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START AUDIO

Introducer: Welcome to the BSA Presidential Address. Nice to see so many of you.

It is my great pleasure to introduce Professor Lynn Jamieson, who was elected as the BSA President in 2014. Lynn is Professor of Sociology, Families, and Relationships at the University of Edinburgh. She has previously been a Trustee on BSA Council, Chair of the Heads and Professors of Sociology Group as well. She does much of her work at the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships at Edinburgh, of which she is Co-Director.

She is involved in the longitudinal research for growing up in Scotland, and 20+ Futures, looking at the views of young people on issues including recession, climate change, security threats, and parenting. Lynn has also worked on a study of young people living alone, at ages usually associated with living with a partner or children.

Her portfolio of research, which is extensive, includes work on European identity and work on gender violence. She is probably best known for her writing on intimacy, particularly the book Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies, which was published in 1998. She is also currently co-editor of a book series called Studies of Family and Intimate Life, and this is with Graham Allen and David Morgan. It is published by Palgrave Macmillan and now Springer. Lynn has recently become one of three editors of the relatively new Policy Press journal Families, Relationships, and Societies, and has also recently edited a special issue in that journal, entitled Families, Relationships, and the Environment: Climate Change, Sustainability, and Biodiversity.

She is going to talk for about 50 minutes, which will leave plenty of time for questions and discussion, and can I just say that at the end of the session Laurie Taylor will present the BBC Ethnography Prize, so please don’t rush off.

 Okay, over to you Lynn.

Lynn: Thank you. Right. Okay, so before I forget, it is time to nominate the next President, and anyone can put in a nomination, so just get on with that. Right. I will start talking in a minute – I’ve forgotten to get this on.

So that is my structure to my talk: this is what I hope to be doing. So in talking about this area of work, what I’m hoping to do is talk about my specialist area, if you like, if you think about… I don’t know whether you, as a sociologist, think of yourself as working in a particular topic area, so I am badged with, well, depending on where you are, families and relationships when I’m in Edinburgh, intimacy in some contexts, personal life maybe.

And I’m going to talk about this topic area in relation to the discipline as a whole, and I’m hoping that you’re going to think with me about issues about our discipline and the relationship between specialisms and the discipline, that is the idea. And so although you may not be working in this particular field, I’m hoping that you’ll find something of interest in this.

Okay, so I wanted to start with just some, what some people call throat-clearing remarks, some introductory general remarks. So I wanted to make it clear, for example, that I don’t there is any one correct way of doing sociology, that that is the case both methodologically and theoretically – I don’t think there is a brand, I don’t think there is a single brand that is the one way, although I will be talking brands of theory some of the time.

In this topic area, David Morgan is the main theorist within the specialism, whose work spans the decades since the 1970s, and who of course we are pleased is here, and who has more or less explicitly addressed issues of the relationship between this specialist area and social theory in a series of books that I’ll show you and talk about in a minute.

But also by way of introductory remarks I wanted to say that there is, in these debates about brands of theory and theorising, I think it is important to also acknowledge that sometimes there is audiences in front of whom it is best not to talk ourselves down. So I think that sometimes saying the glass is half-full is really better than saying it is half-empty, because it doesn’t do us any favours to detract ourselves when there is no purpose of doing that in front of certain audiences, okay, so… This will maybe become clearer in a minute.

Right, so I’m starting with this image of our journals. So we have the Sociology BSA official journals here, and some specialist journals down below. So this is representing this relationship between the discipline and the specialist areas. So Sociology is a discipline in which specialisms are often also, I suggest, the core. So some of our Sociology BSA journals, some people might think are specialist and others might say are core. And as far as I’m concerned, there is a coherence in a lot of specialisms – they are part of the core.

So when I took up the editorship of a specialist journal, I didn’t think of myself in any way detracting from the core of the discipline. But having said that, that doesn’t mean in any way that I disagree with concerns and fears about Sociology not being taught any longer in sufficient Sociology-specific departments, or not being returned as a unit of assessment in the Research Assessment Exercise. There has to be a visible core of the discipline, and there are very real threats I think in the current climate to that core.

But I’m completely optimistic about Sociology as a discipline, and my optimism is based on the quality of the work that we do. And I’m not talking about my work, I’m talking about your work. And the relationships that I have with sociologists, they give me faith in the discipline, despite this context of creeping privatisation of higher education, and some very real threats and difficulties, especially perhaps for early career sociologists. But early career sociologists themselves give me incredible confidence in the future of our discipline.

Okay, so that is my throat-clearing remarks, my beginning. One thing that I want to say about my topic area is that it is methodologically dominated more by qualitative research than any other kind of research, although within that there is quite a diversity of types of qualitative work. But it isn’t exclusively so: there is also some strong quantitative work going on, and a lot of mixed methods work.

