

Workshop on climate change based on the work of Macy, and informed by the Satir Model

Janet Christie-Seely

2017

Satir International Journal

UVic Libraries ePublishing Services

© 2017 Christie-Seely. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Original citation:

Christie-Seely, J. (2017). Workshop on climate change based on the work of Macy, and informed by the Satir Model. *Satir International Journal*, 5(1), 19–35. <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/satir/article/view/17872>

Downloaded from UVicSpace Research & Learning Repository

dspace.library.uvic.ca



**University
of Victoria**

Libraries

Research Article

Workshop on Climate Change Based on the Work of Macy, and Informed by the Satir Model

Janet Christie-Seely, MD, University of Ottawa

Abstract

Impacts of climate change have become as much a psychological problem as an ecological one. When I started the article in 2016, books and articles were commenting on the conspiracy of silence around climate change—apart from the noisy climate-change deniers. The silence was broken in 2017, thanks to the strong denial of climate change by one man. Two years ago, after extensive reading, particularly regarding Joanna Macy’s workshop “How to Face the Mess We’re in Without Going Crazy,” I decided I needed to *do something* rather than despair or deny (Al Gore’s triad). Of Macy and Johnstone’s three areas of action, raising consciousness was the obvious one for a therapist.

After summarizing Satir’s tools and their relevance to both climate change and Macy’s workshop, I describe the workshop on climate change, based on Macy’s work. I first presented it to my local Satir group, then to the annual International Human Learning Resources Network conference in 2015, and finally to the Virginia Satir Global Network Conference for Satir’s 100th Birthday Celebration in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada (June 2016). This article is written with therapists in mind, and so I have tried to be true to the experiential nature of both Macy and Satir’s work. Therapists may either want to help clients deal with the prevalent angst or to take a leadership role themselves and give presentations or workshops on this key topic for humanity.

Keywords

climate change, Virginia Satir, Joanna Macy, conspiracy of silence, workshop

Satir and Macy on Climate Change

The workshop that is described in this paper was based on Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone’s (2012) book, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in Without Going Crazy*. The context of climate change is the exponential growth in world population (now seven billion) and increasing consumerism on a planet running out of food, fresh water, energy, and space to grow trees and dump waste. Climate change links with the other planetary worries: the economy (will be worse with increasing cost of catastrophic weather), refugees (Syria had a severe drought from 2007-2010 (Wendle, 2016)), and the increasing power and wealth of the 1% who control the corporations. As Macy and Young Brown (2014) put it: “Consumerism can be seen as institutionalized greed, the military-industrial complex as institutionalized aggression and state- and corporate-controlled media as institutionalized delusion” (p. 2).

Many have said that climate change is a psychological problem as well as an ecological one. Four years ago, I rarely thought of it. In retrospect, I was numbed. Over the last three years, I've been through my own psychological process and have done a great deal of reading. I decided to present Macy's workshop to my Satir group. That's when I became more aware of the general deafening silence on the subject—present at that time.

Curious, I started asking people if they heard much talk about climate change. Most said, “No” and changed the subject. How would people react to this topic in a workshop? This was not my usual, “Can I help you with your family problem?” workshop; this was “Can I open up the can of worms for you called ‘We may not survive beyond 50 years?’” workshop. Macy and Young Brown (2014) wrote:

When we are distracted and fearful and the odds are running out on us, it is easy to let the heart and mind go numb ... the numbing touches us all. No one is unaffected by it. No one is immune to doubt, denial or distraction in relation to the severity of the situation, nor to doubt about our power to change it. Yet of all the dangers we face, from climate change to nuclear wars, none is so great as the deadening of our response.... Reformers and revolutionaries decry public apathy. To rouse people, they deliver yet more terrifying information, as if people didn't know that our world is in trouble. They preach about moral imperatives, as if people didn't already care. Their alarms and sermons tend to make people pull the shades down tighter, resisting what appears too overwhelming, too complicated, too out of their control (pp. 17-18); 20).

I have now understood why Macy (n.d.-c) called it the “Work that Reconnects.” The workshop reconnects us to ourselves and each other. It reconnects us to the feelings of pain, fear, and sadness. It does what therapists do for their clients; they help them face their pain and resolve it instead of coping through addictions, distractions, projections, and blame. That helps people come alive again. “Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive” (Thurman, 2015, p. 5). (I was in a room with a group of activists working on *The Leap Manifesto* (n.d.) to be described later, and they agreed the biggest bonus was that they felt so alive compared to friends deadened by denial and numbness).

As Al Gore (2006) pointed out, there are three responses to the data on climate change: denial, depression, or do something. Macy and Johnstone (2012) pointed to the parallel societal reactions:

1. “Business as Usual” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 14; denial)

- Rugged individualism; we're all separate bundles of self-interest.
- One billion of us in 1850; seven billion now.
- Money, greed, and consumerism as the great motivators.
- How we mostly spent our day yesterday.

2. “The Great Unravelling” (p. 17, decline, depression)

- Financial chaos and inequality, issues regarding justice, human rights.
- Deteriorating social values and cohesion.
- War as top priority: \$160 billion per year would eliminate poverty and starvation by 2025 (the world's military spending in 2010 was 10 times that, with the US spending half of it).
- Mass extinction of species, the “sixth extinction” (Kolbert, 2014).
- Deteriorating environment and global warming.

3. “The Great Turning” (p. 26; doing something)

The actions of the great turning include:

- Actions to slow the damage.

- Analysis of structural causes leads to creation of structural solutions (e.g., The Leap Manifesto (leapmanifesto.org), The Climate Mobilization (theclimatemobilization.org), Avaaz: The World in Action (avaaz.org), The Transition Movement (transitionkw.com), the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, etc.; I will summarize three of these later).
- Shift in perceptions and values, and consciousness-raising (e.g., my workshop and this article).

Richard Hawken (2007) started to notice, after 15 years of giving talks on the environment, that the cluster of people who gathered around him afterward to talk, question, or exchange business cards followed a pattern. In his words:

These people were typically working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights. They came from the non-profits and the non-governmental world, also known as civil society; they looked after rivers and bays, educated consumers about sustainable agriculture, retrofitted houses with solar panels, lobbied state legislatures about pollution, fought against corporate-weighted trade policies, worked to green inner cities, and taught children about the environment. Quite simply they had dedicated themselves to safeguard nature and ensure justice (p. 1).

