

Thiefless in Seattle—almost

Arizona Republic, November 4, 1995

'Lost' wallets test honesty in 12 cities

Associated Press

SEATTLE - If there's such a thing as a good place to lose your wallet, *Reader's Digest* says it's Seattle.

The magazine left a trail of 120 "lost" wallets in 12 communities across the nation and kept track of how many were returned with the \$50 cash contents intact. Seattle had the best rate of return, nine in 10.

Despite the large role that chance could play in such a small experiment, Mayor Norm Rice was ecstatic.

"Of all the Number 1 rankings that Seattle has received, this is the one that I'm the most proud of," Rice said.

Three small cities were the next best, with a score of eight in 10: Meadville, Pa.; Concord, N.H.; and Cheyenne, Wyo.

Of the two other big cities tested, St. Louis returned seven in 10 and Atlanta trailed with five in 10, according to the magazine's December issue.

Reader's Digest interviewed those who returned wallets. Some cited religion or ethics. Some said they were moved by the baby picture placed in each billfold.

The lone keeper in Seattle picked up a wallet left on a staircase in the downtown Pike Place Market, slipped it into his black fanny pack and was never heard from again.

"If we find that guy with the black fanny pack, we are going to take away his latte privileges for an entire month," mayoral spokesman Mark Murray said.

DIGEST'S TEST SITES

The 12 communities in the Reader's Digest "wallet test," with the percentage of people who returned the wallet with money intact:

Big cities:

- Seattle, 90 percent
- St. Louis, 70 %
- Atlanta, 50 %

Mid-size cities:

- Greensboro, NC, 70 %
- Las Vegas, 60 %
- Dayton, OH, 50%

suburbs:

- Boston, 70 percent
- Los Angeles, 60 percent • Houston, 60 percent

Small towns:

- Cheyenne, Wyo., 80 %
- Concord, N.H., 80 %
- Meadville, Pa., 80 %

Source: Associated Press

What's wrong with the research?

Phoenix fares poorly on safety

Phoenix finished ninth in a 10-city race to see which was the safest.

New York remained the safest of the nation's 10 largest cities in 2005, with about one crime reported for every 37 people, according to FBI statistics.

The large city with the highest crime rate was Dallas, with about one crime reported for every 12 people. Phoenix was ninth, with one crime for every 14.1 residents.

Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest city, ranked third safest, with about one crime for every 26 people.

San Jose took the No. 2 spot, while San Diego ranked fourth. Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston, San Antonio and then Phoenix followed.

The AP's calculation ranked cities by the total number of crimes reported per resident and did not distinguish between violent crimes and property crimes.

The FBI said in its report that it makes a point not to rank cities, saying "they provide no insight into the many variables that mold the crime in a particular town, city, county, state, or region."

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Smoking Causes Crime!

What's wrong with this research?

¹Although we have scientific evidence that women should not smoke when they are pregnant, many future mothers ignore this danger. ²only are these mothers endangering the physical health of their babies, but they also could be contributing to even more problems in the future. ³In addition to the known problems, recent studies have linked mothers' smoking during pregnancy with sons who go on to become criminals. ⁴Researchers in Finland followed over 5,000 males and their mothers from the time the mothers were six months pregnant until the young men were 28 years old. ⁵Compared to sons whose mothers did not smoke during pregnancy, those young men whose birth mothers did smoke were more than twice as likely to commit criminal acts. ⁶The researchers theorized that smoking during pregnancy may alter the chemical balance in the baby's brain. ⁷This recent information, added to the body of evidence available for years, should be a warning to pregnant women to give up smoking.

What are the problems with the research and with the news report below?

Size difference in key brain structure found between gay and straight men

The Associated Press

NEW YORK - A key passageway between two parts of the brain may be bigger in gay men than in heterosexual men, according to a study offering new evidence that sexual orientation is at least partly a matter of biology.

The size difference appears in a communication conduit between parts of the brain used for understanding speech and perceiving objects.

The finding suggests that sexual orientation may be part of a larger package of brain characteristics, so that gay men as a group may have a different pattern of mental skills than heterosexual men, researcher Sandra Witelson said.

