Co-Sleeping with Partners and Pets as a Family Practice of Intimacy: Israeli Couples’ Narratives of Creating Kinship

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Abstract
Despite advances in the sociology of sleep, we know relatively little about the experience of co-sleeping in general and about co-sleeping with pets in particular. This study draws on semi-structured interviews with Israeli couples who raise either a dog or a cat to show that co-sleeping with partners and pets is a family practice of intimacy, which both implicates and constitutes time and space, emotions, as well as the body and embodiment of the interacting parties. Co-sleeping allows couples to constitute their pets as ‘kin’ and to blur the boundaries between humans and animals in two distinct ways: (1) by emphasising the personhood of pets and treating them as children or substitute-partners, and (2) by highlighting the animality of humans. This study enhances sociological understanding of the associations between family practices and time and space and sheds light on how family practices create post-human sensory worlds of kinship.

Keywords
body and embodiment, companion animals, co-sleeping, couples, family practices, human–animal relations, kinship, pets, time and space

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Introduction

Sociologists have recognised that in many socio-cultural contexts, sleep is not an individual but rather a joint practice. It is often shared by intimate partners, siblings, parents and their children, as well as by individuals/couples and their pets (e.g. Smith et al., 2017; Welles-Nystrom, 2005). However, despite growing interest in the sociology of sleep, relatively little is known about the experience of co-sleeping in general and co-sleeping with companion animals in particular. Hsu (2017), criticising the focus on human sleep, made a compelling case for further empirical studies on non-human sleep, including that of animals. Hsu suggested that such studies would afford insights into various social aspects, enlarging our understanding of the close bonds that animals and humans can form with one another and the role of corporeality in these bonds.

In line with Hsu’s suggestion, in the present study we employed interviews with Israeli couples to investigate how individuals experience co-sleeping with a life partner and with pets. We make sense of the results by drawing on and synthesising four bodies of knowledge rarely brought together in one analysis: the sociology of sleep, family sociology, embodied sociology and human–animal relations. Our findings indicate that co-sleeping with partners and with companion animals is a family practice of intimacy, whose enactment both implicates and constructs time and space as well as the body and the embodiment of the interacting parties in a way that consolidates them as a multispecies family unit. Co-sleeping also allows couples to constitute their pets as ‘kin’ and to blur the boundaries between humans and animals in two ways: by emphasising the personhood of pets, by treating them as family members – either as children or as substitute partners; by highlighting the animality of humans, especially the unruliness of the fleshly body, which becomes most apparent in sleep. We will illustrate this argument after we situate the article within the sociological literature and discuss the data and methods.

Couples’ Co-Sleeping and Family Practices

The sociology of sleep has successfully transformed the understanding of sleep as an ‘individual’ matter that is not shared with others and reshaped it as a relational and negotiated practice (Meadows et al., 2018). Several studies have explored couples’ sleep chiefly through the prism of gender (see, for example, Meadows et al., 2008; Venn, 2007; Venn et al., 2008); others have highlighted that sleep is not only a gendered practice but also a part of ‘doing family’ (Zarhin, 2016, 2020). The concept of ‘doing family’ draws on the work of Morgan (1996), who recast the sociological understanding of family as a reified structure or institution to which individuals belong, into something that is actively and creatively ‘done’. In Morgan’s (1996: 186) conceptualisation, ‘family’ represents a quality that has to be achieved and ‘family practices’ refer to ‘the activities that family members did in relation to each other and how that, in carrying out these practices, they affirmed, reproduced and sometimes re-defined those relationships understood to be family relationships’ (Morgan, 2020: 734). Numerous studies have since described various family practices and demonstrated the applicability of this approach in multiple realms of life (see, for example, Borgstrom et al., 2019; Holmes, 2019; Roberts et al., 2017). Nevertheless, as Morgan himself argued, additional research is required to clarify
precisely how family practices involve and illuminate dimensions of time and space, emotions, as well as the body and embodiment (Morgan, 2011, 2020).

