

6.3: Connecting Humor and Science: A Force for Change?

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Abstract

Although sometimes science is thought to be humorless, scientists enjoy poking fun at each other and the absurdities in science. For example, *Dopeia* was a humor and satire of science publication produced by members of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists that poked fun at journals, scientists, and scholarly publishing. Other examples of humor and satire in science include *Journal of Irreproducible Results*, *Annals of Improbable Research*, and the Ig Nobel Prizes. In today's world of science communication and popular culture, humor can be used to inspire activism and provide a catalyst for public engagement. This presentation looks at the use of humor and satire to promote and influence the discussion about scientific topics such as climate change.

Outline

- **Humor and Science Communication**
- **Scientists and Humor**
 - *Dopeia* and its progeny
- **The Generations/OK Boomer!**
- **Satirical News & Late Night Comedy**
- **Why Is This Important to Science Communication?**
- **Why Librarians?**
- **Bibliography (available as a handout)**
- **Appendix: Memes, Cartoons, Fun Stuff**



Humor & Science Communication

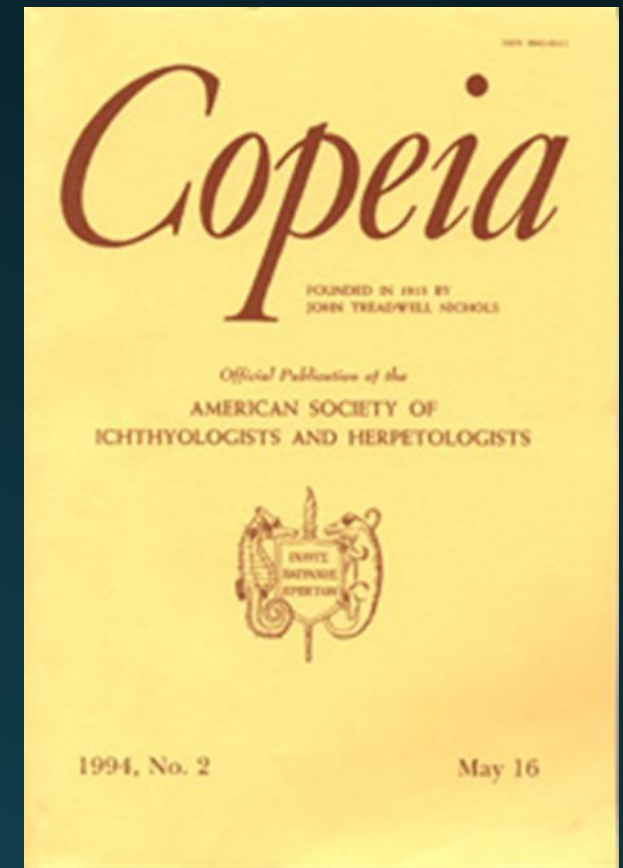
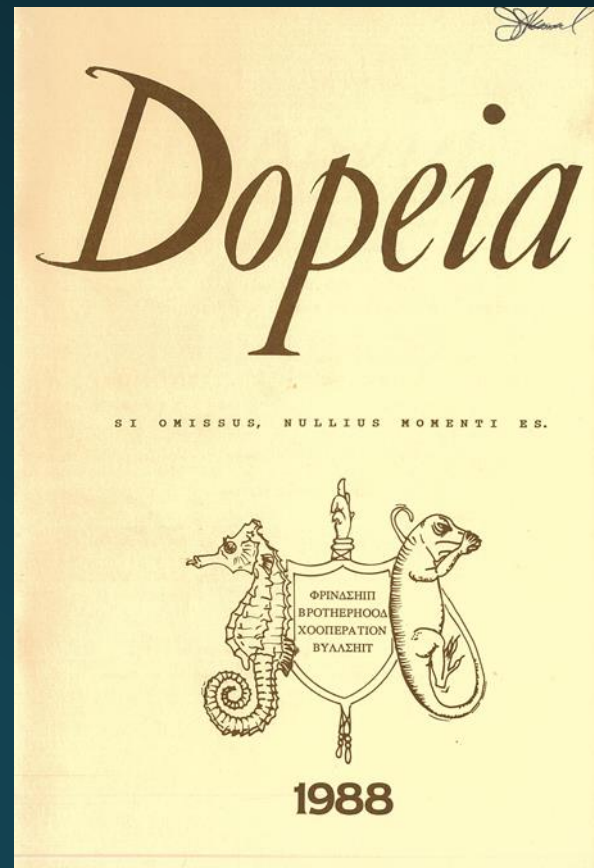
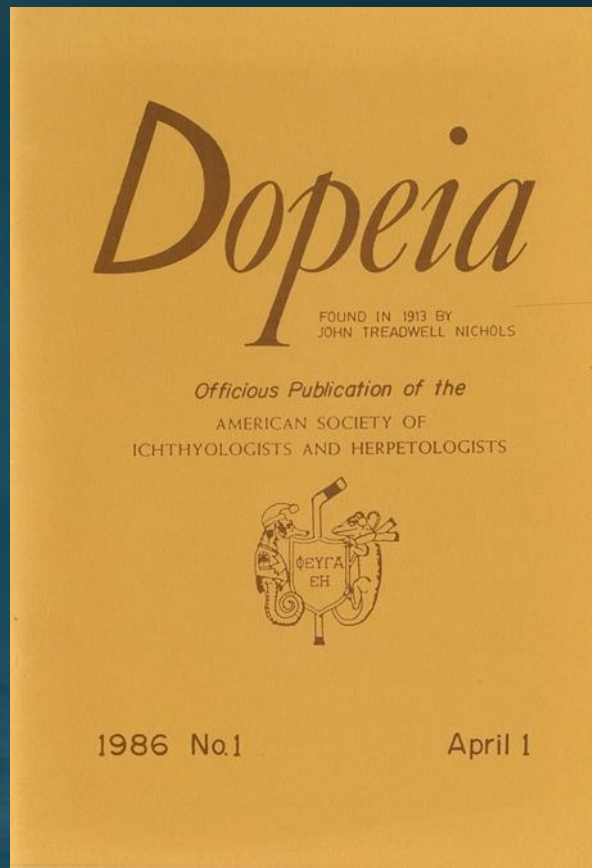
- Humor including satire, comedy, and irony are considered nontraditional communication. Over the last decade researchers began looking at humor as a way to engage individuals on polarizing topics such as climate change.
- While satire, comedy, and irony are considered forms of polite often light-hearted, engagement, sarcasm is aligned with impoliteness, used to express a negative attitude and is considered aggressive.
- Nontraditional forms of communication are important when employed in the arena of science discourse and public debate.



