

Environmentalism and Mental Health

contributed by Barbara Jane Davy

contains sources that may be of use, descriptions of assignments

Course Description:

300 or 400 level undergraduate course (could be offered at graduate level as a seminar with the additional readings added as required readings). The threats posed by climate change, mass extinction, and environmental damage can induce feelings of angst, dread, and grief, and have considerable import for mental health within environmental movements and society more generally. This course examines the theory, practice, and consequences for mental health collectively and individually of what happens when we start from the point of taking social ecological collapse seriously. Some students may find this subject matter emotionally challenging. The course is designed to offer a structured forum for students to discuss such challenges, and provides information on how to access additional support and resources.

Required Texts:

Cunsolo, A. & Landman, K., eds. 2017. *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press.

Kingsnorth, Paul. 2017. *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press.

Other readings available online or in course pack.

Learning Objectives:

Identify types and causes of ecological angst and grief.

Identify individual and collective consequences of ecological angst and grief.

Assess strategies for managing individual and collective ecological angst and grief. Design personal strategies for managing ecological angst and grief.

Assignments and grading:

1. Annotated bibliography – due in weekly installments, totaling 20%

Respond to and reflect on assigned readings and films shown in class. Briefly (about 250 words per source) summarize how the content is relevant to the course, and note what stood out to you. Indicate what types of causes of ecological angst and grief are present in the work, and any strategies discussed for managing individual and collective ecological angst and grief.

2. Participation – 20%

Writing entries in your annotated bibliography each week will prepare you to discuss the course readings. Participation will be assessed through attendance and participation in class discussions and group work activities.

3. Personal strategy for managing ecological angst and grief – 15%

Describe a personal strategy for managing ecological angst and grief. How is it supposed to work? Have you tried it, or is there any evidence that it works (or should work, based on indirect evidence)? How might it be improved?

4. Eulogy for a place that you feel ecological grief or solastalgia for – 15%

Write a 5-7 page (single spaced) essay about a place that does not exist, or has changed due to environmental damage. Where is the place? Have you been there, and if so, when? What was it like? What do you miss about it? What did it mean to you? If you do not feel solastalgia, you may interview someone who does, or write about someone else's experience of solastalgia.

Reference course materials and additional literature as appropriate.

5. Lamentation for an extinct or endangered species – 15%

Write a 5-7 page (single spaced) essay about an extinct or endangered species. Where did they live? What caused their species to decline or become extinct? What are the consequences of the loss of this species? Reference course materials and additional literature as appropriate.

6. A. Design a ritual to manage collective ecological angst or grief – OR –

B. Describe what makes you hopeful for the future of environmentalism – 15% option A: write a script for a ritual. Who is to be present? What sort of ritual is it? What is the context? What will the ritual accomplish? How do you think this ritual would be helpful, and for whom? Aim for 5-7 pages including the script and explanation. option B: Write a 5-7 page paper describing what makes you hopeful for the future of environmentalism. Use appropriate citations.

Schedule:

1. The problem before the problem

Introduction to course and requirements, sharing of mental health strategies and resources.

2. Staying with the trouble

Kingsnorth, Paul. 2017. "Introduction" and "Collapse" in *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press. pp. 1-50.

Cunsolo, Ashlee. 2017. "Prologue: She Was Bereft" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. xiii-xxii.

Cunsolo, Ashlee & Karen Landman. 2017. "Introduction: To Mourn Beyond the Human" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 3-38.

additional readings:

Macy, Joanna. 1991. "Despair Work" in *World as Lover, World as Self*. Berkeley: Parallax Press. pp. 15-28.

Atkinson, Jennifer. 2020. "An Existential Toolkit for Climate Justice Educators" Rachel Carson Centre project on "Eco-Grief and the Climate Generation" (currently in development)

3. Apathy and repression

Kingsnorth, Paul. 2017. "Withdrawal" in *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press. pp. 153-234.

Norgaard, Kari Marie. 2011. "'People Want to Protect Themselves a Little Bit': The Why of Denial" in *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. pp. 1-12.

additional reading:

Macy, Joanna. 1991. "Taking Heart: Spiritual Exercises for Social Activists" in *World as Lover, World as Self*. Berkeley: Parallax Press. pp. 39-49.

4. Lamentations

Whale, Helen & Franklin Ginn. 2017. "In the Absence of Sparrows" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 92-116.

Ryan, John Charles. 2017. "Where Have All the Boronia Gone? A Posthumanist Model of Environmental Mourning" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 117-143.

additional readings:

Barr, Jessica Marion. 2017. "Auguries of Elegy: The Art and Ethics of Ecological Grieving" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 190-226.

Atkinson, Jennifer. "The Art of Grieving: Environmental Humanities in the Age of Eco-Anxiety" (forthcoming)

5. Solastalgia and attachment to place

Albrecht, Glenn. 2017. "Solastalgia and the New Mourning" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 292-315.

