Eco-Anxiety in Canadian News Media: Representations, Frames, and Public Implications (2019–2024)

Shangxuan Yang
peteryangfall2026@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research investigates how eco-anxiety has been represented in Canadian mainstream media over the past five years and the potential impacts of this coverage on public opinion. Eco-anxiety, defined as the persistent fear or distress related to climate change, is increasingly recognized as both a psychological challenge and a motivator for environmental engagement. Yet, little is known about how Canadian outlets such as The Globe and Mail, National Post, and Toronto Star frame eco-anxiety, or how these portrayals intersect with public perceptions. Using qualitative content analysis, this study will examine media frames (alarmist, solution-oriented, systemic critique, individual responsibility, dismissive) and tones across 2019–2024 coverage. The findings will contribute to climate communication research and offer insights for responsible media reporting and public engagement in the Canadian climate context.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is widely recognized as one of the most serious threats to public health in the 21st century (Coffey et al., 2021). While the physical impacts of climate change (e.g., extreme weather, heat-related illness, infectious diseases) are well documented, there is growing attention to the mental health dimensions. In particular, eco-anxiety—the distress caused by climate change and concern for one's future in a warming world—has emerged as a phenomenon of increasing public and scholarly interest (Coffey et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2020). Recent years have seen a surge in references to "eco-anxiety" in both expert discourse and popular media, indicating a rising awareness that climate change poses not only environmental and physical risks but psychological ones as well (Coffey et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2020).

Thanks to media coverage and youth activists, the term eco-anxiety has entered the public's attention. Since 2018, Swedish youth climate activist Greta Thunberg has drawn global attention to the eco-anxiety of her generation by openly expressing her own climate worries (Pihkala, 2020). After 2017–2018, media coverage of eco-anxiety increased substantially, often focusing on children's and young people's feelings about an uncertain climate future (Pihkala, 2020). This popularization of eco-anxiety has highlighted the intense emotions younger people feel about climate change—validating their concern as a rational response. At the same time, mental health professionals have begun to grapple with what this new form of anxiety means for the public and how to address it.

well-being, resulting in a number of mental health impacts that disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged groups (Hayes et al., 2018). Direct effects include trauma and psychological distress from more frequent disasters and ecological disruptions (e.g., flooding, wildfires, drought). Indirect effects, such as gradual sea level rise or persistent drought, create chronic stress and anxiety within communities. These burdens fall unevenly across society. Many low-resourced or otherwise vulnerable communities are more heavily affected in terms of mental health outcomes. This includes Indigenous communities and at-risk frontline populations in the Global South, as well as groups of lower socio-economic status (Hayes et al., 2018). Even in wealthier countries, studies have found that eco-anxiety tends to impact youth and Indigenous peoples the most, as these groups have a strong stake in future environmental outcomes and (in the case of Indigenous peoples) deep cultural ties to lands that are under threat (Coffey et al., 2021). Thus, eco-anxiety is a two-pronged public health issue: first, it represents a rational distress in the face of real climate threats; and second, it raises the prospect of climate-related mental health harms that are not borne equally by all, thereby introducing questions of climate justice into mental health discourse.

This study aims to review how Canadian news media have covered eco-anxiety, in order to illuminate the narratives and frames reaching the public in a country that both contributes to climate change and faces its impacts. The media in Canada hold considerable power in influencing public opinion and policy; how these outlets discuss eco-anxiety could shape public discourse, policy priorities, and the willingness of people to act on their climate-related fears. Eco-anxiety has become a widespread reaction, especially among youth and vulnerable groups, and media coverage has played a key role in mediating this reaction.

Encouragingly, recent research suggests that even those experiencing strong climate anxiety are not inevitably paralyzed by it. A study led by researchers at Yale found that about 16% of American adults report feeling at least some anxiety or depression when thinking about climate change, and those individuals are more likely than others to engage in collective climate action—such as protesting, contacting elected officials, or volunteering—regardless of political leanings (Campbell, 2025). The study found no evidence that higher climate distress leads to withdrawal; on the contrary, worry was associated with greater activism and civic engagement (Campbell, 2025). "Some have presumed that people experiencing climate or eco-anxiety are paralyzed by their fears… but we find the opposite. Most people experiencing climate-related distress are not hiding under the covers. They're taking action to help solve the problem," noted the study's co-author Anthony Leiserowitz (Campbell, 2025). This finding aligns with the idea that a certain level of anxiety can be motivating. It also reinforces the responsibility of media to present climate challenges in ways that encourage agency rather than despair. By reporting on solutions, mitigation efforts, and adaptation strategies, journalism can help people see that their climate anxiety is valid but also actionable. In summary, the literature indicates that media framing can profoundly influence eco-anxiety and public responses: doom-heavy coverage risks fueling hopelessness or apathy, whereas solution-oriented and empowering coverage can inspire hope, resilience, and action despite the daunting nature of the climate crisis. This paper will first establish a theoretical grounding on eco-anxiety and media effects. It will then analyze Canadian news content to assess how eco-anxiety is

being framed and what types of public responses such coverage may encourage.. Eco-anxiety provides a lens for understanding the emotional impact of climate change, and media-framing theory (including audience segmentation like the Six Americas framework) offers a way to interpret how news coverage might sway or reflect public attitudes. With this foundation, we turn to the literature review and then the analysis of Canadian media content.

Literature Review

2.1. Eco-Anxiety: Concept and Impacts

"Eco-anxiety" refers to distress caused by climate change and environmental decline. Importantly, unlike clinical anxiety disorders, experts view eco-anxiety as a non-pathological reaction—in other words, a normal response to the very real and existential threat of climate change (Pihkala, 2020). Sufferers often describe a sense of profound worry, sadness, fear, anger, and helplessness about environmental degradation and the anticipated future. In many cases, eco-anxiety has an existential quality, involving grief for losses already occurring due to the ecological crisis and dread about one's future survival. Many researchers also note that it can manifest as what Pihkala (2020) calls "practical anxiety." In this form, feeling anxious about climate change spurs individuals to gather information or reassess their lifestyle and behavior choices in order to cope with their anxiety and contribute to solutions (Pihkala, 2020). In other words, some people channel their climate-related anxiety into practical actions—such as changing their personal habits or engaging in activism—as a way to regain a sense of control and purpose. This stands in contrast to paralyzing anxiety, which can overwhelm an individual into inaction.

While large-scale attention to eco-anxiety began in the Western world, it is increasingly recognized globally. A systematic scoping review by Coffey et al. (2021) found that most studies to date have focused on Western populations, and it highlighted the need for further research on the experiences of non-Western populations. Nevertheless, certain demographic groups consistently emerge as particularly affected by eco-anxiety. Children and teenagers, for example, have been found to be especially fearful of climate change since they will live through its worsening consequences (Coffey et al., 2021). Indigenous peoples and those closely connected to the natural environment are also noted as vulnerable to eco-anxiety (Coffey et al., 2021). This is likely because climate change threatens not only their physical world but also their cultural identities and ways of life, which are often deeply tied to the land and environment.

