



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

# Consciousness and Cognition

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/concog](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/concog)

## Beliefs in being unlucky and deficits in executive functioning

John Maltby<sup>a,\*</sup>, Liz Day<sup>b</sup>, Diana G. Pinto<sup>a</sup>, Rebecca A. Hogan<sup>a</sup>, Alex M. Wood<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> College of Medicine, Biological Sciences and Psychology, University of Leicester, Lancaster Road, Leicester LE1 9HN, United Kingdom<sup>b</sup> Psychology Subject Group, Faculty of Development & Society, Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Crescent Campus, Sheffield S10 2BP, United Kingdom<sup>c</sup> Stirling Management School, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, United Kingdom

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 18 February 2012

Available online 23 December 2012

#### Keywords:

Luck

Executive functioning

Shifting, Inhibition

Somatic Marker hypothesis

### ABSTRACT

The current paper proposes the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis; that beliefs in being unlucky are associated with deficits in executive functioning. Four studies suggest initial support for the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis via four aspects of executive functioning. Study 1 established that self-reports of dysexecutive symptoms predicted unique variance in beliefs in being unlucky after controlling for a number of other variables previously reported to be related to beliefs around luck. Studies 2 to 4 demonstrated support for the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis via assessment of executive functioning via: (1) two fundamental executive functions (shifting and inhibition), (2) emotional processes related to executive functioning as described by the Somatic Marker hypothesis, and (3) higher executive functions as accessed via divergent thinking. The findings suggest that individuals' beliefs in being unlucky are accompanied by a range of deficits in executive functioning.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

The role of luck in human decision-making and behaviour is considered across a number of domains, much more so than the normally cited superstition or gambling literature (e.g. Andre, 2009; Ellis, 1994). For instance, luck has been cited as playing a role in judgements in criminal law; for those practising law, the accused, the victim, and the juror. Luck may also be used when making judgements about endangerment statutes, presuming causation, and equating punishments (Kessler, 1994). In terms of the recent economic collapse of Western financial markets, the role of luck in influencing banking professionals to mistakenly perceive patterns in random financial data, and then misjudge possible outcomes, has been reported (Wall Street Journal, 2009). Among entrepreneurs, rating their own successes in business, luck is felt to be responsible for just less than 17% of performance (Loderer, Peyer, & Liechti, 2010). In terms of attributions of love, one's feelings towards one's own luck and their partner's luck is often considered as the causal factor to discovering one another (Ben-Ze'ev, 2009).

For a long time within the psychological literature, beliefs around luck were explained within irrational belief theory. Within this theory, beliefs around luck reflect absolute beliefs about the world, where many aspects of life are akin to chance, with luck having an external, unpredictable, and uncontrollable influence upon the individual, eventually forming the basis of emotional distress (Ellis, 1994). However, this view was reconsidered with the discovery that individual's beliefs in their own good luck can lead to positive outcomes (Darke & Freedman, 1997a, 1997b). Within this perspective luck is a personal attribute, that is also stable, predictable, and controllable, and has shown to be related to a number of positive outcomes such as better mental health and optimism (Darke & Freedman, 1997a, 1997b; Maltby, Day, Gill, Colley, & Wood, 2008). Moreover, Damisch, Stoberock, and Mussweiler (2010) examined the relationship between promoting lucky thoughts (via good luck

\* Corresponding author. Fax: +44 (0) 116 229 7196.

E-mail addresses: [jm148@le.ac.uk](mailto:jm148@le.ac.uk) (J. Maltby), [l.day@shu.ac.uk](mailto:l.day@shu.ac.uk) (L. Day), [dp122@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:dp122@leicester.ac.uk) (D.G. Pinto), [rh153@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:rh153@leicester.ac.uk) (R.A. Hogan), [alex.wood@stir.ac.uk](mailto:alex.wood@stir.ac.uk) (A.M. Wood).

charms) and their subsequent positive effects, resulting in an increase in perceived self-efficacy, and performance in golfing, motor dexterity, memory, and anagram games.

Important to the current consideration is that the identification of belief in good luck has introduced a dynamic to how to improve psychological considerations of luck distinguishing between those who demonstrate beliefs in being lucky, beliefs in being unlucky, and those who do not believe in luck at all (Maltby et al., 2008). Furthermore, when considering theoretical and empirical explanations between beliefs in being unlucky and lucky, while there is growing evidence that beliefs in being lucky is accompanied by greater control and self-efficacy towards tasks (e.g. Darke & Freedman, 1997a, 1997b; Damisch et al., 2010), psychological accounts of those who have beliefs in being unlucky are less well developed (Maltby et al., 2008).