Scientists and Humor: *Dopeia*

- *Dopeia* was published by “American Society of Fish Prevaricators and Reptile Fabricators” and distributed at the annual meetings of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH) beginning in 1940.
- *Dopeia* was an irreverent, fun-house mirror image of *Copeia*, official publication for ASIH founded in 1913. *Dopeia* was humor by scientists for scientists.
- *Dopeia* was a predecessor to two other science humor journals: *The Journal of Irreproducible Results* & *Annals of Improbable Research* (sponsor of the Ig Nobel Awards). The audience for these latter titles shifted from scientists only to more general interest—college students, academics, etc.

Dopeia Sometimes Looked Like Copeia



<https://www.worldcat.org/title/dopeia/oclc/426052524>

<http://aquaticcommons.org/23275/3/presentation%20shaw%20joyce%20dopeia.pdf>

Dopeia Begat: *The Journal of Irreproducible Results & Annals of Improbable Research* (& Ig Nobel Prizes)



<https://www.improbable.com/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journal_of_Irreproducible_Results
<https://www.improbable.com/ig-about/>



“The Stinker” -- the official mascot of the Ig Nobel Prizes.

The Generations

GENERATIONS

main characteristics

BABY BOOMER 1944-1964

- Live to work
- Self worth = work ethic
- Loyal to employer
- Competitive
- Goal-centric
- Process oriented
- Focused
- Disciplined
- Enjoy working in teams and proving themselves to the team
- Need to know that they are valued
- Want to make a difference



GEN X 1965 - 1979

- Work to live
- Crave independence
- Skepticism
- Focused on results
- Think globally
- Adapt to change
- Eager to learn
- Thrive on flexibility
- Education is a necessary means to succeed



MILLENNIALS 1980-1994

- Fully transparent, shares everything
- Do well with detailed instructions
- Desire to make an impact
- Commerce & conscience together
- Value diversity
- Love technology
- Education is a highly expensive necessity
- Do not perform at their best in a traditional work environment
- Find solutions using technology



GEN Z 1995-2015

- Tech-innate (first generation to grow up with modern technology)
- Accepting of others
- Make things
- Realists
- Individualistic
- Competitive
- Transparent
- Entrepreneurial and Inventive spirit
- Concerned about the cost of education



Climate Change and Gen X, Y (Millennials), & Z

EDITOR'S PICK | 3,259 views | Dec 9, 2019, 06:24pm

Generation Z Fears Climate Change More Than Anything Else



Emanuela Barbiroglio Contributor

Energy

I write about sustainability and EU's environmental policies



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Protests in Madrid on December 6. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Climate change tops the list of vital challenges of our time, say young people interviewed by Amnesty International. The new Future of Humanity survey of over 10,000 18-25-year olds across 22 countries reveals that 41% of respondents cited global warming as the most important issue facing the world.

Barbiroglio, 2019

WHAT DO GEN X AND GEN Y WORRY ABOUT MOST? CLIMATE CHANGE.

Climate change is their number one cause for concern and they aren't impressed by government efforts to tackle environmental challenges

By Dr Julia Cook, Associate Professor Hernán Cuervo and Dr Jenny Chesters, University of Melbourne

Two generations of Australians believe one of the most important issues facing the country right now is climate change.

The [latest Life Patterns report](https://education.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2887895/Most-important-issues-report-final-Sept-2018.pdf)

