

DySoC/NIMBioS Webinar Series on Cultural Evolution

Questions from *Cognitive biases in folklore: From fairy tales to fake news*, with Joseph Stubbersfield, October 20, 2020

1. Why can you view fake news as folk tales? How are they different?
2. What factors in a tale (its structure, internal relations, etc.) give it the power to possess a mind by tying into basic biological instincts?
3. To what extent would dream experiences be factors in MCI bias?
4. Do horror stories fall under the same category as folktales? The source of fear is often culturally specific.
5. What are the effects of emotions in content biases? Specifically, can we say something about specific emotions or types of emotions?
6. I'm curious if you know of any work on how such content biases have been exploited historically by groups with certain political goals? e.g., current disinformation campaigns aimed at creating discord? Does this work offer any suggestions about how societies can arm themselves against such campaigns?
7. How about a "cautionary tale" bias?
8. Can minimally counterintuitive bias also be based on pre-existing cultural references? So whether a narrative lives or dies depends on how well they resonate with existing cultural concepts, references, etc. If so, how do you factor that in?
9. So, when we talk about folktales, conspiracy theories and fake news, they all have different affordances to the humans partaking in the discussion in terms of the direct effect it has on their lives. Folktales are more abstract, conspiracy theories are more about real things around us but not necessarily affecting us and fake news has the possibility of direct impact on our lives. Does this play a role in the cognitive biases associated with each?
10. How can those cognitive "content based" biases be related to the "cultural-fitness" of a cultural artifact? It sounds like they could be the measure of the ultimate 'fitness' of a cultural artifact, though frequency-based mechanisms will interact with these cognitive biases and help or prevent the transmission of different variants. Would a 'utility' vs 'fitness' distinction help to separate different mechanisms?
11. Of the three 'genres' of folklore that you're mainly looking at (legends, urban legends, and fake news), is there any way to take into account differences in the *context* in which instances of each type are typically transmitted "in the wild"?
12. In real life people might have different intentions and goals when they pass along instances of each genre, and consume instances of each genre in different settings and with different expectations, e.g. have their xenophobic/group membership sensitivities primed (especially w/r/t fake news) or capacities for empathy primed (legends, etc.)?
13. Does the rise of counter-intuitive/complex science findings/theories (e.g. Quantum entanglement in physics) and the concept of MCI explain some of the current perception of science perception to the general public?
14. Are there age differences in urban legends and fake news? For example between what teenagers transmit and what retired folk transmit?
15. Have you looked at "teaching stories?" (e.g., those collected and published by Idries Shah.)

16. There is evidence in the bilingual and second language processing literature that framing effects and emotional biases are attenuated in the non-native language - do these studies control for this?
17. So far the conspiracy theories and urban legends deal with non-human entities or threats, but what if they're conspiracy theories about specific groups of people? If you have to test social and survival info bias theories on conspiracies about groups of people, how can you do so without falling into the trap of reproducing Social Darwinist or racist tropes yourself?
18. To what extent has this work been looked at in terms of Sperger's cultural attractor theory?
19. Apart from the one you mentioned is there any cross cultural work on these transmission biases. Could such biases be the basis for cultural differences in responses to news events?
20. If you're studying transmission of larger, more comprehensive bundles of worldviews (religious, philosophical, and political ideas), how might studying those be similar or different than studying folk tales and conspiracy theories?
21. Is this a general issue? Transmission does not explain creation of new ideas in the first place.
22. As you age things become more threatening?
23. Do we know anything about the differential success of societies that do or do not rely on fake news?