

"Describe the study by Dubner and Levitt which examines the link between the legalization of abortion and the decline in crime rates that began to appear roughly eighteen years later. In particular, does their study provide a viable explanation for the decline in crime rates that occurred in the 1990s? Is there enough research to help you decide whether you agree or disagree?"

Turn the Oven Off Before the Bun Burns

In Dubner and Levitt's Freakonomics, the question is posed, "Where have all the criminals gone?" Looking at the huge drop in crime rates that happened in the United States during the 1990s, Dubner and Levitt suggest this to be the direct result of the legalization of abortion in 1973. All the would be criminals were the babies that were no longer being born thanks to legal abortion procedures. Dubner and Levitt give adequate explanations and data to convince any reader, including myself.

From 1975 to 1990, violent crime in the United States had risen 80%. According to Dubner and Levitt, all experts predicted that this rate would continue to soar. The one thing they never took into account, however, was the case of *Roe v. Wade* that legalized abortion throughout the United States on January 22, 1973. "By 1980 the number of abortions reached 1.6 million (one for every 2.25 births), where it leveled off" (Levitt 126). By 1990, seventeen years after abortion was legalized, the crime rates unexpectedly dropped. People credited the economy, innovative policing strategies, more cops, increased use of capital punishment, increased reliance on prisons, tougher gun laws, and the bursting of the crack bubble for the unforeseen decrease but Levitt and Dubner review these explanations and

confute each one. Doing so in the beginning of the chapter makes the reader prepared to accept the new theory they present. While setting the stage, the authors' also utilize exact figures in abortion rates which make their argument powerful, for one can not dispute exact numbers. It's sort of like trying to challenge the cop on what speed he pulled you over for or debate a mathematical equation; you can always try, but you just won't get anywhere.

The first thing to consider in order to believe Dubner and Levitt's argument would be the women who were having these now legal abortions. Dubner and Levitt explain, the woman that was now taking advantage of this service was very often unmarried, in her teens, and or poor (Levitt 126). If the American mother getting the abortion is single, poor, and in her teens, this means her child would be very likely to live in poverty and without both parents. Dubner and Levitt give the numbers of the child brought up in a single-parent home as doubling a child's proneness to commit crime (Levitt 127). This seems very logical once said. In my opinion, the child that only has one parent is most likely on some level resentful, maybe blaming the present parent for the other's absence. Also, there is no way for a child with the handicap of having only one parent to receive the same kind of attention as a child that has both parents. Perhaps this caused the child not to develop intellectually as much while growing up, becoming uninterested in school and then turning to small crime which could then lead to violent crime. Or perhaps the single parent, who most likely would have to be working in order to support the child, was just too busy and unable to discipline the child properly leading to the child's committal of crime. In fact, I found that according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Children in single-parent families are two to three

times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems” (Stanton). This information confirms that children raised in a single family home are extremely affected and that their situation could be the cause of criminal behavior. Dubner and Levitt's numbers, while shocking at first, make complete sense. And once again, the authors' argument is strengthened not only with the inclusion of statistical numbers, but also by citing an outside study.

The authors also describe research of Eastern Europe from 1930 through the 1960s that found that in the instances where women were denied an abortion, the mother often would resent her baby and fail to provide it with a good home. "Even when controlling for the income, age, education, and health of the mother, the researchers found that these children too were more likely to become criminals" (Levitt 124). If this is true for Eastern Europe, it seems that it would apply to the mothers in the United States. So when considering the unwanted children born before the legalization of abortion, one must presume that they had a parent who very likely resented them. Also, as previously stated, they probably were hindered with the fact that they only had one parent; thus, their only parent resented them. No wonder these children are more likely to become a criminal.

Now we know the women who started having abortions after *Roe v. Wade* were on the whole the women whose child would have been more likely to commit crime. The crime rates were peaking in the 1980s and then began to fall in 1990, seventeen years after the legalization of abortion. The babies who were likely to become criminals but weren't being born now due to the legalization of abortion would have been in their teens, when most

criminals are in their prime. Of course a child isn't going to be committing any serious crimes before then, but that is why no one suspected the crime drop to be the result of legalized abortion, it was not fresh in everyone's mind. People don't tend to think of something that happened almost twenty years ago as being the cause of a present situation; they tend to look at recent occurrences. As Dubner and Levitt put it, "Legalized abortion led to less unwantedness; unwantedness leads to high crime; legalized abortion, therefore, led to less crime" (Levitt 127). The authors could have stopped there and probably would have had their readers convinced. But just to make certain, Dubner and Levitt go on to make sure the abortion-crime link isn't just a fluke correlation. Here, they bring in the statistics of New York, California, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii, where abortion was legal for at least two years before *Roe v. Wade*. "Between 1988 and 1994, violent crime in the early-legalizing states fell 13% compared to the other states; between 1994 and 1997, their murder rates fell 23% more than those of the other states" (Levitt 128). So the states that legalized abortion before the rest of the nation experienced the crime drop before the remainder of the states. This indicates there is definitely a causal relationship between legalized abortion and the crime drop. With this, it would now be very hard to argue that Dubner and Levitt's argument is a case of fluke correlation.

