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Some Thoughts on Magic: Its Use and Effect in Undergraduate Student Life

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Introduction

Exploring Bronislaw Malinowski's (1954) claim that people will resort to performing magical practices as a means of gaining a degree of control over uncertain and unpredictable situations, George Gmelch (2009, 1978) looked at the use of magic in American baseball – its nature, prevalence, function, and effect. He found that modern-day baseball players were not so unlike Trobriand fishermen of the 1920's-30's, employing magic as an attempt to sway chance outcomes in their favour. The lasting contribution of Gmelch's baseball study lies not only in the recognition that the taboos, fetishes (e.g. good luck charms) and rituals followed by American athletes are in fact forms of magic, but that they constitute habitual and repeated practices performed with the same intent and ultimate effect as in Trobriand fishing and myriad other culturally specific situations worldwide: to reduce anxiety.

Gmelch (Gmelch and Felson 1979) subsequently expanded his investigation of the use of magic in industrialized societies by conducting a quantified study of the relationship between uncertainty and magic. In this study, undertaken with Richard Felson, a central objective was to determine whether the use of magic in uncertain situations was motivated by experiential knowledge of its ability to reduce anxiety through its performance or, alternately, whether its use was rooted in cognitive processes relating to belief in its ability to alter the forces of luck. As a case study, Gmelch and Felson examined the use of

magic by American and Irish college students and their beliefs about the ability of magic to alleviate anxiety and produce favourable outcomes (1979:587). They asked a selected group of sociology students to complete a questionnaire which ranked a series of activities according to the degree of anxiety the students felt in undertaking them and the students' use of magic in conjunction with the activities. Included in the list were sports, illness, gambling, dangerous activities, and face-to-face interactions such as dating and interviews (Gmelch and Felson 1979:587-588). Absent from the list were activities associated with the performing arts, such as music and theatre. Based on the quantitative analysis of the students' responses, Gmelch and Felson (1979: 588-589) concluded the following:

1. American students used magic more frequently in activities such as sports and gambling, where the outcomes are relatively uncertain.
2. Both groups of students used magic less frequently in situations (such as illness) where the outcome was more certain.
3. Students who used magic made them feel better as it relieved anxiety.
4. The students' use of magic derived from a belief in its potential ability to alter the forces of luck rather than its ability to reduce anxiety.
5. Although students who used magic did not believe strongly in its efficacy in terms of its ability to produce favourable or desired results, they used it in uncertain situations anyway, as a 'just in case' measure.

The following collection of short essays presents the thoughts and reflections of some first year cultural anthropology students at The University of Western Ontario about their use of magic in sports, performance arts, and other situational

contexts. In these insightful and inspiring pieces, the students explore the nature and function of magic in contemporary student life, drawing on their own personal experiences. Their perspectives offer an opportunity to reflect on the commonalities and differences in these Canadian students' experiences with magic and those of the American and Irish students evaluated by Gmelch and Felson in the 1970's.

Wizards on ice: the magic of hockey

Mike Sattin

George Gmelch's (2009) article, *Baseball Magic*, presents a detailed portrayal of the use of rituals, taboos, and fetishes (like good luck charms) in the sport of baseball. As a sports fan and player, I have witnessed (and even practiced) many of Gmelch's examples of magic, as well as their equivalents in other sports. Hockey is one such sport where magic and superstitions figure prominently. Although magic may not *physically* affect the way a game is played, it does give players confidence in their abilities, which seems to manifest itself in a psychological advantage that leads to increased performance.

The most common way to bring magic into a sport is through rituals and routines repeated on a regular basis. These rituals usually have no logical advantage and are usually established and repeated due to some sort of previous success, as Gmelch (2009) describes in his article. One of the most vivid examples of this in hockey is the way goalies will often prepare themselves in their crease before every game. Some goalies take this ritual to great extremes and talk to their goal posts throughout the game, like Patrick Roy used to do when playing for both the Montreal Canadiens and the Colorado Avalanche.

