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## Sociologies of personal relationships and the challenge of climate change

**Citation for published version:**

Jamieson, L 2020, 'Sociologies of personal relationships and the challenge of climate change', *Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 219-236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038519882599>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1177/0038038519882599](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038519882599)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Sociology

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

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## Title

Sociologies of personal relationships and the challenge of climate change

## Abstract

The substantive concerns and theoretical insights of sociologies of family, intimate and personal life ought to place this body of work in closer dialogue with environmental sociology over the 'big issue' of climate change. However, its research active practitioners typically have a narrower repertoire of engagement with global issues and those who are outside the topic area often miss the value of its contributions. This article discusses common ground between this specialist area and sociologies of environmental issues in unpacking processes of social change through empirically grounded theoretical work. This includes the renewed theoretical emphasis on relationality, empirically based critique of the 'individualization thesis', uses of 'practice' to transcend 'micro' - 'macro' and 'social' - 'natural' divisions, and interest in I/we boundary shifts. More fully recognising the potential of this overlapping territory may help leverage more effective sociological responses to the global challenge of climate change.

## Key words

climate change, family, intimacy, personal life, theory, environment, sustainability

## Author

name(s), with affiliations

Professor Lynn Jamieson, University of Edinburgh

## Corresponding author details

Lynn Jamieson, Sociology, University of Edinburgh, L.Jamieson@ed.ac.uk

## Main text of article

### Introduction

The substantive concerns and theoretical insights of the topic area within sociology dealing with family, intimate and personal life ought to place this body of work in dialogue with environmental sociology in addressing the most pressing of global issues facing societies. However, the 'big issue' epitomised by climate change, the related complexities of sustainable development, loss of biodiversity and despoiling of natural resources, remains only exceptionally taken up, despite the multiple intersections between personal life, political agency and relevant practices. In this article, I take one slice through these intersections by focusing on how studies of intimacy, families and relationships overlap with environmental sociology in unpacking processes of social change and possibilities for social change. I remind the reader that family, intimate and personal life generates human agency both as an abstract possibility and as context-specific, embodied, variable capacities for effecting social change. This reminder is necessary because the fundamental entanglements of relational selves, social worlds, political agency and creative world-making are obfuscated by some sociological theorising. Having laid this aside, I indicate possibilities of deeper engagement between sociologies of personal life and environmental sociologies through overlap in their empirically grounded theoretical directions, including the renewed emphasis on relationality,

interests in re-critiquing the 'individualization thesis', efforts to transcend separation of micro-macro social worlds in usages of 'practice' and, finally, in mutual areas of concern with I/we boundaries

Sociology engages with environmental 'big issues' at multiple levels, but, despite Radhakama Mukerjee's early plea for an ecological sociology (Mukerjee 1930a 1930b), ecology is not routinely integrated into core sociological business or across its specialisms (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, Murphy 1995). Indeed, concern with natural world environmental issues has been somewhat ghettoised (Grundman and Stehr 2010, Lever-Tracey 2008). European sociologists' engagement with climate change includes recurrent interventions from high-profile theorists (e.g. Beck, 1992, 2010, Giddens, 1990, 2009, Latour 2004, 2017, Luhmann, 1989, Urry 2011), sociologists working in interdisciplinary teams focused on sustainable development, occasional contributions across specialisms and a relatively recent environmental sociology. Rolf Lidskog and colleagues peg the beginning of a self-defined 'environmental sociology' to the emergence of a cohesive grouping of scholars engaging with grass-roots activism in the 1970s in North America (Lidskog et al 2014). The authors contrast this with a later, more porous and eclectic body of work in Europe. In the UK contributions have been dominated by the social studies of science and technology, sociology of consumption, sociology of political and social movements and their uses of media (e.g. Shaw 2015, Shove and Southerton 2000, Shove and Warde 2002, Shove 2003, Yearley 1991, 1996, 2004, 2009) but not the topic area of families and relationships (although there are exceptions e.g. Burningham 2017, Jamieson 2016, Shirani et al 2017, Phoenix et al 2017).