Building on this concept of ‘family practices’, Jamieson (2011: 3) coined the term ‘practices of intimacy’ to capture those ‘practices which cumulatively and in combination enable, create and sustain a sense of a close and special quality of a relationship between people’. The two concepts – ‘family practices’ and ‘practices of intimacy’ – are neither identical nor mutually exclusive, and their overlap merits further scholarly attention. Relatively few studies have addressed this overlap or sought to explain which family practices produce intimacy and how. Additionally, more empirical research is needed to explore in depth the distinct role of non-visual senses in the formation of intimate family relations, in particular, and associations and social interactions, in general (Davies, 2012; Reed, 2020; Schwarz, 2015). Elucidating that role would be especially valuable for the investigation of family life and kinship, because, as Jennifer Mason (2008) observed, ‘sensory affinities’ – ‘affinities that are physical, bodily, material, and, above all, sensory’ (2008: 40) – are part of the ‘tangible affinities’ that represent diverse ways of imagining and practising kinship. These tangible affinities (which in addition to the sensory dimension also include negotiated, creative and ethereal dimensions) are vivid, palpable and resonant in lived experience. Despite their clear significance, however, few studies have touched upon sensory affinities and the role of sensory relationality and interphysicality in how individuals constitute non-biologically related others as ‘kin’ (Davies, 2019; Mason, 2008: 40).

The literature of family sociology highlights the active, creative and dynamic nature of kinship and family, as well as the enduring importance of social ties in late-modern societies, subverting the sociological narrative of individualisation and fragmentation of social ties (Borgstrom et al., 2019). These inferences hold for multiple contemporary societies, including Israel, which has been described as a ‘familistic society’ in which the family is central for both the individual and society (Fogiel-Bijaou and Rutlinger-Reiner, 2013). Drawing on this literature, we addressed the research gaps identified above by showing that co-sleeping with partners and pets is what we term a family practice of intimacy, which both implicates and constitutes time and space, emotions and the body and embodiment.

Raising Pets

Human–animal relationships are at the centre of an increasing number of sociological studies. Research has found that pet keeping has increased, as has the tendency to keep animals inside rather than outside the home (Charles, 2014). This trend exists in many urban areas worldwide, including cities in Israel (Sadetzki-Vered, 2019). Scholars found that pet keepers often assign the designation of ‘person’ to their pets, indicating that the boundaries that separate humans and animals may be porous (Haraway, 2003; Shir-Vertesh, 2012). Sanders (2003) argued that the definition of ‘personhood’ does not depend on a common system of linguistic symbols, but rather on social interactions. We can consider a pet a ‘person’ because ‘his or her perspective and feelings are knowable; interaction is predictable; and the shared relationship provides an experience of closeness, warmth, and pleasure’ (Sanders, 2003: 418). Furthermore, the literature on
human–animal bonds indicates that pet keepers regard household pets as full-fledged participants in the family system (Walsh, 2009). They often use the language of kinship to indicate these inter-species connections, in a sense forming ‘post-human families’ that are more than human (Charles, 2014; Charles and Davies, 2008; Shir-Vertesh, 2012). Nonetheless, scholars argue that the daily practices of kinship may both blur and reinforce the human–animal boundary (Charles, 2016). Although pet keepers may love their companion animals and integrate them into their lives and families, they may also revoke their pets’ personhood and even give them away (Shir-Vertesh, 2012). Thus, as Irvine and Cilia (2017) conclude, what it means for a pet to ‘be’ a family member remains unsettled.

Some studies indicate that while people may come to recognise the ‘personhood’ in animals, they also respect the latter’s animality and otherness (Fox, 2006; Gabb, 2011), thereby essentially preserving the distinction between personhood and animality. Further empirical research is required to clarify what is entailed in ‘doing family’ in the context of multispecies families, including the role of ‘animality’ in these processes. Additionally, studies generally emphasise the domination exercised by humans over animals, seeing animals as relatively powerless and neglecting the ways in which animals evade such domination (Finkel and Danby, 2019). Scholars have called for further research to show that animals are not always passive, not always incapable of initiating change and affecting human actions (Hsu, 2017).

The current literature has little to say about the role of sleep in the process of integrating a companion animal into the family. Although we know that many pet keepers worldwide choose to share a bed with their pet (Chomel and Sun, 2011; Smith et al., 2017), little is known about the reasons for and experience of this type of co-sleeping, as well as its consequences for the family. The few studies that have explored co-sleeping with companion animals focus primarily on canine sleep and its effects on humans’ sleep quality and quantity. These studies reveal a divide between objective and subjective reports regarding the impact of dogs’ sleep on human sleep. Actigraphy-based data, for example, indicate that co-sleeping may disrupt humans’ sleep; however, humans seem to be unaware of these disruptions and instead argue that co-sleeping improves sleep quality (e.g. Andre et al., 2020; Hoffman et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2018). Conversely, other research suggests that human sleep quality may not be reduced by co-sleeping with dogs (Rosano et al., 2021). Despite these results, sleep specialists often assume that co-sleeping with pets harms human sleep and recommend that pet owners remove animals from the bedroom or at least not allow them on the bed (American Sleep Association, 2021; Brown et al., 2018). The present study addresses the gaps identified in the literature on human–animal relationships by developing a sociological analysis of the under-examined issue of co-sleeping with pets.

