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discoveries

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the environmental costs of global bargain shopping

Why are Olympic athletes in Beijing worried about the air quality in a country on the rise? According to Richard York (*Sociological Forum*, December 2007), it may be because economic success in Asia is coming at the expense of the natural environment.

Energy production is a huge contributor to global climate change and the depletion of fossil fuels. And countries entering the global marketplace by boosting their own economies require more energy. Yet, prevailing economic and political theories suggest globaliza-

tion will reduce energy production and consumption with more efficient technologies and better environmental regulations.

York analyzed energy production in 14 Asian economies and found that bargains in the global marketplace run up a big environmental tab. For example, trade with other nations requires much more intensive production of exported goods, which leads to greater energy production. Similarly, countries with lots of debt need more energy to build currency and pay back loans to the inter-

national community.

In contrast, he finds little evidence for the popular economic assumption that globalization lifts all boats. Economic growth, too, leads to more energy production and more environmental problems.

The author reminds us that quality of life has little to do with economic development, but it does depend on a clean and safe environment. Just ask the athletes who brought their gas masks to Beijing. [W.L.](#)

what we learn from political stink-eye

You can't stand "that candidate from the other party," but when you can't tear your eyes off Sunday morning political talk shows, blame the camera work and lack of civility.

In a series of experimental studies, Diana Mutz (*American Political Science Review*, November 2007) recorded people's opinions after viewing staged political debates between two candidates running for a distant congressional seat. The actors hired to play the candidates were either civil or uncivil (rolled their eyes, interrupted the other "politician," raised their voice), and camera work featured either numerous or no unflattering close-ups of them.

Audiences who watched uncivil debates with frequent

close-ups paid closer attention to the conversations and indicated a better understanding of their least favorite candidate's positions on the issue. However, Mutz points out, this increased understanding was offset by audiences turning more strongly against the candidate they didn't like in the first place.

Mutz's study underscores that emotions and social processes are important conduits for making sense of political television. So the coming months should teach us more about the position of the "other candidate," but we'll also end up disliking him or her more than we already did. [K.C.](#)

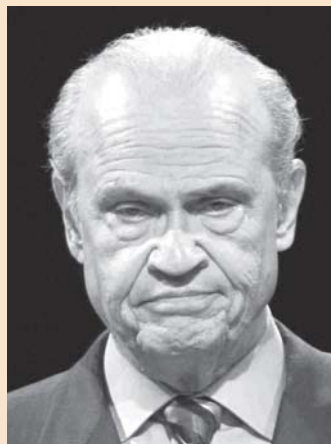


Photo by Andrea Melendez/AFP/Getty Images

Former Republican presidential candidate Fred Thompson.



AP Photo/Jim Cole

Former Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

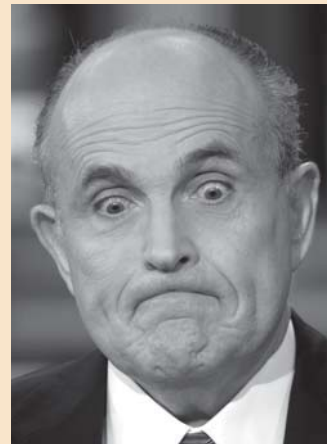


Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images for Meet the Press

Former Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani.

birds of a feather take off together, or so it seems

National polls suggest Americans share similar views on most subjects, yet pundits like Bill O'Reilly insist we're in the midst of a culture war. According to Delia Baldassarri and Peter Bearman (*American Sociological Review*, October 2007), the presumed culture war has a lot to do with "takeoff issues."

Takeoff issues are hot-button topics that make the front pages for a short time and appear to divide the public (think abortion, stem cell research, or the Iraq War). The authors use computer simulations to show that takeoff issues dominate the public discussion for a short time and give the illusion of widespread polarization.

These issues determine what we discuss most with others, and people are far less likely to discuss sensitive topics with those whose opinions differ from their own, the authors say. Yet, opinions on more mundane subjects are less polarized, thus most of us rarely experience polarization in our day-to-day lives.

So while Mr. O'Reilly may be correct in pointing out public disagreement over some hot topics, these issues don't take off very often. **J.W.**

don't worry about old age, be happy

Lighting another candle on the birthday cake each year may not seem like a cheerful occasion, but think again. According to Yang Yang (*American Sociological Review*, April 2008), growing older may actually make us happier.

Yang draws upon the General Social Survey to show how happiness actually peaks in our late 50s, long after the supposed "glory days" of youth. But not everybody experiences the same levels of joy as they age. Baby boomers, for example, report the lowest levels of happiness, perhaps due to more competition with their peers in school and the workplace.

