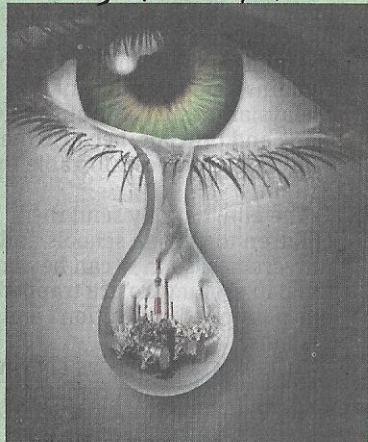


Climate change also affects mental health. Call it eco-anxiety

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By ROSE WONG



ANNA Lynn Heine has thought about dropping out of Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, United States, more times than she cares to admit.

Or she'll work on an essay and wonder what is even the point.

Anxiety about the planet's future has also kept the 21-year-old from enjoying dinner with family or drinks with friends. A plastic cup can send her into an existential spiral.

"Where did this food come from? Where's this plastic going to go and how many fossil fuels were burned for it to arrive at my table?" she'll ask herself. "And is this going to go to a landfill if I don't finish it?"

Mental health professionals have a term for the stress and grief many feel about the planet's future:

eco-anxiety. The American Psychiatric Association defines it as "chronic fear of environmental doom." It can lead to anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

A *Nature* study published last September surveyed 10,000 young people in 10 countries and found that most respondents are "very worried" or "extremely worried" about climate change. Nearly half of them said climate anxiety impacts their daily lives.

Heine is an environmental studies major in Jo Huxster's climate change communications class at Eckerd College. The assistant environmental studies professor said almost every student in her class has eco-anxiety.

Huxster's course examines the psychology of climate denial and the ways different sectors – the

media, government, corporations – discuss climate change. Students learn how to run an organizing campaign to address climate policy and ways to talk about it with climate denialists and the apathetic.

Heine, who mostly grew up in Miami and Key West, said she's most anxious about the rising threat of natural disasters due to climate change and the suffering that will occur along class and racial lines.

She mourns for her hometown of Miami, where scientists predict sea level rise will displace nearly a third of the current population by the end of the century.

"It's going to be a painful ending," Heine said, "and it's going to happen in an unjust way."

'What do you have control over?'

Anxiety about the planet's future increasingly comes up in Orlando therapist Kaley Sinclair's sessions with clients.

Sinclair, a licensed mental health counselor and trauma specialist, said her adolescent and young adult clients discuss feeling a sense of doom about the environment. Those with young children, or thoughts of having kids, contend with the guilt of forcing the next generation to inherit a hotter, less inhabitable world.

Many, she said, are childhood trauma survivors, who struggle with a pervasive feeling of being unsafe.

Sinclair didn't learn to treat climate anxiety or grief in graduate school, but realized that the number of clients needing professional help will only grow. In

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