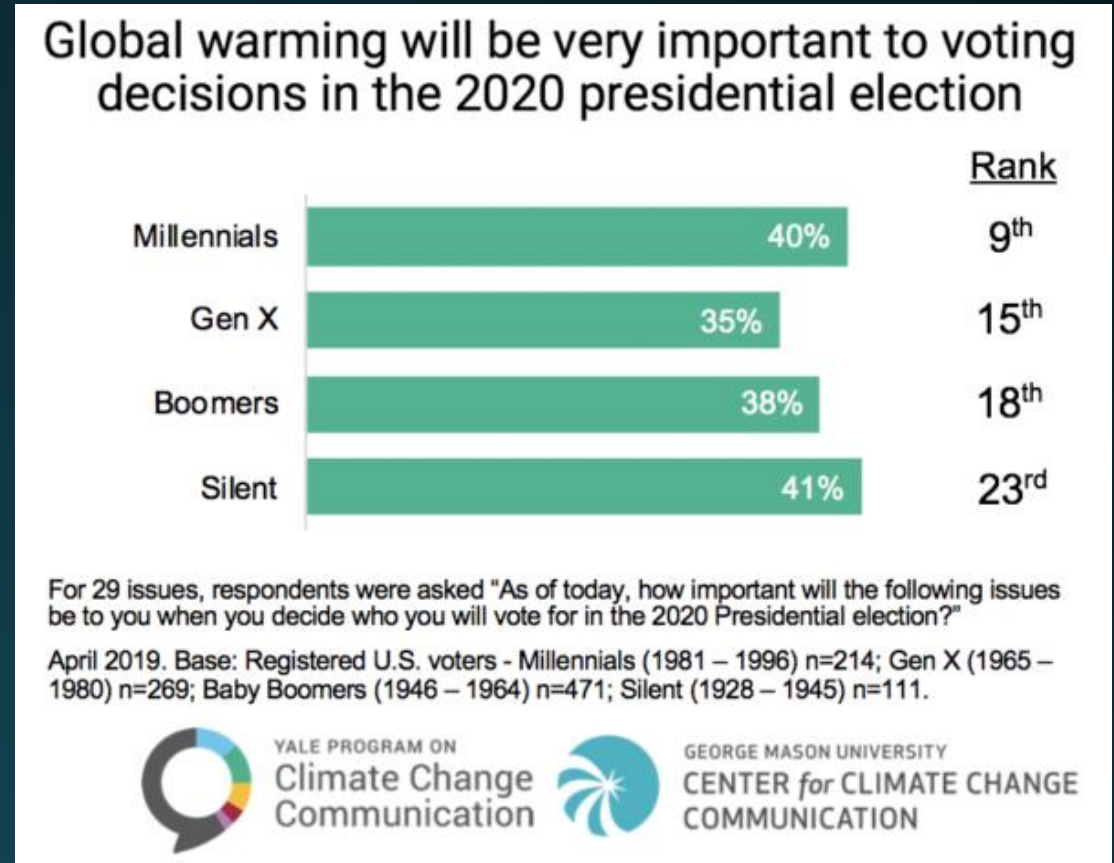
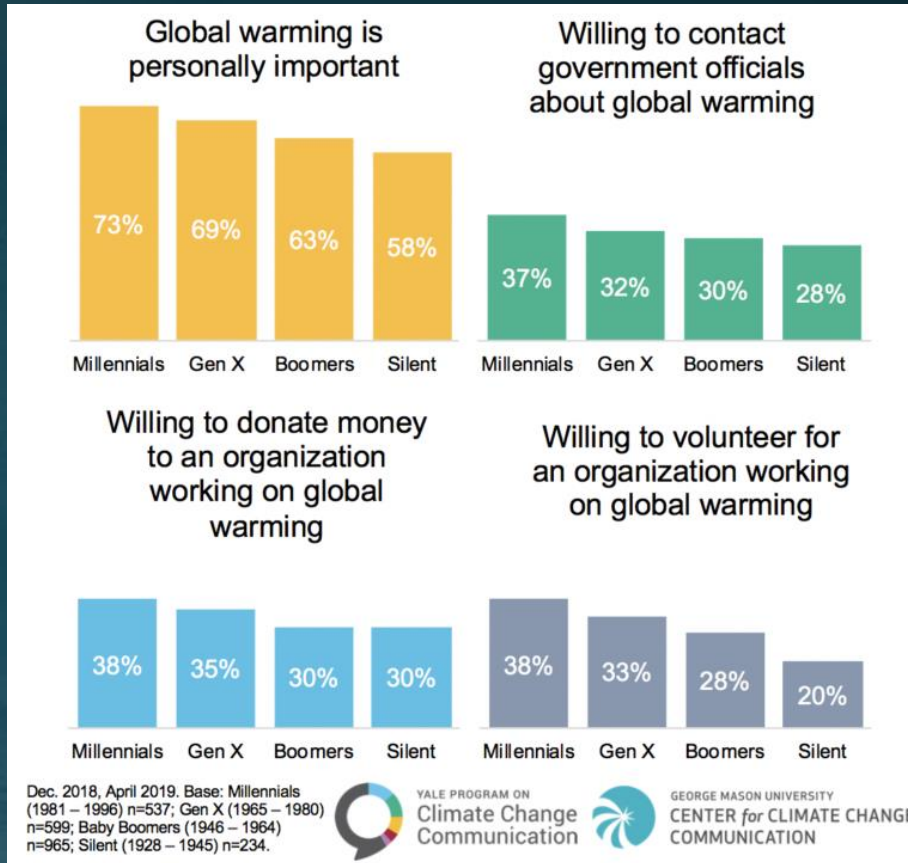
(https://education.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/2887895/Most-important-issues-report-final-Sept-2018.pdf)

by the University of Melbourne shows that many members of both Gen X and Gen Y see climate change as Australia's most significant and urgent issue.