Empirical research confirms that climate anxiety is widespread among youth. In 2019, a global survey – the largest of its kind – revealed high levels of climate anxiety in young people. In this survey of 10,000 young people (aged 16–25) across 10 countries, 84% of respondents said they were at least moderately worried about climate change, and about 59% said they were "very" or "extremely" worried (Hickman et al., 2021). More than half of these young respondents reported feeling sad, anxious, angry, powerless, or guilty about the climate situation, and 45% said that climate anxiety has negatively affected their daily life and functioning (Hickman et al., 2021). The research also found that climate anxiety was strongly associated with feelings of betrayal toward governments; youths' distress was made worse by the perception that governments were failing to act adequately on climate change (Hickman et al., 2021). In other words, young people not only fear the physical impacts of climate change but also experience moral distress and anger at leaders for perceived inaction, which compounds their anxiety.

According to mental health specialists, eco-anxiety should not be considered a mental illness—rather, it is a rational consequence of confronting an existential threat (Pihkala, 2020). As long as it remains moderate, such anxiety could even be beneficial, as it may motivate individuals and communities to implement solutions (thus addressing the source of their fears) (Pihkala, 2020). However, climate-related anxiety can turn into despair and dysfunction if it becomes too intense to manage or if people lack the coping mechanisms to deal with it. This concern has led mental health professionals, often in collaboration with climate experts and community leaders, to search for ways to help people manage climate anguish. Strategies range from therapeutic interventions (e.g., climate-aware therapy, support groups) to community and educational initiatives that empower people to take action. In sum, eco-anxiety has become a defining emotional feature of the climate crisis era, reflecting genuine concern about environmental threats as well as a potential catalyst for positive action. Addressing this emotional dimension is essential for a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to climate change.

2.2 Media Coverage, Climate Framing, and Public Response

The media play a pivotal role in how people learn about and emotionally respond to climate change. News media and social media are among the principal sources of climate information for the public, which means their content can either exacerbate eco-anxiety or help alleviate it. Studies show that eco-anxiety is primarily triggered by media reporting, since media are the main source of climate change information for most people (Loll et al., 2023). In particular, alarming and catastrophic coverage—stories emphasizing dramatic disasters, dire predictions, and political inaction without providing context or solutions—tends to amplify anxiety and fear. Psychologists warn that focusing consistently on worst-case scenarios and calamities can leave audiences feeling hopeless or powerless. This phenomenon has been termed a "hope gap," where people fret about global warming but feel incapable of doing anything about it (Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance [MHCCA], n.d.). In many parts of the world, people receive far more stories of climate horror and carnage than stories of success or solutions. Consequently, some begin to feel fatalistic: they worry about global warming but come to believe it is futile to act (MHCCA, n.d.). According to communication research in the U.S., UK, and elsewhere, this sense of hopelessness and cynicism is not a result of too much climate storytelling, but rather of too little storytelling about solutions (MHCCA, n.d.). In other words, an imbalance in media narratives—skewing heavily toward doom and gloom—can prompt audiences to shut down emotionally or dismiss the issue as unsolvable.

Conversely, the way climate change is framed in the media can also mobilize positive engagement. Communication scholars suggest that alarming information should be paired with efficacy—that is, news reports should highlight solutions, actions, and success stories alongside the threats. This approach helps foster productive concern rather than paralyzing fear (MHCCA, n.d.). When the news communicates both the seriousness of the climate crisis and the availability of meaningful responses, audiences do not tend to lose hope. Instead, they feel grounded in the possibility of a better future and are more motivated to engage. Research supports this: one study found that climate news emphasizing solutions and practical

actions significantly increased readers' feelings of hope, while also lowering feelings of fear and anger (MHCCA, n.d.). Notably, these uplifted feelings did not make audiences dismiss the importance of climate change; in fact, solution-oriented coverage managed to engage a broad audience without engendering complacency. Studies have shown that "solutions stories" – for example, profiles of individuals or communities successfully tackling climate challenges or innovating adaptations – improve audience optimism and sense of agency compared to doom-and-gloom narratives. In other words, media coverage that acknowledges people's climate anxieties but also shows possible pathways to act may help channel emotional distress into constructive behavior. It must be recognized that the public is not homogenous; views on climate change exist on a continuum. The Yale Program on Climate Change Communication has identified "Global Warming's Six Americas," which refers to six groups of people with different levels of concern and engagement on climate issues (Leiserowitz et al., 2022). These groups range from Alarmed to Dismissive. The Alarmed are the most engaged: they are very certain climate change is happening, very worried about it, and strongly supportive of climate action. The Concerned think climate change is real and a serious threat, but they tend to view it as less immediate and are less personally involved. The Cautious are aware of climate change but uncertain about its causes or urgency, and they are not very worried about it. The Disengaged are largely unaware of or uninterested in climate change. The Doubtful generally doubt that climate change is a problem or believe it may not be human-caused, seeing it as a low risk. Finally, the Dismissive firmly reject the reality of human-caused climate change and oppose most climate policies (Leiserowitz et al., 2022). This Six Americas framework implies that messages about climate change – including its psychological effects like eco-anxiety – will resonate differently with different audiences. For instance, members of the Alarmed or Concerned groups are more likely to relate to eco-anxiety and may feel validated or galvanized by news reports on the topic. In contrast, Dismissive individuals might ridicule such stories, dismissing eco-anxiety as an overreaction or "hysteria." Effective climate communication often needs to be tailored to the audience's pre-existing beliefs. News organizations, whether consciously or not, tend to adopt frames that resonate with their primary readership's stance on climate change. For example, a liberal-leaning newspaper might frame eco-anxiety as a legitimate concern that should spur action, while a more skeptical outlet might frame it as needless panic or youthful alarmism.

In summary, media narratives and framing have a profound effect on public perceptions and emotional responses to climate change. Alarming, catastrophic coverage without context can heighten eco-anxiety to unproductive levels, whereas solution-oriented, empowering coverage can foster hope and engagement. Moreover, audience differences (as outlined by the Six Americas) mean that the impact of a given media frame will vary – reinforcing the importance of understanding both the message and the audience. This theoretical background sets the stage for examining how Canadian media have been depicting eco-anxiety in recent years.

3.1. Methodological Approach

This study employed a qualitative content analysis of Canadian news articles, following a transparent and stepwise workflow. The date range for the sample was January 2019 through December 2024 – starting just before the term "eco-anxiety" began to gain widespread usage and covering the subsequent surge of climate–mental health discussion from 2019 onward. The year 2019 saw youth-led climate strikes and a proliferation of discourse on eco-anxiety, and the following years (including the COVID-19 period) saw a maturation of coverage on climate change and mental health. By defining this timeframe, the analysis captures the recent discourse on eco-anxiety while avoiding sparse or tangential earlier references.

