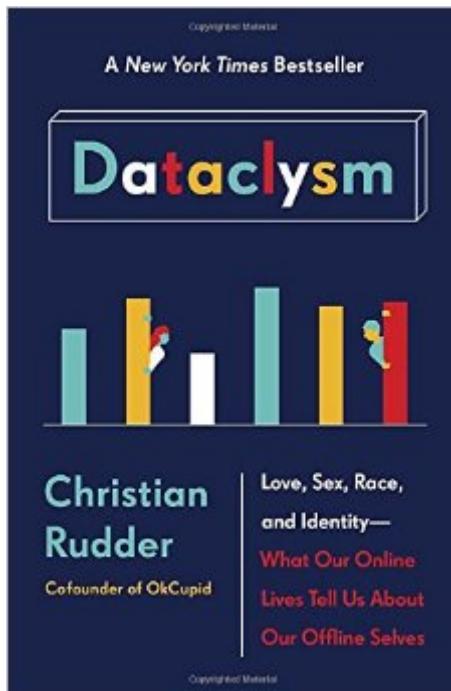


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Dataclysm: Love, Sex, Race, And Identity--What Our Online Lives Tell Us About Our Offline Selves



Synopsis

A New York Times BestsellerAn audacious, irreverent investigation of human behavior "and a first look at a revolution in the making. Our personal data has been used to spy on us, hire and fire us, and sell us stuff we don't need. In Dataclysm, Christian Rudder uses it to show us who we truly are. For centuries, we've relied on polling or small-scale lab experiments to study human behavior. Today, a new approach is possible. As we live more of our lives online, researchers can finally observe us directly, in vast numbers, and without filters. Data scientists have become the new demographers. In this daring and original book, Rudder explains how Facebook "likes" can predict, with surprising accuracy, a person's sexual orientation and even intelligence; how attractive women receive exponentially more interview requests; and why you must have haters to be hot. He charts the rise and fall of America's most reviled word through Google Search and examines the new dynamics of collaborative rage on Twitter. He shows how people express themselves, both privately and publicly. What is the least Asian thing you can say? Do people bathe more in Vermont or New Jersey? What do black women think about Simon & Garfunkel? (Hint: they don't think about Simon & Garfunkel.) Rudder also traces human migration over time, showing how groups of people move from certain small towns to the same big cities across the globe. And he grapples with the challenge of maintaining privacy in a world where these explorations are possible. Visually arresting and full of wit and insight, Dataclysm is a new way of seeing ourselves—a brilliant alchemy, in which math is made human and numbers become the narrative of our time. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

This book may be to Data Science and Big Data what Freakonomics was to Economics. The author is one of the founders of the dating web site OKCupid and has spent a lot of time sifting through the vast amount of data collected by user interactions with their website and each other, and he uses this wealth of personal and private information to explore what it can tell us about human social behavior. The writing is excellent and it is a very fun read (I was hooked by the second page of the introduction, finished it in a couple sittings, and was never bored). There's lots of information in this book that will make you think, and a lot worth talking about more. I think it's at its best in the first part where the theme is "things that bring us together" and he talks about statistics relating to how people find each other on his dating site. In the second part of the book "what pulls us apart" he deals with issues like race and what his data shows about the prevalence of racism in American society, as well as the internet's capacity for rage. The last part of the book "what makes us who we are" continues with the relationships theme as he investigates a few more racial as well as gay and bi-sexual issues before covering a few miscellaneous topics like comparing the kind of uses of this data he makes and his vision of using it for good compared to things like marketing and government spying. People who consider themselves Data Scientists may be bothered by the fact that he does not go into much formal detail and actually few of his analyses require any fancy math or a PhD in anything.

I bought the audio version of this book because I'm an OK Cupid user, and I've followed the OK Cupid blog. OK Cupid-- by being one of the most popular dating sites in the world-- has collected an enormous amount of data from its users. Data which is very intimate, personal, and unique because it is information that can be analyzed in order to determine patterns or draw conclusions. However, Rudder does an absolute hack job in interpreting the data and it's painful to listen to him attempt to play alchemist or voodoo witch doctor. It's as if he's never taken a single class in the fields of logic, statistics, or psychology. Google "spurious correlations" by Tyler Vigen, and you'll get a good overview of the problems when people don't understand correlation vs. causation. Rudder also completely fails to take into account (even in the subtitle of the book) that users on OK Cupid are typically answering questions publicly so it is a mistake to assume that all self-reported answers are accurate and candid. Also, many of the questions on OK Cupid are broad unscientific questions, compound questions, or allow very restricted responses in the form of multiple-choice answers

(many of which are casual/informal and don't allow for the ideal and most accurate response). I don't mean to dump on the author, but there is one more strong criticism of Rudder's choice of topics for this book: When he spends a third of the book discussing Google searches and Twitter, it's like watching one of those pathetic interviews with a retired ball player who's asked how the college team needs to win (duh, they need to score more points and prevent the other team from scoring point).

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