

The Lady Tasting Tea: How Statistics Revolutionized Science in the Twentieth Century

By David Salsburg

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An insightful, revealing history of the magical mathematics that transformed our world.

At a summer tea party in Cambridge, England, a guest states that tea poured into milk tastes different from milk poured into tea. Her notion is shouted down by the scientific minds of the group. But one man, Ronald Fisher, proposes to scientifically test the hypothesis. There is no better person to conduct such an experiment, for Fisher is a pioneer in the field of statistics.

The Lady Tasting Tea spotlights not only Fisher's theories but also the revolutionary ideas of dozens of men and women which affect our modern everyday lives. Writing with verve and wit, David Salsburg traces breakthroughs ranging from the rise and fall of Karl Pearson's theories to the methods of quality control that rebuilt postwar Japan's economy, including a pivotal early study on the capacity of a small beer cask at the Guinness brewing factory. Brimming with intriguing tidbits and colorful characters, *The Lady Tasting Tea* salutes the spirit of those who dared to look at the world in a new way.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Science is inextricably linked with mathematics. Statistician David Salsburg examines the development of ever-more-powerful statistical methods for determining scientific truth in *The Lady Tasting Tea*, a series of historical and biographical sketches that illuminate without alienating the mathematically timid. Salsburg, who has worked in academia and industry and has met many of the major players he writes about, shares his subjects' enthusiasm for problem solving and deep thinking. His sense of excitement drives the prose, but never at the expense of the reader; if anything, the author has taken pains to eliminate esoterica and ephemera from his stories. This might frustrate a few number-head readers, but the abundant notes and references should keep them happy in the library for weeks after reading the book.

Ultimately, the various tales herein are unified in a single theme: the conversion of science from observational natural history into rigorously defined statistical models of data collection and analysis. This process, usually only implicit in studies of scientific methods and history, is especially important now that we seem to be reaching the point of diminishing returns and are looking for new paradigms of scientific investigation. *The Lady Tasting Tea* will appeal to a broad audience of scientifically literate readers, reminding them of the humanity underlying the work. --*Rob Lightner*

From Publishers Weekly
The development of statistical modeling in primary research is the underreported paradigm shift in the foundation of science. The lady of the title's claim that she could detect a difference between milk-into-tea vs. tea-into-milk infusions sets up the social history of a theory that has changed the culture of science as thoroughly as relativity did (the lady's palate is analogous to quantum physics' famous cat-subject), making possible the construction of meaningful scientific experiments. Statistical modeling is the child of applied mathematics and the 19th-century scientific revolution. So Salsburg begins his history at the beginning (with field agronomists in the U.K. in the 1920s trying to test the usefulness of early artificial fertilizer) and creates an important, near-complete chapter in the social history of science. His modest style sometimes labors to keep the lid on the Wonderland of statistical reality, especially under the "This Book Contains No Equations!" marketing rule for trade science books. He does his best to make a lively story of mostly British scientists' lives and work under this stricture, right through chaos theory. The products of their advancements include more reliable pharmaceuticals, better beer, econometrics, quality control manufacturing, diagnostic tests and social policy. It is unfortunate that this introduction to new statistical descriptions of reality tries so hard to appease mathophobia. Someone should do hypothesis testing of the relationship between equations in texts and sales in popular science markets it would make a fine example of the use of statistics. Illus.

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From Library Journal
This is an insightful and revealing history of how the emergence of statistics in scientific research revolutionized the sciences. Without using a single mathematical equation, Salsburg, a former Harvard professor and a prolific writer with three books and numerous articles on applied statistics, clearly discusses some major advances in statistics in the last century. He covers most of the major contributors to the field and dedicates two chapters to the contributions made by women. Salsburg also does an excellent job of showing how statistics has had an impact in the development of other sciences likes agriculture, cancer

research, and econometrics as well as its influence in industry, where statistical methods are widely used in quality control and for the analysis of operational research. General readers with little mathematical background will be able to grasp Salsburg's lucid concepts with ease. Specialists will also enjoy reading this book for its interesting presentation and for the many biographical notations about some of the most influential researchers in the field. Since Salsburg focuses on the 20th century, readers interested in learning about earlier developments in statistics can look at Stephen M. Stigler's Statistics on the Table (LJ 10/1/99).
Nestor L. Osorio, Northern Illinois Univ. Lib., DeKalb
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donald Campbell:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite guide and reading a publication. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the book entitled The Lady Tasting Tea: How Statistics Revolutionized Science in the Twentieth Century. Try to make book The Lady Tasting Tea: How Statistics Revolutionized Science in the Twentieth Century as your close friend. It means that it can to get your friend when you feel alone and beside that of course make you smarter than ever before. Yeah, it is very fortuned in your case. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know every thing by the book. So , let's make new experience along with knowledge with this book.

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Alan Durham:

Information is provisions for anyone to get better life, information these days can get by anyone in everywhere. The information can be a know-how or any news even a concern. What people must be consider any time those information which is within the former life are challenging be find than now is taking seriously which one is suitable to believe or which one the actual resource are convinced. If you have the unstable resource then you have it as your main information you will see huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen inside you if you take The Lady Tasting Tea: How Statistics Revolutionized Science in the Twentieth Century as the daily resource information.

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