But the reason for showing this is because also it makes the point about the relationship between the specialist area and the wider discipline. I think there is aspects of the topic area – of personal life, families, relationships, intimacy, domestic life, whatever we want to call it – that are quite challenging for researchers. They raise quite big issues around ethical concerns and they’re emotionally sometimes quite demanding. It is not the only topic area like that, of course, but it results in taking reflexivity about the whole research process very seriously, and I think that contributors to this topic have been quite influential in leading roles in also writing more generally about research methods. And so Ros Edwards, for example, was a founding editor I think of the International Journal of Research Methods, and Jennifer Mason’s work is incredibly well known, generally, when people are looking for inspiration about qualitative research.

So the topic area is also one that is a main thread in popular culture. So there is lots of popular culture around personal life, families, relationships, the programme Friends, I’ve got here some Little Britain. It is also a political football: it is talked about a lot by politicians, headlines about families from hell and so on are quite common. So it is an area in which, I think, public sociology is something that we have to engage in and are engaging in.

So lots of people in this topic area are working on topics that are deliberately trying to address – call out harms, sometimes of government or others in power that are being inflicted on people who are less powerful, dispel myths, counteract stereotypes. That kind of work is very standard within this topic area, and I think well done, although not always successfully translating back into changing the popular discourse that it is directed at.

But to just give you some examples. Simon Duncan and Ros Edwards and others adopted the phrase ‘gendered moral rationalities’ to describe the choices made by some mothers to live on benefits and look after their children – rather than to take paid employment, to take low-paid paid employment, and put their children in care arrangements that they know would be less satisfactory than the care that they themselves could give their children.

To take a much more recent example, from a recent Sociology, journal Sociology, this is a piece of work that is looking at the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey and using their data to argue against the stereotyping of poor mothers – the assumptions that pop up in sometimes Government Minister discourse about poor parenting and showing that actually the evidence doesn’t support those kinds of assumptions.

So those sorts of forms of work are really common in the topic area, and of course there are lots of harms and challenges in this area to try to address. And you can see that some of this work is going to be in some senses on the boundary between sociology and social policy work, but it is often also addressing much bigger sociological issues, so Val Gillies’ work on class differences in parenting, Tracey Reynolds’ work on British Caribbean mothers, Jane Ribbens McCarthy and others’ work on family troubles are all addressing issues about reproduction in class inequalities, racism, racialized ethnicity and so on.

But some of it does get very wide media coverage, so here is Jacqui Gabb’s work. It is precisely because it is a topic that has very significant interest – everybody has families, everybody is interested in relationships, everybody has got friends – so it is sometimes, I wouldn’t say it is easy to get good coverage, and Jacqui will have worked hard to get the coverage that she has got, but it can be picked up and get good coverage.

Now you’ll know that of course there is now a growing literature on impact and along with the ESRC drive there are other completely separate from the way that our funders are shaping our agenda, so there are completely separate good sound political reasons for trying to make your work get to audiences beyond the academic world.

And the literature on how this is most likely to happen, and my own experience suggests that actually an element of serendipity is often involved – it is extremely difficult, it is a very complicated process to try to manage, and I’m certainly not a strategic enough academic to totally orchestrate this, but working with other non-governmental organisations, other change-agents if you like, other activists, is basically extremely important.

So I would totally disagree with one of the comments that was made by our speaker yesterday, about not wasting – I think she said, “Don’t waste your time working with the child poverty action group”, but I might have misheard that. But it was something like that. I actually think working with people who are already in the business of lobbying and mobilising for a topic, and feeding them your information – if your research is in their domain – is much better than trying to put it about yourself in some ways, because they are already connected, know what they are doing. So whatever level that is, I think there is always sense in that, and that is where success I think sometimes is had.

Okay, so the more of the personal that is this title that I’ve given myself, is what I want to talk about now. And finally getting more explicitly on the topic of C. Wright Mills. The slogan ‘The personal is political’, I take for granted. Mills’ private troubles, public issues, we could all agree. But as sociologists, we know that personal life is always framed, constrained, structured, in the Dorothy Smith sense maybe of the everyday world being problematic, of there being bigger framework of ruling relations, might be one way you might want to think about it. You might want to think about it in terms of discourses or simply the economic structuring or whatever.

Personal life is sometimes almost talked out of existence as a creative source of potential social change by some of the way that sometimes sociology frames this relationship. And I just want to remind you of all of the theoretical ways in which actually this area is also about world-making. So we don’t talk very much about socialisation any longer – it is not a popular term – because it got somewhat tainted, I think, by our move away from frameworks that seem too rigid and too top-down.

But it is important, I think, in trying to theorise personal relationships and their way of contributing to the world-making, that we don’t forget that actually, something is carried with us through our biography – that the theoretical positions that put great emphasis on the early years, so a Freudian view or some versions of reading Pierre Bourdieu’s work, for example, would say that there is a sedimentation pretty early in life, that then goes with you as your habitus or whatever.

