

# Psychology myth buster



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Psychology Myth Buster Nicole Nugent Pennsylvania This paper was prepared for the Psychology 105, taught by Professor Lisa Stevenson.

Abstract This paper was done to test superstitions if they were true, and at the same time operationalizing the construct of luck. The superstition for this study was: Wearing your birthstone encourages luck, and will actually make you lucky. To test the superstition and to operationalize luck, there were two participants who actually wore their respective birthstones all day and proceeded to make bets in the lottery to test their luck. They did not win; in fact, their numbers did not even figure in the lottery. Therefore, the superstition is false.

Psychology Myth Buster Superstitions and myths are beliefs that are widely held but prove to be irrational most of the time (Merriam-Webster's). They are usually beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation, often explain various phenomena, but is most commonly held for luck and for problem solving purposes. The myth that was picked for this paper was the myth that “wearing your birthstone can bring you good luck”, which is common according to the site of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry ([http://www.csicop.org/superstition/library/common\\_superstitions/](http://www.csicop.org/superstition/library/common_superstitions/)). To operationally define the construct, the researcher devised a task. The task is entering a lottery while the participants were wearing their birthstones (ruby and opal, respectively). The lottery is a complete test of luck, as it does not depend on IQ, skill or any person's abilities. Luck, according to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, is a favoring chance, with chance meaning “something caused by luck” (Merriam-Webster's). Also, chance also meant a raffle lottery ticket, which is something significant to the experimental setup. Apart from having the lottery task, self-report is another way of operationally defining the

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constructs. Self-report of the participants could also be used (as in interview) to know if they had other eventful events of luck during the course of the day. The self-report could be a good barometer of luck for this experimental setup since the researcher could not be with the participants all the time, and sometimes luck can be in a form where the participants could only be the judge of something if it is lucky. Between two methods in operationalizing the constructs, the task of betting in the lottery was chosen. To test the superstition, the researcher chose two participants, one born in July with a ruby birthstone and one born in October with an opal birthstone, and they will be let to participate in the Pennsylvania Lottery, where the beneficiaries are older people. This birthstone assignments were according to the website <http://www.bernardine.com/birthstone/by-stone.htm>. The luck construct would be operationalized with the use of lottery. The participants placed their bets in the website of the Pennsylvania Lottery, on the Game called Daily Number, with both \$1 bets. Now there are two draws and the participants' bets were to be checked if they won in the two draws. If they do, then the superstition could prove to be true. Lottery is one of the best games of chance, and if one won, then one can absolutely conclude that the player is lucky, since the number combinations in lottery could amount to millions. They said the chances of getting hit by lightning are greater than chances of being a winner in a lottery (Dr. Math). Now the participants went to the site <http://www.palottery.state.pa.us/games.aspx?id=430> early in the morning (8 am) to enter their chosen numbers on April 21, 2011. Participant A's numbers were: 5, 2, 1 and Participant B's numbers were 8, 5, 7. They said these numbers were their favorite "lucky" numbers. In the midday draw, we checked the results and it did not win for the winning

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numbers are 6, 1 and 1. So we waited until 7 pm and watched the TV for the numbers of the nightly draw. They did not win on the nightly draw either as the winning numbers were 4, 7 and 0. The numbers were raffled randomly by the state. The lottery is also run by the state to benefit the older population. In a sense, it is a charity sweepstakes, so that the “gamble” is actually a donation to the elders. The participants had been wearing their birthstones all day, as in earrings and rings, respectively for both Participant A and Participant B. The result of the lottery did not support the superstition on luck depending on the birthstone on the wearer. Luck is not based on birthstones and if ever the wearers of the birthstones before incurred luck, maybe because they were indeed lucky, not because of the birthstones. If this superstition were true, I think lottery games (and game that depend of chance, which is largely a characteristic of gambling) would not exist because there would be a lot of winners. The jewelers would also be happy if this superstition were true, because many people would buy from them. Lastly, if this superstition were true, I think the world would be a better place because there would be no untoward incidents and disasters because everyone would be lucky. To check if the theory holds true, this experiment could be replicated more. Also, there are different birthstones depending on belief, and maybe the future researches could use this knowledge to check the validity of the superstition. There are various kinds of birthstones: there are lunar calendar birthstones, mystical calendar birthstones, etc. The ones used here are modern birthstones. Another variable to consider in trying redoing the experiment is the amount of birthstones worn while doing the task. Maybe more stones worn would have a better effect on the wearer.

Works Cited Atkinson, R. Atkinson, R., Smith, E., and Bem, D. (1993).

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