

Shame or hope? How should we feel about climate change?

December 1 2022



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Is it OK to enjoy warmer summers, given they are caused by climate change? Should we feel shame when we fly? Is anxiety an overreaction, or a rational response to the current climate crisis? There is widespread

disagreement about how we should feel regarding climate change. In a new award-winning article, two researchers at the Institute for Futures Studies (IFFS), Stockholm help us sort out our climate emotions.

The debate around climate emotions is heated. According to some, certain emotions are appropriate, and others inappropriate. Julia Mosquera, philosopher, and Kirsti Jylhä, researcher in psychology, refer to the process of creating and negotiating new norms on how to feel as the "normativization of climate emotions."

But, as they point out, this process can go wrong if it becomes a simplistic search for the "one" correct emotion. According to Mosquera and Jylhä we would all benefit from realizing that there are many valid emotions, and to understand their role we should become more familiar with some criteria of evaluation.

"When climate emotions are discussed in the public debate it is common to evaluate their suitability by referring to the consequences they may have; for example, if they will lead to more [climate action](#). This discussion might be well-intended, but is often based more on intuitions than on research results or normative analysis," says Kirsti Jylhä.

What is appropriate to feel varies, for example, between individuals and contexts. Therefore, there is no universal "correct" emotion, say the researchers. However, this does not mean that emotions cannot be evaluated at all. In the article, the researchers evaluate several climate emotions using criteria from philosophy and psychology that can help to understand one's own as well as other's emotions.

"At the individual level, people also experience what we call 'emotional dilemmas.' For example, can I enjoy a warm summer day, or should I feel worried considering what is causing the heat? Both reactions can be rational since they involve emotions that are directed towards different

aspects of climate change. Climate change is a complex phenomenon with many aspects, which can evoke different reactions," says Julia Mosquera.

The authors warn against focusing [public debate](#) on emotional disagreements and simplistic views on how people should feel about climate change.

"For example, people may begin to distrust each other's motivation for action and thus refrain from acting collectively on the climate crisis," says Kirsti Jylhä.

Julia Mosquera's and Kirsti Jylhä's article "How to feel about climate change? An analysis of the normativity of climate emotions" has just received the 2021 PERITIA Prize, awarded by the UCD Center for Ethics in Public Life, Dublin, as part of the annual IJPS Robert Papazian Essay Competition on Ethics and Emotions. The paper has just come out in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*.

Need help to sort out your climate emotions? Here are some tips from the researchers.

Ask yourself:

What are you are reacting to?

Start by identifying which aspect of [climate change](#) you are reacting to. Is it fear about personal security? Is it the injustice in the distribution of the [climate](#) effects? Is it the inaction of politicians? Or the feeling that there is nothing you can do to influence the crisis?

Is the feeling rational?

When you have identified what you are reacting to, ask yourself if the feeling matches the situation and the relevant facts. Is the problem as bad as you think? Is it true that nothing is being done, or that you cannot take relevant actions? Are the changes you are hoping for realistic?

What are the effects of your emotion?

Also, think about what consequences the emotion will have for you and others. Does it result in desirable responses in others? Does it motivate you to take appropriate actions? Does it cause a disproportionate amount of suffering for you?

More information: Julia Mosquera et al, How to Feel About Climate Change? An Analysis of the Normativity of Climate Emotions, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/09672559.2022.2125150](https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2022.2125150)

Provided by The Institute for Futures Studies

Citation: Shame or hope? How should we feel about climate change? (2022, December 1) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-12-shame-climate.html>

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