

- 1. The climate crisis is an ongoing problem that affects all of us collectively. However, not many have a vested interest in tackling this problem, personally and systematically. Could you talk about the first time you came to terms with the climate crisis and how you became an advocate for climate change?**

Coming to terms with the climate crisis is a complex experience. I am continuously “coming to terms” with the scale of the problems and systems which have created and sustain it. That’s the nature of learning and incorporating those lessons into my language, practice, action, and organizing work. I remember learning about climate change through the language of global warming. My elementary school incorporated “fruits and veggies day”, recycling bins, and composts to try to get us more connected to the earth and lessen our carbon footprints. I was in the sixth grade. These teachings were heavily focused on ways we could individually help “save the earth” – lots of emphasis on carpooling, biking, second-hand shopping, turning off the lights, and not wasting food or water. These are things that I incorporate in my practices to date, but not because I believe that they are the solutions or that they are necessarily impactful or because I think they’re “green.” This is what I grew up knowing what to value because it was just what you did.

My experience with being taught these new “green” initiatives was highly emotional, but not just in the ways that I received or reacted to them. These initiatives themselves were being conducted through a kind of emotional logic with lots of emphasis on driving shame, guilt, and fear into our action. The logic and language of carceralism and punishment was engrained early:

“If you litter, you’re a bad person.” (Okay, I admit this one is still kind of true)
“If you don’t carpool, the climate crisis is your fault.”
“If you don’t recycle, you don’t care about the earth.”

This is probably what I bristled against the most as a kid because the acts of second-hand shopping, conserving water, and recycling (and I don’t mean blue-bin kind, I mean repurposing the same plastic bags and containers for years) were things I was used to doing already. It wasn’t necessarily because of “climate change” but because conservation, repurposing, and not wasting are basic ethics of living. As a kid, I was told to hide these aspects of my reality because they were markings of being racialized or lower class. I had shame and guilt for bringing lunch in a reused plastic container rather than a thermos bought specifically for school lunch or wearing second-hand clothing because it was what we could afford. It was emotional whiplash to witness the resistances and shifts in attitudes from my peers who still carried prejudice or those who were now quick to show just how much they cared about the earth by enacting the behaviours and practices I was told to hide away. It was the hypocrisies and faults in the logics of what I was being told in school and experiencing at home that made the intersections of class, gender, and race clear, along with ways in which emotionality was held over me as a means to control or enact certain behaviours. This most likely explains the reason why I have come to advocate and research the topic of climate from an emotion, logic, political economy, and subjectivity lens.

My journey to advocating for climate justice is a little unconventional. I like to explain that I’ve arrived at climate justice organizing as a cumulative point of my learnings and previous organizing work. Like most, I began organizing and advocacy work around what I knew, which

was (and still is) poverty, housing, violence, and the police. There are a lot of intersections in these wicked problems that are overwhelming as they stand alone, however, as I continued to grow curious and ask, “why is this happening?” – I began to come to terms with how insidiously these problems are rooted in carceral capitalism, settler colonialism, globalization, and neoliberalism. The consequences of these overlapping systems have created and sustain the climate emergency, and as I continued to carry my relentless need to “know why” throughout my degree in sociology, dialogue facilitation, and community building work – it became clear that what was needed to tackle the problems that I cared about required a climate justice lens. There is not a single person, social problem, or policy that will be left unscathed by the climate crisis, and I would argue that change has already begun – whether we come to accept it or not.

