

“No “wise” men or women but real doctors!”*

Stigmatizing discourses on magical healing in Ostrobothnian newspapers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.110933>

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Magical healers and physicians were among those who provided healing in the medical market of pre-modern Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia. Using newspaper texts published in the region about local occurrences of magical healing as source material, this article examines through discourse analysis how magical healing was stigmatized in public discourse at the turn of the twentieth century. Two main discourses that stigmatize magical healing are evident from the data: the religious and enlightenment discourses. These show the power relations involved in the condemnation of magical healing as an example of the rural population's superstition and naivety. This article offers new information about stigmatizing discourses on healing methods and practices that were considered witchcraft in a period when a community was undergoing cultural changes that affected health beliefs and power relations.

Introduction

In pre-modern rural regions of Finland, healthcare was traditionally provided by vernacular healers using both magical and non-magical methods.¹ However, the

development of medicine created tensions in a rural medical market that had previously been dominated by vernacular healers. The attitudes of health authorities and pastors towards magical healing during the time of modernization can be characterized as condescending towards the ‘superstitious’ and non-conventional manners of the rural population, which still resorted to traditional vernacular healing (Piela 2003: 318; cf. Karisto *et al.* 1992: 11). In this article, I discuss how the ‘framework of stigma’ (Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan 2001) can be adapted to the discourses on magical healing in pre-modern Swedish Ostrobothnia. Through discourse analysis, the power relations affecting stigmatization in a mass medium can be detected (Fairclough 1995: 54). This analysis brings new information to bear on the tensions that affected healthcare providers in the pre-modern rural community, and in general on discourses of healing in a community undergoing profound changes. I focus

* Original text in Swedish: ‘inga “kloka” gubbar och gummor, utan riktiga läkare!’ (Syd-Österbotten 3.9.1904).

1 I am grateful for the anonymous reviewers for their constructive recommendations on an earlier version of this article. The article is part of the research project ‘Invisible Forces: Contact with the Supernatural

in Two Languages’, funded by the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland. Earlier versions of this paper were given at conferences ‘Religion and Cultural Change’ (Turku 2021), and SIEF 2021 (Helsinki).

on discourses on magical healing in connection with medicine, rather than magical healing itself (cf. Cohen 2002). In this article, ‘discourses’ are understood as ‘semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world (physical, social or mental) which can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors’ (Fairclough 2010: 232). I begin by defining the central terms applied in this article.

The term ‘magical healing’ refers here to the healing practised by ritual specialists known as ‘cunning folk’, using spells and rituals; these held authority in healing illnesses caused by witchcraft (Davies 1999: 56; cf. Piela 2017: 102).² This definition seeks to distinguish magical healing from non-magical vernacular healing, which is excluded from the data.³ Other vernacular healers did not heal illnesses caused by witchcraft nor practice other deeds associated with the cunning folk, such as finding stolen property or using spells (cf. Davies 1999: 56, 59–61). The terms ‘physician’ and ‘medicine’ refer here to professional health care (cf. O’Connor 1995: xxi).

The fluidly structured medical market is loosely defined as covering suppliers of medical services who provide medical treatments from their own standpoints,

- 2 Word *laga fo* (= *laga för*) is used when ‘an old witch man or woman or someone else tries to heal an illness through [folk-]healing (*omlagning*) or some medicine which only he (she) can prepare or by pure witchcraft’. (Swe. ‘Uttrycket laga fo = laga för användes, då en trollgubbe eller -kärning eller någon annan försökes bota en sjukdom genom omlagning eller någon medicin som han (hon) ensam kan förfärdiga eller genom rent trolleri.’) (SLS 554: 221)
- 3 Vernacular healers like Johan Jakob Bäck, who appeared in local newspapers but did not practise magical healing, are excluded from the data (cf. Kananoja 2021).

and patients who buy treatments about which they might have little knowledge (Lindemann 1996: 13–14; Digby 1994: 2–3). Although the term ‘illicit healing’ lacks a definitive definition, its practitioners were seen to oppose medicine (Ling 2004: 13–15; cf. Digby 1994: 27). English newspapers often labelled cunning folk ‘quacks’⁴ (Davies 1999: 57–8), and in Ostrobothnia the same term in Swedish (*kvacksalvare*) was used for vernacular, including magical, healers. Most probably, patients in rural communities resorted to both magical healers and physicians when needed, if they had access to both healthcare providers (Davies 1999: 62–3; Digby 1994: 26), despite newspapers writing about issues related to magic as being scandalous (Davies 1998: 145). Illicit healing was condemned ‘in economic, social, and moral terms’ (Lindemann 1996: 15) in Ostrobothnia as well as elsewhere. At the turn of the twentieth century, the density of the physicians’ network in Finland was very low, with 13,550 rural residents per physician (Konttinen 1991: 151–2). Therefore, rural patients in Swedish Ostrobothnia as well as in other rural regions in Finland may have had no other option than to turn to vernacular healers. In general, healthcare providers in the medical market competed financially against each other, which affected how physicians related to vernacular healers (Piela 2017: 100; Ling 2004: 170–82).

- 4 Because ‘quack’ is a pejorative term, I apply the term ‘vernacular healer’ or ‘illicit healing/healers’ when I refer to vernacular healers who most likely did not perform magical healing (cf. Lindemann 1996: 168–71). However, I use the term ‘quack’ or ‘quackery’ when I refer to pre-modern discourses on vernacular healing.

