



Women, Wealth, and Wisdom: *Freakonomics*

Chapter 1: Schoolteachers and Sumo Wrestlers

Questions to Ponder:

1. The authors identify three types of incentives — economic, social, and moral. Think of a big decision you made recently. Which type of incentive drove it most? Do you think one type is generally more powerful than the others?
2. The schoolteacher example shows that even people in honorable professions will cheat when the incentives are right. Does that surprise you? Can you think of other high-status professions where similar dynamics might exist?
3. We only hear about cheaters who get caught. How does that shape your sense of how honest or dishonest society really is? Does it make you more cynical, or do you think most people behave well regardless of observation?

Chapter 2: The Ku Klux Klan and Real-Estate Agents

Questions to Ponder:

1. *Both real estate agents and the KKK derived power from hoarding information. Does that comparison feel fair or provocative to you?*
2. *Can you think of a time when information was used against you as a weapon? How did it feel, and how did you respond?*
3. *The authors claim the internet has "vastly shrunk the gap between experts and the public." Do you think that's still true — or has the flood of information online created new asymmetries, like the gap between those who can evaluate sources and those who can't?*
4. *The real-estate data shows that agents sell their own homes for more money and hold them on the market longer than they do for clients. Have you ever sensed that a professional was steering you toward a decision that served them more than it served you?*

Chapter 3: Why Do Drug Dealers Still Live with Their Moms?

Questions to Ponder:

1. The authors say conventional wisdom "must be simple, convenient, comfortable, and comforting — though not necessarily true." Can you think of a piece of conventional wisdom in your own field, community, or family that you suspect survives more because it's comforting than because it's accurate?
2. "Criminals, like everyone else, respond to incentives." If that's true, what does it suggest about how society should approach crime reduction?



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Chapter 4: Where Have The Criminals Gone?

Questions to Ponder:

1. The authors argue that legalized abortion was "one of the greatest crime-lowering factors in American history." Does this conclusion surprise you? How do you feel about a social policy being evaluated primarily through the lens of crime statistics?
2. The authors dismiss the death penalty as having virtually no effect on crime rates given how rarely and slowly it is carried out. Does that argument change how you think about capital punishment — either for or against it?
3. The data suggests that economic factors like unemployment primarily affect financially motivated crimes but not violent ones. What does that imply about the root causes of violence, and what policies might address them?

Chapter 5: What Makes a Perfect Parent?

Questions to Ponder:

1. What responsibility do parents actually bear for how their children turn out?
2. On page 177, Levitt and Dubner distinguish between what parents *are* and what parents *do*, suggesting the former matters far more. Do you find this convincing?
3. Risk expert Peter Sandman is quoted saying that "the risks that scare people and the risks that kill people are very different." Can you think of examples from your own life where fear and actual danger were misaligned?

Chapter 6: Perfect Parent, Part II; OR: Would a Roshanda by Any Other Name Smell as Sweet?

Questions to Ponder:

1. The authors note that a "high-end" name eventually gets adopted more broadly, "the kind of families that were the first to call their daughters Amber or Heather are now calling them Lauren or Madison," and the name loses its prestige signal. What does this cycle reveal about how Americans think about class, race, and social mobility?
2. Knowing the data, what is your opinion about baby names? Do you think a child's name can hinder or advance their success in life?
3. Across these chapters, the authors repeatedly show that conventional wisdom is wrong. Did any of these arguments genuinely change your thinking, or did you find yourself resisting the data? What made the difference?