

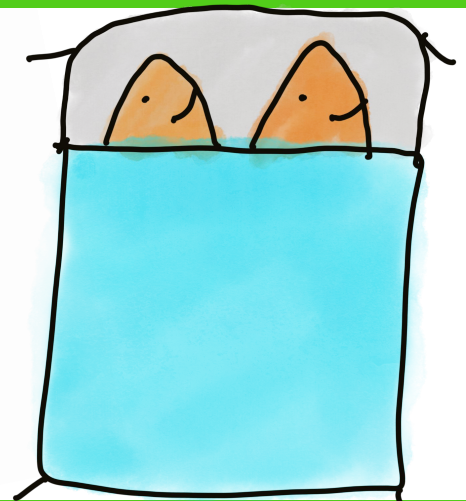
OH, OH, OH! I'M SO EXCITED TO SHARE THIS WITH YOU, IT'S MY FAVORITE
favorite thing, oh, oh, oh! *ahem* Ah, hello listen, listen, LISTEN! I am the icon, I am the masterpiece, I am
the beauty, I am the wonder, I am the majestic, I am the GRANDIOse, I am the magnificent, I am the one
OHUUUUUUUU! You are talking to ME, you are speaking with Me, I

THE ⚡ LOOP

**DO PEOPLE KNOW
WHERE GERMANY?**



**NEW QUESTIONS
ABOUT NUKING
YOUR TEA**

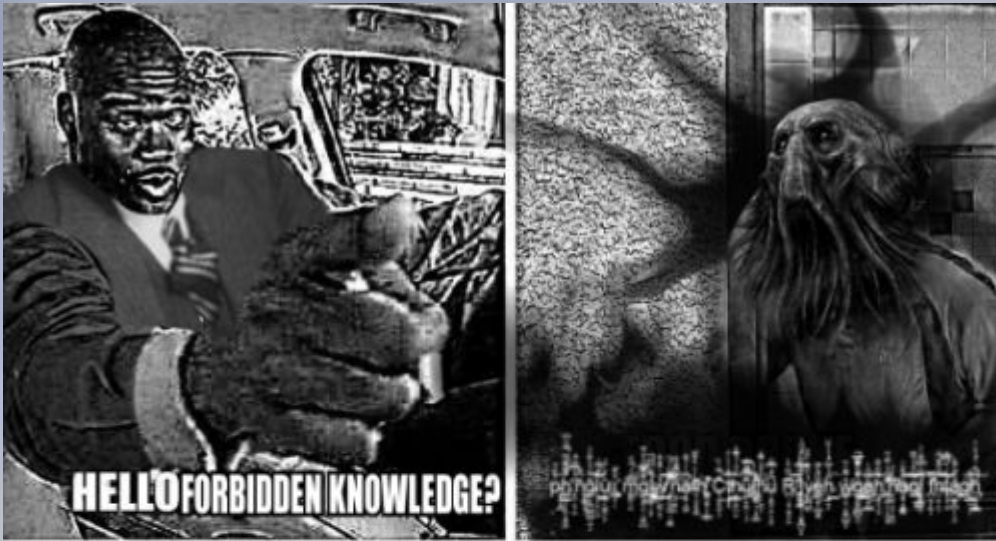


**WHAT EVERY FISH
SHOULD KNOW
ABOUT SEX**

JUST THE TIP? NEW STUDY SHOWS: NOT WITH FINANCE BROS

THE LOOP IS BROUGHT
TO YOU BY...

THE POWER OF **IMAGINATION**
IMAGINATION



HELLO FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE?



INCOMPREHENSIBLE I'VE MET WITH A
TERRIBLE FATE

DO NOT LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU.
MAKE SOMETHING UP TODAY!

EDITOR'S NOTE

The LOOP is a record of the undertakings, studies, and labours of curiosity from around the world. Our ingenious contributors offer accounts of the present Philosophical Matters from around the world. We salute our friends for their thoughtful reporting.

–SLIME MOLD TIME MOLD 🌸



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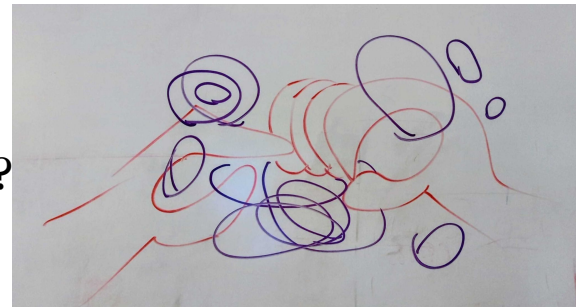
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THE “WORSE ONION”

SUBSCRIBE:



IS MICROWAVED TEA ACTUALLY BAD?

By KAYLEE KIM

hi gwern :)

Gwern is convinced that microwaved tea is bad. He has a [couple of theories](#) as to why, most of which depend on the fact that microwaving water leads to fewer bubbles.

But [Benjamin Sturgeon](#) says he likes to put boiling water with tea in the microwave. I've put herbal teabags in microwaved water, and never noticed a difference. We were not convinced that microwaved tea is actually bad.

science!

So we ran some (2) studies! We compared the following methods:

- **Method 1 (Kettle):** Boiling water was poured over the teabag, then left to sit for 30 seconds.
- **Method 2 (Ben's Method):** Boiling water was poured over the teabag, then microwaved on full power for 30 seconds.
- **Method 3 (Microwave):** Teabag was placed in room temperature water, then microwaved on full power for 3 minutes.^[1]

All three were steeped for the same amount of time (~2-3 minutes), then stirred for 10 seconds each. Each tea was then poured out into separate mugs, which were grouped by pour order.



1. We observed that the microwave tea only started boiling at the 2 minute 30 second mark.

Study A

In Study A, we prepared rooibos^[2] tea using the three different methods, and asked people what they thought about it.

We asked for prior assumptions about microwaved tea, if any, and asked them to rate each tea out of 7 (where 7 is the best). Virtually everyone tasted the teas in order 1, 2, 3. People were free to retaste any of the teas and update their ratings.

Study A had some limitations: it was only single-blind, people could hear other people's opinions, and people were asked whether they had opinions about microwave tea before or as they were tasting. Also, rooibos tea might not be what Gwern means by "tea", since he mentions brewing tea with tea leaves in particular.

Study B

In Study B, we re-ran Study A with black tea and some improvements.

As in Study A, the three teas were prepared and poured out the same way as in Study A, and participants were asked to rate the teas on a 7-point scale. In addition, Study B was double-blinded. Also, participants were surveyed separately from other participants, and only asked about their microwaved tea opinions after giving ratings.^[3]



^ Rooibos tea, if you trust Lighthaven labeling procedures.

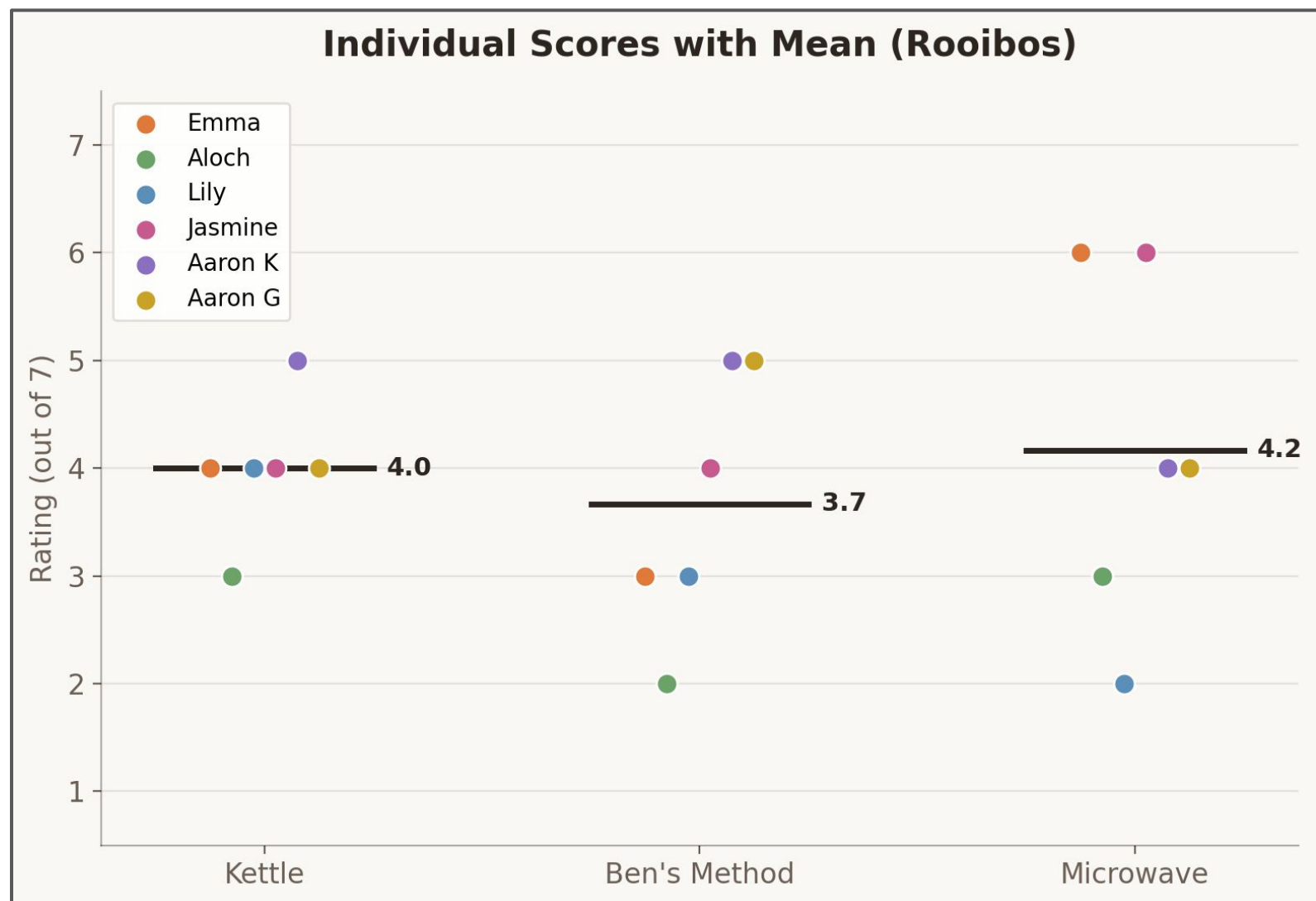


2. Why rooibos? Well, rooibos is brewed at a high temperature, the same as black tea, but is palatable without add-ins like milk or honey.

results

Study A

We recruited 6 participants for Study A. Most people didn't have strong opinions on microwaved tea, though one participant (Jasmine) mentioned that they switched away from microwaving to make their friend happy.



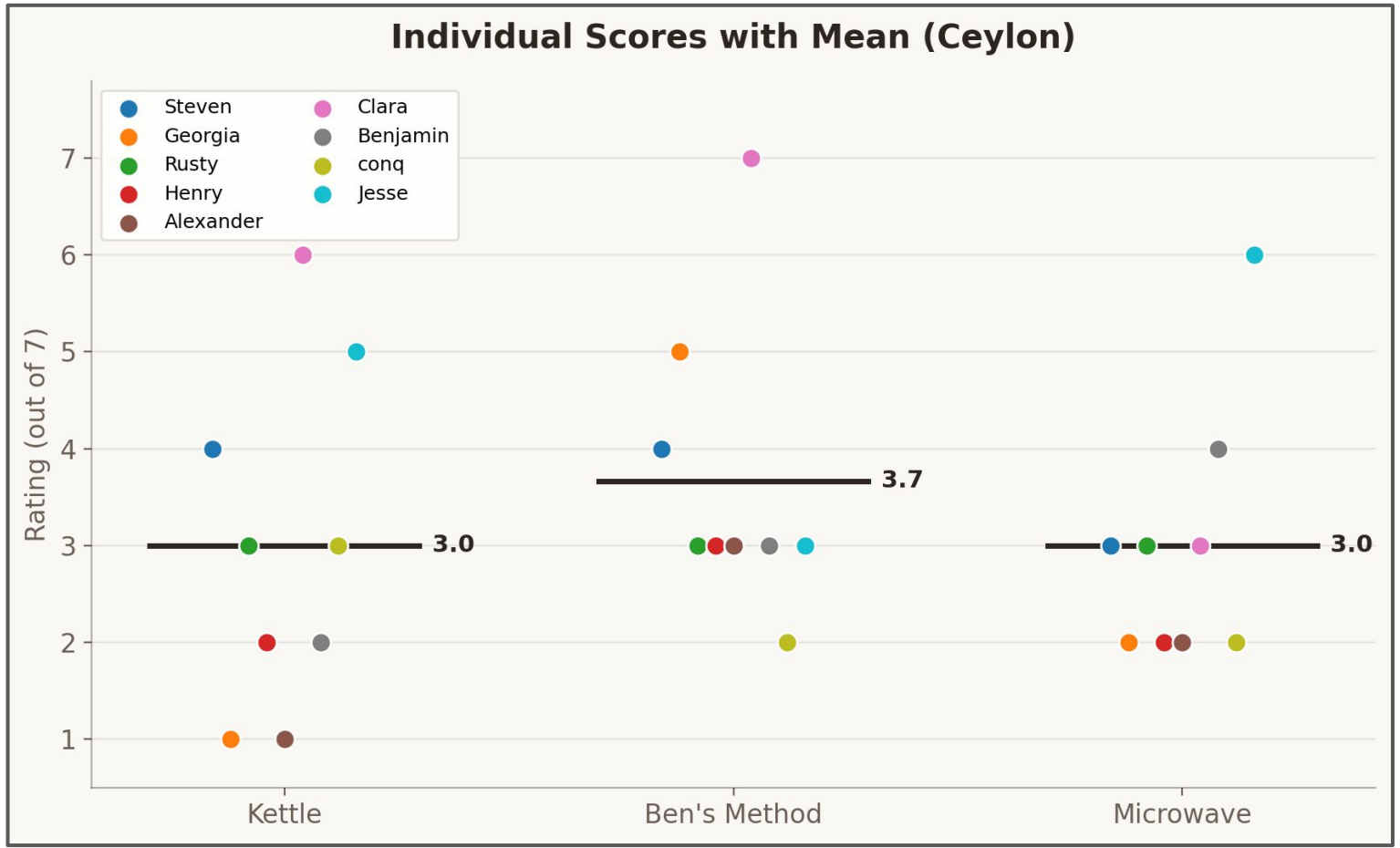
There wasn't a noticeable difference between the three methods, though the ratings for the microwaved tea were quite varied compared to that of the kettle tea.

