

Naked Statistics: Stripping the Dread from the Data

By Charles Wheelan

“Brilliant, funny . . . the best math teacher you never had.”? *San Francisco Chronicle*

Once considered tedious, the field of statistics is rapidly evolving into a discipline Hal Varian, chief economist at Google, has actually called “sexy.” From batting averages and political polls to game shows and medical research, the real-world application of statistics continues to grow by leaps and bounds. How can we catch schools that cheat on standardized tests? How does Netflix know which movies you’ll like? What is causing the rising incidence of autism? As best-selling author Charles Wheelan shows us in *Naked Statistics*, the right data and a few well-chosen statistical tools can help us answer these questions and more.

For those who slept through Stats 101, this book is a lifesaver. Wheelan strips away the arcane and technical details and focuses on the underlying intuition that drives statistical analysis. He clarifies key concepts such as inference, correlation, and regression analysis, reveals how biased or careless parties can manipulate or misrepresent data, and shows us how brilliant and creative researchers are exploiting the valuable data from natural experiments to tackle thorny questions.

And in Wheelan’s trademark style, there’s not a dull page in sight. You’ll encounter clever Schlitz Beer marketers leveraging basic probability, an International Sausage Festival illuminating the tenets of the central limit theorem, and a head-scratching choice from the famous game show *Let’s Make a Deal?* and you’ll come away with insights each time. With the wit, accessibility, and sheer fun that turned *Naked Economics* into a bestseller, Wheelan defies the odds yet again by bringing another essential, formerly unglamorous discipline to life.

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Review

“While a great measure of the book’s appeal comes from Mr. Wheelan’s fluent style?a natural comedian, he is truly the Dave Barry of the coin toss set?the rest comes from his multiple real world examples illustrating exactly why even the most reluctant mathphobe is well advised to achieve a personal understanding of the statistical underpinnings of life.” (New York Times)

“The best math teacher you never had. [*Naked Statistics*] is filled with practical lessons, like how to judge the validity of polls, why you should never buy a lottery ticket, and how to keep an eye out for red flags in public statements.” (San Francisco Chronicle)

“*Naked Statistics* is an apt title. Charles Wheelan strips away the superfluous outer garments and exposes the underlying beauty of the subject in a way that everyone can appreciate.” (Hal Varian, chief economist at Google)

“I cannot stress enough the importance of Americans’ need to understand statistics?the basis for a great deal of what we hear and read these days?and I cannot stress enough the value of Wheelan’s book in giving readers an approachable avenue to understanding statistics. Almost anyone interested in sports, politics, business, and the myriad of other areas in which statistics rule the roost today will benefit from this highly readable, on-target, and important book.” (Frank Newport, Gallup editor-in-chief)

“A fun, engaging book that shows why statistics is a vital tool for anyone who wants to understand the modern world.” (Jacob J. Goldstein, "Planet Money" on NPR)

“Two phrases you don’t often see together: ‘statistics primer’ and ‘rollicking good time.’ Until Charlie Wheelan got to it, that is. This book explains the way statistical ideas can help you understand much of everyday life.” (Austan Goolsbee, professor of economics at the University of Chicago and former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers)

About the Author

Charles Wheelan is the author of the best-selling *Naked Statistics* and *Naked Economics* and is a former correspondent for *The Economist*. He teaches public policy and economics at Dartmouth College and lives in Hanover, New Hampshire, with his family.

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