I first give an overview of my sources, methods and theoretical framework. Then I proceed to the analysis sections. I focus on stigmatizing discourses although other discourses could be found in the data. The main public discourses discussed here are the religious discourse and enlightenment discourse.⁵ To conclude, I summarize the key findings.

Sources and method

The primary data consist of newspaper texts in the National Library of Finland's digital collections.⁶ Swedish-language newspapers published between 1848 and 1918 were chosen for analysis on the basis of their regionality. This time period encompasses years during which folklore was being collected in Swedish Ostrobothnia, beginning in 1848 when Oscar Rancken published

an inquiry in *Ilmarinen* for the collection of Swedish folklore (Häggman 2021: 50). The number of newspapers expanded in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Salmi *et al.* 2021: 15; Landgren 1988: 280; Åkerblom 1963: 310–12). I have excluded fictional narratives and newspaper texts about magical healers in regions outside Ostrobothnia from the data. Although these examples might offer supplementary data for the public discourse on magical healing, I suggest that the data derived from newspaper texts is large enough, for the purposes of this study, to provide insight into the local public discussion on magical healing.

I searched several Swedish-language newspapers⁷ under the terms *widskepelse* (superstition or use of witchcraft), *omlaga* (to heal), *botare* (healer), *kwacksalware* (quacksalver), *klok* gumm** (wise woman), *klok* gubb** (wise man), *trollkarl* (male witch) and *trollkvinna* (female witch), *trolldo** (witchcraft), and *trollko** (witchcraft).⁸ From these results, I chose sixty-one newspaper texts as the main data corpus for newspaper texts that represent the public discourse on magical healing. Of these sixty-one texts, fifty-four represent stigmatizing discourses according to this analysis.

- 5 Mirjam Mencej (2017) has analysed Christian and rational discourses in her data among other discourses related to witchcraft in rural Slovenia. In her article, Christian discourse is 'a discourse which is occasionally embraced by the clergy, and only marginally by the people in the region (when talking about witchcraft)' (p. 152). The religious discourse analysed in this article is more closely connected to vernacular beliefs and Christian attitudes towards witchcraft than what Menjec's data show. Menjec (p. 155) has also connected the labelling of witchcraft as 'superstition' with rational (here = enlightenment) discourse. In this article, I have connected the superstition label with religious discourse, as I see religious discourse as being opposed to magical healing, which it castigates as 'false beliefs' (e.g. *Österbotten* 15.6.1867), and not as being connected to the ideal of an enlightened person.
- 6 As I aim to recognize the main discourses that were used about magical healing in the newspapers, I have not performed a typological analysis of different genres in the newspaper texts but approached them as examples of public discourse regardless of text type.

- 7 These newspapers are *Ilmarinen* (est. 1847), *Jakobstads Tidning* (est. 1898), *Kristinestads tidning* (est. 1897), *Mellersta Österbotten* (est. 1881), *Norra Posten* (est. 1883), *Svenska Österbotten* (est. 1895), *Syd-Österbotten* (est. 1903), *Wasa Tidning* (est. 1839 and 1880), *Vasabladet* (est. 1856), *Österbotten* (est. 1864), *Österbottens Folkblad* (est. 1908), *Österbottningen* (est. 1898), and *Österbottniska Posten* (est. 1883).

- 8 I have kept gendered expressions about witches in the data examples in this article because they indicate which gender was thought to use magical healing and/or witchcraft.

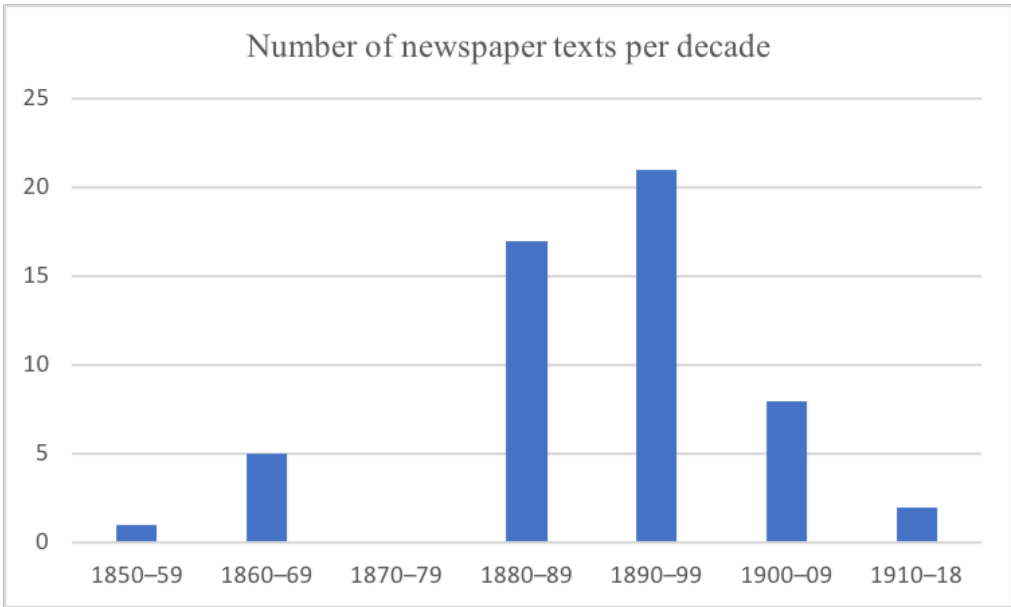
These data were analysed using discourse analysis. Norman Fairclough (1995) has drawn up three dimensions of discourse analysis that are adopted in this article: text analysis, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. On a textual level, I seek to explain, through the stigma framework presented below, how social relations are represented in newspaper texts (p. 58). Discourse practices that mediate between the textual and sociocultural levels reflect social changes (pp. 59–61): in this article, the change from vernacular healing towards medicine. On this level, the results from the first-level analysis are placed in a wider context in an analysis of underlying tendencies that affect stigmatizing discourses. Finally, analysis turns to sociocultural practice as it relates to those considered to hold positions of power in the field of magical healing, and to the kinds of sociocultural power relations that can be detected (pp. 50–2).