Cook, Cuervo, Chesters. 2018

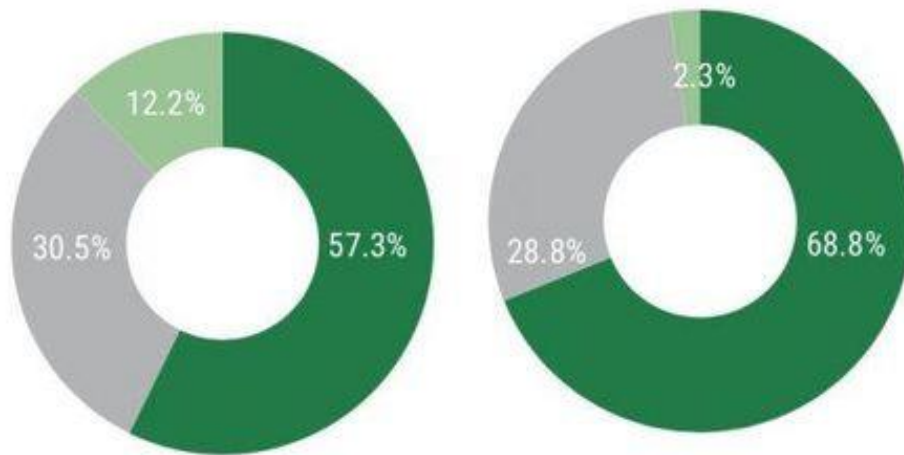
How Gens Rank Climate Change



OK, Boomer!

Where do you think you stand?

Boomers & Gen X: Compared to when you were in your 20s

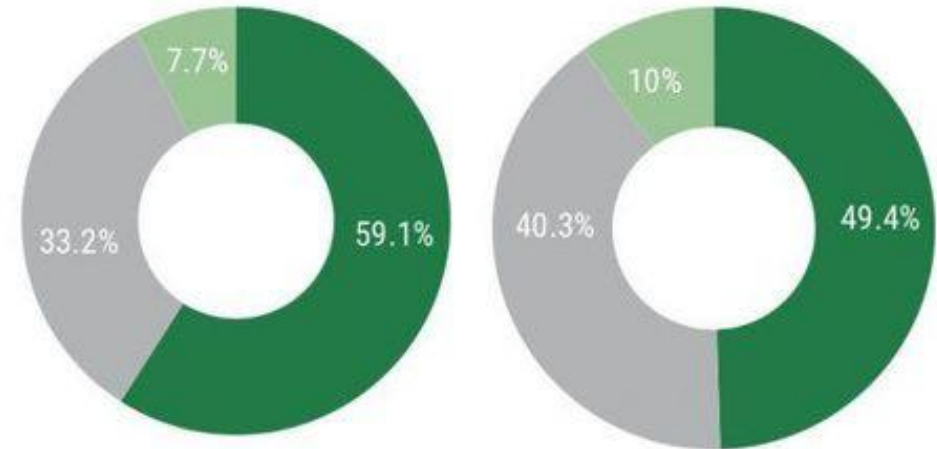


How concerned are you about protecting the environment?

How have your behaviors around protecting the environment changed?

More About the same Less

Millennials: Compared to people in their 60s



How concerned are you about protecting the environment?

How much would you say that you protect the environment?

Satirical News & Late Night Comedy (used in climate change/comedy research)

- **The Daily Show** (Brewer & McKnight, 2015; Feldman, 2013; Feldman 2017)
“Results show that a large majority of segments... explicitly affirmed the reality of global warming”
- **The Colbert Report** (Feldman, 2013) *op. cit.*
- **Last Week Tonight with John Oliver** (Brewer & McKnight, 2017)
Three climate change skeptics vs. 97 scientists affirming global warming—to provide “balanced coverage”
- **Jimmy Kimmel Live** (Skurka, Niederdeppe, & Nabi, 2019)
Study showed his monologue affected YA climate change risk perception

Gens X, Gen Y (Millennials), and Gen Z are the demographic reached through these programs.



