

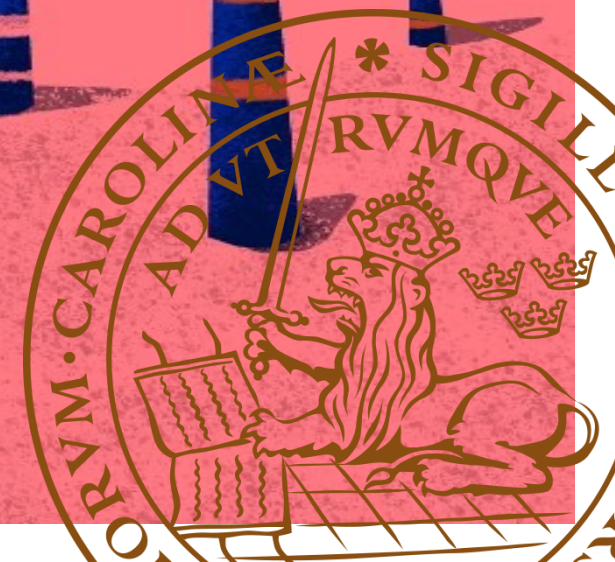


LUND
UNIVERSITY

An introduction to climate anxiety & eco-emotions

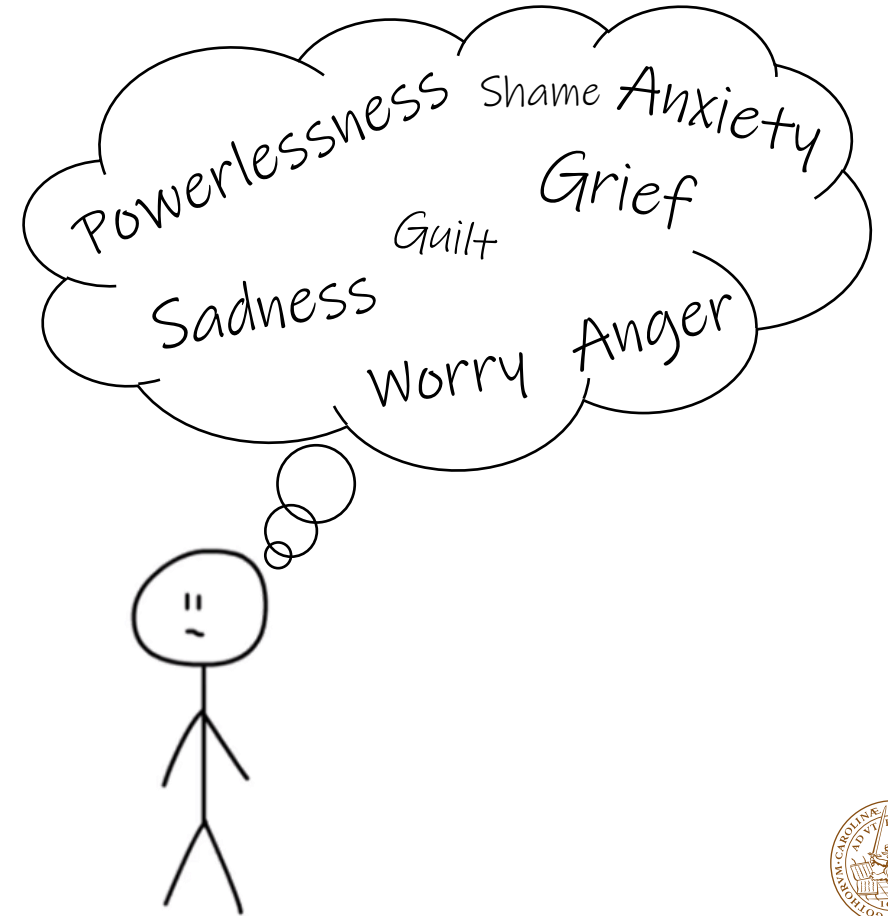
MARLIS WULLENKORD, 27.09.2023, TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY SEMINAR