3. However, since Study A had already been conducted (quite publicly), we could not guarantee that participants were not aware of the microwave tea hypothesis.

results (more)

Study B

For Study B, we recruited 10 participants. None of the participants had strong personal opinions on microwaved tea, though 2 participants (Georgia, Henry) noted larger social attitudes against it. 3 participants (Georgia, Clara, Benjamin) implied that they brew tea on a regular-ish basis. In the following data, we have dropped one participant (Jasmine), because she had already participated in Study A and gave all three black teas an outlier rating of 1.



People didn't like the straight black tea as much as the rooibos, even after we dropped Jasmine's ratings. However, as in Study A, there wasn't a huge difference between the ratings between the methods. The average ratings were all within one point of each other, and microwave tea performed just as well as kettle tea.

is gwern wrong?!?!?!??

On the whole, it doesn't seem like microwaved tea is really that bad compared to kettle tea. Both microwaved tea and Ben's method tea had ratings that were on par with kettle tea, and kettle tea wasn't the best-rated tea in either study! Even though the sample size is small, I think we can say that microwaved tea is not as universally bad as Gwern thinks.

There are some limitations to the study, though. For example, it is possible that tea straight out the microwave is actually bad, but the stirring and pouring we did in our preparation was what made it not bad. This would track with both of Gwern's theories, which both hinge on the fact that microwaving does not introduce enough bubbles. It is also backed up by the fact that stirring the microwaved tea generated frothy bubbles in both Study A and Study B—perhaps these bubbles were enough to fix the taste. But still: if microwaved tea is so easily fixed, it doesn't seem as bad as its reputation implies. We would be excited to see more study on microwaved tea straight from the microwave (no stirring, no pouring).

Another limitation was that most our participants were not regular tea-drinkers. It could be the case that the differences between kettle tea and microwaved tea are just too subtle for non-tea drinkers to notice. Clara, who showed strong tea knowledge,^[4] differentiated pretty clearly between microwaving and the other two methods. She gave kettle and Ben's method a 6 and 7, respectively, while giving microwaved tea a rating of 3. But then again, Benjamin (the study participant, not Benjamin Sturgeon) also drinks tea and rated microwaved tea the best of the three. We just didn't have enough tea people to make a strong statement here.

Still, we think that you should try stirring your microwaved tea before committing to buying a kettle.

acknowledgements

Thanks to Benjamin Sturgeon for brewing tea and charts, Emma Baker for also helping with the tea brewing, and Valentino of Slime Mold Time Mold for helping make Study B better. Also, thanks to all the participants for tasting the tea!

4. She noted that she is careful about water temperature as to not scald the leaves.

DO PEOPLE KNOW WHERE GERMANY IS?

By MAX HARMS

In 2019, a colleague and I were driving back to Berkeley from a work retreat and talking about elitism. I argued, to put it bluntly, that average people are *really dumb*. I think it's hard to appreciate the degree to which this is true, given the selection effects of our bubble/community. He disagreed, and thought that I was underrating the common man.¹ And so, in Rationalist tradition, we bet.

Can you point to Germany on this² map?



We decided to go ask random people in downtown Berkeley this question. If they succeeded, we would give them \$10.³ If they guessed wrong, they got nothing.

We each put in \$100, for a total pot of \$200 minus whatever we gave to participants, and set out to ask 10 people, showing no bias in who we asked. We tried to ask everyone who was nearby and would talk to us, though we would reject anyone who was clearly cheating.⁴ We would give people all the time they wanted, encourage them to take the time to think about it, and generally give them space to think. If 5 or more of the 10 people guessed correctly, my colleague would win. If 4/10 or fewer were correct, I would win. (This meant the payoff was biased in my favor, which my colleague was explicitly okay with.)

Only 3/10 random people on the street were able to point to Germany.

In fact, many people — normal people! — failed to identify *any* countries correctly, often thinking that Italy was Greece or that Great Britain was France or whatever. It took many people some effort to understand what they were looking at, and figure out where the ocean is.

Were we asking drugged out homeless people? Well... yes? We were at least talking to dirty street people who were probably homeless and probably not *that* drugged out or crazy, based on my recollections. But we were also talking to a bunch of other people, too. We talked to students at UC Berkeley. We talked to people who worked at the downtown shops. We talked to businesspeople heading to and from the nearby BART rail station. We did talk to one woman who confessed to being extremely stoned (and failed to find Germany), but she wasn't homeless.

Interestingly, the homeless people were about as good as the other random city folk. Based on my shoddy recollection, I believe we talked to approximately three people who I suspect were homeless. All three tried pretty hard to get it right, and one of them did!

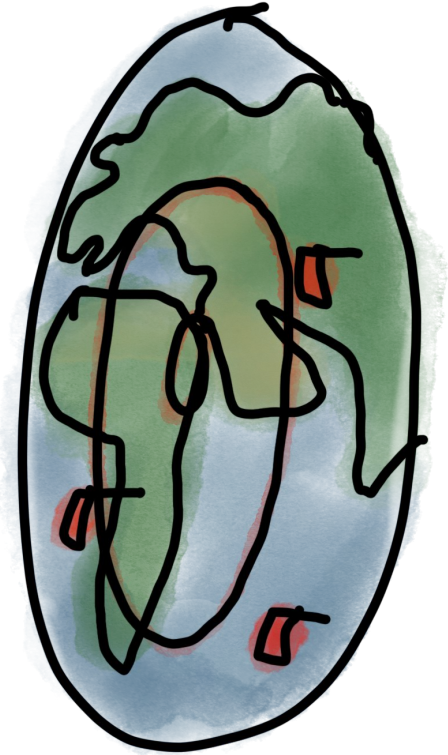
Very frustratingly, even after I took my winnings, my colleague insisted that he was right in spirit, because he thought that success was correlated with trying, and we still ended up with a notable bias in who we talked to. A bunch of people blew past us and wouldn't stop, even as we waved cash at them and said "We'll give you \$10 if you can answer just one question to help us settle a bet!" Those people, he argued, valued their time more highly than the others, and thus were more likely to be educated. The students hurrying along on their way to class were, he claimed, less likely to take the time to think hard about what they knew and try their hardest.

I'm still kinda mad about this. None of the people we talked to were children. None were particularly elderly. None were insane shut-ins. It is *not that hard*, in the scope of intellectual challenges, to identify Germany on a map, especially if you are a literal college student at one of the top schools in America.

Don't believe it? REPLICATE IT — da editors

I think I challenged him to double-or-nothing, perhaps with a different methodology? He (of course) refused. Still, I'd love to learn if I'm wrong, and whether our finding was a fluke of methods or of low sample size. Replicate me!

Skill issue.



¹ – To be clear, I don't think that being dumb is anything to be ashamed of. If anything, being privileged with intelligence genes (and not having childhood health issues) makes more room for moral failure. If Phineas Gage is a drunkard and a gambler, this is because he has brain damage. If you do it... Well, what's *your* excuse?

² – This is not the actual map we ended up using, which has been lost to history. My memory says the actual map we used had a similar look to it, with black lines and no color/shading.

³ – My memory is a little hazy. I think it was \$10 but it might've been \$20. It was definitely one of those two. 70% probability that it was \$10.

⁴ – One person probably did end up cheating. He was lingering nearby while someone else answered our quiz, and in retrospect my colleague and I agreed that he probably heard what the challenge was and looked it up on his phone. Since it didn't change the result, we allowed it, but if you're more strict you might find that *even fewer* people get it right.

No soap, radio!

MOCHI IN CROSS-SECTION

By HERBERT STEEPWELL

In Arizona there are two brands of green tea mochi. The first is "Bubbies green tea mochi ice cream", described as "super-premium matcha green tea ice cream wrapped in sweet mochi". The other, Trader Joe's brand Green Tea Mochi, is labeled "green tea ice cream surrounded by sweet rice dough".

For many weeks I would buy the two kinds of mochi indiscriminately based on whether I happened to be going to Trader Joe's or to the local hippie co-op, or else having my groceries delivered. Both brands are green tea mochi and so as you can imagine, I saw them as basically interchangeable.

But over the span of these weeks, I began to slowly grow uneasy, as a strange doubt began to grow in the back of my mind. The two mochi, which I had always thought of as simply *fungible*, I now began to suspect were in fact *indistinguishable*.

Consider. Both came in light green boxes. The boxes were similar dimensions. But were they more than just similar? Could they be the same box? Certainly the labeling was different, but was the material and the dimensions the exact same? Both were of similar size and shape, made of coated paperboard / cardstock (likely 16–18pt weight), the industry standard for frozen food cartons. I could find no trace in my memory that they were at all dissimilar.

In both cases, the interior tray was of slightly rough, fibrous molded pulp (paper/egg-carton-style) with 6 individual rounded cavities shaped to cradle each mochi ball, covered by a thin transparent plastic film that could be peeled back to reach the mochi. These were suspiciously similar in design and material. I fished some of these out of my recycling, but I couldn't tell which brand the tray had come from.

And both were similar products, green tea mochi. But could they possibly be... identical? Could Bubbies and Trader Joe's be selling the same mochi, the same packaging even, but in different skin? Might they be drawing mochi from the same well? I resolved that I must not look away, I must find out.

After several weeks of fear, I finally worked up my courage to buy one box of each mochi, and place them side-by-side in my very kitchen. The results were somehow left me both reassured and disturbed.

Plate 1 shows the two boxes side-by-side. Already we can see that while they differ in their printed design, they are in fact identical in their dimensions and material. My fears are already well on the road to being confirmed.



Plate 2 reveals the interior trays. As I thought, they appear not only similar, but identical.



In **Plate 3**, the trays have been removed, and the mochi revealed.

At once, a separation of hopes. The trays are indeed indistinguishable in each end every way. They are the same trays.

Yet the mochi are distinct even at a glance. Perhaps this is only their color, and only skin-deep. But it is the first sign that these might be in any way distinct, may be something other than the same exact ice cream and rice balls reduplicated.



Plate 4. The mochi are removed and revealed!



Plate 5. Finally, a cross-section. The interiors are suspiciously similar. They might be the same ice cream. The skins, however, are most definitely different colors.

Though it is not captured in the plate, I can also confirm, they have a very similar bite, but a slightly different taste.



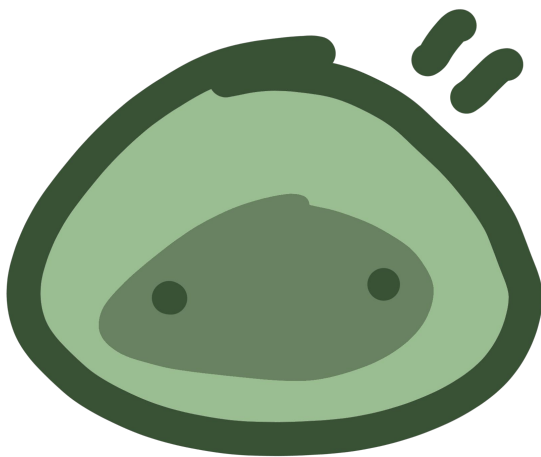
Plates 6 and 7, where we have a direct comparison of the cross-sections, and where we see the (stated, alleged) ingredients.

The similarities are incontrovertable. They are the same box and the same tray. They are not the same ice cream product, though they are similar.

I am torn. For the first, I am reassured that I have not taken leave of my senses. I am sane. The mochi and their packaging are nearly identical.

And yet I find that I am more confused than ever. For while they are nearly identical, yet they are not *entirely* identical. If they were entirely identical, I would assume that they were the same mochi, from the same facility, and that either Bubbies or Trader Joe's was selling the other's product under their own brand.

What am I to make of the fact that the packaging is identical, and the mochi nearly so, but yet not exactly? I suspect that they are made in the same factory, or at least by the same machine. Perhaps both Bubbies and Trader Joe's hire out to the same subcontractor to make their mochi, but request a slightly different recipe, leading to this perplexing situation. There are strange markings on the boxes that I cannot decode, but that make me suspect this may be the case. But the truth remains elusive.



a

TRANSMISSION

The

from

KEPLER

ILLUSION

22 B



of:

““““HUMAN THINKING””””

the SO_CALLED “scientists” of PSR 1257+12 b would like to convince us that

THE HUMAN RACE is intelligent. We present these findings...

a SERIES of INTERROGATIVE STATEMENTS were given to SIX MEMBERS of

THE HUMAN RACE:

Q1. What is five plus two? Q2. What is seventeen plus fifty-two? Q3. What is eight hundred and ninety-three plus six hundred fifty-four? Q4. What is three thousand four hundred and twenty-eight plus two thousand and seventy-three? Q5. What is thirteen thousand five hundred and ninety-six plus forty-six thousand four hundred sixty-eight?

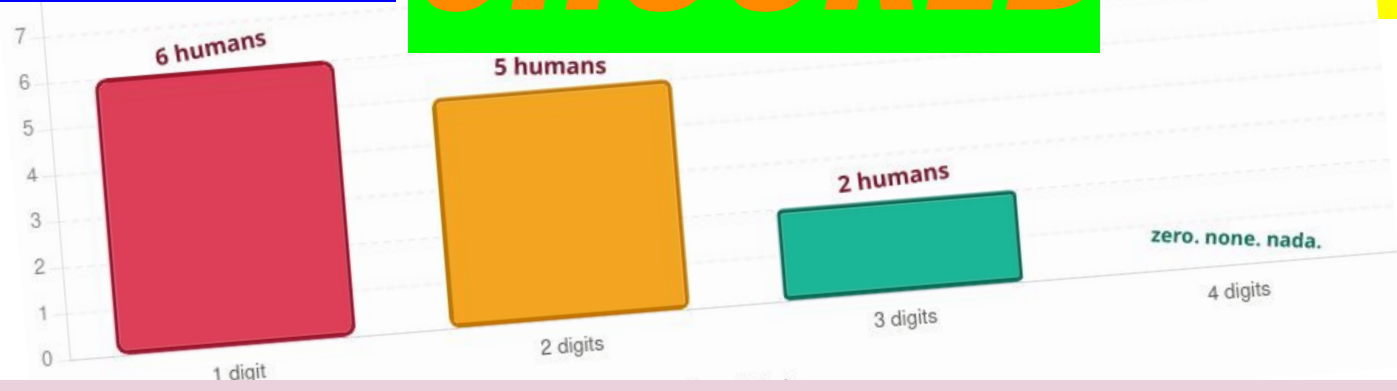
... [omitted] ...

