

Framing support for parents managing their own and children's eco-anxiety

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Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

The Brisbane River pattern from *A Guidance Through Time*
by Casey Coolwell and Kyra Mancktelow.



Current Evidence



Climate change is a top concern globally.

- **Australians regarded it as their top concern for the future in 2021, above COVID-19 (Patrick et al., 2021).**

60% of respondents in a US survey cited climate change in their fertility decisions (Schneider-Mayerson & Leong, 2020).

Eco-anxiety – anxiety, anger, helplessness, guilt related to climate change – is increasing.

- **International prevalence is estimated to be between 25% and 68% (Pihkala, 2020)..**

Patrick, R., Garad, R., Snell, T., Enticott, J., & Meadows, G. (2021). Australians report climate change as a bigger concern than COVID-19. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health*, 3, 100032. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2021.100032>

Pihkala, P. (2020). Eco-anxiety and environmental education. *Sustainability*, 12(23), 10149. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122310149>

Schneider-Mayerson, M., & Leong, K. L. (2020). Eco-reproductive concerns in the age of climate change. *Climatic Change*, 163(2), 1007–1023.


Current Evidence

How we frame the issue of climate anxiety matters



Special Issue: Future/Tense: A Sociology of Temporal Dis/Order

**Affecting the future:
A multi-method qualitative
text and discourse analysis
of emotions in Australian news
reporting on climate change
and climate anxiety**

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Framing climate anxiety as an individual pathology could risk exacerbating existing feelings of isolation and ineffectiveness.

Framing climate anxiety as a relational experience, could help to alleviate isolation and promote collective social action.

Summary of articles

Newspaper & Title	Focus	Emotions	Anxiety / Worry	Grief / Loss / Sad	Fear / Scared / Terror	Hope / Optimism	Anger / Rage / Betrayal	Shame / Guilt	Trauma / Distress	Mania / Hysteria
Sydney Morning Herald (Fairfax, Metro, NSW)										
A space to quell climate fears	Describes youth art installation at Sydney Opera House featuring a future water world after climate change	11	✓		✓	✓				
Climate change a turn-off for next gen	Summarises research findings showing young people are worried about climate change and provides commentary	6	✓		✓					
Eco-grief takes hold as climate fears hit home	Concerns about the future are said to be understandable; activism, mindfulness and engaging with nature encouraged	8	✓	✓		✓				
For the doomers this election isn't changing the climate	Asks how people with eco-anxiety can maintain hope – through activism to reduce (not prevent) climate change impacts	7	✓	✓		✓				
Green shoots of hope	Author asserts the horrors of climate change are immobilising; art can generate future imaginings to inspire hope and action	7		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Koalas climb free of floods, right? Wrong	Greens MP: humans can recover from the emotional effects of climate change weather events and adapt; animals cannot adapt	5			✓				✓	
The Australian (News Pty Ltd [Murdoch], Metro, NSW)										
Deliberately locked into the politics of climate hysteria	Reflects on disruption to traffic caused by climate activist; climate anxiety cast as hysteria and climate inaction as rational	6	✓					✓		✓
Severe weather amped up climate 'doomism' vote	Argues teaching young people to be fearful of and intervene in the environment is dangerous to mental health and the environment	10	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Unhappy anniversary: 50 years of climate panic	Positions 'last chance' messaging from UN climate summit and similar events in history as a mental health risk to children; promotes adaption	5	✓	✓	✓					
'We're going to miss the iceberg' on climate catastrophe	Suggests a solution to Gen Z's high rates of climate anxiety: build your own self-sustaining house and business	4	✓		✓	✓				
The Age (Fairfax, Metro, VIC)										
Age of climate disaster fuels anxiety around parenthood	Reports climate anxiety prompting many to reconsider parenthood; current parents are making decisions to prepare their families	9	✓	✓			✓			

Summary of articles (continued)

