

Dr. Panu Pihkala, University of Helsinki

Climate change and bereavement

Climate Change and Death, 8th April 2024, Sofia, Helsinki

Climate Emotions Wheel

Climate Emotions Wheel



Climate Emotions Wheel © 2023 is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

 Climate Mental Health Network
ClimateMentalHealth.Net
based on research by Panu Pihkala: bit.ly/3Ky4k6G

Pihkala (2022)

frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fclim.2021.738154/full



About us

All journals

All articles

Submit your research

Search

Frontiers in Climate

Sections

Articles

Research Topics

Editorial Board

About journal

ORIGINAL RESEARCH article

Front. Clim., 14 January 2022

Sec. Climate Risk Management

Volume 3 - 2021 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2021.738154>

This article is part of the Research Topic

Affective Dimensions of Climate Risk

[View all 9 Articles >](#)

Download Article

Toward a Taxonomy of Climate Emotions



Panu Pihkala*

Faculty of Theology and HELSUS Sustainability Science Institute, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

There is a growing evidence that emotions shape people's reactions to the climate crisis in profound but complex ways. Climate emotions are related to resilience, climate action, and psychological well-being and health. However, there is currently a lack of research about the array of various climate emotions. There is also a need for more integration with general research about emotions. This article conducts a preliminary exploration of the taxonomy of climate emotions, based on literature reviews and philosophical discussion. The term emotion is used here in a broad sense, as is common in climate emotion research. Because of the urgency of the climate crisis and the lack of previous research, this kind of exploration is aimed to be helpful for both practical climate work and for future research which would include more systematic reviews of the topic. Research items which

24,892

Total Views and Downloads



View Article Impact

SHARE ON



Edited by



Nino Antadze

University of Prince Edward Island,
Canada

Reviewed by

ECOLOGICAL SORROW: TYPES OF GRIEF AND LOSS IN ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

Forms of loss

TANGIBLE / INTANGIBLE LOSS

This distinction can help to discern various forms of ecological loss. Intangible losses can be difficult to notice and are often disenfranchised. A single loss can include both tangible and intangible elements (e.g. loss of identity because of ecological loss).



AMBIGUOUS LOSS

Losses which have uncertainty and ambivalence, such as grieving soldiers missing in action. Many ecological losses have ambiguous elements: either psychological presence but psychological absence, or vice versa (e.g. snowy winters partly lost).



NONFINITE LOSS

This scholarship about ongoing losses can help to make sense of ecological losses. Nonfinite losses easily generate anxiety and there is social tension around them, often resulting in disenfranchisement.



SHATTERED ASSUMPTIONS

Some losses are so profound that they impact basic assumptions about the world and self. People then have to engage in meaning reconstruction. The ecological crisis can profoundly challenge people's meaning systems and cause spiritual grief.



Forms of grief

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF

Grief which is not given validation and/or public recognition. Ecological grief has often been disenfranchised, and grief theory helps to see various forms of this: 1) the loss is not acknowledged, 2) the griever is excluded, or 3) the relationship or kinship is not recognized.



CHRONIC SORROW

Non-pathological but persistent form of grief (not the same as "chronic grief"!). Its descriptions fit ecological grief very precisely: e.g. "constant reminders or triggers" and "unavoidable, periodic resurgences of intensity".



ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Some scholars define this as mourning in advance, before the losses have happened, but anticipatory grief can also be seen as part of grieving ongoing changes which are estimated to gain stronger forms in the future. A major aspect of ecological grief and related to continuing emotional bonds.

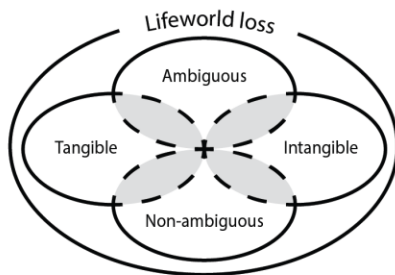


COMPLICATED GRIEF

As applied to ecological grief:
 a) Clearly prolonged and very intense grief reactions to a particular ecological loss.
 b) Long-standing and debilitating grief reactions to global ecological loss.
 c) Overly strong forms of anticipatory grief/mourning.
 d) Cases where inhibited ecological grief can clearly be noticed.