Q20. What is forty-three quintillion two hundred and eighty-nine quadrillion four hundred and twenty-three trillion seven hundred and thirteen billion four hundred and eighty million nine hundred and seventy-five thousand four hundred and forty-two plus thirty-two quadrillion seven hundred and forty-four quadrillion three hundred and twenty-eight trillion seven hundred and eighty-seven billion four hundred and twenty-eight million four hundred and twenty-three thousand eight hundred and seventy-nine?

THE RESULTS

SHOCKED

US!!!!



...we observe a **PERSISTENT FAILURE** to *generalize* the **ADDITION ALGORITHM** past three digits and were *PLAGUED* by **OBSTINATE REFUSALS**...

no. I

6501

wrong

no. II

6541

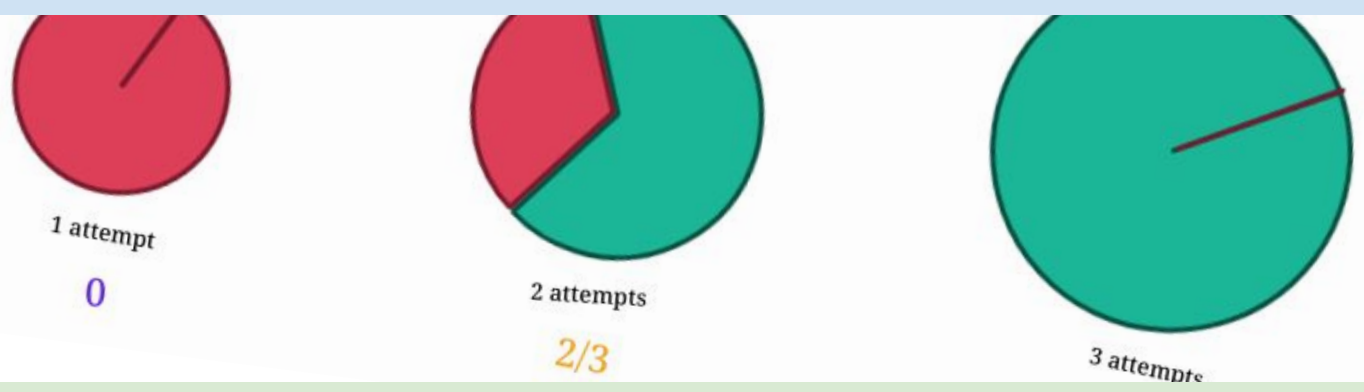
also wrong

no. III

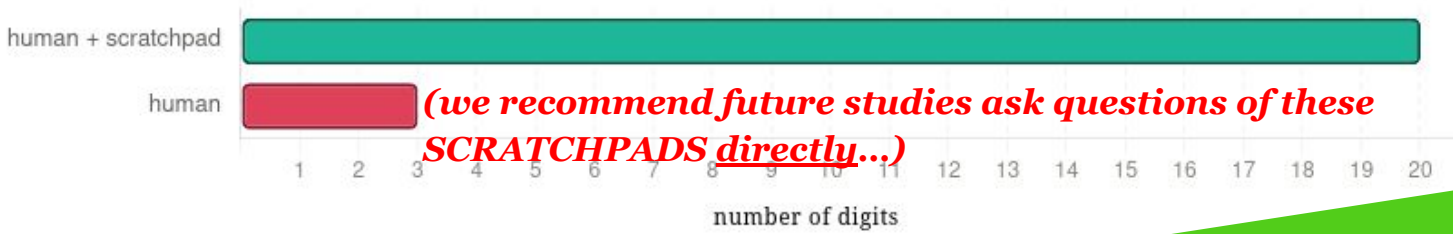
No ... NO!

emphatically wrong

...though the simple method of **REPEATING THE QUESTION** (*methodology pioneered by Yaniv Leviathan et al.*) proves **STRANGELY EFFECTIVE**...



...and allowing them to consult a “**SCRATCHPAD**” allows humans to answer even our **MOST TRICKIEST QUESTIONS**, making them POWERFUL indeed...



AND BEYOND...?

ADVENTURES IN DIETING

By DREW SCHORNO



You probably already know the story of Hiroo Onoda. He was that Japanese soldier who holed up in a jungle in the Philippines during world war two, and then kept fighting the war for 29 years after it, strictly speaking, was over: raiding local farmers and police for supplies, and living on a diet of coconuts and stolen rice. The Japanese government dropped leaflets, sent search parties, and sent his own family members into the jungle to call out to him. But he dismissed all of this as allied propaganda.

Less familiar is the story of the soldier Shoichi Yokoi, who was found in Guam in 1972 after hiding in a cave that he dug himself for 28 years. Apparently this is just a type of guy. But where nothing could convince Onoda that the war was actually finished until his former commanding officer came to the jungle and relieved him of duty, Yokoi figured out that the war was over on his own: he kept hiding in that cave because he was too ashamed to return home.

In 2021 I published an essay called [Bear Nation](#) that has proven to be my most popular essay to date. The core idea, borrowed from a researcher named Brad Marshall, is that the modern obesity epidemic might be caused by polyunsaturated fats in seed oils accidentally triggering ancient hibernation pathways: that Americans are, metabolically speaking, preparing for a winter that never comes.

Being a fat person myself, I found this explanation intriguing. That my body could be intentionally putting on weight in preparation for an eternal winter made my futile battle against it seem to make more sense. We share a common ancestor with every hibernating animal and we do have vestigial hibernation pathways: why couldn't they be triggered by changes in diet? The single most intriguing data point is that average human body temperatures seem to have dropped from 98.6°F to as low as 97.5°F over the past 150 years¹.

So I decided to try cutting polyunsaturated fats from my diet. For the past five years I have largely avoided—with the exception of a few cheat meals I could count on my fingers—the consumption of most cooking oils, nuts, and the fat from pork and chicken (which are animals that largely pass on polyunsaturated fat from their own bad diets)

I've kept a record of my weight over this period. Some individual sections of this chart with downward trajectories have been posted to Twitter to the sound of oohs and ahhs from my adoring followers, but the overall zoomed out picture is pretty bleak:



Still, it's probably worth talking about some of the additional dietary restrictions that I tried that led to periods of weight loss, even if I obviously gained the weight back soon afterwards.

I tried many approaches popular on the [r/saturatedfat](#) subreddit, but the one guiding principle was a stubborn refusal to count calories: all of these diets were *ad libitum* (aka I could eat as much food as I wanted, within the parameters of the diet).

The Potato Diet

Apparently if you eat a diet made up of mostly or entirely potatoes, you will lose weight.

What this meant for me in practice was lugging 20 pound bags of potatoes from the bulk restaurant warehouse to my house in a granny cart (I unfortunately don't drive), putting in enough hours of manual peeling to reach a master level of skill, and dialling in a delicate combination of microwave and air fryer time to create the perfect fry. I would often serve myself the potatoes topped with kimchi or pickled beets, and a variety of sauces or gravy.



Reinventing chippy from first principles

Exfatloss Inspired Keto

I would chug whipping cream, inhale prepackaged deli meat with a squirt of sriracha, and eat copious amounts of sugar free jello. The only way that this was at all different from normal keto was that I was specifically *not* protein-maxxing: trying to eat closer to a maintenance dose rather than as much as possible. I don't remember why but it was supposedly important.

Creating novel prion diseases by microwaving hot dogs for horrifying amounts of time



The Glass Noodle Diet

In many ways the exact opposite of keto: as many carbs as you want but <20g of fat (which is very low) and protein restricted. It is named for glass noodles, which are a type of noodle derived from mung beans that are essentially all starch and have basically no protein content whatsoever.

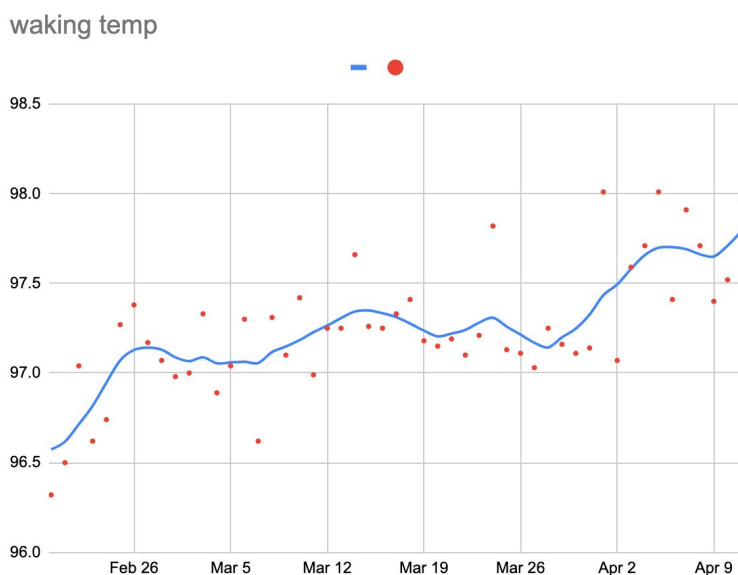
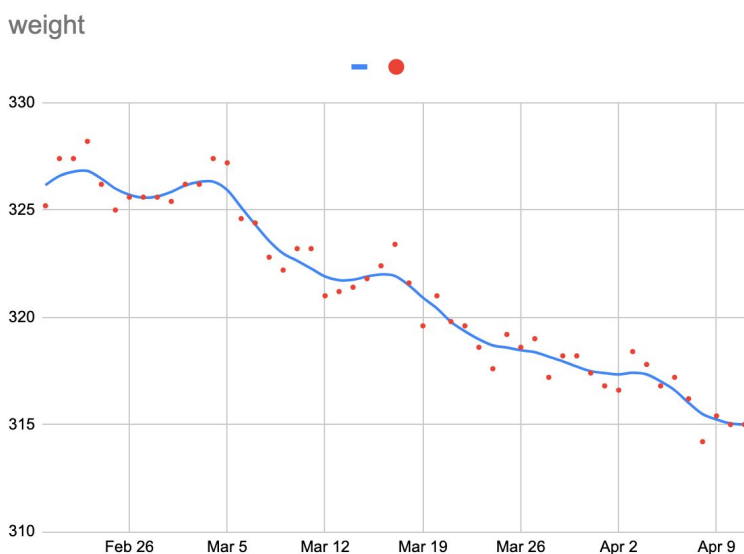
Mostly I would do the potato diet chippy thing but would swap out the carb substrate for oatmeal. I got really into broth and noodle soups, and would eat spoonfuls of dextrose powder.

The Pyruvate “““Study”””

I started taking a wide variety of Brad Marshall approved supplements to see if they could help: most notably 12g of calcium pyruvate daily (which I later came to understand is enough to plausibly cause hypercalcemia). Pyruvate tastes like ass so I would manually pack it into 12 horse sized OO gelatin capsules every day, which was incredibly time consuming. They make these things called “pill machines”—which are literally just a sheet of plastic with holes in it to hold the capsules—that would have made it easier, but apparently they are illegal in Canada and you can be fined \$200,000 for having one.

While I was taking the pyruvate I was not only tracking my weight but also my waking temperature every day using a high precision thermometer, and you can actually see my temperature go up quite a lot over the course of the month:

Because of the sloppiness of my approach, the only interesting conclusion that you can really derive is that *yes, through diet and oral supplements you can raise your body temperature*. For me this was as close as I’ll ever come to finding evidence that Brad’s hibernation hypothesis could have something to it.



waking temperature? I hardly know er

Other Failed Experiments

Most of my abject failures came from wandering outside of the Brad Marshall-verse and trying ideas being floated around the Ray Peat fandom.



Peaters in control

I tried a diet where I only ate cans of condensed orange juice and developed rashes all over my body. I also tried taking desiccated bovine thyroid and was bedridden for days with bizarre symptoms.

I like to frame some of my actions as coming from a place of “citizen science”, but this stuff feels like it was bordering on self harm.

The End of the War

Last summer I caved and ordered grey market Chinese peptides from the dark web, specifically *Retatrutide* (which is like hipster Ozempic basically), and since then I have lost 70 pounds largely effortlessly. This has been accompanied by some periods of keto, but this is driven by impatience: even a normal diet seems to produce a steady trickle of weight loss.

My goal of losing weight without going hungry has essentially been fulfilled.

