MAGIC

ARTS FOR HEALTH

Series Editor: Paul Crawford, Professor of Health Humanities, University of Nottingham, UK

The *Arts for Health* series offers a ground-breaking set of books that guide the general public, carers, and healthcare providers on how different arts can help people to stay healthy or improve their health and wellbeing.

Bringing together new information and resources underpinning the health humanities (that link health and social care disciplines with the arts and humanities), the books demonstrate the ways in which the arts offer people worldwide a kind of shadow health service – a non-clinical way to maintain or improve our health and wellbeing. The books are aimed at general readers along with interested arts' practitioners seeking to explore the health benefits of their work, health and social care providers and clinicians wishing to learn about the application of the arts for health, educators in arts, health and social care and organisations, carers and individuals engaged in public health or generating healthier environments. These easy-to-read, engaging short books help readers to understand the evidence about the value of arts for health and offer guidelines, case studies, and resources to make use of these non-clinical routes to a better life.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Rex

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Wiseman holds Britain's only Professorship in the Public Understanding of Psychology at the University of Hertfordshire. He has published more than 100 academic papers, including those examining the psychology of magic, illusion, deception, luck, and self-development. He has also written popular psychology books that have sold over 3 million copies (including *The Luck Factor* and *59 Seconds*) and created illusion-based YouTube videos that have attracted more than 600 million views. He regularly gives keynote talks, is one of the most followed psychologists on Twitter, and the *Independent on Sunday* chose him as one of the top 100 people who make Britain a better place to live. Richard is a Member of the Inner Magic Circle, and acts as a creative consultant for high-profile stage and television projects. He was recently awarded the prestigious Golden Grolla Award for his work into psychology and illusion, and has been described by Elizabeth Loftus (Past President, Association for Psychological Science) as 'one of the world's most creative psychologists'.

FOREWORD: CREATIVE PUBLIC HEALTH

The 'Arts for Health' series aims to provide key information on how different arts and humanities practices can support, or even transform, health and wellbeing. Each book introduces a particular creative activity or resource and outlines its place and value in society, the evidence for its use in advancing health and wellbeing, and cases of how this works. In addition, each book provides useful links and suggestions to readers for following-up on these quick reads. We can think of this series as a kind of shadow health service – encouraging the use of the arts and humanities alongside all the other resources on offer to keep us fit and well.

Creative practices in the arts and humanities offer a fantastic, non-medical, but medically relevant way to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities. Intuitively, we know just how important creative activities are in maintaining or recovering our best possible lives. For example, imagine that we woke up tomorrow to find that all music, books, or films had to be destroyed, learn that singing, dancing, or theatre had been outlawed or that galleries, museums, and theatres had to close permanently; or, indeed, that every street had posters warning citizens of severe punishment for taking photographs, drawing, or writing. How would we feel? What would happen to our bodies and minds? How would we survive? Unfortunately, we have seen this kind of removal of creative activities from human society before and today many people remain terribly restricted in artistic expression and consumption.

I hope that this series adds a practical resource to the public. I hope people buy these little books as gifts for family and friends,

or for hard-pressed healthcare professionals, to encourage them to revisit or to consider a creative path to living well. I hope that creative public health makes for a brighter future.

Professor Paul Crawford

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INTRODUCTION

When I was a child, my family and I used to visit my grandfather regularly. Although I enjoyed the requisite cup of tea and slice of fruitcake, the highlight of each trip involved him performing a wonderful illusion that he had learned during the Second World War. My grandfather began by handing me a marker pen and a Victorian penny, and then asking me to write my initials on the coin. He carefully placed the initialled coin onto his palm, closed his fingers around it, and then opened his hand to reveal that the coin had disappeared. Next, he reached under his chair and took out a metal tobacco tin that was about the size of a deck of cards. The tin was sealed tightly with several elastic bands, and he asked me to look inside. I carefully removed the bands, lifted the lid, and discovered that the tin contained an even smaller wooden box that was similarly sealed with more elastic bands. When I removed the second set of bands and opened the wooden box, I was amazed to discover my initialled coin.

For years, I pestered my grandfather to reveal the secret, and, like all good magicians, he steadfastly refused to spill the beans. Then, on my eighth birthday, he relented just a little, and told me that the solution was described in a book, and that that book was in my local library. At the time, I struggled with reading and so a library visit wasn't top of my agenda. Nevertheless, finding out the secret of the tobacco tin miracle was hugely appealing and so I went to the library and searched for books on magic. The books proved to be a portal into a wonderous world in which I was mesmerised by sensational stories of mysterious performers, fascinated by woodcuts illustrating complex sleight of hand, and spellbound by the secrets to hundreds of illusions. I was soon performing for

my friends and family, and quickly discovered that magic often required a considerable amount of practice and hard work, and that watching a well-crafted illusion could be a transformative and fascinating experience.