Inequalities in happiness also decreased over the past 30 years. Whereas women are happier than men in youth, there's no noticeable difference later in life. Differences between whites and African Americans also decreased with age, though whites remain significantly happier. This may be thanks to shared life experiences that trigger (or dampen) happy thoughts over a lifetime, such as marrying a sweetheart, retiring from the workforce, or losing a loved one.

Yang's study gives us something to look forward to as our hair grays and our pace slows—the grass does turn greener on the other side of the hill. *Carpe diem.* **R.A.**

and that's why my name is on the annual report

For some companies, the second letter in CEO might as well stand for ego. And according to Arijit Chatterjee and Donald Hambrick (*Administrative Science Quarterly*, September 2007), having a narcissistic boss could bring big dividends to a company.

Chatterjee and Hambrick measured the narcissism of more than 100 chief executive officers in the software industry and looked at its effect on company performance. Evidence of vanity included lots of headshots in annual reports, the use of first-person pronouns when talking about the company, and relatively high pay for the top executive.

As it turns out, spending a lot of time in front of the mirror could be good for the company, at least some of the time. Companies with a narcissistic boss made bigger and bolder acquisitions, and their strategies were more dynamic. However, big egos correlate with big losses, too. Company performance was more erratic and extreme for the self-absorbed firms, and thus they did no better or worse over the long run than their humbler counterparts.

This study reveals how the personality of a leader can shape the perform-

ance of an organization, particularly in an industry as unpredictable as the software sector. And it shows a big payoff every now and then doesn't necessarily offset the narcissistic boss staring into the pond at the company picnic. **W.L.**

when is a felon not a felon?

Being convicted of a felony has major impacts long after the prison sentence is up. That is, unless no one ever finds out about the conviction.

Florida law allows judges to "withhold adjudication" for people convicted of felonies, which means individuals keep the right to vote and other civil liberties, and can even lawfully claim they were never convicted of the crime.

Ted Chiricos, Kelle Barrick, William Bales, and Stephanie Bontrager (*Criminology*, August 2007) studied 96,000 men and women found guilty of a felony, about half of whom had adjudication withheld. They found that being legally labeled a "felon" made people significantly more likely to commit another crime within two years of their release, even when accounting for the type of crime committed and community into which they returned.

The study shows the powerful and long-lasting effects of deviant labels given to people convicted of past crimes. It also points to the promise of policies aiming to reduce future harm rather than simply punish the offender. **J.W.**

fat in the fire

Judged by current body mass index standards, nearly two-thirds of Americans today are overweight.

Whatever you may think about these standards and figures, Abigail Saguy and Rene Almeling (*Sociological Forum*, March 2008) argue that news media coverage and reporting exaggerates the extent of the weight problem in the United States—the so-called obesity epidemic—and obscures its under-

lying systemic and genetic roots.

Saguy and Almeling reach their conclusions by comparing medical science publications on weight and health with those of news media reports. They find that since the mid-1990s the mainstream news media has run more stories on obesity than scientific journals, and tends to characterize the issue in more evocative and extreme terms. They also find the news media are more likely to offer individualist explanations for weight problems, especially when discussing children, minorities, and the poor.

Selective reporting partially explains the news media's tendencies, the authors say, but the press releases distributed by researchers and medical journals are also partly to blame. The fact that "alarmist studies are more likely to be covered in the media," they conclude, "may make scientists even more prone to presenting their findings in the most dramatic light possible." **C.S.**

becoming white by voting red?

Recent election results show that self-identified Mexican Americans are increasingly voting Republican. Carleen Basler (*Ethnic and Racial Studies*, January 2008) argues that this trend toward conservatism is influenced by the racial identity of Mexican Americans, their desire to be good Americans, and their conflation of whiteness with American-ness.

Basler's claims are based on interviews with more than 150 naturalized Mexican Americans in California, and their explanations for voting for President George W. Bush in 2004 are illustrative.

Mexican Americans who supported Bush did so because he made them feel included in his campaign efforts and in his vision for America's future—a future they believed positioned them as equals. Voting Republican also gave Mexican Americans a hedge against the racialized stigma and deviant images associated with illegal immigration and terrorism. It was especially attractive for

upwardly mobile segments of this community, particularly those who had "whiter" skin and were more educated and better off financially.

Especially during divisive times, Basler concludes, Mexican Americans feel compelled to prove their loyalty to the nation and voting offers them a means to do so. One wonders what these Americans will decide is the "most American" vote in November. **E.B.**

it's not just florida

When we think of immigrants we often imagine young, able-bodied men and women in search of work and better opportunities for themselves and their families. But many forms of international migration no longer fit this description. Per Gustafson (*Ethnic and Racial Studies*, March 2008) recently interviewed members of one such group: retirees from Sweden who decided to spend their golden years in Spain.