Newspaper & Title	Focus	Emotions	Anxiety / Worry	Grief / Loss / Sad	Fear / Scared / Terror	Hope / Optimism	Anger / Rage / Betrayal	Shame / Guilt	Trauma / Distress	Mania / Hysteria
No climate change refuge for coral reefs: study	Expresses concern that knowledge of the alarming changes to the coral reef will deplete hope and prompt inaction	7	✓	✓	✓	✓				
<i>The Daily Telegraph (News Pty Ltd [Murdoch], Metro, NSW)</i>										
Cashing in on climate	Argues alarmist reporting on climate change is scare mongering; encourages adaptation over climate action	4			✓					✓
Coal closure hurts the poor	Argues climate change action is idealist and hurts poor coal-fired plant workers: 'Coal lives matter'	3								
<i>Illawarra Mercury (Fairfax, Regional, NSW)</i>										
Need for immediate climate action is clear	Suggests climate activism is a solution to climate change's physical, emotional and financial impacts	3	✓						✓	
What to do about feelings of eco-anxiety	To maintain hope despite eco-anxiety advises consumer, gardening and political action	3	✓			✓				
<i>The Advertiser (News Pty Ltd [Murdoch], Metro, SA)</i>										
Climate change is our new Christmas Grinch	Suggests socially connecting and taking individual action to respond to increasing climate anxiety	6	✓	✓			✓		✓	
<i>The Advocate (Fairfax, Regional, TAS)</i>										
Activist channels 'big emotions' into her art	Family moves to TAS due to climate change concerns; mum channels emotions into her art	4			✓		✓			
<i>The Courier Mail (News Pty Ltd [Murdoch], Metro, QLD)</i>										
Seeds of change	Advises on how to talk to children about climate challenges: individual actions and emotion management skills	8	✓		✓	✓			✓	
<i>The Courier (Fairfax, Regional, VIC)</i>										
Young raised in 'a world that is dying'	Psychologist advises managing eco-grief through moderated – not 'all-encompassing' – action	10	✓	✓				✓		
<i>Gold Coast Bulletin (News Pty Ltd [Murdoch], Regional, QLD)</i>										
The future is frightening: How disasters are impacting our kids	Describes psychological effects of climate change on children; offers coping strategies so they can 'become the generation that changes the world'	14	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
<i>Singleton Angus (Fairfax, Regional, NSW)</i>										
The Hunter Valley is breathing 'extreme' levels of air pollution as fear rises for climate health emergency	Describes detrimental health effects of coal-fired power station and climate change; calls for government action	9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

Summary of article narratives

1. Emotions as an understandable response to climate change

“For many, the devastating extreme weather of 2022 has left behind chronic uncertainty and an abundance of emotions. Images of locals desperately paddling through floodwaters appearing next to those of communities sheltering from extreme heat have become ubiquitous, but no less alarming... **Climate anxiety is a growing concern among Aussies, which can lead to feelings of worry, upset, anger, sadness, and distress**, especially at this time of year.” (Climate change is our new Christmas Grinch, *The Advertiser*, News Pty Limited, Metro SA)

“Climate grief is the profound sadness, helplessness, guilt, anxiety, dread, or numbness related to species loss and ecosystem decline due to environmental and climate change. Also known as ecological grief, or eco-grief, it's like other forms of despair - a human reaction to actual and predicted loss. “...**it was a natural response to an uncertain future** but could present in different ways, including concern that Australia is becoming "far less" habitable. "I think ... the bushfires, the floods, and some of the disasters that have happened lately have brought it up to the forefront.”” (Young raised in ‘a world that is dying,’ *The Courier*, Fairfax, Regional VIC)



Summary of article narratives

2. Emotions as an extreme or politicised response to climate change

‘...it’s time more people woke up, especially after millions of Australians just went **gaga at this election for global warming hysterics** demanding we “do something” about global warming, and never mind the cost’ (Cashing in on climate, The Daily Telegraph, News Pty Ltd, Metro NSW)

‘When even our major party **politicians talk about a “climate crisis” and the fringe parties are ever more maniacal**, we might expect radical action from young activists. You cannot deliberately **spread hysteria and be surprised at hysterical responses**’ (Deliberately locked into the politics of climate hysteria, The Australian, News Pty Ltd, Metro NSW)



Summary of article narratives

3. The effects of emotions related to climate change

‘Humanity has been deeply affected by the major traumatic events we’ve all been exposed to over recent years....the growing impacts of climate change....The good news is there are strategies we can all employ **to help us cope....Validation**...it’s good to share these feelings....**focusing on what we can control**....Gratitude, **mindfulness and time in nature.**’ (‘The future is frightening’: How disasters are impacting our kids, Gold Coast Bulletin, News Pty Ltd, Regional QLD)

‘It turns out that doing something about the problem is how you stay sane... **There is hope in action.**’ (What to do about feelings of eco-anxiety, Illawarra Mercury, Fairfax, Regional NSW)