In the past three decades, 'the sociology of the family', like the wider discipline, has broadened its horizons and refurbished its theoretical resources in order to sustain its relevance and capacities of analysis in the context of global social change. The topic area has become sociologies of families and relationships, of intimacy or intimate life and of personal life. These different designations are sufficiently closely related to talk of a common field despite the conceptual boundary work of their advocates, (Edwards and Gillies 2012, Jamieson 2011, May 2011, 2012, Smart 2007); they share theoretical concerns, conceptual apparatus and dialogue about research methods. The broad topic area encompasses studies of friendship (e.g. Blatterer 2014, Heaphy and Davies 2012) and sexual relationships (e.g. Jackson and Scott 2010, Plummer 2015, Richardson, Stella et al 2015, Siedman 2011,) that can also be regarded as separate specialisms.<sup>1</sup> Longstanding areas of work have necessarily taken new directions reorienting to social change in mobility, transnational, 'mixed' and digitally mediated relationships<sup>2</sup>. Research attention to family life has increasingly focused on 'family practices' (Morgan 1996, 2011a, 2011b; Bourdieu 1977), the relational practices that produce the meaning of family, the sense of being a family and display being a family (Dermott and Seymour 2011, Finch 2007). Researchers have simultaneously recognised that to understand and adequately theorise the part played by personal relationships in lives as they unfold, 'family' is not the only key analytical category or always the appropriate unit of analysis. As well as focusing down on relational practices in specific types of relationships, such as parent-child, couple, sibling or friendship relationships, analysts map the total constellation of significant relationships that constitute informal enabling support systems and are the key players for personal lives: variously described as family configurations (Widmer 2016), personal communities (Pahl and Spencer 2010), networks of care (Allan 2008, Hansen 2005, Roseneil and Budgeon 2004), and important personal networks (Fischer 2011). The relational practices, the key social processes creating linked personal lives, are conceptualised and variously named as connection (Fischer 2011, Mason 2018, Morgan 1996, Smart 2007), relatedness (Carsten 2000), solidarity (Bengtson 2014, Bengtson et al 2002, Crow 2010), togetherness (Jackson

and Ray 2018), and in my own writing, practices of intimacy (Jamieson 1998, 2011). More specific examples of relational practices such as love (Jónasdóttir and Ferguson 2014) care (Bowlby et al 2010, Doucet 2017) and particular forms of intimacy (Santore 2010) are also theorised. These developments equip the topic area well for dialogue and collaboration with environmental sociology where 'practice' is also a key concept in attempts to understand possibilities of social change.

### Relationality and Individualisation

It takes selective theoretical framing to bracket off the relevance of families and relationships to wider social change, given long standing acceptance that embodied, emotionally charged, symbolically communicative personal relationships are the essential creativity-enabling context of being human and human capacities for effecting social change. Symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, phenomenological and psycho-social theoretical traditions within sociology all acknowledge the fundamental significance of such personal relationships to selves and societies. The relational process that constitute parenting, family, friendship and friendly caring relationships are reproducing bodies and species, socially shaping selves, producing liveable social world, and nurturing nature/culture through both 'carrying on' traditions and creating the conditions of 'world making' innovations. The constellation of relationships that form personal lives sustain the 'ontological security' necessary for agency and reflexivity, sense of individualisation and identification with others, including kinship with other species (Charles 2014, Gabb 2011, Irvine and Cilia 2017). Yet, in foregrounding macro-level concerns, sociologists can easily slip into treating personal life as if best described as small groups of powerless individuals in the path of global forces. The latter are often construed as the hard edges of interlocked institutions of global capitalism, supra-state and state systems, such as steel-and-petroleum-fuelled military-industrial complexes (Urry 2011), or the inescapable formlessness of disembodied discourse (Rose 1996). Hence, when theorising societal responses to climate change, the relational practices of personal life may be screened out and denied any capacities for energising collective restructuring of structures. Yet sociologists have recently reasserted and reclaimed the discipline's long-term acknowledgment that individuals are relational (Emirbayer 1997, Crossley 2011, Prandini 2015, Roseneil and Ketokivi 2016). In a relational sociology, personal lives must be implicated in wider social process since individuals and social life are mutually constituted through relationships and the relational processes or practices of their making.

