

Interview with Dr. Jessica Reeves by Louise Lap - Gender CC



Dr. Jessica Reeves has been working in the areas of palaeoclimate and palaeoenvironmental change for around 20 years. She is particularly interested in connecting long-term changes in climate with changes in the environment (hydrology, vegetation, biodiversity) and impact on people through time. More recently, Dr. Reeves has been working with researchers across the Southern Hemisphere to look at teleconnections in climate change and variability over the past 30,000 years. What she enjoys most about palaeoclimate research is the need to bring together so many diverse disciplines to solve complex problems.

LL: What difference would it make if women were adequately represented in climate science?

JR: I think a greater difference would be if women were heard and in positions of influence in climate (and other) science. Perhaps some women who can spin a vivid narrative would have a greater influence on both policy and public opinion.

LL: Why should more women and girls work in climate science?

JR: Women should work in climate science because it is complex, really topical, critically important and constantly engaging. My experience has been that women I have worked with are far more capable of bringing together multidisciplinary teams – which are necessary to move forward.

LL: What has been your greatest achievement so far?

JR: Bringing together 50 researchers to achieve the OZ-INTIMATE synthesis of palaeoclimate in our region over the past 30,000 years.

LL: What barriers have you faced working in climate science?

JR: The 'old approach' in my field of palaeoclimate research was for a 'silverback' to preside over an area - either geographical or discipline. There were some multi-disciplinary teams, but generally people kept in their corner. Establishing a place in this hierarchical structure, with few female role models, was challenging. However, there were a number of women coming through the ranks at the same time and also the world of big data means that sharing and collaboration is the only way forward. So rather than play the old game, we changed it.

LL: In your work, do you see any concrete aspects of gendered climate injustices?

JR: In my work - no. In my experience, yes. Women in society globally bear the brunt of men's decisions. This includes where they live, access to water, feeding their children

LL: Do you believe that there is a male bias in the underlying assumptions that climate models are based upon?

JR: This is not something I have considered in my field. However, this may come out in the future models and our ability to make the changes that are required to meet the 'better' case scenarios. The majority of leaders in positions to make the fundamental decisions are currently male.

LL: Is there another woman in the climate sciences who inspires you?

JR: Many: Andrea Dutton, Nerilie Abrams, Helen Bostock, Claire Krause

LL: What would you say to encourage more women and girls to work in climate science?

JR: Do you believe we are currently living sustainably? Do you want to make a difference? Do you want make a contribution to how we actually undertake our lives and value our resources? You have an opportunity and responsibility to make that difference.