

Date: Thu, 18 Mar 2010 12:10:21 -0400

To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy Committee on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>

From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

Subject: Hierarchical psychodrama models: Fwd: "Reality Show Contestants Willing to Kill in French Experiment"

Dear Dr. Fischhoff & Colleagues:

The new hierarchical psychodrama/neuroscience models may only have limited zones of application to aspects of American politics - for example, on behalf of progressive politics by illuminating unrecognized and nonrational brain mechanisms that reduce political participation by lower status groups. (E.g., Tens of millions of people without health insurance do not vote. This inhibits the potential of democracy for rapid policy learning and progressive politics, both of which might be facilitated by fresh thinking based on the new research.)

The purpose of this message is to forward the enclosed article and bring to your attention that this (recapitalization) funding also could be highly and widely revealing about comparative behavior of adults in other cultures and contexts.

For example: The case of France (where the different culture includes a different relationship to authority and the State) and the enactment of the Milgram experiment "**Reality Show Contestants Willing to Kill in French Experiment**" described in the following news report from this morning's Washington Post. <1>

Hierarchical psychodramas also can be used to define situations and their logic - including a definition of who is responsible or accountable - and, often, this appears to be the intervening mechanism by which hierarchical power can operate to arouse motivation and direct behavior.

Forecasting Nonrational Political Behavior

For purposes of DNI forecasting: It might be relevant to note in the National Academy Report that the original Milgram experiment was described to psychologists and the mean expectation was that only a very small percentage of American adults would repeatedly use the highest "danger" shock level when con-

fronted by cries of pain, demands to stop, and declarations of older victims that they had heart problems and their hearts were starting to bother them. [The observed compliance rate was about 2/3.] These are unsettling results, but they also suggest that formal models based on hierarchical psychodrama and linked brain mechanisms could be much better predictors of behavior in some political circumstances than human forecasters.

Better Human Rights Protections

We also probably - given the commitment of the Obama Administration to promote human rights - need a much better understanding of the actual public and brain mechanisms that can create and sustain human rights in different circumstances and other cultures. Even today, whatever human rights protections are formally/legally available in France do not seem to be operating as a deterrent in this case.

Lloyd Etheredge

<1> There are many scientific questions that need to be raised about the French show, the populations involved, how the television producers got the 80% rate, etc. But anything approaching this number is a reminder that much of the cognitive psychology/rational choice/independent individual sensibility that has characterized much of American social science in recent years is addressing a very limited sub-set of the behaviors that the DNI needs to understand and forecast beyond the water's edge.

Reality show contestants willing to kill in French experiment

By Lisa de Moraes. The Washington Post
Thursday, March 18, 2010; C05

American reality TV has left a trail of corpses, but we can still say this: No one appears to have been executed on any of the U.S. shows.

That's apparently not the case in France, where, according to a new French documentary series, people would be willing to kill their countrymen for their 15 minutes of fame.

Eighty people who thought they were participating in the shooting of a pilot for a

French reality series were willing to deliver potentially lethal electric shocks to a contestant who had incorrectly answered knowledge questions, according to the documentary, "The Game of Death," airing on French TV on Wednesday night.

"Zone Xtreme" seemed to have a pretty standard game-show format, complete with wildly enthusiastic studio audience, a glam well-known TV weatherwoman hostess, gaudy lighting, etc., said the French press reports.

In truth, the would-be reality series participants were part of an experiment that was turned into the documentary.

In "Zone Xtreme," the faux contestants who gave all the wrong answers were actually actors. Each "contestant" was strapped into an electric chair. The 80 wannabe famesters were each asked to punish the contestant, when a wrong answer was given, by administering up to 460 volts of electricity. The majority of them ignored the contestant's screams and obeyed the orders of the weather-chick hostess to ratchet up the jolt. They also obeyed the chant of "Punishment!" from the studio audience -- which did not know the game show was a fake -- until the contestant fell silent and appeared to have died. Only 16 contestants walked away, according to press reports.

The idea for the show came from the work of psychologist Stanley Milgram, who conducted the experiment at Yale University in the 1960s. Milgram found that most people, if pushed by an authority figure, would administer ostensibly dangerous electric shocks to another person. His experiment became famous, having been conducted at the same time as the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann.

As for American reality TV, it's had its share of *actual* deaths -- though not on air. Among them:

-- Major fame-seeker Ryan Jenkins, star of the VH1 reality series "Megan Wants a Millionaire" and "I Love Money 3," was found dead of apparent suicide after becoming the only person of interest in the slaying of his wife.

-- The producers of MTV's save-an-addict reality series "Gone Too Far" might have gone too far when they had show host Adam Goldstein, a.k.a. DJ AM, go into a bodega to buy a crack pipe because they wanted the footage. Goldstein, a recovering addict who said he'd been clean 11 years, was found dead in his apart-

ment three days after shooting ended on the show. Authorities found a lethal cocktail of crack and prescription drugs in his system and a crack pipe in his apartment.

-- Avid runner Tom Sparks died in November 2009 after participating in the filming of ABC's "Wipeout" when he experienced knee pain, followed by shortness of breath, followed by a stroke.

We reached out to the TV community for their thoughts on "Zone Xtreme." By press time, almost no executive had returned calls to dignify the show with his own comments -- maybe they were too busy wondering how to get the rights.

One brave executive did call back and acknowledged he'd once told a reality-TV exec he thought it would make an interesting reality series to re-create some of the more bizarre social-psychology experiments -- as appears to have been done in France. It never came to anything, said the executive, who asked to remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

Dr. Lloyd S. Etheredge - Director, Government Learning Project
Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science
Policy Sciences Center Inc.
c/o 7106 Bells Mill Rd.
Bethesda, MD 20817-1204
URL: www.policyscience.net
301-365-5241 (v); lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net (email)