The reclaiming of relational sociology occurred in parallel with commentary re-suggesting individualisation as a causal factor in the trajectory of social change. Writing from the perspective of British sociology about the period in which Mustafa Emirbayer's (1997) presented a 'manifesto for relational sociology', William Outhwaite (2009) noted individualisation was a key concept in the 'theoretical canon'. Individualisation was linked to growing fluidity, plasticity and detraditionalisation of contemporary sexual, couple and familial relationships, particularly in the 1990s work of Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1990, 91, 92) and the overlapping themes in the work of Ulrich Beck (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) and Zygmund Baumann (Bauman 1991, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2005). Major North American scholars of families and relationships crafted their own versions of the 'individualisation thesis', suggesting that both women and men increasingly prioritise personal interests over commitment to relationships (Bellah et al 1985, Cherlin 2004, 2009), a theme further popularised in Robert Putnam's account of declining social capital (2000). The response in European sociology of personal life remains predominantly critical, tempered with more enthusiasm in the domain of queer studies, where the thesis's emphasis on unprecedented individual freedom seems irresistible. The critiques are solidly evidence based, emerging from studies of lives as lived in a range of places and circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

Wave after wave of feminist-informed research demonstrates continuity as well as change in felt and enacted moral responsibility towards family, kin and friends, and, in some circumstances, continued commitment to place-based 'community', albeit that the language of choice has replaced that of obligation. Studies also demonstrate continued gender, social class, ethnic and geographical variations in practices that often, nevertheless, seek to do their best for family and friends. Variation not explicable in the term of the individualisation thesis, further stacks up evidence against it.

Environmental sociologists are also concerned to counter exaggerated claims concerning individualisation and complementarily naïve views of both 'individual' (Middlemiss 2010) and 'community' action (Taylor et al 2017). The use of social practice theory by Elizabeth Shove and her colleagues seeks to replace a view of human behaviour as the product of autonomous rational-choice individual consumers with an understanding of the socially embedded and socially constructed nature of apparently individual practices, thus problematizing 'individual choice' (Shove 2010, Shove et al 2012). Lucie Middlemiss (2014) summarised discussion of the individualisation thesis for her colleagues in sustainable development, alerting them to the need to distinguish the 'idea' of individualisation from 'realities'. She noted that her colleagues need to know if and when the tendency within sustainable development to emphasise civic participation and shared interests in common-good collective projects is misplaced, to be alert to the traction of the individualisation thesis in government, and to unintended, counter-productive individualising effects of policies framed by its assumptions. Middlemiss's use of critiques of the 'individualisation thesis' is a rare example of grasping the gains of dialogue between sociologies of personal life and environmental sociology. Niamh Moore and colleagues add the neologism privatepublics to Haraway's (2008) naturecultures to theorise the blend of private intimacies, sense of community, vegetable-growing and acts of assistance to other species enacted on an allotment rented by a lesbian and bisexual women's group. Seeing the private in the public and vice versa is consistent with a relational sociology and the meshing of micro and macro also found in practice theory.

