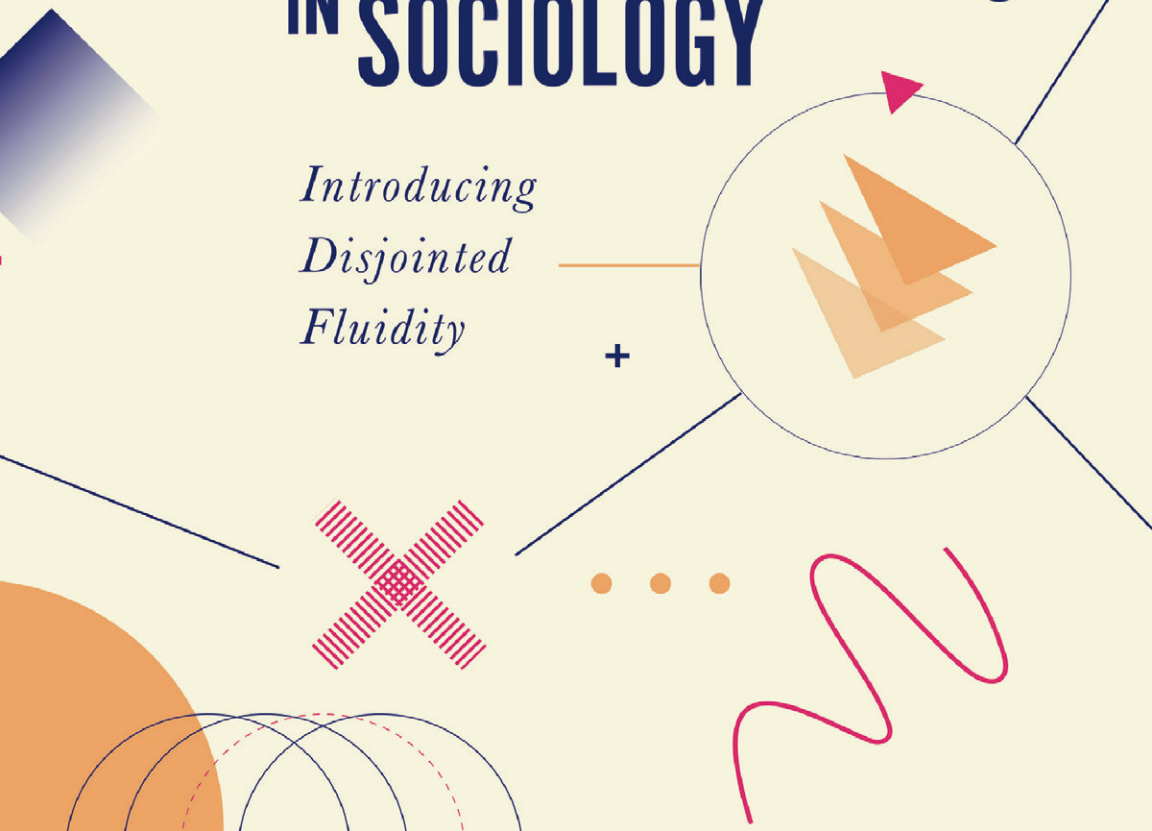




Jacqueline Foslyn

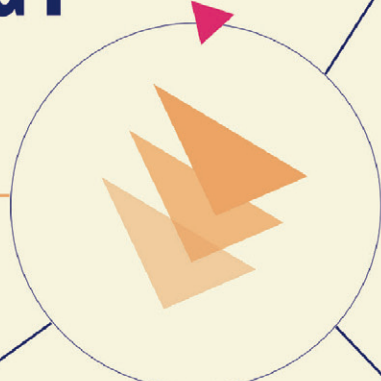
CONCEPTUALIZING AND MODELING RELATIONAL PROCESSES IN SOCIOLOGY

∴



*Introducing
Disjointed
Fluidity*

+



Conceptualizing and Modeling Relational Processes in Sociology

This page intentionally left blank

Conceptualizing and Modeling Relational Processes in Sociology: Introducing Disjointed Fluidity

BY

JACQUELINE JOSLYN

University of Arizona, USA



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2022

Copyright © 2022 Jacqueline Joslyn.
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80382-828-2 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80382-827-5 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80382-829-9 (Epub)



ISOQAR

REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Carmela Joslyn (my mom), Clara Pasto and Jennie Joslyn (my grandmothers), Jennifer Joslyn-Mahuta (my sister), and to all strong women: Thank you for giving me so many pixels to share.