ECOLOGICAL LOSS



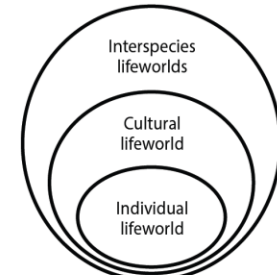
SPECIAL FORMS OF ECOLOGICAL LOSS AND GRIEF

Transitional loss and grief: ongoing ecological changes evoke these, and temporalities are complex.

Lifeworld loss: some losses are so holistic that they affect whole lifeworlds (see figure on the right).

Shattered dreams: ecological destruction produces shattered dreams, which are significant intangible losses.

LIFEWORLD LOSS



ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

DISENFRANCHISED GRIEF



CC BY-NC-ND

Grief which is not given validation and/or public recognition. Ecological grief has often been disenfranchised, and grief theory helps to see various forms of this:

- 1) the loss is not acknowledged,
- 2) the griever is excluded, or
- 3) the relationship or kinship is not recognized.

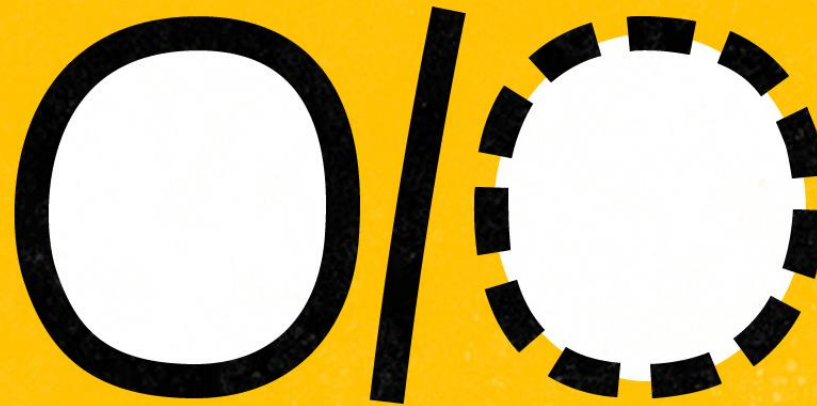
Fear of death, fear of grief?

- Research about how climate change may remind people of death and mortality
 - Smith, Lauren K. M., Hanna C. Ross, Stephanie A. Shouldice, and Sarah Elizabeth Wolfe. 'Mortality Management and Climate Action: A Review and Reference for Using Terror Management Theory Methods in Interdisciplinary Environmental Research'. *WIREs Climate Change* 13, no. 4 (1 July 2022): e776.
- Grief aversion in contemporary societies

ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

TANGIBLE / INTANGIBLE LOSS



CC BY-NC-ND

This distinction can help to discern various forms of ecological loss. Intangible losses can be difficult to notice and are often disenfranchised. A single loss can include both tangible and intangible elements (e.g. loss of identity because of ecological loss).