I eventually uncovered the solution to the tobacco tin mystery. A few days later, I visited my grandfather and excitedly explained that I had completed my quest. He smiled, nodded, and then reached under his chair and handed me a secret object that played an essential role in the illusion. I have held onto that object for more than 40 years, and it currently resides in a display case in my office. Oh, and if you want to find out the secret to the mystery… then it's described in one of the magic books in your local library.

When I was about 12 years old, I joined my local magic club (The Mystic Ring in Luton) and continued my journey into the art of conjuring. I found out that there is more to magic than meets the eye. Unlike many performing arts, magic doesn't require spectators to suspend their disbelief, and seeing the impossible apparently made possible can induce a unique sense of awe, astonishment, and wonder (Lamont, 2017; Leddington, 2016). Magicians and academics have argued that this amazing experience helps to explain the universal appeal of magic and has the power to awaken people's dreams and to expand their horizons (Wiseman & Watt, 2022).

In my early teens, I started to perform at children's parties and made notes about each of my shows in a little blue book. I have that book in front of me right now, and so I know that my first performance was on 3 April 1979, that I was paid three pounds, and that one child noticed that I had an egg hidden under my arm at the start of the show. During my twenties, I became a member of The Magic Circle, performed street magic in London's Covent Garden, and travelled to America to work at The Magic Castle, a prestigious private magic club in Hollywood.

Over time, I became interested in the fascinating relationship between magic and psychology. Good magicians understand how to control audiences' attention, how to encourage them to make certain assumptions, and how to play with their memory. Academics have long been interested in these topics, with some of the earliest work dating back to the turn of the twentieth century.

For instance, in 1894, the French psychologist Alfred Binet investigated whether the hand really is quicker than the eye by having magicians perform sleight of hand in front of a camera that took several photographs of their movements in rapid succession (Binet, 1894). Similarly, in 1896, Joseph Jastrow conducted experiments into the dexterity and mental skills with two famous illusionists of his day, Alexander Herrmann and Harry Kellar (Jastrow, 1896). Inspired by this type of work, I eventually enrolled for an undergraduate degree in psychology at University College London (chosen, in part, because it is close to The Magic Circle) and then completed a doctorate in the psychology of deception at the University of Edinburgh. Shortly afterwards, I joined the University of Hertfordshire, where I am now a professor of psychology.

Much of my early research examined why magic works and involved studying the psychology employed by experienced magicians (Lamont & Wiseman, 1999), exploring whether psychology can inspire new illusions (Lamont & Wiseman, 2003; Wiseman & Lamont, 2003), and examining how conjurors and fake psychics fool their audiences (Wiseman et al., 2003; Wiseman & Morris, 1995). In the last decade, this area has attracted the attention of many more academics (for a review, see Kuhn, 2019). Then, in 2008, I started to expand the focus of this work and to examine the therapeutic and educational benefits of watching and learning magic (Derbyshire, 2008; Paton, 2008).

I soon discovered that magic is used to help people in a surprisingly wide variety of settings. For instance, hospital magicians aid patients' recovery, occupational therapists employ magic to boost motor skills and coordination, counsellors conjure up key life skills, and teachers perform illusions to promote attention and curiosity. These activities are highly practical and often easier to implement than interventions associated with other performing arts. Whereas plays, dance, and concerts often need to be staged in relatively formal settings, people can be shown or perform magic almost anywhere. Whilst learning to play a musical instrument or memorising a script can be difficult and time consuming, some illusions can be mastered very quickly. Plays, dance routines, and music concerts often involve lengthy and fixed forms of performance, whereas

magic is highly flexible, can be adapted to suit individuals' needs and abilities, and is easily tailored to any length of show. Also, from an economic perspective, purchasing a musical instrument can be costly, whilst lots of illusions just involve inexpensive everyday objects.