As a theoretical tool, I use stigma theory to analyse how various discourses were formed in order to stigmatize magical healing in the newspaper data. I define ‘stigma’ as a culturally constructed negative label applied to magical healing, based on the various components required to form a stigma (cf. Link and Phelan 2001: 377; see below). Media images of various actors in the medical market contribute to the construction of popular stereotypes that affect how a stigma is embedded in cultural contexts and hence in the thinking of media consumers (Pescosolido and Martin 2015: 104). I argue that these labels were constructed within narratives that the newspapers generated about a changing medical market. The newspapers were part of a communal context with vernacular narratives in which potential stigmas were constructed and reinforced (Pescosolido *et al.* 2008: 435–6).

Link and Phelan (2001: 365–76) recognize five components in constructing a stigma:

1. Groups are distinguished by oversimplified socially constructed differences. To reflect this, I have included labelling terms that appear in the newspaper texts on magical healing, healers and their patients.
2. These differences are associated with negative attributes. These first two aspects of a stigma construction are analysed on a textual level, following the model presented above.
3. The stigmatized group is othered from ‘us’. I aim to analyse the ‘othered’ as those reported as using magical healing, whether as practitioners or patients.
4. The status loss and discrimination of the stigmatized group refer to newspapers’ aim of lessening belief in magical healing. Aspects 3 and 4 are analysed as discursive practices.
5. The final component of the social production of stigma is power, that is, to whom the power to educate, heal or otherwise correct the situation is given. This relates to the final level on a discourse analysis that mediates sociocultural practices. In some cases, these stigmatizing components may overlap, especially the first and second components, and the same newspaper text may contain several components.

Next, I will introduce two dominant discourses found in the public discourse data, the religious and enlightenment discourses, before venturing towards a more detailed analysis of stigmatizing discourses applied



Number of newspaper texts per decade.

in the newspapers and consider how these two discourses appear in the data.

Religious discourse

The table above illustrates how the number of stigmatizing newspaper discourses about magical healing was highest in 1880–99, with thirty-nine texts out of fifty-four. Of these fifty-four newspaper texts, eight were published as duplicates (for reuse of Finnish newspaper texts, see Salmi *et al.* 2021).

There appear to be several explanations behind this. In 1865, the healthcare of the populace was assigned to municipal boards (Fi. *kunnallislautakunta*), but during the great famine years of 1867–8 it became obvious that the healthcare system in Finland was not efficient. In the 1880s and 1890s, several governmental healthcare institutions were established (Piela 2006: 287). This could explain why the most newspaper texts about magical healing were published between 1880 and 1900. Crises create power structures connected

to stigmatizing discourses. By applying discourse analysis, these changes and their effects on the community can be understood on a more profound level (Fairclough 2005: 930–1).

Christianity and religious adherence were a firm part of pre-modern world-views. Religious language and motifs were employed to discuss many topics (Mikkola 2009: 180–2). Newspaper texts reflect the contemporary tumultuous public discourse on religious matters regarding revival movements and their growing popularity. By the early twentieth century, their strongest following in Finland was in Ostrobothnia (Wolf-Knuts 1991: 50–1; Dahlbacka 1987: 17–19).⁹ Revival move-

9 To demonstrate the diversity of revival movements in Swedish Ostrobothnia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ulrika Wolf-Knuts (2002: 151) lists as the main revival movements: Pietism, Svenska Lutherska Evangeli-Föreningen (The Swedish Lutheran Evangelical

ments' popularity had an impact on what was considered normative behaviour.

The religious discourse discussed in this article echoes vernacular motifs. Ostrobothnian magical healers did not want to be associated with witches because the Catechism identifies witches with the devil (SLS 218: 80; cf. Mencej 2017: 153–4; see Lindemann 1996: 306–7 for denial of consulting magical healers or explaining illnesses within vernacular healing). The school teacher Mårten Holmberg's about 'superstition' in Vörå lecture (SLS 163: 18–19) associates the devil with magical healers: it is considered a great sin to know spells, and male witches (Swe. *trollkarl*) have sold their souls to the devil, although they are 'in principle doctors' (see Wolf-Knuts 1991: 202 for the difficulty of interpreting Holmberg's lecture). A vernacular explanation defines 'superstition' as 'a strong faith in a marvellous force that rules in nature and with which one could do both good and evil'¹⁰ (SLS 220: 13–14). This distinction between witches and healers did not prevent vernacular narratives from associating magical healers with the devil (Kouvola 2021: 12; Wolf-Knuts 2002: 162; Tillhagen 1977: 56–60). The association was also evoked as a discursive practice in a newspaper text against belief in cunning folk's magical abilities: 'people live in a belief that *trollgubbar* and *gummor* can do good and harm with help

Association in Finland), and Kyrkans Ungdom in Ostrobothnian Vörå, besides the official Lutheran Church. Also, non-Lutheran movements such as the Baptist movement, Pentecostalism and Methodism were popular.