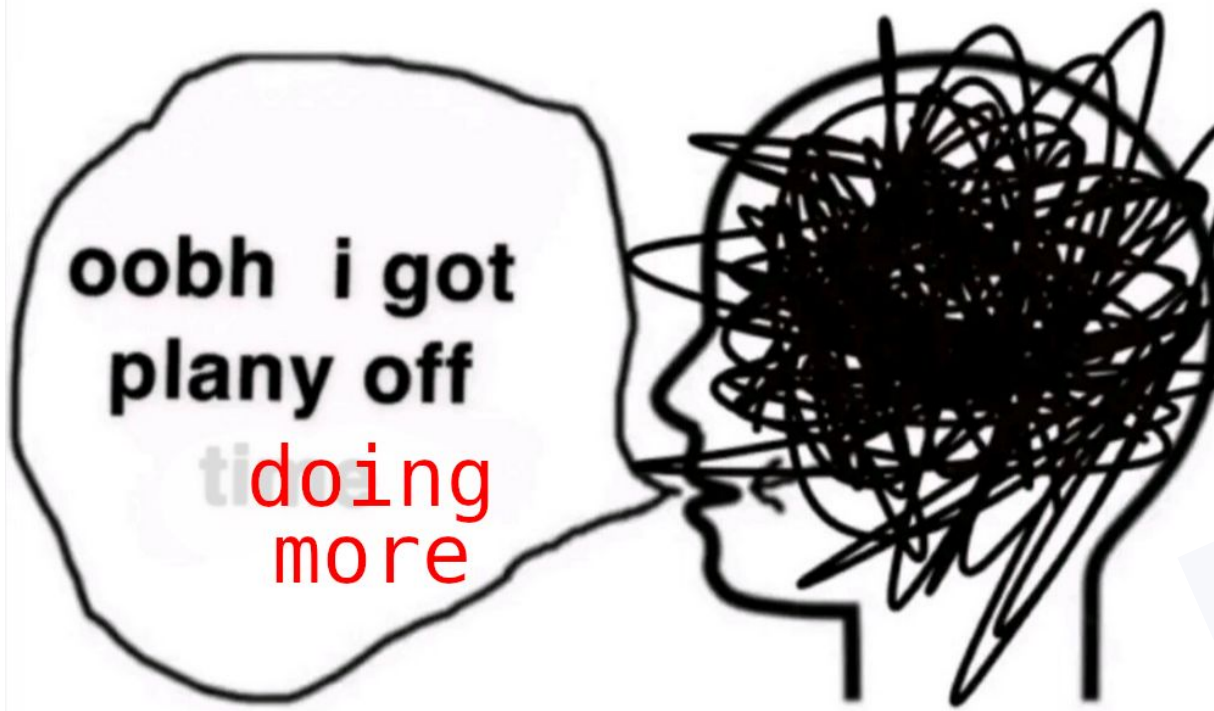
I still have another 70–90 pounds of weight loss to go, but barring any extreme supply chain disruptions I am going to be thin again by the end of the year at the latest. I haven't been thin since just after college when I lived in New York.

I'm still avoiding seed oils but at this point its almost just a reflex. I still wonder if the hibernation theory of obesity has something to it, but it's obviously sort of unfalsifiable, and at any rate a moot point.

The war is over, but I'm not sure I know how to leave the cave.

*Burning tokens
to visualize how
I'll look thin*





Don't worry about it
Don't worry about it
Don't worry about it



Doing More

You can always

Do More



INKHAVEN CAN'T WRITE POEMS

By P.L.M.H.

Abstract

Something something current and topical trends in syntactics and linguistics and such, but something something something remains poorly understood.

We determined through a peer-to-peer tokenised poetry generation method that most people at Inkhaven are soulless, low-whimsy individuals who cannot collectively create poetry in any meaningful way.

Introduction

We are unfortunately unable to put together an introduction for this paper. In many ways, this paper not only fails at what it sets out to do, but fails at being a piece of experimental science altogether. To some extent the following report is a thinly-veiled attempt at shoving an art project into a scientific journal.

That said, the authors would love to see the editors try and stop them.

Methodology

The basic procedure for adding tokens to a query was to read the poem in its entirety to the subject, and record the entire response that the subject gave. The response was then appended to the poem, and the process was repeated with the next respondent.

We constructed three poems from random subjects found throughout the Lighthaven campus on the afternoon of Holy Saturday, 2026.

The first poem, P_0 , had no seed phrase. We simply approached the first subject, said nothing, and waited for a response, which we appended to the (empty) set of tokens.

The second poem, P_p , had the seed phrase "Poetry".

The third poem, P_R , had the seed phrase "Roses are red".

We continued to collect responses and add to the poem until we got bored of it. We would then take a break and go generate the next poem.

Results

The following poems were assembled by the end of the experiment. n is the number of respondents and t is the number of tokens. Note that the individual conducting the experiment (and thereby stating the initial seed phrase) is not counted as a "respondent" for the purposes of n , but the seed phrase itself is counted for the purposes of t .

P_0 = "Hey¹ / hello / hello / ah!² / wuh? / awuh? / What? / What." (n = 8, t = 8)

P_p = "**Poetry** / right now? / sorry? / sorry? / yes? / yes? / what? / what?" (n = 4, t = 9)

P_R = "**Roses are red** / yeah / violets are blue / true / dogs are French, duh, and you are too, whoever you are,³ / nice." (n = 5, t = 20)

The seed phrases are in bold, and the sets of tokens given by each respondent are demarcated by slashes.

Discussion

In brief, it is not possible to force the Inkhaven 2 community to create a poem of any substance. After an exhaustive three trials it became clear ($p < 0.001$) that in all cases, this methodology will yield only one of two results.

Case 1: a never-ending sequence of "what?" and "huh?" responses that will continue ad infinitum. In our view, once there is a certain threshold of "what?" tokens at the end of the poem, each following query will always yield more "what?" responses. We call this a "terminal loop", and it signals the optimal time to terminate the poem.

Case 2: someone will figure out what exactly we are doing (writing a collective poem) and complete it themselves, giving a dramatically long response and capping off the poem to a satisfying conclusion. This is problematic, as when that poem is read aloud to the next respondent, they will universally ($n=1$) assume that the speaker was just awkwardly reading them a poem, and give a trite "nice" or "OK".

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Drew Schorno for talking through the experiment with me and feeding my delusions. I promised you co-authorship but I lied.

Thank you to Evelyn McLean for encouraging me to actually try to take this experiment seriously and come up with a "hypothesis" and "control group" and such. Unfortunately I do not have anywhere near the requisite IQ or engagement with the material to do that.

Footnotes

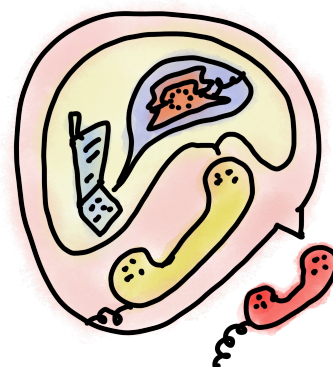
1: Remember, in this poem there was no seed phrase. We stared blankly into the soulless eyes of (subject name redacted for anonymity) until they yielded a "hey".

2: Subject became highly agitated, chased down, and threatened to assault research personnel. Only the first token of their response, "ah!", was recorded.

3: (Subject name redacted for anonymity), chief organiser of the Inkhaven writer's residency, seemed to know what we were doing immediately and took it upon himself to complete the poem himself and bugger the entire procedure.

Works Consulted

Seriously?



TALKING TO STRANGERS: AN APP ADVENTURE

By HENRY STANLEY

WAIT! Want to talk to strangers more? You might want to take the talking to strangers challenge [<https://strangertalk.vercel.app/>] before you read on, otherwise your results will be biased!

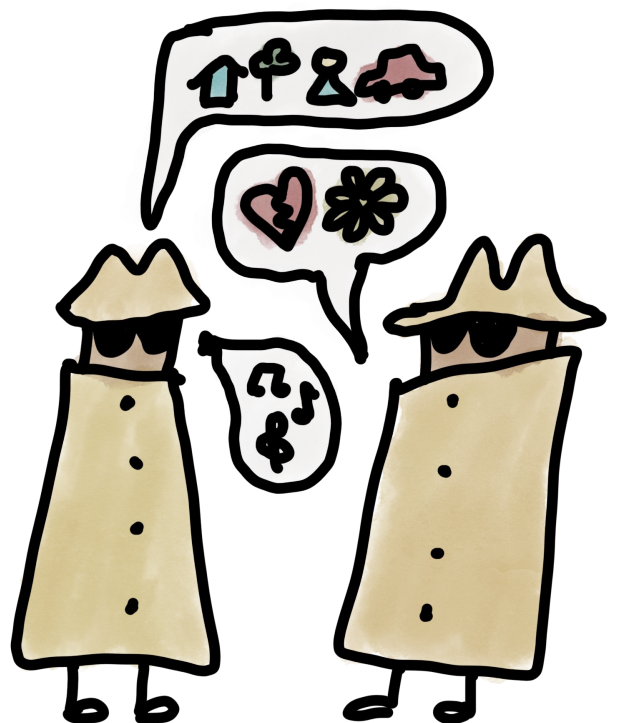
Do you find it hard to talk to strangers? If you're like most people, you're pretty down on yourself in this particular domain. This is sad. Talking to strangers is great! You can make new friends, meet a new partner, have a fling, or just enjoy a nice chat.

Most people think 1) people will not want to talk to them, 2) they will be bad at keeping up the conversation, 3) people will not like them.

They're wrong on all three counts! [Sandstrom \(2022\) did a study on this](#). People were given an app which was a little treasure hunt where they had to go and talk to strangers, at least one per day for five days. The control group just had to observe strangers.

The minimum dose was one conversation per day for five days. That's nothing! You can totally do that even if you're a massive strangerphobe! Participants averaged 6.7 interactions over the 5 days, so a little more than one per day. Presumably the more you do the better you get! Go team!

The paper finds that not only does talking to strangers disprove the above beliefs, but also improved people's enjoyment and the impressions people thought they made on strangers. (However those last two also occurred in the control group – it's possible that simply observing strangers might do this.)



Importantly, the effects persisted when participants were surveyed a week later. So it might be a durable way to improve people's beliefs around talking to strangers.

Crucial point: the paper notes that often people do have positive interactions with strangers, but that doesn't seem to be enough to unlearn their wrongly negative beliefs about them. So participants had to do this every day for a week, not just once.

Do you want to love talking to strangers too? Time to crack out Claude Code.

```
• Time to go wild.
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* Reticulating... (38
```

--dangerously-skip-permissions

I reproduced the app from the study, abridging the questionnaires as they're a bit tedious. It also has an 'express mode' so you can do it just for a day – but remember this usually isn't long enough to actually fix your limiting beliefs around talking to strangers!

I assume this is what the app in the study looked like



I assembled a small (N=3) study sample, drawn from an extremely unbiased population of nerdy rationalists. They're a famously friendly bunch but also a bit weird, so this seemed good for testing the hypothesis. We wandered around Berkeley attempting to ruin people's days with our bad chat.

Scores on the doors:

Measure	Avg Before	Avg Predicted	Avg Actual	Avg After	Avg Change
Rejection expectation	1.00	0.50	0.00	0.00	-1.00
Conversational ability	3.00	2.50	4.00	4.00	+1.00
Nervousness	5.00	3.50	2.00	2.50	-2.50
Enjoyment	5.50	4.50	4.00	6.00	+0.50
Positive impression	5.00	3.50	3.00	5.00	0.00

The results are frankly *bananas*: a single conversation with a stranger obliterated nervousness, catapulted conversational confidence, and the whole thing was way less scary than predicted – exactly what the literature says will happen, every single time, and yet somehow it's still a surprise.

The paper has a quote:

“Despite the benefits of social interaction, people seldom strike up conversations with people they do not know. Instead, people wear headphones to avoid talking, stay glued to their smartphones in public places, or pretend not to notice a new coworker they still have not introduced themselves to.”

I feel this. I've definitely worked at places for years where there were people I just NEVER TALKED TO. Which is insane if you think about it – you spend more time with these people than with your family! your friends! your polycule!

I want more people to challenge themselves and have an excuse to talk to strangers. [Go forth and make new friends!](#)*

*And don't forget to email me the results!

ABANDON THE FIRST LAYER OF THE ONION

BY ITSI WEINSTOCK

I too was like you once. I would slave away under the yoke of the onion peel, its papery membrane fracturing under my touch and flaking to the floor into an impossible-to-clean mess as I scratched away piece-by-piece until I was left with the naked flesh.

They say that Saul of Tarsus was struck by light from heaven as he journeyed to Damascus. I'd say it was probably the first layer of the onion, the peel attached, as there is no greater revelation.

I tell it to you now! You can just get rid of the first real edible layer of the onion and discard it with the rest of the peel. It is so much faster.

Some say it is wasteful, I am saying you must respect your time and sanity more. Onions are the epitome of abundance. As far as I am aware, they always have been. They are cheap. You will be ok.

I abandon the first layer of the onion, now look at me. Youthful, courageous, the world ahead of me.

You've reclaimed 43 good seconds of your valuable life, the only question is what you do with it.



allium? I hardly know em

I DUNNO WHAT GETS YOU HackerNews CLOUT, BUT IT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE TIME SPENT WRITING

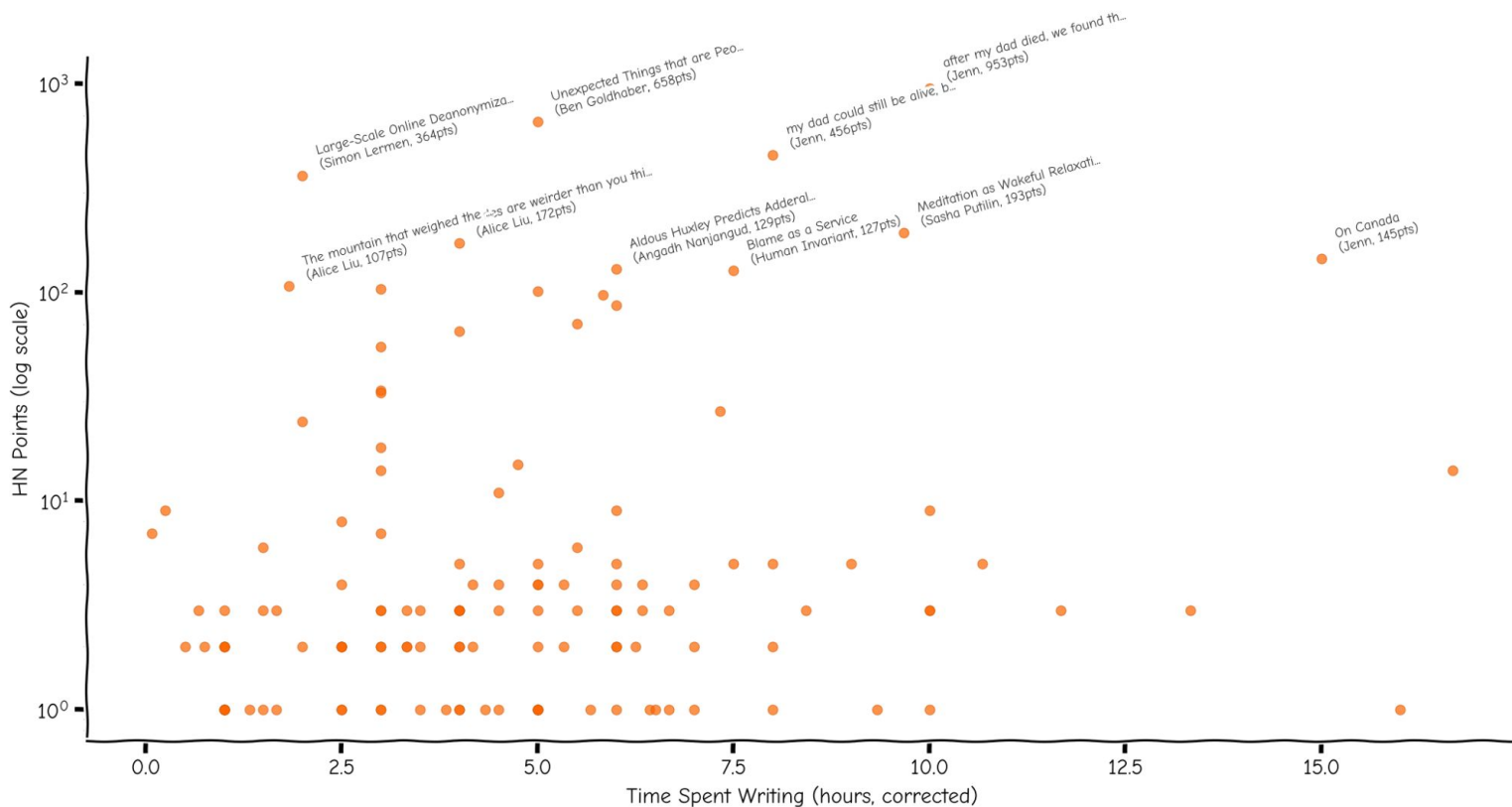
By Lucie and Claude Code

So, you know how all the first Inkhaven cohort complained of all the effort posts they wanted to write but did not get enough time to write? Well, it does seem that putting more effort into a post does not increase its chances of getting lots of points on HackerNews.