That is difficult to change, and makes you uncomfortable in some fields if you were Bourdieu’s language, whereas other theoretical approaches would have us much more \_\_\_[0:20:17], in the moment, constantly remaking. But either way, personal relationships that are emotionally charged are an important aspect not only of who we are but our capacity to act in the world and do and remake the world.

So David Morgan in his text in the 1980s, the middle, the family politics of social theory, already then has a section summarising the theoretical state of the art in terms of seeing the family not just as an endpoint but as centrally concerned with interconnecting between interpersonal and structural. And then starting to move beyond thinking of it as that middle position, to something much more actually active, certainly taking issue with it ever being seen as a passive variable, whatever the ‘ever’ is. I don’t just mean family relationships, I mean personal relationships more generally, intimate relationships. But also acknowledging family and personal life is what helps us think about social change across generations.

Now recently a number of authors have re-emphasised relational sociology – the field of the sociology of emotions now sees emotions as relational. Sasha Roseneil and a co-author and also Nick Crossley are recent authors of work on relational sociology, and you can see from the sweep of the titles there, the extent of social change both in…

So I’ve got as representing sort of family, we’ve got David Morgan, a line of David Morgan books, not every book he has published by any means. Representing sexuality, we’ve got a line of books by Ken Plummer. I don’t know if you can possibly not read the title on that first book there, Sexual Stigma. So he moved from Sexual Stigma to Cosmopolitan Sexualities. You can see how much – at one level how profound the social change that people are themselves reflecting in their writing and that is change that in some senses has been enacted by people in their personal relations, that is change that has happened by people making it happen.

But my own work, Intimacy, has also of course been to some extent about pouring cold water on some of the accounts of social change that are in, not this work particularly, but in social theory, in maybe more mainstream social theory.

So I just now want to talk a little bit about whether we can identify a theoretical canon. William Outhwaite writing in Sociology in 2002, described a theoretical canon for the decades that had just passed. David Morgan in his first book was quite clear, and I think it wasn’t I think then difficult to identify the theoretical canon, because we’re still in the territory that overlaps with Mills almost. Or at least the error that Mills was writing of is still very much around, so functionalist, structural functionalist, was still casting a very big shadow, and in that first book David talked about phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, in a blend with Marxism and Feminism – the new emergent, if you like, approach.

So William Outhwaite talks about Giddens, Beck, Baumann, and Bourdieu as the canon, and he talks about their emphasis on individualism and also the juggernaut of a runaway world globalisation, as two of the strands of work that unites them. And you can see in the book titles from America on the left of this overhead, individualism and the idea of people ending up alone, even when they’re in couple relationships, has been quite a strand.

So a lot of writing about personal life has oriented to this theoretical work and the optimistic version of it has been Giddens, whose book Transformation of Intimacy has been so influential, and my own work has been critiquing both the over-optimistic nature of that work and also the absurdly pessimistic, I would have argued, I do argue, nature of some of the rest.

And that book, published in ‘98, I am still trying to get the second edition finished, the overarching message isn’t going to be terribly different, in that there is still a gap between rhetoric and reality, there is still a gap between what people talk about in terms of intensely intimate and equal relationships, and the kinds of friendship – parent-child relationships, couple relationships, sexual relationships that are the relationships that we live in.

It is not that there aren’t intensely equal and intimate relationships, but they’re not necessarily the only or main story and the kinds of the ways in which people do intimacy are much more complex than the, “Let’s just disclose our inner selves to each other” view of intimacy that was promulgated around that time.

And there is lots of new empirical work that reaffirms that alongside this discourse, there is still life in the much more traditional discourse, the idea that men are really naturally the earners, the providers, that men need sex more, that women need someone to love more – those scripts are still there, still alive.

And one of the reasons that I did the work on living alone was to try to dispel some of the, both the stereotypes of the sad and lonely or the swinging single who doesn’t care about anything, other than the self, both of which are unhelpful, but also to address some of the themes of social change and the idea that the networked society, the rapid, digital, communicative, mediated, mobile world was also totally dis-embedding people from not just relationships in a place, but actually long-term committed relationships of any sort. And people who live alone can be embedded in very rich social worlds of family, friends, and indeed sometimes localities.

Okay, so the unsolved, or unresolved issues still that I want to move onto quickly, what unit of analysis you use if you teach methods, you’ll be probably saying to students, depends what your question is. But actually there is a bit of a discussion: if you take my question below about responsibility to strangers, which I think is an increasingly pressing question, and has always been a pressing question – one that Simmel talked about, one that lots of theorists have talked about.