**Methods and Data**

This study aimed to shed light on two main research questions: how do individuals experience co-sleeping with a life partner, and how do young couples experience co-sleeping with companion animals? We decided to address both research questions in one analysis to enable us to examine the similarities and differences between the two types of
co-sleeping. To explore these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with young Israeli couples who raised either cats or dogs (the most common companion animals (Animal Welfare Institute, 2021)).

We employed purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: couples aged 20–40 years who (1) had been cohabiting for at least six months and up to five years, and (2) had been raising a pet for six months to one year prior to the beginning of the study. The intention was to ensure that couples had some experience with raising pets and that their memories of the adoption process were fresh in their minds. We chose to focus on young couples because we reasoned that, for them, the experience of cohabiting in general and co-sleeping with a partner on a regular basis would be relatively new and thus better recollected. Additionally, this particular age group is largely absent in the sociological literature on sleep, which tends to focus on middle-aged or older individuals.

Interviews with 15 couples were conducted between February 2020 and March 2021. The first nine interviews were conducted face-to-face. However, after the spread of COVID-19 in Israel, six more interviews were conducted using Zoom (Zoom Video Communications Inc., California, USA). Two interviews were conducted in Russian and the rest in Hebrew. They were then transcribed verbatim; excerpts quoted in this article were translated into English by the first author. Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes for an average of 55 minutes. Fourteen couples lived in apartment buildings in cities and one couple in a rural area. Seven couples had a dog, four had a cat and four had both. Participants’ minimum and maximum ages were 25 and 40, respectively, for an average age of 28.5. Only seven were married, but all had cohabitated for a minimum of nine months and maximum of five years, for an average of 24.6 months. Except for one homosexual couple, all were heterosexual. Eight individuals had one or two children. (Three couples had one shared child. The rest had one or two children from a previous marriage.) Twelve couples shared a bed with their pets on a regular basis.

We followed the principles of constructivist grounded theory in both the collection and the analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2014). These principles included simultaneous data collection and analysis, coding and constant comparison. We identified categories and themes, which we investigated further by adding questions and probes to the interview guide. Questions were designed to explore interviewees’ experiences and perspectives as individuals and couples. Joint interviews with couples were deemed justified despite the methodological and ethical challenges they pose because the units of analysis in this study were both individuals and couples; narratives were compared on both levels. (For a lengthier discussion of the challenges involved in conducting joint interviews with couples, please see Zarhin, 2018.) In addition, joint interviews were chosen because they afford a look at family life, including both dynamics between partners and dynamics between couples and their pets (which were often around during the interviews).

Findings: Co-Sleeping as a Family Practice of Intimacy

The interviews with couples indicated that co-sleeping with both partners and pets is what we term a family practice of intimacy. Through this practice, partners constitute each other and their companion animal as family members/kin and (re)produce intimate family relationships. Co-sleeping as a family practice both implicates and
constructs time and space, emotions, as well as the body and the embodiment of the interacting parties.

**Co-Sleeping with a Partner**

All couples in this sample shared a bed, though they acknowledged that bed-sharing could be inconvenient for one or both partners. Respondents argued that their sleep was often interrupted by their partner, whether by snoring noise, tugging of blankets, frequent rolling around in bed, stinky breath or other unintentional bodily behaviours. For example, Debby explained:

> I must admit that Terry [partner] snores a bit sometimes at night, and because my sleep is relatively light, any kind of noise really bothers me. So I frequently find myself pushing him, rolling him, kicking him, like any good woman does. And, oh, the most annoying thing is, and it’s actually not his fault, but it just freaks me out that he turns around in the middle of the night with his face up against me and he’s breathing with his mouth open right on my face with all the smell of his unbrushed teeth and it drives me crazy, and so all night I tell him ‘Terry, turn around, turn around’ and after a very long struggle with a sleeping person, he eventually turns around.