- 2. Your undergraduate thesis, “Resistance and Resilience in the Era of Ecological Grief conceptualizes ecological grief through affect theory as a socio-politically and culturally informed response to the climate crisis. Could you talk about the concept of ecological grief and the first time you experienced it in your life? (I kind of blended this with the third question: What does resistance and resilience in the era of ecological grief look like? How can we as individuals be resilient and resistant to these emotions when there is a lack of systemic change when it comes to tackling the climate crisis?)**

This is a funny question to me because truly experiencing ecological grief came with having the ability to name it and conduct research. Before I had the language or a theoretical framework that fit with what I was hearing and seeing, I did not know that these feelings of overwhelm, denial, sadness, and anger could be understood as “grief.” My experience is always changing, but nowadays, I experience eco grief as relentless emotional exhaustion that converges with the experience of learning about its heaviness. It can get claustrophobic. Before my thesis, I felt a lot of panic and dread – it can be difficult to behave in a way that requires believing that there is a future to plan for. I do believe that there is hope, but it is also healthy to mourn and feel the breadth of loss in knowing that the future I believed I would have as a kid no longer exists. Now, experiencing eco grief is about adapting, caring deeply about people and the planet, and creating the possibility of making better worlds. To me, that is the resilience that is required to tackle these climate emotions. Resistance is not about always fighting against something, although it takes up a big part of it. It’s an ethos in direct opposition to the ways “green” initiatives were taught to me through shame and guilt. Climate justice and the practice of world making is made out of imagination and love. I find ways to love the world I’m in (despite being trained to critique and analyze it) simply because I love the people that are in it. They are worth fighting for, and for me, that is enough.

Eco grief (and grief more broadly) are more commonly understood through a psychological lens. But as a sociology student, of course I am going to understand things from a social and political lens. Not just personally, but theoretically and pedagogically, I resist pathologizing the language

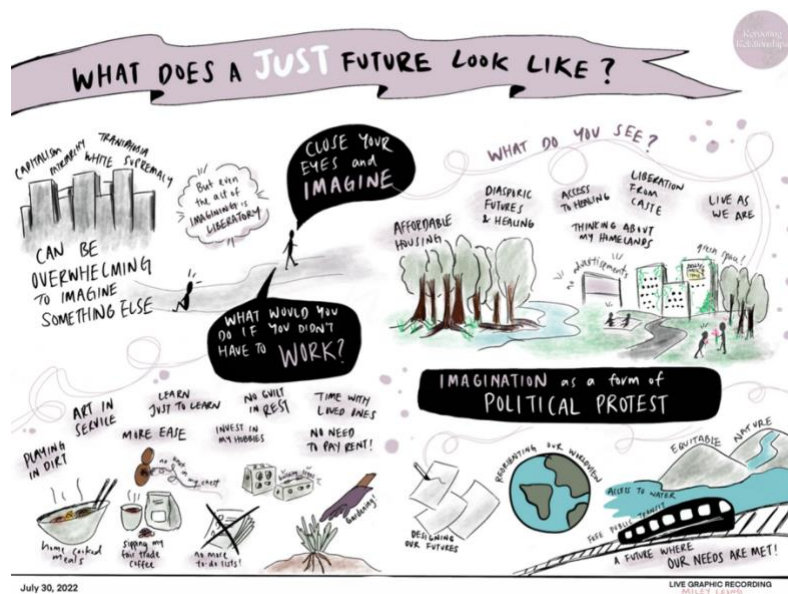
of climate emotions because I think it risks over-medicalizing and individualizing what I believe to be very normal responses to something as threatening as environmental collapse. Who wouldn't freak out? Quite frankly, if there isn't a bit of panic, anger, sadness, or some kind of emotional response in coming to terms with what feels like "the end of the world", *then* I would start to worry. It's not that I am against mental health or therapy – I think these things are valuable, powerful, and are important. But I do think that we often prescribe "therapy" to things that most often can't be solved by therapy alone. I've been thinking a lot with Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism* and how he offered thinking about the environment and mental health as two of the capitalist "reals" in which we have the ability to create systems change. You can't truly heal by only treating the symptoms of the problem. This is true for any kind of injury, trauma, or illness. Enact your sociological imagination: what if we could prescribe revolution, secure and safe housing for all, reparations, or divestment from fossil fuels instead of/with therapy?

