a cultural one has been exhausted.”

- Margaret Mead (1959, p. 16) quoting William Fielding Ogburn, one of her mentors at Columbia University.
“The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively—both against other such wholes and against social and natural background—is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.”

- Clifford Geertz, 1973, p. 34.
PURPOSE OF THE PRESENTATION

• The importance of inclusive cultural empathy.

• The reframing of “individualistic empathy” into inclusive cultural empathy.

• To encourage use of relationship-centered alternatives based on indigenous psychological perspectives and practices.
THE CONCEPTUAL IMAGE OF MULTICULTURAL QUESTIONS

1). When does a specific psychological theory provide valid explanations?

2). What are the cultural boundaries?

3). Which psychological patterns always appear?

4). Which patterns only sometimes appear?
Diane’s Bear Dream Story
Four levels of development are 1). infancy, 2). preschool, 3). childhood, and 4). adolescence. Each stage is characterized by a general cognitive structure that affects all of the child's thinking. **Sensorimotor**: (birth to about age 2) -- **Preoperational**: (begins about the time the child starts to talk to about age 7) - **Concrete**: (about first grade to early adolescence) -- **Formal Operations**: (adolescence)

In **Preoperational Stage** speech becomes more social, less egocentric. The child has an intuitive grasp of logical concepts in some areas. Concepts formed are crude and irreversible. Easy to believe in **magical thinking** increases. Reality not firm. Perceptions dominate judgment.
WORKING DEFINITIONS OF MAGIC

1).....is an intuitive, and possibly universal, aspect of human thinking.

2).....generally does not make sense in terms of contemporary science.

3).....typically relies on subjective evidence and involves the assumption of correspondence between the subjective, internal world and the world of reality.

4).....may serve important cognitive, emotional, social, and adaptive functions.

5).....involves the sympathetic principles of similarity, and contagion, and the notion of an imperceptible force that carries, drives, or provides mechanisms for effects.

- Nemeroff & Rozin, 2000, p. 5.
Magical thinking relies on two laws.....

1). The law of similarity where an effect resembles its cause.

2). The law of contagion where things which were once in physical contact maintain a connection even after the physical effect has been broken.

“Sympathetic Magic” – the manipulation of effigies or similar symbols or tokens can cause changes to occur in the thing the symbol represented.

1. **FORCES** – forces in nature that are separate from and operate independently of any spiritual beings and from those identified by science.

2. **POWER** – forces are energized by a mystical power that exists in varying degrees in all things.

3. **A COHERENT INTERCONNECTED COSMOS** – everything in the cosmos is actually or potentially interconnected – not only spatially but also temporally – past, present, future.

4. **SYMBOLS** – words, thoughts, or actions that not only represent other things but can take on the qualities of the things they represent.

5. **SYMPATHETIC MAGIC** – Frazer’s laws of homeopathy (things resemble one another) and contact (things remain connected after they’re separated spatially or temporally).

Magical thinking underlies a vast, often unseen universe of small rituals that accompany people through every waking hour of a day.

It’s the feeling and belief that our thoughts and actions can somehow control things can be a needed feeling – the opposite of helplessness that often accompanies depression.

Magical thinking for many is reality and therefore it’s not “magical.” It’s a magical belief.

People who hold magical beliefs or engage in magical behavior are often aware that their thoughts and action or both are unreasonable and irrational….but they are unable to rid themselves of such behavior.
MAGICAL THINKING IN CONTEMPORARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE


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“Many of today’s complimentary or alternative systems of healing involve magical beliefs, manifesting ways of thinking based on principles of cosmology and causality that are timeless and absolutely universal. So similar are some of these principles among all human populations that some cognitive scientists have suggested they are innate to the human species and this suggestion is being strengthened by current scientific research....”

“The person believes that his or her thoughts, words, or actions might, or will in some manner, cause or prevent a specific outcome in some way that defies the normal laws of cause and effect…..

. . . . Magical thinking is seen in children, in people in primitive cultures, and in Schizotypal Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.”
“The belief that ideas are all-powerful is inherent in animistic thought and belief systems but also common in obsessional neurosis, where the same kind of magical thinking occurs as a symptom. It consists in the belief that one can transform or influence the external world through one's thoughts alone. According to Freud, omnipotence of thoughts underscores a general trait characteristic of every neurosis. ‘Neurotics . . . are only affected by what is thought with intensity and pictured with emotion, whereas agreement with external reality is a matter of no importance’” (1912-13, p. 86).

Do you believe in telepathy?
When in the dark do you often see shapes or forms even though there’s nothing there?
Does your own voice ever seem so far away?
Do you have vivid dreams that disturb your sleep?
Do things sometimes feel as if they were not real?
Have you ever felt that you were communicating with another person telepathically?
Are your thoughts sometimes so strong that you can hear them?
Do you believe that dreams can come true?
Do you ever feel that your thoughts don’t belong to you?
Do you ever have a sense of vague danger or sudden dread for reasons that you do not understand?

MAGICAL IDEATION SCALE
(Selected Items)

• Some people can make me aware of them just by thinking about me.
• I have noticed sounds on my records that are not there at other times.
• I sometimes have a feeling of gaining or losing energy when people look at me or touch me.
• Is it a little bit silly to believe aliens might be controlling things here on earth?
• I have had the momentary feeling that I might not be human.
• I have occasionally had the silly feeling that a TV or radio broadcaster knew I was listening to him.
• If reincarnation were true, it would explain some unusual experiences I have had.

The scale measures: thought-broadcasting; passivity; auditory hallucinations; thought-withdrawal; aberrant beliefs; visual hallucinations; and thought-reading.

“….the learned ability of counselors to accurately gain an understanding of the self-experience of clients from other cultures – an understanding informed by counselors’ interpretation of cultural data. Cultural empathy also involves the ability of counselors to communicate this understanding effectively with an attitude of concern for culturally different clients.”

- Ridley & Lingle, 1996, p. 32.
CULTURAL EMPATHY
CHARACTERISTICS

Cultural empathy….

1). Is multidimensional.
2). Is an interpersonal process.
3). Does not depend upon cultural similarity and neutrality of client and counselor.
4). Can be learned.

-- Ridley & Lingle, 1996, p. 32.
Counselors and therapists should “respect culture as a necessary psychological defense and design interventions accordingly; promote interventions emphasizing meaning construction at the community level and support the collective (community) and individual construction of meaning that sustains adaptive action; support and assist individuals and communities in the identification of standards and values they identify with that promote adaptive action in current realities; and support and assist communities in cultural recovery through content analysis of traditional stories.”

Westernized perspectives, which have dominated the field of mental health, must not become the exclusive criteria of "modernized" psychotherapy.

- Pedersen et al., 2008.
The task is to construct a complex and dynamic balance of tendencies that a competent counselor or psychotherapist can manage without distorting the truth in any cultural context.
“Just as rational thinking helps us to cope with problems in the physical world, magical thinking and magical beliefs come to our aid when we deal with problems in our personal, social, and emotional lives. That is why, despite the popular view, magical thinking and magical beliefs (religion included) go well with common logic and are a useful complement to scientific thinking and rational reasoning” (p. 173).

- Eugene Subbotsky (2010)
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