Like this respondent, others recognised the limited control sleepers have over their bodies and actions. While they refrained from blaming sleep partners for their corporeal behaviour in dormancy, they still emphasised its consequences for their own sleep. As Sofi clarified, ‘I have problems sleeping anyways, let alone when he suddenly puts his foot in my face or when he almost hits me on the head with his hand. It’s a little uncomfortable, and it really does affect my sleep.’

Sleep, then, draws attention to partners’ bodies in their natural uncivilised state: noisy, smelly, spacious and aggressive. The biology of both partners is implicated in these narratives. Nevertheless, respondents continued to explain that such physical interruptions are part of what couples must endure; they are simply a part of family life. Echoing previous research, respondents viewed bed-sharing as vital to relationships and as part of ‘doing family’ (Zarhin, 2016). However, their accounts enlarge on previous literature by elucidating why co-sleeping is considered a significant family practice: when asked why it was important to them, participants repeatedly described co-sleeping as a time-and-space-sharing experience that consolidated them as a single unit distinct from the rest of the world. As Johnny explains:

> Sharing a bed is the basis. It’s like what you see in the movies. If you don’t have it and each of us sleeps in separate rooms, then there is no intimacy, no closeness. For me personally, it is very very important; when the day is over, you are with your partner in bed and it’s only the two of you, and this is your time together.

Similarly, respondents explained that this was the only time they could be sure to share, stressing that this was ‘our time’ in ‘our bed’. This certainty of being together in a confined time and space was seen as reassuring, as Ben explained: ‘These are our safest moments to be together. Every other time during the day, we don’t know where we are
going to be, but at night we are together. This kind of certainty is good for the heart ['sic']. The heart is invoked here to indicate emotions: the felt certainty co-sleeping provides is comforting in a way that allows for the development of other positive emotions and also of intimate attachment.

Respondents treasure the time in bed before they fall asleep and after they wake up, considering it their most precious moments together, a time that brings them closer due to intimate communication and isolation from the world:

Sherry: Our innermost conversations take place at night when we are in bed. We tell each other how the day went.

David: I cannot wait for this moment when we get into bed together.

Interviewer: Is it important to you?

David: Certainly! She [partner] knows that if she has to stay in the living room after I go to bed, I’m upset about it. As far as I am concerned, when I go to bed, she needs to get into bed as well, even if she doesn’t want to sleep.

Sharing a bed thus enables what Jamieson terms, ‘disclosing intimacy’, the mutual disclosure of inner thoughts and feelings, which creates ‘an intimacy of the self’ (Jamieson, 1998: 1). Several couples said they try to synchronise bedtimes or wakeup times to ensure that they could share these moments and disclosures. However, most respondents also emphasised that the time spent actually sleeping together was as important to their relationship as the times of wakefulness, if not more. Their accounts direct attention to how intimacy of the self can be enhanced by bodily intimacy. Guy expounded, ‘There is an intimacy in sharing a bed that I think you need in a relationship. Even sitting on a couch together is not the same as sleeping together in the same bed. It is more intimate.’

As this account implies, consciousness is not a requirement for co-presence. In fact, the lack of consciousness seems to boost intimacy, as two embodied beings share space and time in proximity. By enacting the practice of co-sleeping, couples imagine themselves as interconnected but separate from the rest of the world, which deepens their bond and enhances their intimacy. Although control over bodies is limited in sleep, causing human animalic features to be highly prominent (drooling, snoring, farting, etc.), these features do not create distance between partners; instead, as respondents’ narratives reveal, these features, along with such bodily interactions as caressing and holding each other in bed, or even accidentally touching in sleep, fortify closeness and intimate attachment. These interactions with family members’ bodies, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are the basis for forming sensory affinities that create a sensory world of kinship. Interestingly, respondents gave similar accounts of the experience of co-sleeping with pets.

Co-Sleeping with Pets

Many respondents said their relatives advised against co-sleeping with pets because they viewed it as bad hygiene. However, most couples in this sample fended off this advice and decided to co-sleep with their companion animals, for the same reasons they shared
a bed with a partner. Their accounts indicated that co-sleeping is a family practice of intimacy that consolidates the triad as a close family. As Roy explicated:

When we co-sleep and Sunny [dog] is right there next to us, I feel ‘Oh, this is how it is supposed to be. It’s whole’ [ . . . ] We see Sunny as part of our family when he sleeps next to us. It’s really very important to us. When someone adopts a dog, they choose to bring someone else into their lives, and sleeping is one of our most expressive needs in life. So if the dog sleeps next to us, then we are like a family.

