

Handling eco-emotions in educational settings

Docent Panu Pihkala, University of Helsinki

26.9.2023, Lund

Climate Emotions Wheel



Various emotions: Pihkala (2022)

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

frontiers About us All journals All articles Submit your research

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

Mieli maassa?

YMPÄRISTÖTUNTEET



KIRJAPAJA

PANU
PIHKALA

My research background

- Interdisciplinary research about eco-emotions and climate anxiety
- Education and eco-emotions
 - 2017. 'Environmental Education After Sustainability: Hope in the Midst of Tragedy'. *Global Discourse* 7 (1): 109–27.
 - 2020. 'Eco-Anxiety and Environmental Education'. *Sustainability* 12 (23): 10149.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310149>.
 - Oxford Research Bibliography, Education: "Emotional and affective issues in environmental and sustainability education" (forthcoming in Autumn 2023)

...and practical work

- Facilitation of workshops, discussion groups
- Lecture course on eco-anxiety, University of Helsinki 2020-2023
- Various advisory boards
 - Finnish national project on eco-anxiety in the social and health sectors, www.ymparistoahdistus.fi
 - Puistokatu 4, www.puistokatu4.fi
- Education projects about eco-emotions
 - www.toivoajatoimintaa.fi
 - www.existentialtoolkit.com

Some important starting points

- Encouragement and compassion: this is difficult, but we can face this together
- Realizing social resistance: we need structures, so that people will continue to engage with the topic
- Where is eco-anxiety?
 - Chronic stressor
 - Only a small number of people who feel it talk about it

Practical needs

- The need for the **educator** to encounter his/her **own** emotions
 - Feeling them; naming them; working through
 - -> What could be done to facilitate this?
- The need to critically evaluate **cultural attitudes** and norms related to (eco-) emotions
- There is a great lack, in general, of emotional skills or emotional literacy in industrialized countries (cf. alexithymia)

Social & cultural attitudes

- What are the attitudes towards various emotions in the places where I live and work?
 - What were they like when I grew up?
The influence of parents, education, culture...
- Is it ok to be sad?
 - If, for whom?
- Is it ok to be angry?
 - If, for whom?
- -> How does all this influence attitudes and reactions to eco-emotions?

Emotion norms etc.

- The need for critical analysis of emotion norms and “feeling rules”
- For example, many young women who participate in climate activism suffer from education and socialization where anger is not valued (moral outrage)
- Many boys and young men suffer from stereotypical images of masculinity in relation to sadness: “Boys don’t cry”

Educators etc.

- What kind of factors affect my attitudes and actions regarding eco-emotions?
 - School / university subcultures and emotions
- How am I / how are we doing in general in relation to emotional skills?
- -> The long and winding road of improving one's emotional skills has many benefits for well-being in general

Pihkala (2020)

Journals / Sustainability / Volume 12 / Issue 23 / 10.3390/su122310149



sustainability

Submit to this Journal

Review for this Journal

Edit a Special Issue

Article Menu

Article Overview

- Abstract
- Supplementary Material
- Open Access and Permissions
- Share and Cite
- Article Metrics
- Order Article Reprints

Article Versions

Open Access Article

Eco-Anxiety and Environmental Education

by  Panu Pihkala 

Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science HELSUS & Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki, 00014 Helsinki, Finland

Sustainability **2020**, *12*(23), 10149; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310149>

Received: 30 October 2020 / Revised: 1 December 2020 / Accepted: 2 December 2020 / Published: 4 December 2020

(This article belongs to the Section **Sustainable Education and Approaches**)

[View Full-Text](#)

[Download PDF](#)

[Browse Figures](#)

[Citation Export](#)