This page intentionally left blank

Table of Contents

List of Figures	<i>ix</i>
List of Tables	<i>xi</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>xiii</i>
Introduction	<i>1</i>
Chapter 1 Conceptualizing Relationships	<i>9</i>
Chapter 2 Internal Mechanisms of Continuity	<i>25</i>
Chapter 3 External Mechanisms of Continuity	<i>37</i>
Chapter 4 Pixels and Flows	<i>51</i>
Chapter 5 A Mixed Methods Analysis of Gender and Mentorship	<i>77</i>
Conclusion	<i>93</i>
Appendix A: Data and Methods	<i>109</i>
References	<i>123</i>
Index	<i>137</i>

This page intentionally left blank

List of Figures

Chapter 1

Figure 1.	Zooming in on a Social Tie.	12
Figure 2.	Relationship Trajectories Evolving Over Time.	13
Figure 3.	RIECOs Are the Building Blocks of Relationship Constructs.	21
Figure 4.	Does a Relationship Exist?	22

Chapter 4

Figure 5.	Zooming in on a Social Tie to Show Pixels.	54
Figure 6.	Comparison of Pixel Trail Changes After Gender Awareness Training.	58
Figure 7.	Natalie-Denise Dyadic Structure as Pixels and Flows.	63
Figure 8.	Natalie Passing a Secondhand Pixel to a Student.	67
Figure 9.	Pixel Trajectory Foundations for Conformity, Loyalty, and Innovation.	68
Figure 10.	Fading and Merging of Pixels Over Time.	70

Chapter 5

Figure 11.	Average Marginal Effects of Gender for Nonsexual Discrimination (Hypothesis 2b).	85
Figure 12.	Average Marginal Effects of Gender for Sexual Discrimination (Hypothesis 2b).	86
Figure 13.	Average Marginal Effects of Gender for Nonsexual Discrimination (Hypothesis 2b, Control Variable Incl.).	86
Figure 14.	Average Marginal Effects of Gender for Sexual Discrimination (Hypothesis 2b, Control Variable Incl.).	87

This page intentionally left blank

List of Tables

Chapter 2

Table 1.	Internal Mechanisms of Continuity.	28
----------	------------------------------------	----

Chapter 3

Table 2.	External Mechanisms of Continuity.	38
----------	------------------------------------	----

Chapter 5

Table 3.	Logistic Regression Models of Sexual and Nonsexual Discrimination for Additive Effects (Odds Ratios).	82
----------	---	----

Table 4.	Logistic Regression Models of Sexual and Nonsexual Discrimination With Average Marginal Effects (Probabilities).	84
----------	--	----

Appendix A

Table 5.	Demographics for Part II.	114
----------	---------------------------	-----

Table 6.	Demographics for Part I.	117
----------	--------------------------	-----

Table 7.	Mentorship Statistics by Gender.	118
----------	----------------------------------	-----

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my dissertation cochairs, Joseph Galaskiewicz and Robin Stryker. Their astute advice, feedback, and encouragement has been so very instrumental to every aspect of this research. I am wholeheartedly grateful to my dissertation committee members, Ronald Breiger and Brian Hilligoss, for their generous guidance and suggestions. Thank you to the University of Arizona Graduate and Professional Student Council for providing funding for this research. I would like to recognize Nina Eliasoph and the Junior Theorists Symposium volunteers for providing critical feedback and allowing me to bring disjointed fluidity to the attention of the scholarly community. A special thank you to Corey Abramson for his valuable literature recommendations. I would also like to acknowledge Albert Bergesen. Our conversations were a valuable and cherished source of creative inspiration. I lovingly thank my friends and family for all the support, which I will forever pay forward.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