Hawken (2007) catalogued his large collection of business cards, which led to research numbers, likely more than 200 million such organizations / active groups of people in the world, pointing to a source of optimism despite the pessimism from the climate data. This is the Great Turning. He shares that humanity has become:

... more globally united and interconnected, more sensitized to the experiences and suffering of others ... more able to think, feel, and respond together in a spiritually evolved manner to the world's swiftly changing realities than has ever before been possible (Hawken, 2007, p. 483).

Kolbert (2007) commented on how impossible it is to think that a technologically advanced society could choose to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in fact doing. This silence a year ago was occurring despite the hopeful fact that we can correct the situation—if we act now.

This numbness is “acedia,” an old word Dave MacQuarrie (2012) in British Columbia, wrote about in *Acedia: The Darkness Within (and the Darkness of Climate Change)*. Acedia means grief, resignation, sloth, weariness, despair, and self-pity, or as he finally summarized it: “fearfulness, laziness, and self-righteousness” (p. 6). How can we get through that? In the preface, MacQuarrie writes:

If we do not do the hard work of the inner transformation of our species, the hard outer work of supporting our world will not be sustainable. At the same time, if we do not create this inner work in such a way that it authentically feels good, and is relatively playful and fun for the common person, we will not do the work. Our laziness and fearfulness will overcome us (p. xv).

Virginia Satir understood human fallibility and frailty. She was a master of the glass half-full and very effective in stimulating the “hard work of inner transformation of our species” (MacQuarrie, 2012, p. xv).

Hope is key to facing this topic. (The recent book by Bloomberg and Pope: *Climate of Hope: How Cities, Businesses and Citizens can Save the Planet* (2017)—is well worth reading and epitomizes this). Watching Macy leading a workshop on climate change on the web (Macy, n.d.-c) reminded me of Satir’s ability to create hope, safety and open sharing. Both she and Macy thought and acted systemically, believing that change at one level (personal) could have impacts on another level (societal). Both were committed to global healing and evolution. So, I resolved to put on Macy’s workshop in 2014 with my Satir group at home, despite my misgivings. I repeated it at the 2015 International Human Learning Resources Network

(annual week-long Satir Conference), and again at Virginia Satir's 100th Birthday conference in Vancouver in 2016. But before I outline the workshop, I will briefly describe Satir's tools and how they inform my thinking about the psychology of climate change.

The Satir Tools and Climate Change

I am quite sure Virginia Satir would not be silent about climate change if she were here today. I have been a member of Satir Global since 1986, and spent five months in Satir training and have led a Satir Centre in Ottawa since 1989. Satir taught worldwide and was active politically; for example, she was in a campaign to promote Barbara Marx-Hubbard (now 87, a well-known writer and workshop leader on the state of the planet) for United States (US) president. She was not afraid to speak up on global issues.

Welcoming change is part of the Satir Growth or Seed Model (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gamori, 1991) in which relationships are between people of equal value, regardless of age or status. Congruent communication (acknowledging one's own thoughts, feelings, and opinions; the other person's thoughts, feelings, and opinions; and the context of the relationship) is the goal. This contrasts with the prevalent hierarchical model of one-up/one-down relationships with each person's value based on status and power. Hierarchy prompts non-congruent communication (blaming, placating, super-reasonable or computer, or distracting). The Satir Model is essentially love-based, whereas hierarchy is fear-based, and often resistant to change.

The Satir Change Process

The Change Process (Satir et al., 1991) has six stages: (a) The Old Status Quo, familiar but has become uncomfortable and no longer appropriate; (b) A Foreign Element or stimulus for change, such as promotion, a new baby, a warming planet; (c) Chaos as change begins, with fear, pain, and stress—but also creativity, which can stimulate a transforming idea, which leads to; (d) Learning, practice, and making mistakes which can produce setbacks but develop new skills; (e) Integration of new behaviors results in; (f) A New Status Quo, which is much more appropriate for the new situation. Later, this may become the Old Status Quo for another change process. In the stage of chaos, the temptation is to move back to the old familiar status quo. Support is the necessary ingredient to help the beleaguered person to move forward through the process with renewed vigor and creativity. At a deeper level, the process of change is a way to assist people in making choices that increase self-esteem, provide self-accountability, and move a person toward a more congruent sense of self. The transformation that is experienced is an internal process where the universal yearnings to be loved, acknowledged, and accepted can be met by the individual "self" (Sales, 2002).

We are certainly in the chaos stage of the change process, and coping with several dramatic foreign elements—increasing poverty, financial inequality and instability, resultant increasing terrorism, refugees now in the millions, and the unanimous predictions of calamitous climate change if something is not done quickly to avert it. No wonder so many are desperately running back to the old status quo of isolationism, black and white simplistic thinking, and a need for "America to be great again!" When many people feel resigned and pessimistic, there can be far-reaching consequences. What is needed now is many people with courage and the love of humanity and the planet who can see the climate crisis as a serious call to action, a challenge; an opportunity to correct the greed, anger, and hatred and to work together to survive, and then thrive!

Two Ways of Viewing the World in Relation to Climate Change

Satir taught all around the world, and there are many Satir institutes globally. Hierarchy and the Satir Model are two quite different ways of viewing the world. Macy and Johnstone (2012), speak of "Seeing with new eyes," meaning seeing the value of every person, plant, and animal on the planet—as in Satir's Model—instead of their utility, status, money, or power. As in the Satir Model, relationships will be

of equals, rather than the hierarchy of corporations or humans with power over other humans and other species. Change is welcomed as an opportunity and challenge, not a reason for denial and depression.

The Satir Model incorporates a systemic perspective (Christie-Seely, 1984; Satir et al., 1991). David Spratt and Philip Sutton (2008) give examples of limited non-systemic or linear thinking in *Climate Code Red* that don't consider the whole system of interlocking influences and factors. Biofuels often are developed in areas previously focused on food, or in prior rainforests which gave us oxygen and take up carbon-dioxide. The world's 800 million motorists are in competition with the 2 billion poorest people, who are simply trying to survive.

Integral thinking (Watkins & Wilber, 2015) which includes systemic thinking, takes it several steps further. It is important that those in leadership positions are self-aware and are compassionate and non-judgmental of others; that they see the whole planet and all its occupants need our protection—a world-centric or cosmo-centric approach, not ethnocentric (my country or my religion is what counts), or egocentric, focused on me and mine.

