

✘ How common in cognitive development and how widespread across cultures is the idea of immanent justice, with the good or bad fortune being seen as generally deserved and even as a sign of the moral worth of lucky or unlucky people? A new article by Kristina R. Olson, Yarrow Dunham, Carol S. Dweck, Elizabeth S. Spelke and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Judgments of the Lucky Across Development and Culture" (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 94, No. 5, 757-776) provides novel and relevant experimental evidence.

The abstract:

For millennia, human beings have believed that it is morally wrong to judge others by the fortuitous or unfortunate events that befall them or by the actions of another person. Rather, an individual's own intended, deliberate actions should be the basis of his or her evaluation, reward, and punishment. In a series of studies, the authors investigated whether such rules guide the judgments of children. The first 3 studies demonstrated that children view lucky others as more likely than unlucky others to perform intentional good actions. Children similarly assess the siblings of lucky others as more likely to perform intentional good actions than the siblings of unlucky others. The next 3 studies demonstrated that children as young as 3 years believe that lucky people are nicer than unlucky people. The final 2 studies found that Japanese children also demonstrate a robust preference for the lucky and their associates. These findings are discussed in relation to M. J. Lerner's (1980) just-world theory and J. Piaget's (1932/1965) immanent-justice research and in relation to the development of intergroup attitudes.

It would be particularly relevant to have studies on the topic combining experimental and standard ethnographic method and illuminating the relationship between the culturally affirmed views and the people's (including children's) spontaneous inference in the matter.

Picture: design by Erica Michaels.