Practices or relationships is in the way that theorising personal relationships has moved, David Morgan introduced the term ‘family practices’ to get away from the normative family and to try to focus on what people actually do when they’re doing family, what is it that is meaningful in making family meaningful, what are they doing at that point? And I talked about practices of intimacy – practices and theory of practice has a life that has become very important, because it has also been used in understanding consumption and starting to think around how to make the changes that we need to make to become a more sustainable planet, to live in more sustainable ways. So Elizabeth Shove and her co-authors, Alan Ward, have all written about practice.

The debate about practice versus relationships is a non-debate, really, because obviously I think – you could think about relational practices, you could think about what it is that people do when they’re making connections to others, and that is how I talk about practices of intimacy. I talk about basic doing activities, like spending time with someone, but spending privileged time, so it becomes like this special time – those ordinary activities become particular sorts of activities in context, so you can try to get a practice and a relationship to line up.

But this question about strangers requires us to understand how discourse – political discourse, wider public discourses – enter into our doing of relationships. And this is written a lot about, it is written about by everybody that I’ve talked about. It is also of course written a lot about in social movements literature, and it is talked a lot about now, that we’re trying to grapple with what I’m not naming, but which you can see, Brexit, Trump, whatever.

The ways that these messages appeal to imaginary communities – Scotland be brave, let’s get our country back, whatever – we know that people work with discourses filtered through their relationships, so you talk about things, you make remarks about things to your nearest, dearest, to people that are important to you, what they say about them may matter. But also whether you go around wearing a badge that says something, whatever, you have to negotiate with relationships – these things are not completely separated. But when we talk about social movements, that literature often is quite disconnected from the literature on families and relationships, so I’ll come back to that maybe.

This is taken from interviews that I did for the work on European identity, so this is somebody around about early, maybe 23, 24, has three children, is a working mother, and has very strong views about people working and not working, doesn’t speak to her brother because he is on the dole and he could work, and is here being quite anti-migrants and is unusual in various ways, but not unusual in picking up this discourse around people coming to Britain to get benefits. But is expressing this through a family rhetoric of what her nan, her grandparents had told her, and how she’d been brought up to look after her own first, okay.

This is an example from the referendum campaign, work that was done by Maddie Breeze that is going to be published, and talks to young people now, young voters, people who had the vote in the referendum that didn’t then get a vote in the subsequent election, about their family and friendship discussions – this came out spontaneously, she wasn’t specifically asking about this.

Now I don’t think there were… We don’t know, but we should know, about what discussions there were around the referendum to leave the European Union in families and friendships – I don’t know if anyone has done research on this. I haven’t, I wish I had, I wish I was, I don’t know if anyone here is but please tell me. But I actually think it is important to know because it would help us in various ways, and we can talk about that, because I’m going to run out of time.

I wanted to go back to this much older piece of work, so this is Baumann’s book on the Holocaust. And this discourse about connection, it is an argument about proximity that has been used against groups, for failing to integrate – if you remember the parallel lives discussion that went on for quite a long time and that comes back in various guises. But it is also giving us particular warnings about legal processes, about legally labelling, classifying people as less than, for example not able to bring your family to live here if you’ve got a certain amount of money in your bank account or whatever.

Elias talked about, Elias believed that as we were in bigger unions, like the European Union, that our consciousness and awareness of people who were not our nearest and dearest, our sympathy with them, our sense of affinity with them, our empathy with them, might actually change. And here we have also Ulrich Beck talking about how people’s actual personal relationships across borders will make a difference and will make people become somehow more inclusive and willing and encompassing of other people.

Now, of course the literature, the actual literature on transnational relationships and on relationships across borders, mixed relationships, is much more complicated and often that literature is showing relationships, some of it is showing relationships of exploitation, some of it is showing that actually it can be quite difficult for people to carve out supportive space when they are coming together across boundaries, whether they be ethnic, religious, to get social support and space for social support isn’t always easy. But the optimistic vision in both of these authors’ work is worth hanging onto, or thinking with, and working with, and trying to bring back to the empirical research.

So the topic area that I’ve become interested in trying to make my field of family, relationships, personal life contribute to more, is around environmental issues and sustainability, because I think for our discipline it has to be one that we address even more.

So of course there are already lots of people doing that, but we should be doing it from every area of the discipline. It isn’t enough to leave it to a specialist area, because it is such an overarching, threatening, sort of effects, is going to affect everything issue. And so personal relationships of course interact with this in multiple ways, and I’m not going to talk at any length because I’m just about running out of time, but it is there in the special issue if you want to read about it.

It is also an inequalities issue, of course, because in any part of the world – in our world, it is the rich consumers that are doing more harm in some senses than the poor ones, but it is also of course true on the global scale. And so this is an issue of significant inequality. And some aspects of it are never talked about, so we began to speak of the consumption part I think, but sociologists don’t think that much about the natural world and, although again there is some work, there is not a huge amount of work talking about issues like loss of biodiversity.

