

# Emotions in sustainability

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# Why emotions matter in (un)sustainability questions & higher education?

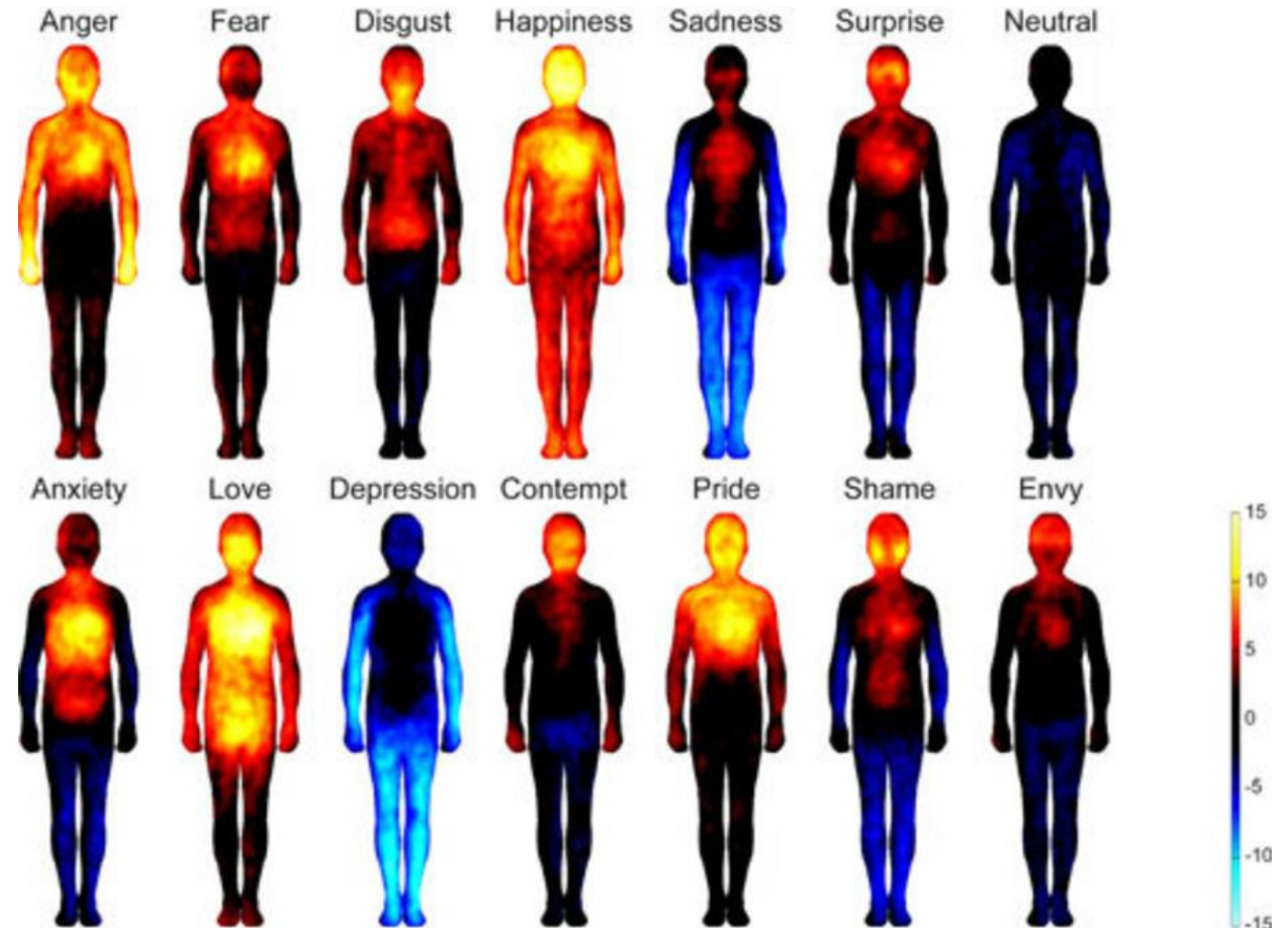
- Emotions related to these issues are common and very human – individuals shouldn't be left alone to deal with them
- When we encounter something new, huge or complex, it can be e.g. scary and overwhelming, and also provoke feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty
- Emotions can be energy for actions if one finds ways to channel it, but too heavy emotional burden and feeling that there is nothing one can do to make situation better can cause one to freeze or get stuck
- The way we deal (or not deal) with difficult emotions can affect learning, creativity and motivation to take part in solving these issues

## Emotions: what and why?

- Emotions impact everything, and are present for a reason. They have evolutionary basis; physiological and social, connected to thoughts and behaviour
- Basic emotions: fear, sadness, anger, disgust, joy, surprise
- Secondary emotions function as reactions – e.g. eco-anxiety is often built on many emotions
- *Eco-emotions*: Emotions related to environmental and climate issues, ecology and nature or natural phenomena

# Emotions (in general) are experienced also in the body, not just in your mind.

- <https://www.aalto.fi/en/news/finnish-research-team-reveals-how-emotions-are-mapped-in-the-body>



# Research on eco-emotions

- Research on eco-emotions has increased remarkably during the last five years.
- Results from a new, [global study](#)\* on young people's climate anxiety:
  - 10 000 16–25-year-old respondents from 10 countries
  - 59% very or extremely worried, 84% at least moderately worried about climate change
  - 75 % feel that the future is frightening
  - 45 % report negative impact on daily functioning
- In Finland, people feeling **both** climate anxiety and hope are most likely to act on mitigating climate change (\*\*[Sangervo, 2020](#))
- \*[https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3918955](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3918955),  
\*\*<https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/123166>



## Fourfold table PART 1

- What **thoughts, emotions and body-sensations** could

A) you

B) your students

experience related to e.g. climate and environmental crises, diversity loss and pollution, and taking part in (teaching of) these issues?