Another important ritual that most players develop over time is the specific way they warm-up for a game. Some players

like to sit calmly in a certain area of the ice, stretching, relaxing and attempting to visualize the upcoming game, whereas others like to hit the cross-bar during the warm-up to prove to themselves that they are feeling confident with their skills. There are also those who prefer to have a bad warm-up so that they do not 'waste' good shots. Players may develop certain rituals because they worked once and thus are repeated to increase the chances of similar successes. For instance, I found that if I was silent and contemplative before a game, I would play better and, therefore, I began to do this on a regular basis. One of my friends used to put his skates on before he put his pants on for the same reason. Although this was very impractical, he said that he continued to do this because he scored a goal every time. Another important ritual performed by many teams is listening to a certain song before going out onto the ice. This 'pump-up' song seems to motivate players to play harder and it is often chosen because it was played continually during a winning streak.

Taboos are also prevalent in hockey and most players adhere to them at all cost. The most well-known hockey taboo is that teams and players must avoid holding the Stanley Cup until they actually win it themselves. An example of how seriously players take this taboo is when Rob Niedermayer refused to touch the Stanley Cup for the entire summer he was at home with his brother, Scott Niedermayer, after Scott won it in 2003 playing for the New Jersey Devils. It was not until four years later (in 2007), when the two brothers were playing for the same team (the Anaheim Ducks), that both were able to hoist the Cup over their heads. There is a similar taboo associated with the Prince of Wales Trophy and Clarence S. Campbell Bowl, which are awarded to the champions of the Eastern and Western conferences, respectively, during

the playoffs. In this case, however, players avoid holding these lower-level trophies because they do not want to 'jinx' themselves, the Stanley Cup being the ultimate trophy and the only one worthy of real celebration. Probably the most visible taboo in the NHL involves the 'playoff beard'. For at least two months and then continuing as long as their team is in the playoffs, most NHL players refrain from shaving their facial hair and thus grow a 'playoff beard'. Although there is no real evidence that adherence to this taboo brings about greater playoff success, the perceived efficacy of the playoff beard is linked to the fact that the New York Islanders managed to win four Stanley Cups during the 1980's and did not shave during any of their playoff runs. The belief is that this impressive record of wins, being quite rare, must have been somehow linked to their beards!

In my experience, fetishes – the term Gmelch (2009) uses to refer to 'good luck charms' – are not as prevalent in hockey as they might be in other sports such as baseball. Nonetheless, they still play an important role in bringing about a positive mindset for some hockey players. The most common type of good luck charm used by hockey players is a specific piece of clothing, undergarment, or jock-strap. An example of this is the lucky jump-suit that my friend wore underneath his hockey equipment for over ten years and refused to throw out, even though it barely fit him anymore. He truly believed that it brought him good luck and, therefore, continued to wear it. Another very common good luck charm in hockey is the 'lucky tape-job', which is when you tape your stick a certain way before every game because you believe that a certain pattern will enhance your ability to score. It is perhaps more often the case, however, that players will avoid re-taping their sticks after they have scored multiple goals in a game. The belief is that

the tape on the stick contributed in some way to the goals and, therefore, should not be discarded.

It would seem that magic is just as important in hockey as Gmelch proposes it is in baseball, since players in both sports use magic for the same reason: they believe it will enhance their abilities even though there is no scientific evidence that it actually does. What is interesting is that regardless of the lack of proof of its effectiveness, magic is still omnipresent and widespread in sports. As in baseball, the different forms of magic used by hockey players seem to function in the same way: they increase players' confidence and thus reduce their anxiety. In addition, players continue to use magic even though it has no 'logical' bearing on the outcome of a game. Perhaps most important, therefore, is the contribution magic makes to psychological aspects of the game, by enabling players to feel that they have done all that they can to bring about a favourable or desired outcome.

Routines and rituals at the rink

Simon Coutu

Rituals and other forms of magic such as good luck charms are used almost every day of an athlete's life. I have played sports for most of my life, starting at the young age of five years old. Admittedly, I too am a creature of habit, since as far back I can remember I have always had rituals that I follow when playing sports. I have played so many different sports that I could probably write a book about the rituals I have performed in different contexts. In this paper, however, I will focus on just one sport – hockey – and examine specific forms of magic I have used personally and how magic contributed to my performance. My taken-for-granted habits and experiences came to mind when I read George Gmelch's (2009) essay, *Baseball Magic*; they characterize both my hockey and refereeing

careers, both of which progressed to semi-professional levels. For me, hockey and rituals have always gone hand-in-hand, and even after understanding magic in an academic framework, I doubt that this will ever change.