Articles were drawn from the ProQuest One Academic database, focusing on Canadian mainstream English-language newspapers with national reach or agenda-setting influence. In particular, The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, and the National Post were selected. These three newspapers span a range of editorial perspectives in Canada (from progressive to conservative) and have broad readerships. Limiting the corpus to these prominent publications yielded an impactful yet manageable set of media texts for analysis.

A keyword search strategy was used to identify relevant articles. Using ProQuest's search function, we employed the Boolean query: ((eco anxiety OR climate anxiety OR ecological anxiety OR eco-anxiety) AND (worry OR anxiety)). This query aimed to capture articles that explicitly discussed climate-related anxiety. Search filters were then applied to include only pertinent document types (namely, News articles, Feature articles, and Opinion/Editorial pieces) and to ensure the sources were the three chosen newspapers. The initial search returned a larger pool of results, which were then screened in two stages. First, titles and leads (article summaries or first lines) were reviewed to eliminate clearly unrelated hits. Next, the remaining articles were read in full to apply the inclusion criteria.

To be included in the final sample, an article had to meet all of the following conditions: (a) it made eco-anxiety (or an equivalent term like climate anxiety) a substantive focus of the piece, rather than just a passing mention and (b) it discussed implications or responses – for example, how people are coping with climate anxiety, seeking help, taking action, or conversely, feeling overwhelmed or dismissive. Articles that used "eco-anxiety" only as a throwaway line or metaphor were excluded. Very short news briefs (e.g., wire blurbs), duplicate content, and stories purely about physical climate impacts with no mental health element were also excluded. The goal was to analyze a set of in-depth articles that squarely addressed eco-anxiety in the context of climate change in Canada.

To interpret the coverage through theoretical lenses, the analysis applied two complementary frameworks regarding audience attitudes and media framing. First, each article's apparent audience orientation was inferred using the Six Americas segmentation. Although actual audience reactions were not measured, textual cues (such as the level of urgency, certainty about climate science, calls to action, or skeptical tone) were used to gauge which segment the article might appeal to or represent. For instance, an article filled with urgent warnings and moral outrage about climate inaction would align with an Alarmed perspective, whereas an article questioning the legitimacy of eco-anxiety might align with a Dismissive viewpoint. Using definitions from Yale/George Mason University researchers (Leiserowitz et al., 2022), each piece was labeled with a primary segment (and sometimes a secondary segment) that best fit its tone

and framing. In cases of mixed signals, greater weight was given to the headline and lead paragraphs, on the assumption that these set the tone for readers.

Because the Six Americas typology is based on climate change beliefs and concern (rather than on attitudes toward taking action per se), a second analytic framework was developed to classify the articles' implied action orientation. This was intended to capture what responses or behaviors the coverage was encouraging (implicitly or explicitly) in relation to eco-anxiety. Concurrently, a tailored media framing schema was created to categorize each article's overall narrative frame regarding eco-anxiety. Based on climate communication literature and refined through iterative coding of the sample, five main framing types were specified:

Alarmist/Crisis Frame: Coverage that emphasizes fear, urgency, or catastrophic outcomes without providing solutions. Articles in this frame often focus on worst-case scenarios or convey a tone of doom. For example, an opinion piece describing eco-anxiety as a "rising tide of panic" in the face of apocalyptic climate impacts, offering little in terms of remedy, would be coded as Alarmist.

Solution-Oriented Frame: Coverage that highlights ways to cope or act, focusing on constructive responses. Such articles acknowledge the distress people feel about climate change but devote considerable attention to solutions—be it personal actions, community initiatives, activism, or policy measures—to manage eco-anxiety or address its root causes. The tone of these pieces is empowering or practical, emphasizing resilience and agency (e.g., stories about youth turning their anxiety into climate activism, or advice from psychologists on handling climate stress).

Systemic Critique Frame: Coverage that situates eco-anxiety within broader structural or political failings. These articles present climate anxiety as a symptom of institutional failure (by governments, corporations, etc.) to address climate change. The frame often carries an implicit call for systemic change: the cure for climate anxiety is climate action at the societal or policy level. For instance, an article that argues widespread eco-anxiety among youth is justified and will persist until leaders enact bold climate policies would exemplify a Systemic Critique frame (often overlapping with themes of institutional betrayal or climate justice).

Individual Responsibility Frame: Coverage that presents personal lifestyle changes or individual actions as the main solution to eco-anxiety. Such pieces leave the impression that those feeling eco-anxious should assuage it by, for example, reducing their carbon footprint, volunteering for green causes, or otherwise taking personal responsibility. The focus is on individual agency rather than collective action or policy. An example might be a feature story highlighting people who cope with their climate anxiety by planting trees, adopting zero-waste habits, etc., thereby implying that personal change is the key outlet for eco-anxiety.

Dismissive/Mocking Frame: Coverage that questions or belittles the validity of eco-anxiety, or even mocks it. In this frame, commentators may portray climate fears as overblown or misguided. For instance, an article might label youth climate anxiety as "hysteria" fueled by alarmist media and argue that children are being unnecessarily frightened. Such pieces often suggest that the solution is to reassure people that things aren't so dire or to critique those who are "scaring" the public.

Each article in the sample was assigned one of the above dominant frames.

3.2. Methodological Limitations

Several limitations of this methodology should be acknowledged. First, the inference of audience segment (Six Americas) for each article is based on content cues and researcher interpretation, not on actual audience survey data; thus, any conclusions about how different readers might react are speculative. Second, the use of a single database and focusing on English-language Canadian newspapers means that perspectives from French-language press, online-only outlets, television, and international media are not represented. This could bias the findings toward the mainstream Canadian print media perspective. Third, having a single coder (the author) conduct the content analysis introduces the possibility of subjective bias and may affect reliability. Ideally, multiple coders would verify the coding scheme and intercoder agreement would be assessed. Finally, the chosen time frame (2019–2024) captures a distinct period of growing media discourse on climate and mental health; while it provides a snapshot of recent trends, it cannot account for shifts that might occur beyond 2024 (for example, the emergence of new narratives like "climate doomism" or evolving public sentiment). Despite these limitations, the study's design—featuring clearly defined samples, explicit inclusion criteria, and an analytical lens grounded in established frameworks—aims to ensure a systematic examination. By concentrating on significant recent conversations about climate anxiety in elite Canadian news media, the research seeks to yield insights that will be useful for communicators, mental health practitioners, and scholars at the intersection of climate change, media, and psychology.