10 Original text in Swedish: 'Widskepelse är en stark tro på en förunderlig kraft som härska i naturen med hvilken man kan göra både godt och ondt.'

from the devil'¹¹ (*Österbotten* 15.6.1867). Regardless of the stigmatizing association, some people still chose magical healing in the medical market (Wolf-Knuts 1991: 202). Vernacular beliefs and Christianity did not necessarily contradict each other in vernacular thinking; rather, they formed a syncretic worldview that did not exclude magical healing if it was considered to come from a source other than witchcraft, which was associated with the devil. Revivalist movements nevertheless felt it important to distinguish between vernacular beliefs and Christianity, which included defending Christian living against non-Christian beliefs (Mikkola 2009: 225). Revivalist movements also condemned alcohol use because it was associated with the devil, but this did not necessarily affect vernacular narratives or the belief in the use of alcohol in healing (cf. Wolf-Knuts 2002: 160–1). I will return to this subject later in the analysis section.

The rural population regarded practices of magical rituals as shameful as a result of oppression by the clergy (Wolf-Knuts 2004: 197–9). As patients did not want to seek help from witches (SLS 218: 80), they may have tried to avoid stigma by association by socially distancing themselves from a stigmatized practice (Pescosolido and Martin 2015: 94, 96–7), in this case healing with 'witchcraft'. Vernacular narratives already stigmatized users of magic as witches who had made a pact with the devil (cf. Mikkola 2009: 225). As shown below, the religious discourse is evident in the newspaper texts on magical healing, as is the way practices related to it were discussed in a stigmatizing manner. Before continuing to the

11 Original text in Swedish: 'folket lefver i den tro, att trollgubbar och gummor, genom djävulens hjälp kunna göra nytta eller skada.'

analysis, I introduce the second main discourse discussed in this article, that is, the enlightenment discourse.

Enlightenment discourse

Newspapers and elementary schools had an influence upon cultural assumptions in Ostrobothnia (Lönnqvist 1972: 41). The individual's ability to read did not affect the distribution of public discourse, because the rural population collectively read important texts, such as religious texts and newspapers, whose subscription numbers had increased in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Asplund Ingemark 2004: 74, 79–80; Dahlbacka 1987: 137; cf. Mikkola 2009: 184–5; Wolf-Knuts 2002: 151). According to the newspapers, the education of the people was proceeding, albeit slowly (*Vasabladet* 4.12.1880; *Vasabladet* 25.2.1888; *Wasa Tidning* 4.8.1892; *Wasa Tidning* 30.5.1893; Mikkola 2009: 141–4). Newspaper texts often expressed amazement that belief in magical healing still existed (*Syd-Österbotten* 23.2.1907; *Österbottningen* 24.9.1907; cf. Davies 1998: 141). This bewilderment originated from an enlightenment discourse, according to which 'superstition' should be banished as it is in opposition to scientific knowledge (Mencej 2017: 155; Motz 1998: 341–4).¹²

By the end of the nineteenth century, 'the ideal of the informed individual' (Asplund Ingemark 2004: 177) had become part of the public discourse in Ostrobothnia. Several new elementary schools were established in Swedish Ostrobothnia in the late nineteenth century, which made it easier for families to send their children

to foundations that were located nearby (Mikkola 2009: 257; Lönnqvist 1972: 64). Some of these schools had already been established before the Education Decree of 1866, which affirmed free education (Asplund Ingemark 2004: 73). As a result, the rural population should have been 'enlightened' through newly established governmental facilities and non-profit organizations (Asplund Ingemark 2004: 74; Åkerblom 1963: 262–339; Lönnqvist 1972: 65). In a village community, teachers met with a similar ambivalence to pastors on the parish level. They were respected as authorities but at the same time public education was resisted, at least in the Finnish communities (Mikkola 2009: 157–8, 161–5). The 'enlightening' of the people was in progress and faith in magical healing did not fit into the picture of an enlightened and civilized individual.

Enlightenment was associated with education, and therefore with health authorities staffed by the academically trained. Newspaper articles told of how difficult and expensive it was for patients to consult physicians (*Norra Posten* 6.12.1883) as there were too few physicians in rural regions (*Wasa Tidning* 5.2.1888; *Vasabladet* 8.2.1888). This changed, for example in Vörå in 1897 when the first municipal physician began his work (Lönnqvist 1972: 64). However, some of the patients who consulted magical healers may have been afraid that the physicians would condemn their hygiene or make them doubt their ability to take care of their cattle if they turned to academically trained physicians when needed (Mencej 2015: 121–2), although this is not explicitly stated in the source material used for this article. In 1892, Konrad Relander published a survey of health conditions in Haapajärvi, Northern Ostrobothnia, in which he reported that most of the rural residents lived in unhygienic conditions

12 Similarly, in eighteenth-century Germany, 'superstition' was seen as hindering the enlightenment and improvement of material goods (Lindemann 1996: 11).

