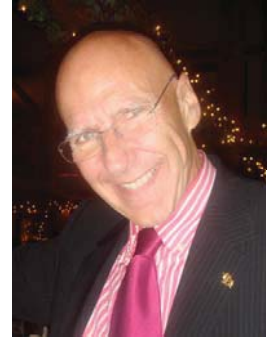


THE GOLDHABER WARNINGS REPORT



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THE AGE OF OUR WARNINGS CONTEMPT: FORBIDDEN FRUIT THEORY

This past weekend as Hurricane Bill brushed past the Eastern Coast Line of the United States, bringing dangerous riptides to our shores, police and lifeguards posted explicit warning signs (reinforced by nonstop media coverage about the dangers of these riptides) closing beaches from North Carolina throughout New Jersey, New York and New England. Despite this barrage of warning and safety information, who can forget the televised images of the hundreds of apparent daredevils, mostly young men, ignoring the warnings and entering the beaches to look at the waves, and even swim or surf in the turbulent waters!

Why do young people tend to ignore warnings more so than those who are more mature? Psychologists have written for decades about what they have labeled “the forbidden fruit theory of human behavior” which, simply stated predicts that the more negatively we portray a risky behavior, the more likely a young person, especially a young male, is likely to accept the challenge and “eat the forbidden fruit”, despite the risk to his own personal safety. Studies have consistently shown that the demographic profile of the “risk taker” is more likely to be a male under 30 years of age.

One study conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan concluded that television viewers subjected to warning labels about the violent content of selected television shows were more likely to desire to watch these shows than those viewers not subjected to such warnings. This effect was 25% more likely to occur with viewers under 18 compared to older viewers. A similar study was reported last year at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association in Montreal which showed that the more violent the video game was (as described by written warning labels), the more likely younger males were to desire to play the game.

The British Association of Dermatologists reported last month in a national survey of 1213 adults 18 and over from Northern Ireland, that those aged below 25 are more likely than any other age group to use no sun protection at all when sunbathing, and that men are twice as likely as women to use no sun protection at all. My own studies with Dr. Mark deTurck of teens and adults exposed to no diving signs posted prominently at swimming pools, concluded that the latter were significantly more likely than the former age group to notice, read and indicate a willingness to follow the no diving warning signs, despite an equal appreciation by both age groups of the potential hazards associated with diving into shallow water in a swimming pool.

It is apparent from the above studies, as well as many others reported in the scientific literature, that young people are more likely to bite from the forbidden fruit of dangerous, even highly hazardous situations, despite being warned about such hazards. Future issues of this newsletter will continue to address other factors that may influence a warning’s effectiveness. Feel free to pass this newsletter on to any of your friends and colleagues.