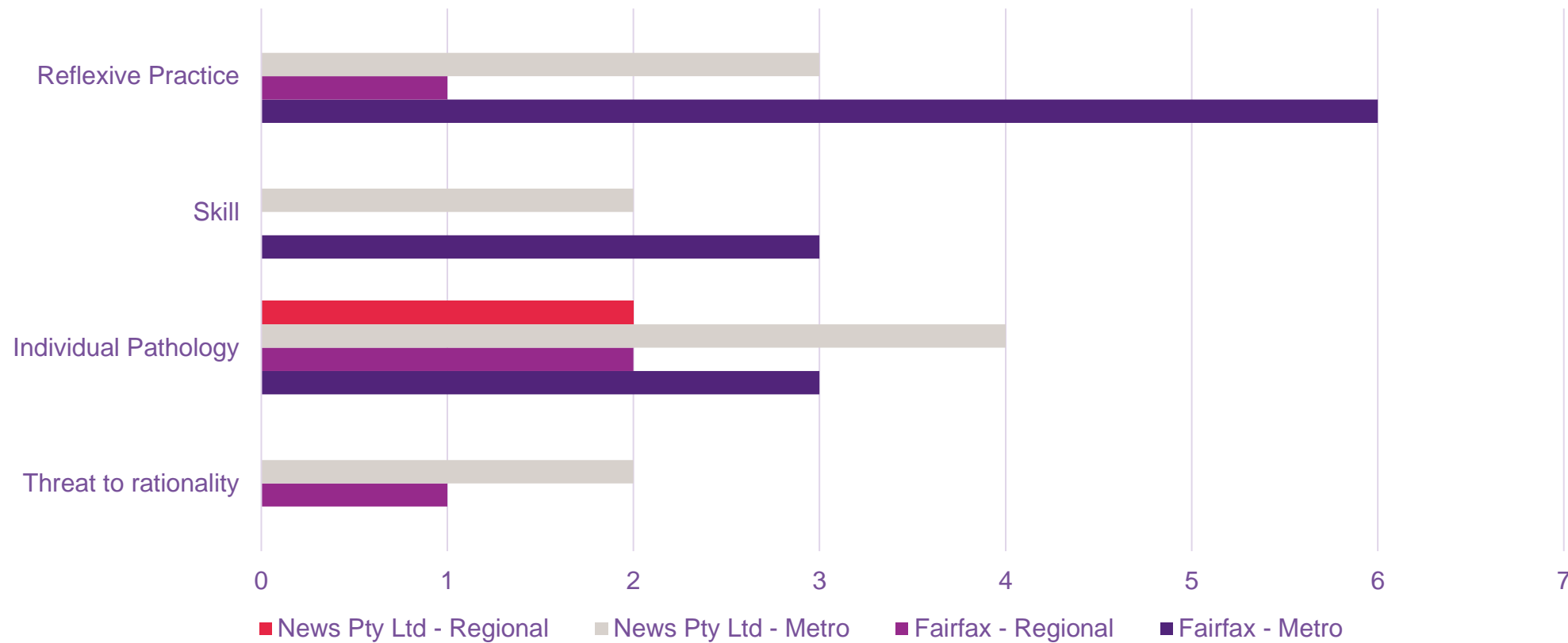
‘**You feel so much more hopeful when you are making change** and you can see people making change around you.’ (Climate change a turn-off for next gen, Sydney Morning Herald, Fairfax, Metro NSW)



Summary of article discourses on emotion

Emotion discourse	Definition: How emotion is conceptualised	Application: How the discourse is presented in news articles
Emotion as threat to rationality (mind-body dualism)	Emotions are physical phenomenon that can disrupt rationality and reasoning.	Emotions related to climate change cast as 'global warming hysterics' or threat to effective activism.
Emotion as individual pathology (classic psychology)	Emotion as embodied and cognitive phenomenon that can overwhelm and cause pathology that prevents functioning. Coping skills are needed to assuage the pathology.	Emotions related to climate change positioned as an epidemic that needs to be 'combated' or a form of 'psychological damage' that 'climate combatants' are inflicting on children and 'patients'.
Emotion as skill (emotion management)	Emotions as embodied and cognitive, but regulated according to cultural expectations.	Emotions related to climate change are implicitly and explicitly positioned as in need of modification to align with expectations that we be cheerful or 'merry'
Emotion as reflexive practice (pathos)	Emotions as relational and part of persuasion, with individuals drawing on their own and others' emotions to determine how to proceed	Emotions related to climate change are positioned as central to decision making (e.g., procreation) and political action.

Summary of article discourses on emotion



Possible effects of emotion discourses

What do differing discourses of emotions *do* in the context of climate anxiety reporting?

Emotion discourse	Aims	Potential effects
Emotion as threat to rationality (mind-body dualism)	Discredit climate change concerns and subvert climate change activism Inflict shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforce patriarchal discourses (e.g., hysterical) - Could invoke anger
Emotion as individual pathology (classic psychology)	Medicalise & Individualise: Raise awareness about and validation for climate anxiety Protect children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individualise a collective experience - Shift focus to the illness (climate anxiety) and away from the cause
Emotion as skill (emotion management)	Arm the public with strategies for managing climate anxiety and meeting cultural expectations that we be cheerful, functional and productive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Localise a collective experience, reducing isolation - Replace anxiety and anger with cheer, spurring / undermining political motivation
Emotion as reflexive practice (pathos)	Validate climate anxiety Spur political action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforce a politically de-energising feeling of hopelessness and depression