Abstract

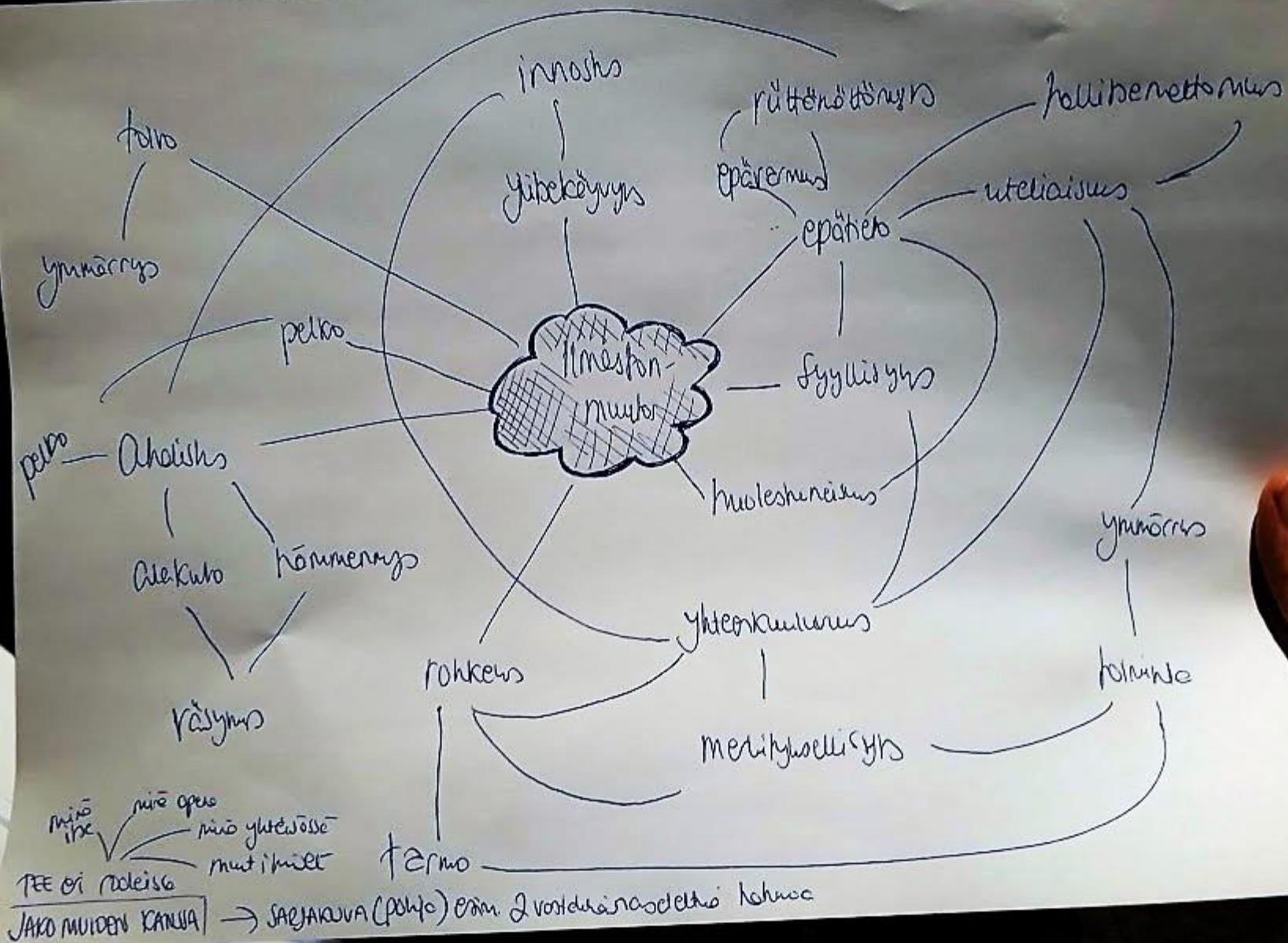
Anxiety and distress about the ecological crisis seems to be a rapidly growing phenomenon. This article analyzes the causes and possibilities posed by such “eco-anxiety” for environmental education. Variations of eco-anxiety are analyzed, and it is argued that educators should be aware of the multiple forms that the phenomenon has. Eco-anxiety is found to be closely connected with many difficult emotions, such as grief, guilt, anger, and despair. However, anxiety also has an adaptive dimension, which is called “practical anxiety”. Anxiety is connected with expectation, motivation, and hopes. Previous research about eco-