Image: Antonio Rodriguez via Adobe Stock

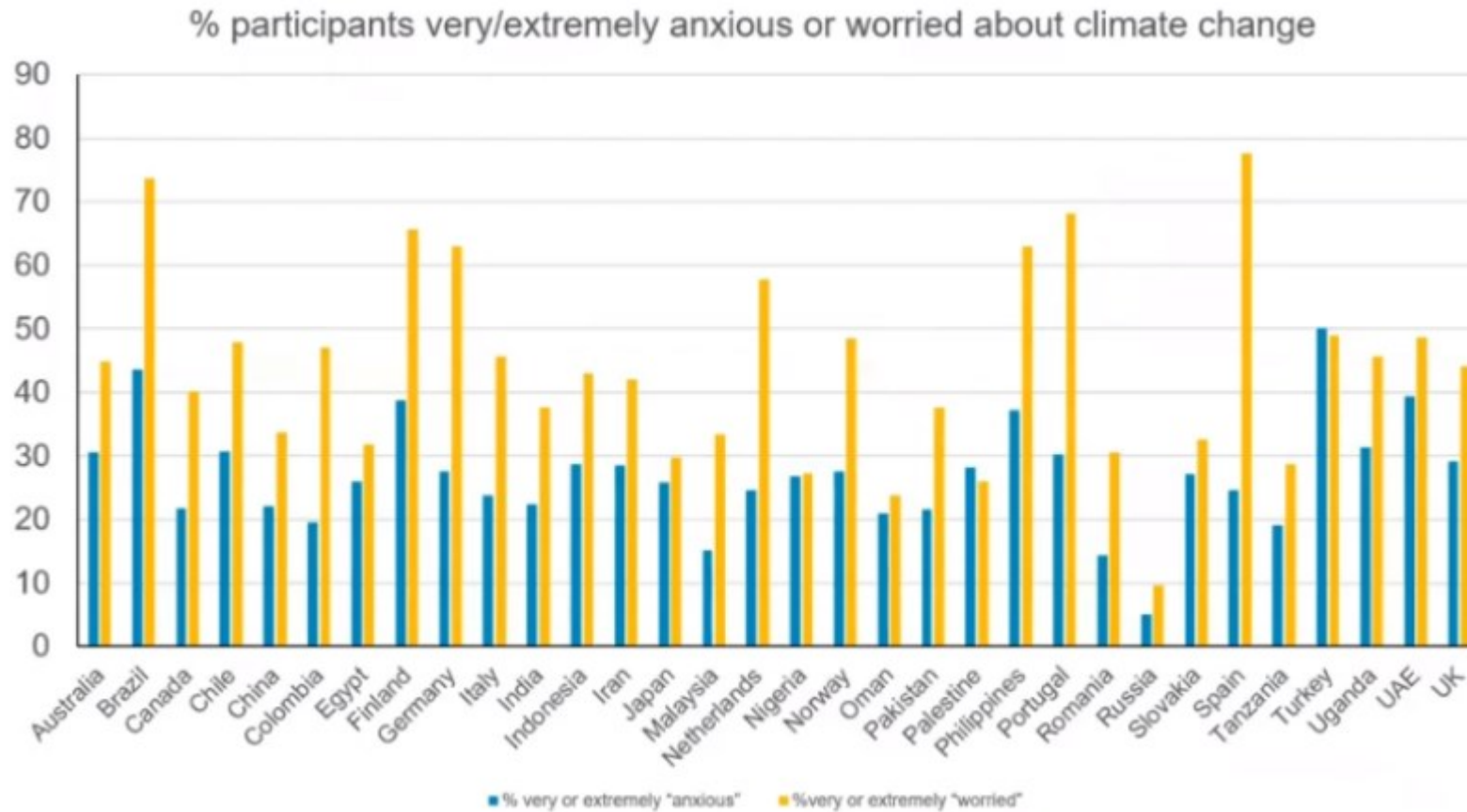


What is eco-anxiety?

