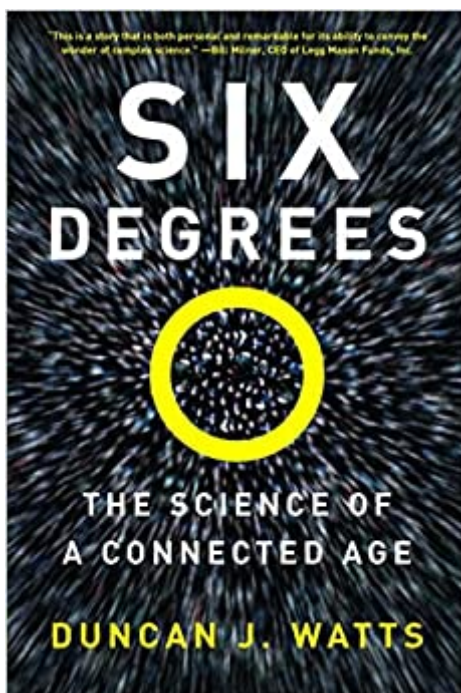


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Six Degrees: The Science Of A Connected Age



Synopsis

The pioneering young scientist whose work on the structure of small worlds has triggered an avalanche of interest in networks. In this remarkable book, Duncan Watts, one of the principal architects of network theory, sets out to explain the innovative research that he and other scientists are spearheading to create a blueprint of our connected planet. Whether they bind computers, economies, or terrorist organizations, networks are everywhere in the real world, yet only recently have scientists attempted to explain their mysterious workings. From epidemics of disease to outbreaks of market madness, from people searching for information to firms surviving crisis and change, from the structure of personal relationships to the technological and social choices of entire societies, Watts weaves together a network of discoveries across an array of disciplines to tell the story of an explosive new field of knowledge, the people who are building it, and his own peculiar path in forging this new science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

You may be only six degrees away from Kevin Bacon, but would he let you borrow his car? It depends on the structures within the network that links you. When the power goes out, when we find that a stranger knows someone we know, when dot-com stocks soar in price, networks are evident. In *Six Degrees*, sociologist Duncan Watts examines networks like these: what they are, how they're being studied, and what we can use them for. To illustrate the often complicated mathematics that describe such structures, Watts uses plenty of examples from life, without which this book would

quickly move beyond a general science readership. Small chapters make each thought-provoking conclusion easy to swallow, though some are hard to digest. For instance, in a short bit on "coercive externalities," Watts sums up sociological research showing that: "Conversations concerning politics displayed a consistent pattern On election day, the strongest predictor of electoral success was not which party an individual privately supported but which party he or she expected would win." Six Degrees attempts to help readers understand the new and exciting field of networks and complexity. While considerably more demanding than a general book like *The Tipping Point*, it offers readers a snapshot of a riveting moment in science, when understanding things like disease epidemics and the stock market seems almost within our reach. --Therese Littleton --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Watts, a Columbia University sociology professor, combines his own research in network theory with summaries of the work of others who he says are "collectively solving problems which cannot be solved by any single individual or even any single discipline." The result is a dizzyingly complex blend of mathematics, computer science, biology and social theory that, despite the best efforts at clarification, often remains opaque, buried in scientific language and graphs. The book also assumes a high level of unfamiliarity on the reader's part with the subject, treating phenomena like the 17th-century tulip craze or the "Kevin Bacon game" as fresh news. Even more surprising, however, are the significant omissions- there is not a single mention of "tipping points," for example, the subject of a recent bestselling book. The parts of the book dealing with the author's own research are strong on science, but frustratingly vague on the social network of scientists with whom Watts has worked. There are intermittent highlights in the scientific account, such as an explanation of why casual acquaintances are more likely to provide life-changing opportunities than best friends, or a look at how New York City's reaction to September 11 illustrates current thinking on network connectivity and disruption, but, despite an admirable effort to syncretize discoveries in several fields, the book as a whole is too dry to compete effectively with the popularized accounts that exist for each separate field. Illus. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fluid and engaging this is a sort of storytelling science where we both learn and get involved throughout the development of the Network discipline. Great references give the reader several options for further reading. Even the boring aspects of mathematics, at least to someone like me not familiar with power curves and random graphs, are not show stoppers and do not distract the reader

from the main objective, which is: to promote the Network discipline as a new knowledge area where insights from multiple fields such as sociology, physics, mathematics, biology and economy need to converge.

I picked up the book to get an introduction into social network theory. Unlike the other critics, I enjoyed the descriptions of his working relationships with others. The book provides good food for thought for the uninitiated, which includes me. I particularly liked his historical description of what was known prior to his research (graph theory, random graphs, Milgram's work). In particular, his use of contemporary events provided a foundation for understanding the significance to his work. I detected, and the author admits, that there were a few areas not fully substantiated yet. There was one aspect particularly exciting for me. As a Christian, I revisited the Book of Acts after reading this book. I thought about the fact that if Christ had lived the 12 apostles might not have dispersed - they would have remained clustered in one group. Their disbursement was crucial to the proliferation of a network and in a sense provides another form of validating the author's thoughts on thresholds and cascading effects. An incredible mind was certainly at work! I gave one star less than five, though, due to the author's tendency for age discrimination in the area of people doing graduate work. I started graduate school well into my forties. :-)

This author looks at groups of items and how they follow certain patterns. He points out how the world wide web was thought to be composed of random lattice clusters. Actually it turned out to be following the power law. So does the wealth of a nation, word usage in languages, and city size. Many groups have actual patterns develop naturally and can be studied mathematically.

For a book in this realm to remain fresh and relevant when over a decade old is remarkable. I found myself recalling the events of the past decade, including the financial crisis, as illustrations of the concepts and overall thesis, only to remind myself that it was published before any of them happened. Clearly and engagingly written.

This book can be challenging at times and unless you have a major degree in a scientific discipline I recommend it be read in small doses. That being said, I highly recommend this to those wanting a broad understanding of a wide variety of concepts.

Cool and just the right amount of technical

The book is supposed to reach out wider audiences than the academics. It does, though in some sections the degree of complexity is quite high. However, the author was very talented to make the most difficult and complex concepts palatable to a wider audience. It is not a book to be read in one evening. It is very enriching to beginners in the field of network studies.

Easy and comprehensive. A must read book for those who want to understand how everything is connected. I strongly recommend.

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