

Powerful emotional reactions

You should anticipate that exposure to dire predictions about what climate change is likely to mean for our future is going to trigger some powerful emotional reactions.

Students may respond in a variety of ways. Overwhelmed; frightened; helpless; despairing; depressed; perhaps frustrated, angry. Some may respond with some form of denial, active or passive (“spacing out”). Others may resist being overwhelmed by such powerful negative feelings by adopting distancing strategies, mocking, being derisive, expressing disdain or contempt for anyone who “takes this stuff seriously.”

Such reactions are difficult to deal with at any time and in any situation. (They may arise, as many of us know, in any Sociology course in which we challenge students to critically reconsider any number of dearly held beliefs, be they about race, sex and gender, power, domination, the rationality of capitalist economics ... as Sociologists it is our calling to question society’s most sacred cows ...)

And all the more difficult when those emotions are not expressed directly, only nonverbally, seen only in facial expressions, only in body language.

Such reactions are almost certain to happen. What can one do?

No easy answers, but one can try:

- anticipating it
- seeing it when it happens;
- pausing the lecture, pausing the discussion of content, pausing **period**
- pointing out – verbalizing – what you are seeing/sensing
- validating that it is OK to have such feelings
- encouraging students to acknowledge their reactions and to talk about them