Sophisticated systemic thinking is required. To adequately diagnose any complex or “wicked problem” before finding solutions, we need to assess from the four conceptual integral quadrants (Watkins & Wilber, 2015):

1. Objective facts regarding weather events, rate of melting ice, sea-level rise, etc.;
2. Personal subjectivity—what am I prepared to do in assessing my energy and lifestyle changes needed versus my wish to survive and have humanity and my grandchildren survive;
3. Objective assessment of humanity as a system, with multiple histories, economies, political systems, legal systems, cultures, etc.
4. Subjective experience of this from the stakeholders—which means all of us—at our levels of development from egocentric, ethnocentric, world-centric or cosmo-centric, our knowledge, motivation, acedia or denial, leader's opinions, etc.

The Satir Iceberg

John Banmen, Jane Gerber, and Maria Gomori questioned Satir after observing her with clients. Together they discovered that how she thought about humans fit an iceberg metaphor (Figure 1), with many layers under the water-level of awareness (Satir et al., 1991). The top layer is “*behavior*,” the more conscious and visible layer. At the water-level are the “*copings*,” the four non-congruent “*communication stances*” of blaming, placating, super-reasonable, and distracting; all ways of protecting the person from low self-esteem. The stances are fueled by the “*feelings*” below, particularly by the “*feelings about the feeling*,” fear, guilt and shame, or acceptance (the self-esteem message). This layer is in turn determined by “*perceptions*” of self, other, the world—as lovable or worthless, friend or foe, fearful or loving, safe or dangerous, and is closely tied to “*expectations*”; these two layers develop in childhood. Expectation can be a barrier to fully living from one's “*yearnings*,” which is a level too painful to look at for those whose needs and desires were not met in childhood. Below yearnings is the *core* “*Self or I am*,” where self-esteem is high, recognizing the truth of one's value as a “magnificent manifestation of the Life Force,” a phrase Satir used often in meditations. At the level of Self, there is no denial or avoidance, no acedia, but the courage to act in the best interests of humanity and the planet becomes natural. Macy's workshop exercises open up feelings and the fear, guilt and shame behind them, allowing sharing of the deeper layers of the iceberg, especially yearnings which allows participants to access Self.

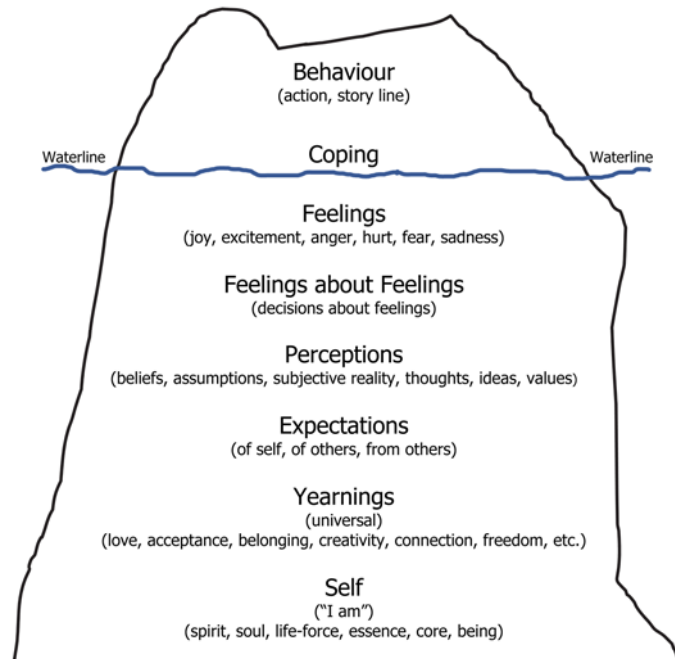


Figure 1. The personal iceberg metaphor. Adapted from *The Satir Model: Family Therapy and Beyond* by V. Satir, J. Banmen, J. Gerber, & M. Gomori, 1991. Copyright 1999 by J. Banmen. Reproduced with permission.

Blame is so prevalent today we take it for granted, unaware it is self-protection and avoidance of responsibility. What of the blame in the climate change arena—the blame of other countries, of companies or politicians or scientists, or the equally and incorrect self-blame and guilt, ways to avoid fear and grief. I can hear Satir saying: “Never blame yourself for what you did in the past. You did the best you knew with the knowledge at the time.” However, all of us need to move to responsibility now—and so do countries and governments.

The Societal Iceberg

Any society, community, or nation has its own unique societal iceberg (Christie-Seely, manuscript in preparation). What are its many behaviors, and how are they organized? In thinking about this, consider a community or country you know with its government, legal system, policies regarding other communities or nations, the response to Kyoto and climate change, refugees, and the like.

What is the community’s usual coping stance? Does the community tend towards blaming or placating, or is congruence and honesty encouraged in the people and displayed by the government (do other countries trust them)? I have taught in countries where blame and gossip are ubiquitous, so trust and cooperation are low—and groups are less productive.

This coping depends on and comes from the general feelings of its people (e.g., respect or distrust of leaders; general personal empowerment or fear of what others or the government will think or do; contentment or dissatisfaction with finances, jobs, social services, etc.). Is there guilt or anger at past events, within the country or with other countries, with forgiveness and understanding of selves or others—*or not*? What does the community feel about climate change? Is it fear and despair, acedia, panic and denial, or determination to be proactive?

Propping up these feelings are the perceptions and beliefs of the country’s people. How do they see themselves in the context of the world—as beleaguered victims, resource-rich or poor, a triumph of development, or noble saviors and world leaders? These perceptions can be assets or liabilities from the rest of the world’s perceptions. How do they perceive the West or the East, terrorists, refugees? Do they

see climate change as hoax or imminent horror? What are their expectations of themselves—as intelligent and cooperative citizens, as warriors, victims, world saviors, or isolationists? Is the majority egocentric, ethnocentric, or world-centric (Watkins & Wilber, 2015)? What are their expectations of others, for example, “they should: help us,” “share their wealth,” “leave us alone,” “deal with their own problems.” What do they think other countries expect of them—handouts, support, protection, or conflict and terror?