But of course we are also humans incredibly implicated in that, and again that is a family, relationship sort of issue, like what you talk to friends and family about is part of it, but also whether people ever get interested in the natural world is very much do to with whether they were ever in a relationship with somebody who had that kind of interest and especially in their early years. This is an image that represents things that we don’t talk about, to me, that are very harmful and constantly lurking. So I use this as an image to represent the kind of fluffier, nicer things, if you like, that we will lose if we don’t talk about them that are going to disappear, that are disappearing.

Okay, so to conclude, this is a very rich field that I have sort of skimmed in a rather grotesque sort of way, but it engages with absolutely fundamental issues and there are disagreements that are pretty important and there are things that we are not working on that we should be working on, but also an enormous wealth of incredibly good work here that actually we could do more with, that maybe could be being got out into the world even more. We need to go even beyond Laurie Taylor. And I’m going to stop there.

(Applause)

Introducer: I want to say thank you to Lynn for a very thought-provoking presentation that as you will hear has picked up a number of the themes that we’ve addressed over the last couple of days. Now we’ve got about 20 minutes for questions and discussion, and there are two roving mics at the top, people in green tee shirts, so who would like to start?

 Okay. Nick over there, thank you.

Nick: Thank you very much indeed Lynn, for that. I wonder if you would reflect a little bit further about what you said towards the end of your talk about sustainability, and in particular the challenge that sociology faces to overcome that binary which has seemed to dog our discipline for such a long time, between nature and culture, and how you might see the way to start to transcend or to cut across or to at least address the problems that that binary poses?

Lynn: Why is it a problem? I’m not sure. I’m not sure if I’m completely understanding where you’re coming from. I mean, in terms of the issues that I’ve been speaking about, one of the people that has written a lot about nature and culture, of course it has been written a lot, maybe more in anthropology than in sociology.

So Marilyn Strathern’s work would be obviously relevant, but some of things that I think are interesting that are going on now, there is an Anthropologist who has been talking to people working in a wildlife centre in northern Scotland about their views about reproductive technology, and that kind of connects with the work that I’ve been trying to do talking to people about futures and their, so people who are at child-bearing age who have either not got children or haven’t completed a family, about their sense of future, so it is…

I think how people imagine a future, and whether the, the way they are thinking about nature and technology in that, is an important issue in terms of… If you can’t imagine an alternative future, it is quite hard, it is harder I think to make it happen. So I think there is a reason for, although obviously futures are, because what people imagine is not necessarily of course going to come to pass, but if you can’t imagine anything other than the way that things are done now, and the way that things are done now we know are going to result in doom, actually, so…

You know, you have to try to think of ways of starting to help dialogues that are helping people imagine alternative futures, and they inevitably have got to do both with nature and culture – socialised nature… I’ve given up worrying about what is natural and what is not, I’m not sure that it is quite where the real issue is at the moment, I suppose.

Introducer: Sue, at the front. Can we have a mic down at the front, please?

Sue: Thank you Lynn, that was extremely interesting, and I think for some of us took us back through a wonderful sweep of sociological work, including your own.

But in relation, perhaps talk partly to that last point you made, you didn’t specifically talk about gender, in that context, and that is not necessarily a criticism, but I think you were talking in quite a unifying way and one of the things that was a big divide in the field that you and others of us work in, is the issue of gender.

And given what you’ve just said about not worrying too much anymore about what is natural and what isn’t, I just wonder if you think, not that we’ve got beyond gender, but whether we’ve got beyond some of those splits and differences, or whether we need to actually get over ourselves and look outward a bit more in relation to these things.

Lynn: Well, inequality, gender inequality is still an important issue, so is ethnic, racial, disability, sexual, homophobia I think is still there – all of those things are still important and it is still important in this topic area to call them out, to try to work against them, to debunk stereotypes, to show that people are human, in all these different guises. And to try to expose ways in which people are being exploited or repressed or whatever. But that can go alongside what I’m talking about, actually, they’re not separate. Just because everybody is going to suffer in the end, doesn’t mean everybody will suffer equally, because of course the privileged always will have a better deal. It is not an accident that the people who are living in places that are being more trashed by the climate are poorer, that is how it is. But we shouldn’t take our eye off really big issues – this is an issue that we’re not working enough on.

Introducer: Okay, thank you. Other questions? Graham here, on this side at the front, please.

Graham: Thank you. Thank you, Lynn. When you were talking and said about socialisation, I’m reminded of some conversations I had with my stepdaughter who, as a mother and also someone who works in training dogs that support other people, we had some interesting discussions about socialisation, but we mean different things by that, and you were talking about early years. I’m wondering whether you could say your thoughts on how we as sociologists are changing and might productively engage with all the debates that there are about the socialisation, in this case I’m talking about of young children, because as I say I think some of the discussions between sociologists and people of a more natural science approach are quite interesting.