Results

The dataset of articles (2019–2024) from The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, and The National Post shows a clear growth in Canadian media coverage of eco-anxiety over this period, with notable differences across outlets and in how the issue was framed. In what follows, I will present the results by dividing the content into four categories: volume of coverage dominant frames, outlet differences, and audience orientation.
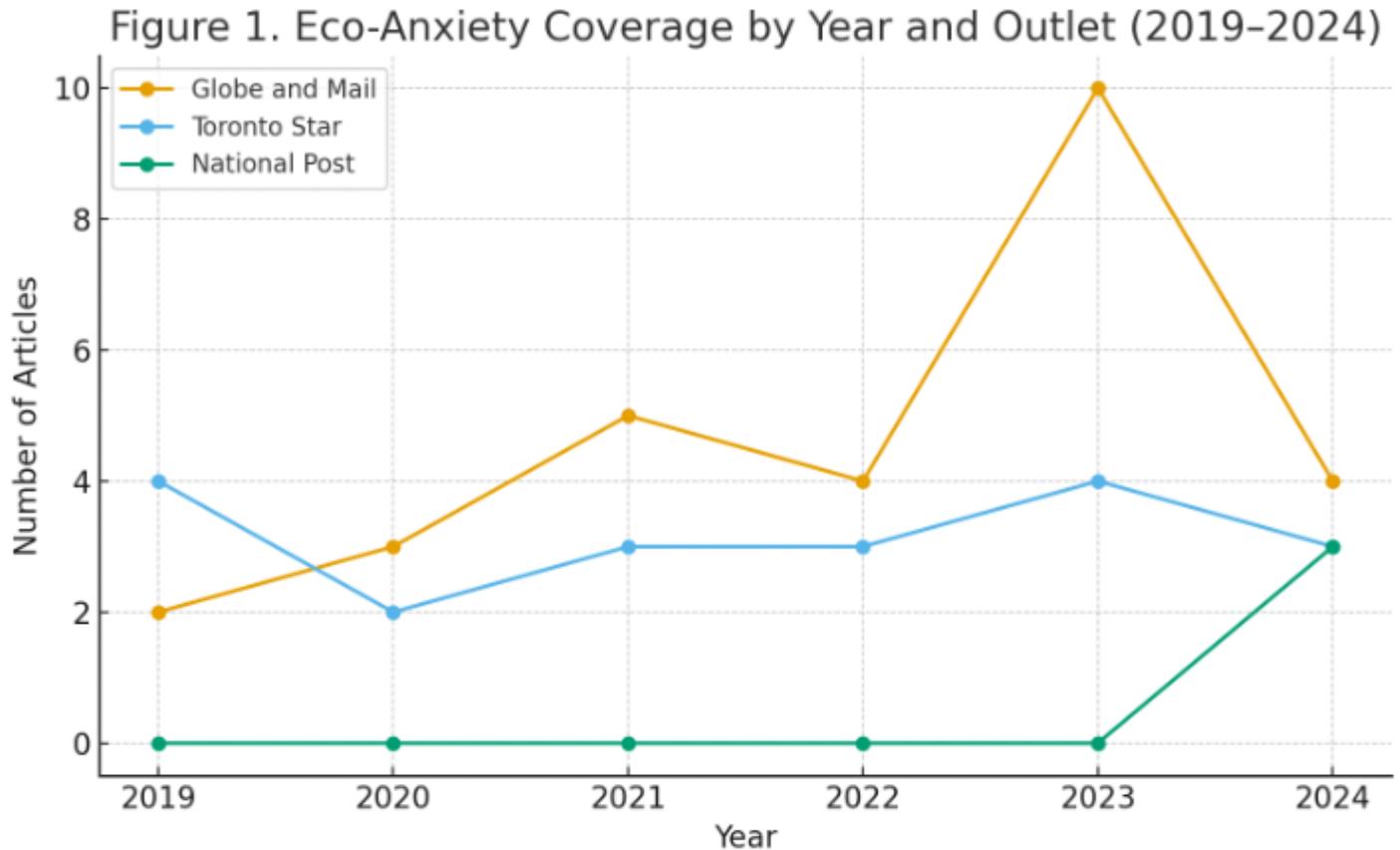
Figure 1. Canadian media coverage of eco-anxiety across outlets.

Volume of Coverage: The Globe and Mail published the most articles about eco-anxiety over this timeline (n = 28), peaking in 2023 with 10 articles that year. The Toronto Star showed steady-to-moderate attention, with a notable early spike in 2019 around the time of the youth climate strikes and then a fairly consistent output each year thereafter. In contrast, the National Post was largely silent on the topic until 2024, when it published three pieces. This pattern suggests that eco-anxiety has evolved from a novel concept in 2019 to a recurring topic in Canadian mainstream media, though not all outlets have embraced it equally. The increasing number of articles by 2023–2024 indicates greater social awareness of the emotional side of climate change, consistent with global findings that climate anxiety has become more common and publicly discussed (Hickman et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2020).

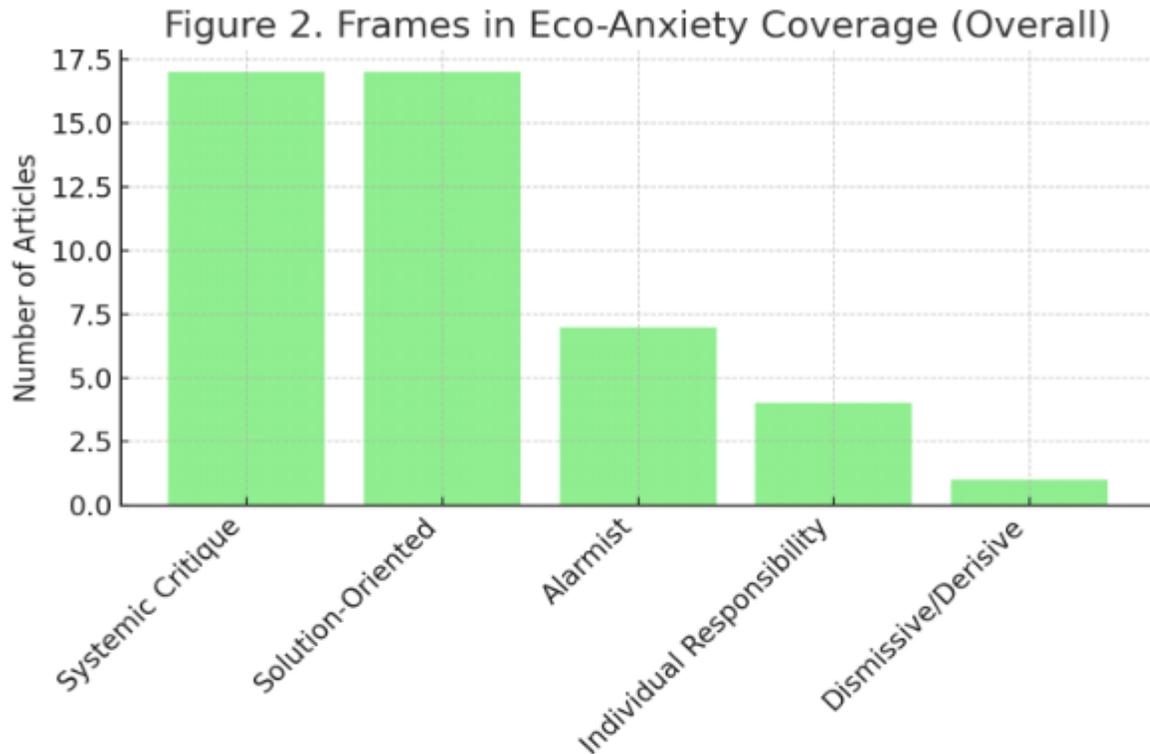## Figure 2. Frames in Eco-Anxiety Coverage (Overall)