It was over the course of my hockey career, which is now over, that I performed rituals most often. Before every game, I would always put on a pair of socks I received for my tenth birthday. Even though the socks had many holes and were as thin as nylons by the time I retired from hockey at the age of seventeen, I always wore them and considered them my 'lucky socks' since they won me scoring titles and skill competitions.

I also developed a specific routine that I undertook before every game I played from the age of ten onward. I would arrive at the rink an hour and a half before the game to sit in the stands and watch whatever was taking place on the ice before my game. Rather than actually watching what was happening, I would envision myself out on the rink making good plays and big hits. The positions I played for my team were power forward and first line center. An hour before the game, I would stretch with my line and then go for a run around the rink, always chewing spearmint gum and bearing the freezing temperatures. As I got ready in the dressing room, I would then put everything on 'right to left' and then reverse the order after the game by getting undressed from 'left to right'. Furthermore, I would make sure that I was the last one out of the dressing room and the last one on the ice.

Before stepping out onto the ice, I would jump four times and I would always run out onto it, as if I was in a track race. In addition, if I was not in starting position and thus already on the ice, I always made sure that I was the last one on the bench. I also made sure that I was the last player to leave the ice in between periods, as well as at the

end of the game. On the bench, after each shift, I would squirt ice-cold water down my back, bang my head on my stick three times and bang each skate twice on the ground. When I hopped the boards, I would only hop to the right. I would always tap the ice with the toe of my stick before every draw at center, and I always celebrated my goals in exactly the same way, with a point to the guy who had passed me the puck.

Interestingly, these rituals did not end when I stopped playing hockey and instead have persisted throughout my refereeing career. I have refereed hockey for five years now and I still follow the same routine that I always have when getting ready for a game. Over time, however, my pre-game routine for refereeing has developed its own quirks: now I only stretch for five minutes and I do so on a carpet, and I always listen to the same three songs (unless I fall during that game and then I change these songs to the next top three on the 'most played list' on my iPod). I always have three bottles of G2 Gatorade with me and two of them must be the same flavour (purple). The third bottle must be a different flavour and I change the specific flavour for every game. I must admit that I still chew spearmint gum every time I take the ice. Before every game, I also tape my index and middle finger on my left hand where I hold my whistle; every time, twice around, with white stick tape. I change the laces on my skates before each game so that they are new, fresh and white, with no marks. When I go out onto the ice I still run out like I am in a race, but I now do two laps of the ice surface and then stretch at center ice. There are more intricate parts of some rituals which I cannot share as I consider them to be a secret, but each is done every time I referee a hockey game.

Rituals like my pre-game routine provide a comfort factor and relax players so they do not think too much and stress

themselves out. I can honestly say that my rituals have always helped me and perhaps have contributed to my ability to reach a professional level of participation in hockey. I know I only do these things because I am nervous, but that is probably the case with every other professional. Other referees have their own rituals, such as heating up their skates before every game or taking their skates off in between periods, to name just a few. It is a matter of personal preference: what makes you comfortable out there? Wayne Gretzky ate two hot dogs and fries before every game he played when he was a kid. Similarly, Sidney Crosby still re-tapes his stick in-between each and every period of hockey he plays. These rituals have different meanings to each of us, but the fact remains that we do them to stay calm and centred.

In my opinion, rituals like the ones I perform are a fundamental part of playing any sport. They enable you to keep your mind on having fun and playing the game you love. It is not as if I am going to lose a game as a referee, yet I still perform my routines and rituals before every game. I do this because it makes me feel more comfortable. It enables me to know that the game will go well since I have prepared myself for it in the right way.

Magic rocks!

