

Between Religion and Science: Bewitchment, Biology, or Both?

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California State University, Northridge at University Student Union
(USU), Thousand Oaks room



In both lay and scientific writing, natural explanations and supernatural explanations are often conceptualized in contradictory or incompatible terms. My research has demonstrated that this common assumption is psychologically inaccurate. The same individuals frequently use both natural and supernatural explanations to interpret the very same events. Moreover, I find that supernatural explanations often increase, rather than decrease, with age. In sum, reasoning about supernatural phenomena is an integral and enduring feature of human cognition, not a transient or ephemeral element of childhood thinking.

Cristine Legare is an Associate Professor of Psychology and the Director of the Cognition, Culture, and Development Lab at The University of Texas at Austin. Her interdisciplinary research examines the interplay of the universal human mind and the variations of human culture to understand cognitive evolution and cultural learning. She has conducted fieldwork in southern Africa, and is currently doing research in Brazil, China, and Vanuatu (a Melanesian archipelago), using both experimental and ethnographic methods.



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