

No need to self-silence

Roger Van Scyoc's article explained climate change self-silencing due to "pluralistic ignorance."

People's negative reactions to climate conversations caused me to begin self-silencing — although I thought only I did it, and that I was failing as a climate advocate by "going dark."

I once asked a psychologist, after a lecture on trends in war, about connections between climate change and war. Before he responded, many in the audience started laughing. Their mocking made me feel vulnerable because I had expected the question was safe at a scientific lecture in my liberal, well-educated town. The lecturer waited for the laughter to end. In those seconds, I feared that he too would scoff. When he spoke, he told the audience that climate change is humanity's greatest danger. Yet, the discomfort I felt from that incident, and similar ones, made me self-silence.

Eventually I found that brief, light comments could generate nontoxic responses, without eye-rolls. In a grocery store, I asked the beer distributor who was checking the store's inventory, which beer he recommended for someone needing to relax after working all day on climate advocacy during the Trump era. Our discussion of light versus dark beers led to deciding that dark beers better represent my dark spirits, and my need for a substantial beverage rather than a light insubstantial alternative.

A silly conversation can acknowledge we're in this together, and can halt the self-silencing downward spiral. And our conversation's feeling of connectedness outlasted getting lit up, even by a delicious stout.

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