

AIR VENTS

Exhalations from our readers

NOTE: The opinions expressed here represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of those who hold other opinions.

Weep for The Cryosphere

You are probably aware that there is a scholarly journal called *The Cryosphere*. It has only just now come to my attention. I study affect, in particular the many varieties of affect associated with the shedding of tears. My immediate, almost reflexive joy at discovering this journal quickly turned to dismay (almost accompanied by, yes, tears) when I actually got a look at an issue. There's nothing lachrymosical about it. The issue I obtained—volume 5, number 2—displayed what I take to be an obsession with cold places. Cold is what the article titles left me. "A full Stokes ice flow model for the vicinity of Dome Fuji, Antarctica, with induced anisotropy and fabric evolution." "The surface energy balance of a polygonal tundra site in northern Siberia – Part 2: Winter." "Point observations of liquid water content in wet snow – investigating methodical, spatial and temporal aspects." At least that third article deals with liquid, but it's cold liquid, inhuman liquid, liquid that probably has low or no saline content.

That journal could have been so different, could have offered so much more.

But alas,

I cry.

Dr. H. Lesseps
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Criminal Investigator on Lint

Lint balls from navels (navel fluff, belly button fluff) won an Ig Nobel Prize in 2002 for Karl Kruszelnicki. Dr. Kruszelnicki worked on observations reported in a survey of 4799 lint-collecting people, rather than on tons (I use that word here metaphorically) of individual balls from a single person.

I am a forensic investigator, with a new (to me, I mean) interest in lint. I mentioned this during a radio program. A few weeks later, a young couple (Elisabeth and Jan from Dresden) approached me after a public lecture and handed me a full collection of lint balls collected exclusively from their own navels. This allowed me

to examine 167 lint balls from two persons instead of many different lint balls from a large number of people.

As a certified expert in biological stains from crime scenes, I checked the lint balls for some basic parameters that are generally of interest to crime scene investigators. (These were aspects not checked by Dr. Karl and the other navel lint researchers of whom I am aware.)

I took some photos, and noticed some things that have not (as far as I know) been reported:

- The balls had a very unexpected, inherent beauty—the closer one looks, the more interesting they become,

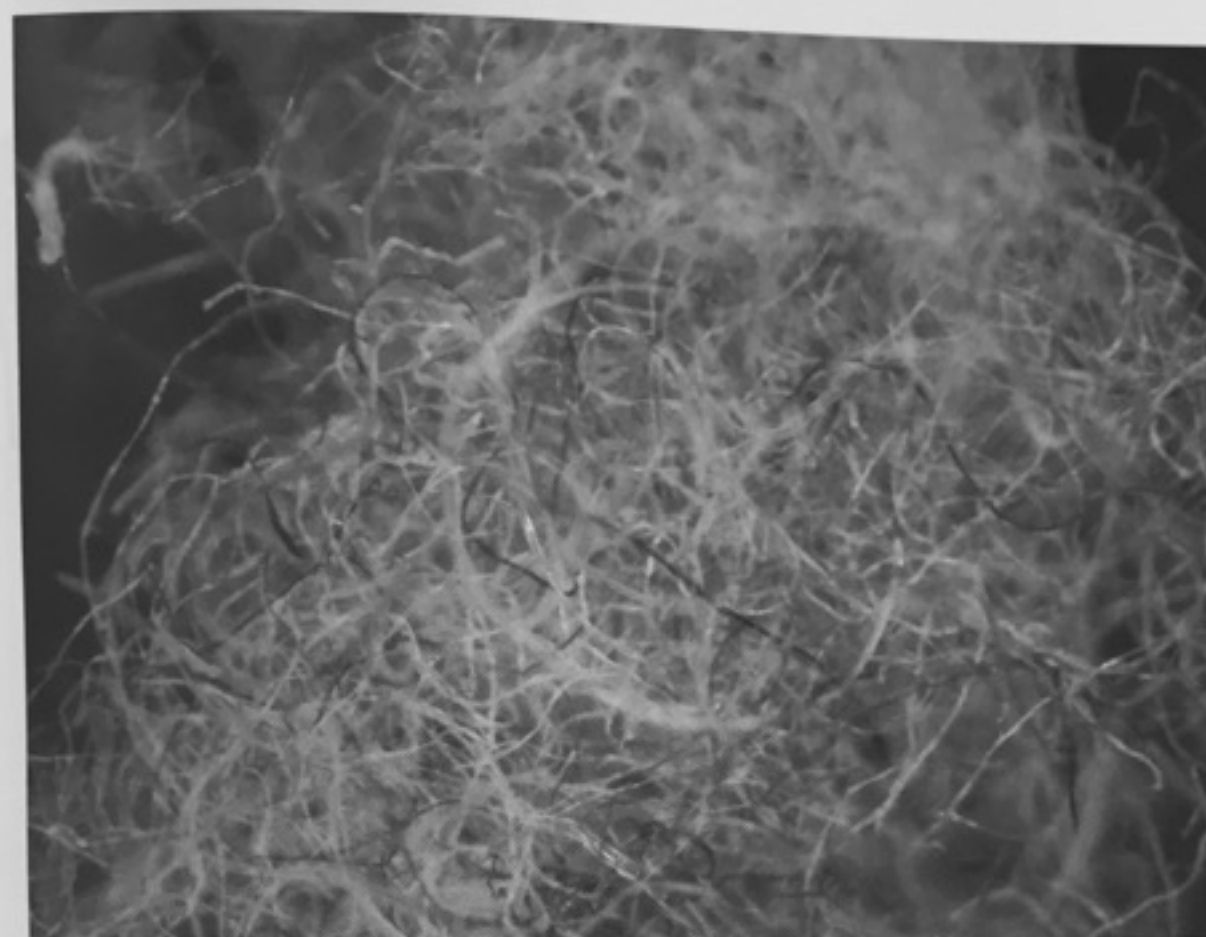
- Even balls that seemed to be composed clearly of one color tone (green, red, violet) were in reality composed of many colors.

- The weight of our lint balls is much below the typical mass reported by Steinhäuser ("The Nature of Navel Fluff," *Medical Hypotheses*, vol. 72, 2009, pp. 623–5). Steinhäuser found that the "most abundant individual mass of a piece of lint was found to be between 1.20 and 1.29 mg. However, due to several much larger pieces, the average mass was 1.82 mg in this three year study." This difference might be due to the fact that cotton wool is rapidly losing its standing in clothing items chosen by younger people, so that lighter fibers (polyester, notably) may cause the reduction in lint ball weight. It may also be correlated to the depth of the navel, or to washing the clothes and/or the navel more often.

- Single lint balls in a mass can be distinguished under a dissection microscope, but not under an SEM. For criminalistic purposes, it is therefore better to use low magnification and a sleeves-up techniques instead of the high power techniques used before.

I hope other scientists will join me in exploring this rich vein of potential knowledge.

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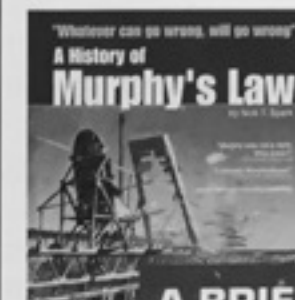


A Little About Mel

I, also, like so many of your letter writers, would very much enjoy seeing more letters about the history of the little man Mel whose photograph so often adorns your letters page. I understand that and why others disagree with me. Ignore them, please. My opinion is what counts. I take the liberty of borrowing much of the wording of my letter from what they have written. I do this in part as an expression of solidarity in the desire to see more Mel in your magazine.

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