And it also comes to mind, I was at a session this morning about people living on houseboats and learned a lot from that, and in that culture there are a lot of rules and a lot of signs up about rules: “Do not do this, do not do that, do this”. But there are also a lot of more informal graffiti, which more informally encourage people to smile at each other and so on, and I was reminded in there about the debate, which seems to have gone away a bit, about the big society and nudge, and that things change not so much by the imposition of top-down rules, but by kind of being nudged in a particular direction, and I think we as sociologists may have responded rather negatively to nudge because of where it came from, but I wonder if you could reflect on whether, if we’re going to revisit socialisation, whether there are some things in there that might be helpful to us?

Lynn: Yes, well I mean, I have got a kind of written version of this that has got more words than I managed to say, but there is, that does acknowledge the literature on, well you know the stuff on brains, on the plasticity in the very early shaping of brains. There has been quite a good sociological, critical literature responding to that, so I’m thinking about people like Jan Macvarish, but others as well have written quite critically about that biological… I’m not trying to say that there is no, obviously there is biology, there are brains – but there is a huge element of interpretation in that science, and there is a normative element that creeps into it that sociologists can point to, so there is a critical discourse there going on.

And similarly with the nudge. Okay, so people react negatively because it is over-simplistic in terms of a sociological understanding of social change and how it is effected – you can’t just do one little shove in one little place and everything will be fine, just like you can’t have one pill and everything will be fine. But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t engage with it. I think that is important to try to keep explaining and re-explaining why actually life is rather more complicated and it is not going to work trying to do it that way.

And family sociology, or whatever you want to call it, that has been going on a long time, like Janet Finch wrote an article about how family policy, trying to steer people to a more normative family, just wasn’t going to work. But we keep having to repeat stories like that. Well, they’re not stories, they’re actually evidenced accounts, that we can give about why…

If you say you want everybody to be married, or you can only cohabit with certain whatevers, otherwise something will happen, but actually there is all kinds of reasons why people are cohabiting across a much wider range of relationships, then you might make people’s lives worse and more miserable and punish some people, but you’re not actually going to fundamentally change behaviour in the way that you expected.

Introducer: Okay. Questions. Lynn, can I ask you to say a little bit more about personal problems, public issues, and sustainable futures, which you seemed to be talking about, in relation in particular to young people. So you linked those themes and I wonder if you could say a little more about that?

Lynn: Well… The possibilities for young people leading more, I mean a lot of young people, obviously there is a whole range, you can’t really generalise about young people, because they’re socially divided as we all are, in various ways, but one thing for example that has happened is the number of people who now have driving licences is less than it was, say, 20 years ago, mainly because of austerity. But also, the more people don’t drive, and the more they become skilled practitioners of public transport, the more likely they are to be able to continue to navigate that, maybe.

The housing difficulties for young people could be responded to much more imaginatively, to make environmental gains as well as giving people decent housing, but there is no political will to do that at the moment. So shared housing, which there is quite a lot of research on, including a paper that was, or maybe more than one at this conference, is still not in the imagination seen as a long-term arrangement, like sharing with friends. Because the cultural script is still that you will at some stage go and live with a partner, or you’ll have your own house. But actually a lot of people really enjoy sharing arrangements, and maybe if housing actually facilitated sharing in a sensible way, so that people had a sense of their own domain to some extent, but could share certain things like whatever.

But not with strangers, with people they wanted to be in some proximity with, maybe those arrangements would be much easier, to last much longer. Living with extended kin is normative for some ethnic groups, but not for the dominant population, and we’ve got an image of a granny flat, but who can afford, who has that? We’ve talking about a tiny, privileged minority.

But housing arrangements that were maybe a bit more like that for older people could maybe be possible with political will and proper social housing. You know… So consumption, the levels of consumption, there has been work on transition, life-course transition as possible points in reducing consumption or making people more environmentally aware of consumption, so there is people who are at this conference who have done work on transition to motherhood or parenthood, fatherhood and retirement as possible points of change in consumption patterns.

But student life, of course, is another one. So young people making that transition with the will at a university level, maybe that could be much more seriously worked on as a way to help people actually do things like grow vegetables or have more meat-free meals or whatever, you know. There is lots of ways that… I mean, that is trivial, at some levels, but there has got to be more imaginative ways of doing things.

Introducer: Thank you. We’ve got time for maybe one more question. I can see one up here, at the back, and one at the front – those two as the final questions.

Male 1: Okay. Thank you Lynn for your presentation.