Gustafson claims that the relocation of retirees from Sweden to Spain is

selling integration in *life* magazine



He's won more games than anyone who ever walked a college gridiron. But his greatest success has been in his tireless efforts to help young people realize their full potential. As a role model and a teacher, a father figure and a friend, former Grambling State head Coach Eddie Robinson has spent over 57 years helping children of all ages become real winners. He has left a truly enduring legacy, not just in the annals of college football, but in the thousands of hearts he has so deeply touched. number of victories. A legacy is really nothing more than a life well lived and plans well made. And, at State Farm, we want to help you make sure that your life and your legacy are all that you planned. State Farm understands Life.



Although images of blacks serving whites are no longer common in American magazines, John Grady (*Visual Studies*, December 2007) shows that contemporary ads rarely depict whites and African Americans interacting, especially in private spaces. Instead, African Americans are often portrayed as overcoming adversity to become exemplars of adult responsibility, typically for other blacks (left). In one case, the difference between threatening and "lifesaving" is astonishingly ambiguous (right). **W.L.**

driven largely by tourism, warm weather, and seasonal residency. Basically, these retirees owned vacation homes they could move into when they moved out of the labor force. Despite being retired, migrant retirees shared many traits with other, more traditional migrant groups: They went back and forth between countries frequently, maintained ties with family and friends back home, and forged new hybrid identities and social ties in their new countries.

Differences, however, were also noticeable. Retiree migrants had little interest or need for politics while labor migrants tend to be politically involved. Further, the flow of economic remittances is reversed: labor migrants typically send money back home, but the northern Europeans brought their pensions with them to Spain.

Clearly, the scale, scope, and complexity of migration is increasing dramatically in this new, global era. **E.B.**

welfare queens, japanese style

In the United States, single moms on welfare are often assumed to be lazy, low-class young women living large on the overly generous resources of the welfare state. So familiar and engrained is this stereotype that even its critics sometimes fail to consider how culturally specific and consequential it may be.

In contrast, the common picture of single mothers in Japan is of middle-class, highly educated workers who don't really need state support. While these assumptions are obviously quite different from the American welfare queen stereotypes, they're no less problematic.

According to Chisa Fujiwara (*Japan Focus*, January 2008), the majority of single moms in Japan do work—and at much higher levels than any other country in the world. For example, 87 percent of Japanese single moms hold full-time jobs, compared with 77 percent in

the United States, one of the next-highest national rates.

The problem, according to Fujiwara, is that Japan's extreme gender gap in wages makes these hard-working moms among the poorest workers in the country. The disjuncture is particularly troubling because the stereotypes—not the facts—have informed Japan's extensive welfare-to-work reforms over the last decade.

Perhaps welfare stereotypes are as diverse as they are prevalent and problematic—not that this cross-cultural insight makes social policy any easier.

C.S.

when to trust someone over 30

Generations of young radicals have found inspiration in Abbie Hoffman's famous dictum about never trusting adults, but Hava Rachel Gordan (*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, December 2007) found an exception to the rule.

After two years observing two youth activist organizations on the west coast and numerous interviews, Gordon found that young political activists were willing to work with adults when those adults acted as mentors and/or represented the cause to elected officials or others unsympathetic to the cause. Such roles and relationships allowed for sustained adult input and advice that helped the young activists accomplish their goals and shift their energies from one issue and action to another.

In contrast, young political organizers who took pride in their unencumbered radicalism had difficulty sustaining their actions beyond a single issue.

Perhaps Hoffman should have said: "Don't trust anyone over 30, unless it works to your advantage." **K.C.**

what would jesus protest?

Albert Cleage's *Black Messiah* may have provoked surprise or even outrage among white Americans when published in the 1970s, but the idea was far from new. The belief that Jesus was black has a long history in the African American community and still resonates with many black Christians today. According to recent polling, in fact, about one-third of African Americans who attend church at least once a year think of Christ as black.

A recent study by Laura A. Reese, Ronald E. Brown, and James David Ivers (*Journal of Political Behavior*, December 2007) explored the effects of these beliefs on political participation. Analyzing data from the 1993–94 National Black Politics Study, the authors found the belief in a black Christ is a "radicalizing" political force.

African Americans who believe Christ to be black are more likely to engage in radical forms of political participation, such as protests, marches, attending political meetings, and signing petitions. For some, the perception that Jesus was black is also associated with the desire for economic autonomy.

More research will help us fully understand the role of black-Christ beliefs in the African American community, especially in terms of how they interact with the political nature of many contemporary black churches. Still, the authors stress that the political effects of seeing Christ as black is not a function of radical political beliefs but rather the result of envisioning God as part of "one's spiritual and natural self." **K.C.**

Contributors include Ryan Alaniz, Erika Busse, Keith A. Cunnie, Meghan L. Krausch, Wesley Longhofer, Heather McLaughlin, Chika Shinohara, Jon Smajda, and Jesse Wozniak.