In all seriousness, we have seen what happens when emotions, characteristics, or behaviours "divert" from the constructed social norm. Sexuality, gender, racialization, and neurodivergence become criminalized and pathologized because they create disruptions in the continuously failing project of making cis-hetero white supremacy a "natural given." Being queer, a woman, trans, non-binary, Black and/or Indigenous were never inherently criminal, morally wrong, or deviant. They were *made* to be seen in a certain way to fulfil the projects of exploiting labour, bodies, and land. When we think about pedagogy, we still see the consequences of the production of that kind of knowledge which continue to have its impacts decades later. Here, I'm thinking with Sylvia Wynters, Tema Okun, Leanne Betasomasake Simpson, Michel Foucault, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs. As a self-described "knowledge-worker", I have to think about what the knowledge I am working with will *do*. Theory isn't just something you read in a book. It's alive and it has the ability to create worlds that have very real impacts – so when I think about the *why*, I also ruminate over the *how*. This is very much thinking with Foucault's concept of governmentality and my MA supervisor Dr. Kyle Willmott.

This is to say that theories of affect allow me to understand climate emotion as these social, political, embodied phenomena that exist beyond our individually held bodies and brains. If we think about grief as a continuous cycle of acceptance, then we open ourselves up to thinking and learning about the world around us. It makes us more adaptable, flexible, and soft – it makes us resilient. To think about emotion as social and political, we can understand how normal it is to respond to the pain of the world around you. Emotions tie us to each other in ways that do not yet have the language to describe – but nonetheless, we feel it. It's powerful to think of eco grief is a social practice that urges us to reach for one another. If you are rigid and closed off, you will hit the walls, corners, and edges of the climate crisis harder. You will be in more pain. Alexis Pauline Gumbs talks about dorsal fin practices in her book *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* that is a helpful way to think about how we have always adapted to change and crisis. To be malleable to the change that is occurring and will continue to happen is a survival skill in treading the literal and metaphorical treacherous waters of the climate emergency.

3. You and your collaborator, Jocelle, created “Rerooting Relationships”, a program designed to prioritize fruitful conversation and learning moments, opportunities to build connections, and journaling. What instigated the creation of this program and why do you think it’s important to create such programs for youth in our current “post pandemic” climate. (Also blended this with the fourth question: In one of your interviews, you mention that systemic problems require a collective and community response but we as people are becoming more isolated and lack community in our surroundings. How do you think the rerooting relationships program helps youth in responding to systemic issues in a collective manner?)

Jocelle and I met for the first time virtually in a program planning meeting for the SFU Centre for Dialogue’s [CAMP Retreat](#). I’m facilitating and planning the programming again this upcoming year and encourage all first and second years to apply. You gain lots of skill building, relationship bonding, and informal networking while we spend time in nature - plus, you get co-curricular credit! We knew of each other beforehand, both being Semester in Dialogue alumni and when we met online for the first time, it was almost like meeting in person. We immediately started private messaging on zoom and giggling. We both have done a lot of youth programming (planning, facilitating and participating) which require some sort of “output” – like a project, report, zine, paper that signify the end of the program. We wanted to do something different that aligned with the experience of social justice and advocacy work: it never really ends, and the strength of your relationships is what makes the work sustainable and meaningful. There was no final “project” in Rerooting Relationships, but rather a cumulative dialogue with community partners to share lessons learned and our visions for a just future.



Rerooting Relationships focused on doing just that – knowing that we are increasingly becoming more disconnected, which makes our relationships (and therefore advocacy work) suffer. We need to re-learn how to lean on each other – which can be scary when the world continuously tells you that independence and care work are not valuable (or worse, are moral failures.) My BA

supervisor Dr. Amanda Watson taught me how to see the ways in which cultures of capitalism frame the devaluation of care work, love, and the things that have been rendered politically “soft.” If you can take her course SA302W, it will change your life. I cannot recommend it enough.