- Different definitions:
 - “apprehension and stress about anticipated threats to salient ecosystems” (Cunsolo et al., 2020, p. e261)
 - “persistent feelings of worry, anxiety, dread, or doom regarding environmental degradation and the impacts and implications of climate change on our planet as a whole” (Passmore et al., 2022, p. 3)
 - “the generalized sense that the ecological foundations of existence are in the process of collapse” (Albrecht, 2012, p. 250)



Worry & anxiety about climate change globally



Young people's worries about climate change

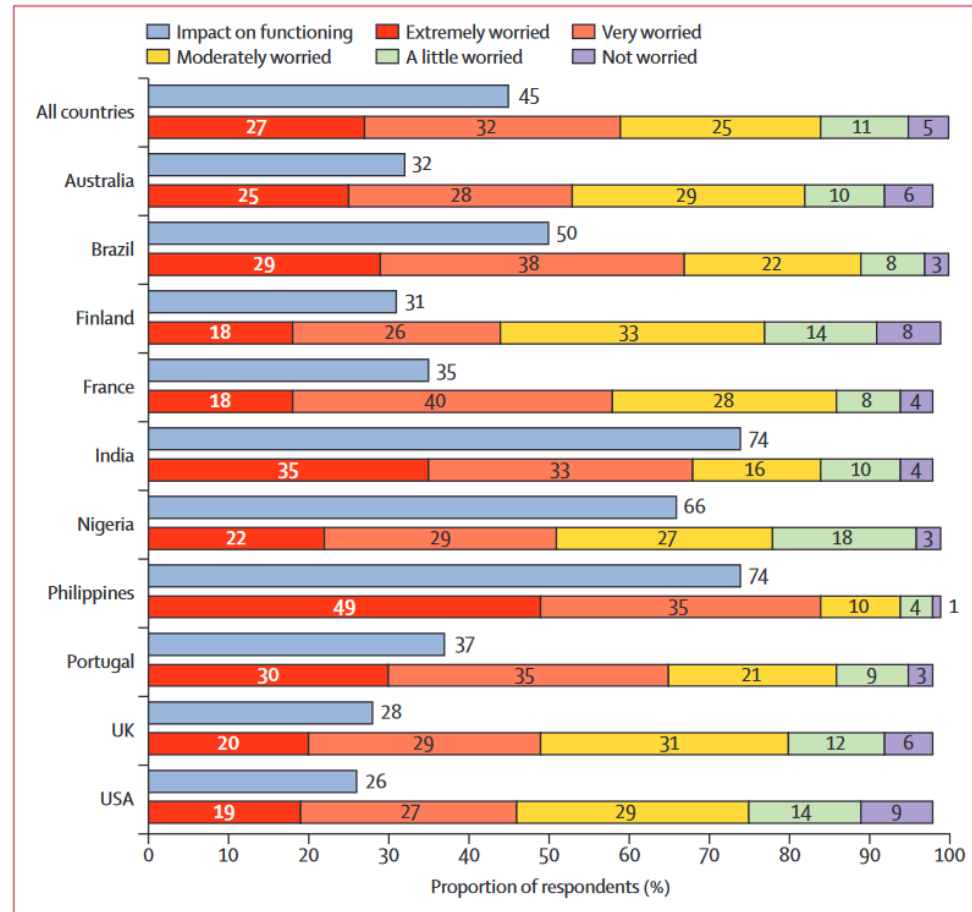
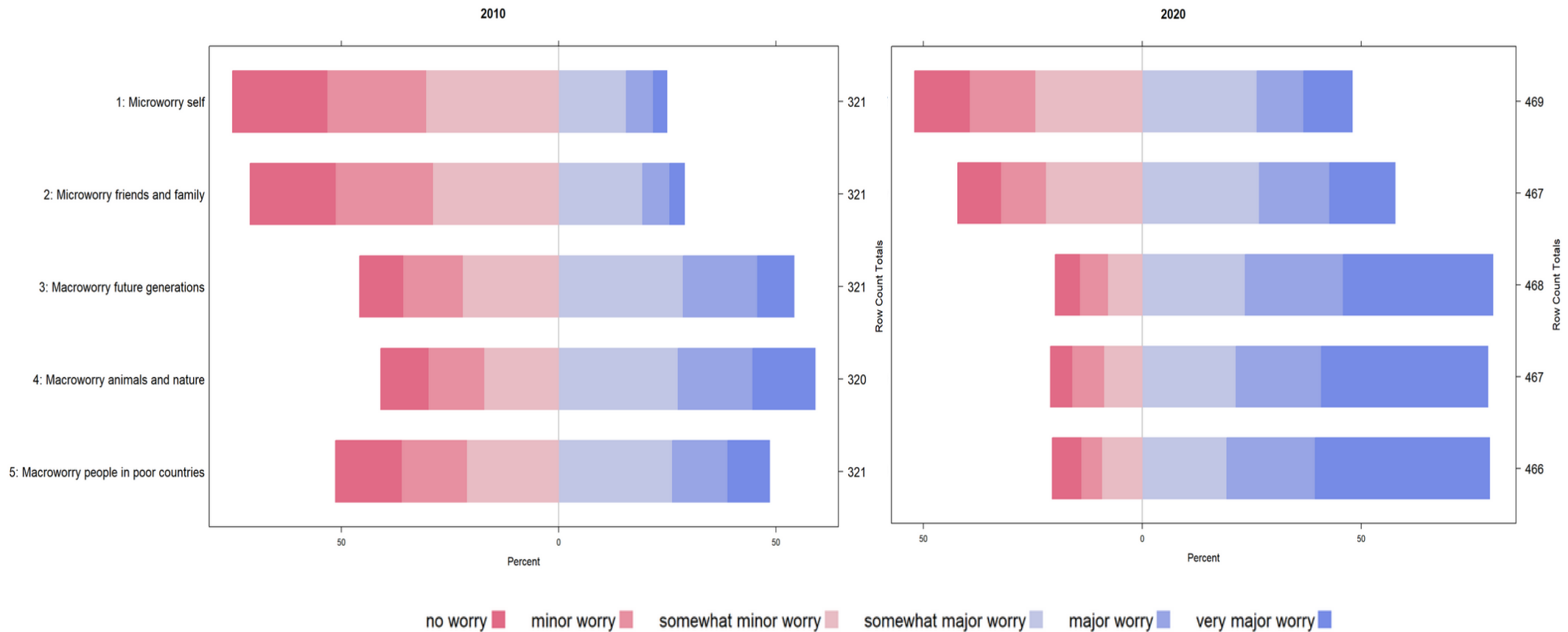


