The Sociology of Spirituality, Superstition, and Folklore
Sociological Research Study

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Abstract

“Sociology is the study of groups of people and their cultures, customs and practices. Because this topic is so broad, and our culture is always changing, the possibilities for writing and research are endless. With sociology, you can research just about anything, from Ancient Folklores to Scientology.” The study of spirituality, superstitions and folklore has been around for years. Even though these are three different topics, they all relate along the lines of beliefs and traditions. For example, we may not know the originality of folklore and superstitions, but we know that these stories were told from some form of truth or the depths of somebody’s imagination. However, the fact that these stories were told repeatedly, it is hard to believe that they were ever make-believe. As Merriam Webster dictionary specifies, “Legends are a story from the past that is believed by many people but cannot be proved to be true”. As for spirituality/religion, religion acts as a second skin to a firm believer. The study of spirituality has not only educated non-believers but opened their mind to a world never fathomed. Ultimately, the study of this sociological matter is proven to be of great value especially when it comes to comprehending how a society functions.
Introduction

For centuries, myths and ancient folklore has been demonstrated in the United States and other regions throughout the world. Mostly perceived as make believe, superstitions and folklore have pried their way into social groups, cultural forms and academic study pertaining to sociological research. The definitions of spirituality, superstition and folklore all correlate along the lines of traditional beliefs, customs, religious lore and stories passed throughout generations of native groups and communities. Superstitions and myths such as Olympian Gods, the story of Friday the 13th, mythological creatures expressly mermaids, vampires, werewolves, elves, fairies and witchcraft such as hoodoo and palo are legendary and prominent in many cultures. Whether or not these myths are derived from true stories or existent cultures, they are highly popular today and the mere demonstration of these myths affect the methodology of today’s society.
Literature Review

Superstitions, spirituality and folklore have played a significant role in society, elucidating an individual’s action and behaviour. According to Palmer, E. (2014) How Does Spirituality Influence Human Behaviour. “In contrast, spirituality can also be regarded in the light of a so-called inner being, that is the individual’s quest to become ‘self-actualized’ by finding a sense of meaning and purpose as well as a sense of community and transcendence. This quest moves beyond individualistic dogma and defines action and behaviour of the individual in the workplace and any other relevant environment he/she deems important.”

Spirituality falls along the line of religion which on a whole may cause a person to act differently toward another person who is not associated with his or her beliefs; as a result it can cause an indeterminate reaction. Religion is a highly controversial topic and because of the many different religions throughout the world, this affects society by causing religious disputes that may lead to verbal abuse and violent actions solely because of the spiritual/religious distinction individuals identify as by representing a specific faith.

Conversely, superstition is slightly different from spirituality. According to Madrigal, L. (2016, October 23). Sociological research. Retrieved March 16, 2018, from https://www.slideshare.net/dtbm04 “Superstitions have become more common nowadays some are negative and others positive however, not everyone practices them. As Merriam Webster detailed, ‘Superstition is a belief that certain events or things will bring good or bad luck’. Thus, many people put their confidence in things that bring them good luck in health, money, love and other aspects. Also, they reject other things that bring them bad luck in the same aspects. Additionally, legends exist since many years ago.” Superstitious beliefs have always been in the minds of some people. There are many superstitions dating back to over 3000 years ago, when they were told as stories; nowadays they are being incorporated into
belief systems. According to Slavidou, Gouldson, and Schreiber, (2015) “A superstition is a belief in supernatural causality – that one event leads to another without anything physically linking the two events.” In essence, superstitions can either produce negative or positive outcomes depending on the person’s perspective and their beliefs, it can affect their life positively or negatively. According to Parashar, (2015) “The phobia of having bad luck has killed many lives till now and society plays an important role in this. People blindly follow the myths and acts which are quite shameful to the society and throwing children in air is just one example…likewise there are many such practices across the world which damages and harms the people in a name of achieving good fortune.” Parashar also detailed that “Some negative superstitions followed by many people are, having a broken mirror, Friday the 13th, having a black cat, sweeping someone's feet, watching a bride with the wedding dress before getting married, opening an umbrella inside a room, among others. If people do some of these actions they will start thinking that something bad is going to happen and they feel afraid.” If a person does not believe in superstitions, it does not automatically give them the right to disdain another person who believes in it, as superstitions have become a form of belief.