She stressed that her study of 21 men was small and must be confirmed by further work. She also said its results and implications apply only to groups and not to individuals.

Witelson, a psychiatry professor at McMaster University in Hamilton; Ontario, discussed the work before presenting it Thursday in Miami Beach at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience.

Studies in 1991 and '92 reported size differences elsewhere in the brain that were related to sexual orientation.

But it's not clear whether the differences really influence sexual

orientation, and they may even result from it, some experts said. It also is not clear whether the structural differences affect brain function.

Scientists are debating what produces sexual orientation. Witelson said the idea that biology plays a role "clearly does not mean that environment is irrelevant."

"But what it means is that environment is not the whole story," she said.

Witelson and colleagues at McMaster and the University of Toronto's Sunnybrook Health Science Center scanned brains in 11 gay men and 10 heterosexual men. The men were matched for age, and all said they were free of disease.

The scans focused on a structure called the isthmus of the corpus callosum. The isthmus runs between the right and left sides of the brain, lying roughly between the ears.

Brain scanning showed that, on average, the isthmus was 13 percent thicker in the gay men than the heterosexual men. But some of the gay men had thinner isthmuses than some of the heterosexual men, so an individual's isthmus size cannot reveal his sexual orientation, Witelson said.

Friday November 18, 1994 *The Arizona Republic*

Many blacks views AIDS as conspiracy to kill them

One-third call disease a germ-warfare product, '90 poll says

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO - A 1990 survey of about 1,000 black church members in five cities found that more than one-third of them believe the AIDS virus was produced in a germ-warfare laboratory and has been used to commit genocide against blacks.

Another third said they were "unsure" whether AIDS was created to kill blacks. That left only one-third who disputed the theory.

The findings held firm even among educated individuals, said Sandra Crouse Quinn, a health educator at the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina, in Chapel Hill.

Asked to react to the statement "I believe there is some truth in reports that the AIDS virus was produced in a germ-warfare laboratory," 33.9 percent of 983 agreed or strongly agreed. Forty-four percent were unsure. Thirty-five percent of 979 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I believe AIDS is a form of genocide against black people." Thirty percent were unsure.

Quinn and Thomas gave a questionnaire to 1,054 church members in black churches in Atlanta; Charlotte,

N.C.; Detroit; Kansas City, Mo.; and Tuscaloosa, Ala. They received slightly fewer than 1,000 valid responses for each question.

Rumors that AIDS was created to kill blacks have circulated in the black community for years, and the belief is endorsed by some black leaders.

The surveyed group was not necessarily a representative sample of America's black population, and the findings, reported this week at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association, cannot be applied to blacks as a whole. But the researchers were surprised by the prevalence of such beliefs.

"They don't trust our public health data," said Quinn, who is white.

The belief that AIDS is a form of genocide has serious health consequences, Quinn said.

"If they believe AIDS is a form of genocide, they are less likely to get tested, less likely to use condoms and less likely to participate in clinical trials," she said.

Although she has not surveyed whites on the genocide question, Quinn said, "I think most whites would say this sounds bizarre."

The wide disparity in world view

between blacks and whites recalls the racial chasm in the reaction to the O.J. Simpson verdict, she said.

The Rev. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, cited the Tuskegee experiment as grounds for cynicism about government health programs. From 1932 to 1972, the U.S. government withheld treatment from 399 poor black men with syphilis in order to study the consequences.

"It's been documented that the government did use African-Americans as guinea pigs in this experiment," Lowery said.

Quinn's study is based on survey questions that were asked in 1990, and Lowery said he believes AIDS education among blacks since then probably has reduced the percentage of those who believe acquired immune deficiency syndrome is a government conspiracy.

"It might have been true in the 1980s, but there's been too much education about AIDS now for African-Americans to believe that," Lowery said. "They know about dirty needles. They know about unprotected sex."

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What are the problems with the research reported?

What are the problems with the way this news was reported?

Study: Many Blacks Cite AIDS Conspiracy

Prevention Efforts Hurt, Activists Say

By Darryl Fears

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, January 25, 2005; Page A02

More than 20 years after the AIDS epidemic arrived in the United States, **a significant proportion of African Americans** embrace the theory that government scientists created the disease to control or wipe out their communities, according to a study released today by Rand Corp. and Oregon State University.