Figure 2. Canadian media coverage of eco-anxiety frames.

Dominant Frames: Analysis of how these articles were framed indicates that the coverage was dominated by two constructive frames – Systemic Critique and Solution-Oriented – which together accounted for the majority of articles. Across all outlets, 34 articles fell into these two categories (17 in each). Meanwhile, a smaller number of articles took an Alarmist/Crisis frame (7 articles), an Individual Responsibility frame (4 articles), or a Dismissive/Mocking frame (1 article). In other words, most Canadian news coverage sampled portrayed eco-anxiety either as a legitimate response that should spur broad societal action (systemic critique) or as a challenge that can be met with coping mechanisms and solutions (solution-oriented). Only a handful of pieces portrayed eco-anxiety in a purely fearful way, and even fewer dismissed it outright or placed the onus solely on individual lifestyle changes. These findings suggest that eco-anxiety is mainly being framed in descriptive or empowering ways in Canadian newspapers, with an emphasis on linking climate anxiety to social inequities and governmental action (or inaction), as well as on discussing concrete responses (from therapy to activism). This is in line with communications research which has found that coupling information about climate risks with efficacy (solutions) can maintain engagement and reduce hopelessness (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009).
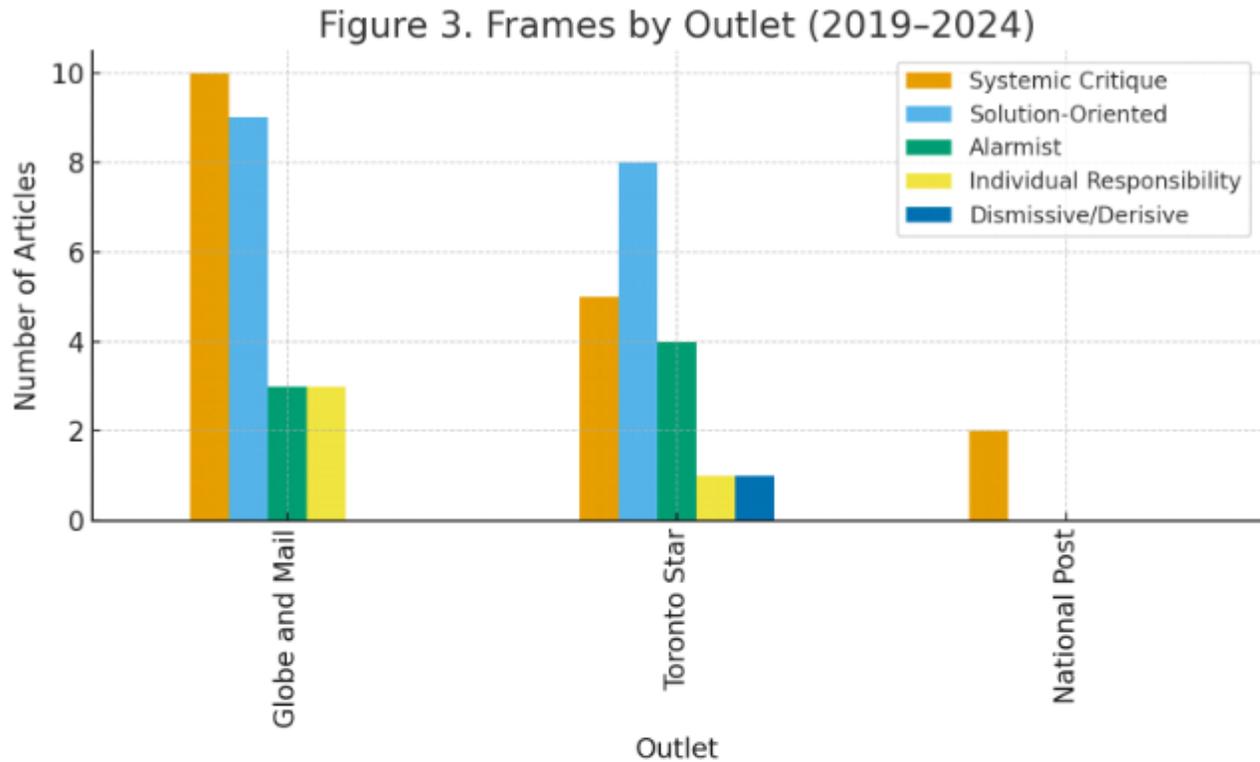
Figure 3. Distribution of frames across outlets.

Outlet Differences: There were noticeable variations among the three newspapers, reflecting their editorial orientations. The Globe and Mail most frequently employed a Systemic Critique framing (10 articles) and a close second was Solution-Oriented framing (9 articles). This suggests the Globe often focused on attributing eco-anxiety to larger systemic issues (e.g., government inaction, climate injustices) and on discussing how society can respond collectively (policy changes, activism, etc.). The Toronto Star also leaned towards positive or constructive frames, with many Solution-Oriented pieces, but it had somewhat more Alarmist articles than the Globe did. Several Star articles, particularly opinion columns, emphasized the urgency and emotional intensity of climate threats from the perspective of youth, sometimes with stark language about the future. On the other hand, the National Post largely avoided the mental health framing of climate change. Out of its three articles in the sample, two had a tone of skepticism or dismissal regarding eco-anxiety: for instance, one opinion piece in the National Post characterized youth climate angst as overblown and politically manipulated. Only one National Post piece was a straight news report treating eco-anxiety as a genuine public concern (it reported survey results on Canadians' climate worries), and even that piece was presented alongside commentary questioning the legitimacy of those fears.