Freakonomics has presented a nearly unshakable case now. To make the case completely concrete however, the authors take their evidence one step further. To prove that the legalization of abortion caused crime rates to drop they examine the relationship between each state's abortion rate and its crime rate. "Sure enough, the states with the highest abortion

rates in the 1970s experienced the greatest crime drops in the 1990s, while states with low abortion rates experienced smaller crime drops" (Levitt 128-9) While this information is rather disheartening considering that it suggests there are still many mothers who for some reason elect to have the unwanted child resulting in the child having a childhood that molds him into a criminal, the information also makes Dubner and Levitt's argument overwhelmingly convincing. The only reason one would not agree with Freakonomics on the subject of abortion solving crime at this point would be because of a strong belief for pro-life. This, however, is not a viable reason to not see the relationship between abortion and crime that Dubner and Levitt put forth. No matter one's personal position on the subject of abortion, the evidence that Dubner and Levitt provide makes it indisputable that the legalization of abortion in the United States in 1973 resulted in a drop in crime.

Works Cited

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Lies, Lies, Lies

"We lie." Everyone can relate to Stephanie Ericsson's statement in her article "The Ways We Lie" because we all have committed this little sin, but in reading her article, we don't gain any new insight into the phenomena that is human deception. It is a subject that no person can escape. In her article, Ericsson describes the different types of lies frequently used, breaking down lies into ten categories: the white lie, facades, ignoring the plain facts, deflecting, omission, stereotypes and cliches, groupthink, out and out lies, dismissal, and delusion. She describes lying as a mechanism to "lubricate the daily machinery of living." But then she questions the effects of lying; does lying help to keep things running smoothly or does it do more harm than good in the grand scheme of things? We can sometimes pretend our lies don't do any harm, but is this naive thinking? Do we just not see the ill-effects and therefore pretend they do not exist. Are we really hurting ourselves by accepting lies as an unavoidable part of life?

After defining a type of lie, Ericsson uses examples to show how that specific way of lying can be harmful, either to the liar or to those around the liar. She even goes as far as to blame most cases of schizophrenia as well as some other mental diseases on the lie she calls dismissal. She argues that when parents dismiss their child's emotions by retorting the opposite of what the child expresses (for example "Mommy, I'm scared" would receive the response "No you're not

darling"), the child exchanges trust of feelings for this false reality. This new acceptance of what the child is told as the true reality instead of what would normally be accepted is what causes the child to develop a split personality, or schizophrenia. This is probably the most extreme case of what harm can come from lies. Her argument seems logical, the constant dismissal of one's feelings would account for a lack of trust in those feelings. However, Ericsson fails to cite the numerical statistics of this being the case which would make her statement credible. If the dismissal lie actually is the cause in a sizable percentage of schizophrenia cases, it should be noted. Her diction connotes that is not that common. She also fails to consider other causes of the disease which implies an exaggeration for the sake of her argument. This makes her article appear fallacious. Either of these actions would have strengthened her stand on how detrimental the use of the dismissal lie can be.

Later, she once again brings up children and lies. She tells of the out and out lie. After she had already witnessed her son break the fence, she questions him on who was responsible to hear that apparently it was "the murderers." The out and out lie is Ericsson's favorite type of lie because it is so boldly incorrect. But this is confusing. Ericsson is arguing that all lies do harm, then she states she likes the lie that is most false. Her light tone causes her argument to digress from being successful. Perhaps she wished to be facetious, but she never gives a reason on why the out and out lie is harmful. She portrays it as humorous. Here, her clashing opinions hurt her argument. How can lies that are being argued as harmful in any case be favored and fun? Also, if the out and out lie is so boldly incorrect, who is being hurt with this lie? Obviously, she is not hurt in her example. She even enjoyed being lied to because it was amusing. Ericsson doesn't claim that it hurt her son either. So the reader must conclude that all lies are harmful, but we can take

pleasure in the out and out lie? This just doesn't match up.

