

Twitter Thread by Simon DeDeo



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This is a pretty valiant attempt to defend the "Feminist Glaciology" article, which says conventional wisdom is wrong, and this is a solid piece of scholarship. I'll beg to differ, because I think Jeffery, here, is confusing scholarship with "saying things that seem right".

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> pic.twitter.com/qtSFBYY80S

— Jeffrey Sachs (@JeffreyASachs) October 13, 2018

The article is, at heart, deeply weird, even essentialist. Here, for example, is the claim that proposing climate engineering is a "man" thing. Also a "man" thing: attempting to get distance from a topic, approaching it in a disinterested fashion.

Also a "man" thing—physical courage. (I guess, not quite: physical courage "co-constitutes" masculinist glaciology along with nationalism and colonialism.)

There's criticism of a New York Times article that talks about glaciology adventures, which makes a similar point.

At the heart of this chunk is the claim that glaciology excludes women because of a narrative of scientific objectivity and physical adventure. This is a strong claim! It's not enough to say, hey, sure, sounds good. Is it true?

The evidence presented is a grab bag of facts scattered around historical time periods that amount to causal claims by mass of circumstantial evidence. The Times article, the fact that overseas scientific expeditions were colonialist (+ colonialism is a man thing)...

Is any of this actually true? The basic assumption here is that the "narrative" that is what matters, and the way to fix the problem of sexism in science is to get counter-narratives going. Here's one they propose, from a "source of native wisdom"(tm, my scare quotes)

I guess the problem for women in field research is that they want to feel deferential to glaciers?

Are glaciers governed by the laws of physics, or are they sentient beings who don't like the smell of grease? To assert the former is "masculinist", and I suppose feminist. Also, great end quote on this page.

Also anti-feminist: using computer models of glacier formation, rather than considering the spiritual aspects of glacierness.

(Just for the record, I kind of pre-committed to this tweet thread, and I had no idea just how bizarre this journey was going to get.)

Researchers should consider the possibility that satellite images of ice flows are actually porn. (Why? Because the authors saw a piece of art.)

HOWEVER, it is OK to see glacier porn if you are up close. (This is actually one of the "core issues in feminist geography").

Just for the record, this is not a sort of whimsical or literary-criticism piece—although the authors seem to confuse literary criticism with sociology and STS. These "results" are going to be important components that will unstick international policy on climate change.

I hesitate to suggest this, but I am not sure the authors have make a good case for this.

Presumably, the authors think that scientific objectivity, physical courage, the use of computer models, and of fluid dynamics are anti-feminist, or at least highly suspicious. Not only that, but it's totally obvious, so they can just cite people who agree.

You might call this article a political opinion piece pretending to be scholarship, but that's a bit generous, because it involves so many strange assumptions (e.g., words create reality, like, literally, rising sea levels) that what the authors mean by politics is unclear.