(Karisto *et al.* 1992: 13–15). Although vernacular narratives did not clearly express patients' thoughts on physicians' attitudes, Relander's account indicates that there may have been a dividing line between physicians and their rural patients, which could have hindered patients in consulting physicians. Stigmatizing discourses towards magical healing in the public discourse may in effect have made patients more cautious about choosing a physician from the medical market if they had been more accustomed to consult a vernacular healer, and if they felt that they might be judged for consulting a stigmatized health practitioner (cf. Goffman 1963: 23–31). Nevertheless, on the basis of this data, it is not possible to evaluate how the local rural population itself considered its opportunities to acquire medical treatment in the medical market and what responses it had to stigmatizing public discourses.

Attitudes to vernacular healing in academic discussion had begun to change by the end of the nineteenth century. Pre-modern physicians approached vernacular health beliefs with either astonishment or suspicion (O'Connor 1995: 70–4; cf. Digby 1994: 63). Interest in vernacular healing was also apparent among members of the Finnish Medical Society Duodecim (est. 1881). In 1913 Duodecim established an ethnology committee to continue collecting vernacular healing material, a project that had begun earlier (Laaksonen 1983: 17–8; cf. Lindemann 1996: 309–11). Also, vernacular healers adopted guidelines from medical books or used medicine from apothecaries in their healing, and undertook training, for example from teachers who knew how to practise cupping (Mikkola 2009: 226). Nevertheless, vernacular health beliefs were arguably seen in general by the practitioners of medicine as practices that belonged to the past and

would eventually be replaced by medicine (O'Connor 1995: 70). Next, I will look more closely at how these two discourses affected how magical healing was stigmatized in the public discourse of the newspaper texts.

Magical healing on a textual level

Mass media, such as newspapers, paint stereotypical pictures, and have the power to set practitioners apart from conventional society (Cohen 2002: 8–9). In the Ostrobothnian newspaper texts, magical healers are continually labelled 'witches' (Swe. *trollkarl*, *trollgubbe*, *trollqvinna*, *trollgumma*) instead of neutral terms such as 'healers' (local term *omlagare*): 'Searching for a cure for this illness, M. had travelled with his wife to Haapawesi to visit "a male witch" who had a reputation for healing such illnesses'¹³ (*Jakobstads Tidning* 3.11.1900¹⁴) and people who consulted them were 'superstitious' (e.g. *Vasabladet* 21.12.1861; *Österbotten* 6.7.1867; *Vasabladet* 18.4.1895). These terms create a stigmatized, othered setting for magical healing. These terms already comment on the two main discourses by labelling magical healing as superstition, calling magical healers witches instead of merely healers. At the same time, people who consult magical healers are labelled 'simple-minded' (Swe. *enfaldiga*) throughout the data (e.g. *Vasabladet* 13.8.1881; *Wasa Tidning* 30.3.1886; *Syd-Österbotten* 17.3.1906), referring to the enlightenment discourse.

13 Original text in Swedish: 'För att söka bot mot denna sjukdom hade M. begifwit sig med sin hustru till Haapawesi till en där boende "trollgubbe", som sått rykte om sig att kunna bota dylika sjukdomar.'

14 Duplicate versions (hereafter abbreviated dupl.) *Österbottningen*, 6.11.1900; *Vasabladet*, 6.11.1900.



Healing illness *knarrin* in Ostrobothnia, 1915. SLS Archive, 253a_28 Traditions- och språksamlingen, photo: Valter W. Forsblom.

Vernacular beliefs were to some extent considered harmless as such, belonging to the mythic past in the pre-modern thinking that lifted up the *Kalevala* as one of the building blocks of the nationally shared heritage (Mikkola 2009: 222–3). When it came to healing, these beliefs hindered enlightenment with inappropriate health concepts. Stigmatizing discourses on magical healing labelled it as a superstition that was common even among people who considered themselves ‘God’s children’ (*Vasabladet* 5.12.1895), which indicates that stigmatizing discourses about magical healing contained vocabulary familiar to revivalist movements. Labelling magical healing as ‘superstition’ portrays it as something that good Christians do not engage in, that is, as ‘false beliefs’ (Swe. *wantro*) that are ‘without a doubt a heritage from the darkness of paganism’¹⁵ (*Österbottniska Posten* 28.6.1913).

15 Original text in Swedish: ‘Utan twiwel är den ett arw från hedendomens mörker.’

On the textual level, magical healers were said to use questionable objects related to the church in their healing, such as soil from graveyards, or otherwise to visit churchyards in their practice (*Vasabladet* 13.8.1881; *Kristinestads Tidning* 21.12.1898; *Vasabladet* 26.1.1899; cf. Kouvola 2021: 9; Tillhagen 1977: 129). Visiting graveyards at night and using artefacts acquired there was a breach of communal norms (Koski 2011: 106–8, 227–32), so using discursive practices which implied that magical healers performed these acts stigmatized them. Vernacular narratives were also adopted in the revivalist teaching of a popular preacher, Jakob Edvard Wefvar, who used communally familiar narratives to make his teaching easier for the local community in Vörå to accept (Asplund Ingemark 2004: 82–3). A message that implies change can be easier for the local community to adopt when it applies a concept already familiar in the region.

These stigmatizing terms and labels created an oversimplified category of people

who practised magical healing and consulted those who did so (Link and Phelan 2001: 367, 368–9). They did not take into consideration any nuances or reasons behind choosing magical healing in the medical market, other than superstition and simple-mindedness. Next, I will look more closely at how these labels are narrated on the second level of the discourse analysis, that is the discursive practices. As noted, the levels of analysis may overlap, and they cannot be separated from each other, as the textual level affects discursive practices (Fairclough 1995: 58–60).