### Melding the Micro and Macro, Social and Natural

The theoretical frame of relationality and social practice theory share an emphasis on processes that intermesh and co-construct micro-intrapersonal and macro-systemic elements. The interactions or 'trans-actions' of relational practices involve emotional states that are both embodied in human beings and 'in between' them, constituted within relationships (Brownlie 2014, Burkitt 2012, 2014, Holmes 2010, Holdsworth and Morgan 2007). Similarly, relationships 'draw on' apparently disembodied resources, such as 'cultures of emotion', as well as social and natural systems that pre-exist 'out there', and yet these are also modified in the 'in between' of relational practices of social worlds. In this reading, relationality, like practice theory, must acknowledge an element of realism, including the acceptance called for by Murphy (1995) that human activity is not the only important element in the ecosystem. Practice theorists have variously described practice as an institutionalised, routinized, organised activity that can be local or global in scale and mesh 'forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (Reckwitz 2002, p 249), 'doing and saying' that are connected to material arrangements (Schatzki, 2017, 133; Schatzki et al 2001, Warde 2005), simplified by Elisabeth Shove and her co-authors (2012) as the combined elements of 'meanings', 'materials' and 'competences'. Users of the concept of practice place more or less emphasis on the melding of micro systems, such as embodied and small-scale relational flows of knowledge, feelings and sense making, and macro systems, such as weather, military-industrial complexes and neo-

liberal discourses. Within the topic area of families and relationships, the concepts of practices and relationality are combined in the hybrid 'relational practices'; family practices, friendship practices, and practices of intimacy are relational practices that also carry other practices including the environmentally consequential practices of consumption and conservation, political and civic engagement, that are the subjects of environmental sociology (e.g. Barr et al 2011, Evans 2014, Taylor Aitken et al 2017, Wheeler and Glucksman 2015, Moore 2015).

More *empirically-grounded* theoretical flesh is needed on the bones of macro-micro melding in relational practices that also carry environmentally consequential practices. Daniel Welch and Alan Warde (2017) have discussed the process of interchange between 'general understandings' as significant and structuring concepts and particular embodied material practices. I suggest that relational practices of personal life are often at the heart of this process. For example, the banal nationalism practices that enact the general understanding of national identity, an instance discussed by Welch and Warde, are materialized in flag displaying as part of family practices and nationalist uses of 'we' in family and friendship talk. More research is needed on how family and friendship practices incorporate general understandings of natural worlds, pro-environmental practices and the dominant messages about such practices, climate change, and environmentalism documented by Philip Smith and Nicolas Howe (Smith and Howe 2015).

Studies which focus on how friendship practices interface with 'general understandings' around climate and environmentalism are thin on the ground but Katherine Dow's (2016) study is an exception, albeit of rather specific and unusual circumstances. She demonstrates how 'affective kinship with friends' (2016, 39) supports discussion of ethical issues and ethical thinking that shapes orientations to imagined futures and modifies environmentally consequential consumption practices in the here and now, such as shopping, food provisioning, cooking, and waste disposal. Her study is an ethnography of staff and volunteers, mostly young highly-educated women, living and working in a Scottish coastal wildlife centre. She found an entanglement of practices of friendship and environmentalism creating a community of like-minded similarly-ethical people seeking 'a good life' that is both virtuous and enjoyable, and may or may not involve future children. The study of Ann Phoenix and her colleagues (2017) shows how family practices work with dominant understandings of climate change and media portrayals of environmentalism. The authors map the overlap between family practice and environmental practices and the meaning of 'environment' for parents and children in 24 families with school-age children in different socio-economic circumstances in India and England. Although some parents and children are trying to increase pro-environmentalism, family practices more often mute political responses to climate change than support mobilisation for mitigating action, sometimes promoting individualising moral narratives that environmental sociologists critique as justifying minimal government action and 'business as usual' (Shove 2010, Newell 2012). The authors found examples of parents in both countries seeking to protect children from upsetting information, using humour to help dissipate media messages about environmental degradation, species loss and harms of consumption and, in some cases, to undermine children's pleas for environmental action. In households with the highest carbon footprint, affluent parents often present narratives of 'responsible privilege', that create moral distance between themselves and both the 'unconcerned' or 'ignorant' and 'hair shirt environmentalists' who advocate a frugality that would interfere with the future-oriented advantages they seek to pass on to their children or modify 'necessary' consumption for the comfort of their present-day family. In emphasising 'the relational commitments that underpin everyday practices' (2017, 139), Phoenix and co-authors could also have been speaking for Dow. The more active pro-environmentalism of Dow's research participants reflects their different relational circumstances and what Phoenix and colleagues refer to as 'environmental affordance, including risks, material opportunities, socioeconomic and



