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In the 1970s & 80s, anthropologists working in small-scale, non-industrial societies fastidiously noted down what people were doing throughout the day. I've been exploring the data & am struck by one of the most popular activities: doing nothing. [thread] <https://t.co/Y3YuZUU550>



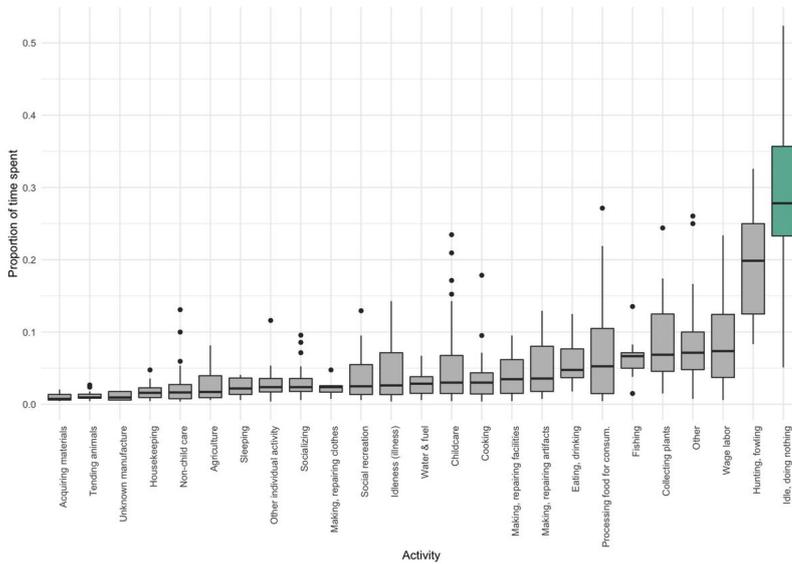
Background: The anthropologists (e.g., Bob Bailey, pictured) visited random people during waking hours & recorded what they were doing, building a representative sample of time use. Most of these data were collected while an anthropologist lived with the community for a year+. <https://t.co/cl025d3FSM>



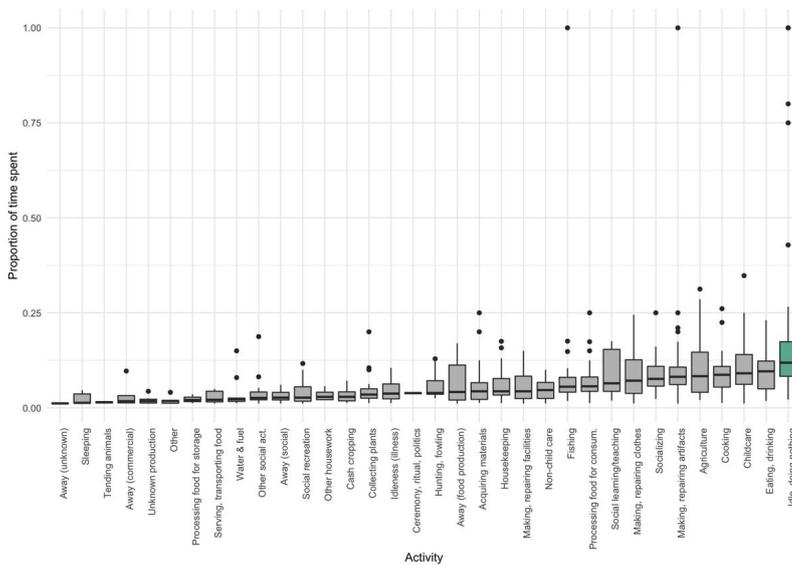
The researchers typically chose among ~60 activity codes, one of which was "Idle, doing nothing". This is different from napping, chatting, fixing tools, tidying up, & idleness b/c of illness. As far as I can tell, it's really about doing nothing at all, at least apparently. <https://t.co/yqaT9sdWku>

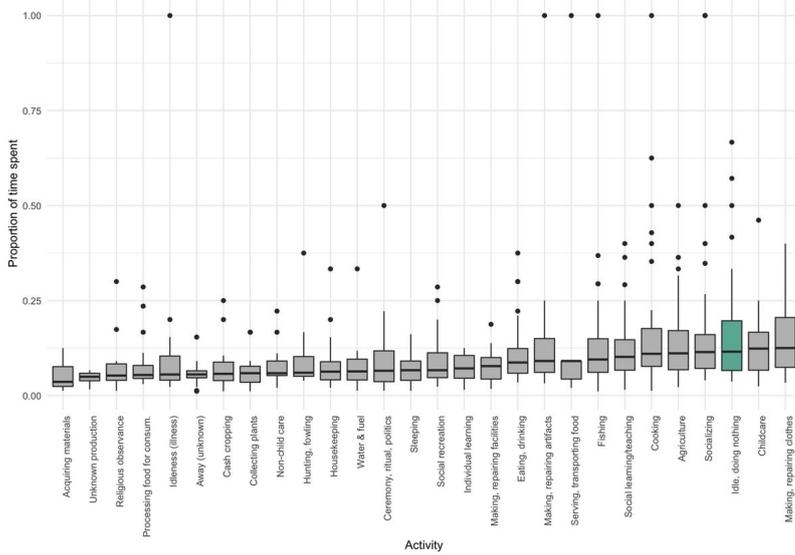


Here are data collected in '80-'81 for the Efé, who lived mostly by hunting & gathering in the Ituri Rainforest of Central Africa. The median adult spent ~27% of their waking time doing nothing (in green). It was the most common activity. <https://t.co/EL5abCMj7>