Like co-sleeping with a life partner, co-sleeping with pets is described as part of the process of ‘doing family’. Through this practice, couples and pets are united by space, time and haptics, connecting the three separate and autonomous beings into one family unit.

Many respondents viewed co-sleeping with pets as natural and taken for granted, and compared it to co-sleeping with children. In fact, as in previous studies (Charles and Davies, 2008; Irvine and Cilia, 2017), participants often blurred the boundaries between humans and animals by regarding their pets as their own children:

Interviewer: Why do you share a bed with her?
Rita: What do you mean? She’s like our baby, our child. We don’t want her to be sad.
Interviewer [addresses husband]: Do you think so too?
Samuel: Of course! She is like my daughter. Certainly.

Even couples who do not co-sleep with their pets on a regular basis sometimes welcome them into their shared bed. One couple initially co-slept with their dog after they adopted her; however, when one partner developed allergy symptoms, they started keeping the animal out of their bedroom. Even so, they sometimes allow the dog on the bed:

Alice: We usually sleep with an open door and sometimes she comes to wake us up even though she knows that she is not allowed on the bed. We sometimes let her on the bed with us, although we usually forbid it.
Interviewer: Why?
Manuel: Sometimes we feel she’s scared or she needs love, we want to hug her.
Alice: She wants to be part of our pack, of our family.

By welcoming pets into the couple’s bed, a space most associated with the notion of family, couples constitute pets as family members. As respondents clarify, in this space, affection can be shown through a gentle touch, and close, embodied connections may be formed.

The findings indicate that pets may occupy not only the role of a child but also that of substitute partner. When one partner is away, the pet is seen as providing functions similar to those provided by partners, such as protection, security, warmth and care, especially when pets fill the ‘empty side of the bed’. As Frieda conveyed:
I love sleeping next to my cat; it helps me relax and fall asleep, especially when my husband is not sleeping next to me. It is very comforting that I can stroke someone while falling asleep. And when a cat makes nice noises and showers you with love, sleeping is even more enjoyable.

Many respondents explained that they learned to dislike solitary sleeping and that co-sleeping with pets makes them feel ‘less alone’ when their partner is away. Because the shared bed was constructed as a space and symbol for the family unit, an empty side of the bed threatens the very notion of ‘family’. Filling the bed with another family member helps restore the comforting notion of family. Respondents highlighted the significance of the body and embodiment:

Shawn: I love hugging Anna [the dog] and sleeping next to her.
Gabriella: What about me? (Laughs)
Shawn: When you’re in the living room and I’m alone, it’s fun to cuddle with Anna, she’s warm and soft and I fall asleep with her. She helps me relax. You can hear her breathing, listen to her heartbeat, it’s fun.
Gabriella: Yeah, and Neevy [the cat] also comes to bed, and makes such cute noises (demonstrates)
Interviewer: So you enjoy it?
Both partners together: Yes, absolutely! This is love.

The shared time and space allow for haptic interactions that lead to enhanced sensations of the other body. During sleep, consciousness is largely absent. What remains is an assortment of bodies in the assemblage of sleep; bodies touch and feel each other, producing sensations and emotions that bind them together as a family. These sensations mediate interactions and produce emotions in the parties to the interaction, forming the basis for the establishment of sensory affinities, not only between human bodies but also between humans and animals. Here again we see that by co-sleeping, supposedly separate embodied beings become united into one loving and close family.

**Learning How to Co-Sleep: Between Training and Animalising Bodies**

According to respondents’ accounts, co-sleeping did not always occur naturally or easily. Rather, partners had to learn how to sleep next to each other, and couples had to learn how to share a bed with an animal. All parties involved had to adapt and change. They described how they reshaped their bodies so they would ‘fit together’:

Interviewer: Could you tell me about the transition from sleeping alone to co-sleeping with a partner?
Dan: Yes. It was not easy at first, but after a while we learned how to do it, which side of the bed each one takes; it becomes more of a habit. Do you sleep hugging each other or not hugging each other? Things like that. In the beginning, we kept a distance, but then we got to know what is more comfortable for the other, what position is better for the other, and you adapt accordingly to make sure you fit together.
Rayna: At first, sleeping together was very difficult. It’s another person who is sleeping next to you, and it was difficult to fall asleep and everything. And with time we got used to it and now it’s hard to sleep without one another.

For most respondents, bed-sharing was an acquired taste and learned skill. They adapted to each other through a gradual process of learning, and then came to love it, so much so that they could not do without it.