temporal resources, and priorities of care' (2017, 137). On the whole, it is environmental social scientists rather than sociologists of families and relationships who have sought to unpack processes of transmission of ecological values and understandings of nature in personal life.<sup>4</sup>

Research attention to the dynamic between relational practices and gendered, racialized socio-economic contexts in the topic area of families and relationships are also of relevance to environmental sociology in their demonstrations of both continuity of practices despite changing contexts and the resilience of communities of practice.<sup>5</sup> Complementing the findings of Phoenix and colleagues, a rich seam of research on parenting practices demonstrates how parents in advantaged positions pass on privilege consequently reproducing social hierarchies while others strive to protect their children from the harms of class inequality, racism and racialized social divisions (Carlson and England 2011, Gillies 2005, 2007, 2011, Klett-Davies 2010, Laureau 2011, Edwards Caballero and Song 2012, Twine 2010). Within this domain, research attention has been given to increasingly sophisticated explorations of transmission of assistance across the life course, and particularly the life-long help parents' give to their children (Carlson and England 2011, Irwin and Elley 2011, Klett-Davies 2010) and the resilience of intergenerational support in face of disruptions of migration (Baldassar and Merla 2014, McGee et al 2013). Studies of family life provide evidence about both normative understandings of obligations to help and actual practices of giving and mitigating negative life events (e.g. Ribbens McCarthy et al 2013, Rowlingson et al 2017). North American environmental sociology has overlapping concerns in the substantial bodies of research on the unequal consequences of extreme climate events, like Hurricane Katrina (e.g. Barnshaw and Trainor 2007) or environmental damaging industrial accidents like Deep Water Horizon also in 2005 (e.g. Cope et al 2013), and planned, government-sanctioned corporate despoiling of lands and ways of life of first-nation communities (e.g. Bacon 2019, Willette et al 2016, Norgaard and Reed 2017). The substance of such studies also overlap with longstanding cross-national interests among sociologists of families and relationships in who helps whom, when, where and why in times of upheaval, disaster and transition (e.g. Fischer, 2011, Gush et al Ryan et al 2015, Viry 2012, Widmer 2016).

### I/We Boundaries

The concept of environmental justices (Agyeman et al 2016, Norgaard and Reed 2017) and the class, nation and species based injustices of climate change draw my attention to the relational practices producing what Norbert Elias called I/we boundaries (2001). Within the topic area of families and relationships, multiple aspects of the circumstances and ways in which practices of intimacy, friendship and family create boundaries of inclusion or exclusion are subject to research (e.g. Dawson et al 2016, Castrén and Widmer 2015, Charles 2014, Jamieson 2005, McKie and Cunningham Burley 2005, Nordqvist 2017, Suanet et al 2013). Much of this work has proceeded without considering the exclusionary boundaries mitigating against climate justice, intergenerational justice or advocacy for species other than humans<sup>6</sup>. Only the latter topic is gaining significant traction. Yet lessons about conditions more or less conducive to considerate action on behalf of unknown others can be derived from these discussions and from the topic area's focus on intergenerational transmission of values.