Kingsnorth, Paul. 2017. "Connection" in *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press. pp. 153-234.

additional readings:

Albrecht, Glenn. et al. Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change. *Aus. Psych.* 15, 95-98 (2007).

Sandilands, Catriona. 2017. "Losing My Place: Landscapes of Depression" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 144-168.

5. Solastalgia: the Arctic

film: Cunsolo Willox, Ashlee, in collaboration with Rigolet Community Government, Makkovik Inuit Community Government, Postville Inuit Community Government, Hopedale Inuit Community Government, Nain Inuit Community Government, & Nunatsiavut Department of Health and Social Development. 2014. Lament for the Land. 36 min.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi7QTyHERjY>

Cunsolo Willox, A. et al. 2012. "From this place and of this place': climate change, sense of place, and health in Nunatsiavut, Canada." *Soc. Sci. Med.* 75: 538–547.

6. Solastalgia: Australia

Ellis, N. & Albrecht, G. 2017. "Climate change threats to family farmers' sense of place and mental wellbeing: a case study from the Western Australian Wheatbelt." *Soc. Sci. Medicine* 175, 161–168.

Rigby, C. W., Rosen, A., Berry, H. & Hart, C. H. 2011. "If the land's sick, we're sick: the impact of prolonged drought on the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal communities in rural New South Wales." *Aus. J. Rural Health* 19: 249–254.

7. Climate Change 1

Cunsolo, Ashlee. 2017. "Climate Change as the Work of Mourning" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 169-189.

Cunsolo, Ashlee & Neville R. Ellis. 2018. "Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate change-related loss" *Nature* 8: 275-281. doi: 10.1038/s41558-018-0092-2.

additional readings:

Hasbach, P. H. 2015. "Therapy in the face of climate change." *Ecopsychology* 7: 205–210.

Clayton, Susan, Christie Manning, Kirra Krygsman & Meighan Speiser. 2017. *Mental Health And Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, And Guidance*. American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica.

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf>

8. Climate Change 2

Doherty, Thomas J. & Susan Clayton. 2011. "The psychological impacts of global climate change." *American Psychologist* 66.4: 265-276.

Clayton, S., Manning, C. M. & Hodge, C. 2014. *Beyond Storms and Droughts: The Psychological Impacts of Climate Change*. American Psychological Association, and ecoAmerica.

additional readings:

Coyle, K. & L Van Susteren. 2012. "The Psychological Effects of Global Warming on the United States: And Why the U.S. Mental Health Care System Is Not Adequately Prepared" *National Forum and Research Report*, National Wildlife Federation, March 12.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. 2012. "Scholar's Research Offers Insight into Future Debate Over Climate Change" August 14.

9. Grief and Hope

Mark, Andrew & Amanda Di Battista. 2017. "Making Loss the Centre: Podcasting Our Environmental Grief" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 227-257.

- Hobbs, R. J. 2013. "Grieving for the past and hoping for the future: balancing polarizing perspectives in conservation and restoration." *Restoration Ecol.* 21: 145–148.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas. 2006. "Catagenesis" in *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*. Toronto: Vintage Canada. pp. 265-295.

additional readings:

- Windle, P. 1992. "The ecology of grief." *BioScience* 42: 363–366.
- Westley, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman, & Michel Quinn Patton. 2006. "The Door Opens" in *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*. Toronto: Vintage Canada. pp. 219-229.

10. Reconnecting

- Braun, Sebastian F. 2017. "Mourning Ourselves and/as Our Relatives: Environment as Kinship" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 64-91.
- Kretz, Lisa. 2017. "Emotional Solidarity: Ecological Emotional Outlaws Mourning Environmental Loss and Empowering Positive Change" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 258-291.

additional reading:

- Glendinning, Chellis. 1994. "All My Relations" in *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*. Boston: Shambala. pp. 187-201.

11. Ritual

- Menning, Nancy. 2017. "Environmental Mourning and the Religious Imagination" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 39-63.
- Pike, Sarah M. 2017. "Rites of Grief and Mourning" in *For the Wild: Ritual and Commitment in Radical Eco-Activism*. Oakland: University of California Press. pp. 196-229.

additional reading:

- Macy, Joanna. 1991. "The Council of All Beings" in *World as Lover, World as Self*. Berkeley: Parallax Press. pp. 198-205.

12. Re-envisioning the Future

- Monbiot, George. 2013. "Raucous Summer" in *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea and Human Life*. Toronto: Allen Lane (Penguin). pp. 1-14.
- Kingsnorth, Paul. 2017. "Epilogue" in *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press. pp. 235-284.
- Lane, Patrick. 2017. "Epilogue: The Wild Creatures" in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*. A. Cunsolo & J. Landman, eds. Montreal: McGill, Queen's Univ. Press. pp. 316-318.