What do all people on the planet **really** want? What are their yearnings? It’s safe to say everyone wants food, water, shelter, security, peace, the ability to play, and contribute with meaningful work and, above all, a peaceful productive future for their children, grand-children, great grand-children. They want to be remembered for their contributions to relationships or to their communities, their ‘immortality projects’. All that is threatened by climate change.

What can be inferred at the level of Self? Self is the “I am” in the Satir iceberg (see Figure 1) or Self in Internal Family Systems Therapy (Schwartz, 1995). Each refers to the same concept or reality. Does that country or community connect with its core, with a sense of internal peace and high self-esteem? Is it able to act and think from Self-identity among its members—or not? If you don’t believe a community has a Self, think of its personality, moral tone, values and ethics, and history—its culture. When our survival, our lifework and legacy, our children and descendants are seriously threatened, individual and community sense of Self may get buried by other protective parts; for example, defensiveness, fear and denial, despair, judgement of others, and anger. It is helpful to remember that if a country’s leaders can remain in Self (i.e., congruent, compassionate, non-judgmental, calm, confident, and curious about others’ positions), with the support and trust of those they lead, they may be able to contribute to rather than impede the tasks of addressing climate change in a more progressive way.

All of this has an impact on climate change around the world, where few countries have strong policies that recognize the urgency of our situation. In most places, the behavior at the top of the iceberg is wanting. Urgently needed is a coherent policy framework for shared participation, taxes, rationing, dividends or rewards to individuals and companies at all levels. “Not the power of one but the power of all” (Marshall, 2014, p. 197). We need to recognize the power of local governments, particularly cities like New York, as Mike Bloomberg, who was Mayor of New York for three terms, wrote in: “Climate of Hope: How Cities, Businesses and Citizens Can Save the Planet” (2017). Cities are sharing information round the world, with friendly competition developing (e.g., Vancouver wants to be the greenest city on the planet), and are more responsive to the plight of their citizens, (e.g., number of asthma deaths—WHO reports 7 million deaths from air pollution per year), and clearer on the economic benefit of closing coal mines, and investing in ever cheaper solar and wind, with preventive maneuvers much cheaper than dealing with the results of catastrophic weather events and rising sea levels.

The Ingredients of an Interaction

The Ingredients of an Interaction tool can help untangle communication crises in individuals in a few minutes, “replacing our old learnings with new up to date, and healthy ways of interacting. It brings to light the process we learned when we were trying to survive in a dysfunctional system” as children (Satir et al., 1991, pp. 122-123). This tool can dramatically end a couple conflict. Satir comments: “We have also started to use this vehicle which can be affective as a vehicle for changing organizations, employer-employee relations and cross-cultural conflicts.” The six ingredients are (p.145):

- (a) Sense information, or what do I hear and see? – the facts
- (b) What meanings do I make of what I hear and see? – the story
- (c) What feelings do I have about the meaning I make?
- (d) What feelings do I have about those feelings? (fear, guilt or shame, the “self-esteem” message)
- (e) What defenses do I use? (To protect me from fear, guilt or shame?)
- (f) What rules for commenting do I use?

When we are aware of our interpretations, and can own, comment on, and accept our feelings, we can be more fully congruent. One person in a group remaining congruent makes it hard for others to persist in their non-congruent stance.

Congruence is also essential to a facilitator's understanding and skill and is necessary in conflict resolution with individuals or groups. Careful and respectful listening, along with focusing on win-win solutions can help shift differences for a more effective end result.

Family Reconstructions (Nerin, 1986)

Working through our family history and relationships with our parents is a major vehicle for understanding ourselves and others, crucial in the climate-change days ahead, as communication and negotiation are skills everyone will need. Not making peace with our parents can tempt us to project our own resentment elsewhere and cause us to see enemies. Rising to the challenges ahead will help take any remaining rough edges off our own personalities and reactivity. Healing the planet will help us to heal ourselves.

Beyond the individual, understanding a country's ancestry, and collective traumas prompts empathy and greater understanding. What if schools routinely studied the backgrounds and histories of the countries currently in the news (potential "enemies")? In Azerbaijan, my husband and I were privileged to be part of a four day workshop in 2007 for therapists run by the international Satir teacher, Laura Dodson and Craig Barnes, a writer and international mediator. It started with each country represented in the room detailing their "family history," which included people's memories of past events—almost a country reconstruction. There were long flip-chart sheets for the Azeri history, for the history of the US, and even of Canada (also present in the room). Slowly, we moved to the biggest problem, the Karabakh crisis of 1991. This followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had set up a region of Azerbaijan for the Armenians. War broke out between the Armenians in Azerbaijan and the Azeris resulting, after many deaths, in a million Azeri refugees. A man who expressed, "Kill the bastards!" on the first day of the workshop was moved to "I think we should sit down with therapists from there and solve this" by day four.

Your Many Parts

"One of Satir's major vehicles for *change* is called the Parts' Party" (Satir, 1991, p.191-193), a tool that helps us look at the many parts we human beings have, how we handle them and how we can transform them into resources for being whole and congruent. Participants pick six famous people, alive or dead, mythical or real, whom they either admire or despise, and give each three adjectives. These become their parts. Then one participant chooses someone to represent each of his or her parts. These parts dress up as the parts and have a party.

Think of your parts that react to climate change. (See the list of phrases on page 23 of Macy & Young-Brown, 2014). Little Bo Peep or Chicken Little, or the Lion in the Wizard of Oz might be your fearful part; Mother Teresa or Jesus, your caring, loving part; Judge Judy, or a Spanish Inquisitor, your judgmental side; or Garfield, your lazy procrastinator. Fear, judgement, blame, and laziness are not aspects of our true Selves, rather they are defensive protective parts that need to be understood, accepted and helped to change. *Self*-acceptance and forgiveness open us to a way of seeing others' foibles or sins—and our own foibles in a new way, with new eyes. We need to face, embrace and transform the darker side of humanity to begin to heal the planet, just as individuals need to do this for themselves. This does *not* mean that those who use and abuse power over others should be ignored.

The Workshop on Climate Change

The first climate-change workshop with my group in Ottawa began with watching a video of the Elm Dance, and dancing it. This practice was adopted in 1992 by Joanna Macy (n.d.-a, n.d.-b), after she and her team were invited to facilitate workshops in cities and towns affected by the 1986 Chernobyl

disaster. Here “we soon realized, [our workshops] were meant not to help people recover from a catastrophe, so much as to live with an ongoing one” (Macy, n.d.-b, para. 3).