Studies of families and relationships show considerable diversity in the extent to which relational practices draw boundaries, challenging the view that exclusionary boundary work and the 'othering' of out groups<sup>7</sup> are necessary facets of intimate relationships. Drawing on Simmel's writing about exclusionary boundaries around intimates, Zygmund Bauman (1989) presumed that only intimates treat each other as 'whole persons' (Simmel 1950) but

variation in how relational practices manage intimacy and openness versus exclusivity is demonstrated by research on the family configurations and relational practices of those living alone (Jamieson and Simpson 2013), couples (Askham 1983, Gabb and Fink 2015, Lampard and Peggs 2007), stepfamilies, and blended families (Aeby et al 2014, Allan et al 2011, Castrén and Widmer 2015, Stewart 2005, Suanet et al 2013), as well as family and friendship relationships across the life course (Pahl and Spencer 2010). Research also demonstrates variation in the openness of family households to receiving and 'bringing home' kin, friends or neighbours (Allen and Crow 2001). Variation is typically synchronised with levels of security and trust afforded by different localities, the balance of distance and friendliness in local norms of neighbouring, as well as gendered and sometimes racialised socio-economic inequalities that impact household members' space and time resources (Crow 2002, 2010, De Caro and Widmer 2011, Morgan 2009). Less research attention has been devoted to acquaintanceship but David Morgan's (2009) work suggests a continuum of relational practices of intimacy from acquaintanceship to intimate relationships. Morgan notes the significance of friendly and respectful relationships with acquaintances for a sense of belonging and 'community'. Studies of 'kindness' (Brownlie and Anderson 2016, Habibis et al 2016) indicate how the social and physical infrastructures of some places and spaces are more conducive to interactions by affording opportunities for low-level kindness to strangers and acquaintances through unobligated, friendly, interpersonal acts. Such acts create 'atmosphere' and have practical and affective consequences that 'are subtly transformative of the relationships in which they occur' (Brownlie and Anderson 2016, p1228).

The extent to which empathetic collective and humanitarian values are consciously passed from generation to generation is explicitly addressed in the intergenerational survey work of Vern Bengtson in the USA (2013). Empathetic collective and humanitarian values have been more or less explicitly addressed in smaller scale qualitative research involving interviews with multiple generations of the same family (Bjørnholt 2010, Brannen 2006, 2015, Kellerhals et al 2002, Nielsen 2017). All of these studies have a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of both socialisation and the relationship between values and practice, that easily match the theoretical efforts to transcend puzzlement with the 'value-action' gap in environmental sociologists' writing about how to foster pro-environmental action (Barr 2006, Barr et al 2011, Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002). Bengtson (2013) statistically illustrates transmission of compassionate humanitarian values among families who state they have no religion. Across the different combinations of family-and-religion in the sample, the factor most associated with inter-generational consistency in values is the quality of relationship between parent and child. This is generally supported by the qualitative research; Jean Kellerhals and her colleagues (2002) note a shift across generations in modes of transmission towards conversational maieutic relationships, an interaction style associated with emotional closeness. The qualitative research also contains salutary reminders of the selectivity, partialities and uncertainties of intergenerational transmission across changing contexts framing the lives of each generation (Bjørnholt 2010, Brannen 2006, 2015, Nielsen 2017). This is strongly demonstrated by Margunn Bjørnholt whose research finds circumstances in which men who retain the values of gender equality of their fathers fail to take up their example of shared care for children and reproduce traditionally gendered practices (Bjørnholt 2010). This nuanced longitudinal research offers empirically grounded pointers to the dangers of too narrow a focus on values, neglecting contextual affordances that may encourage drift between humanitarian values and compassionate practices.

In the early 1990s, Elias suggested that the European Union is one of a number of forms of supra state integration that is facilitating a humanitarian shift, a widening of the imagined 'we' with which the 'I' identifies (Elias 1991) but this was a 'we' that appeared not to loom large for over half of those who voted in 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK. A 'we'-narrowing, anti-