Why Is This Important to Science Communication?

- **Humor is a way to bridge between everyday social systems. It has the power to connect people/ideas/ways of thinking. It can destabilize and threaten fundamentalist thought. Humor works better than trying to address both sides of the issue.** (Anderson & Becker, 2018)
- **Many scientists are guilty of delivering the same message in the same way to the Rotary Club or Congressional Staffers that they give at a science conference. Scientists need to understand how to use humor to “meet their audience where they are.”** (Shepard, 2016)
- **Caveat: Humor can foster understanding and misunderstanding.** (Feldman, 2017)

Why Librarians?

- **Provide a venue & opportunity to learn new skills** (Freeman, Bennett, Demas, Frischer, Peterson, Oliver, 2005)
- **Usually trusted as an impartial arbitrator & resource provider** (Beard, 2018)
- **Help scientists understand what they say as a joke can matter. Alert to how sharing “insider information” can affect public trust** (Simis-Wilkerson, Madden, Lassen, Su, Brossard, Scheufele, Xenos, 2018)
- **Provide resources (see appendix) that are appropriate, insightful, “trendy,” and humorous**

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Appendix of satirical & humorous climate change memes and articles

People are going to die because of climate change, unless we do something now!

Get a grip Karen, your species can't even lick their yum yum, much less change the climate.



You made our lives suck, we have student debt, global warming is killing us and-

Boomers:



Appendix: More, more, more woman screaming/cat memes

Internet chastising me
for not doing anything
about global warming



Me having no idea
what I even can do
about it



**WE'RE GOTTA STOP CLIMATE
CHANGE, IT'S WARMING UP THE EARTH**



**ME SHIVERING TO
DEATH BECAUSE
IT'S SO DAMN COLD OUT**



Appendix: The Child (aka “Baby Yoda”)



Makeameme.org



Appendix—The *Onion* is a great resource

<https://www.theonion.com/encouraged-marine-biologists-project-oceans-will-be-nic-1839045491> (10/15/2019)

Encouraged Marine Biologists Project Oceans Will Be Nice, Simmering Seafood Bisque By 2040

<https://www.theonion.com/climate-researchers-warn-only-hope-for-humanity-now-lie-1828171232> (8/07/2018)

Climate Researchers Warn Only Hope For Humanity Now Lies In Possibility They Making All Of This Up

<https://www.theonion.com/report-doing-your-part-to-stop-climate-change-now-requ-1835870092> (6/26/2019)

Report: Doing Your Part To Stop Climate Change Now Requires Planting 30,000 New Trees, Getting 40,000 Cars Off The Road, Reviving 20 Square Miles Of Coral Reef