That belief markedly hurts efforts to prevent the spread of the disease among black Americans, the study's authors and activists said. African Americans represent 13 percent of the U.S. population, according to Census Bureau figures, yet they account for 50 percent of new HIV infections in the nation, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nearly half of the 500 African Americans surveyed said that HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is man-made. The study, which was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, appears in the Feb. 1 edition of the Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes.

More than one-quarter said they believed that AIDS was produced in a government laboratory, and 12 percent believed it was created and spread by the CIA.

A slight majority said they believe that a cure for AIDS is being withheld from the poor. Forty-four percent said people who take the new medicines for HIV are government guinea pigs, and 15 percent said AIDS is a form of genocide against black people.

At the same time, 75 percent said they believe medical and public health agencies are working to stop the spread of AIDS in black communities. But the responses, which varied only slightly by age, gender, education and income level, alarmed the researchers.

"As a researcher knowing that these beliefs were out there, I wasn't as surprised as people I share the study with," said Laura Bogart, a behavioral scientist for the Rand Corp., who co-authored the study with Sheryl Thorburn, associate professor in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State.

"But the findings are striking, and a wake-up call to the prevention community," Bogart said. "The prevention community has not addressed conspiracy beliefs in the context of prevention. I think that a lot of people involved in prevention may not be from the community where they are trying to prevent HIV."

The findings were also no surprise to Na'im Akbar, a professor of psychology at Florida State University who specializes in African American behavior. "This is not a bunch of crazy people running around saying they're out to get us," Akbar said. The belief "comes from the reality of 300 years of slavery and 100 years of post-slavery exploitation."

Akbar cited the Tuskegee experiment conducted by the federal government between 1932 and 1972. In it, scientists told black men they were being treated for syphilis but actually withheld treatment so they could study the course of the disease.

Today, he said, African Americans are more likely to live in communities near pollution sources, such as freeways and oil refineries, and far from health care centers. "There are a lot of indicators that our lives are not valued," Akbar said.

Phill Wilson, executive director of the Black AIDS Institute in Los Angeles, said past discrimination is no longer an excuse for embracing conspiracies that allow HIV to fester.

"It's a huge barrier to HIV prevention in black communities," Wilson said. "There's an issue around conspiracy theory and urban myths. Thus we have an epidemic raging out of control, and African Americans are being disproportionately impacted in every single sense."

Black women made up 73 percent of new HIV cases among women in 2003, and black men represented 40 percent of new cases, according to the most recent federal figures available.

Among gay men, blacks represented 30 percent of new infections, and adolescents ages 18 to 24 accounted for nearly 80 percent of new HIV cases.

"The whole notion of conspiracy theories and misinformation . . . removes personal responsibility," Wilson said. "If there is this boogeyman, people say, 'Why should I use condoms? Why should I use clean needles?' And if I'm an organization, 'Why should I bother with educating my folks?' The syphilis study was real, but it happened 40 years ago, and holding on to it is killing us."

How good was the research? Random? Representative? Size? What else do you want to know before you accept/reject the statistics?

AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs

A recent study shows a portion of African Americans believe that AIDS is a government-led conspiracy to kill them, which creates barriers to treatment and prevention efforts.

Blacks who believe in some HIV/AIDS conspiracy

Percent who agree somewhat or strongly

HIV is a man-made virus

48.2%

There is a cure for AIDS, but it is being withheld from the poor

53.4%

HIV was created and spread by the CIA

12%

AIDS is a form of genocide against blacks

15.2%

Medical and public health institutions are trying to stop the spread of HIV in black communities

75.4%

AIDS was produced in a government laboratory

26.6%

*The telephone survey was conducted between September 2002 and March 2003 and based on 500 completed surveys out of a random digital dialing of 19,000 telephone numbers. Questions were asked of respondents who were black or African American, ages 15 to 44 and born in the U.S. The numbers were from areas in the U.S. with estimated black household densities of at least 27% based on U.S. census data. The survey was conducted by Applied Research Northwest of Bellingham, Wash.

SOURCES: The Rand Corp., Oregon State University