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UNCONVENTIONAL WISDOM Richard Morin
A Section
When Malls Stay Open on Sundays, the Pious Party

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Who knew Satan worked at the local mall?

While bars, cheap hotels and similar places of questionable repute may remain America's favorite spots to sin, two economists say that giving people an extra day to shop at the mall also contributes significantly to wicked behavior -- particularly among people who are the most religious.

Jonathan Gruber of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Daniel M. Hungerman of the University of Notre Dame discovered the malevolent Mall Effect by studying what happened when states and counties repeal "blue laws." Those statutes prohibit the sale on Sunday of certain nonessential items, such as appliances, furniture and jewelry, typically sold in shopping malls, as well as liquor and cigarettes.

Gruber and Hungerman found that when states eliminated blue laws, church attendance declined while drinking and drug use increased significantly among young adults. Even more striking, the biggest change in bad behavior mostly occurred among those who frequently attended religious services, they report in a working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, "The Church vs. the Mall: What Happens When Religion Faces Increased Secular Competition?"

At one time, all but eight states had blue laws. Today 13 have statewide Sunday selling bans on some products or leave it up to local jurisdictions to decide, with mall owners among those leading the fight to get these statutes off the books.

It turns out those business owners may be doing the devil's work. Before the shopping ban was lifted, about 37 percent of people in a state on average attended religious services at least weekly, Hungerman said. "After the laws are repealed it falls to 32 percent" -- a drop "not driven by declines in religiosity prior to the law change."

Instead of going to church, many of the faithful apparently were going astray. Marijuana use increased by 11 percentage points among church attendees, compared with those who never went to services, after the shopping ban was lifted. Cocaine use increased by nearly 4 percentage points, and heavy drinking increased by about 5 1/2 percentage points among churchgoers compared with those who never went to services, with frequent attendees even more likely to go on benders.

Hmmm. Interesting, but why would the elimination of blue laws suddenly provoke such an outburst of sinning among the religious? After all, there are six other days of the week to shop (or drink) until you drop. And it's not legal to buy cocaine or marijuana on any day of the week.

"That's the million-dollar question," Hungerman said. He suspects that keeping businesses open on Sunday means that some religious young people have to work or choose to go shopping, which apparently increases their exposure to sinners or otherwise weakens their resistance to the dark side.

"Instead of being in church, you're working or shopping in the mall surrounded by 'party animals,'" he said.

Does Training Hurt Diversity?

Corporations have spent millions of dollars on diversity training programs to make managers more sensitive

to minorities, but these efforts have "roundly failed" to eliminate bias or increase the number of minorities in management, according to a team of sociologists headed by Frank Dobbin of Harvard University.

Dobbin and his colleagues Alexandra Kalev of the University of California at Berkeley and Erin Kelly of the University of Minnesota examined a sampling of reports submitted to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by private-sector establishments and surveyed a sample of these businesses about their diversity programs.

Sensitivity programs that emphasize mentoring failed to reduce bias complaints or increase the number of minority managers. Only targeted programs in which senior managers were held accountable for hiring more women and minorities worked, they reported in the latest issue of the American Sociological Review.

In fact, they found diversity training may actually reduce diversity: Such programs were followed by a 6 percent decline in the proportion of black women in management, they found.

Who Would Have Thought?

Dreamers, Lottery Winners and Folding Paper

"The Incidence of Having Dreamed and Conservative Political Attitudes" by Jerry Kroth, et al., Psychological Reports, Vol. 38, No. 3. A Santa Clara University psychologist and his colleagues find that politically conservative women were more likely to dream about falling, being chased or being famous than less conservative women.

"Money and Mental Wellbeing: A Longitudinal Study of Medium-Sized Lottery Wins" by Jonathan Gardner and Andrew J. Oswald, University of Warwick, Economics Working Paper No. 754. British researchers find that people who won 1,000 pounds or more (about \$1,900 U.S.) playing the lottery were significantly happier two years after winning than those who won less money or nothing at all.

"On the Maximum Number of Folds of a Piece of Paper" by G.J. Rees, Philosophical Magazine Letters, Vol. 86, No. 1. An engineering professor at the University of Sheffield finds that a piece of paper typically can be folded in half only six times.

Richard Morin is a senior editor at the Pew Research Center. Versions of this column appear at washingtonpost.com and www.pewresearch.org.

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