Mike Furlong

In *Baseball Magic*, George Gmelch (2009) discusses baseball players and their rituals, good luck charms (fetishes), and taboos. From an anthropological standpoint, it is important to recognize that these practices are not only found throughout baseball in the USA, but are practically universal. For example, while watching a game of baseball in Cuba, I noticed that the players did some of the same routines that Gmelch describes, such as tapping the ground with the bat before swinging and

fixing their baseball caps in a particular way. Similar routines and rituals can also be observed in other sports. In hockey, for instance, it is commonplace to throw hats on the ice after a player has scored three goals (a 'hat trick'). These forms of magic are also not exclusive to sports alone, being prevalent in the performing arts and other contexts where preparing for your best performance contributes directly to a successful or positive outcome.

A topic that I believe has not been explored very thoroughly is the rituals, fetishes, and taboos of rock musicians, specifically before a show or 'gig'. My interest in this topic stems from my experience playing the guitar and drums and the development of my own rather odd idiosyncrasies that might be considered forms of magic. For example, when I write music, I only use one specific guitar. My other guitars are used solely to play songs I have already written or ones I have learned. After playing my guitars, I always clean the strings in the same way, and I always use the same kind of plectrum (or 'pick') when I play. One of the more strange habits I have developed is always carrying a guitar pick in my pocket wherever I go. In fact, if I happen to leave the house without a pick in my pocket, it will bother me all day.

I am not exactly sure what motivates my routines and rituals, especially since some seem to make more sense than others. Music has always been a large part of my life, and I tend to listen to the same songs and bands when I am doing specific things or on specific occasions but for no particular reason that I can think of. I do not consider myself a superstitious or religious person on any level, however, I continue to do these things, perhaps just out of habit. In contrast, my reason for cleaning the strings is clear because I simply like the feeling of new strings. Similarly, carrying a pick around with me could be considered to relate to

'luck' or 'good karma'. The day of my first date with my current girlfriend, now of ten months, I came home and found a pick in my pocket. Since then, whenever I am leaving the house, especially if I am with her, I always make sure to carry a pick.

Many professional rock musicians also have strange rituals, taboos, and fetishes that they follow, particularly before a concert or show. For example, Chris Martin of Coldplay claims that he has approximately 18 consistent pre-gig activities and practices. One of these is brushing his teeth, which apparently makes him feel "smarter". Similarly, Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys will always go into the audience before a show in order to "soak in" its energy. I am unsure if performing these types of rituals actually affects the quality of their singing or playing, but then again, who can say for sure.

In some cases there appears to be logic or a practical consideration that lies behind some of the routines and rituals that rock musicians perform before a gig. For instance, Corey Taylor, of the metal band Slipknot, (perhaps surprisingly) always listens to Billy Joel, drinks three pots of coffee, and smokes an entire pack of cigarettes before going on stage. The practice of drinking coffee and smoking excessively may make his vocals rougher sounding, as is typical in this genre. This band also has a 'huddle' before each show, similar to a huddle in football, and they say a kind of non-religious prayer to "psych themselves up". Similarly, Matt Pike of High on Fire, also a metal band, will lift weights, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol before a show to "psych himself up" for the performance ahead and to prepare his voice. A taboo he has, however, is that he will not drink whiskey, as he once had an embarrassing incident which he refers to as "the whiskey runs", when he soiled his pants due to excessive drinking of whiskey the

night before. Matt Pike does not refrain from drinking whiskey before a show because he thinks this will happen again. Rather, he does it because having the runs threw off "his energy" during the show – understandably!

For rock musicians, much like baseball players, some routines and taboos are believed to specifically enhance performance. For example, Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin drinks tea and irons his clothes before every show, to both relax and ensure that the show goes well. For similar reasons, Chris Adler, the drummer of the pioneering groove metal band, Lamb of God, plays drums (using a small practice kit, not actual drums) for two hours before every show. On the other hand, Matthew McDonough of Mudvayne, who is also a drummer, refuses to play his own drum kit unless he is in the studio or performing on stage, as he thinks that playing his own drums to warm up will throw off "his energy" for the show and thus lead to a bad performance

Rock also has rituals that are performed by both the band and audience. The iconic 'devil horns' symbol, made by making a fist and raising the index and pinky finger, has become synonymous with hard rock and metal but actually dates back hundreds of years. In the music scene, this gesture was arguably made popular by Dio of Black Sabbath. He made this gesture during shows not only because it resembled devil horns and meant 'rock on', but also because his grandmother often invoked it to "ward off evil". Since then, countless musicians and fans have emulated this gesture, perhaps purely out of habit, but it might also be viewed as a kind of group ritual. It is also interesting that this kind of imagery has a very different meaning in metal music than it does in any other music genre. Symbolic and explicit references to Satan, atheism, the devil, and other 'dark' forces are highly visible and widespread,

also occurring in lyrics. This ‘dark’ imagery would probably be considered ‘bad luck’ and thus ‘taboo’ in the context of any other genre of music besides rock and metal.