Discursive practices on magical healing

In this section, I will examine the discursive practices used in pre-modern Ostrobothnian newspapers on magical healing and how these practices constructed religious and enlightenment discourses on a sociocultural level that represented the power structures in creating a stigma against magical healing. This analysis is based on two examples that illuminate how religious and enlightenment discourses are intertwined in the data and how magical healers are contradicted by medicine. We will look at these power structures more closely in the final section of the analysis.

In religious discourse, magical healing is described as ‘unchristian’: ‘[An orderly farmer] had a child who suffered from epilepsy. The father sought countless times for a physician for this difficult illness without success; nearby lived a female witch who had asked for permission to heal the boy; but the father, who saw it as unchristian to trust superstitious means, had forbidden such things’ (*Österbotten* 6.7.1867).¹⁶

16 Original text in Swedish: ‘[En ordentlig bonde] hade ett barn som var behäftadt med fallandesot, för hwilken swåra sjukdom

This discursive practice sets the neighbourhood female witch against a righteous father. Representing othering discursive practice, he is the ‘us’ who understands the corruptness of the use of magical healing even in his son’s difficult disease, which physicians have not been able to cure, and which seems hopeless. In the end, the father buys medicine from an apothecary following the witch’s orders, and the boy is healed. The newspaper text explains that if the treatment had been given using the witch’s ‘usual spells’,¹⁷ the boy’s recovery would have been understood as a result of her ‘powerful readings’¹⁸ instead of medicine. This narrative combines religious and enlightenment discourses by stating that magical healing is unchristian and medicine from an apothecary heals more difficult illnesses than spells and readings.

As shown in this example, magical healing is stigmatized on a textual level with discursive practices. These two aspects of the discourse analysis cannot be separated from each other. Another example (*Norra Posten* 6.12.1883), which aligns with the enlightenment discourse, sets a ‘wise old man and woman’ (Swe. *klok gubbe och klok gumma*) in opposition to physicians who might be difficult for the rural population to reach because of long distances in the countryside. In this example, the magical healers are reported to have less knowledge than the physicians about how the human body operates. If the magical healer is successful in healing someone, it is because the

fadren otaliga gånger förgäfwes sökte läkare; en i närheten bosatt trollqwinna begärde särskilda gånger att få bota den sjuka gossen; men fadren, som ansåg det för okristligt att anlita widskepliga medel, wågrade sådant.’

17 Original text in Swedish: ‘wanliga trollformler.’

18 Original text in Swedish: ‘kraftiga läsningar.’

patient has consulted the magical healer so early in their sickness that it has been easily curable, or because the patient has such a strong faith in the magical healers' abilities to heal that they are cured. This text aims to reduce belief in magical healing by means of discursive practices that portray magical healers as unprofessional healers who heal by chance. Before examining this stigmatization level, let us first look more closely at who the 'us' and 'them' are in relation to magical healing in the newspaper writing.

Informed 'us' and less enlightened 'them'

Public discourses define how 'others' act, and they form stereotypes around labels applied to these people. These discursive practices could also be defined as, for example, meaning systems (Koski 2016: 22). The third level of the stigma framework makes a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. 'They' are different from 'us' because of the negative stereotypes applied to them in earlier levels of the framework (Link and Phelan 2001: 370). An academically trained social class was rising in Finland during the nineteenth century. One of its aims was to distinguish itself from the 'folk' by, among other things, educating the rural population, which was 'the other' that practised magical healing (Piela 2003: 318). According to the newspaper texts, the rural population is consistently the 'they' who consult magical healers (e.g. *Österbotten* 15.6.1867; *Wasa Tidning* 29.12.1885; *Kristinestads Tidning* 18.8.1900), with only a few exceptions.¹⁹ Every educated member of a higher society should work against the 'less enlightened' rural population's super-

stitious beliefs in old men's and women's magical powers (*Vasabladet* 21.12.1861); magical healing 'characterizes our folk heavily'²⁰ (*Norra Posten* 17.1.1891).

After the 1850s, greater emphasis was placed on how healthcare was distributed in Finnish society. In particular, poorer members of society were seen as uncivilized and in need of healthcare education. This was provided at the turn of the twentieth century in informative texts that appeared in publications directed at the working class (Piela 2006: 286–9). The newspaper data analysed here support the reading of the rural population as the 'they' who turn to magical healing despite the progress of enlightenment and physicians' increasing availability in rural regions. Discursive practices used in the newspapers narrated how gullible and simple 'they' were, who still willingly consulted magical healers with their inferior knowledge of the human body as compared to the physicians.

Reducing belief in magical healing

Mediating between the textual and socio-cultural levels, discourse practices make transparent the tensions in a community that indicate a change it taking place. On the fourth level of the stigma framework, the status loss of magical healing is narrated in various ways. Magical healing is soon to disappear (*Österbottenska Posten* 17.12.1885; *Wasa Tidning* 12.12.1894; *Syd-Österbotten* 17.3.1906) because magical healers are no longer in demand unless their customers are 'ignorant and simple-minded'²¹ (*Vasabladet* 18.4.1895) and 'elementary schools in Ostrobothnia have

19 These exceptions are people who consider themselves 'God's children' (*Vasabladet* 5.12.1895) but even 'educated classes' consult magical healers (*Wasa Tidning* 6.11.1896, dupl. *Norra Posten* 11.11.1896).