Figure 1: Worry about climate change and impact on functioning

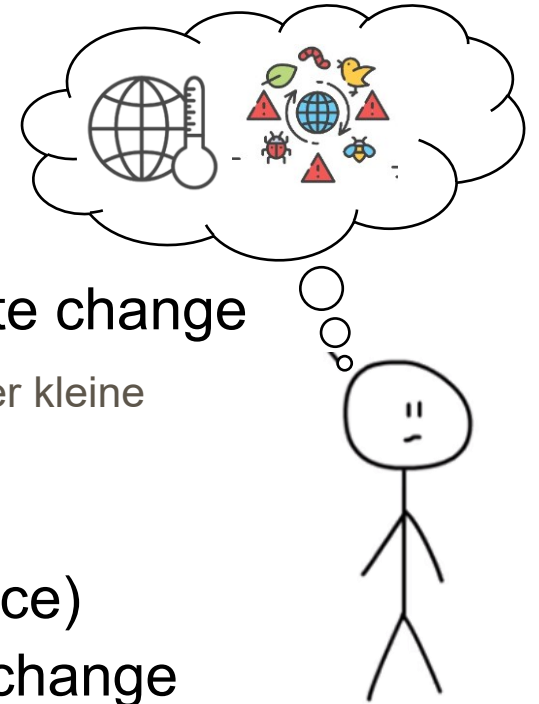


Young people are increasingly worried



Climate anxiety triggers

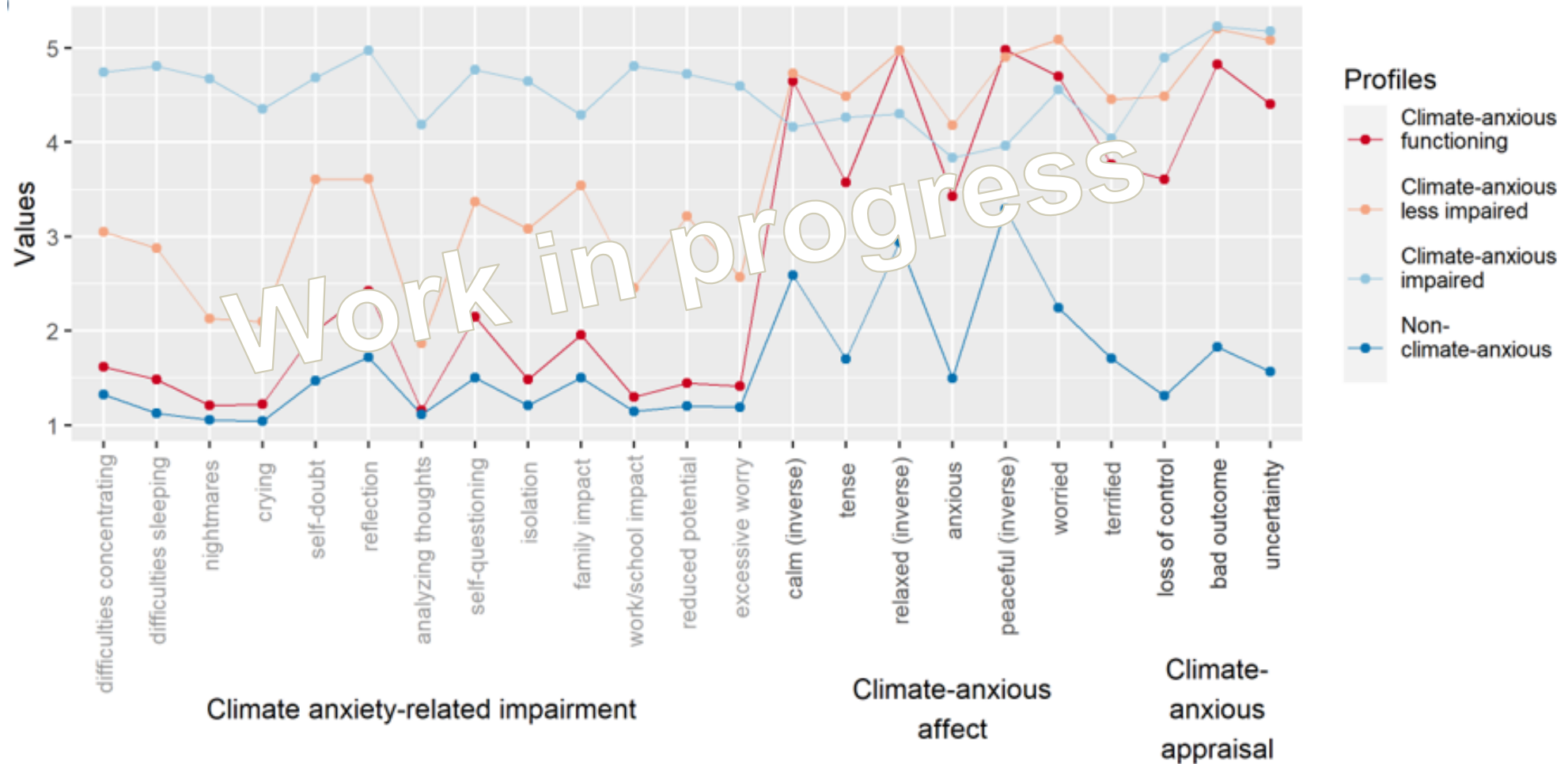
- Different paths of exposure:
 - Direct physical experience of the consequences of climate change (e.g., flooding, wildfire) (HEEREN ET AL., 2022; SIMON ET AL., 2022, aber kleine Korrelationen)
 - In the Global North often social representation of climate change/interpretation (instead of direct physical experience) (CRANDON ET AL., 2022) → learning and thinking about climate change
- Appraisal theories of emotion (e.g., LAZARUS, 1991): appraisals cause emotions



