



The Climate Crisis and Mental Health Oppression

An Oppression that Makes People Fearful and Conforming

We are in the midst of a climate crisis. It is easy to either go numb, or assume we are all going to die and not try to take charge of the situation. Because of mental health oppression (MHO) most people don't get to release their painful emotions, including their fears, and take full charge. Instead we get stuck. MHO keeps us afraid of our emotions and separated from other people, and therefore less effective in organizing to make big changes.

Effects of Mental Health Oppression

Mental health oppression affects everyone—and hardly anyone realizes it. It holds people back, partly because they don't realize they're being held back, or that there's such a thing as mental health oppression. It makes people doubt their own thinking, which explains why they will submit to a society that prioritizes profit, not people. It sets people up to be timid and afraid, unable to take action, and to fear change. It convinces

people that they need to be "normal" in order to be successful, and that being "normal" means supporting the status quo. (To go against the status quo is to be "crazy.") People who organize to end the climate crisis, who are opposing the status quo, can be regarded as "crazy" and can therefore be easily dismissed as having nothing to say. Even having our lives destroyed by the climate crisis can be regarded as "normal," as just the "way things are."

To make the necessary changes, to end the climate crisis, we need to form connections with people who are very different from us, celebrate our differences, and work closely together. As we release the emotions that have held our distresses in place, we will more easily connect with people. Then it will be easier to organize large movements—and we need very large movements to successfully challenge the status quo.



Psychiatric Drugs and Activism

Some of the biggest corporations in the world are drug companies. Part of what they do is sell as many psychiatric drugs as possible. More and more people are being targeted with and using them, especially young people. Most general practitioners now prescribe psychiatric drugs for a variety of common complaints not just those considered to be psychiatric. Mental health professionals and other doctors

may risk losing their licenses if they do not prescribe these drugs.

Most people have no idea how physically damaging these drugs can be. In Re-evaluation Counseling, many people have stopped using them and thereby freed up their natural healing process and experienced healing.

These drugs are not only physically damaging, they also make people quieter and less motivated to be



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism (UER)* is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



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activists. People also become confused—partly because they don't realize that the pervasive promotion of drugs is part of a larger oppression. Also, when they see people around them becoming overwhelmed, regarding themselves as "crazy," and taking psychiatric drugs, they may become afraid that they, too, could "lose their minds."

Moving Forward

MHO has made us afraid of or embarrassed about feeling deeply. It has

made us afraid to have new thoughts, to stand up for ourselves, to be creative, to express unpopular viewpoints, to connect closely with people different from ourselves, and more. However, it is possible to heal from these fears. It is possible to regain confidence in our thinking, to face the climate crisis, to move forward and build ever more confidence as we face and handle each challenge.





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live are needed for this to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the escalating damage to the earth's climate, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been

hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal damage

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this damage.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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