

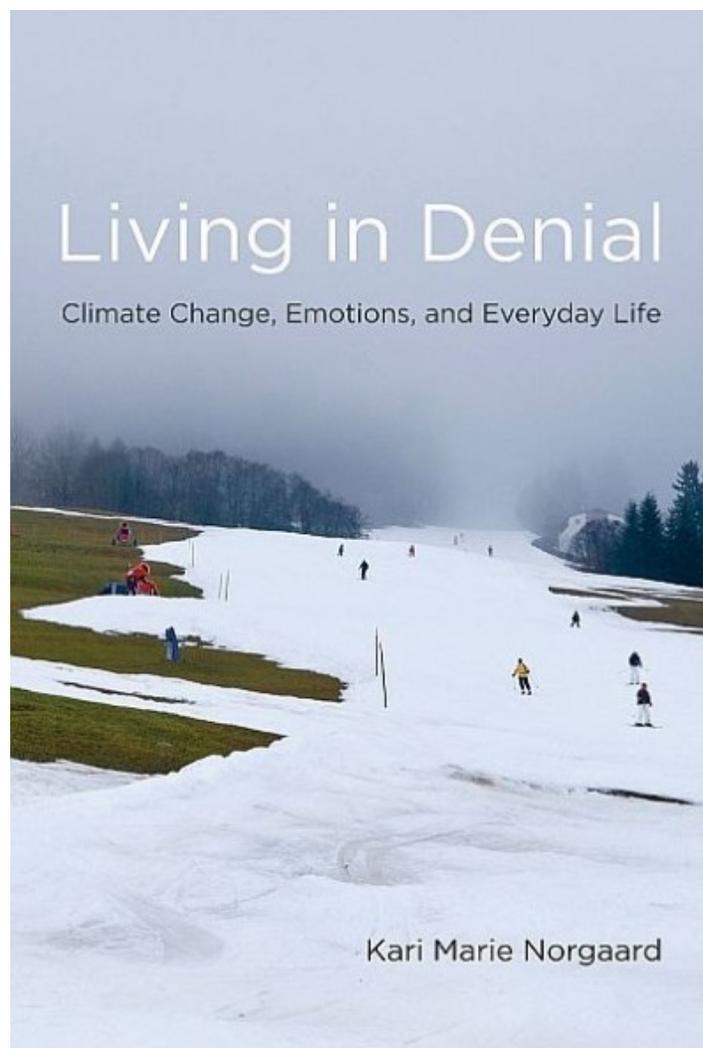
Alumna returns to WSU to talk climate change

By Pierce Greenberg

Climate change is one of the defining societal challenges of the 21st century—and sociologists are striving to be a central part of the solution. WSU alumna Kari Norgaard (MA 1994, University of Oregon PhD, 2000) is one of the leading sociologists in this emerging interest area.

Norgaard returned to WSU in September to discuss her book, *Living in Denial*, which examines the lack of response to climate change in Western countries. Her book stems from fieldwork done in western Norway where gradually rising temperatures have impacted the local economy.

Even though local industries like ice fishing and skiing were disrupted by climate change, Norwegians did not



Norgaard's book "Living in Denial" was

acknowledge it as a major issue. published by MIT Press in 2011.

Norgaard analyzes how residents

navigate emotions like helplessness, guilt, and a fear of the future in determining their response to the localized effects of climate change. Her findings have implications for how people and governments in other industrialized countries, including the U.S., adapt to and address climate change.

Norgaard is currently serving as a faculty mentor for second-year faculty member Emily Kennedy, under the WSU ADVANCE External Mentor Program.

Sociology News sat down with Dr. Norgaard to discuss her time at WSU, the importance of interdisciplinary work on climate change, and how sociology can contribute to the climate change discussion.

Sociology News: *What do you remember most about your time at WSU?*

Kari Norgaard: "I did my undergraduate in biology, so I came into this building not knowing any sociology. I sat in that 201 seminar room and people would go around and say that they did deviance.... I had no idea what that was. So, I have this memory of trying to figure out, what is it that's become sociology? What is it that's in the disciplinary box we call sociology? ... So that was very interesting for me.

And then I just remember the intensity of graduate school, my first term here, and the pace of the things.... It was exciting that there was a critical mass of people thinking about environmental sociology and that feeling of knowing you were at the center of where that was happening.

I learned a huge amount in the two years that I was here. I became a sociologist during the time I was here. I came in not knowing what that was, and I came out knowing that I was going to become a sociologist.

I definitely have fond memories of Gene [Rosa].... He was just a great guy. I miss him and I'm very sad he's not here right now.

SN: *The ASA Task Force on Climate Change recently published an edited volume that you contributed to. On the back, noted environmentalist Bill McKibben wrote:*

"Though more work always remains, the physical sciences have accomplished their core task when it comes to climate change. We know what we need to know about the causes and consequences of our actions. What we don't know is how to stop ourselves, which is why this book—and the social sciences—are so

important from here on out.”

Do you agree with his assessment?

KN: Absolutely. There are two sides to this. On one hand, there is the natural science hierarchy of the work we do in sociology. It is not seen as serious and equally important. There's not real space made for social scientists [in climate discussions]. ... There's a general sense that we need social sciences but they don't really know what to do with us.

On the flipside, sociology as a discipline is embarrassingly behind the ball. I was outraged in Chicago this year that the release of this [book] was not as a keynote.

We are at this moment when we critically need sociology, specifically, and it is way behind.

SN: What can sociologists do better to ensure our seat at the table on climate change discussions?

KN: I think environmental sociology has a bad reputation amidst sociology in general. I think it's partly our fault. There is not much cross-over with race and gender. We are seen as wannabe-scientists, very focused on positivists. It's one technique, it's important, but we're not bringing a lot of the best of what sociology has to offer.

[Members in the Environment and Technology ASA section] overlap with every other section, but... we have very weak ties with the discipline as a whole, and I think that goes both ways.

That has to do with things that happened in the history of environmental sociology that I wasn't around for. It's not well integrated with the best, cutting-edge work in the other parts of the discipline, as a whole.

Now is the time that climate change is as much of a game-changer for how society is going to operate—and what sociological theory is going to need to do—as it was at the time of the early founders, who were writing at a time when [the world] was becoming very urbanized. This whole concept of a modern society was a new thing they were trying to theorize.

I think we are equally on the verge of that kind of level of change in how things are working. And sociology is urgently needed to be engaging in that way. Both, for keeping our discipline current and for the world.