Couples’ accounts of co-sleeping with pets were similar: both human and non-human sleep partners had to learn how to co-sleep:

Alice: She [the cat] learned how to sleep with me. In the beginning, she didn’t know how to sleep next to me, she would jump and move.

Manuel: She used to sleep on top of our bodies too!

Alice: Every time I would slightly move, she used to hop on me. She didn’t understand what to do on this bed, and then every time this happened, I would throw her out of bed, so she slowly learned how to behave in bed and how to sleep in it if she wanted to stay.

Interviewer: And so how does she behave when she wants to stay?

Manuel: She just lies down, clings to me, and when she realises we’re sleeping, then she just sleeps too. When I wake up, then she starts giving me morning kisses and asking that I caress her, demanding her morning’s attention.

As these accounts indicate, all sleep partners, whether human or non-human, had to adjust their sleep behaviour and posture to make them fit the other bodies in bed. This process of mutual somatic learning, which includes coordination of timing, posture, and haptics, has lasting effects:

Gabriella: [Co-sleeping with pets] is very pleasant in my opinion. It also becomes sort of a habit. Just as an example, if we go abroad and sleep there, or at his mother’s, the cat is not there and we miss her, we miss sleeping with her. When I wake up, I feel–

Shawn [completes her sentence]: Like we forgot something.

Gabriella: Yes, exactly, like something is missing. Suddenly it feels like there is too much space, the bed is too empty, there’s too much room because no one takes up space between my feet anymore.

Shawn: Yeah, you even get used to it. When I’m abroad, I sleep exactly in the same position as if my dog was right here between my legs.

Gabriella: Exactly!

According to these accounts, sleep positioning seems to become ingrained in the body through a process of self-transformation in response to other bodies in bed. That is,
co-sleeping as a family practice not only involves the body and embodiment, it also effectively reshapes them.

Although respondents admitted that co-sleeping with partners and pets was often inconvenient, they were unwilling to give up on this shared experience because they believed it produced love and intimate attachment. Several couples added that they could not forgo co-sleeping, because it was important for their pets. One couple, for instance, contended that they initially left their cat outside the bedroom; however, she kept howling near their door until they brought her inside. Nevertheless, after all parties got used to co-sleeping, they could not do without it, even when some inconvenience remained:

Samuel: We prefer her to sleep with us, it’s a kind of indulgence at night because it’s fun when she sleeps with us. Of course, our sleep is important, but I think that when she sleeps with us, she enjoys it too, so . . .

Rita: Yes, I think it also creates a better bond between us and the cat.

Samuel: Yes, we also make sure she is comfortable and enjoys sleeping with us.

Interviewer: And how does this create a better bond between you and the cat?

Rita: When she sleeps with us, she experiences many, many moments with us, and so she feels closer to us and loves us more.

These and other participants explained that co-sleeping is part of family life, and family means making sacrifices, including one’s own comfort. Indeed, respondents’ accounts reveal that they go to great lengths to protect the comfort of their companion animals. For example, one couple disclosed the following:

Sherry: Sometimes, Don [the cat] feels there is not enough room for him, so he starts pushing, and my husband needs to sleep in a way that is inconvenient for him just to make sure it is convenient for the cat.

David: Yes, sometimes I have to put my legs diagonally so that it is comfortable for him [. . .] We don’t want him to leave the bed.

Other couples also stated that they prioritised pets’ sleep needs. Previous studies have found that women tend to subordinate their own sleep needs to those of their loved ones, including children and partners (Venn et al., 2008). However, this research shows that in multispecies families, men and women alike subordinate their sleep needs to those of their pets, thereby constituting their pets as family members. These accounts challenge the anthropocentric hierarchy of humans and animals and indicate that animals are not always passive and marginalised; instead, as suggested by Hsu (2017), they may cause change and affect human actions.