These differences illustrate an ideological split in coverage: readers of the centrist Globe and Mail and progressive Toronto Star were more likely to encounter eco-anxiety depicted as a credible, understandable, and even actionable issue, whereas readers of the conservative National Post saw the

topic raised only sparingly and often through a critical or dismissive lens. Notably, the near absence of Dismissive content (only one article explicitly mocking or rejecting eco-anxiety was found, in the Post) indicates that by the early 2020s, eco-anxiety had gained a certain legitimacy in Canadian media discourse—at least outside of overtly skeptical circles.

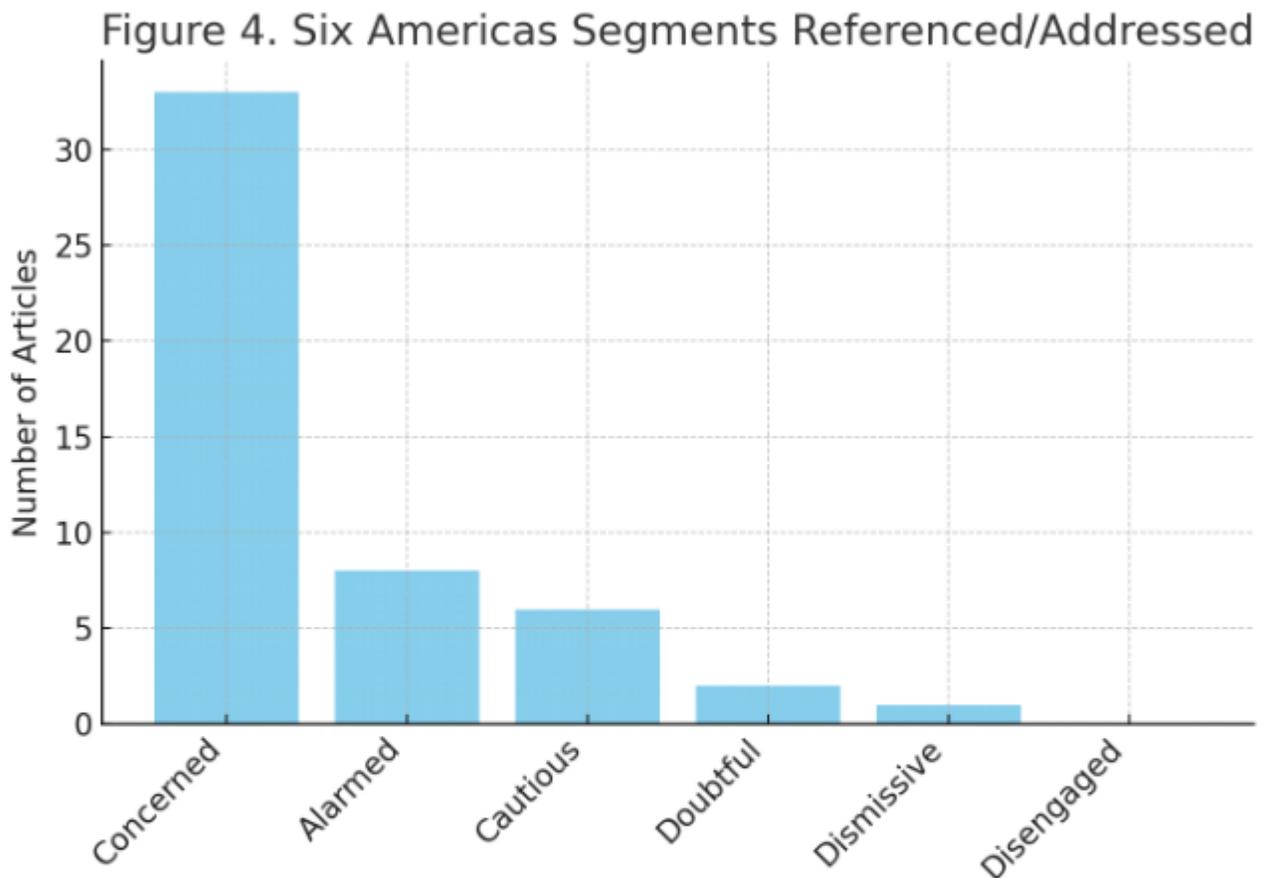## Figure 4. Six Americas Segments Referenced/Addressed

Figure 4. Distribution of Six Americas in total.

Audience Orientation: Applying the Six Americas lens to these articles suggests that most were oriented toward the more engaged segments of the climate-attitude spectrum. The tone and content of the majority of articles seemed calibrated for Concerned or Alarmed audiences – those who already accept the reality and seriousness of climate change. Such articles assumed the reality of the climate crisis and focused on emotional and action responses, which would resonate with readers who are worried about climate change. There were far fewer pieces that appeared aimed at the Cautious, Doubtful, or Dismissive audiences. In fact, only the rare National Post commentary might appeal to the Dismissive viewpoint by treating climate anxiety as unfounded. The general lack of articles catering to disengaged or doubtful

publics suggests that the eco-anxiety narrative remains largely within the sphere of acknowledgment (among those who accept the problem) rather than cutting across the divide to convince skeptics. In short, Canadian media's eco-anxiety coverage during this period was typically preaching to the concerned (or at least the curious), rather than trying to convert the dismissive.

Though not a formal coded field, we also noted the action orientation encouraged by each article. In line with the prevalence of constructive frames, most articles implicitly or explicitly encouraged some form of active coping or collective engagement. A significant portion of the coverage highlighted things like climate marches, youth activism, community solutions, or seeking mental health support – thereby presenting action (whether political or personal) as a constructive outlet for eco-anxiety. This aligns with recommendations in climate communication literature that solution-framed communication can engender hope and a sense of efficacy without diminishing the perceived seriousness of the issue (Pihkala, 2020; O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009).

In summary, across all three newspapers and each year analyzed, four broad features characterize the coverage of eco-anxiety in Canada: (1) Steady growth in media attention since 2019; (2) a predominance of constructive framing (systemic critique and solutions) as opposed to purely doomful or dismissive framing; (3) an orientation toward already concerned or alarmed segments of the public; and (4) an almost complete absence of trivializing or derisive treatment of the issue. These trends demonstrate that the media discourse on eco-anxiety has matured and normalized the concept as a legitimate facet of the climate crisis – one that warrants discussion and response. Indeed, eco-anxiety is increasingly presented not as an odd anomaly, but as a natural and widespread feeling, and even as an impetus for societal reflection and action (Coffey et al., 2021; Hickman et al., 2021).

