

# SuperFreakonomics

- Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes, and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance.
- 2009 by William Morrow: New York, NY
  - A Short Summary
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  - If you like the summary, buy the book.

# The Unifying Theme

- Although their first book, *Freakonomics*, claimed to have no unifying theme, it really did. The theme was that people respond to incentives, although not necessarily in ways that are predictable or manifest. Therefore, one of the more powerful laws in the universe is the law of unintended consequences.
- Their first book offered what economists call an accumulative advantage. The prominence of the first book gave them access to information for the second book an author starting from scratch wouldn't have. Dr. Doug: What is your accumulative advantage?



# Driving/Walking Drunk

- A drunk driver is 10 times more likely to cause an accident than a sober one, but a lot of people still drive drunk. Nearly 60% of fatal crashes that happen at night involve at least one drunk driver. This may be due to the fact that drunk drivers rarely get caught. (1 arrest per 27,000 miles)
- If you think, however, that it is safer to walk home if you had too much to drink, you are wrong. Mile for mile it is eight times more likely you will be killed walking drunk than driving drunk.





# A glut of dung

- In the early 1900's, the horses in New York City produced 5 million pounds of dung each day. The health risks and the stench were huge problems but they just went away thanks to the invention of street cars and automobiles. The point is that humankind has a great capacity for finding technological solutions to seemingly intractable problems. The authors suspect that global warming will be no different.





# Data can mislead

- The average human has one testicle.
- When Time ran a cover story about shark attacks, people came to believe they were more common than in reality. The real data tells us there are about 6 fatal attacks a year. Meanwhile, each year about 200 people die as the result of elephants, which is 33 times as many. Don't expect that cover story soon.

# Women: Still under paid

- Women who went to Harvard earn less than half as much as the average Harvard man. Overweight women suffer a wage penalty as do women with bad teeth. Girls who play high-school sports, however, are more likely to attend college and land a solid job in fields traditionally dominated by men. When Title IX expanded sports opportunities for women, more than 90% of college women's sports teams had women coaches. That number is now barely 40%.

# Supply and Demand and Prostitution

- One profession that women still dominate is prostitution. This is due to the fact that men want more sex than they can get for free. Compared to prices from earlier days, modern prostitutes are working for next to nothing. This due to the fact that premarital sex has emerged as a substitute for prostitution. A Chicago study showed average take-home pay of \$325 per week in a profession where 83% were drug addicts and 3 of 160 participants died during the study.



# Enter the pimp

- Originally, brothels were run by women. As business grew more profitable, men took over as pimps. Now the roll of the pimp is to have good working relationships with the police who often receive freebies. A prostitute is much more likely to have sex with a cop than be arrested by one. Pimps also out perform real estate agents in terms of benefits to their customers and they often employ seasonal labor (think department store Santas) to deal with holiday demand.

# The dangers of Ramadan

- Babies who are in utero during Ramadan are more likely to have developmental after effects. The effects are strongest when fasting coincides with the first month of pregnancy. The risk is magnified when Ramadan occurs in the summer in places like Michigan where there are more daylight hours, which is when Muslims fast.

# The best months to be born

- Levitt and Dubner describe the “relative-age effect”, which is strong in many sports. Older children in an age group are more likely to excel simply because they are older. They then get better coaching and participate in all-star or travel teams. This fits with the “raw talent is vastly overrated” notion that Gladwell also features in *Outliers* (2008). See [DrDougGreen.Com](http://DrDougGreen.Com) for summary of this book.





# Hospitals are full of sick people

- Hospitals recirculate are as do most buildings so it isn't unusual that someone dies from something in a hospital that they didn't come in with. Some studies show that death rates decrease with hospitals shut down. Wrong diagnosis and medication errors usually due to sloppy handwriting along with elective surgery all cause problems.



## We need a reason to live

- Both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams died on July 4, 1826 exactly 50 years after the ratification of the *Declaration of Independence*. Studies show that people are more likely to die after major holidays than before. (Dr. Doug: Both my wife and her mother died four days after their last birthdays, which featured parties attending by their daughters who came from out of town.)



## More unintended consequences

- Passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) resulted in fewer jobs for the disabled as employers worried that they would not be able to discipline or fire bad workers who had a disability.
- The Endangered Species Act caused people to do things to their property so it would be less likely to be an attractive habitat for an endangered species.
- Governments who base their trash pickup fees on volume faced outbreaks of illegal dumping, burning, and dumping trash in the sewer system.





## Kids think carbon dioxide is a poison

- Nathan Myhrvold is the former chief technology officer for Microsoft and a founder of Intellectual Ventures. He claims that some of the nightmare scenarios described in Al Gore's Movie *An Inconvenient Truth* have no basis in physical reality in any reasonable time frame. No climate model shows them happening. Everybody turns the knobs on their climate models so that they won't be an outlier, because the outlying model is going to have difficulty getting funded. The environment started to cool due to the heavy particulate pollution we generated. This caught scientist's attention in the 1970's and the trend began to reverse when we started to clean up the air. Our major greenhouse gas is water vapor and current models do not know how to handle it. Studies also show that an increase in carbon dioxide increases plant growth, which is why commercial greenhouses have supplemental carbon dioxide. While the drumbeat about global warning has grown louder in the last several years, the global temperature has decreased.



# Alternative Energy Issues

- Myhrvold also believes that current proposals to deal with global warming are too little, too late, and too optimistic. Wind power and other alternative energy things are cute, but they don't scale to a sufficient degree. Coal is so cheap that trying to generate electricity without it would be economic suicide. The half-life of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is roughly one hundred years. A lot of things that people say are good probably aren't. The problem with solar cells is that they are black because they are designed to absorb light from the sun. But only 12% gets turned into electricity, and the rest is reradiated as heat, which contributes to global warming. Myhrvold doesn't deny the possibility of severe climate problems for humans. He is optimistic, however, that humans will come up with solutions to deal with what comes our way.

## Buy this book

- If you find some of the information presented here I suggest you purchase this book. There is much more in the book than I have summarized here. My point in summarizing this book is to emphasize the notion of unintended consequences for anyone in a position to make a decision that will impact their life or the lives of others.