As the excerpts above denote, all parties learn how to ‘be’ a family through a process of ‘doing family’, and the training of bodies of animals and humans is a part of this process. While many reported taking an instant liking to their new pet, they also emphasised that they
grew to love and view them as part of the family, as their children, only after some time. During this time, attachment was formed not only through symbolic interactions (Sanders, 2003), but also through bodily practices. In some ways, the inclusion of animals in the family first required the taming of some of the pet’s animalic features, primarily those that have to do with ‘unruly’ fleshly behaviours (e.g. teaching them where to urinate and defecate). In other words, they attempted to civilise and domesticate their pets. However, respondents emphasised that this was not unlike the process of teaching infants and children how to control their needs and behave ‘properly’ in civilised society. Dina explicitly stated:

It’s just like raising a child. If I give birth to a child, I cannot give up on him just because it doesn’t suit me anymore. There are difficulties and you have to deal with them [. . .] a puppy, up to six months old, is not yet in control of his needs. He’s like a baby! However, while you can put a diaper on a baby, you can’t do that with a dog, so she urinates because she is still small, and she does not control her needs [. . .] She’s a child. Sometimes your child poops on the rugs or pees on the bed, he suddenly vomits or cries at 5 a.m. because he needs to eat, or, I don’t know, he’s just bored, or something hurts him; it’s the same thing!

Similarly, Sofi explained, ‘It’s like, if we have a child, then the house is not going to be the most sterile and clean, but it would be worth it!’ Such accounts of the similarities between raising kids and raising pets blur the boundaries between humans and non-humans by highlighting the animality of humans. The accounts further indicate that individuals and couples seek to civilise animalic features in both their pets and their children; however, they are also willing to accept such features to some extent. For these participants, control of the body is important and should be taught through a gradual process in which some infractions are expected and accepted.

However, respondents went on to explain that complete control of the adult body was impossible as well. They compared their pet’s recalcitrant bodily behaviour to their own, stressing the animality that both animals and humans share. This animality is perhaps most clearly manifested in sleep, because corporeal behaviour is often ‘uncivilised’ and control over the body is more limited in sleep than in wakefulness:

Interviewer: Have you had difficulties sharing a bed with Lina [their dog]?
Gideon: Yes, she farts.
Sofi: Yes, it’s awful. It’s really terrible.
Gideon: Sometimes she eats something when we are outside and then her stomach sends unpleasant messages.
Interviewer: Okay, and were there other difficulties?
Sofi: Only in the beginning, when we weren’t used to sleeping next to her, but now, it’s just her farting.
Interviewer: And how do you deal with that?
Gideon: We open a window [Laughs]
Interviewer: Did you consider not sleeping next to her?
Gideon: God forbid! I fart too, does that mean I should get out of the bed as well? [. . .] I fart and she [the dog] farts. That’s part of life. Sofi [wife] farts as well. There’s nothing you can do about it.
Like these respondents, others reiterated that living together ‘as a family’ often requires dealing with and accepting family members’ imperfections, including their undesired animalic features. As these accounts clarify, the fleshly body, universal to all animate creatures, can be a source of both delight and displeasure, of both the appealing and the repellent, all of which play a central role in the creation of sensory affinities among humans and between humans and non-humans.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

By making sense of novel empirical data through the synthesis of four distinct fields of knowledge – family sociology, embodied sociology, the sociology of sleep and human–animal relationships, this article contributes to all four fields and illuminates their interfaces. Analysis of two types of co-sleeping, both underexplored, demonstrated that co-sleeping is a *family practice of intimacy* – a practice through which intimate family relationships are affirmed and reproduced. The experience of co-sleeping creates sensory affinities that are vivid and resonant in a way that consolidates the bond not only between the human partners but also between them and their pets, all of whom are constituted as family members/kin.

The data show that couples choose to co-sleep not only in response to a social norm, but also because they believe that sharing space and time in sleep, as well as the physical contact of corporeal consciousness-free bodies, produce intimacy and reinforce their relationship: through the practice of co-sleeping they construct time and space in a way that allows them to imagine themselves as connected by interphysicality but separate from the rest of the world. In contrast, there is no social expectation that individuals should co-sleep with pets, and in fact the practice is often seen unfavourably – not only do sleep specialists often recommend against it, but so do members of the participants’ extended family. Hence the choice to co-sleep with companion animals represents an act of subversion rather than conformity to social norms; in this context, it is telling that the couples who participated in our research extended the reasoning regarding co-sleeping with partners to co-sleeping with pets, explaining that it fostered the imagining, practising and reproducing of intimate family relationships.

In time, couples learn to dislike solitary sleeping for both symbolic and material reasons: the shared bed – constructed as ‘our bed’ – symbolises the family, so that its emptiness threatens the very notion of family. In addition, couples’ bodily hexis changes as partners get used to sleeping next to each other. These findings could help explain why some couples insist on bed-sharing even when it disturbs the sleep of both or at least one partner and despite sleep specialists’ advice that they should avoid it (see, for example, Troxel, 2019).

