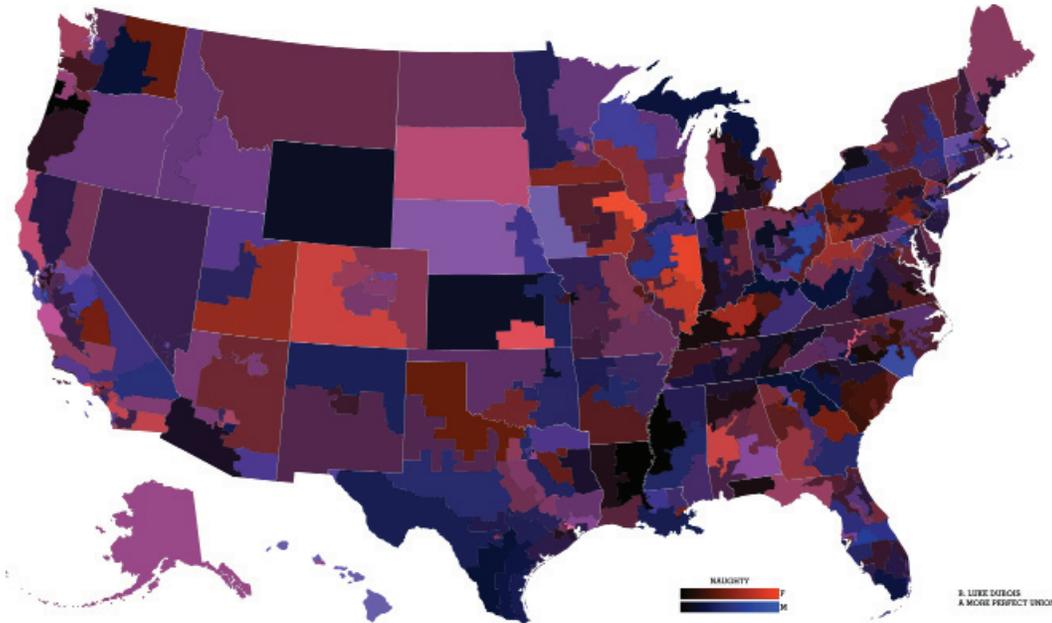


# 19 Million Profiles Later... Online Dating Lingo Tapped and Mapped

BY ROBYN GEE APRIL 5, 2011



The Pew Research Center (PRC) reports that 31 percent of all American adults know someone who has used a dating website. However, PRC doesn't say anything about the alternative reasons why some adults use dating websites, which may come as a surprise. For instance, R. Luke DuBois, who holds a doctorate in music composition from Columbia, tried online dating three years ago. He thought everything he wrote about himself sounded bogus, but became interested in the language people used to describe themselves. This prompted him to create a project called, "A More Perfect Union," which broke down data from 19 million profiles on different dating websites, to map out the frequency that people used certain words in their profiles around the country.

Since 2010 was a census year, DuBois decided to create a visual census of online dating profile language. He made nationwide maps that are shaded red and blue, like political maps, except that blue stands for boys and red stands for girls. Brighter colors mean more people used that word, and darker colors mean less people used that word.

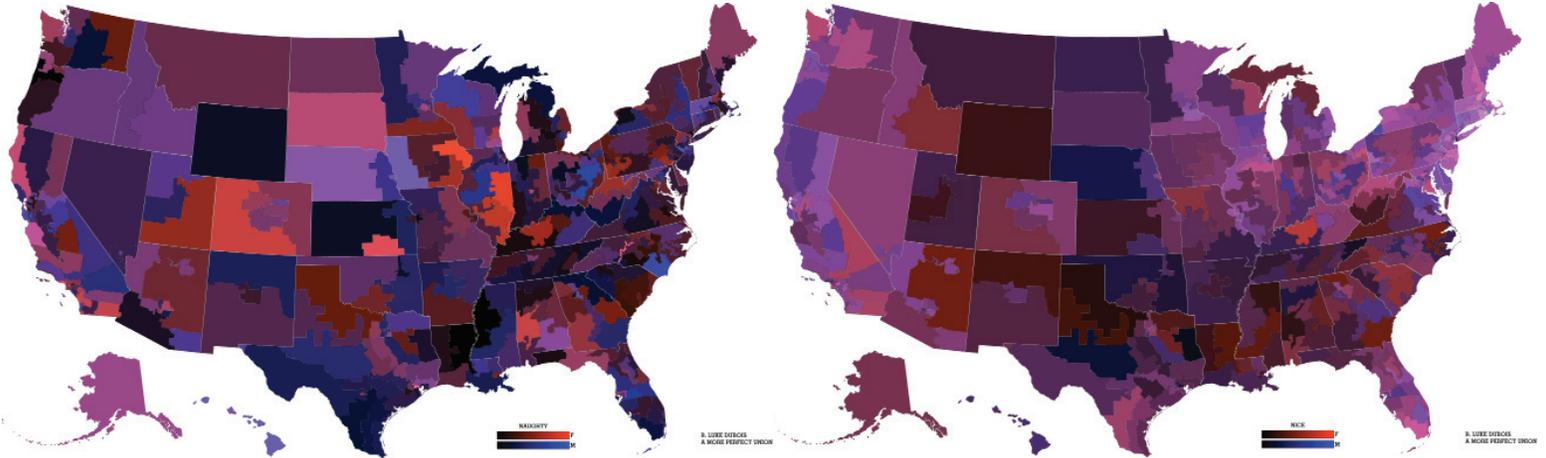
To gather this data, he joined 21 dating sites (using the 30 day free trial period) as a gay man, straight man, gay woman, and straight woman wherever possible. The object: gather data from as many online profiles as he could. He created a computer algorithm that would download the profile data from all his matches, and then change his zip code by one number, and download again. "It was kind of fun. It's as if I clicked on everyone's profile at once, until I had the whole country," said DuBois.

