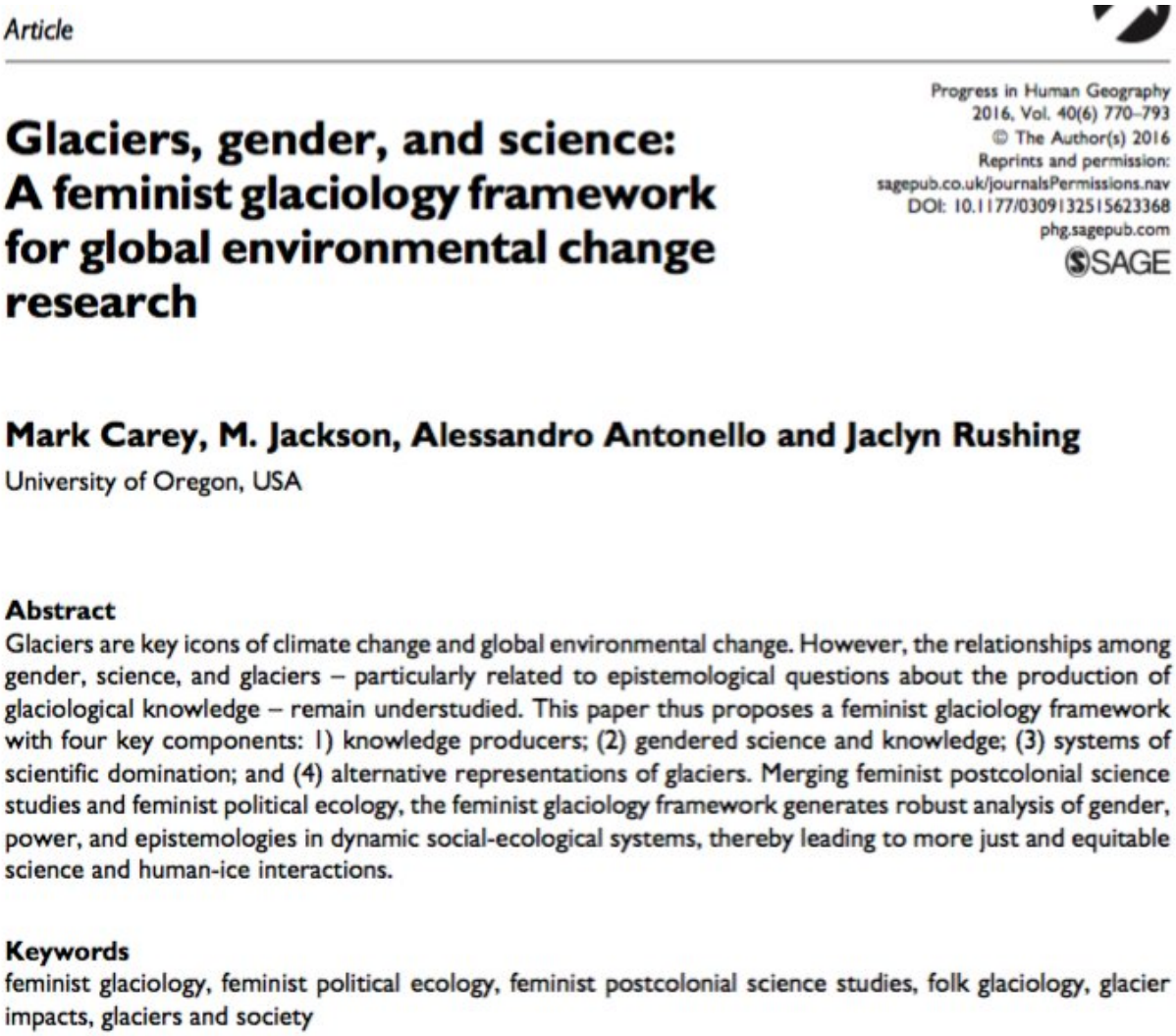
Twitter Thread by Jeffrey Sachs



Jeffrey Sachs
@JeffreyASachs

Imagine for a moment the most obscurantist, jargon-filled, po-mo article the politically correct academy might produce. Pure SJW nonsense. Got it? Chances are you're imagining something like the infamous "Feminist Glaciology" article from a few years back.
https://t.co/NRaWNREBvR



Article

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Glaciers, gender, and science: A feminist glaciology framework for global environmental change research

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Abstract
Glaciers are key icons of climate change and global environmental change. However, the relationships among gender, science, and glaciers – particularly related to epistemological questions about the production of glaciological knowledge – remain understudied. This paper thus proposes a feminist glaciology framework with four key components: 1) knowledge producers; (2) gendered science and knowledge; (3) systems of scientific domination; and (4) alternative representations of glaciers. Merging feminist postcolonial science studies and feminist political ecology, the feminist glaciology framework generates robust analysis of gender, power, and epistemologies in dynamic social-ecological systems, thereby leading to more just and equitable science and human-ice interactions.