There, and especially in Novozybkov, the most contaminated of inhabited cities, the dance became an expression of their will to live. It was here the dance evolved a distinctive form with the raising and swaying of arms, evoking their connection with the trees they so loved (Macy, n.d.-a, para. 2).

The Russian government had made “a fast decision...to seed the clouds and cause them to precipitate...in an around the agricultural and light-industrial city of Novozybkov” (Macy, n.d.-b, para. 5), 100 miles east of Chernobyl. In her workshop, at first the Novozybkov people were silent, numbed, shut-down. The second day they entered, joined hands and, spontaneously, began the Elm Dance. In the “afternoon, the grief broke open” (para. 26) and, the next day, the anger. After a number spoke, a man said “Yes, it was hard yesterday ... [h]ard to look at the pain, hard to feel it, hard to speak it. But the way it feels today, it is like being clean, for the first time in a long time” (para. 35). Macy promised she would never teach the dance without telling their story.

Every year during the week-long IHLRN (International Human Learning Resources Network) conference, Satir people dance the Elm Dance before meditation each morning. This simple beautiful practice is gradually spreading around the planet as people gather to work together for the healing of our world. To celebrate our commitment to life and solidarity with activists the world over, people join hands in a circle dance.

Like the people of Novozybkov, we too must talk. Group discussions were a major part of the workshop after brief power point presentations for each stage of the workshop, with exercises interspersed between.

After we had swayed in the dance, arms raised like the trees harmed by Chernobyl, I had the participants think of their own tree of life. They did this by filling in a drawing I had made of an apple tree (Figure 2), complete with a compost pile beside it (Christie-Seely, manuscript in preparation). I suggested they write in their: country of origin, language, grandparents, and parents in the roots; values and goals in the trunk; interests, hopes, and dreams in the branches; any progeny in the leaves; and their legacy in the fruit. They were then instructed to write in the compost pile what they wanted to discard, remembering to also write the gold into which it was transformed. As Satir so often said in her Colorado workshops, “Turn shit into gold!” (also used by Gomori & Adaskin, 2009, p.1)

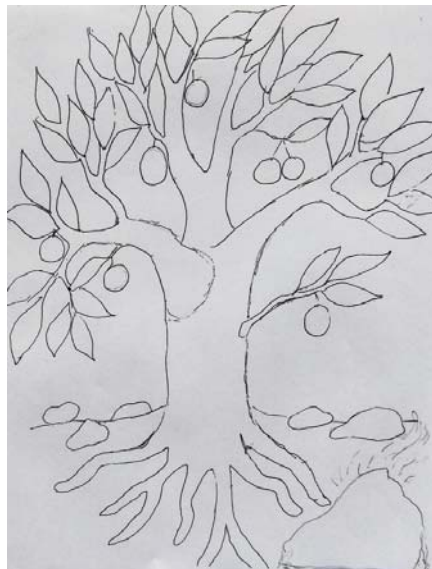


Figure 2. The tree of life drawing workshop participants used to express their own tree of life. Drawing based on the Dulwich Centre’s (n.d.) “The Tree of Life.”

My groups found this exercise fun to do. It connected the trees of the Elm Dance to their own tree of life, and to their ancestors, descendants, legacies, and life-work—all potentially at risk if we don't act to correct climate change. This led to the first part of Macy's and Johnstone's (2012) **4-part "spiral"** (p. 39) which guides the workshop. My drawing of a rose (Figure 3), represents this spiral, which starts with **"gratitude"** (p. 39) for what we have now. This invigorates participants for the difficult work of facing the truth about the state of the planet, **"honoring our pain for the world"** (p. 38-39). The third part of the spiral is **"seeing with new eyes"** (p. 39 -41), which leads us to action, **"going (or growing) forth"** (p. 37-41)—the seeds of transformation of our civilization and its home. Gratitude again follows action, and so on—hence a spiral.



Figure 3. Four-part "spiral." Drawing based on Macy and Johnstone's (2012) plant (p. 39).

1. Gratitude

All the belief statements and open sentences for completion are from Macy and Johnstone (2012). I asked the participants to complete the following:

Some things I love about being alive on earth are . . .

A place that was magical to me as a child was . . .

My favorite activities include . . .

Someone who helped me believe in myself is or was . . .

Some things I appreciate about myself are. . . (p. 49)

This activity is best done in dyads. There is ample research supporting the energizing power of gratitude ("In Praise of Gratitude," 2011), which gives a sense of well-being and makes one feel alive. Like Satir et al.'s (1991) appreciations in "Temperature Reading" (pp. 309-316), this is where we start—on a positive note rather than with complaints or problems.

2. Truth-Telling and Honoring the Pain

We moved to the second part of Macy's spiral which surfaces the underground feelings about the future in all of us. I asked the group whether the following phrases about climate change sounded familiar or applied to them.

1. "I don't believe it's that dangerous" (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 60). They're exaggerating. Besides, they say we're due for another Ice Age.
2. "It isn't my role to sort this out!" (p. 61).
3. "I don't want to stand out from the crowd" (p. 61). Whistle-blowers often get blamed. Fear leads to a climate of collusion. Conspiracy of silence.
4. "The climate information threatens my commercial or political interests" (p. 62).
5. "It's so upsetting I prefer not to think about it" (p. 63). Fear—denial as protection.
6. "I feel paralyzed. I'm aware of the danger but I don't know what to do" (p. 63).
7. "There's no point in doing anything, since it won't make any difference" (p. 64).

Or just: "I'm too overwhelmed by my own problems, the world's too much of a mess to have to think of that too." Think of a Parts Party. Would you be able to name the part of you that stands out in response to one of these sentences? Is it the Captain of the Titanic, or Garfield, or is it Lion in the Wizard of Oz or Chicken Little (panic!!—"The sky is falling!"), or the familiar Ostrich Symbol. Or do you find yourself in Judge Judy as you react to the responses? But what would your Florence Nightingale or Martin Luther King or Joan of Arc say? We're all capable of courage, optimism and heroism, especially where protecting our family is concerned. Panic or paralysis is what we *do not* need. There is plenty of valid optimism if we all begin to act.