This study contributes to family sociology in several ways. It identifies a particular type of family practice – which we have termed *family practice of intimacy* – and suggests that, rather than taking intimacy as a given in families, further research should explore which practices produce intimacy in families and how. It answers Morgan’s (2011, 2020) call to elucidate the associations linking family practices to time and space, emotions, as well as the body and embodiment. It sheds light on the following: how family practices evolve over time, how they change the meanings ascribed to time and space, and how they produce certain emotions; how enactment of these practices is based on, but also reshapes, the body and the embodiment of those constituted as family members; how certain family practices become embedded not only in daily but also in nightly lives, thereby changing the family habitus.
Further, this study illuminates the importance of corporeality and sensory relationality in family relationships among humans as well as across species. Respondents argued that the presence of bodies and physical closeness made the liaison real and reinforced it, in a way that empirically illustrates Mason’s theorisation of ‘sensory affinity’ as tangible: this affinity feels real and resonant in lived experience, creating sensory and material worlds of kinship (Mason, 2008), worlds that include both humans and non-humans. Not only is intersubjectivity formed in the relationship between pet keepers and their companion animals (Young, 2013), but also intercorporeality: the data show how reciprocity between bodies was created through a process of mutual moulding of bodies. These findings enhance our understanding of how senses other than sight may mediate experiences and affect the formation of associations in general and family relationships in particular.

Similar to results from previous studies on human–animal relationships (Irvine and Cilia, 2017; Shir-Vertesh, 2012), this research demonstrates that the pet’s status in the family is dynamic and flexible; however, it adds to the literature by showing that a pet can serve as a partner-substitute when partners are away, and thus that its status can exceed that of a child: pets provide warmth and protection, filling the void left when one partner is not at home and especially not in bed. The data also demonstrate that humans do not always dominate animals; instead, humans are willing to subordinate their own sleep needs to those of their pets to make sure that the latter feel loved and protected. Through these practices, pet owners constitute pets as ‘kin’ and create new family configurations that are more than human; as such, this study supports the claim that more-than-human kinship is formed by accentuating the personhood of animals (Charles, 2014; Shir-Vertesh, 2012).

This research is nonetheless innovative in demonstrating that humans blur the boundaries between themselves and animals not just through anthropomorphism but also through their declared emphasis on their own animality. Pet keepers accept some of the ‘animality’ of animals but stress that they accept it in humans as well – first and foremost in babies and children, but also in adults. (In contrast to previous research, humans are not presented here as animalistic as part of a process of de-humanisation and ‘othering’ that seeks to delineate boundaries between groups of humans (Cudworth and Hobden, 2014); rather than distinguishing between ‘us’ and ‘them’, animality is invoked to shatter boundaries and create a united ‘us’.) Co-sleeping epitomises the notion that animality is an integral part of family life. In ‘doing family’, animality needs to be actively civilised, that is, detached from nature, but should also be accepted and tolerated as an inevitable part of both human and non-human nature. The acceptance of the other’s animality may well be a unique feature of family life; indeed, in other domains of life the animalic features of humans are not well tolerated, let alone appreciated. These insights indicate that both biology and choice are implicated in kinship and relatedness, thereby contributing to existing social scientific research on kinship in general (Mason, 2008) and post-humanist kinship in particular.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, this study also has practical implications. In particular, the findings should be taken into account before advising individuals and couples to remove pets from their bedrooms and beds, as sleep specialists often do (American Sleep Association, 2021; Brown et al., 2018). Similarly, as respondents assigned a high value to co-sleeping as a part of family life, asking them to avoid it might have negative effects. Future research could use quantitative research methods and larger samples to
examine how prevalent the views and practices presented in this article are and whether they differ across groups and populations. This issue is significant because both human and non-human animals spend a significant part of their lives sleeping, often together.

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Notes
1. Both co-authors, Alexandra Karanewsky-Samnidze and Moriah Aharon, were Dana Zarhin’s BA students in Dr Zarhin’s seminar class ‘Sociological Perspectives of Sleep and Sleep Disorders’. After the completion of the seminar, the three decided to continue the research process. The students collected additional data and Dr Zarhin analysed all the data and wrote this article.
2. In this article, we use ‘family’ and ‘kinship’ interchangeably.
3. Actigraphy is a method of monitoring movement that can be used to assess sleep–wake cycles using a non-invasive accelerometer.
4. This study received ethical approval from the University of Haifa #541/20.

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