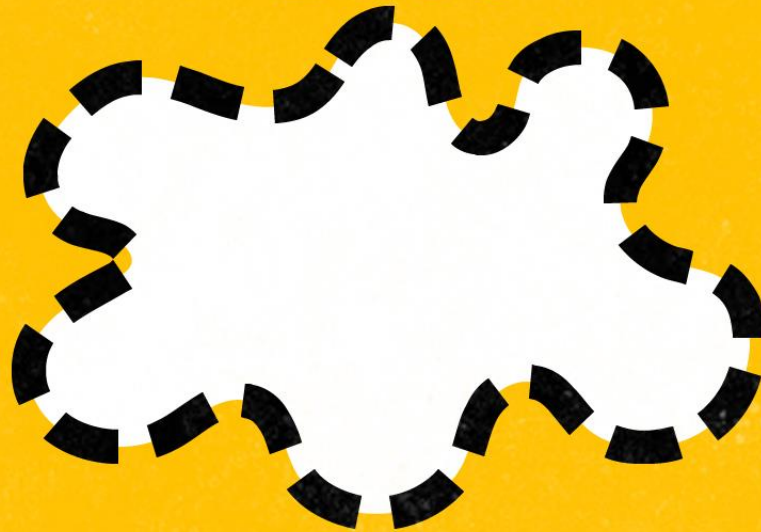
Tangible / intangible loss

- Climate change can produce physical death, but often it causes various other losses, both tangible and intangible.

ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

AMBIGUOUS LOSS



CC BY-NC-ND

Losses which have uncertainty and ambivalence, such as grieving soldiers missing in action. Many ecological losses have ambiguous elements: either psychological presence but psychological absence, or vice versa (e.g. snowy winters partly lost).

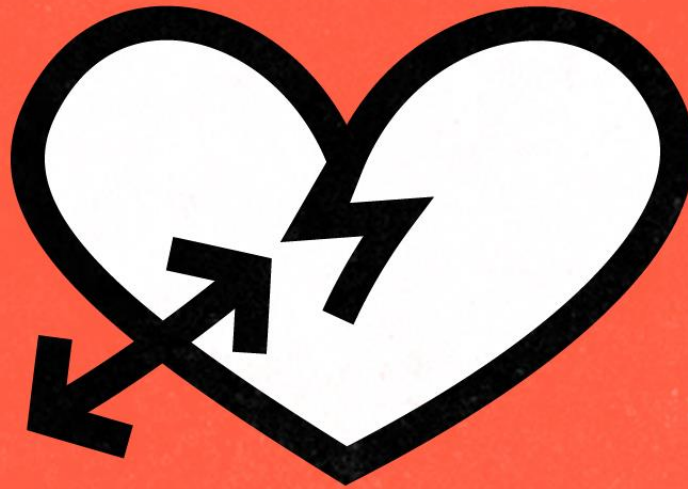
Ambiguous loss

- Some of these losses include ambiguity, and the concept of ambiguous loss helps to understand grief processes arising from situations where something is partly lost and partly not.

ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

ANTICIPATORY GRIEF



CC BY-NC-ND

Some scholars define this as mourning in advance, before the losses have happened, but anticipatory grief can also be seen as part of grieving ongoing changes which are estimated to gain stronger forms in the future. A major aspect of ecological grief and related to continuing emotional bonds.

Author: Panu Pihkala

Sustainability 2024

Anticipatory grief

- Temporalities are multifaceted in climate grief, because there are past, ongoing, and anticipated losses.
- The dynamics of anticipatory grief are thus more complex in relation to climate grief than in relation to death of a close one, and “transitional loss and grief” require attention.

ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

TRANSITIONAL LOSS AND GRIEF



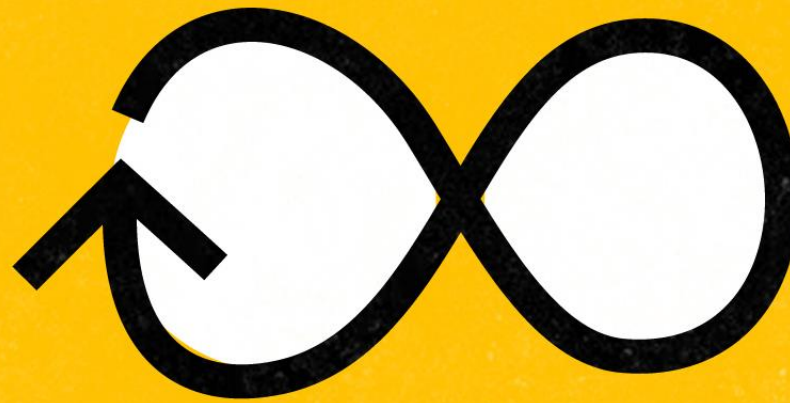
CC BY-NC-ND

Ongoing changes can evoke sadness (think of aging, for example). Adjustment is required: coming to terms with what is happening, and letting feelings flow. Many ecological changes produce these kinds of loss and grief.

ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

NONFINITE LOSS



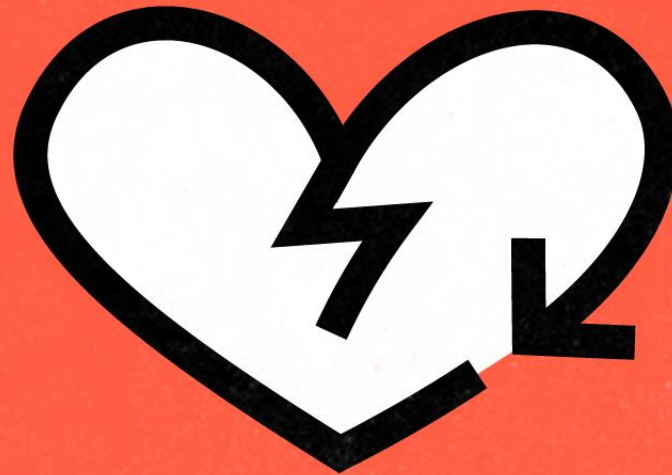
CC BY-NC-ND

This scholarship about ongoing losses can help to make sense of ecological losses. Nonfinite losses easily generate anxiety and there is social tension around them, often resulting in disenfranchisement. There is often a lack of rituals for nonfinite, ongoing losses.

ECOLOGICAL SORROW:

Types of grief and loss in ecological grief

CHRONIC SORROW



CC BY-NC-ND

Non-pathological but persistent form of grief (not the same as “chronic grief”!). Its descriptions fit ecological grief very precisely: e.g. “constant reminders or triggers”, “unavoidable, periodic resurgences of intensity”, and “predictable and unpredictable stress points” (Susan Roos).