20 Original text in Swedish: 'i så hög grad karektiserar vårt folk.'

21 Original text in Swedish: 'okunniga och enfaldiga kunder.'



Simon Viklund heals illness called *likfassna*. Oravais, Kukkus 1916. SLS Archive, 267_10 Traditions- och språksamlingen, photo: Valter W. Forsblom.

already made many witches disappear; they have lost their popularity²² (*Vasabladet* 16.6.1898). These examples point towards a change in the medical market from vernacular magical healers to academically trained physicians, at least on a discursive level. As noted earlier, it is difficult to determine how the local population actually saw this change in meaning systems, owing to the nature of the source material.

Wasa Tidning (29.12.1885) describes various healing methods for *likkråsa*, an illness that strikes if a person is frightened by seeing a dead body, in order to make magical healing less effective by revealing its methods. The narrative stigmatizes magical healing strongly: male witches (Swe. *trollkarlar*) con their patients for money.²³

22 Original text in Swedish: 'Folkundervisningen i Österbotten har redan bragt många trollgubbar att försvinna; de hafva mistat sin popularitet.'

23 For other newspaper texts that use the discursive practice that the magical healers con their patients, see *Vasabladet* 13.8.1881;

According to the newspapers, the main reason for consulting magical healers is a lack of physicians and pharmacies nearby. If people were to receive better access to modern healthcare, they would choose medicine over vernacular healing. The author explains that published descriptions of magical healing methods reduced belief in them among the rural population, because it was believed that these methods would lose their power once they were explicitly spoken of (cf. *Wasa Tidning* 4.8.1892).²⁴ This text also places magical healing in opposition to modern medicine.

Similar discursive practices sought to decrease belief in magical healing, portraying magical healers as ordinary people who happened to heal with shrewdness and a good medicine cabinet (*Vasabladet* 2.7.1896²⁵) instead of magical abilities. Magical healers were known to boast about their skills in healing to advertise and to strengthen their personal reputation as communally accepted healers (Lahti 2013: 104–5). *Vasabladet* (21.1.1897) tells of a male witch (Swe. *trollkarl*) who was proud enough to consider himself 'the most respected physician in the world'.²⁶ Despite his boasting, the author in *Vasabladet* defines him as a quack, who flees before he can be accused of his craft.

Vasabladet 8.12.1886 (dupl. *Norra Posten* 10.12.1886); *Wasa Tidning* 6.11.1896 (dupl. *Norra Posten* 11.11.1896).

24 A similar belief that the words lose power when they are heard is known in other regions, for example in Sweden (Tillhagen 1977: 52).

25 Dupl. *Norra Posten* 4.7.1896.

26 Original text in Swedish: 'tror sig wara den förnämsta läkare i världen.'

A stigmatizing ingredient, alcohol, ‘plays the main role each time’ (*Österbottniska Posten* 28.06.1913) in magical healing.²⁷ It was used as a diagnostic and healing ingredient in vernacular healing (Kouvola 2021: 9) despite revivalist movements’ suspicions of it, as mentioned earlier. Related to the religious discourse, alcohol in the public discourse is not used in healing rituals; rather, the magical healers use alcohol to intoxicate themselves:

The male witch [Swe. *trollkarlen*] was now so intoxicated that he did not have the strength to go inside the cottage but rested on the stairs. It was then that I arrived. The *trollkarl* mumbled to himself. I saw straightaway that he was drunk; but he asked me to leave him alone because he wanted to sleep. But when I learned that he was a *trollkarl*, I gave him a good lesson. I sought to enlighten people about this humbug. Sum: the maid still had her toothache and the male witch had got himself very drunk.²⁸ (*Ilmarinen* 11.2.1852)

- 27 Alcohol was also used as a discursive practice in newspaper texts that told of how ‘one cannot bewitch without alcohol’ (*Vasabladet* 25.2.1888), a ‘male witch’ consuming alcohol himself instead of using it in healing (*Wasa Tidning* 12.12.1894, cf. *Vasabladet* 15.9.1903), alcohol being paradoxically used to cure delirium (*Wasa Tidning* 9.10.1895), and a ‘quack’ who healed with supernatural forces being so drunk that he was taken to jail (*Vasabladet* 15.9.1903).
- 28 Original text in Swedish: ‘Trollkarlen var nu så öfverlastad, att han ej orkade in i stugan, utan blef liggande på trappan. Just “in dem” kommer jag dit. Trollkarlen mumlar för sig själf. Jag insåg nog genast att han var full; men han bad mig låta sig vara i fred emedan han ville drömma. Men då jag fick veta att det var en trollkarl, gaf jag honom en dugtig lexa. Jag sökte jemväl upplysa folket om bedrägeriet. Summa: pigan fick

This example combines religious and enlightenment discourses. The ‘I’ of the narrative tells how he has arrived just in time to witness the magical healer’s intoxicated state after he had drunk the alcohol that the maid had given him to be healed from a toothache. In this example, the narrator aims to educate people on magical healing, but it also labels the magical healer as someone who uses alcohol to intoxicate themselves instead of helping those in need.

As an outmost discursive practice against magical healing, it is portrayed as being potentially lethal: ‘a quack may give a dose that does not need repeating’ (*Vasabladet* 4.12.1880),²⁹ implying a final treatment after which the patient is no longer alive. Newspaper texts tell of how healing procedures lead to death because of some toxic ingredient in the remedy, such as opium (*Österbotten* 3.6.1865), or the patient committing suicide at a cunning man’s house to which she has been brought to get help for her depression (*Jakobstads Tidning* 3.11.1900;³⁰ cf. *Österbottningen* 18.10.1898). Labelling magical healers as potentially lethal for their patients, newspaper texts increased the stigma around them (Pescosolido *et al.* 2008: 433–4), narrating a disaster model for what happens when one consults a magical healer instead of a physician (cf. Cohen 2002: 37–8).