Analysis

The findings above offer insight into the trajectory and nuances of eco-anxiety coverage in Canadian news media, and several key themes emerge from the analysis. Over time, there has been growing media attention to climate-related anxiety, though this attention is uneven across outlets. Major publications like The Globe and Mail and The Toronto Star have published dozens of articles on the topic, indicating that climate anxiety has become newsworthy and relevant to their audiences. The National Post's minimal coverage until 2024 suggests that the issue was not deemed as salient, or was approached with more skepticism, in conservative media circles. The spikes in coverage (e.g., in 2019 around youth climate strikes, and again in 2023 amid escalating climate impacts like wildfires) indicate that eco-anxiety tends to enter the news agenda during broader climate news cycles or events that make the emotional

dimensions of climate change particularly salient. Overall, it appears that eco-anxiety has gone from a niche concept to a recognized public issue in Canada's mainstream press—albeit one that is covered to varying extents depending on the outlet's priorities. This echoes a broader observation in climate communications: while the physical science of climate change has long been reported, its psychological and emotional aspects are only recently gaining sustained media attention.

In terms of framing, the Canadian media coverage of eco-anxiety has been notably constructive in tone, especially in the centrist and left-of-center outlets. Both the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star frequently framed eco-anxiety as a valid and even empowering reaction to the climate crisis, rather than as an overreaction or purely a personal problem. They often highlighted coping strategies and collective responses. For example, many articles in these papers told stories of young people or communities channeling their climate anxiety into activism and solutions. Such coverage not only acknowledges the fear and grief people feel, but also provides readers with narratives of agency—showing that one can respond to eco-anxiety by taking meaningful action. This aligns with research suggesting that pairing alarming news with solutions can maintain engagement and hope (MHCCA, n.d.). Indeed, a number of Canadian stories made a deliberate effort to balance urgency with agency, often citing mental health experts or climate advocates who emphasize that action is the antidote to despair. By regularly including voices of psychologists, counselors, or activists who offer ways to cope (from therapy to community activism), these articles fulfill a kind of trauma-informed journalism approach, acknowledging distress but also highlighting pathways forward (MHCCA, n.d.).

There were, however, some differences in tone between the outlets that reflect their editorial tendencies. The Toronto Star, known for its progressive and socially-conscious stance, often presented eco-anxiety as a reasonable and even healthy reaction to a real threat—one that can spur positive changes. Star articles frequently featured the voices of young activists, educators, or psychologists validating the feelings of eco-anxious individuals and discussing ways to turn anxiety into action. In doing so, these pieces underscored how having open conversations, engaging in advocacy, or seeking support can transform anxiety into empowerment. The Globe and Mail, with its national and centrist outlook, similarly treated climate anxiety as real and widespread, but tended to situate it within broader contexts such as economic policy, health systems, or cultural trends. Globe and Mail articles often adopted an analytical tone, linking climate anxiety to tangible events (like a summer of wildfires or a surge in therapy referrals) and then discussing structural responses—ranging from government initiatives to incorporate mental health into climate adaptation plans, to calls for educational curricula on climate change to help younger generations. In effect, the Globe and Mail's framing often combined Systemic Critique (pointing out institutional or policy shortcomings contributing to anxiety) with Solution-Oriented elements (what can be done at a policy or community level to address climate change and its mental health impacts). This approach is consistent with viewing climate anxiety as a form of social suffering caused by the inequitable burden of the climate crisis, which, as some scholars argue, is best addressed through collective action and systemic

remedies (Murray et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the National Post's limited coverage exhibited a skeptical or dismissive framing. Two of its three articles effectively fell into what might be called a "climate alarmism" frame: they suggested that the climate anxiety seen in youth was exaggerated or manufactured, implying that environmental activists and sympathetic media were unduly scaring people. This mirrors a narrative observed in some other contexts (notably certain UK and Australian media) where eco-anxiety is portrayed as a case of adults irresponsibly "terrifying the children" with apocalyptic rhetoric (Murray et al., 2025). In the National Post pieces, eco-anxiety was sometimes depicted as a politically driven hysteria – for instance, op-eds argued that impressionable young minds were being fed only worst-case climate scenarios, resulting in unnecessary panic. Such commentary often carried the implication that shielding people (especially youth) from alarmist information would be the proper course, rather than focusing on the climate crisis itself. This stands in stark contrast to Toronto Star and Globe and Mail's approach of validating the anxiety and looking for solutions to the crisis. The National Post did have one news piece that straightforwardly reported on polling about Canadians' climate worries (showing a significant portion are very worried), thereby acknowledging eco-anxiety as a phenomenon. But even in that case, the surrounding editorial context of National Post tends to frame climate concern within economic or political arguments (for example, stressing costs of action or questioning policy efficacy) rather than empathizing with the emotional component. These outlet-based differences mean that Canadian media audiences could be getting very different takeaways: a Toronto Star reader might come away thinking "Eco-anxiety is real, but we can do something about it," whereas a National Post reader might think "Eco-anxiety is hype, and young people are being unduly alarmed."

From an audience segmentation perspective, it appears that Canadian media frames on eco-anxiety largely echoed and reinforced the attitudes of their respective readerships. The Globe and Mail and Toronto Star cater to audiences who are likely Concerned or Alarmed about climate change; thus, their coverage treats eco-anxiety as credible and even as a rallying point for action. The National Post, catering to a more Doubtful or Dismissive leaning audience on climate issues, only broached the topic in ways that downplayed its seriousness or framed it as someone else's issue (e.g., "today's youth are anxious, but perhaps they're overreacting"). This kind of alignment suggests that media not only reflect audience sentiment but can also reinforce it by framing issues in familiar ways. In the case of eco-anxiety, the lack of any significant dismissive framing across all media is interesting—it indicates that even more conservative voices found it hard to entirely ignore the prevalence of climate anxiety by the mid-2020s (given the polling and youth activism evidence), and outright mockery was minimal. This could point to a gradual mainstreaming of climate-related mental health concerns.

A critical takeaway from these results is that Canadian media have begun to frame eco-anxiety as a public issue, not just a private trouble. By reporting on the fears and mental stresses people have about climate change, newspapers have effectively placed eco-anxiety in the public arena of discourse. This is significant: it marks a shift from seeing climate change purely as an environmental, economic, or political issue to seeing it also as a societal and psychological issue. The media, in their agenda-setting

role, have contributed to legitimizing the conversation about the mental health impacts of climate change. For readers, seeing their feelings of worry or grief reflected in the news can be validating. Many articles across the outlets quoted mental health experts and individuals with lived experience saying that feeling anxious about climate change is a logical and shared reaction to an existential problem, not a sign of personal weakness or pathology. Such messages can reduce stigma around eco-anxiety and encourage those who feel it to speak out or seek support. In fact, this mirrors guidance from Canadian health authorities and organizations: for example, the Mental Health Commission of Canada notes that it's natural to feel some worry, sadness, or stress about the future of the environment, and that these emotions are valid (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2023). By echoing this perspective, media coverage plays an educational role, telling the public that eco-anxiety is not only acceptable but perhaps even reasonable.

