Class Sessions #12
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# Sociology and Climate Change

## Psychology is how individual things make a difference

## Sociology is how social things make a difference

# Leiserowitz and Fernandez, 2007: Social, not personal, drivers

## So accepted we don’t even see them

## Deep-seated norms that are “taken for granted”

### “Conference focused on the role of cultural values and worldviews in environmentally destructive behavior within affluent societies” (Leiserowitz and Fernandez, 2007).

## “Anthropocentrism, materialism, and alienation from nature.” (Leiserowitz and Fernandez, 2007). This is a social feature, not a personal one.

## Reductionism: “if we can just understand and model the behavior of each piece, we will understand the behavior of the whole.” Contrary to insights of systems theory and complexity theory.

## “Binary and dichotomous thinking”

## “Radical individualism” – “individualism privileges personal autonomy at the expense of what is best for communities or society as a whole”

## “Economism” – everything can be monetized, progress defined in terms of economic *growth* and *economic* well-being.

## “Cornucopianism and technological optimism”: “while environmental science and green technologies will certainly be important contributors to the effort to find solutions to global environmental problems, such as climate change, overfishing, biodiversity extinctions, and ocean acidification, they alone are insufficient”

## Institutions as part of sociology and social structure

### Media: balance and focus on certain topics but not others and lack of systemic critiques

### Academia: disciplinary silos, no interdisciplinarity

### Humanities: focused on humans rather than the natural world

### Environmentalism: “pragmatic and incrementalist” and focused on the symptoms of environmental damage rather than the deeper, root causes

### Policy: political gridlock with power of special interests

### Philanthropy: tactical rather than strategic

## Norms and beliefs:

### Environmental issues lack urgency.

### Scientists should not advocate.

### Environmental behavior is an individual responsibility.

### Consumerism as the basis of self-identity.

## The solutions:

### “New narratives are needed to help guide and inspire social transformation and changes in the practice of science and education, religion and ethics, and policy and economics. Narratives ranging from sacred texts to national myths to individual life stories give meaning, order, and direction to the lives of individuals and entire societies.”

### Science and education

### Religion and ethics

### Policy and economics

# UO Prof. Kari Norgaard, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* article – not assigned but an interesting read

## Research question: “What can explain the mismatch between scientific information and public concern?” -- <http://thebulletin.org/everyday-denial-climate-change>

## Puzzle: “Why most people who say they are concerned about climate change nevertheless manage to ignore it.” -- <http://thebulletin.org/everyday-denial-climate-change>

## Good case: “A high standard of living and high levels of political involvement make Norway a useful place to explore questions about apathy toward climate change. If any nation can find the ability to respond, it must be in a place such as this, where the population is educated and environmentally engaged.” -- <http://thebulletin.org/everyday-denial-climate-change>

## Sociology, not psychology: “To avoid emotions of guilt, fear, and helplessness, people in the Norwegian community I studied changed the topic of conversations, told jokes, tried not to think about climate change, and kept the concept off the agenda of political meetings. Community members ***collectively*** held information about global warming at arm's length ***by following cultural norms of what to pay attention to, what to talk about, and what to feel***.” -- <http://thebulletin.org/everyday-denial-climate-change>

## “The public silence comes from people who -- despite understanding and caring -- actively mute out the climate crisis in order to protect their senses of identity and empowerment as well as to maintain culturally produced conceptions of reality.” -- <http://thebulletin.org/everyday-denial-climate-change>

## “Working together may, over time, create the supportive environment that is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for people to face greater fears about the future and engage in large-scale social change.” -- <http://thebulletin.org/everyday-denial-climate-change>

## Discussion of the response to her work. This TOO is sociology.

# Findings from sociology: causes of climate change

## **Political economy matters:** emissions reflect how we organize politically and economically

## **Human ecology matters:** climate change is global but effects depend on local social/political conditions

## **Social factors drive consumption:** excessive consumption related to status-seeking and advertising

## **Social factors influence knowledge and response:** acceptance and response to science is socially driven

## **Social organization of science policy matters:** ability to learn and respond depends on our institutions

# Findings from sociology: impacts of climate change

## **Environmental justice:** impacts differ by social and economic categories

## **Disasters:** impacts of, and response to, disaster depend on social structures (who empowered, who not)

## **Human health:** social and health inequalities tend to exacerbate climate change health impacts

## **Security and conflict:** impacts depend on how CC interacts with security concerns, e.g., migration

## **Social demography and population:** response to CC depends on race, gender, class, age structure of society

# Findings from sociology: mitigation and adaptation

## **Multi-level governance:** from property rights to global governance, social organizational rules matter

## **Decision making and risk assessment:** how we assess risk and decide how to respond is socially driven

## **Cultures of consumption:** consumption relates as much to social identity as material needs

## **Advocacy and action research:** social structure influences success of mitigation and adaptation policies

## **Organizations and networks:** how does social organization foster or inhibit mitigation and adaptation