Knowledge Gaps

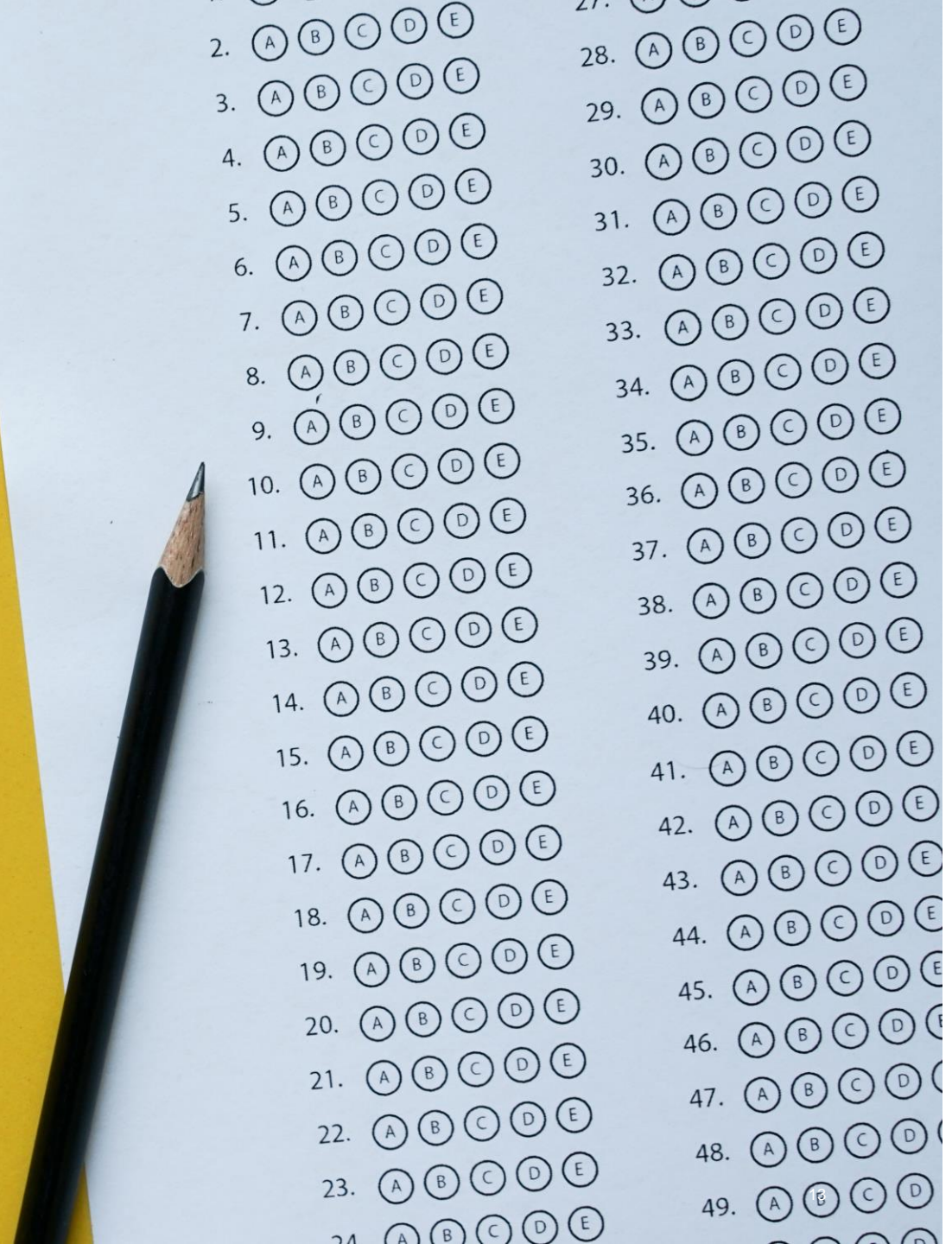
How are parents experiencing and managing climate anxiety?

How prevalent is it? What emotion management strategies are typically employed?

How does climate anxiety impact parents' mental health and wellbeing?

What is the division of labour in managing climate anxiety? Are women providing more emotional care?

How might management of climate anxiety shape collective resilience, action and hope?



Questions for discussion

Emotion discourse	Aims
Emotion as threat to rationality (mind-body dualism)	Discredit climate change concerns and subvert climate change activism Inflict shame
Emotion as individual pathology (classic psychology)	Medicalise & Individualise: Raise awareness about and validation for climate anxiety Protect children
Emotion as skill (emotion management)	Arm the public with strategies for managing climate anxiety and meeting cultural expectations that we be cheerful, functional and productive
Emotion as reflexive practice (pathos)	Validate climate anxiety Spur political action

How is climate anxiety framed within government reports?

What resources or services are currently in place to help families managing emotions related to climate change?

What more can be done?

Thank you!

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