A three-step model (Pihkala 2020)

- **Validating** the existence of eco-emotions
 - A further step would be to confess that the educator, too, has complex feelings
- Providing opportunities to **discuss** eco-emotions
 - A further step: “easy-to-use” arts, such as painting emotions or moods
- Providing opportunities for **embodied** encounters of eco-emotions

Experiences from Finland

- Teachers and university educators need encouragement, but even after one intervention some of them start using eco-emotion methods
- Some groups which have participated much in developing eco-emotion work:
 - Art-based educators and researchers / teachers
 - Environmental education researchers and teachers



Mind map of ecological emotions

- A simple activity that can be used both with children and adults
- Helps to recognize emotions
- Can increase empathy toward oneself and others
- Can be joined with small-group discussions and joint discussions
- Can be joined with art-based activities

Mind map

- Available both in Panu's **blog**
 - <http://ecoanxietyandhope.blogspot.com/2020/07/mind-map-of-ecological-emotions.html>
- and in the international **Existential Toolkit** for Climate Justice Educators website
 - <https://www.existentialtoolkit.com/activities>
- In Finland: educational project "Toivoa ja toimintaa" (Hope and Action")
 - www.toivoajatoimintaa.fi

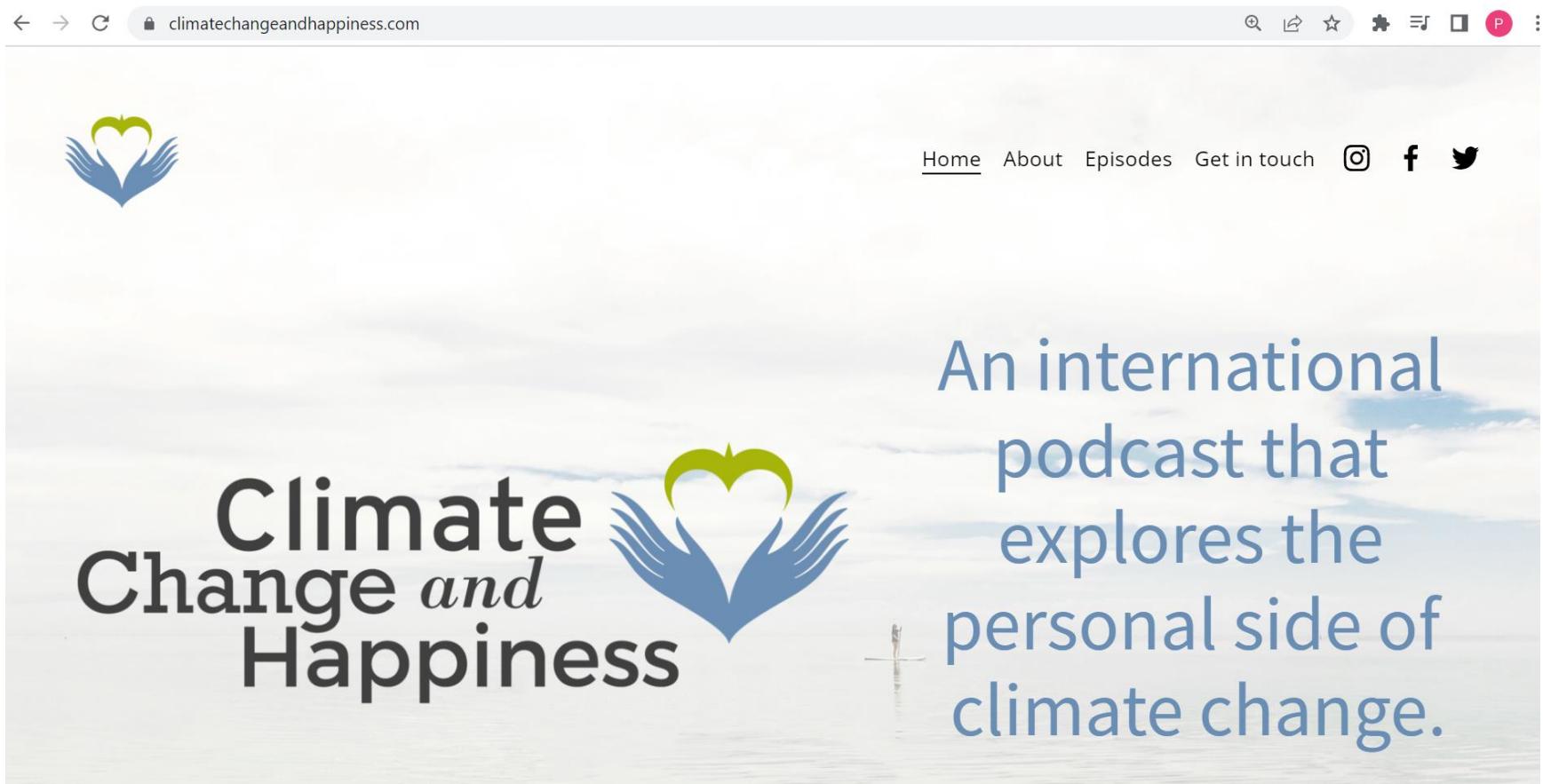
Spectrum line of eco-emotions

- A more embodied method, which includes pair discussions and group discussions
 - <https://ecoanxietyandhope.blogspot.com/2020/03/spectrum-line-of-ecological-emotions.html>
- Requires a bit more from the facilitator, but suitable for psychologists, counsellors etc.

Organizations to remember

- Force of Nature
 - A simple guide for educators about eco-anxiety:
<https://www.forceofnature.xyz/discussion-guide>
- Climate Psychology Alliance
 - <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/>
- Group methods:
Ro Randall from Climate Psychology Alliance
 - <https://livingwiththeclimatecrisis.org/>

Podcast



The image is a screenshot of a website for a podcast. The header features a large yellow 'Podcast' title. Below the header is a navigation bar with links for Home, About, Episodes, and Get in touch, along with social media icons for Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. The main content area has a background image of a cloudy sky over water. On the left, the text 'Climate Change and Happiness' is displayed next to a logo of two hands holding a heart. On the right, the text 'An international podcast that explores the personal side of climate change.' is written.