Keywords
feminist glaciology, feminist political ecology, feminist postcolonial science studies, folk glaciology, glacier impacts, glaciers and society

I'm dredging this article up now because for many people, it is the ne plus ultra of bad humanities writing, the archetypal example of "Grievance Studies" scholarship that adds nothing of value to human knowledge, and in fact may actively detract

from it.

They're wrong.

Warning: This thread is going to be long and extremely insider baseball. You may want to mute. However, @Inframethod asked me to do this some time ago, so here we go.

First, some contemporary coverage:

"In the you-can't-make-this-stuff-up pile today comes word of an academic paper that ponders the notion of gender as it relates to … blocks of ice." ~ The College Fix

"Academic gibberish" ~ Powerline

"A new low in climate 'science'" ~ NYPost

And here's how Robby Soave concluded his analysis over at Reason. Grim stuff!

https://t.co/rhhKpzBO7O

> In his write-up of the study, Powerline's Steven Hayward quips, "This is why you get Trump." He's not wrong. Disaffected college students are rebelling against the hegemonies of leftist dogma and political correctness that rule their campuses —and "Trump!" is, sadly, their rallying cry. In a country where working class people are being forced to fund research on the postcolonial gender theory of melting ice caps, is it any wonder some of them are rooting for a charismatic demagogue who promises to bully their tormentors?

I have two goals here: 1) To persuade you that the piece, while far from flawless and certainly not my personal cup of tea, does have real merit; and 2) To show that many people criticized the paper for doing precisely what, in other contexts, they are eager for scholars to do.

OK, so what does "feminist glaciology" actually claim? In short, that the academic study of glaciers has been and continues to be dominated by men, and that this dominance shapes the research questions, methods, policy proposals, and public reception of glaciologists.

Most existing glaciological research – and hence discourse and discussions about cryospheric change – stems from information produced by men, about men, with manly characteristics, and within masculinist discourses. These characteristics apply to scientific disciplines beyond glaciology; there is an explicit need to uncover the role of women in the history of science and technology, while also exposing processes for excluding women from science and technology (Phillips and Phillips, 2010; Domosh, 1991; Rose, 1993). Harding (2009) explains that the absence of women in science critically shapes 'the selection of scientific problems, hypotheses to be tested, what constituted relevant data to be collected, how it was collected and interpreted, the dissemination and consequences of the results of research, and who was credited with the scientific and technological work' (Harding, 2009: 408). Scientific studies themselves can also be gendered, especially when credibility is attributed to research produced through typically masculinist activities or manly characteristics, such as heroism, risk, conquests, strength, self-sufficiency, and exploration (Terrall, 1998). The tendency to exclude women and emphasize masculinity thus has far-reaching effects on science and knowledge, including glaciology and glacier-related knowledges.

This is not an unreasonable set of claims. Indeed, any conservative who has ever complained about how the academy's leftwing bias distorts research agendas or undermines public trust in the academy should sympathize with this point enormously.

The first third explains why glaciology was historically dominated by men: 1) It emerged out of mountaineering and polar exploration, which women were excluded from pursuing; and 2) It required long excursions and seclusion, where women were/are judged to be a sexual distraction.

The next third explores the consequences of this gender imbalance for glaciology: 1) The public associates authority on glaciers with masculinity, such that glaciologists must present themselves as "adventurers" in order to be taken seriously on issues like, say, climate change.

This has had real costs for glaciology. In one case, the field adopted a mistaken theory of glacial flow because its proponent was a "man's man" who had accomplished many heroic mountain ascents, whereas the proponent of the correct view was not.

When debates about glacier motion emerged in the second half of the 19th century, two central protagonists – the early leading glaciologists James Forbes and John Tyndall – competed for credibility by pinning their scientific contributions to their abilities as 'manly' mountaineers and heroic conquerors of the European Alps. Forbes theorized that glaciers behaved more like a semi-fluid body, flowing downhill as a viscous fluid rather than as a solid object. He highlighted his fieldwork in the mountains and among the glaciers to legitimate his theory. Tyndall, on the other hand, argued that glaciers moved more like a solid substance flowing over bedrock. He eventually triumphed in this debate, contends Hevly (1996), because Tyndall mobilized his greater fame as a mountaineer – having achieved many pioneering first ascents – and deployed a rhetoric of manly risk and exertion. There was what Hevly calls a 'culture of field science' in the 19th century that favored 'authentic, rigorous, manly experience', and scientists – let alone women – who did not explicitly demonstrate that their glaciological conclusions stemmed from heroic, manly adventures struggled to make their scientific claims credible. Glaciology was for muscular gentlemen scientists. Women could

2) Women face major obstacles breaking into the field, in part because they do not comport to this "adventuring" image. Considering how much glaciology takes place in the lab, this amounts to a significant distortion of reality.