immigrant, anti-EU rhetoric infused the campaign around the Brexit referendum (Bhambra 2017).<sup>8</sup> It is known theoretically that the social context of receiving media messages and personal-life interaction around their content play a part in how people engage with and take on board their messages (Chambers 2016, Couldry et al 2016, Gauntlett and Hill 2002, Silverstone 1994), but there is little by way of research on these aspects of this particular case. However, research on European identity confirms that positive affect associated with a 'general understanding' of the European Union as an imagined community is supported by the experience of personal relationships, particularly across European borders, often as a result of realising opportunities for mobility that are not equally accessible to all (Bregbauer 2018, Fligstein 2009, Grundy and Jamieson 2007, López-Bazo, E. & V. Royuela 2017, Van Mol 2013). Clearly there are not yet empirical grounds for the hopes expressed by, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2014, 2<sup>nd</sup> page chapter 11) for transnational, multi-site 'world families' that will eventually make it: "more natural ... to live together with the excluded 'others' (who by then will have ceased to be excluded others)." Yet, understanding how I/we boundaries are and are not drawn in personal life remains a research priority of relevance to mainstream sociology and environmental sociologies.

Humans' everyday encounters with non-human species are increasingly discussed within the topic area of personal life. Much of the literature focuses on companion animals and their status as family and friends (Charles 2014, 2016, Irvine and Cila 2017, Laurent-Simpson 2017, Malone 2016, 2018, Tipper 2011). Multi-species families have been identified as 'post-human' suggesting a shift away from relationships framed by human superiority and exceptionalism (Malone 2016, 2018). Erica Fudge has suggested that both treating an animal as kin and acknowledging their unknowable 'otherness' disrupt human superiority and exceptionalism (Fudge 2014). However, as Nikki Charles notes (2016), the troubling of human exceptionalism and the human-animal boundary is undermined by a backdrop of profound inequality in the social relations of other animals with humans. Research on human-dog relationships finds evidence of mutual love and acceptance of unique individuality and agency but without yet any wider challenge to the hierarchy in which humans generally assume the right to revoke kinship with dogs and to unashamedly treat them as disposable. There is a more limited sociological literature on other species-crossing encounters in everyday personal life. However, they do typically indicate, as Jennifer Mason notes, the possibilities of humans feeling affinities with other creatures including fleeting 'emphatic glimpses into a creaturely world' (Mason, 201, 33). An ecological sociology remains elusive. Moreover, few sociologists are attentive to ecological awareness in everyday life, communities of practice or collective action in rural or urban post-industrial contexts. Interest in 'affinities' with the natural world and 'post human families' are modest steps in this direction within the topic area of families and relationships.

## Conclusion

The sociologies of families, relationships, intimacy and personal life rarely directly address the 'big issue' of climate change and associated environmental catastrophes and are not at the centre of debates about social change or imagined futures within environmental sociology; nevertheless, the case for further dialogue and future collaboration rests on common, empirically grounded, theoretical concerns. The fact that many environmentally consequential practices are conducted as family, in personal relationship and in the contexts of their domestic lives is important common ground<sup>9</sup>; but the point of this article is not to work through research on specific consequential practices, such as heating or cooling, washing, cooking and eating, waste management, home-making, gardening, pet owning and traveling, but on the topic areas' empirically grounded understandings of processes of social change and possibilities of social change.

The common ground in grappling with social change lies in discussions of relational sociology, problematizing ‘the individualisation thesis’ and uses of the concept of ‘practice’ in the theoretical melding of micro and macro, social and natural worlds. Middlemiss’s use of critiques developed within family sociology, my highlighting of the hybrid concept ‘relational practices’ and introduction of the exemplary research by Dow, and by Phoenix and colleagues, are part of an illustrative efforts to put some flesh on the bones of the argument. The two contrasting examples concern relational practices that are consequential for capacities and will, or its lack, for pro-environmental collective action on behalf of better futures for ecosystems and species other than humans: the ethical ‘good life’ versus justifications of ‘responsible privilege’. The final section on the relational practices of I/we boundaries addresses themes of inclusion and exclusion that are core issues for the discipline of sociology. However, research complementing a politics of I/we boundaries that seeks climate justice, or promotes the interests for species other than humans, remains peripheral. Some steps in this direction in the topic area of families and relationships are identified. Further collaboration and dialogue between the sociologies focused on intimate personal life and on the environmental sociologies seems overdue. Surely more can be done to leverage effective sociological responses to the global challenge of climate change.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to my colleagues at the University of Edinburgh, Julie Brownlie, Angelica Thumala and Donald MacKenzie who read earlier drafts of this paper and to the anonymous reviewers.

