Everybody Lies Summary
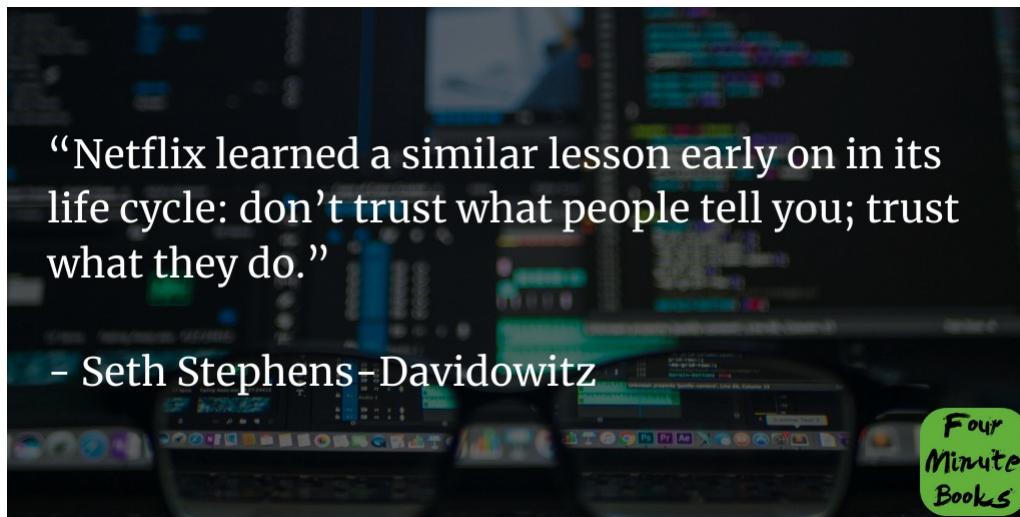
1-Sentence-Summary: _Everybody Lies_ will expand your mind about the true nature of human beings by explaining what big data is, how it came to be, and how we can use it to understand ourselves better.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:

How do you feel about Google having the information that it has about you? I have a family member who, a few years ago, was convinced that it was a big problem. He was so passionate about it that he wouldn't use Google search or even consider having a Gmail account!

While everybody has a right to choose what they will and won't use, I believe that information collection on the internet is a good thing. It helps sites know how to better market to our needs, for one. And we can learn a lot about human nature from looking at the data and use it to improve society.

Big data, as this collected online information is called, is an important part of our digital world. Understanding it is important to our future, and Seth Stephens-Davidowitz's _Everybody Lies: What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are_ explains it all in great detail.

Here are the 3 biggest lessons that have opened my eyes about people:

1. Big data is better than people at identifying patterns in human behavior because it uses larger sample sizes to come to conclusions.

2. People lie about their actions and feelings, but big data tells us the truth.
3. Political leaders need to look at information in terms of how it can help society as a whole, not on what it tells us about individuals.

Grab some popcorn, sit back, relax, and let's learn about the secret life of humans!

Lesson 1: **People aren't as good at identifying patterns as big data is because they don't consider large enough sample sizes.**

The term big data refers to amounts of information so big that we need massive computational power to understand it.

We might, for example, use <u>Google</u> searches to determine popular foods in a region. It's actually rather intuitive, at least in some regards. With this understanding, we can all see that in some ways we're all data scientists.

We like to rely on our intuition but it's not really scientific. We're right to gather information and try to make sense of it to make predictions, but we need to do it correctly. When we have the right data, we get facts to back up our ideas so that our understanding of how the world works is correct.

One experience the author had with his grandmother is a good example of this. She once began giving him relationship advice, suggesting all the traits to look for in a companion. His potential partner needed to be funny, clever, and pretty, just to name a few.

Looking at this from a data science perspective, she was simply using her 88 years of experience, and the information it had given her, to come to these conclusions. Over the years she'd seen the traits of successful relationships and was simply passing that down. But not all of her conclusions were accurate.

She firmly believed that for a long-lasting relationship couples should have a lot of mutual friends. However, she wasn't taking information from enough people's experiences.

But in 2014 a study identified, with a large enough sample size from big data, that more mutual friends on Facebook made a couple more likely to eventually split up.

Lesson 2: **Big data tells us the deep dark secrets that people won't share.**

One university recently asked students in a poll to share their GPA. Just 2% of the participants mentioned their 2.5 or lower GPA. But when the school checked the official records, the actual number was over five times that amount at 11%!

It's pretty obvious from this that people lie on surveys. We do this because we want to look good, even in the face of someone that we don't know. This is also known as social desirability bias.

And people don't just lie to become liked, either. They'll also try to impress whoever is asking the survey questions. Regardless of how well we know someone, this underline psychological bias takes over and we try to make a good impression.

Just think if someone that looked similar to your dad was asking you about your drug use in college. You probably wouldn't be very willing to share the truth!

This is why surveys are unreliable, but where big data comes in to save the day. What we do online seems anonymous to us, but the information collected can tell when we're lying.

Some surveys that asked about sexual acts, for example, showcases this perfectly. A far less number of people were willing to try certain things in surveys compared to the actual amount that showed based on search data from websites!

Lesson 3: **Society will be better off if the government uses big data to look at helping society as a whole rather than specific individuals.**

Whenever you use Google to search for something, you're giving your information to big data. As I mentioned at the beginning, this isn't necessarily a bad thing, but there are implications we should think about. For example, what if the government decided to take over this information?

If people search for suicide-related phrases, for example, then it might be a good idea to notify local police, right?

The numbers show that this isn't smart. About 3.5 million searches for suicide-related words happen each month, but only 4,000 actual suicides. **Following-up with each search would be an incredible waste of time and money.** Let alone the ethical implications.

If we instead look at how we can use regional data to influence people's lives for the better, we get much more promising results.

For example, research indicates that actual suicides do correlate with Google searches on the state level. A local police department could then determine whether the search rates for these terms are higher in their state. Using that information they could then implement measures to reduce the number of suicides with prevention programs.

So the next time you're worried about Google having your information and the government

getting it, stop and think. Your use of the internet and allowing big data to collect your information could help save someone's life someday, at least in a small way.

Everybody Lies Review

What an interesting book! I knew the term big data and had an idea what it was, but I couldn't have imagined how useful it is. _Everybody Lies_ is a real eye-opener that can help us all understand our true natures a little better and hopefully make us want to improve ourselves.

Read full summary on Blinkist >>

Free Preview >>

Learn more about the author >>

Who would I recommend the Everybody Lies summary to?

The 47-year-old who thinks that Google is the enemy and that they're going to steal his data and use it against him, the 22-year-old who is studying social sciences in college, and anyone who wonders what the truth is about human nature.