Newspaper texts show consistent, repetitive discursive practices that are almost homogeneous. Therefore, it can be argued, based on this analysis, that stigmatizing discursive practices exhibit a

behålla sin tandverk, och trollkarlen fick sig ett väldigt rus.’

- 29 Original text in Swedish: ‘en qwacksalware, kan han ge den sjuke utan vidare en dosis, som ej behöfwer repeteras.’

- 30 Dupl. *Österbottningen* 6.11.1900; *Vasabladet* 6.11.1900.



Hidden location for making illicit alcohol (Swe. *lönnbränneri*) in Oravais in 1916, where magical healers (*omlagare*) were told to get alcohol. SLS Archive, 267_24 Traditions- och språksamlingen, photo: Valter W. Forsblom.

textually unchanging opposition of stigmatized and stigmatizers (cf. Fairclough 1995: 60–1): it is the simple-minded rural population that consults magical healers, who merely con their customers, for example for financial benefit (e.g. *Österbottniska Posten* 25.7.1889;³¹ *Wasa Tidning* 6.11.1896³²). In *Österbotten* (6.7.1867) magical healing and the establishment of elementary schools was directly confronted: ‘Many have been angered because the school costs a couple of pennies. But they are not so concerned for when a female witch fools them for several marks.’³³ Financial arguments against elementary school were common not only in Swedish Ostrobothnia but in other regions in Finland as well. The costs of establishing and maintaining elementary

schools were one of the biggest expenditures for municipalities, and these costs also fell on local families with children. Some of the economically hard-pressed rural families felt that it was more sensible to educate children at home for the duties they would encounter later in life in their own communities, such as in farming, than send them to expensive schools that promoted a different kind of thinking and worldview from their local communities, which might oppose their parents’ authority and the opportunities that they might have had as children (Mikkola 2009: 258–60, 273). Sociocultural structures affected how this change was discussed and what parties had the power to affect the local population’s thinking.

Sociocultural level and power relations

The fifth and final component shows which parties exercised power over the ‘simple rural population’s childish belief’ in magical healing. There were two main parties who had the power to affect persistent

31 Dupl. *Norra Posten* 27.7.1889.

32 Dupl. *Norra Posten* 11.11.1896.

33 Original text in Swedish: ‘Mången har varit förargad, när till skolan skall läggas ut några penni. Men det räknas ej så noga när en trollpacka narrar till sig flere mark.’

and stigmatized beliefs: pastors and educators. The main stigmatizing discourses, religious and enlightenment discourse, arose from power relations seen as ideal for an informed person's choice in the medical market over 'superstitious' vernacular beliefs. Pastors were expected to root out superstition (*Vasabladet* 21.12.1861). They were respected within the local communities, despite there also being vernacular narratives that portrayed pastors in a controversial light (Mikkola 2009: 156–8).

With education, such 'phantoms of the night'³⁴ should be banished from people's minds (*Vasabladet* 4.12.1880; cf. *Österbottniska Posten* 17.12.1885; *Vasabladet* 8.2.1888; *Vasabladet* 25.2.1888). Connected to the enlightenment discourse, physicians were promoted as the most highly valued option in the medical market. They had the best knowledge of illnesses (*Vasabladet* 25.2.1888; cf. *Österbottniska Posten* 28.6.1913) but were often helpless when patients consulted them too late (*Norra Posten* 6.12.1883; *Wasa Tidning* 22.11.1888). If physicians could not heal illnesses quickly enough, it created mistrust among the rural population (*Wasa Tidning* 6.8.1898), and because of this mistrust, rural residents would not want to consult physicians (*Wasa Tidning* 20.7.1894; cf. *Kristinestads Tidning* 21.12.1898). Similarly, this discussion was current in nearby regions as well. Physicians in Sweden were concerned that unprofessional healing might harm patients (Ling 2004: 133–40), so arguments against illicit healing among the rural population were needed to save lives.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, authorities often approached vernacular and magical healing condescendingly

and hierarchically. This attitude became visible in the public discourse on magical healing. Contextualized into a larger picture, magical healing in newspapers was an example of the rural population's backwardness in the time of enlightenment progress. Wider contextualization of local power relations and their impact on health-care values remains beyond the scope of this article and is left for future research.

Conclusions

My analysis has shown that newspaper texts paralleled magical healing with the superstition that was considered customary among the rural population. Newspaper media presented narratives that reflected physicians' concerns about the dangers of unprofessional healing, and defined norms for socially acceptable healing. Although newspapers applied religious and enlightenment discourses to promote modern medicine in the medical market, their actual impact may have been overshadowed by people's own social relationships and contacts, especially in rural villages (Mikkola 2009: 145). The religious discourse found parallels in vernacular narratives, but the enlightenment discourse brought new ideas with it as the importance of physicians and elementary schools were promoted (cf. p. 155). Magical healing was labelled 'superstition', which both the religious and educational authorities should root out from the rural population. By combining stigma theory with discourse analysis, this article brings new information to bear on how discursive practices are used in a public discourse to define normative and socially accepted behaviour. ■

34 Original text in Swedish: 'nattens spöken'.

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