Equally important, the study of folklore and its effects on society ties in with religion and superstition. According to Plummer, A. (n.d.). What Is Folklore? - Definition, Legends & Myths. Retrieved March 11, 2018, from https://study.com/academy/lesson-legends-“Folklore is oral history that is preserved by the people of the culture, consisting of traditions belonging to a specific culture. These traditions usually include music, stories, history, legends, and myths. Folklore is passed down from generation to generation and is kept active by the people in the culture.” Types of folklore include: urban legends, myths, riddles, ballads, fairy tales, folk art etc. Superstitions are also a type of folklore and can possibly produce the same effect on that particular aspect of society. Folklore allows people to give meaning to their
lives and their surroundings. Given these points, the practice of folklore can enrich a society by incorporating cultural aspects. To illustrate, according to Pitlane Magazine. (n.d.). From https://www.pitlanemagazine.com/cultures/the-influence-of-folklore-on-culture-and-society.html. “Folklore is a strong influence on culture and society. It is through folklore that we learn about the knowledge, beliefs, and culture of people who have gone before us in all parts of the world. Even within contemporary folklore, we can experience the attitudes and values of people from different regions within one’s own country or from nations near and far.” Folklore is very educational; it teaches one society about numerous societies while introducing us to new and exciting cultures. According to Does Folklore Have a Place in Modern Society? (2015, July 20). “...despite our differences and varied opinions, we are coming increasingly closer to each other, as a result of globalisation and the spread of popular media and culture via the Internet.” In essence, folklore helps us stay connected in ways we never imagined.
Theory Section

In order to gather more information on the sociological aspect of spirituality, superstitions and folklore, a scientific research method must be carried out. To conduct my research from a theoretical perspective, I would issue a survey of fixed questions pertaining to my research topic. I would choose a maximum of 50 individuals all from different backgrounds and ages ranging between 16 and 65. I would create a minimum of 20 questions distributing an even amount to each subtopic and a bonus question which states the individual’s own personal opinion on the subject matter. After the surveys are distributed and thoroughly answered, I would then test my hypothesis to see if my theory is proven true, that spirituality, superstitions and folklore do affect the outcome of a society’s value and overall environment.

Hypotheses/Expectations

If the survey is proven of value, there are only two outcomes that could be derived from the survey. If there are more individuals who agree with the societal relevance of spirituality, superstitions and folklore then my theory is proven to be true and further sociological research may be conducted, however, if there are more individuals against the societal relevance of the research topic, then my theory is proven to be inaccurate and may result in my research topic being denied of its sociological applicability. On the contrary, I expect that the results would be inclusive; spirituality, superstitions and folklore affects more than one aspect of society.
**Methods**

The method I would use to carry out this research would be precise and descriptive. The survey would be carried out in a highly populated area, with high levels of diversity. For example a city like New York, Los Angeles or Miami would be a perfect place to conduct the survey because of its diversity, we would receive a lot of people from different backgrounds whether it is African-American, Asian, Caucasian or Pacific Islander etc. I would also conduct the survey during a busy season, either fall or spring during a convenient time; the survey would be more than likely administered in the afternoon when most people are free. In order to invite individuals to participate in the survey, I would go to local schools, churches, restaurants and work environments to seek anyone who is willing to partake. After I have coordinated this method, I would tally the results and come up with a conclusion.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, myths and legends have been around for centuries. Different stories are derived from different cultures and are passed around to many societies in which some of these legends are practiced. Whether or not you believe in superstitions, they exist and are carried out everyday by the individuals who believe in them. Spirituality like religion is a controversial topic but nonetheless affects society whether it is positive or negative. Folklore perhaps has the most effect on society as it connects people on a whole as we study the different forms of culture and learn to adapt to our changing environment.
Reference

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