Abstract

Sociologists have not neglected the study of relationships, but there remains no central definition of what a relationship is. This study offers a definition of relationships that supports a conceptual tool and visualization technique for analyzing relational processes that are otherwise difficult to model using standard ethnographic methods and social network analysis techniques. Grounded in the work of social psychologists and relational sociologists, the premise of this proposition is that relationships are both remembered and imagined. I maintain that relationships are molded by a flow of changing circumstances and dynamic cognitive processes, a characteristic that I refer to as disjointed fluidity. With data from my ethnographic study of doctoral student mentorship, I use this perspective to detail the mechanisms by which relationships are created, maintained, and dissolved. I go on to introduce a new computational ethnographic technique that visualizes relationship properties and characteristics of relational processes using cognitive–temporal depictions called pixels and flows. This book contributes to the efforts in relational sociology to build a universal conceptualization of relationships. It differs from existing literature in its focus on the elements of relationships and their function in social construction.

People are difficult to study. They are full of thoughts, feelings, urges, and sensations. They make choices and change their minds. Sometimes they conform and sometimes they think outside the box. They respond to a myriad of contingencies and situations. They believe, make believe, and misbelieve. They routinely create and dismantle their own knowledge and culture. Indeed, it is the horrendously and beautifully untidy nature of social construction that adds layers of complexity to sociological research. For social theorists, scientists, and practitioners alike, it is imperative to continuously revisit, refine, and expand the theories and methods used to study our own social world.

This book takes a closer look at some of the messiest and most ambiguous aspects social construction in order to better understand the foundations of relationships. I explore relationships from a cognitive–temporal perspective, and this was an intentional decision. The act of thinking is described by the pragmatist tradition as an imaginative, logical, and adaptive process (Dewey 1910). It is through socialization that this cognitive capacity is honed for the embodied and

2 *Conceptualizing and Modeling Relational Processes in Sociology*

embedded experience of living as a human being in the world. The pragmatist tradition asserts that relationship constructs are not reified reflections of an ultimate truth or reality; rather, they are derived logically and creatively in the mind to convey complex meanings.

The significance of cognition and meaning-making in social construction is evident in the development of increasingly advanced relationship configurations and abstractions during childhood. According to Dewey (1910:190), “all persons have a natural desire – akin to curiosity – for a widening of their range of acquaintance with persons and things.” A child can draw a picture of several stick figures representing different members of their family. Even at a young age, the child can explain the nature of these family relationships. The parents and children play different social functions, and they are both united and differentiated by those distinctions. An adolescent might engage in more sophisticated storytelling of relationships – Jill loves Jeff, but Jeff loves Jamie, and Jamie does not know that Jeff exists! This is a classic social network concept of relationships articulated in the form of a story.

There are many ways of conceptualizing relationships, such as roles, social networks, identities, or affiliations. The challenge for social scientists is to break down these social constructs in order to think about them and study them in a scientific way.

But is social network analysis not a highly intellectual subfield? Does it not help to clarify these cognitive abstractions? There is a current rift between social network theory and relational sociology, which is a component, of a larger paradigmatic tension between intellectual and pragmatic approaches to theory. Social network theory has endeavored to measure relationships and categorize them into neat orderly boxes. To be sure, many useful forms of mathematical analysis demand some compromise between the unruliness of socially constructed reality and the high precision of the methods themselves. The simplification of complexity and quest for truth has yielded important scientific research, yet it is not enough on its own. The rise of relational sociology has reinserted a pragmatic perspective that seeks to make sense of inconvenient meanings and ambiguous realities, which could throw a monkey wrench into even the most meticulously designed model. The pragmatic scholar does not necessarily wish to eliminate social network analysis, but to marry it with a more comprehensive range of research methods that can better capture the quagmire of social construction.

Cognitive processes contribute to the complexity of social construction. In pragmatic fashion, these complexities will be addressed directly in this book (so that social network analysis can be usefully expanded, not replaced). Its usefulness notwithstanding cognition is only one dimension of relational processes. Recalling the previous example, one wonders how the stick figure family of the child changes over time? And what becomes of the adolescent relationship between Jeff, Jill, and Jamie? Time is inseparable from the cognitive aspects of relational processes.