In my studies, I continue down the rabbit holes of interrogating how large oppressive systems interfere with every aspect of our lives - language, our taste, beliefs, jobs, and friends. It is scary to come to terms with it and it can feel like we have absolutely no control or power over our lives. While in some ways, it is true that no one person can fix the entire world alone, but there is hope and possibility in our relationships. If we see that an economic system (capitalism) creates political ideologies (neoliberalism) that create values (independence, individualism) that we carry into our action (voting with your dollar, citizen-consumer hybrid, myths of meritocracy) but want to move *beyond* consumption, then what we have left is ourselves and each other. The values of hyper independence and moral judgements of who “deserves” care and love (and when) meddle in our relationships. That is where we *do* have some control over how we want to show up, engage, value, prioritize, and care for each other. That is where the work needs to be done, and that is what we wanted to facilitate in this program.

The creation of Rerooting Relationships was very intentional on setting the priorities for creating meaningful dialogue between passionate youth and reflective exercises that help us see our personal experiences in broader social and political contexts. It was really meant to help give youth the skills to ask hard questions in an environment where curiosity and learning were prioritized within the topics of accountability, mutual aid, anti-oppression, and harm reduction. The skills of building intimate relationships and the art of conversation were things that we wanted to build into the program so that participants could carry them beyond the end of the program. These are skills that we know take time, dedication, and the space to be able to practice them.

4. Finally, where would you point students to go to if they wanted to be involved in tackling the climate crisis and create impactful programs for youth like rerooting relationships?

While Rerooting Relationships is on pause for the moment as I make my way through my Master’s program and Jocelle prepares for hers, we are not shelving the project altogether. We are open to seeing where this experience takes us – whether it’s an iteration of the program or something else. If you want to get involved in meaningful organizing, I would start with the people you already know. It’s great and important to join movements and groups that already exist (show up, donate, practice mutual aid, offer supplies and time) but the reality is we need everyone on board. Don’t remove yourself from the communities you are already a part of – start building momentum there and bring them with you. Build relationships where you can practice mutual aid, interdependence, and care with the people you already know on top of your larger community. Climate justice is about leaving no one behind, and we are only more powerful when we are together.

You can also participate and join initiatives like CityHive's Youth Climate Innovation Lab, Sustainabiliteens, Apathy is Boring's RISE program, Youth Climate Lab, BCCIC, Lead Now CA, Renfrew Collingwood Food Justice, The Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance, West Coast Environmental Law's Sue Big Oil Campaign, Climate Recentered, and The Climate Justice Organizing Hub. Oceanwise also has an amazing program called [Ocean Bridge](#) for youth in Canada to learn about and be of service to ocean wellness

Follow people and groups on Instagram like @SFPIRG @CoastProtectors @ClimateResilienceProject @StopTMX @NoGentle @CircularityCommunity @IntersectionalEnvironmentalist @TheSlowFactory @Wetsuweten Checkpoint @BraidedWarriors @Defund604Network to be up to date with mutual aid calls, resources, public research, and public demonstrations/social action. Gab @TheClimateChaplin offers political grief/eco grief circles on zoom for the public and also specific ones for climate organizers.

If you have ideas for programming and need funding - look into SFU'S Student Community Engagement Competition, Social Innovations Seed Fund from Embark Sustainability (Radius), or Small Community Grants. It also never hurts to put out a cold call email. My biggest suggestion is to see if there are programs and people who are already doing the work so that you can collaborate with. Rerooting Relationships was a success because we were able to lean on, invite, and co-create with our friends who also happened to be our community partners: SFU Centre for Dialogue, Radius, SFPIRG, Hook or Crook Consulting, Hua Foundation, Sustainabiliteens, CityHive, Youth Climate Lab, and many more. We never do this work alone.

If you want to stay up to date with me, my work, or have any questions: you can reach me on Instagram @sarahxlaw or my email sarah_law@sfu.ca. You can also read more about my thesis [here](#) and Rerooting Relationship's Impact Report [here](#) which includes survey results from our participant feedback.