A	B



# Discussion

- What emotions are easy or difficult to notice, name or deal with? Why?
- In which situations have your own or others' eco-emotions appeared in your work/studying/volunteer-work/daily life/social life?



# How we might behave when not able to face/deal with these emotions?

- Denial, belittling, “shooting the messenger”
- Conscious avoidance, surrogate functions & addictions, dissociation
- Cynicism, “not worth it” thinking
- “Horror devouring” or crippling worrying
- “Over-performing,” acting beyond your own limits
- Compulsive thinking and action
- Excessive blaming, condemning, punishing
- As an extreme reaction, (self)destructive thinking and behavior

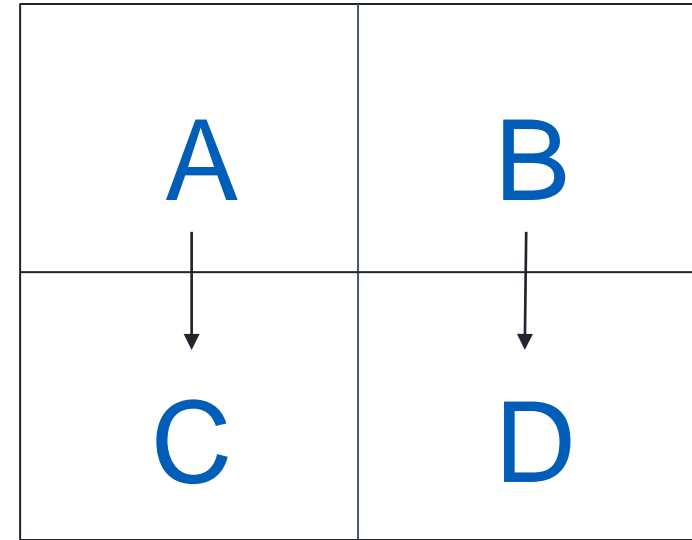


## Fourfold table PART 2

- What kind of **reactions** can/could

C) your eco-emotions cause **in others (students)?**

D) others' (students') eco-emotions cause **in you?**



# Questions

- What kind of notions you made about reactions to eco-emotions?
- What helps to deal, cope and thrive with eco-emotions and reactions to them?
  - E.g. what to take into account when communicating with others? How to help yourself or "colleagues" when encountering difficult eco-emotions?

# Why eco-emotions matter?

- Emotions are messengers, travel-partners, and can be the engines of change
- It's rational to e.g. feel fear and anxiety when facing threats to our existence. It's also rational to feel joy, awe and love when we connect with other humans, species and nature around us. We are interconnected.
- Don't try to get rid of certain emotions but consider them as travel companions. Difficult and unpleasant emotions are also important – they are trying to tell something.
- Dare to be vulnerable, dare to share your feelings and allow this to others as well.
- Action? Or connection? *"It's said that action is the antidote to anxiety, but maybe connection is a much better remedy."*

# Tools for teachers

- Pausing and observing ourselves and surroundings
- Adequate amount of facts + accepting and admitting that they might evoke emotions. Not knowing yet and being unsure is allowed, and while we are learning, we are also bound to make mistakes
- Emotional skills:
  - Recognizing our own emotions, reactions and basic assumptions
  - Separating facts from own interpretations
  - Uncertainty handling, acceptance, and skill of “two-level vision” or ambivalence
  - Conscious presence, compassion towards self and others
- Action: Working on values (becoming aware of the things that are meaningful) and acting based on them, slightly testing your limits to learn to set them in future
- Everyday routines, rest, taking time and space to recover
- Cooperation, communality, sharing, connection with non-human-world, nature

# Notions from my own practical work

- Recognizing where the limit is now is not always easy!
  - Taking a necessary break or avoiding?: *Relaxing and resting vs. harmful avoidance of emotions*
  - *Confronting and processing emotions vs. over-ruminating*
- *Sharing one's emotions and discussing these themes, especially about difficult ones, requires feeling of safety – How can you make it safe enough for others to open and grow/learn from their eco-emotions?*



# Questions for reflecting with colleagues

- What makes it easier/harder for you to encounter difficult feelings and emotions related to these issues?
- What kind of “tools” (as a teacher) you already have?
- What kind of tools higher education teachers would need to develop/learn in future?
- What kind of support you would need to be able to use those tools?

# How to continue?

- <http://ecoanxietyandhope.blogspot.com/> (*Panu Pihkala's blog*)
- [https://mieli.fi/sites/default/files/materials\\_files/mieli\\_climate\\_anxiety\\_30\\_10\\_2019.pdf](https://mieli.fi/sites/default/files/materials_files/mieli_climate_anxiety_30_10_2019.pdf) (Climate anxiety report)
- <https://tunne.org/english/> (Tunne ry – Känslä rf. provides possibilities for groups and individuals to process eco-emotions and thoughts)
- <https://www.ymparistoahdistus.fi/> (in Finnish)

# How to continue?

- An extensive collection of the best resources out there, in English: <https://www.allwecansave.earth/emotions>
- [Project InsideOut](#) - a guided process to becoming more engaged, both in action and emotion
- [Climate Psychologists: Identifying Climate Anxiety and Managing Eco-Emotions](#)
- In Swedish:
  - [Naturskyddsföreningens 5 tips](#)
  - [Panu Pihkalas 10 rekommendationer](#) (the same [in Finnish](#))
  - [Tuntuu.fi](#) - för bättre avslappning, sömn och kontakt med naturen

Klimatpsykologerna har gett ut boken *Klimatpsykologi - hur vi skapar hållbar förändring* (Natur & Kultur) och ger ut poddarna [Klimatpsykologipodden](#) och [Klimatkänslor](#)