

Big Data



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Big Data has recently come to public awareness as a catch phrase for the vast network of personal information about you that is accumulating in *The Cloud*, to be used by who knows who for who knows what. Privacy in the digital age poses important social, personal, political, technical and legal challenges that many individuals and policy makers are properly concerned with, but this emphasis obscures the real significance of the explosion in computational and data storage capacity that is transforming the way complex systems of all kinds can suddenly be understood.

Until very recently the only way to understand complex systems like the weather, the global economy or the human genome was to discover or invent a few rules of thumb that were good enough to be mistaken for an accurate description of those systems. Suddenly we can do better than that for relatively simple complex systems like the global economy, the human genome and your next likely Internet purchase, because we suddenly have the data and computational capacity to model these systems in detail. We can suddenly understand these systems as idiosyncratic individuals rather than as typical representatives of their class. The weather and the more interesting aspects of human beings will remain unpredictable for the foreseeable future.

The rules of thumb that we use for people are called stereotypes. It is impossible to function without stereotypes, simply because we have never met many of the people we deal with every day. There are appropriate ways to behave with police officers and massage therapists, no matter what they might be like as individuals. And you also have a variety of other social, ethnic, age, class and gender stereotypes that you rely on all the time, even at home. Yes you do, and that is OK as long as it isn't a problem. When it *does* become a problem you may need to take a more personal look at the person you may not have been treating quite like a person, or show a more personal side of yourself to whoever it is that has not been treating *you* like one. Trust me. Call me.

Concise Personal Counseling

\$150 per 70-minute session

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