Appendix: Cartoons

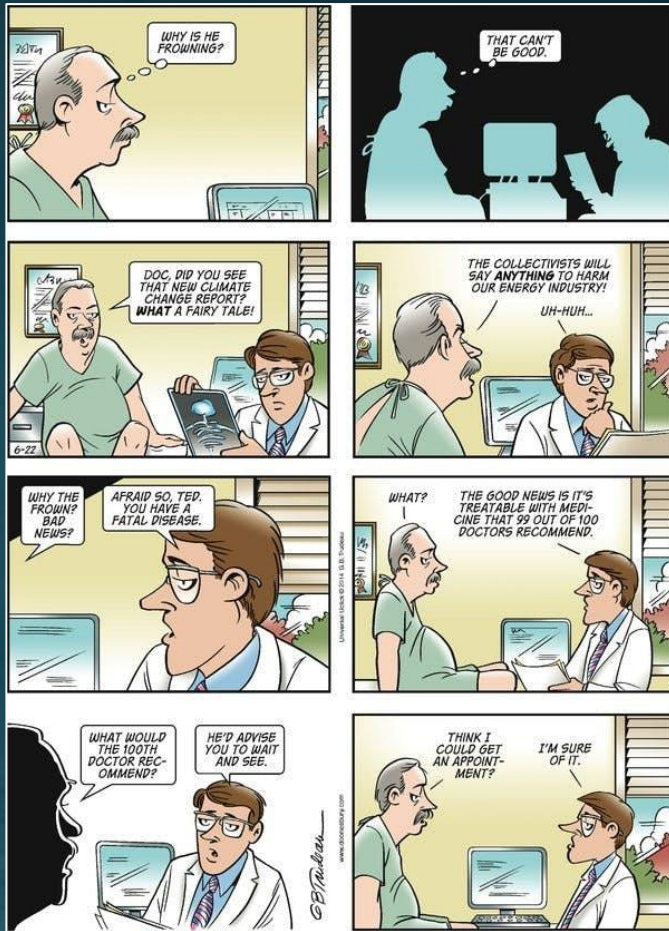


<https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article44162106.html>

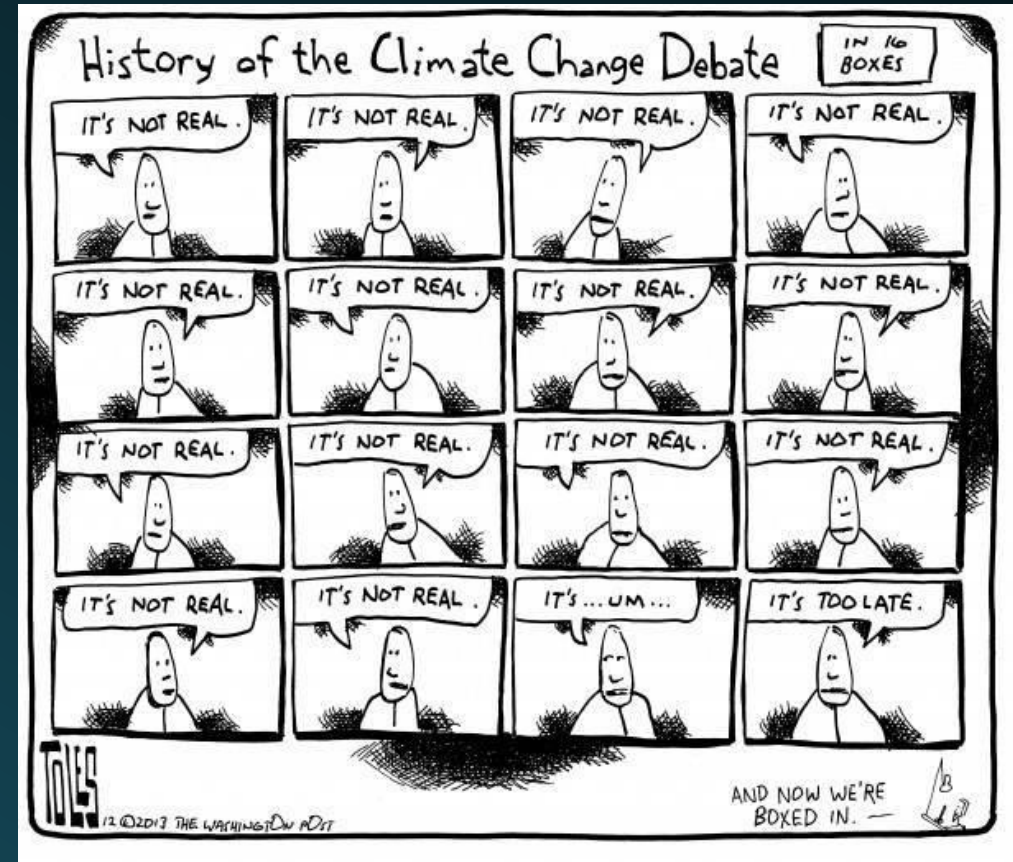


<https://scienistswarning.forestry.oregonstate.edu/research-concludes>

Appendix: Other Cartoons



<https://earthmaven.io/planetwatch/news-opinion/doonesbury-on-climate-change-can-i-get-a-second-opinion-JsOc94-XB0GuMIm2BIJFwA>



<https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/tom-toles/>



Questions?

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