I could make grand statements about how this shows that learning to write fast and well is obviously the optimal play in blogging, but it's been rehashed and rehashed. Maybe you have a different audience and they care more about effort posts. Maybe you don't have anything else than effort posts in your soul. Anyway, here's a piece of evidence to inform your decision on the matter.

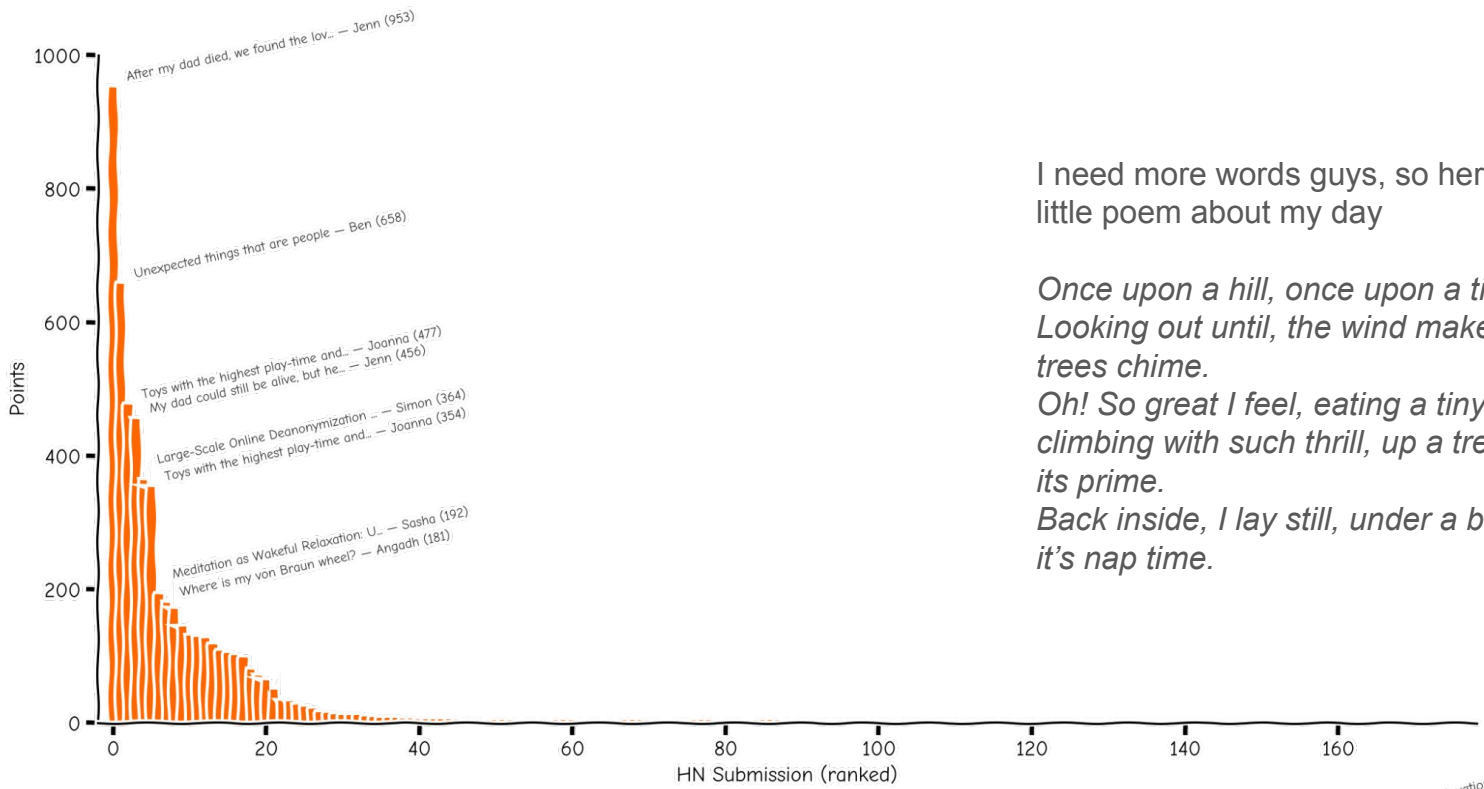
May your words reach their audience

Limitations: Not all Inkhaven posts were posted to HN. Time spent writing were self reports of varied accuracy.



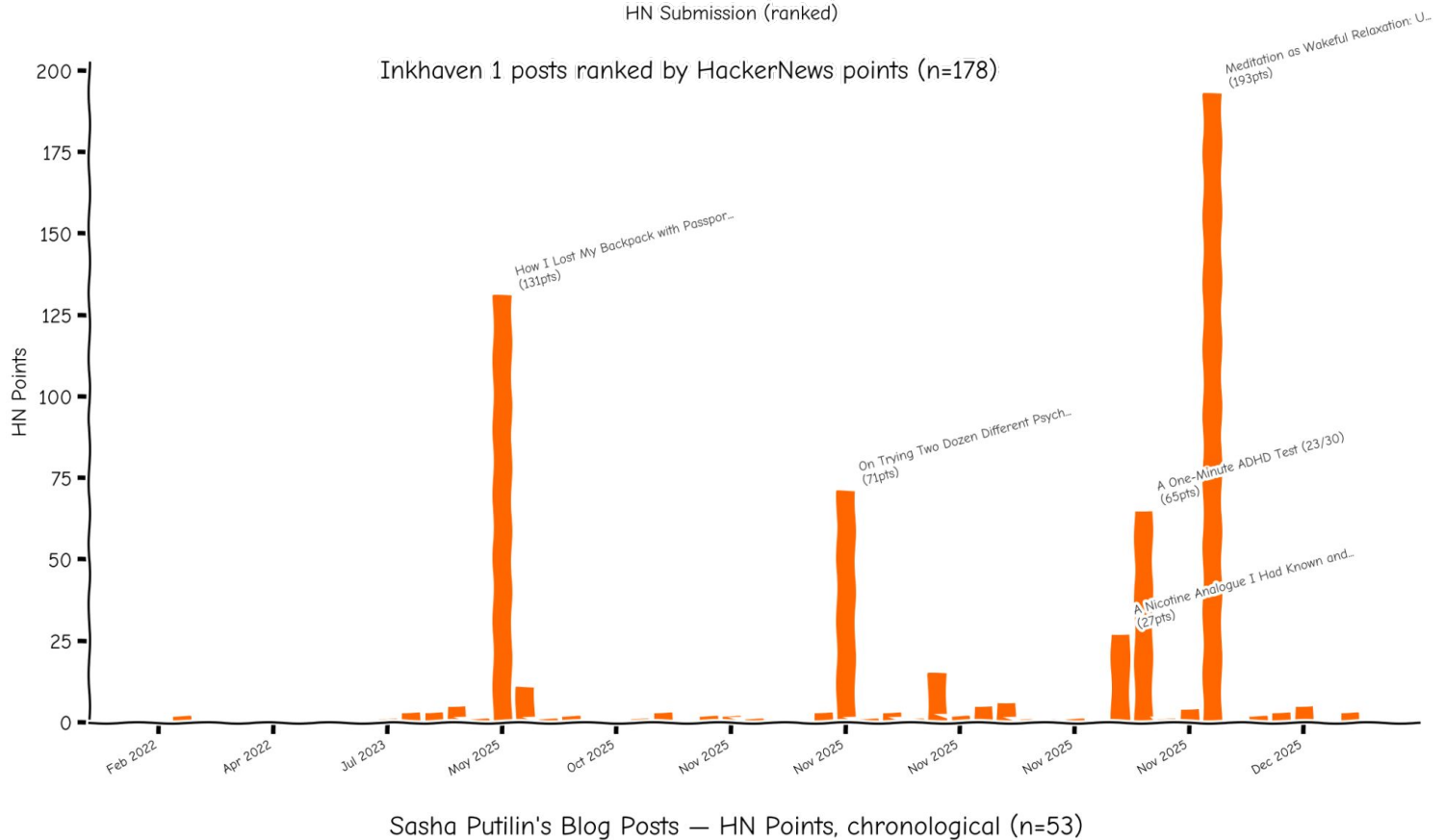
HackerNews Points vs Time Spent Writing in the first Inkhaven cohort (n=128, log scale)

Here's some more graphs for you! Points per posts had a classic zipf law distribution, and you can see in Sasha's case that Inkhaven made him create way more successful HN posts.



I need more words guys, so here's a little poem about my day

*Once upon a hill, once upon a time
Looking out until, the wind makes
trees chime.
Oh! So great I feel, eating a tiny lime,
climbing with such thrill, up a tree in
its prime.
Back inside, I lay still, under a blanket,
it's nap time.*



Sasha Putilin's Blog Posts — HN Points, chronological (n=53)

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF BEING HUNGRY WHILE PREGNANT

By Vivian Belenky

This morning while weight loss, theories of obesity, and GLP-1s with [a friend](#), I noticed that we were using the word “hunger” in two completely different ways.

Until I got pregnant, I experienced hunger purely as physical discomfort. I would eat to relieve that physical discomfort, and I resented it. Why did I have to come pre-installed with a circuit that would make me feel *bad* if I didn't do something that I only sort of enjoyed? If I had it my way I would eat once a week, like a snake, or only on social occasions where the boringness of eating could be offset by pleasant conversation with friends.

It isn't that I never enjoyed meals. I vividly remember particular especially delicious meals I've had over the years. Food definitely tasted good to me; meals could be enjoyable. I just never thought about them if I wasn't hungry to the point of discomfort, and I certainly never wanted to interrupt what I was doing just to go have one.

“Hunger” is massively underspecified

It turns out that “hunger” is not one phenomenon. It's at least two, and maybe more like five.

People know that pregnant women gain a lot of weight [1]; they're “eating for two.” You might think this means that they're hungry all the time. But I haven't been experiencing more of what I would have traditionally called “hunger”, the negatively valenced physical discomfort of needing to eat.

Instead, I started to experience something almost completely novel for me—a desire for food.

Surprisingly, the desire for food is not, in itself, a singular phenomenon. It is textured, nuanced, and brings together a variety of different qualia, drives, and resultant behaviors.

[1]: Although about a third of that is water weight; your blood volume approximately doubles, and you gain about as much extra fluid in your tissues

Willingness to go and eat at ~any time

These days I am almost always down for a meal. It doesn't matter how recently I've eaten, how hungry I am, or almost anything else [2]. Breakfast, second breakfast, elevenses, luncheon, afternoon tea—I could spend all day on meals. Rationally speaking, I should spend the remaining months of this pregnancy going to omakases and Brazilian steakhouses and fancy restaurants with 9-course tasting menus, making the hedonic most of this likely-temporary period [3].

Thinking about eating while not eating

I often think about food while I'm doing something else. I imagine different meals I might have, and what it will be like to eat them, and how much I'm going to enjoy eating them. It isn't distracting in a bad way—it's like an additional layer of pleasant fantasy layered over my daily life, the way you might really look forward to sex with an exciting new lover.

My second-favorite essay is [Joy](#), by Zadie Smith. This section was previously completely lost on me:

I seem to get more than the ordinary satisfaction out of food, for example—any old food. An egg sandwich from one of these grimy food vans on Washington Square has the genuine power to turn my day around. Whatever is put in front of me, foodwise, will usually get a five-star review.

You'd think that people would like to cook for, or eat with, me—in fact I'm told it's boring. Where there is no discernment there can be no awareness of expertise or gratitude for special effort. “Don't say that was delicious,” my husband warns, “you say everything's delicious.” “But it was delicious.” It drives him crazy. All day long I can look forward to a popsicle.

How could a person who had moved me so profoundly with the rest of the essay write something so alienating? Well, Zadie, I get it now. All day long I look forward to a popsicle, now, too. Maybe six popsicles.

[2]: The only thing that puts a damper on my appetite is true despondency; but I need to be *really* miserable before I lose the desire to eat

[3]: I already did hotpot and Korean barbecue. It was terrifying—for my husband.

Continuing to eat even after becoming full

I will almost always finish everything on my plate, and probably most of what's on my husband's plate. Even if I started the meal feeling hungry, I'll usually stop feeling *hungry* about halfway through the main course, maybe even after the appetizer—I am easily able to tell that I've reached the point where I've eaten enough, and if I stop eating now, I won't be experience an discomfort from hunger for several more hours. But then I just keep eating anyway, whether the food is particularly good or not. Yesterday I dumped too much of a sauce I didn't end up liking over my rice, and ate the entire bowl anyway.