The interplay between cognition and time inheres ubiquitously in the human experience. One need not go further than everyday life to notice that cognition

and time have intriguing qualities. Consider the natural human capacity for sequencing using the memory and the imagination in the arts and humanities. Movies and stories have the interesting quality of using time to manipulate the way the visualizations are interpreted by the observer. Several pictures could achieve a rough depiction of change over time, and a story could be told in a choppy manner in which the storyteller eliminates detailed narratives and summarizes a chain of events. But sophisticated movies and stories, especially in mainstream media, have a fluid quality, such that the pieces are selected, sequenced, and timed with intention to portray a particular meaning. They can mimic or manipulate the human memory and imagination by using time and clips of key events to guide one's thinking.

The significance of time and remembered and imagined events is especially evident in plot twists. In the *Sixth Sense* (1999), the audience internally pieces together a relationship construct of Dr Crowe's relationship to Cole, a young boy who can see dead people. We understand that Dr Crowe and Cole have the roles of psychologist and patient, respectively. These roles define their relationship. Interactions between Dr Crowe and his former patient who shot him lead us to believe that his relationship with Cole is motivated by those events. Throughout most of the movie, there are no indications that Dr Crowe identifies as a dead person nor that Cole construes him that way. The plot twist is jarring because one important piece of information is left out – the fact that Dr Crowe actually died after the gunshot at the beginning of the movie. This utterly changes the way the audience constructs Cole and Dr Crowe's relationship.

The social psychology of plot twists is intriguing from the perspective of relationship construction. The filmmakers deliberately control the timing of memory creation. The audience must construct the relationship between Dr Crowe and Cole based on the information available to them. Much like the routine gaps in real-life interactions, audience members must fill in the gaps between scenes using their own imaginations. The ability of the filmmaker to anticipate the way most individuals will construct the relationship is precisely where the genius of the narrative lies. After all, individuals can construct relationships in numerous ways. One person's villain can be another's hero. A work of art could be interpreted 10 different ways by 10 different people. However, the *Sixth Sense* shows us that most people will assume that a person is alive – even in the movies – unless otherwise informed. There is a brilliance to being able to identify a common blind spot in human thinking and exploit it in a plot twist.

The memory and imagination are not just important for storytelling; indeed, they are significant underpinnings of the way people understand relationships. Consider the children's movie *Coco* (2017) – a story about a Mexican boy named Miguel who steals a guitar from the grave of his deceased music idol on Día de los Muertos, thereby cursing him and leading to a series of adventures with his ancestors in the Land of the Dead. The Land of the Dead is bustling with animated skeletons of people who have died. During Miguel's adventures, he meets a man who asks him to bring his photograph to the family altar. It is important that he be remembered by the living because once someone is forgotten, they disappear from existence completely.

4 *Conceptualizing and Modeling Relational Processes in Sociology*

This is an interesting representation of a common sentiment. Many people feel a deep-seated desire to remember the dead. Remembering the dead does not bring the person back to life, but it does preserve the relationship between the dead and the living. Día de los Muertos is an annual memorial celebration of lost loved ones. Memorials of the dead are intended to revive and pass on memories. The relationship between the dead and the living continues, albeit in an altered form. Others prefer to use their imaginations instead of looking back on memories. Perhaps they imagine the dead in the afterlife or envision them as becoming part of the natural world. Still, others choose to forget the deceased. The act of forgetting is a way of removing the relationship. It does not remove the effects that the person has had, but the relationship can fade along with the person's memory. If it does not exist in one's mind, the relationship effectively "disappears." For some, this is not a sad or disrespectful choice as portrayed in *Coco*, but rather, it is a way for the living to move forward with their lives and adapt to a new relational reality.

Relationships are intimately connected to the memory and the imagination in the arts and humanities, and perhaps this connection has some grounding in sociological reality. Cognition and time are challenging to study, but it is the nature of social construction to be messy and ambiguous. The pragmatism of relational sociology has much to offer the intellectualism of social network theory in the study of social construction. From here, I shall move away from the artistic side of human relationships into the real world of social interactions to study a topic that many sociologists have grappled with. I offer this compilation of theoretical and methodological research as an extension of the sociological study of relationship process conceptualization and modeling.