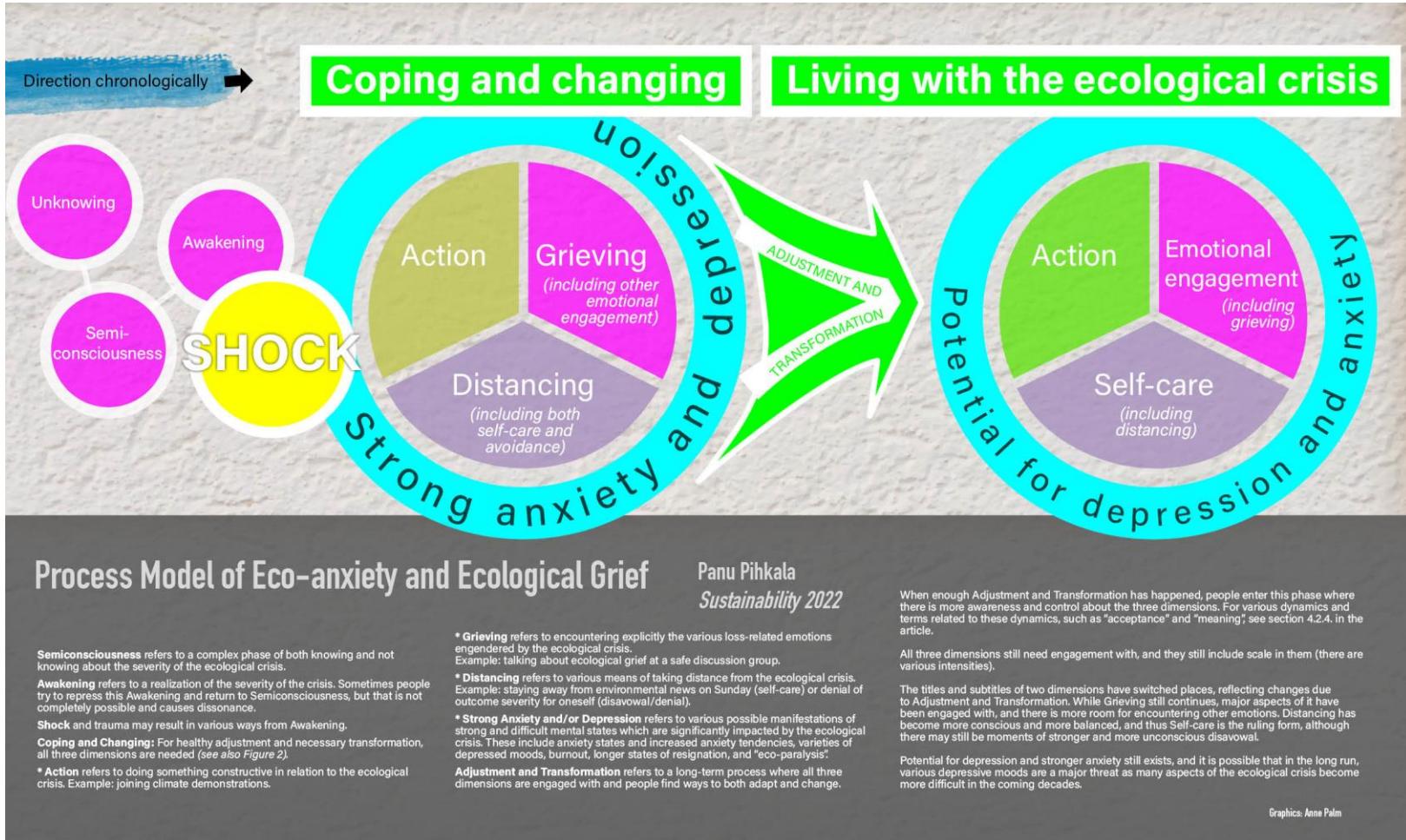
climatechangeandhappiness.com

Home About Episodes Get in touch

Climate Change and Happiness

An international podcast that explores the personal side of climate change.

Pihkala (2022)



Pihkala (2020), BBC Climate Emotions

← → ⌂ bbc.com/future/article/20200402-climate-grief-mourning-loss-due-to-climate-change?utm_campaign=Hot+News&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium... + ⭐ ⏪ P ⋮

FUTURE

What is BBC Future? Follow the Food Made on Earth Future Planet Future Inc Best of BBC Future

More ⋮

CLIMATE EMOTIONS | CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate grief: How we mourn a changing planet



(Image credit: Getty Images/Javier Hirschfeld)



The losses we will experience under climate change will occur over many decades and even generations (Credit: Getty Images/Javier Hirschfeld)

TOMI KIILAKOSKI (TOIM.)

KESTÄVÄÄ TEKOA

NUORISOBAROMETRI 2021



Finnish Youth Barometer 2021

- Includes many questions about eco-emotions and climate anxiety
- Published March 2022 in Finnish
 - *Doing Things Sustainably*, abstract in English
- Respondents: 15-29 years
- Our research article:
 - Pihkala, P., Sangervo, J. & Jylhä, Kirsti M. (2022), "Nuorten ilmastoahdistus ja ympäristötunteet" (Climate anxiety and eco-emotions among Finnish youth)

Some key results

- **76 %** felt sadness caused by loss of biodiversity and the extinction of species
- **59 %** had spoken about climate anxiety during the last 6 months
- **75 %** felt good when they made sustainable choices
- Optimism about environmental solutions

Kiitos!

- panu.pihkala@helsinki.fi
University of Helsinki,
HELSUS Sustainability Science Center &
Faculty of Theology
X (Twitter): @panupihkala
- www.ecoanxietyandhope.blogspot.com
- Podcast: Climate Change and Happiness
 - With environmental psychologist Dr. Thomas Doherty