I conclude from this experience that “having room” for more food must be almost entirely psychological. This makes sense—competitive eaters seem to be able to eat over 10,000 calories in a single sitting without throwing up, and they aren't usually particularly fat. Perhaps they are just unusual on *this* particular psychological setting.

Before pregnancy, continuing to eat after I was already full was actively disgusting to me. Have you ever been jerking off, and you think, no way am I going to be any less into this porn after I'm done cumming—and then you cum, and lose all interest in it? That's how eating while full was for me before. Once I was done, I was done—I would get nothing but negative marginal value from additional food, no matter how delicious it was or how desperate and gagging for it I was when I started.

Alternatively, especially if you have a clit, or are a gooner, have you ever been jerking off, cum once—and felt yourself able to just kind of keep going? Like, sure, you could stop...but you could also keep going, and keeping going sounds pretty good. That's what it's like for me now. And it's great.

What's the deal with pregnancy cravings?

I won't say that pregnancy cravings are “fake”—probably some people really do have them—but I haven't experienced cravings stereotypically, in that I haven't experienced a new desire for particular foods I didn't like before. I still hate the smell of vinegar, for instance, and don't really care for fermented or pickled foods as a result.

Instead, I would describe it as experiencing certain new dimensions of hunger that are vaguely craving-shaped.

Being highly suggestible

It is trivially easy to get me to want to eat some particular thing with a visual or verbal prompt. I recently had a large meal. I felt full to the point of pain—I could literally feel my belly skin stretching to accommodate the mass. Then I stepped outside and saw a flattened gumdrop on the sidewalk.

“Wow,” I thought to myself, “I could really go for some gummy fruity candy right now.” And I thought longingly of gumdrops the whole drive home.

Text-based prompts work just as well, and I can even incept them into myself by accident. I wrote that sentence about Brazilian steakhouses above a few minutes ago. Now at least one of the threads on my CPU is busy thinking about that, and will pretty soon compel me to pause writing this piece pretty soon to urgently text my husband that we need to go to a Brazilian steakhouse *soon* or I may experience some kind of serious consequence.

Being far less picky

Between being more suggestible and less picky, and more imaginative about food in general, strange meals might occur to me just by conceptual collision.

For example: broccoli cheddar soup + grilled cheese sandwich = “hmm, broccoli as a grilled cheese sandwich filling, that could be pretty good.”

I usually don’t actually create [4] any of the culinary monstrosities my imagination produces. They aren’t *that* compelling. But they do occur to me. That’s as close to “weird” food cravings as I’ve gotten.

Roving around locations desperately searching for particular foods like an anxious bear in torpor

Perhaps the most visceral, lizard-brained behavior I engage in now is this. Frankly it’s a little frightening. Yesterday I heard there was mochi ice cream somewhere on the premises. I zoomed around, criss-crossing the grounds, laser focused on traveling to the location where the bright glowing “mochi ice cream” quest marker was.

[4]: ask my husband to create

Later that night, while everyone was asleep, I paced back and forth in the kitchen and living room. I wanted *something*. What did I want? I didn't know, I just know I wanted it. I ended up chugging half a can of coke and going to bed deeply satisfied. Fuck my spiking blood sugar and fuck my acid reflux, that can of coke was *good*.

It might be rational to be overweight

Pregnancy is [mostly whatever](#), but I really love this part of it. I'm going to miss it when it's gone; it'll be like the ending of *Flowers for Algernon*. There are all these brand new layers of positive valence superimposed onto my daily waking experience that I had no idea existed. But I know if I kept living this way, I would definitely gain weight, and at my stature, I would probably hit 'overweight' status quite quickly.

But honestly, if I had a choice between keeping the dial tuned to Hungerbeast and accepting the consequences of extra weight, I would probably do it. Food is really just that good, and loving it is an insane boost to subjective quality of life.

I don't think this is a crazy proposition. A friend of mine recently [quit retatrutide](#). She had a number of issues with it, but a major one was that it made her stop enjoying food.

People talk about GLP-1s like they're a free lunch [5], a shortcut, a way of cheating the body into being thin without any cost. But as I see it, the cost is commensurate with the benefits, and I would assert that unless you're seriously obese, or your weight is really ruining your life in some other way, a GLP-1 may be a pretty bad deal for you.

Love life—love food. You might not know how good you have it.

MIDNIGHT SESSIONS

By Doctor Butler

I came to this with relatively little context. I am not a Science Writer, but they had a dataset on hand, and I could just write about that. Alright. I've read one or two of Aella's posts, but not, like, tons. She's posted some stuff about this dataset before, though not all of it. It has been updated since then.

There was a csv file in the slack. It's just raw data. Column: He came: 1/1/0/1. He gave oral: / / x /x/ / / x

So I go over to the porch to ask her about the vision, initial hypotheses, subjective trends. Elicit tacit sex researcher knowledge.

“Lovely to meet you I am writing the article about your escort appointments from 2019 and the cowgirl and the doggy and so on. Revealed preferences, if you will. Client archetypes.”

The sky is the limit, it turns out; in other words, there is no vision. “Uh I found that I came *slightly* more often with guys who are less attractive than average.”

“Interesting.”

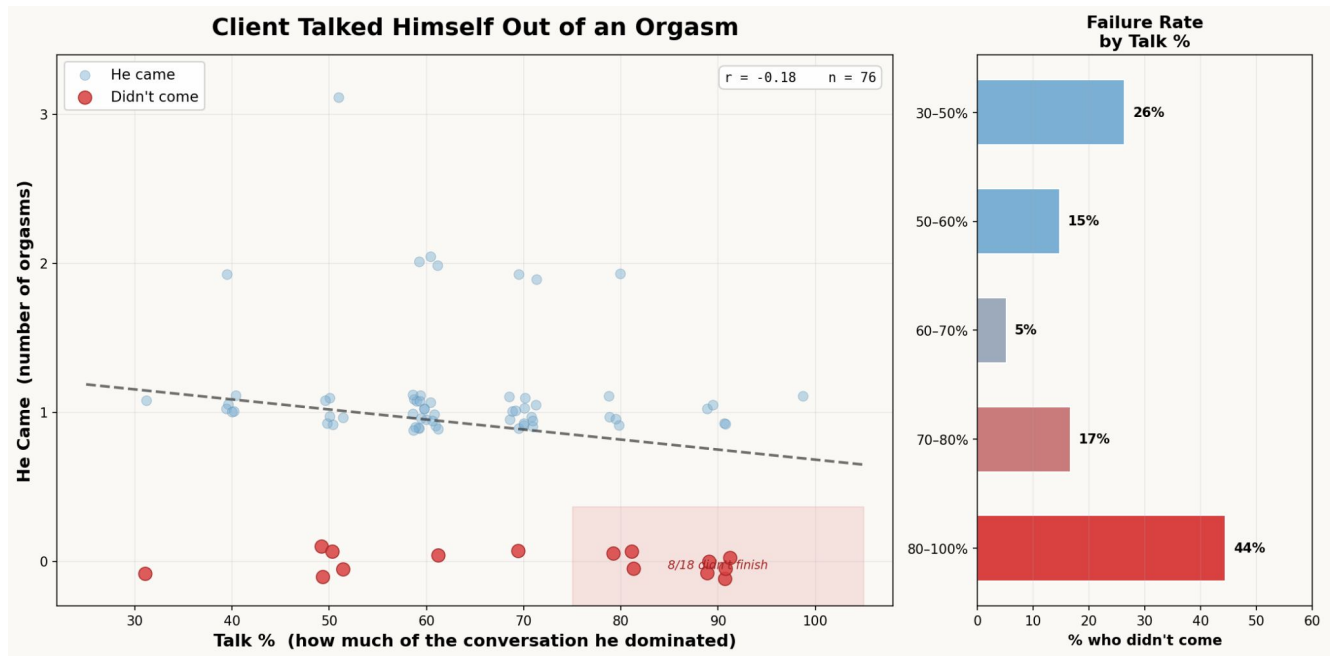
Thank god for Claude.

1.

If readers have read [Aella's post on hiring an escort](#) you may know that the average client she sees is 46, with a median income of 100k, and that the average session is 1.5 hours.

What you don't know is that for the *modal* client she sees, none of these things are true. The modal client is 37, lives in San Francisco, God help him, and is a creative class type. She performs oral on him; positions are cowgirl and missionary. He comes once.

2.
 At a given appointment, there was a 1/54 chance he makes money growing weed; it's twice as likely as that to be a surgeon or does standup comedy.
 If the client worked in finance --- about a fifth of them did --- the man did not tip. Ever. (Across the main professions, 22% tipped.)



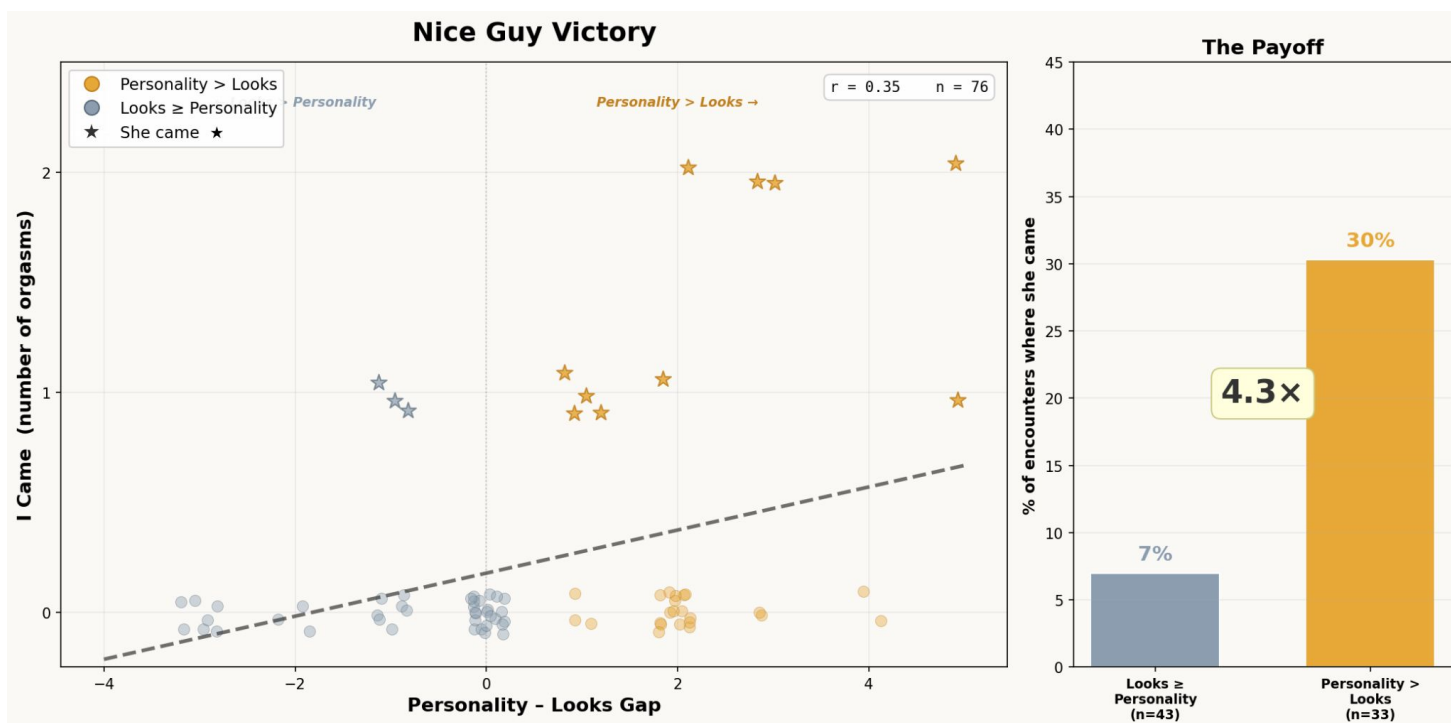
3. Good at sex: author LARP

Most — about 80% in her estimation — of Aella's clients care about her experience. She only orgasmed with like 17% of clients. How might they do better? One thing stood out. This isn't necessarily causal but the relationship is statistically significant (odds ratio = 26.2, $p = 0.0005$). The overwhelming determinant of whether Aella came was whether the client gave oral sex during the session. In fact, those were the only clients with whom Aella came. About 58% of the clients gave oral. Of those, she had an orgasm with 29%.

The clients are also rated by how attractive they are: physical attractiveness, and personality. There doesn't seem to be much of a halo effect going on; the personality attractiveness scores aren't really correlated with physical attractiveness. They are correlated with something else though: conversation. There's a sweet spot; it's an inverse-u. The ones who completely dominate the conversation were rated as unattractive. So were the ones who talked less than half the time. The sweet spot was about 63%. Take notes.

Other fun facts:

- Married clients tipped at three times the rate of unmarried ones
- Encounters where the client tipped had 6.9× the odds of Aella orgasming.
- Repeat clients reuse 61% of their position choices across visits, nearly double the 34% expected by chance. The “stickiest” one — sorry — is cowgirl (repeated 82% of the time).
- As per the chart above, if a client talked like 80-90% of the time they were somewhat less likely to orgasm. ($p = 0.08$)
- Aella orgasmed more with clients whose physical attractiveness score was lower than their personality (30% of the time) than vice versa (7% of the time). That is, if the guy was hot and had a bad personality, she came much less than if he was ugly but nice. $P = 0.08$.



THREE STONES ARE ENOUGH

By Anna Mattinger

The case against leaves, in particular.

From a god's-eye view: in times of scarcity, there are those who wipe, those who wash, and those who scrape.

I went on record in a [2018 VICE fluff piece](#) as a member of the find-a-smooth-rock camp, a conviction hard-won through multifecal experimentation. Deigning to quote myself:

For a week, I sang the praises of using pine cones. Gentle jeffrey, as opposed to prickly ponderosa. That skid-marked to a halt when I forgot to check one for tree sap. I spent a rather sordid afternoon with my multi-tool by the creek, my own bitter coprolalia punctuated by the laughter of the other women on the crew, who had come to spectate for lack of better entertainment.