About This Book

The inspiration for this book is partly attributable to my work as a research assistant for Corey Abramson at the University of Arizona on a study of terminally ill cancer patients. I remember reading and coding the transcripts of patient interviews for social network variables, only to discover a rather tricky coding problem: Every once in a while, a patient would discuss their relationship with God.

As a student of social network theory and analysis, this issue gave me pause. For sure, one could conceive of a relationship with a divine entity as a one-way tie. It is a tie that serves a completely different role than a tie to an actual human being, unless that human being constitutes an angel or spirit that is functionally equivalent to a divine entity in the mind of the ego. But is this a legitimate relationship?

This issue can quickly lead a social network analyst into an existential crisis. Is an imaginary relationship real? If an imaginary relationship is real to the perceiver, then it can ostensibly have social consequences. It can provide social capital. If so, then one must include imaginary relationships in the analysis. If an imaginary relationship is not real, then at what point does the relationship cease

to exist? If a person dies and no one in the network knows, is the imaginary relationship illegitimate? What is required for a relationship to exist? Interactions? Fulfilling a role? What is a relationship?

In fact, the researcher gets to pick and choose what the conceptual boundaries of a relationship are. The upshot is that many social network studies share similar analytical methods, but have very different conceptual underpinnings. In some cases, this can make research studies incomparable because the conceptual definitions of relationships are different.

My ontological inquiries have brought me into phenomenology/social psychology and relational sociology. These are the literatures that I incorporate into my conceptualization of relationships and my application of this concept. My perspective is strongly focused on social network theory because: (1) that is one of the subfields that I specialize in; (2) it is the subfield that inspired this research study in the first place; (3) relational sociology has performed parallel work with a heavy emphasis on social network theory; and (4) social network scholarship is decisively dedicated to the study of relationships, so it is only appropriate to use this subfield as a starting point for understanding the constituents of relationships.

That said, this is not just written for relational sociologists or network analysts or phenomenologists. The disjointed fluidity perspective that I will develop here is applicable to other relationship concepts, such as identities and roles. While I do explain the general connection and benefits to these concepts, I do not engage in theory-building or empirical analysis that draws heavily on these literatures. It is important to understand the potential for this concept to unify other relationship concepts based on their common foundations. However, I shall leave this task of extended theory development and empirical application to the experts of subfields that express interest in it.

It is worth noting here that I occasionally use the terms “universal” and “unifying” to describe my intentions. This deserves clarification, especially in a book that takes a strong social constructionist stance. Social constructionism is grounded in the assumption that the construction of social relationships is a universal occurrence among cognitively functioning human beings; that is to say, relationships can be constructed in innumerable ways, but the one thing that they all have in common is that fact that they were constructed. This book attempts to explore this universality of construction using a cognitive–temporal approach. That said, a prudent reader must proceed with caution about the use of the word “universal.” In this context, a universal conceptualization of relationships is referring to a shared set of processes involved in social construction that has achieved legitimacy through scientific consensus. It is, effectively, an exploration of social construction itself, a process that is shared “universally” (and nonspecifically) by relationship constructs in their various forms.

Care must be taken not to overextend the condition of universality. The cognitive–temporal approach proposed here is not universally applicable. This is only one perspective with which to view socially constructed processes. It is not the ideal approach for all studies, and it is not necessary to begin every study with an in-depth analysis of its cognitive–temporal elements, in the same way the gravitational pull need not be calculated to have a successful game of baseball.

6 *Conceptualizing and Modeling Relational Processes in Sociology*

Similarly, social constructs and measurements are certainly not universal. The conceptualization process may be universal, but not the concepts themselves. Can frequency of time spent together always be used to measure strong ties? Is the concept of strong ties always useful? These are not the issues at hand, and I do not make claims about the universality of specific concepts or measurements. From what common basis can relationship concepts (and measures) be derived? This is the question of unification that is addressed in this book. Social constructionism is powerful because it explains the natural variation in cultural and social phenomena. There is a distinction to be made between this paradigm and the wide-ranging creative and rational products that it seeks to explain.