During that process, he noticed one other user who was also on all the same dating sites as he was. DuBois asked her out on a date. Turns out, she was also doing "research." She was a folk singer, using phrases from dating profiles to write song lyrics. Unfortunately, said DuBois, the date didn't turn into anything beyond that.

DuBois walked me through a couple maps: (Photos courtesy of bitforms gallery nyc)

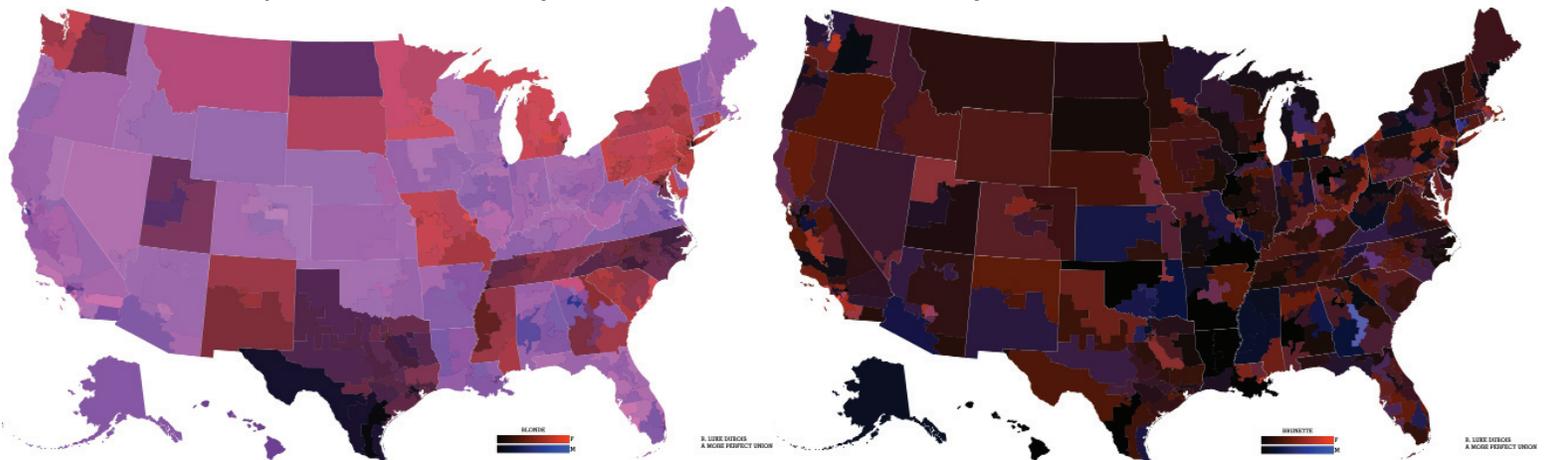
## Naughty Vs Nice

Looking at the Naughty map, DuBois said that from this image he can tell that no one in Wyoming used “naughty” in their profile, but bigger amounts of women in Colorado used “naughty. In addition, all the purple on the Nice map suggests that both men and women use “nice” in their profile.



## Blonde Vs. Brunette

DuBois said in this comparison of maps, you can tell that blonde people are more likely to mention the word “blonde” in their profile, while not many men or women mention that they are brunettes.



Other maps that DuBois puts next to each other include, “Marriage vs. Techno,” Dominant vs. Submissive,” and “Funny vs. Sarcastic.”

In addition to color-coded maps by gender, he also scanned a Rand-McNally Road Atlas into his computer and replaced the city names with unique words. “Not the word people used the most [in their dating profiles] – but the word that was used uniquely in that place – the word that shows up there more than anywhere else,” said DuBois. The atlas maps are labelled with 20,000 unique words. He rattled off some combinations:

- Dallas – “symphony”
- Houston – “rich”
- Santa Cruz – “liberal”
- Atlanta – “God,” “company,” “coca,” “jazz,” “protestant”
- New York City – “now”
- Syracuse – “dinosaur”

Over the course of the project, which started in 2008, he noticed that these dating sites adhere to very hetero-normative social practices. For instance, if a man makes a profile, but doesn’t make a move, his inbox remains empty. But when he posed as a woman, his inbox would be full in a day without making a move. However, the fact that more men used the word submissive in their own profiles seems to suggest some gender-bending underneath the surface level status quo on dating websites.

He also noticed that on the dating websites that were focused on a “fetish,” people were much more honest because... “you might as well be if you really want someone to beat you up in bed”, according to DuBois.