The truth mandala. For this exercise, I had collected a pile of dead leaves for grief, a heavy grey stone for fear, a heavy crooked stick to be held (not brandished) for anger, and an empty wicker bowl for emptiness and helplessness and, finally, a napkin to hold any other emotion—as Macy and Young Brown (2014) had outlined (Chapter 7, "Practices," Number 10). I placed these in the four quadrants of a beautiful Persian rug that a Satir friend from Syria had given me (which seemed particularly appropriate just now with the Syrian refugee situation), and put the napkin in the middle. I suggested each person come up, pick up the symbol of the feeling they were addressing and speak of those feelings, if they wished. So, I started the process by picking up the stick and was surprised at how very angry I felt as I spoke of my reaction to the pictures of dead elephants, their tusks yanked out, with a baby elephant grieving beside them. (The first time I went through this exercise I felt worse and worse but, somehow, I could release and felt relief.) One-by-one people came up and spoke of grief over disappearing species, fears they had never spoken, rage that no one was talking about climate change at all at that time, helplessness about politics and oil companies. Then one elderly man sat on the napkin cross-legged and spoke quietly and eloquently of images from his childhood in England, in countryside now disappeared, and of ways and animals long gone.

The group spoke of relief that we were finally talking. When people tell the truth about what they know, feel, and see (Satir's Five Freedoms) (Satir, et al., 1991, p. 62), a transformation occurs. There is an increased determination to act and a renewed appetite for life. When we close off emotionally, we feel less alive and tend to turn to distractions, medications, addictions.

Macy and Johnstone (2012) emphasize the need to "Hear ourselves speak what we already know" (p. 80). They wrote:

The Power of Conversations: An expression we've often heard is, "I didn't realize I felt so strongly until I heard myself say that." By speaking our concerns and giving voice to our feelings, we make them more visible, not just to others but also to ourselves. The more we draw issues into the open, the more we are inclined to tackle them.

Best-selling author Margaret Wheatley (2009) also observes that the simple act of having courageous conversations with friends about our fears and dreams can have wide-ranging impact.

When time permits, I add Macy and Johnstone's (2012) "Breathing Through" Meditation, which I have abbreviated here:

Allow yourself to be ... breathed by life, sustained by a vast living breathing web ... inhaling the suffering of the world—in prisons, hospitals, tenements, refugee camps ... the countless hardships of our fellow human beings, and of our animal brothers and sisters as well, as they swim the seas and fly the air of this planet ... breathe in the pain like granules of sand on the stream of air ... don't hang onto the pain, but let it pass through your heart and out to the healing resources of life's vast web ... passing them through our heart makes good, rich compost out of all the grief (pp. 73-75).

3. Seeing with New Eyes—the main part of the workshop

Moving forward up the spiral, I spoke of seeing with new eyes—from a wider sense of self (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 85-103), that is evolving to use power with, rather than power over (p. 105-120), a richer experience of community (p. 121-137), and living with a larger view of time (p. 139-160). How different would our behavior be if we truly believed we were an organic part of the planet that hurts when we forget to recycle, drive when we could walk, own two cars, plan to go on a cruise ship or fly somewhere. There was an early attempt to engage the public in climate protection called "The Power of One" (Marshall, 2014) emphasizing the power of the individual to change. However, it backfired as it triggered the already-present guilt ("It's my fault?") in individuals, along with denial and depression. Besides it missed the point. If we are all separate disconnected entities, each one of us is insignificant. Whereas if humanity is the power of one—all 7 billion of us—more and more aware of our interconnectedness, our similarities, and our nature as part of nature, part of Gaia, then what might be accomplished? We feel distress when other beings suffer because, at a deep level, we are not separate from them. For example, witness our responses to Syrian refugees, or to Tar Sands devastation, or hear of another endangered species.

However, realistically, legislation helps to train us to see with new eyes. Wearing seatbelts and not using cell phones while driving gets easier when a fine will result. What does this say about our freewill and desire to do the right thing? Would we shift from lip-service to the environment if we had that "new sense of self" more akin to what I am gradually learning from a Native Canadian member of the Satir Learning Centre of Ottawa, Lisa Bourque? Her ancestors were all forced to attend residential schools, but her patience with Canadians is astonishing. Tolerance and acceptance of all life as connected seems behind this. Discussion of this perception in the workshop connected to the next exercise, One of Macy and Young Brown's (2014) exercises is based on Chief Seattle's speech, responding to the US government's decision to buy—or take—his people's land, abbreviated here:

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? This idea is strange to us ... the rivers are our brothers ... the air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath—the beast, the tree, the man ... whatever happens to the beast soon happens to the man. All things are connected.

The speech is read by participants in a circle, taking turns, followed by responses from everyone to the imagined spirit of Chief Seattle sitting in the center.¹

A wider self leads to a richer sense of community, which we discussed in the workshop. For example, there are many stories of recent catastrophes (i.e., hurricanes, ice storms, wars, etc.) and the humanity they have brought out in people. Our disconnected population is rebuilding community around Farmers Markets, help for the elderly and shut-ins, soup kitchens, community gardens, and activities related

¹ Macy and Young Brown (2014) offer many creative exercises that each fit in the spiral. Instructions are clear and detailed. I strongly recommend this book for anyone interested in learning more and becoming more active in the "do something" domain.

to sustainability (Hawken, 2007). Book clubs are sharing some eye-opening books. (In fact, Macy and Johnstone's book (2012) came from a friend's book club).

Participants were recommended to find some kindred souls with whom to discuss climate-change and other important topics.

New data on evolution relating to competition and revolutionary co-operation was presented as relating to a wider sense of community and a hopeful new perspective on humanity. Lipton and Bhaerman (2009) explained endosymbiotic theory, which states that important steps in evolution came from species co-operating, or even joining together. In contrast, the original writing by Darwin (2013) exaggerated competition (so the public saw it as the norm for humanity) and down-played cooperation for which there is now much evidence.

Lipton and Bhaerman (2009) also point out that evolution did not happen gradually but in discontinuous steps, with environmental crises as turning points, the threatened dangers moving us to the next revolutionary steps. They suggest that, given the surfeit of environmental crises currently, we are ripe for an evolutionary leap. Further, that this should be a leap in co-operation, just as single-celled organisms learned to cooperate with 37 trillion others, with 200 different jobs (cell types), ultimately to function as the remarkable organism called a human. The authors have a hope and a plea: Now that our survival is at stake, we put what we now know about co-operation, teamwork, and conflict resolution together to deal with, not only the climate, but the reorganization of our civilization for sustainable, peaceful, and gratifying living.