In this paper, we propose and test a supplementary viewpoint by which to consider beliefs in being unlucky. This proposition is based on the wider conceptualization that a range of cognitions, affect, and behaviours underpin the formation of attitudes and beliefs (Fabrigar, MacDonald, & Wegener, 2005), and that cognitive elements, and the evaluation and self-monitoring processes surrounding these cognitive elements, influence attitude and belief formation across a number of domains (Wegener & Carlston, 2005; Wyer & Albarracín, 2005). More specifically, we propose the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis. With this proposition, we suggest that beliefs in being unlucky are associated with differential levels of executive functioning, a broad umbrella term used to capture a range of interacting high-level cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes involved in goal or task-directed achievement. These basic processes include abilities around initiating, planning, devising alternate strategies around, organising, and paying attention to, tasks or goals.

The evidential basis for this approach begins with Wiseman (2004) who found, when comparing people who either described themselves as 'lucky' or 'unlucky', that 'unlucky' people failed to properly attend to potential rewards when they were presented, whereas 'lucky' people did. Wiseman suggested 'lucky' people may achieve certain goals, and 'unlucky' people may not achieve the same goals, simply because they approach these goals in a different manner. He suggests that 'lucky' people may have cognitive skills at creating and noticing opportunities, and by implication 'unlucky' people do not. Day and Maltby (2005) extended this view by showing how beliefs around luck were associated with goal achievement. Participants who believed themselves 'lucky' used luck as part of a cognitive schema comprising a need for hard work, adequate planning, and a need for luck to achieve outcomes (i.e. "I should do well in a job interview if I prepare properly, but also if no-one better than me shows up"). They also found that those who believed themselves to be 'unlucky' did not develop such a schema and failed to achieve their goals.

The current paper suggests the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis, by considering beliefs in being unlucky as being associated with deficits in executive functioning. There are two possible causal directions of an association between beliefs in being unlucky and deficits in executive functioning. Individual levels of executive functioning might be inadvertently influencing an individual's experience and reporting of 'being unlucky'. For example, if an individual shows a weakness in executive functioning abilities, and is unable to initiate, plan, devise alternate strategies, organise, and pay attention to task or goal-orientated behaviour, then they are less likely to achieve their goals and then they may consider themselves as 'unlucky'. Conversely, someone who believes themselves to be unlucky may not engage those executive functions needed to effectively initiate, plan, devise alternate strategies, organise, and pay attention in relation to task or goal-orientated behaviour, and therefore consequently fail at the goal. Notwithstanding the causal direction of the association between beliefs in being unlucky and deficits in executive functioning, the proposal is that the experience of being unlucky may reflect deficits in a series of executive functions needed to accomplish task or goals. The proposition that beliefs in being unlucky is positively associated with deficits in executive functioning is something that has not been examined directly within the current literature.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Overview of studies

In this paper, we test for initial evidence for the veracity of the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis; whether beliefs in being unlucky are accompanied by deficits in executive functioning. Four studies are presented to test this hypothesis, with each study exploring whether there is initial evidence for the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis across a number of different established markers of executive functioning.

The first study sets out to establish whether there is a relationship between beliefs in being unlucky and a self-report of broad domains of dysexecutive symptoms covering a range of emotional, personality, motivational, behavioural, and cognitive problems (Wilson, Alderman, Burgess, Emslie, & Evans, 1996). Moreover, the study controls for a number of other variables related to beliefs in being unlucky, to establish whether there is any incremental value, at the self-report level, to proposing the Dysexecutive Luck hypothesis. Specifically, the study controls for a series of variables that have found to be associated with beliefs around luck; irrational beliefs (Maltby et al., 2008), optimism (Day & Maltby, 2005), self-efficacy (Damisch et al., 2010), and personality (Maltby et al., 2008). Therefore, finding evidence in this study for the Dysexecutive

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that we are not proposing an opposing position that individuals with beliefs in being lucky have improved executive functioning. Although evidence suggests that those who believe they are lucky may compare favourably to those who believe they are unlucky, these studies have rarely accounted for those who do not believe in luck. Therefore, the current evidence suggests that there is no reason to suggest that those who believe they are lucky have improved executive functioning than someone who does not believe in luck at all. Secondary evidence from our reported studies in this paper confirm this expectation as we found no relationship between beliefs in being lucky and any of the measures of executive functioning reported in this paper ( $r_s < .08$ ,  $p_s > .05$ ).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10458376>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10458376>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)