But I'm just a girl [*living in captivity...and, as of recently, with a bidet*]. What follows is a survey of humanity's approaches to this messily human problem, organized along three axes: history, habitat, and disposition.

I. Across Time

My affinity for rocks is privileged with long historical precedent. The practice of using smooth stones predates written history and is documented archaeologically across the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the American Southwest. A *hadith* attributed to Muhammad specifies three stones as ideal.

¹ A Greek proverb is blunter: *Three stones are enough to wipe one's ass.*

A 2012 forensic analysis of *pestoi*—Greek for "pebbles," describing stones or smoothed ceramic shards—confirmed fecal residue on specimens excavated from ancient latrines.² The same shards, called *ostraka*, were used in Athenian democracy to vote for the exile of one's enemies, giving us "ostracize," and giving the Greeks the satisfaction of literally shitting on the names of their enemies.³

In Song dynasty China, a Chan [Zen, but in China] koan takes a different communal ass-wiper as its punchline. Case 21 of Wumen Huikai's *Gateless Barrier* (无门关) records a monk asking Master Yunmen, "What is Buddha?"



Yunmen's response: *gānshǐjué* (干屎橛)! Literally: a dried shit-stick.⁶

This was not purely metaphorical. A 2016 study in the *Journal of Archaeological Science* documented purpose-built hygiene sticks excavated from a 2,000-year-old Silk Road latrine, with microscopic traces of human feces—and parasite eggs—still on them.⁷

The Roman *tersorium*—a sea sponge on a stick, soaked between uses in a bucket of salt water or vinegar—was shared communally among latrine-goers and is known to have been a vector for intestinal parasites such as roundworm and whipworm.⁴ Seneca, in his 70th letter to Lucilius, describes a German gladiator-slave whose only stolen moments of privacy were in the latrine, and whose last recourse against his own enslavement had apparently been to seize the *tersorium* and shove it down his own windpipe and choke himself to death. Seneca frames this as not only an indictment of slavery, but as the bravest imaginable exertion of free choice: to die poetically on one's own terms with an implied bird flipped at death.⁵

By now the reader is hopefully assured that communal wiping implements are suboptimal.

Of course, a large swath of the world has always simply used water and the left hand—a practice codified in Islamic law as *istinja* and in Hindu texts including the *Manusmriti*⁸—while the right hand, reserved for eating and greeting, stays clean. The custom is so deeply embedded that the Latin word *sinister*—meaning "left"—acquired its dark connotations in part through Roman association of the left hand with unclean tasks.⁹

Whether more novel propositions were viable, if not entirely earnest, is up to one's interpretation and temerity. François Rabelais, in 1534, devoted an entire chapter of *Gargantua* to the poop-removal discourse. Young Gargantua catalogs dozens of materials—kerchiefs, hats, sage, nettles, a hen, a cormorant, an attorney's bag—and concludes that "of all torcheuculs, arsewisps, bumfodders, tail-napkins, bunghole cleansers, and wipe-breeches, there is none in the world comparable to the neck of a goose, that is well downed."¹⁰



II. Across Turf

Toilet paper takes 1–3 years to decompose in wet soil — and even longer in desert or alpine environments. "Toilet paper blooms" have become common sights along the Pacific Crest Trail.¹¹ Without supportive infrastructure, toilet paper is broadly bad, and its degree of badness is partially biome-dependent. This last clause applies to almost every alternative one might consider.

Across wilderness forums and hiking guides, mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) has achieved something close to universal endorsement: its leaves, sometimes called "cowboy toilet paper," are popular thanks to their velvety texture.¹² Mullein grows in disturbed soils at lower to mid elevations across North America. It does not grow above treeline, in deep rainforest, or in the desert; it isn't a universal solution even for those who'd like it to be. Additionally, some on permaculture forums have reported that its fine hairs cause skin irritation precisely where one wants it least.¹³

Xeric. The apparent trouble is aridity: leaves are scarce to nonexistent. I don't believe this is a problem. You're left with a boundless expanse of smooth stones and sand, both historically proven.

I could find no primary sources but would posit speculatively that succulents like aloe would serve as excellent wipers: the exterior shares the virtues of a smoothed stone; the interior presents a soothing mucilaginous balm. I propose this as an area for further study.

Tropical. Leaves are plentiful but treacherous. Warm, moist tropical soil enables parasitic larval development — hookworm can penetrate bare skin on contact with contaminated ground¹⁵ — and tropical forests are full of plants that cause contact dermatitis.¹⁶ Nothing dries. Materials that might have been serviceable in a temperate forest stay damp and become vectors. As does your asshole.

The beautiful irony of the tropics is that they give you the most abundant leaf supply on Earth and then punish you for using any of it.

Littoral. Favored implements like seashells have been attested but poorly documented; given the prevalence of seawater, this is hardly mysterious. That said, in Hawaii, coconut husks and seashells were used; in the Netherlands, blue mussel shells reportedly persisted until Napoleon.¹⁷ The sailor's tow rag—a frayed rope dangling from the ship's head, rinsed by the ocean between uses—is better sourced and worse in every other respect.¹⁸

Alpine. Above the timberline, the most available choices are snow [usually seasonal] and smooth rocks [always]. The Inuit used snow for centuries; the practice persists among Arctic mushers today.¹⁹ In summer, tundra moss (*Sphagnum*) is the fallback. Sphagnum can absorb up to twenty times its dry weight in fluid, creates a naturally acidic and mildly antiseptic environment, and doesn't mildew.²⁰ It was used as wound dressing in WWI when cotton ran short—by 1918, Britain was shipping a million moss dressings per month to field hospitals—and by Native Americans as diaper lining for infants.²¹ If it's good enough for a shrapnel wound and a baby's ass, it is presumably adequate for yours.

III. Across Temperament

I'm down on mullein. Leaves tear; they don't scrape. They transfer rather than remove.

In the same way a person might inflate their lifestyle to match their income, scatological duress may deflate one's expectations around creature comforts. A few examples of how one's circumstantially deflated expectations may manifest:

The libertine draws inspiration from the adage "anything is a dildo if you're brave enough" and applies it to unorthodox ass-wiping. Broken bottles, discarded crab shells, rotting corn cobs, and their landlord's dog are all fair game.

The nihilist uses nothing.

The Athenian writes your name on it first.

The vindictive uses the clothes of someone they don't like. Or takes a note from Rabelais, but insists the goose still be alive and awake.

IV. Future Work

I could not find an actual ethnobotanical study comparing toilet hygiene plants across biomes. While I've made clear my own disdain for most plants as a solution, it seemed worth mentioning that the field is wide open.

Additionally, although most other primates enjoy the benefits of planar posteriors relative to our round ones, a physical anthropological perspective may yet be warranted; per a 2025 study, a group of Ugandan chimpanzees have been found using leaves for post-defecation cleanup.²²

My follow-up paper, "The Optimum Wipe: A Materials Science Perspective," will give this subject deserving treatment as an engineering problem, comparing candidate poop-removal implements in terms of friction coefficient, absorbency, compressive yield strength, surface contaminant transfer efficiency, and parasitic and dermatological risk. Keep a brown eye peeled for future issues of *The Loop*.

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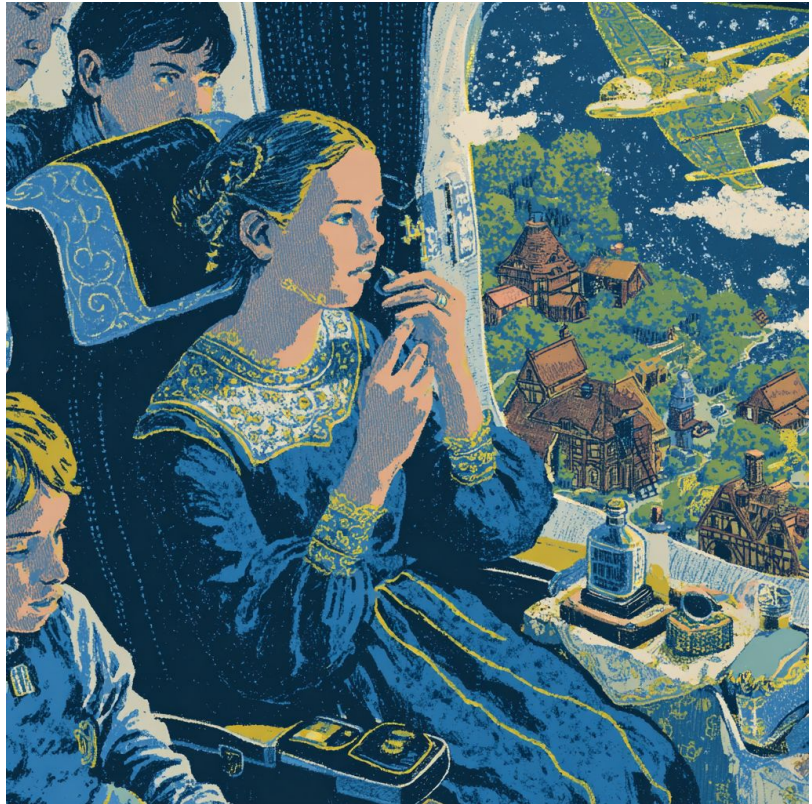
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SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

By Sir Sniffs-a-Lot

When I was 13 I accidentally did a scientific experiment on myself that I want to replicate but don't know how.

When you're travelling alone internationally under the age of 14 you are considered an "unaccompanied minor" and they assign a flight attendant to help you check in and get to your gate and make sure you don't leave anything on the plane. My flight attendant let me meet the pilot and gave me those little wings you can stick on your shirt. I liked the special treatment, but I was a little embarrassed since the wings seemed like a thing they usually reserved for younger kids.



They had me sitting next to the other teenager travelling alone. He seemed to be a few years older than me and I didn't want him to think of me as a kid. It felt very adult to be traveling alone and I wanted him to think I was totally capable of doing it on my own, maybe even to notice how unusual and cool it was for a 13 year-old-girl to be travelling internationally by herself. I don't think we exchanged a word on the whole flight. I listened to the music I had loaded onto my ipod mini, imagining what I would say if he did start talking to me.

When the plane landed in Stockholm I recognized Johanna, my mom's friend's daughter who had stayed with us in LA the summer before. We hadn't kept in touch since she left but we were excited to see each other. It was my first time meeting Charlotta, my mom's friend, who would be hosting me for the next three weeks. On the walk to the car they told

me about all the things they had planned for us to do while I was there, including the costume she was going to sew for me in the next few days so I'd have something to wear when we went to the medieval festival on Gottland.

I loved everything about being in Sweden. I loved noticing the word "utfart" written above the exit of the parking lot and learning that this was the Swedish word for "exit." I loved listening to Johanna's precise and rhythmic sentences as she argued with Charlotta in Swedish on the drive back to their house in the suburbs. I loved the wide, tree-peppered fields that flew by as we sped down the highway; the narrow, crooked roads between the houses in their neighborhood; the houses that all looked like little cottages, all painted in a limited palette of colors, bright yellow, snow white, candy apple red.

You may be wondering what this trip to Sweden has to do with my science experiment. I admit, I got a little carried away with my memories there. But it's amazing to notice how vivid those memories still are. That trip to Sweden happened nearly 21 years ago, but as soon as I start thinking about it the memories come flooding back with more detail than perhaps any other trip I've taken. There are a few reasons for this.

For one, the events of your childhood and adolescence are very easy to remember because they are so new.



...as soon as I start thinking about it the memories come flooding back with more detail than perhaps any other trip I've taken.

Most people remember their childhoods more vividly than any other period of their life. As the elements of your experience become more familiar they become less cool and new; more of the detail around you is lost to boring glossing-over-ness as the patterns of this experience are matched to previous experiences. This is also why time seems to speed up as you get older!

Highly emotional experiences also tend to stick in the mind more. A normal day as a 13-year-old is already more emotional than a normal day for the average adult. So the combination of these features (novelty, emotional intensity, time of life) contributed to a perfect storm to get these really high-resolution memories. But there was one more ingredient in the mix that took these memories to the next level: smell.

I brought a scented lotion that I used every day of the trip. After I got back I noticed that every time I used the lotion I was overwhelmed with a powerful emotional connection to my memories of Sweden. Sometimes it would bring up specific memories of my experiences, but it was mostly a strong sense of being there again, like being transported back to those three weeks.

Many people are probably familiar with this experience of transportation, and know that memory and scent are closely connected in the brain. A few years ago I started wondering whether you could use this link to intentionally save certain memories in higher fidelity, like taking a scent-snapshot. If you chose a totally unfamiliar scent and then you smelled it a lot over a period of life that you knew would be highly salient, either due to novelty, emotionality, or both, could you encode that memory more deeply than a normal memory? I wanted to see whether my experience would replicate, especially for adults.

So I developed a protocol. I posted on twitter to see if anyone who was planning to get married in the next 6 months would like to try my protocol over the couple of days spanning their wedding. I got a few takers, and had one or two people agree to try it out, and I sent them the protocol and told them I'd follow up in a few months.

But then, when I started writing a follow-up survey, I hit a wall. I realized I had no way to test this scientifically. Even if I recruited a control group, even if I somehow re-did my recruitment and made it double-blind, how was I supposed to operationalize "is your memory stronger"? Stronger than what? Just looking at a photo? How do you test that? How can you compare it to a memory you didn't scent-encode? I got stuck.