Although these examples offer only a brief glimpse into the rituals, taboos, and fetishes of rock musicians, it seems clear that this ‘magic’ is similar to that used by baseball players in terms of its intent and function. More often than not, these practices are undertaken to increase the chances that the musicians will have a good show and the fans will enjoy it. However, one difference between rock magic and baseball magic is that many bands have rituals they perform together as a group to ensure a good performance and not just rituals/actions performed as individuals. Nonetheless, the underlying beliefs are still there, and magic is even practiced by musicians who see themselves as neither religious nor superstitious. They continue to do these seemingly odd things because the last time they did, something good happened. As with my own rather odd routines, rituals, and practices that I continue to do so that I do not throw off a ‘lucky streak’, I still do not believe that luck really exists; these things are just habit for me.

My lucky stone

Madison Wood

Many people have various superstitions they believe in and live by; anything from ‘real’ magic to a lucky stone can mean the world to a person when faced with particular life circumstances. In this paper I talk about my family and our lucky stones and the effect they have had on our lives, especially recently. I have always been a strong believer in luck, fate, and karma. In November of this year, these three things came into my life with a strong force when my family found out that my Papa had cancer. My family had never had to endure anything like this before, and none of us

knew exactly what to do. Just as George Gmelch (2009) describes in his article, *Baseball Magic*, concerning the use of fetishes (good luck charms) by baseball players to gain some control over unpredictable situations, in my family’s time of uncertainty, my Papa reminded us all of our lucky stones and gave us all strength and comfort by bringing out his.

Ever since I was little, I would go up to my cottage and go looking for lucky stones on the beach with my Papa – a lucky stone being one with a hole directly through it. My Papa had a whole vase full of them, and during long summer days he would sit me down and show them all to me, explaining how much each one meant to him. He told me that a lucky stone is not a lucky stone unless you find it yourself, so I went looking for a long, long time until I finally found one. When I did, I brought it home and put it in my drawer, never to be looked at again, until this year.

When we found out my Papa had cancer, one thing became very apparent: how much my Papa’s lucky stone meant to him and thus to all of us. His lucky stone has two holes in it, so it is an especially rare find, and he made sure that the whole family would have their lucky stones with them whenever we took him to a medical appointment or went to his house. He carried his lucky stone with him in his pocket through every doctor’s appointment and chemotherapy session. He just had surgery two Tuesdays ago, and sure enough, right there on the bedside table close to his hospital bed sat his lucky stone – there every day during and since his operation.

This simple ‘fetish’ or good luck charm has come to mean a lot to my family over the past year. My Papa made it through his surgery and first round of chemotherapy with his lucky stone to bring him the luck, belief, and hope that he needed during a very challenging and uncertain time. This

shows how much simple things like this can mean to a person. As crazy as it sounds, I believe that our family's stones – his and ours – have kept my Papa going over the past year, and have kept him wanting to keep trying. They have also given my family hope. Who is to say whether or not such things actually keep people alive? I say all the power to the people who use them, especially if doing so helps you to make it through those tough times.

In world of uncertainty, magic makes sense
Erik Pettersson

In a world of uncertain outcomes, people often rely on rituals and other forms of magic to provide them with feelings of control and consistency. Rituals, good luck charms, and taboos help us to rationalize the consequences of our actions by interpreting a certain event as the product of performing a certain action. These assumptions are almost always unreasonable when looked at from a scientific point of view, and yet many people still believe that these charms and invisible forces have supposedly created the circumstances around them.