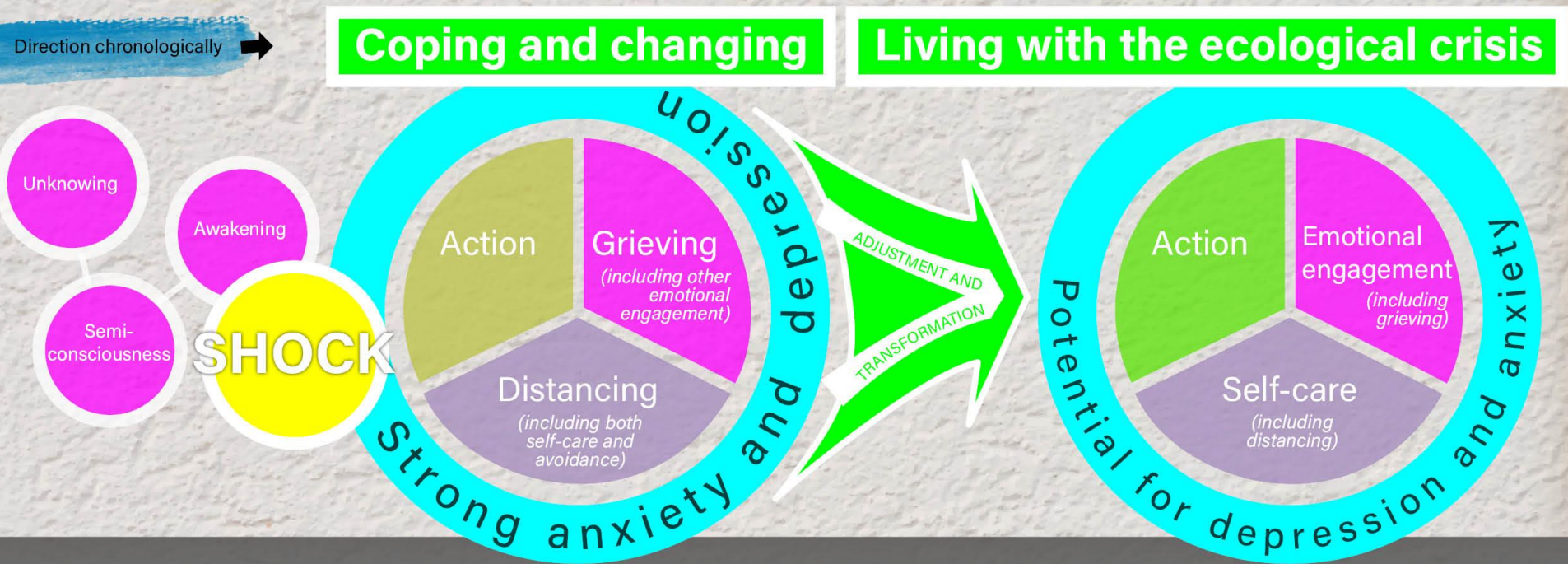
Author: Panu Pihkala

Sustainability 2024

Chronic sorrow / Complicated grief

- There can be aspects of nonfinite loss and chronic sorrow in climate grief, which makes evaluation of clinically significant, “prolonged” or “complicated” grief difficult.
- Fundamentally, climate change resonates with the depth dimension of death studies and grief research: the need to wrestle with existential questions and reconstruction of meanings in life amidst crises.

Process model (Pihkala 2022)



Process Model of Eco-anxiety and Ecological Grief

Panu Pihkala
Sustainability 2022

Semiconsciousness refers to a complex phase of both knowing and not knowing about the severity of the ecological crisis.

Awakening refers to a realization of the severity of the crisis. Sometimes people try to repress this Awakening and return to Semiconsciousness, but that is not completely possible and causes dissonance.

Shock and trauma may result in various ways from Awakening.

Coping and Changing: For healthy adjustment and necessary transformation, all three dimensions are needed (see also Figure 2).

* **Action** refers to doing something constructive in relation to the ecological crisis. Example: joining climate demonstrations.

* **Grieving** refers to encountering explicitly the various loss-related emotions engendered by the ecological crisis.

Example: talking about ecological grief at a safe discussion group.

* **Distancing** refers to various means of taking distance from the ecological crisis. Example: staying away from environmental news on Sunday (self-care) or denial of outcome severity for oneself (disavowal/denial).

* **Strong Anxiety and/or Depression** refers to various possible manifestations of strong and difficult mental states which are significantly impacted by the ecological crisis. These include anxiety states and increased anxiety tendencies, varieties of depressed moods, burnout, longer states of resignation, and "eco-paralysis".

Adjustment and Transformation refers to a long-term process where all three dimensions are engaged with and people find ways to both adapt and change.

When enough Adjustment and Transformation has happened, people enter this phase where there is more awareness and control about the three dimensions. For various dynamics and terms related to these dynamics, such as "acceptance" and "meaning", see section 4.2.4. in the article.

All three dimensions still need engagement with, and they still include scale in them (there are various intensities).

The titles and subtitles of two dimensions have switched places, reflecting changes due to Adjustment and Transformation. While Grieving still continues, major aspects of it have been engaged with, and there is more room for encountering other emotions. Distancing has become more conscious and more balanced, and thus Self-care is the ruling form, although there may still be moments of stronger and more unconscious disavowal.

Potential for depression and stronger anxiety still exists, and it is possible that in the long run, various depressive moods are a major threat as many aspects of the ecological crisis become more difficult in the coming decades.

Climate Change and Happiness podcast (Pihkala & T Doherty)



Nov 25

Season 2, Episode 7: When Grief Is A Barrier To
Enjoying Time In Nature

