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## Are we all psychotic when it comes to climate change or is it just our media?

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Two weeks ago the United Nation's scientific panel on climate change released a report on the accelerating impact of global warming. It detailed the seriousness of the issue — escalating risks of extreme heat, droughts, floods and poverty — and what can be done about it.

According to the world's leading climate scientists, we have about a dozen years to make serious changes to our energy system in order to stave off the looming global crises: among them, massive food shortages, species extinction, increasing wildfires, huge die-offs of coral reefs causing a complete collapse of the marine ecosystem — all of which could become a reality by 2040.

You'd think a report of this magnitude, which lays out humanity's last best hope for preventing major planetary catastrophe, would merit continuous front-page news. Yet it largely passed the news cycle without much commotion. (You probably heard more about Trump's tweets and campaign rallies.)

This is important news, right? At least if you believe in science.

Of course, some people don't believe in science, but for those of us who do, it's still hard to digest the report since it ultimately means confronting the uncertainty of our own survival.

Here's the reality: Unless we limit future warming to 2 degrees Celsius — we're currently on pace for 4 degrees C by the end of the century — the earth's polar ice sheets will melt, flooding dozens of coastal cities (including New York, London and Shanghai). Some 400 million people will suffer from water scarcity, and heat waves will kill thousands each summer. It will be worse in the planet's equatorial band, where parts of India, Iran and Australia already top 120 degrees F. In the north plain of China, one of the most populous areas in the world, temperatures are on pace to make the region unlivable by 2100. The cause is a combination of heat and humidity measured as the "wet bulb" temperature; once that reaches 35 C (95 F), a healthy person cannot survive outdoors for more than six hours, even in the shade.

Why isn't this making headlines every day? Why aren't we freaking out?

Why aren't we devoting every waking second of our lives to averting ecological disaster?

Is it selfishness? "Ah, it doesn't effect me. I don't live in the northern plain of China. Why should I care if it becomes unlivable?" (I leave aside the obvious point that everyone will be impacted once the most densely populated region in the world becomes a scorching wasteland.)

Is it shortsightedness? “The really bad stuff is a long way out; climate change is a problem for future generations, not ours” (clearly, this connects to selfishness).

Is it sheer stupidity? “It’s pretty cold here, right?” But this assumes most people are idiots when it comes to climate change, when in fact public opinion shows a majority of Americans now recognize global warming is happening, and 50 percent say it’s already harming people in the U.S.

All of which leads to another explanation: psychological denial. Perhaps our casual response to climate crisis betrays a kind of cultural refusal to take in a reality that exists but is too daunting to fully accept.

Psychologists have a word for this: it’s called psychosis.

When people suffer a “psychotic break,” they disavow a part of their reality they don’t wish to confront, denying its existence. Disavowing climate crisis can go something like this: “I know very well how real the danger is, but nonetheless I cannot take it seriously enough; I don’t really believe it will happen.”

Indeed most of us know we’re coursing on a path of destruction, and that the problem has to do with our use of fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas). Yet we fail to act as if we truly believe it. We still drive our cars, fly our planes, consume carbon-heavy red meat and contribute in other ways to killing the planet.

Meanwhile the news industry facilitates our psychosis by relegating the topic of climate crisis to the backburner (at best) or (worse) succumbing to the delusion that there’s actually a “debate” to be had. Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists say warming is real and humans are the cause. Yet much of the discourse happens in the opinion section, as if the consequences of warming are still an open question.

In fact, most columns that cast doubt upon the science (like the ones that appear in this paper) are excreted by think tanks (e.g., Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute) funded by energy profiteers with a direct stake in the status quo. Their goal is to make sure “debate” continues in order to forestall the regulation of fossil fuels. Accordingly they pay pundits to churn out corporate propaganda in the guise of “research.”

They construct delusions, in other words, that help us to deny reality — that make us psychotic.

And it seems to be working. We’re facing imminent catastrophe, yet we carry on with business as usual.

And so long as the news industry continues to spuriously offer up “both sides” of the discussion, our psychotic break will continue — “it’s not really happening.”