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What's Black and White and Red All Over?

By Richard Morin
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More ink equals more blood, claim two economists who say that newspaper coverage of terrorist incidents leads directly to more attacks.

It's a macabre example of win-win in what economists call a "common-interest game," say Bruno S. Frey of the University of Zurich and Dominic Rohner of Cambridge University.

"Both the media and terrorists benefit from terrorist incidents," their study contends. Terrorists get free publicity for themselves and their cause. The media, meanwhile, make money "as reports of terror attacks increase newspaper sales and the number of television viewers."

The researchers counted direct references to terrorism between 1998 and 2005 in the New York Times and Neue Zuercher Zeitung, a respected Swiss newspaper. They also collected data on terrorist attacks around the world during that period. Using a statistical procedure called the Granger Causality Test, they attempted to determine whether more coverage directly led to more attacks.

The results, they said, were unequivocal: Coverage caused more attacks, and attacks caused more coverage -- a mutually beneficial spiral of death that they say has increased because of a heightened interest in terrorism since Sept. 11, 2001.

One partial solution: Deny groups publicity by not publicly naming the attackers, Frey said. But won't they become known anyway through informal channels such as the Internet?

Not necessarily, Frey said. "Many experiences show us that in virtually all cases several groups claimed responsibility for a particular terrorist act. I would like the same rule that obtains within a country: Nobody can be called a criminal -- in our case a terrorist -- if this has not been established by a court of law."

An Unhelping Hand

Here's a reason some black people may have difficulty finding jobs: Disadvantaged African Americans are hesitant to help even their close friends find work, according to one study.

Sociologist Sandra Susan Smith of the University of California at Berkeley interviewed 105 low-income blacks about the kinds of help they would be willing to give to people they knew. She found that big majorities were reluctant to offer help even to those they felt closest to, either because they thought it would take too much of their time or because they felt the applicant lacked motivation or responsibility.

One big fear: concerns that the applicant might "bring the street" to the job, in the form of language, dress or behavior that would be inappropriate for the workplace, according to a summary of her research that appeared in the latest issue of *Contexts*, published by the American Sociological Association.

Child Molesters and Home Values

"Megan's Law" and similar statutes may or may not make kids safer from sex predators, but they do drive down property values when a child molester moves into a neighborhood, according to two economists.

Those laws were mandated by Congress after 7-year-old Megan Nicole Kanka was raped and murdered by a twice-convicted pedophile in 1994. They require states to register convicted sex offenders and make their names and addresses publicly available.

Economists Leigh L. Linden and **Jonah E. Rockoff** of Columbia University used the list of registered sex offenders living in Mecklenburg County, N.C., to study home values before and after an offender moved in.

"Houses within a one-tenth-mile area around the home of a sex offender fall by four percent on average (about \$5,500) while those further away show no decline," they reported in a working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

So Shut Up Already

Talking to passengers may be just as dangerous for drivers as talking on a cellphone, according to a study released by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute.

James Sayer, an assistant research scientist at the institute, and his colleagues found that drivers who are talking with passengers perform similarly to those yakking on cellphones. For example, the study found that drivers chatting with a passenger were not notably better at staying in the correct lane or steering properly than were drivers who were talking on a cellphone.

Who Would Have Thought? *Beer Ads, Regretting Sex and the Kinks*

· "Effects of Showing Risk in Beer Commercials to Young Drinkers" by Lara Zwarun, et al., *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Vol. 50, No. 1. A University of Texas researcher and her colleagues find that college students exposed to TV beer ads

depicting activities that are hazardous to perform while drinking, such as snowboarding, were more likely to think it was all right to drink and drive.

- "Sex Differences in Regret: All for Love or Some for Lust?" by Neal Roese, et al., Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, Vol. 32, No. 6. A research team headed by a University of Illinois psychologist finds that men are more likely to regret missed opportunities for sex than to regret sexual activity, while women are equally likely to regret the times they did and the times they didn't.
- "Za Kinkusu : Ray Davies and the Rise and Fall and Rise of Japanese Rock and Roll" by Michael K. Bourdaghs, Popular Music and Society, Vol. 29, No. 2. A UCLA Asian-language scholar chronicles the influence of the Kinks on Japanese rock-and-roll in a special issue of this journal devoted to the seminal British Invasion rock band.

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