I’d like to push you a bit further on your views about climate change and biodiversity. The question is: is existing social theory enough to address the challenge? It reminds me of a paper from Elizabeth Shove Which was Beyond the ABC and she says, ‘Climate change is such a big problem where we need to have major changes and large-scale transitions in energy systems, food systems, housing systems’, so to look just at attitudes and a bit of nudge and the… She was saying the current approaches that we are using are not the definition of… She is saying we are approaching the problems with the same old tools that we’ve done for the last 30 years – so attitude, behaviour, choice – the nature of capitalism…

Lynn: Yes, I’m not talking about that, though.

Male 1: Well, you were, actually, you were talking about environmental \_\_\_[1:00:03], consumption, the natural world, people’s interest in the natural world – those have been studied for 20, 30 years. And I think we need to study more, it is a point that John \_\_\_’s been making as well, the large-scale system change, which of course is difficult, we don’t want to go back to [Parsons 1:00:20] and we don’t want to talk about collective actors too much, but it does seem to me that what I’ve seen at this conference, it is not enough to look at a few local community energy initiatives or just look at the attitude of people about nature, that is not enough to understand the change.

Lynn: No, I agree with you absolutely. Absolutely agree with you. And actually if you read the article that I’ve written, I think you’ll find that I agree with you.

Sorry, I’ve obviously not done a good job and I apologise for that, but the approach that you are talking about I do agree with, but actually it does connect back to the beginning of my talk. Families and relationships are sort of systems as well, and so, yes, of course we have to change systems. So John \_\_\_[1:01:16] said, it is not individuals that have to change, it is the big technical systems: petroleum, steel, military-industrial complex, whatever…

But actually it needs political will and our capacity to act to an important extent is shaped by emotional, visceral, hands-on, face-to-face relationships, okay. And we are nevertheless agents in systems, right, so I accept what you’re saying. Of course, something really, really major has to change, but actually that doesn’t let off the hook the topic domain of families and relationships. We’re as implicated in that as you are if you’re working on the military-industrial complex or as you are if you’re working on governmentality, whatever. We are all implicated in this, that is what I’m saying.

Introducer: Okay, thank you. One last question at the front, please. Janet, can we have a mic down at the front?

Janet: Thank you very much, Lynn. Typically you’ve started me thinking on a lot of other things that I hadn’t thought about before.

The link between families and relationships on the one hand, and sustainable futures on the other, does raise a lot of questions but it occurred to me that one of the questions that it raises quite directly is about population growth. So population growth, along with climate change, is probably the other thing that really threatens a sustainable future. And it reminded me that in the 1960s, when I was a teenager, and before I became a Sociologist, I and my friends used to have animated discussions about whether it was responsible or not to have children, because we were very, very aware that population growth, even then, was threatening the world, and it is more so now.

Now all of that has gone away, which is quite interesting, and of course I’m not suggesting that in any way that sociologists should take moral positions on whether people should have children or not, but do we have a responsibility to, if we want to make those sort of connections, to actually raise questions which people are not thinking about at the moment, and finding ways of doing that, and making sure that the discipline is properly geared up to deal with those big questions, even though they’re not yet questions that other people are raising?

Lynn: Yes. (Laughter) Definitely. Yes, and that is also why I’m working on fertility. Yes.

Introducer: Okay. I think at this point I’d like to say thank you again to Lynn for some very, very thought-provoking presentation, and making us think very hard about some very important issues. Thank you.

 (Applause)

Lynn: Thank you.

Introducer: Okay, I’d now like to welcome Laurie Taylor, who will present the BBC Ethnography Prize.

Laurie: Thank you so much. Is this on? Da da da. Yes, it is. Thank you.

Just a very quick word, just a little tiny plug for, first of all, before we get around to presenting the winner of this 2017 BBC BSA Ethnography Prize, just a very quick word just about Thinking Allowed.

Just to remind you that we still very, very much welcome hearing from you, if you would like to have your research represented on the programme. You’ll know, if you ever listen, that there are certain restrictions around what we can do – I mean, there is a certain sort of preference for ethnography, for empirical work, rather than for quantitative work, or perhaps theoretical work on occasions.

But nevertheless, do remind yourself, it is worth remembering that we have now over a million listeners to the programme, which if you want to put it in proportion is perhaps three times the figure for the readership of the Guardian, and not many people read the Guardian all the way through, most people really listen to Thinking Allowed all the way through.

But perhaps the biggest development is the podcast, these sort of international podcasts, because it has now meant with podcasting that what we do goes all over the world, and I am later this year going over to Montreal, to the American Sociological Association conference to talk about podcasting sociology around the world, so that there there are representatives from different countries, different radio programmes that have sociology programmes, social science programmes – this is a very, very big development. It is a way in which your work can absolutely move beyond these particular shores.

 I just want to now remind you also, as we move onto the prize, just to say that this is the fourth year for the one thousand BSA BBC Ethnography Award. That means we’ve got one more year to go, before we end this particular period – we had a five-year setup in the first place. I’m not sure that the BBC are going to go on financing it afterwards, but we’re discussing it with anthropology associations to see whether they would come in with the BSA, which under Judith Mudd has been an excellent sponsor of this award in past years, so I think the award is going to go ahead for many more years to come.