A different kind of power. Macy and Johnstone (2012) suggest future communities will require a different kind of power—power with, rather than power over—to address the mess we're in together, once everyone is awake and aware that our children's survival is at stake (there is no greater motivator than our kids' survival!). Think of Mandela talking to de Klerk, the man who imprisoned him, as they planned how to end apartheid together. Think of what we've learned of non-violent confrontation from Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and so many others.

Emergence. A system develops emergent properties. An empowered group of humans can do things no individual can do. Macy and Johnstone (2012) speak of mutual support and support from the powers that be (who also must eventually wake up and realize their kids and their entire legacy are at risk, and who won't like the pointing fingers of blame: "You did this!"). We also need the helping hand of Grace and Chaos Theory (Baldari & Knudsen, 2014) which says: the greatest creativity occurs on the edge of chaos. Slowly there is emergence of collective consciousness, which we've all experienced when attending an exciting sports event, a jazz concert or just being "in the flow" with our family or friends. The documentary about climate change, *This Changes Everything* (Barnes & Lewis, 2015) filmed over 4 years in nine countries and five continents), shows it powerfully in the large crowds blocking pipelines, protecting sacred land from oil companies, demonstrating against smog in China, and more.

A longer view of time is part of our new eyes. In contrast to political time lasting four years, or business time which might be six months (with this year's budget ignoring maintenance costs and the cost of long-term damage to people, the environment, or the climate), our ancestors had a very different time in mind. For example, York Minster cathedral took 250 years to build; and Stonehenge, with four-ton stones each brought from 240 miles away took 1,500 years to erect (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 141). Today still, a family view of time for North American Indigenous nations is seven generations. The next exercise I presented in the workshop was: "Meeting our descendants of seven generations," which uses Macy and Young Brown's (2014) wonderful imagination and ability to mobilize groups (Chapter 9, Deep Time, Exercise 4).

4. Going Forth is the stage of action.

Catch an inspiring vision. The consensus of most writers on this subject is that people who are suffering financially, who are jobless and feeling unfairly or cruelly-treated, will only have the courage to take a stand, with a determination to survive and protect their families—if it is worth it. A sustainable world

with equality, fairness, community, and co-operation provides for the sort of life that is happy, satisfying, and creative. Therefore, we must work for social justice and human rights *while* working to reverse climate change.

Fueling the best ideas is the belief that it will be good for humanity. Today there is passion in the wish to save the planet. (A comment I heard recently was, “I don’t know one of my friends who would not give up their life if they knew it would save the planet.”)

For the final exercise of my workshop on climate change, I asked the following of each participant:

- Daydream for a few minutes about what you’d like to see in a life-sustaining future.
- Close your eyes and think about what issue makes you most passionate.
- What topic or statement this afternoon [or in this article] most grabbed you?
- Ask yourself, “What aspect of sustainability or social justice most inspires you?”
- How do you see this coming about—possible steps and pathways?
- Your role—what can you do to help the vision come about.
- Now share that with your neighbor (or spouse or colleague if you are reading this article).
- Make notes about your experience.

Believe it can happen. Macy and Johnstone (2012) list some recommendations to help us face the challenge of disbelief in ourselves and others. Inspiring examples from history and aspects of current reality once dismissed as hopeless dreams are examples of sudden unpredictable discontinuous change, like the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of slavery and apartheid, or Galileo’s view of the earth. I mentioned the book: *Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think* (Diamondis & Kotler, 2012), a New York Times bestseller translated into 20 languages. The authors state early in the book that the concept of abundance is a hard-sell in our current environment. (I can echo that. But after reading it, I felt a lot better). Between this and a second potent book about change, Diamondis and Kotler (2014) paint a convincing picture of exponential growth that can significantly and permanently raise global standards of living and shift entirely to clean energy sources that become more cost-effective each year. They point out that it previously took large industrial companies to solve large-scale problems, prior to that managed by kings and emperors. Today these have been democratized. A committed individual has access to the technology and capital (crowd-sourcing) to take on any challenge: “The best way to become a billionaire is to solve a billion-person problem” (Diamondis as cited in Frey (2015) in the first line of his article).

I ended with some examples of climate initiatives and picked three to talk about that were familiar to me. It is crucial to connect to a like-minded community for support and a recognition one is not alone, but part of a powerful worldwide community with lots of creativity and ingenuity—so necessary for commitment and continuity in this area.

1. A first step might be to join the impressive 44 million-strong Avaaz web network (<https://www.avaaz.org>). They embody democratic and liberal values, which makes it easy to vote on significant issues, from protecting elephants from ivory hunters to saving the bees, stopping undersea mining, and more. I find it helps me feel less helpless to join with highly successful like-minded groups.
2. A major Canadian initiative spearheaded by Naomi Klein (n.d.), *The Leap Manifesto*, was a proposal of 15 items to make leap year, 2016, a time for a major turning. It demands an end to fossil fuels by 2050 and to trade deals that block the local economy, appropriate job training in the clean energy economy, and localized ecologically based agriculture. It further ensures the rights of all Indigenous peoples, higher taxes for corporations and higher incomes, cuts to military spending, an end to fossil-fuel subsidies, progressive carbon tax, and removes corporate money from election campaigns. The manifesto can be signed on-line (<https://leapmanifesto.org>), and has the support of two federal parties.

3. A major US initiative is The Climate Mobilization (<https://www.theclimatemobilization.org/>), where people can find a 100-page document (Silk, 2016) with an update regarding the recent dramatic turn in politics. This key proposal, with Democratic buy-in, uses the parallel emergency of the WWII mobilization of the U.S.A. following Pearl Harbor. There was a dramatic shift in the activity of most Americans to respond to the challenge, which created a sense of purpose and cohesion, with less focus on selfish pursuits and consumerism and amazing efficiency. Gilding in the Forward emphasizes the necessity of immediate and radical action to avoid “increasing military conflict, accelerating costs, massive refugee flows, nations collapsing and global food crises as the world spirals down into economic and social collapse. This would inevitably require heavy government intervention and quite probably authoritarian rule to manage” (Gilding, 2016, par. 22). I recommend reading the Forward:
http://www.theclimatemobilization.org/introducing_the_climate_mobilization_victory_plan

Closing Comments

Of all our freedoms, above all is the freedom to choose. It has taken me three years of oscillating and worry, but now I am clear on the climate facts and aware of the feelings. I must be an active participant in the power of action by humanity to do what can be done, to influence the promise of the future, and to accept the peril. As in all crises, we will learn a lot. Though I am 78 and do not fear mortality, I will fight like the proverbial saber-toothed tiger to give my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren the joy of living and loving on this planet, and creating and contributing to its well-being as well as their own. As Margaret Mead (n.d.) said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” What if all of us were part of that group? Sleeping people are now waking up., and expressing their commitment to change, particularly in morals and ethics and raised consciousness which will facilitate the actions for climate change.