3) Scholarship on the social impact of glaciers often ignores the place of women. E.g. how women in the Andes are disproportionately likely to engage in agriculture or grazing around glaciers, and therefore their livelihoods are especially vulnerable to ice melt.

In other words, if you are interested in any of the following questions...

a) Why is a particular scientific field dominated by men?
b) How does this affect public perceptions of that field?
c) How does it shape policy choices?

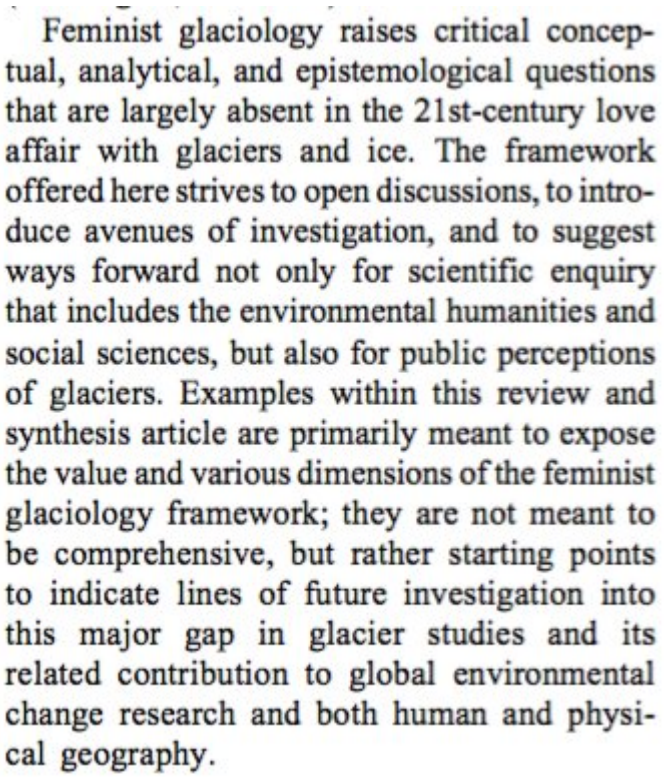
...then there's something here for you.

The last third of the paper proposes solutions and alternatives to the masculinity of glaciology. This is the section that attracted the most ridicule, as it emphasizes the importance of women's and postcolonial knowledge that many critics dismiss as useless.

And to be fair, the jargon here is especially thick. But the core point is more reasonable than you might think. Essentially, the claim is that when we think about glaciology, we should not *only* think about scientific knowledge, but also artistic, religious, or folk knowledge.

Don't snicker! Studying this sort of knowledge can tell us something important about what glaciers mean to the people who live on and around them, or the ways that they affect nearby communities. If you're a policymaker, this is knowledge you should care about!

What can we say about the article in general? Well, it doesn't break any new empirical ground, but rather synthesizes the work of others and organizes them together around the concept of gender. The article is quite clear about this at the outset.



Feminist glaciology raises critical conceptual, analytical, and epistemological questions that are largely absent in the 21st-century love affair with glaciers and ice. The framework offered here strives to open discussions, to introduce avenues of investigation, and to suggest ways forward not only for scientific enquiry that includes the environmental humanities and social sciences, but also for public perceptions of glaciers. Examples within this review and synthesis article are primarily meant to expose the value and various dimensions of the feminist glaciology framework; they are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather starting points to indicate lines of future investigation into this major gap in glacier studies and its related contribution to global environmental change research and both human and physical geography.