What is the difference to other types of anxiety?

- Characteristics of anxiety (Lazarus, 2001):
 - Threat appraisal
 - Often existential
 - Loss of control/powerlessness
 - Future-oriented
 - Uncertainty
- Climate anxiety: Rational reaction to an existential threat
 - Not pathological (i.e., not a disorder)

Different configurations of climate anxiety



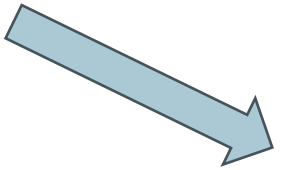
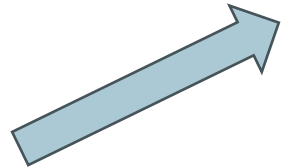
“Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people, to give them hope, but I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is.” – GRETA THUNBERG, 2019



polar bears are dying...
cars create pollution...
we're heating the planet...



I'm uncomfortable.

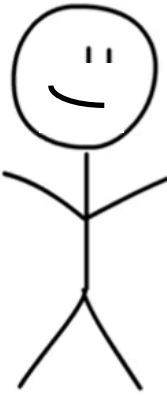


whatever.
you're wrong!



shield of Safety

Act Now!



Coping with climate anxiety



Talking about uncomfortable emotions



Social Connection



- Join with others who also have uncomfortable climate feelings
- Create protected spaces to talk about feelings and to be in those feelings and process them → it's okay and healthy to have these feelings
- Allow disturbing feelings → they communicate something important about the world (there is a problem) and about us (we care)
- Acknowledge that we all have different ways of dealing with our feelings
- Acknowledge that difficult, uncomfortable feelings are a part of life and make sense ("you need to acknowledge the negative in order for the positive to arise" - Ojala, 2022)
- Communication that strengthens needs (empathy, creating trust)

Acknowledging and validating feelings

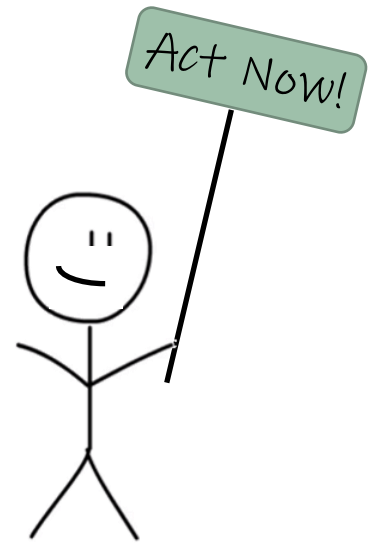


Emotional Coping Tools



Create active hope

- Acknowledge nuance and complexity: there are problems AND solutions
- Talk about solutions
 - What is already happening?
 - What is possible?
- Getting or staying active and celebrating successes
- Changing the narrative of what environmental action means →
Creates hope and drives environmental action



Social
Connection



Climate Action



Emotional Coping
Tools



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Coping with climate anxiety in higher education

- Integrate critical emotional awareness in teacher trainings (Ojala, 2022)
 - Giving educators tools to learn about and develop emotional competencies so that their students can learn about and develop emotional competencies
- Give educators time and resources to integrate emotion work in teaching
- Have institutional discussion and maybe policies how to deal with climate anxiety in students and staff
- University as a powerful institution that can act in more or less climate-friendly ways → responsibility
 - Anxiety is often about inactivity of powerful actors





Thank you!