

## *Symposium S-D6*

### **Rituals Make Life Better -- By Enhancing Consumption, Communicating Social Norms, Treating Illness, and Relieving Grief**

**Friday, February 14, 2014, 3:30 PM - 4:45 PM, Room 18 C/D**

**Chair:** Kathleen Vohs, University of Minnesota

**Co-Chair:**

Rituals are pervasive in people's lives worldwide but unknown to social psychology until late. Wang shows that rituals enhance consumption of food and drink. Norton found that rituals make dealing with death easier. Legare went to Brazil and concocted healing rituals. Rossano's evolutionary framework argues that rituals underly social norms.

### **Rituals Make People Savor What They Consume, Heighten Pleasure, and Make Consumption Better**

Yajin Wang, Kathleen Vohs, Francesca Gino, Michael Norton

*University of Minnesota; Harvard Business School*

Four experiments tested the novel hypothesis that ritualistic behavior potentiates and enhances the enjoyment of ensuing consumption -- an effect found for chocolates, lemonade, and even carrots. Experiment 1 showed that ritual behaviors, compared to a no-ritual condition, made chocolate more flavorful, valuable, and led to more behavioral savoring. Experiment 2 demonstrated that random gestures do not boost consumption like ritualistic gestures do. It further showed that a delay between a ritual and the opportunity to consume heightens enjoyment, which attests to the idea that ritual behavior stimulates goal-directed action (to consume). Experiment 3 found that performing rituals oneself enhances consumption whereas watching someone else perform the same ritual does not. Last, Experiment 4 provided direct evidence of the underlying process: Rituals enhance consumption enjoyment due to the greater involvement they prompt in the experience. In short, rituals have the power to make consumption better, richer, and more compelling than otherwise.

### **Rituals Alleviate Grieving for Loved Ones, Lovers, and Lotteries**

Michael Norton, Francesca Gino

*Harvard Business School*

Three experiments explored the impact of mourning rituals--after losses of loved ones, lovers, and lotteries--on mitigating grief. Participants who were directed to reflect on past rituals or who were assigned to complete novel rituals after experiencing losses reported lower levels of grief. Increased feelings of control after rituals mediated the link between use of rituals and reduced grief after losses, and the benefits of rituals accrued not only to individuals who professed a belief in rituals effectiveness but also to those who did not. Although the specific rituals in which people engage after losses vary widely by culture and religion--and among our participants--our results suggest a common psychological mechanism underlying their effectiveness: regained feelings of control.

### **Evidence from the Supernatural: Reasoning about Ritual Efficacy**

Cristine Legare

*University of Texas*

Rituals pose a paradox -- although widely used to treat illness and problems, rituals lack

veridical causal forces. How do people evaluate the efficacy of rituals in the absence of causal information? Three studies were conducted in Brazil, where rituals called *simpatias* are used to treat a variety of problems ranging from asthma to infidelity. We analyzed content in existing *simpatias* in order to create experimental *simpatias* that manipulated the kinds of information that seemed to determine whether rituals were deemed effective (e.g., greater repetition, greater number of procedural steps). As predicted, the experimental *simpatias* with the right 'active ingredients' were judged by Brazilians to be efficacious. A fourth study with identical stimuli was conducted in the U.S. to assess cross-cultural generalizability. Results replicated the Brazilian samples. We conclude that the structure of rituals is a reflection of evolved lay theories of intuitive causality.

## **Rituals Form the Basis of Social Norms**

Matthew Rossano

*Southeastern Louisiana University*

Social norms are agreed upon, morally significant behavioral standards that are partly responsible for sophisticated human social organization. A recent theory (Rossano, 2012, *Psychological Bulletin*) concluded that ritualized behaviors are cornerstones of the transmission and reinforcement of norms. Ritualized behaviors work so outstandingly well because they are attention-getting intentional gestures that unambiguously signal important information, such as normative standards. In fact, rituals are used almost immediately upon birth to draw attention to and therefore communicate which information is important, with much evidence revealing that caregivers interactions with newborns feature many rituals. In addition, I present a new theory of ritualized action in human evolution. This model documents how humans -- but not other animals -- moved from using rituals used for personal gain and self-interest ('Bring me something') to those prompting joint perspective-taking ('I want to show you something'), thereby aiding such essential psychological processes as cooperation and theory of mind.