 Now you don’t need me to tell you about the importance of promoting ethnography. Everything about the current research climate in our universities, as we know, militates against the type of long-term, in-depth, qualitative studies that our award celebrates. And I was consistently amazed, really, as I read through this year’s record number of entrants – we had more entrants this year than ever before – the sheer amount of personal time and personal resources that people had used up in order to complete their research.

 Now after a great deal of effort by our splendid judges, my splendid co-judges, Al [Peshar 1:07:53], Sarah Neil, and Shane Blackman, we eventually produced a shortlist of five books. These were: Enduring Uncertainty, by Ines Hasselberg, which was a study of the deportation processing of convicted criminals, which was praised for the manner in which it allowed us to hear voices that would normally remain silent or discredited. Second was Working The Phones, by Jamie Woodcock, which was a study of a call centre that not only captured the nature of this form of labour, but also documented the manner in which its demands were consistently resisted. Third was Made in Egypt, by Leila Zaki Chakravarti, which was a compelling and vivid account of life on the floor of an Egyptian clothing factory, and the dramatic transformation of that life following the arrival of new British management. Next was Hunger Pains, by Kayleigh Garthwaite. This is a close-up study of the operation of food banks, which not only provided a welcome antidote to popular misunderstandings of their modus operandi, but also delivered an important and compelling message. Then there was Loud and Proud by Hilary Pilkington, which was a study of the English Defence League, which was praised for its close focus upon the ordinary activists in the EDL and for its admirable demonstration of the contradictions between what people say and what people do and for its success in humanising members of this extreme group.

 Now I’m about to announce the winner, and I’ve got to do a little tiny bit of stage management here, because as you see my producer, the absolutely admirable sociologist Jane Egerton here on my left, is recording this for the programme which is going to be transmitted \_\_\_[1:09:43] next Wednesday. And we also hope incidentally that we seem to have secured a possible spot on the Today programme on the morning of that day for a celebration of this particular ethnography award, so we’re hoping that will be there.

 But when we do this, when I announce the winner, I wonder if I could ask you to break into very loud spontaneous applause. (Laughter) Because polite clapping somehow doesn’t sound enthusiastic on the radio, where everyone is enjoined as you know – cheer, clap, or whatever.

 So anyway, so I’m delighted now to announce verdict for the judges. The winning entry in the 2017 BBC BSA Ethnography Award is Loud and Proud by Hilary Pilkington.

 (Applause)

Laurie: Hilary. Congratulations, congratulations. Well done, well done.

 [Background noise 1:11:00-1:11:06]

Hilary, just a very quick thing. Congratulations on this, I mean as I say it was a unanimous verdict, and people were enormously impressed by the book, it was a tremendous feat and a tremendous amount of time that you devoted to it. Just, can I just ask you a very quick word, just about the significance or the importance of ethnography, which I was referring to just a little earlier.

Hilary: Yes, so I’d like to thank the BBC and Thinking Allowed in particular for the great job it does of just keeping Sociology in the public eye. We try to do that all the time – we have impact awards to make us do it, but you do it week in week out, and I’m sure I’m not the only one in this room who listens regularly just to find out what each other are doing and also uses those podcasts for teaching.

So that is great and the Ethnography Award is fantastic for people who work in this, with this type of sociology. It recognises the distinctive dimension of sociology that we can access with that particular focus and yes, like you said, these are difficult times. There are lots and lots of pressures on people. We used to say that ethnography had become a preserve of the PhD – I think there are so many pressures on PhD students we’re actually risking losing that last bastion of ethnography, so I feel particularly privileged to be able to go on through my career having these moments, these spaces, to do ethnography.

And yes, that is largely to do with the funding, I must say, so I’d like to thank the European Commission for funding what was actually a huge project under FP7 called My Place, of which Loud and Proud, the EDL study, is just a tiny, tiny fragment. And also School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester, because they honoured the space that that funding allowed, to be outside of the lecture room and to actually do this kind of work.

Laurie: Thank you very much and let me just invite Judith Mudd, the Chief Executive of the BSA, to come up and join us here, because of course BSA is co-sponsor so Judith you must come up here and share the photographs and share the platform. And just a very quick reminder…

 (Applause)

 And that is it, so once again congratulations to all those who participated and to the short list and of course once again to the winner, Hilary.

And just a quick reminder that entries for the 2018 Ethnography Award are going to be invited from early September this year, and if you would like the programme to have a little look at the research you’re doing and possibly invite you on to talk about it, remember that our address is thinkingallowed@bbc.co.uk. Thank you all very much for your attendance. Thanks.

(Applause)

END AUDIO

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