

2018

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Recommended Citation

Grant, Cara (2018) "Superstitions: Carefree or Damaging?," *SWOSU Sayre Student Anthology*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 8 , Article 41.
Available at: https://dc.swosu.edu/sayre_student_anthology/vol1/iss8/41

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Superstitions: Carefree or Damaging?

Cross Your Fingers and Hope You Find Out!

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SWOSU Timed W.A.R.P. (Writing and Research Project) 1st Place Winner



Superstitions: often we either hate them or love them. Some superstitions have become so ritual in daily life that we don't even think about the reason we participate in them; we just do! For example, the minute one of our peers suggests an unlucky event will take place in our life, we rush to the nearest piece of wood and knock the bad luck away. On other occasions, we take extra care to pick up pennies if they're heads up; in contrast, if they're heads down, we run away with our tails between our legs. One of the most common superstitions known in society today is the habit of crossing our fingers to instill good luck or waive a wrong, generally lying. Though this superstition has become a part of daily lives, how early did we really inhabit such a miniscule fallacy? Beyond the history of the habit, how did we as a society transform that habit into an adaptable action in an ever-progressing world, and how has that habit in turn transformed us?

As teachers love to remind students, there is truly a history to everything. From the creation of humans to the creation of the iPhone, history is rich with interesting and explanatory information. Superstitions are not detached from this concept. For a majority of the irrational acts of superstition we participate in, there is a defining history lurking beneath the surface. Lurking may paint a dreary and chilling historical picture on the subject, but in most cases, dreary and chilling is an excellent setting for



the origins of superstitious beliefs. According to an article by Hannah Keyser, pagans in Western Europe created and developed the fingers-crossed superstition from

a simple act of crossing index fingers with a peer to wish good luck to one another to the superstition we practice in the present of crossing our index and middle fingers to obtain the same outcome (Keyser). Within her article, Keyser explains, "The intersection [of a cross] was

thought to mark a concentration of god spirits and served to anchor a wish until it could come true" (Keyser). It is also explained on the website *Psychic Library* that early Christians used their fingers to communicate by forming a cross symbol, thus avoiding persecution during a time when Christianity was illegal ("Crossing"). The history of our well-known fingers-crossed superstition is dark with tales of preventing dark spirits and persecution, but the current context in which we use it is significantly lighter.

As children we often tell secrets, but before we'll spill the beans, the recipient might be asked to cross their heart and hope to die, symbolizing that they won't repeat the secret, and if they do, they should hope to die. Although the recipient crossed their heart to keep the secret, the probably soon after crossed their fingers to escape it. In the modern world, society is hung up on finding new and improved ways to avoid responsibility and blame, but the solid, standard escape route still lies within our physical extremities! We have sculpted a means of survival for early Christians and a religious be-

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belief of food fortune for Pagans into a lazy excuse to spread gossip and deny our morals with justification. Though it may appear that we have simply created our own form of justification for wrong doing, this justification has in a way sculpted us.

Naturally, most humans have tendency to avoid conflict. Though we want to avoid conflict, humans have an even greater desire to evade guilt or culpability. The use of crossing our fingers to eliminate that factor of guilt has in part created a nature of laziness, but also arrogance. When we cross our fingers, we get to have our cake (do what we want) and eat it too (avoid responsibility for our actions). With such an easy escape route from accountability, we take on an attitude of invincibility. It isn't so bad to lie because *technically* we exiled our promise to keep a secret or do good from the moment we agreed. *Technically*, we bought our Get Out of Jail Free Card the second our fingers crossed. All of this may seem a little heavy for a simple superstition, but as stated in the article in *Most Inside*, "... superstitions are merely the fear and weakness of mind and heart which leads to serious beliefs on rubbish facts" ("Everything"). The trivial aspects of our lives and beliefs can snowball and form a much loftier

Why do we cross our hearts and hope to die?

role in our thought process and character. One we let a superstition such as crossing our fingers become a safety blanket for wrong-doing, we allow an attitude of invincibility to overtake us, thus exemplifying how a superstition can not only be shaped by humans, but shape humans in its own way.

There are a plethora of reasons that people chose to oppose superstitions. For some, superstitions are a direct insult to their beliefs. For others, superstitions are simply a foolish form of denial against fact and science. The origins of crossing our fingers base around a presence of religious belief and a lack of scientific fact. Once the superstition was established, it progressed and evolved with the times to a much more modern flexible version of the original tactic. Aside from our effect on the superstition, the fingers-crossed superstition left a permanent mark on humanity and our attitude. Is crossing your fingers a silly sign of good luck for light-hearted fun, or a deeper seated problem that encourages the avoidance of accountability? Hopefully as history progresses, we'll find out the true psychological effect of superstitions; cross your fingers . . . or don't!

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