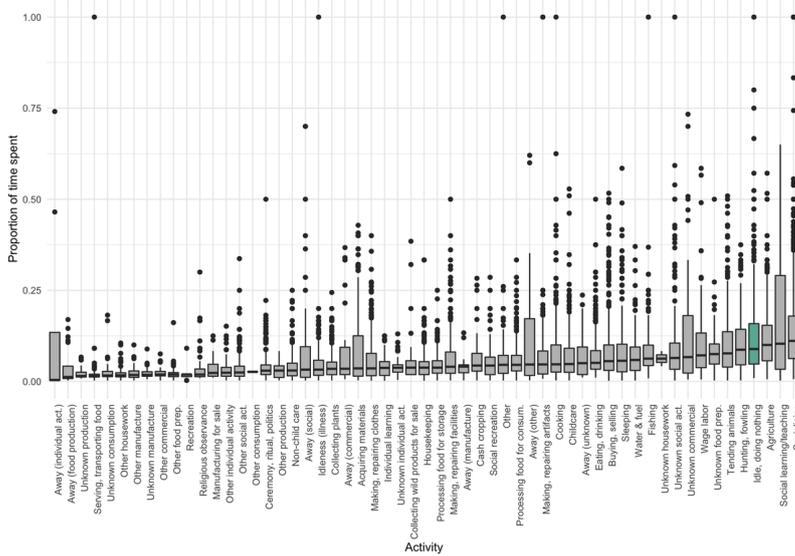


Here are the data for two Machiguenga communities in Peru, collected in '72-'73 (left) and '86-'87 (right). The Machiguenga combined small-scale horticulture with foraging. Again, "doing nothing" leads the pack, either as number one or in the top 3. <https://t.co/FIhXIH0N9Z>





"Doing nothing" didn't always win. For the Madurese (Indonesia), it ranked 12th, perhaps reflecting the tiresome lives of more full-time agriculturalists. Still, across 8 diverse communities "doing nothing" came in 4th behind agri work, learning/teaching, & socializing (see plot) <https://t.co/ashWpnxMR7>



Most of the high-ranking activities in these plots are well-studied by psychologists. But how much do we know about doing nothing? Not much. Living in fast-paced, industrialized societies with constant access to entertainment, it's easy to lose sight of the value of doing nothing <https://t.co/6bqFgF72TO>



These data were collected in the 70s & 80s but were digitized (I believe) by [@JoHenrich](#) & then released in 2019 with this paper led by [@rabhui](#): <https://t.co/7UWhrlhrAf>

Here's a link to the digitized data: <https://t.co/QjG6qiHemL>

Finally, I've been exploring these data in preparation for my talk at the Sophia Club (hosted by @aeon) on June 14th in NYC! If you're in the city that night, come & chat about leisure, idleness, & work across cultures:

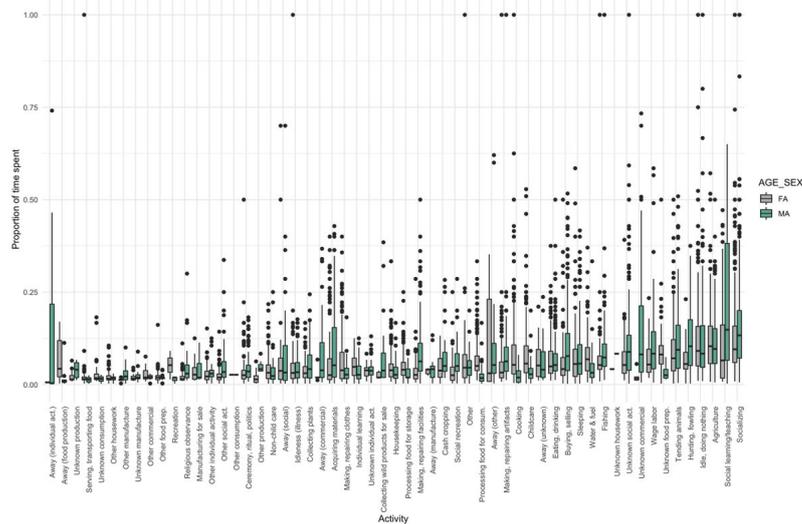
<https://t.co/wtaeXDurnZ>

An addendum: There have been lots of questions on gender. As I showed in my response to @kris_m_smith, if we compare the data for adults across the 8 communities (women in gray, men in green), we don't see a difference in how often men & women do nothing: <https://t.co/wlGx6arUoy>

Yet women do work more, where work includes food prep, food production, childcare, manufacture, housework, etc. @RaBhui @JoHenrich found this when they analyzed these datasets in their PNAS paper, although they also found that the gender work gap declines with market integration: <https://t.co/WDofF4iPb5>

Notably, women work more than men. Women whose labor is completely noncommercial work about 53 h per week, which is markedly higher than men (with $P(\delta_{EC} > 0) = 98.7\%$ and $P(\delta_{ENC} > 0) = 99.6\%$ according to analyses including both genders in *SI Appendix, Table S5*). This disparity is often found when all types of work are taken into account (e.g., ref. 7). In our data, market engagement closes this gender gap.

So, men & women do nothing at similar rates, yet women work more. How are men filling that extra time? We can make informed speculations. Look at the data again: Men socialize more (first on the right) & engage in more recreation. They also hunt, fish, & do more wage labor, but <https://t.co/tgHWb6mijf>



apparently not enough to outweigh work by women.

These are just impressions when aggregating individual-level data across the 8 communities. I'm sure each society exhibits its own idiosyncratic patterns.