



Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life (MIT Press)

By Kari Marie Norgaard

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Global warming is the most significant environmental issue of our time, yet public response in Western nations has been meager. Why have so few taken any action? In *Living in Denial*, sociologist Kari Norgaard searches for answers to this question, drawing on interviews and ethnographic data from her study of "Bygdaby," the fictional name of an actual rural community in western Norway, during the unusually warm winter of 2000-2001.

In 2000-2001 the first snowfall came to Bygdaby two months later than usual; ice fishing was impossible; and the ski industry had to invest substantially in artificial snow-making. Stories in local and national newspapers linked the warm winter explicitly to global warming. Yet residents did not write letters to the editor, pressure politicians, or cut down on use of fossil fuels. Norgaard attributes this lack of response to the phenomenon of socially organized denial, by which information about climate science is known in the abstract but disconnected from political, social, and private life, and sees this as emblematic of how citizens of industrialized countries are responding to global warming.

Norgaard finds that for the highly educated and politically savvy residents of Bygdaby, global warming was both common knowledge and unimaginable. Norgaard traces this denial through multiple levels, from emotions to cultural norms to political economy. Her report from Bygdaby, supplemented by comparisons throughout the book to the United States, tells a larger story behind our paralysis in the face of today's alarming predictions from climate scientists.



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Editorial Review

Review

At a time when most climate denial scholarship focuses on an extreme right-wing fringe, Norgaard's strikingly original and fascinating research invites us to see the many ways in which we are all in denial about climate change, and the profound challenges it poses to our identities and cultures. A rare and important book with powerful insights on every page.

(Naomi Klein, author of *The Shock Doctrine*)

This is an extremely important intellectual contribution. Research on climate change and culture has been primarily focused on individual attitudinal change. This work brings a sociological perspective to our understanding of individual and collective responses to climate change information, and opens up a new research area. It also has important practical implications...This perspective calls for a much different approach to climate change communications, and defines a new agenda for this field.

(Robert Brulle *The New York Times "Dot Earth"*)

Drawing on the way Norwegians deal with the reality of global warming, Kari Norgaard provides an incisive account of the way individuals' avoidance patterns reflect social norms of feeling, attending, and discourse. As such, this book is an important step in the development of our sociological understanding of denial.

(Eviatar Zerubavel, Board of Governors Professor of Sociology, Rutgers University, and author of *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* and *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*)

Living in Denial is particularly interesting because of the ethnographic research methods employed, which are unusual in such a field as global climate change. We gain a rich understanding of how people react to information about climate change. This book shows why information-rich programs are inadequate to get the general populace to take action to address this most serious of issues.

(Randolph Haluza-DeLay, Department of Sociology, The King's University College, Edmonton; co-editor of *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada*)

Kari Norgaard has written a rigorous and insightful account about a subtle and profound social problem that confronts the mitigation of climate change -- namely, the cognitive and social tools used to deny or ignore a problem even when the populace agrees it should be addressed. The population of Bygdaby holds a solid national image of itself as a humanitarian, egalitarian, nature-loving people who love their snow. Yet they fail to even think coherently about climate change. This startling mismatch makes the storyline of the book quite engaging, and it will undoubtedly be recognized for making an important contribution by explaining how this mismatch is socially produced.

(Peter Jacques, Department of Political Science, University of Central Florida)

One of the great unanswered questions in politics is, why is there not more mobilization about more issues? People see all sorts of things they dislike; why don't they do more to change them? 'Free riding' is hardly a sufficient answer. Kari Marie Norgaard provides a much better, ethnographic account by looking at a remote town in Norway, whose citizens work hard to deny the threat posed by global warming. One of the most surprising findings is the amount of emotion work they do to keep from facing up to climate change. Unfortunately for our future, but fortunately for the power of this book, 'Bygdaby' is the world we all inhabit.

(James M. Jasper, CUNY Graduate Center)

This is an original and extremely important intellectual contribution. The analysis of social responses to climate change information has primarily focused on individual values and beliefs. Norgaard's work moves beyond this individualistic focus and brings a social dimension to the analysis of climate denial. She demonstrates that climate denial is a social process in which collective actions are taken to restore a sense of equilibrium and social stability. This book advances our understanding of climate denial and lays the ground for new approaches to climate change communication.

(Robert J. Brulle, Professor of Sociology and Environmental Science, Drexel University)

About the Author

Kari Marie Norgaard is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies at the University of Oregon.

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