Everyone has some knowledge of and experience with taboos, fetishes (like good luck charms) and rituals. We start learning about them and incorporating them into our lives from a very young age, maybe even from the point when we first possess the capacity to learn. Some of the common taboos to which I was first exposed as a child include: not speaking of an event if it is going well, making sure you do not think that you are sick for fear of actually bringing on an illness, and avoiding stepping on cracks so that my Mother's back would not break. These very minor taboos had little actual affect on my life as a child. When I thought about what rituals I had possibly taken part in growing up and their possible impact on my life, I immediately thought of going to church. Religion and religious

rituals are ubiquitous means through which people derive comfort and hope during times of despair and ambiguity. For example, practicing Catholics have a large variety of rituals that they perform in order to ensure the benevolence of God and to help them feel better about themselves or their current life circumstances. These rituals assure the person that things are going to be fine and that the future and resulting outcomes of their actions will unfold smoothly and, hopefully, in their favour. This belief is demonstrated clearly in George Gmelch's (2009) article, *Baseball Magic*, in which he describes the ritualistic practices of his past teammates – Roman Catholic Latino players – who would kiss their crucifix necklaces or saint pendants prior to going up to bat for good luck.

As with religion, sports of all kinds are abundant with rituals, taboos, and fetishes, which can be thought of as active attempts on the part of the athletes to consolidate and steer outcomes through what seems like illegitimate means. When I played basketball as a kid, it seemed as though we were always one of the final four teams in the tournaments we played in. I cannot say that this success was linked to a particular ritual regularly performed by myself and my teammates, but I do recall that our coach would always wear the same black outfit every time we were in a championship game. I noticed this because we would often play up to four games in a day, and each time, before the final game, he would always change into the black outfit. I overheard him once telling one of my teammates that he wore the black outfit because it was something he started doing it in University ten years previously when he played basketball. He said that there was one season that he was injured for the final game, requiring him to sit on the bench, and his coach had told him to dress nicely. They won that game and, outside of the fact that

he did not play, the only thing that he could think of that was different about that game was that he had been wearing black. He said that from that moment on, every time he is on the sidelines during a championship game, he always wears black for his team for good luck. I always found him to be a bit of an odd character so I had never thought previously about the possibility that his practice of wearing black for championship games was in fact a form of ritual or magic that is practiced widely by athletes on all levels. When I started thinking about the significance of my coach's black outfit and some of the other odd practices I have observed (and taken for granted) in a range of professional sports, including basketball, it immediately became apparent that most athletes have rituals, charms, and taboos, just like the baseball players described in Gmelch's (2009) article. For example, it is well-known that Michael Jordan always wore his North Carolina basketball shorts under his Chicago Bulls shorts, and that LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers always throws a hand full of chalk up into the air before every game. These are just a couple of examples of the many kinds of strange things that professional athletes repeat from game to game to prepare themselves for the tasks that lie ahead. As spectators and fans, we do not deem these practices as 'odd' *per se* when performed by these sports legends, and perhaps we accept them as part in parcel of their exceptional performance.

In a world full of uncertainties, rituals and beliefs help people to focus on their current situation and give them assurance that there is no need for worry as they have taken some necessary precautions to help prevent unfavourable repercussions or outcomes from occurring. When evaluating the significance of these practices from a scientific standpoint, it seems ridiculous to think that there is any validity

to belief in the efficacy of rituals, fetishes, and taboos. However, when considered from a Freudian point of view, which emphasizes the major role played by unconscious motivations and drives, this really does not seem that far-fetched. The concept of wish fulfillment, while not a demonstrated reality, challenges us with the thought that maybe if we think a certain object or routine makes us more focused than it actually will. After all, it only makes sense to act in ways that you know will put your mind at ease, especially during times of doubt and uncertainty.

