The Department of Psychology and Social Area are pleased to announce a colloquium presentation by

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Tempting fate: The effect of negativity and accessibility on belief and behavior

Psychology Building, Room 35 at 12:00pm
Monday, January 8, 2007

Abstract:

How can people simultaneously believe something is true and know that it is false? Whether due to culture, age, mental illness, or stress, the magical thinking literature has traditionally stressed deficits in cognitive capacities. I argue that a complete understanding must take into account certain psychological tendencies that make magical beliefs common even among educated, intelligent, emotionally-stable adults. In this talk, I will provide evidence for the belief that negative outcomes are especially likely to occur if they follow actions that “tempt fate.” I propose that by drawing on two well-developed research areas in psychology we may be able to understand why people often hold this belief, despite the "knowledge" that it is not true. Specifically, I contend that actions that tempt fate elevate the perceived likelihood of misfortune because such negative possibilities are automatically called to mind and, once entertained, they gain fluency and are seen as more likely to occur.

Jane Risen is a candidate for a JDM faculty position in the social area.