More recently, several academics (myself included) reviewed research examining the efficacy of magic-based interventions and discovered that most of the work has yielded positive findings (Bagienski & Kuhn, 2019, 2020; Lam et al., 2017; Wiseman & Watt, 2018, 2020). In addition, I conducted several studies in the area, examining, for instance, how magic boosts creativity, enhances student engagement, and encourages critical thinking (Wiseman et al., 2020, 2021). I also teamed up with experienced performers to create illusions and shows that encourage children to tackle challenging tasks, to persevere when the going gets tough, and to learn how to deal with negative emotions (Wiseman & Kaye, 2020). Together, this work convinced me that magic has an important, and possibly unique, role to play in enhancing wellbeing, health, and education.

This book presents a comprehensive examination of the relationship between magic and wellbeing, and addresses two main issues.

Firstly, magic has been employed in a disparate range of therapeutic and educational contexts, and these performers and practitioners are often unaware of each other's work. This book brings together this diverse activity and unifies it into a single discipline of Applied Magic.

Secondly, magic tends to be neglected in discussions about the performing arts and health. This may be due to the secretive nature of conjuring, the mistaken belief that magic isn't an art form, or that work in the area is often published in relatively obscure books and journals. Whatever the explanation, many people are unaware of the benefits of watching and learning magic. This book aims to address this issue and to bring the power of Applied Magic to the attention of a wide range of practitioners, performers, and academics.

Chapter One takes a brief look at the subculture of magic and describes some of the illusions that are often used in therapeutic

and educational work. Each of the following chapters then explores one of the three main types of Applied Magic. Chapter Two examines how magic is employed within a medical setting, Chapter Three investigates how it's used to build life skills, and Chapter Four reviews work into magic and education. Each of these chapters begins by describing some of the most successful programmes in the area and highlighting especially interesting ideas. Hopefully, practitioners and performers will find this material informative and inspirational. The chapters then review research that has assessed the efficacy of this work. These studies are important as they ensure that the area is evidence-based and help to attract participants, institutions, collaborators, and funders. At the end of each chapter, there are in-depth interviews with experienced practitioners involved in this area, exploring how they became involved in the field, how they go about their work, and how they overcome challenges and issues. Finally, the Conclusion outlines seven ways in which Applied Magic can grow and develop in the future.

I hope that you find our time together enjoyable, informative, and magical.

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1

A PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN

This chapter presents a brief guide to the subculture of magic, takes an in-depth look at the types of illusions employed in therapeutic and educational work, and concludes with some general advice for those starting out in conjuring.

THE SUBCULTURE OF MAGIC

Conjurors are a naturally secretive bunch and so the public tend to have little insight into the world of magic. Here's a brief guide to this intriguing subculture.

First, magic has a long lasting and universal appeal. Records from ancient cultures contain accounts of magic shows, with some of the earliest descriptions appearing in works by the legendary Greek philosopher Plato and the great Roman scholar Seneca. Throughout history, magicians have continued to astound people, and even the dramatic rise of science and technology has done nothing to dent the enduring popularity of this unusual performing art. Nowadays, famous magicians still attract huge audiences to their lives shows and videos of illusions attract millions of views on social media.

Second, magic is a small, well organised, and close-knit community. Many large towns and cities have a local magic club where members will meet, perform for each other, and offer

encouragement and criticism (usually the latter). In addition, many countries have a national magic society, such as The Magic Circle in Britain and The Society of American Magicians in the USA. At a global level, The International Brotherhood of Magicians currently boasts thousands of members in more than 80 countries. Lots of these clubs and societies regularly stage shows for the public, as well as organising conferences and conventions for magicians. Some of these events are surprisingly large with, for example, the Blackpool Magic Convention attracting more than 4,000 magicians each year. There are also individuals and businesses that sell magic, with many magic shops offering lessons to beginners and providing a meeting place for magicians.

Third, magicians have produced a vast amount of literature about their art. Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* was published in 1584 and is widely seen as the first English language book to contain detailed descriptions of magic tricks. Since then, magicians have written thousands of books for their fellow deceivers, including those containing instructions for performing sleight of hand, plans of magical apparatus and discussions about the theory of magic. In addition, they have published long-running magazines that are replete with new illusions, reports of conventions, advertisements, and profiles of well-known performers. Organisations like The Magic Circle and The Magic Castle maintain immense and impressive libraries, and most recently. The Conjuring Arts Research Center in New York created an online database of key publications that currently contains over 2.5 million pages of material.

Appendix 1 contains information about recommended books, magazines, organisations, and shops.

SOME TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Performing magic can be challenging because it often involves the careful handling of apparatus, learning difficult sleight of hand, remembering the order of a complex series of actions, and creating entertaining presentations. Because of this, it can take years of practise, hard work, and dedication to master. In contrast, most of the illusions used in Applied Magic must be suitable for beginners