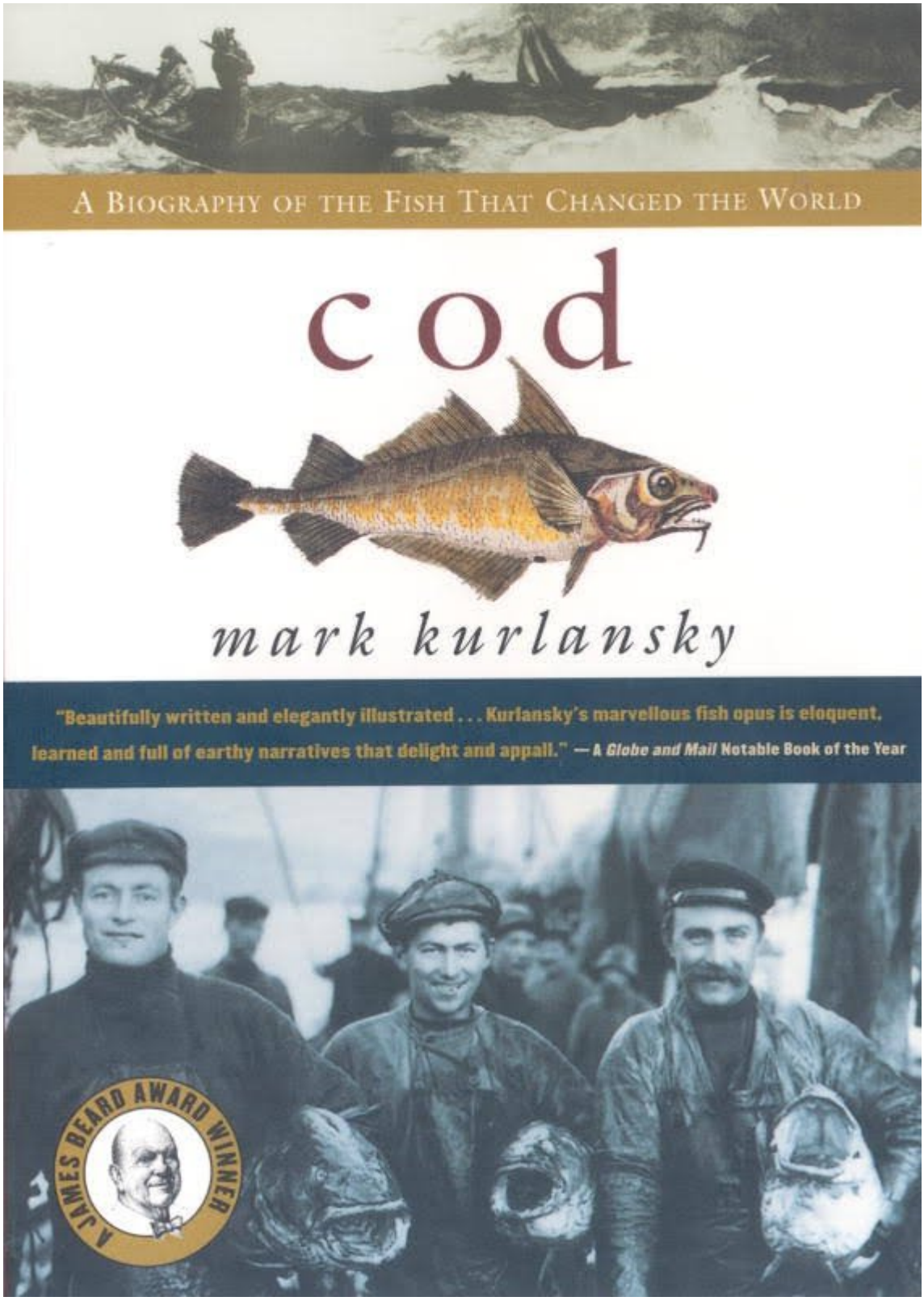
It is also not an *act* of glaciology per se, but rather a study of how glaciology is pursued. Again, the article is quite explicit about this. The lead author, Mark Carey, is an environmental and scientific historian, not a scientist himself.

https://t.co/1Sr63qTB2w

But none of this should be held against the paper or the broader mode of inquiry it represents. On the contrary, this is a good example of scholars doing the kind of work that many critics of the academy claim to desperately want. That is to say:

An interdisciplinary work that draws connections between multiple fields in order to establish a broad theoretical framework. If you've ever rolled your eyes at yet another incredibly narrow and specialized book or article, this is probably what you're after.

And judging from the popularity of books like these, there's a real hunger among the public for scholarship that presents the historical, political, economic, literary, artistic, AND YES gendered and racial story of material things.



Some contemporary coverage:

"Kurlansky finds the world in a grain of salt." ~ NYTimes, on "Salt"

“One of the 25 Best Books of the Year.” ~ The New York Public Library, on "Cod"

“Required reading.” ~ NYPost, on "Banana"

No, "Glaciers, gender, and science" is not going to become a runaway bestseller anytime soon, but so what? It wasn't meant to. It does its own thing for its own audience, and it does it relatively well. There's value there, for those charitable enough to give it a fair chance.