One of the broader intentions of this study is to demonstrate the importance of exploring this universal connection. The use of social constructs and measurements is of practical importance and, though it can be quite messy and complicated, so is the definition and analysis of the constructive processes that they all have in common. The cognitive–temporal approach is one useful way of approaching this topic.

This work is foremost dedicated to the conceptual exploration of relationships from the perspective of remembered and imagined events and other cognitive outputs. Thought experiments and references to extant literature are used in some places for the purpose of illustration. I also include an analysis of primary data that I collected for three purposes. The first purpose is to develop theories related to social construction (see Chapters 2 and 3). The second purpose is to have a rich data source with which to develop a modeling tool for relational processes from a disjointedly fluid perspective (see Chapter 4). Finally, the empirical data are used to provide some sense of how the concepts presented here can be applied concretely (Chapter 5). For more information about the data and methods, please see the appendix.

Summary of Contents

The general thesis is that conceptualizing relationships as simultaneously cognitive and temporal provides a microfoundation for other relationship concepts. Having a more unified understanding of what relationships consist of is useful for analyzing and modeling relational processes.

Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical background. This writing is undertaken with the intention of specifying what a relationship is. I look to unite common conceptualizations of relationships around their shared phenomenological/social psychological elements. I also explain how this helps to extend relational research. First, I focus on the intersection of time and cognition. Relationships can be understood as trajectories. I define the concept of a relationship in terms of remembered and imagined events and their cognitive outputs intersecting with time, which I describe as “disjointed fluidity.” Then, the phenomenological and social psychological literatures behind this conceptualization are discussed, as is the place of this concept and the contribution it makes to relational sociology.

Given the disjointedness of relationships, how is it that relationships feel and appear to be continuous? Chapter 2 gives consideration to the mechanisms by which fluidity is maintained. The fluidity of relationships fosters a sense and appearance of continuity during periods of loss and absence. Loss and absence have been studied at length in different classical traditions. In this chapter, I describe three internal mechanisms of continuity. These mechanisms are illustrated with empirical examples from a study on mentorship in academia. I explain how these mechanisms can help to break down the underlying processes behind social isolation, alienation, and social structure. I proceed to explain some of the limitations of the analysis.

Chapter 3 switches to an analysis of external mechanisms of continuity. I describe three external mechanisms and provide empirical examples to explain their function. The external mechanisms are defined as triggers of internal mechanisms. I conclude the analysis by exploring applications of the mechanisms to three empirical studies by other scholars.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to methodology. The disjointed fluidity of relationships makes standard social network analysis inappropriate for this type of analysis. There are currently no techniques specifically for modeling cognitive–temporal elements. I suggest the use of pixels and flows as a means of modeling relational processes for the purpose of theory-building. Using data from the mentorship study, I explore empirical situations using pixels and flows. With these empirical cases, I demonstrate the value of pixels and flows as a: (1) modeling tool that treads the line between oversimplification and under-simplification; (2) tool for building theories about disjointedly fluid realities; and (3) way of detecting and/or taking into account very specific properties of cognition and time that can affect relational processes. With software development, pixels and flows can be integrated into ethnographic or social network analysis research programs.

Chapter 5 includes a statistical and qualitative analysis of gender culture in academic mentorship based on results from the pixel and flow analysis. I demonstrate how pixel and flow analysis guides and supplements existing methods. In the case of feminist scholarship, the tradition of storytelling is improved with computational ethnographic methods.

The study concludes with a review of my key arguments and follow-up responses to potential questions that may linger in the minds of the readers. There are many theoretical, methodological, and practical directions to take disjointedly fluid trajectories. I give some general attention to different conceptualizations of relationships, but the disjointedly fluid foundations of particular niche topics are deserving of more nuanced attention by experts in those fields. I explain the limitations and possibilities of the disjointed fluidity perspective and pixel and flow modeling. This study suggests a conceptual and methodological solution to a unification problem. The most significant contribution of this research is to bring attention to the concept of the relationship and push forward new ways of breaking down relational processes into their constituent components.

This page intentionally left blank