We have come a long way in our evolution. Humans used to be rather nasty, even our founders 100 or 200 years ago. Think of Romans saving up for a seat to watch people thrown to the lions, the Inquisition, slavery, the rule of thumb. Most of us now know better. Despite the horrors seen daily of inhumanity I choose to believe we are evolving—another choice. But the learning curve is getting steeper every year. This climate change (and all the other crises) does change everything!

Janet Christie-Seely, MD (McGill, 1962), MSc, FCFP, is retired as Professor in the Department of Family Medicine, University of Ottawa. She has taught Family Systems Medicine and Satir Brief Systemic Therapy in 16 countries. She now has a psychotherapy, Family, and Group Therapy practice out of her home in Ottawa

After a three-year course in Family Therapy she trained with Virginia Satir from 1981 to 1988. (She is also trained in hypnosis, NLP, EMDR, CBT, Gestalt, Psych-K and IFS). In 1989, Janet founded the Satir Learning Centre of Ottawa. She is also an artist, and has four children, and 9 grand-children. Until recently she was on the Canadian Board of Physicians for Global Survival.

christieseely@sympatico.ca

References

- Baldari, M., & Knudsen, K.S. (2014). Creativity on the edge of chaos. *Frontiers in Psychology: Psychopathology*. doi:[10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01104](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01104)
- Barnes, J., & Lewis, A. (Producers), & Lewis, A. (Director). (2015). *This changes everything*. [Motion Picture]. Canada/USA: Klein Lewis Productions & Louverture Films.
- Bloomberg, M., & Pope, C. (2017). *Climate of hope: How cities, businesses, and citizens can save the planet*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Christie-Seely, J. (1984). *Working with the family in primary care: A systems approach to health and illness*. New York: Praegar.
- Christie-Seely, J. *The blame game. Heal yourself: Heal the planet*. In preparation.
- Darwin, C. (2013). *The autobiography of Charles Darwin, 1809-1892: From the life and letters of Charles Darwin* (F. Darwin, Ed.; eBook). Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg.
- Diamondis, P., & Kotler, S. (2012). *Abundance: The future is better than you think*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Diamondis, P., & Kotler, S. (2014). *Bold: How to go big, create wealth, and impact the world*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Dulwich Centre. (n.d.). The tree of life. Retrieved from <http://dulwichcentre.com.au/the-tree-of-life/>
- Frey, T. (2015, May 7). Solving a billion-person problem [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.futuristspeaker.com/business-trends/solving-a-billion-person-problem/>
- Gilding, P. (2016). Foreword. In E. Silk (Ed.), *The climate mobilization victory plan* (pp. 4-7). Retrieved from <https://www.theclimatemobilization.org/victory-plan-doc>
- Gomori, M., & Adaskin, E. (2009). [Personal alchemy: The art of family reconstruction]. Hong Kong, China.: Zang Cultural Corporation.
- Gore, A. (2006). *An inconvenient truth: The planetary emergency of global warming and what we can do about it*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press.
- Hawken, P. (2007). *Blessed unrest: How the largest social movement in history is restoring grace, justice, and beauty to the world*. New York: Penguin.
- In praise of gratitude. (2011). *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, 28(5), 1-2. Retrieved from https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/in-praise-of-gratitude
- Kolbert, E. (2007). *Field notes from a catastrophe: Man, nature and climate*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Kolbert, E. (2014). *The sixth extinction: An unnatural history*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.
- The leap manifesto: A call for a Canada based on caring for the earth and one another*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto>
- Lipton, B., & Bhaerman, S. (2009). *Spontaneous evolution: Our positive future and way to get there from here*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.
- MacQuarrie, D. (2012). *Acedia: The darkness within (and the darkness of climate change)*. Bloomington, IN: Author House.
- Macy, J. (n.d.-a). The elm dance. Retrieved from <http://www.joannamacy.net/theelmdance.html>
- Macy, J. (n.d.-b). The story of the elm dance. Retrieved from: <http://www.joannamacy.net/theelmdance/55-the-story-of-the-elm-dance.html>

- Macy, J. (n.d.-c). The work that reconnects. Retrieved from <http://workthatreconnects.org>
- Macy, J., & Johnstone, C. (2012). *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Macy, J., & Young Brown, M. (2014). *Coming back to life: The updated guide to the work that reconnects*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Marshall, G. (2014). *Don't even think about it: Why our brains are wired to ignore climate change*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Mead, M. (n.d.). *Margaret Mead quotes*. Retrieved from <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/margaretme100502.html>
- Nerin, W. (1986). *Family reconstruction: Long day's journey into light*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Sales, C. (2002). Transformational change—based on the model of Virginia Satir. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 24(1), 93-109.
- Satir, V., Banmen, J., Gerber, J., & Gomori, M. (1991). *The Satir model: Family therapy and beyond*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.
- Schwartz, R. (1995). *Internal family systems therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Silk, E. (2016). *The climate mobilization victory plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.theclimatemobilization.org/victory-plan-doc>
- Spratt, D., & Sutton, P. (2008). *Climate code red: The case for emergency action*. Melbourne, Australia: Scribe Publications.
- Thurman, H. (2015). *Pass it on*. Retrieved from <http://www.values.com/inspirational-quotes/7061-dont-ask-yourself-what-the-world-needs-ask>
- Watkins, A., & Wilber, K. (2015). *Wicked and wise: How to solve the world's toughest problems*. London: Urbane Publications Ltd.
- Wendle, J. (2016, March). The ominous story of Syria's climate refugees. *Scientific American*, 314(3). Retrieved from <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/ominous-story-of-syria-climate-refugees>
- Wheatley, M.J. (2009). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.