Finally, the media's treatment of eco-anxiety reflects and potentially contributes to the normalization of mental health discussions in relation to climate change. It was not long ago that feelings like climate anxiety or grief were seldom publicly acknowledged. The frequent discussion of emotions (anxiety, grief, guilt, hope) in climate stories by major newspapers indicates a breaking of silence around what might once have been considered a private, even taboo subject. This normalization can have positive ripple effects. It encourages individuals who feel eco-anxiety to realize they are not alone – that it is, in fact, a common response shared by many, including those featured in the media. This could make them more likely to seek support or to talk about their feelings with others, thereby reducing isolation. It can also spark intergenerational dialogue; several media stories explicitly brought together the perspectives of youth and elders on climate anxiety, helping to bridge understanding across age groups. Moreover, by treating eco-anxiety as a valid topic, media might indirectly help destigmatize mental health issues more broadly. If anxiety and despair related to climate are discussed openly in the news, it reinforces the notion that mental health challenges are part of public life and can be addressed collectively. Notably, the tone of most coverage was careful not to pathologize eco-anxiety. Articles often echoed experts in saying that anxiety about climate change is, up to a point, healthy – for example, as a sign of empathy for the planet or a motivator for action (MHCCA, n.d.). Mental health specialists share this view, emphasizing that climate anxiety, when managed, can be a constructive force rather than a debilitating one. By amplifying that perspective, media stories are helping to de-pathologize eco-anxiety. They present it not as a psychiatric disorder in need of "fixing," but as an understandable reaction that can be guided toward positive ends through community support, personal coping strategies, and societal change.

In sum, Canadian media coverage from 2019 to 2024 suggests that eco-anxiety has gone from obscurity to a mainstream topic, framed largely in ways that validate the emotion and explore its implications for action and policy. The press has thus become a key forum for society to acknowledge and negotiate the psychological dimension of the climate crisis.

Conclusion

Between 2019 and 2024, Canadian news media's engagement with eco-anxiety illustrates an important evolution in public discourse around climate change. This period saw the issue of climate-related distress move from the margins to a place of visibility and legitimacy in mainstream media. Coverage increased steadily, peaked around climate flashpoints, and was characterized mostly by constructive framing rather than denial or derision. The analysis reveals that while journalists have been giving voice to the growing climate anxiety in society, the way they frame this anxiety carries significant implications. In The Globe and Mail and Toronto Star, eco-anxiety was often portrayed as a logical reaction that can galvanize climate action or demands for systemic change. In the National Post, limited though its coverage was, eco-anxiety was more often portrayed as overreaction or used to critique the tone of climate activism. These differences underscore that media both reflect and shape public concerns: they don't simply report that people are anxious about climate change; they also inform the public how to interpret that anxiety—whether as a call to action, a sign of institutional failure, or (less frequently) as misplaced panic. The differences in their approach also reflect the relative political positions these media hold regarding eco-anxiety, currently associated to progressive ideologies. We can see how liberal media in canada tends to analyse eco-anxiety as a real public problem that demands solution through different mechanisms. However, conservative media tends to report much less and picture eco-anxiety as an overreaction rather than a valid response to climate change.

Overall, the trend in Canada's media has been to position eco-anxiety as a real public issue intertwined with climate policy and public health, rather than as a niche psychological quirk. This reflects a broader shift in understanding climate change as not only an environmental and economic problem, but a human and social one. Canadians consuming the news are now regularly reminded that climate change can affect mental well-being, especially of the young and those on the frontlines, and that this impact is something that society and leaders need to take seriously. One promising aspect of the coverage is its frequent emphasis on solutions and coping, which suggests that climate anxiety—while a source of distress—could potentially be channeled into constructive outcomes. As Anthony Leiserowitz observed, many people experiencing climate distress are not hiding under the covers; they are trying to solve the problem (Campbell, 2025). This points to a narrative in which eco-anxiety is not just an ailment, but also a motivator for civic engagement and personal change.

In conclusion, Canadian media in the late 2010s and early 2020s have played a critical role in bringing eco-anxiety out of the shadows and into public conversation. In doing so, they have begun to foster a more nuanced and compassionate climate discourse—one that recognizes eco-anxiety as a legitimate response to our times, yet also strives to highlight pathways for hope and meaningful action. The narrative surrounding eco-anxiety, if handled with care, could indeed become part of the solution to the climate crisis: by validating people's fears and simultaneously empowering them, it can help build a public that is not only aware and concerned, but also motivated to work toward a sustainable and just future.

References

1. Campbell, L. (2025, January 14). Anxiety about climate change is spurring action. Yale School of the Environment. https://environment.yale.edu/news/article/anxiety-about-climate-change-spurring-action

2. Coffey, Y., Bhullar, N., Durkin, J., Islam, M. S., & Usher, K. (2021). Understanding eco-anxiety: A systematic scoping review of current literature and identified knowledge gaps. Journal of Climate Change and Health, 3, 100047. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2021.100047

3. Hayes, K., Blashki, G., Wiseman, J., Burke, S., & Reifels, L. (2018). Climate change and mental health: Risks, impacts and priority actions. International Journal of Mental Health Systems, 12(1), Article 28. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-018-0210-6

4. Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R. E., Mayall, E. E., Wray, B., Mellor, C., & van Susteren, L. (2021). Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses: A global survey. The Lancet Planetary Health, 5(12), e863–e873. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00278-3

5. Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Rosenthal, S., Kotcher, J., Neyens, L., Marlon, J., Carman, J., Lacroix, K., & Goldberg, M. (2022). Global Warming's Six Americas, September 2021 (Climate Note). Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/global-warmings-six-americas-september-2021/

6. Loll, L., Schmatz, N., von Lonski, L., Cremer, L. D., & Richter, M. H. (2023). The influence of climate crisis-related media reporting on the eco-anxiety of individuals. Interdisciplinary Journal of Environmental and Science Education, 19(2), e2306. https://doi.org/10.29333/ijese/13044

7. Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance. (n.d.). Chapter 2: The mental health impacts of climate news. Journal of Mental Health and Climate Change. Retrieved October 18, 2025, from https://mhcca.ca/media-professionals/the-mental-health-impacts-of-climate-news

8. Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2023, April 21). Understanding and coping with eco-anxiety. https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/public-resources/research/understanding-and-coping-with-eco-anxiety/

9. Murray, L., Breheny, M., Cumming, R., Doig, T., Erueti, B., Mooney, M., Severinsen, C., & Shanly, J. (2025). Representations of youth climate anxiety: A framing analysis of emotional responses to the climate crisis in international news media. Environmental Communication. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2025.2510374

10. O'Neill, S. J., & Nicholson-Cole, S. (2009). "Fear won't do it": Promoting positive engagement with climate change through visual and iconic representations. Science Communication, 30(3), 355–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547008329201

11. Pihkala, P. (2020). Anxiety and the ecological crisis: An analysis of eco-anxiety and climate anxiety. Sustainability, 12(19), 7836. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197836