Summative comments

The student perspectives expressed in these short essays offer interesting and even thought-provoking insight into some of the ways these Canadian students experience and perceive magic; the various uses of magic in 2010 are not only comparable to those of the Irish and American students presented in Gmelch and Felson's (1979) study but also how they have changed in significant ways. For example, as the essays by Coutu, Sattin, and Pettersson demonstrate, the use of magic continues to be prevalent in North American sports across all levels of participation. It is also apparent that athletes begin to learn about and incorporate various forms of magic into the regular performance of sports activities from a very early age. The fact that these students had not really thought of these habitual practices as being forms of magic until asked to consider their own experiences with the kinds of rituals, taboos, and fetishes described by Gmelch for baseball is perhaps a strong indicator of how natural these learned behaviours and attendant beliefs seem to the participant within this specific cultural context. The use of magic in hockey, in particular, appears to be strongly associated with relieving anxiety, often taking the form of routines and rituals that function as a means to sharpen mental focus

and dissipate nervous energy, thereby contributing to perceived control over uncertain outcomes and individual performance level. The essays by Sattin and Coutu not only vividly describe the feelings of comfort that derive from the regular enactment of consistent and specific patterns of behaviour (whether this is a routine or ritual) but also demonstrate a full recognition of the 'mental edge' that such practices foster, as well as the importance of this mental edge in achieving a good or favourable athletic performance. The fact that students in 2010, whether currently participating in sports or not, are fully cognisant of this connection is undoubtedly a direct reflection of the expansion of the field of sports psychology since the 1970's.

The omission of activities relating to the performing arts as a category of experience selected for evaluation by Gmelch and Felson (1979) seems somewhat surprising, especially if one considers the various first experiences each of us has had, particularly in elementary school, with public speaking, school plays, music class, choir, and music and dance lessons, including the obligatory recitals. For many, the level of anxiety felt when participating in sports and other social interactions pales in comparison to the bone-chilling fear experienced when first confronted with the task of getting up in front of a class to give a speech or going on stage in front of the school, either alone or as part of a group, to sing, play an instrument, say a line, dance, or otherwise perform. Given the undeniably high level of perceived uncertainty that often accompanies these situational contexts, it seems reasonable to surmise that magic would figure prominently in such activities, especially as a means of gaining a sense of control over a highly unpredictable unfolding of events. The essay by Mike Furlong demonstrates that this is in fact the case, describing though vivid examples the

great variety of forms of magic that are used by musicians to increase their chances of delivering a good performance.

A particularly interesting example of the use of magic is found within the context of rock and metal, as described by Furlong, especially the emphasis on bringing about an atmosphere and general 'state of mind' that is conducive not only to a good performance but for a positive and meaningful shared experience involving both the performers and an audience. Furlong's reflections on the various habits he himself has developed, stemming directly from the centrality of music in his day-to-day life (both as a musician and rock and metal enthusiast) and yet not associated specifically with performance, underline the significance of the experiential quality of musical performance and demonstrate how material and behavioural referents (objects and practices) to music are incorporated into forms of magic that are then used in daily routine to bring about the positive energy and mind set with which music is associated.

The important role of *shared* experience and knowledge as a fundamental aspect of beliefs surrounding the *potential* ability of magic to produce a favourable or desired outcome, leading to its widespread use as a 'just in case' measure, is illustrated perhaps most vividly in the essays by Pettersson and Wood. Using Catholic religious practices as an example, Pettersson illustrates how shared belief systems are invoked and manipulated by practitioners to alleviate anxiety, comfort themselves, and bring about feelings of hope and possibility, particularly during times of despair and ambiguity. Similarly, Wood's essay demonstrates through a powerful narrative how a shared belief in the ability of a simple object, such as a stone with a hole in it, can steer the forces of luck in a positive direction to serve as an incredible source of strength and emotional support when a

group of people are confronted with particularly trying or traumatic life circumstances. For those who have either witnessed or experienced first-hand the toll that cancer takes not only on the person who has it but also their family, Wood's strong belief in the efficacy of her family's lucky stones in producing a favourable outcome in the case of her grandfather is entirely understandable and, to most, might not seem at all irrational.

When considering that the results of Gmelch and Felson's (1979) study that indicated students in the 1970's felt that illness did not constitute a particularly uncertain situation and, consequently, they did not associate it with the use of magic either conceptually or based on personal experience, it would appear that 40 years later, students' experiences with these particular life circumstances may have changed significantly.

Despite this and other aspects of the 'student experience' that might have changed since the 1970's, it is also clear that the use of magic is still as prevalent now as it was then. As Gmelch and Felson (1979: 589) observe: "the cost of performing magic is small, and there is always the possibility that it may help", and so students and the rest of us continue to hedge our bets and incorporate magic into our day-to-day lives as required.

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