One question Ericsson could have delved into is why children lie. Is it a habit they pick up from adults? Is it a natural human defense mechanism so as to escape getting into trouble? Can some lying actually help a child's imagination to grow? Parents try to tell their children not to lie, but if pressured it seems children are very likely to lie. And what about the lie one accidentally commits when believing a statement to be true, but in actuality it is false? Does this do the same harm as the lies purposefully executed? Lies, in these cases, are part of nature and will always be around as long as speech and children exist. In fact, haven't lies been around for as long as mankind could speak? Why is this? Does this suggest it is an unavoidable part of human nature? Thus, in order to follow the advice of Ericsson, one would have to believe that we are constantly causing ourselves harm and should go against nature in an attempt to be more civilized. A very noble idea, but one that may be difficult to catch on.

Ericsson does a fine job of showing some of the harm that can come from lying, but she never quite tears the reader away from the unavoidable thought that even if one stops accepting lies, they will still undoubtedly exist. One can demand others to be truthful, and be just in doing so if holding oneself to these rules, but can one believe that demanding others to be truthful will have any affect? In this world, it is not unlikely that you have come into contact with someone that constantly lied, someone that should never be trusted. Some people lie for sheer enjoyment, taking it as a sort of game. Even when you may demand these people to be honest, and after you have been completely honest with them, some people it seems will always lie for one reason or another. What is the solution Ericsson suggests for these people? Once again, while Ericsson's argument that all lies can do damage appears logical, she fails to show that the absence of lying is

logical.

It feels she is preaching the old "thou shalt not lie," but she doesn't bring any new insight to this advice. She also fails to suggest how to avoid lying. It is hard to take advice from someone who in the beginning of the same article admits to lying regularly. She poses the question, "if I justify lying, what makes me any different from slick politicians or the corporate robbers"? Dividing matters into these black and white terms is avoiding the reality of this world where there are countless shades of grey. Corporate robbers lying to the people in order to make the most profit is a far cry from telling a friend "You look so cute in that dress!" when perhaps she doesn't look as dazzling as you make out. Robber barons have cost lives with their lies. Attempting to keep things so simple makes Ericsson's argument seem childish and not thought out.

Ericsson's standpoint contradicts itself several places throughout the article. Lies are good, bad, unavoidable, but should not be used. If the point of the article is simply to have her readers ponder the different lies told daily, it may be considered successful. We really needed an article to know that we lie? But if the point of the article was to have some affect on how her readers go on with their daily lives and how they view lying, it falls short. The reader leaves the article never straying from the idea that, as Ericsson put it, lies are tools constantly employed to "lubricate the daily machinery of living." It is nice to believe in a world where deception is a fabrication, but if lies are part of human nature, this will never be the case. Perhaps Ericsson's readers will actually think a little longer on the next lie they tell. Or perhaps some readers may even consider the effects of that lie when they wouldn't have before. But in either case, the lies are being told all the same, and the consideration given to the act of lying will soon fade after a few more are told. Because lies are inevitable, as Ericsson shows in her account of daily life, it is

also inevitable that human's will justify the act of lying. Thus, arguing that all lies have harm is a difficult task, one that Stephanie Ericsson is unable to fully explore effectively.

Out of the Picture

I was talking on the phone with my mother from my Hollywood apartment. She was driving on her way to pick up my sister from UCI. My sister is in her last year of undergraduate studies there. It may seem weird, a college student being picked up by her mother, but my sister had just been in a car accident in which her pelvis was broken and she still required some help getting around. We were speaking on the phone just as we do every day when my mom said, "Dad filed for divorce."

Apparently he had told her that morning, but had filed for it about a week prior. Recently my parents were having problems, so it shouldn't have come as too much of a surprise. Nonetheless, the news hit me like that sudden charlie-horse you get in your leg when stretching out in the morning, and this one didn't want to go away. We go on family vacations all the time, spend lots of time together, not to mention we speak about everything, but now that would no longer be the case. My dad would move out of the house we had all lived in for fifteen years, a twenty-four year marriage at an end.

I finally replied, "Well, I just want you both to be happy." Perhaps I said this because I truly meant it, or perhaps I did because I wanted to sound as if I wasn't sad. I wonder how long they had really not wanted to be married. In high school my sister and I had pleaded they stay together when they sat us down to tell us they were separating, and they listened. I know people always say there's no one to blame when things go bad, that it all just worked out that way, but I

wonder who is to blame? Would things have worked out differently under different circumstances? I somehow doubt it.