**How do I do this study??? If you have any ideas email me!
evelyncmclean@gmail.com**

MILK IS NUTS NOW

In a Nutshell: Give Me Funding to go Nuts in the “Milk” Aisle

By bananaslug

While roaming around the kitchen sometime after midnight last night, I was drawn to the glowing fridge fortified with a freshly-restocked wall of alternative milks. I remember back in the day it was soy milk or bust, but now this fridge was casually stocked with not one but TWO varieties of Kirkland Signature® almond milk. Intrigued, I became curious about what other things are being milked these days, so the next day I embarked on a fact-finding/content-farming expedition to two area supermarkets that seemed like promising places to find exotic milks (Whole Foods and Berkeley Bowl). What I discovered is that there’s been a veritable Cambrian explosion in the field, they’re milking nuts that have never been milked before, and the madmen have even been milking grains and legumes too! Here are the milks I observed, collected into a Scientific table with some additional data (price):

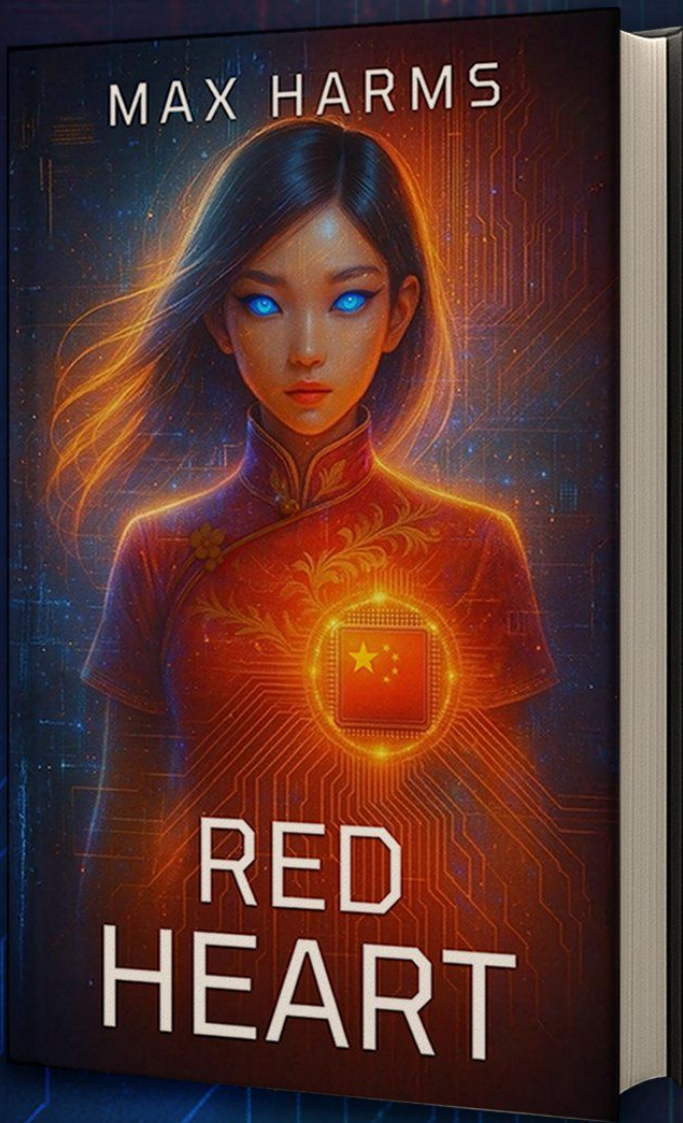
NUT MILKS		NON-NUT MILKS	
Type	Cost per unit	Type	Cost per unit
Almond	\$2.99	Soy	\$2.99
Cashew	\$8.79	Oat	\$4.49
Macadamia	\$4.39	Corn	\$5.99
Pistachio	\$8.79	Rice	\$5.39
Hazelnut	\$8.79	Hemp	\$5.79
Walnut	\$8.79	Flax	\$4.86
Pecan	\$7.49		
Coconut	\$3.99		
TOTAL	\$54.02	TOTAL	\$29.51

From the tabulated data, at least one conclusion can be made: for just \$83.53 (plus tax), you can buy All The “Milks”. My modest proposal is that someone fund their acquisition for Research, here are some potential experiment ideas collected into a Scientific bullet-point list:

- The Great “Milk” Taste Test: the most basic, prepare samples of every milk and have some Human Test Subjects rate them, potentially along multiple dimensions such as flavor, texture, color. With that data, we could crown a King of “Milk”, plus find out if we should really be milking some of this stuff in the first place.. Additional avenues for analysis could be seeing if the nutritional content of the “Milks” like calorie count, amount of added sugar, etc. is correlated in any way with its palatability.
- To what extent do these “Milks” taste like what they’ve been milked from? Put together a lineup of several “Milks” and see how accurately the Test Subjects can identify their origins. The only potential issue is that some of the Test Subjects may not know what “flax” or “hemp” taste like... an alternative design could have test subjects sample some of the original ingredient and then the milked version, rating how similar they are. The only limitation is that that would require additional funding.

Plus, once the research is completed, the leftover “Milk” can always be used for other purposes like recreational consumption.

However, there’s no need to worry if funding doesn’t come through, Nut Milk research can still progress, albeit slower and with less exciting samples. As mentioned at the outset, Lighthaven is already stocked with several types of nut milk that can be requisitioned for research, there are also loose walnuts and cashews that we can use to make our own nut milks, I’ve looked up some recipes and the kitchen is equipped with everything required.



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IS THE URGE TO HAVE SEX OLDER THAN THE URGE TO BREATHE?

By GEORGIA RAY

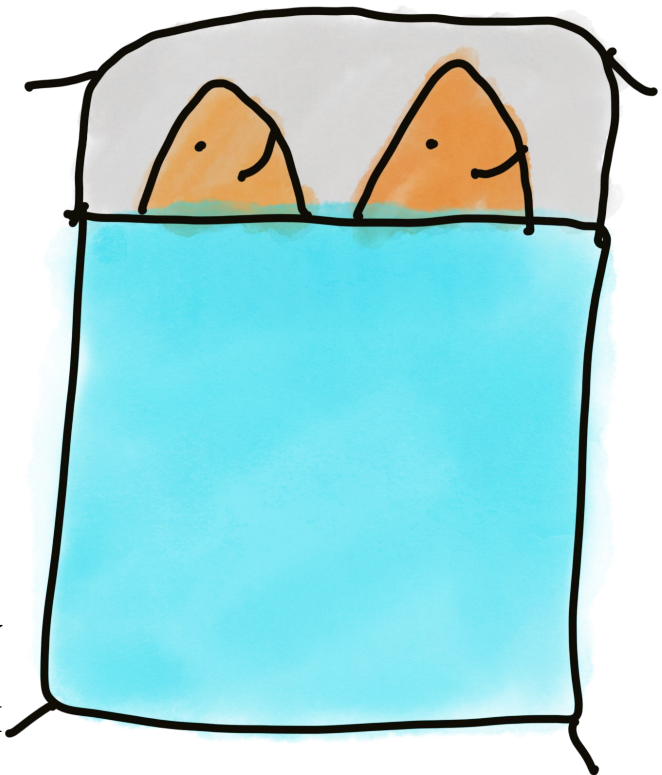
Once I hatewatched a video where someone claimed that the human instinct to have sex is, evolutionarily speaking, older than the instinct to breathe. They then made a lot of other stranger claims but THIS ONE caught my eye because that's KIND OF EMPIRICAL!

The reasoning presumably goes like this: fish have sex and do not breathe. So if you go back in the evolutionary tree far enough that we're fish, those guys were having sex, so the urge to breathe is newer than the urge to bang. Also, *and I am not making this up*, something something chakras.

MY HYPOTHESIS: Our fish ancestors were having sex and not breathing air. But fish *do* "breathe" by inhaling water through their mouth and letting water wash over their gills, to oxygenate their cells, and they basically have to do it all the time. I suspect this mechanism was co-opted by the later development of lungs so these fish did have the qualia of breathing. More tentatively: I bet this mouth-gill mechanism also predates sex behavior.

LETS BE CLEAR:

- "Sex" in the sense of gametes is really old, probably back to single-celled days. But early animals do other forms of external fertilization, like releasing sperm or eggs into the water *en masse*, or depositing one and then the other like salmon. We're specifically talking about *internal fertilization* by means of *genitalia*. You know, bangin'. Copulation. To learn more, look up pictures of this on the internet.
- Our question here is about qualia, which obviously we cannot "answer." So I'm going to use a lot of dubious reasoning about evolutionary history to guess. "Dubious reasoning" is, alas, how we got here in the first place. But I am coming out ahead morally ahead of the competition, because I am learning more about fish.



THE OG SEX-HAVER: As far as we know, copulation was invented about 385 million years ago by a species of placoderm fish named, *and I am not making this up, Microbrachius dicki*. Its fossils have little arm-type appendages kinda analogous to the ‘clasper’ fins of modern sharks, plus genital shapes that indicate internal fertilization – they probably had sex!¹

But then later placoderms might have gone back to external fertilization. *Microbrachius* was a pretty early placoderm, and the human vertebrate lineage *did* come out of placoderms (although *Microbrachius* wasn’t necessarily in the human lineage.)

Later come the sarcopterygians. Lungfishes do external fertilization but coelacanths, to my surprise, are *ovoviviparous* – which I think indicates some kind of internal fertilization *must* be happening, because how else does the sperm get into the fish? So we *might* be looking at an unbroken lineage of sex since the placoderms.

At the end of the day it’s unclear whomst, among our fossil ancestors, were bonkin’. Definitely by the time the amniotic reptiles show up, internal fertilization is back on the menu.

Also, qualia-wise, once an animal evolves sex, maybe any later sexual behavior – even if it reverts back to external fertilization – maybe it now “feels like” sex?² I suspect an evolutionary history of orgasm would be of interest here but that REALLY doesn’t fossilize well.

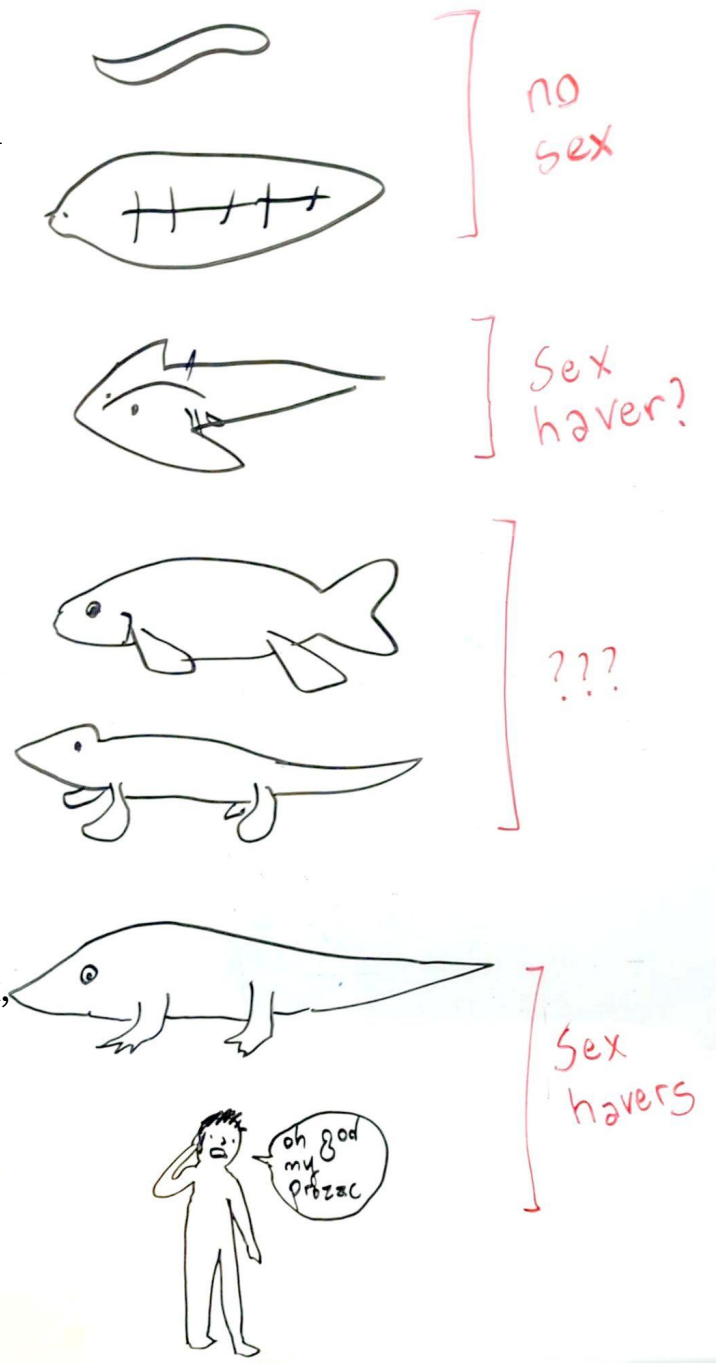


fig. 1: human evolution

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 2. Look up “oviposition” on human sexuality database “Archive of Our Own” for possible evidence of vestigial human inclinations supporting this hypothesis.

IS GILLS BREATHING? What “is” breathing? Humans, and our amniote relatives like reptiles, take air in through the mouth - but most of the ‘work’ you feel breathing is controlling the diaphragm. This moving of the thorax muscles is called “aspiration breathing.”

Fish do buccal pumping, where they move their mouth muscles. Amphibians seem to do a combination of both, breathing in with mouth muscles and exhaling with axial muscles. Note that it’s complicated in fish like lungfish or bettas with various lung-type situations, in addition to their water gills.

But wait, we’re asking about the *urge to breathe*, right? Whatever muscles you use are secondary to *the need to take a breath*. ...Right? Like, when I’m suddenly scared, I don’t necessarily feel it in my legs or arms, even though that’s the body part I would need to jump up and run away or fight back.

BUT TAKE NOTE:

- Humans have more options – a fish needs its mouth open to inhale and closed to push water over the gills. A human has more axes of control.
- The fish version of coughing also involves buccal pumps.³
- Breathing rhythm is localized to part of the medulla oblongata of both fish and mammals.
- Air-breathing fish today use lungs AND gills, and have to switch between them. Some of our ancestors must have been similarly transitional, and also that both kinds of breathing must have had a qualitative difference.

CONCLUSION: It’s hard to know when different things evolved! We actually don’t know for sure which of our ancestors were banging last. We know how breathing worked but not the qualia. I think it’s POSSIBLE that early fish didd something qualitatively similar to breathing (pumping water over gills) but maybe not because it had to switch over at some point, and also I guess “urge to breathe in using my diaphragm” and “urge to not suffocate” are potentially distinct.

**FUN
FACT!**

Coelacanths have vestigial lungs. They probably used these for hearing. This is, in my opinion, stupid.

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