Thanks to staff, officers and trustees of the British Sociological Association whom I got to know better when I was president and for their ongoing work on behalf of British sociology.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This exemplifies the porousness between specialisms and British sociology as a whole. Accepting that the advantages of specialisms outweigh the dangers of fragmentation (Crompton 2008) is not to disagree about the dangers to the future wellbeing of sociology of becoming an ‘export discipline’ whose graduates enter academic jobs by trading sub-disciplinary specialisms to join legal, medical or business faculties or generic social science teams while the number of academic sociology departments diminish (Holmwood 2010, Scott 2016).

<sup>2</sup> See for example Chambers 2013, Goulbourne et al 2010, Edwards et al 2012, Holmes 2014, King-Orain 2016, Lopez 2017, Viry 2012, Reynolds et al 2018, Twine 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The individualisation thesis has also been extensively critiqued in other fields, such as youth studies (Furlong et al 2011, 2007), and subjected to theoretical criticism (e.g. Santore 2008). However, an unprecedented number and range of empirical studies in British and European sociology of families and relationships orient to this thesis. For example, in date order, Jordan et al 1994, Morgan 1996, Jamieson 1998, Lewis 1999, 2001, Neale and Smart 1999, Ribbens McCarthy et al 2003, Heath 2004, Homes 2004, Smart and Shipman 2004, Björnberg and Kollin 2005, Brannen and Nilsen 2005, Gillies 2005, Duncan and Darren 2006, , Smart 2007, Charles et al 2008.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Chawla 2009, Hards 2011 but see also D’Amore 2016, Martens 2016.

<sup>5</sup> For example, research suggests that a necessary combination for ‘undoing gender’ includes multiple conditions facilitating gender equality in child-rearing heterosexual family households, such as accessible affordable childcare, gender-equal wages and career opportunities, as well as a political commitment on behalf of both members of the couple to an ethic of fairness, competence in and capacity for determined working at achieving

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fairness (Bianchi et al 2007, Bjørnholt 2014, Coltrane 2010, Doucet 2015, Kan et al 2011, Nielsen 2017, Nyman et al 2018)

<sup>6</sup> As the previous section notes, authors are frequently melding micro and macro issue but their focus is more typically on the reproduction of structural inequalities of gender, social class and racism.

<sup>7</sup> Bauman also drew on psychology research subsequently developed by Tajfel (2010) showing that when groups are defined in hierarchical opposition, difference between in-group and out-group members becomes exaggerated and relationships antagonistic. Friend-and-family talk can participate in such 'othering' and the remarks here should not be read as doubting the dangers of combinations of segregation, othering discourses, inequalities and hierarchical social divisions that Bauman identified.

<sup>8</sup> Just as contemporary anti-immigrant rhetoric silences the UK's colonial past (Bhambra 2017), disavowals of responsibility for climate change are blind to its colonial history of 'development' kick-started by stripping natural resources from overseas lands.

<sup>9</sup> This is discussed at greater length in Jamieson 2016.

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### Author biographies

Lynn Jamieson is a Professor in Sociology, University of Edinburgh, co-director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships [www.cfr.ac.uk](http://www.cfr.ac.uk) , co-editor of the Policy Press journal Families Relationships and Societies and of the once Palgrave/Macmillan and now Springer monograph series on Studies in Family and Intimate Life. This paper has developed from an address to the British Sociological Association annual conference in 2017 when she was then president.