When on the phone with her, I could hear a weakness in her voice that usually wasn't there, a shakiness that bid for help. I knew she wished I would come home. She always made her desires clear even if she didn't say the exact words. I thought she might be thinking that if I came home, somehow my dad would be convinced to stay and call the whole thing off. I didn't bring it up though. It made me feel guilty, as if I was being selfish not to.

A couple weeks later, as my mother's birthday neared, my mom approached me while I was at the house. "I want pictures of the family for my birthday. I need pictures of you and Ali to put up at work." She asked for this almost every birthday. I agreed and told her that I would check out a nice digital camera from school.

It was awhile later before I actually went to get the camera. After class, I went to the photo lab to pick up the one I had reserved, the one called "The Rebel." That sucker was heavy, and it was in a super heavy duty case. It was like I was carrying a bomb or the dinosaur D.N.A. in *Jurassic Park* (If you are thinking "Wait, the guy in Jurassic Park carried it in a little shaving cream can!" then understand it just felt like I was carrying a briefcase you see in action movies). I packed the case, along with lights I checked out from the audio/visual lab, into the back of my car and drove home to my family.

By the time I arrived there, it was dark. My dad had gotten there before I had so he was there waiting with my sister. I put the cases down, "Thanks for taking my parking spot, Dad! These cases are über heavy!"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mad." But the truth was my parking spot had been snatched up by my

sister long before.

My dad began peeking around the equipment I had brought, throwing open one of the light reflectors and flashing it around. I poured myself something to drink and grabbed some cheese and bread to snack on. Because I hadn't eaten much of a lunch, I was rather hungry. Then I set up the lights and began taking some candid shots of Alicen and Dad sitting in the kitchen while we waited for my mom to get home from work. We weren't waiting long before hearing the sound of the garage opening and her car stereo blaring.

"MING MING!" We all have nicknames, and that is mine.

"MOMOS!" I yelled towards the garage where my mom was walking in.

"What am I, chop liver?" my sister chimed in as she turned from her computer. My mom put her things down and began to settle in which took her some time. She got her mixed nuts from the cabinet as she spoke with my father. I heard them talking about her work as they quietly walked into the other room.

"How is everything, Ali?" I nodded my head in the direction of our parents. Alicen gave me a look as if she had just worked twenty hours in a coal mine. She was tired of the arguments, the back and forth between them, the high highs and the low lows. I could tell, and I knew before I even asked, but I asked just the same.

"One day they are getting divorced, that night they want to make up. Ehh!" Poor Alicen had been right in the trenches the entire time. Our house had become like Baghdad outside the green zone, and Alicen was in the middle of it while I was living in LA; I just looked on from afar, like Bush from the White House.

My parents came back from the other room just as our friend Alan, who had agreed to be

our photographer for the night, walked in the door. So we decided to get things rolling. My sister suggested we all wear white dress shirts. But to make it more unique, so as not to look like some awful 90's glamour shots from the mall, we would jokingly wear black underwear in the photos to appear like we had thought they were only going to be head shots, therefore requiring no pants. So dressed (or undressed) and ready to go, we lined up for our photos. We first took shots in front of the fireplace. The walls are off-white and so is the chimney so the background was very plain. My father had a tie on, my sister was wearing a women's bow tie, my mother had on her black opal necklace, and I had my hair pinned back with a black-netted hat adornment.

As soon as the shutter started clicking, laughter broke out. What we must have looked like. Somehow my father gravitated towards the center of the frame, even though he was suppose to be towards the side. He has a way of taking over a picture. It is quite hilarious but was probably upsetting to my mom. The entire reason for taking the pictures was, after-all, my mother.

We took plenty of pictures, changing the background and our positioning several times. After the fireplace, we moved to the living room no one ever uses except on rare occasions. We sat in a row on the deep purple couch, the lace curtained window behind us. The most striking pictures, however, were taken in my sister's room. Her walls are black and she has heavy, draping red curtains. It's a very dramatic setting with high contrast lighting, making for very interesting looking pictures. Moving to the last room, Alan began clicking a few of Alicen and then Alicen with mom while my dad and I moved the lights. I then entered the picture. Then my father inched his way in, and began taking command of the picture again.

“Get out! Take some of the girls and me, Alan. Gary, you can get out!”

“Ouch!” I thought to myself. Poor dad. But I didn’t do anything. I just sat there awkwardly and smiled for the picture. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see my dad sitting to the side. I could feel the tension in the room like a heavy gas that you can feel saturate your body as you slowly breathe it in more and more. I just sat in it and let it consume me. I guess there was nothing else to do. I guess that’s what happens in a divorce; the family breaks up. One person leaves and is no longer in the picture.
