

## UNDERSTANDING CONTROL MYTHOLOGIES

**What Is It?** Brainstorm, Discussion & Theater of the Oppressed interactive activity (involving physical movement and some optional contact) that explores United States' mythologies around ecological problems and environmentalism and allows participants to express their thoughts and emotions about being subject to such mythologies.

**Why Do it?**

- Helps people understand how even as conscious, progressive, left people, we are still controlled by myths that keep us from constructively engaging in a problem that is so huge & important (the ecological crisis)
- Allow people to process what they've learned about the global ecological crises in a more physical and emotional way
- Allows people to take a look at their personal, as well as organizational and political orientation to the problem
- Gives people an opportunity to envision how they can integrate the ecological justice frame into their current political work

**Time** 2 Hours 30 min

**Materials Needed**

- Butcher paper, markers, tape, easel pad
- Facilitators' list of control mythologies (Attached at the end of this curriculum)
- Material and/or props for group report-back:
  - butcher paper*
  - markers*
  - scratch paper & pens*
  - banners/blank posters*
  - bullhorn, mic, protest props, etc.*

**Directions****PART 1****45 min**

## Set up

1. Have at least 2 sheets of butcher paper ready for a brainstorm, and give the top paper the title of "Control Mythologies".

## Brainstorm

2. Set the context:

*Now that we have spent some time learning about the global ecological crises (bio-cultural diversity loss, water scarcity, food scarcity and collapse of agricultural systems, waste & toxics and energy climate change), we understand that no matter what sector of economic or racial justice we work in, the issues and communities that we care about stand to be severely impacted as ecological breakdown continues to worsen world wide.*

*This is not a new phenomenon, many social justice leaders have had this notion for a long time, yet the social justice movement as a whole is just now beginning to explore how it can best respond to the eco-crisis while still maintaining a racial & economic justice agenda.*

*The mainstream US is even farther behind in acknowledging and accepting the significance of the current and soon-coming ecological breakdown. We suggest that there is a whole world of control mythologies (perpetuated by the corporate/ government complex) that keeps people in the US from facing the most significant threat to humanity it will ever see, and keeps even us conscious, progressive, intelligent left radical people from engaging in this problem that is so huge that it underlies and encompasses all the separate issues we individually work on.*

3. Invite the group to begin brainstorming some of these mythologies with you. Explain that once we have a good list, the facilitator will select a few of them and the whole group will go through an activity that will give people a chance to physically and emotionally express the way they feel and are affected by these mythologies.

4. Model brainstorming a control mythology by beginning with an “easy” one, and then letting the group escalate to more challenging mythologies, including several that represent the control mythologies that are entrenched in the left and have kept us from addressing these issues.

**Start with “HUMANS ARE SEPARATE FROM NATURE”.**

5. Encourage any and all ideas, and refer to the facilitator’s list of mythologies to make sure those concepts get covered. (A facilitator’s list is attached at the end of this curriculum)

As people brainstorm, make sure to explain any mythologies that are not clear to the whole group.

Once the core mythologies have been covered and the list feels complete, thank everyone for their really great ideas!

**Theater of the Oppressed: Modeling Our Responses**

6. Before explaining the activity, take a moment to select 4 mythologies that you want the group to model for this activity. Make sure that 2 of them are mythologies that pertain especially to controlling Left-wing politically conscious folks.

Ask the group to count off by 2’s, so that you end up with 2 groups of equal number.

(If your participant group is uneven, you may step in as a participant while you facilitate in order for everyone to participate.)

7. Ask one group to be the ‘inner circle’ and the other group to be the ‘outer circle’. Help the groups position themselves, with the ‘outer circle’ surrounding the ‘inner circle’.

The people in each circle should be facing one another so that each person is lined up with one person in the other circle. Let people know that the circles will switch places half way through this activity.

8. Explain that the people in the ‘outer circle’ start off being the molders and the people in the ‘inner circle’ start off being the clay. Using one control mythology at a time, the facilitator will give a prompting question to the molders, who “mold” the clay to illustrate their response to the prompting question. This process should be done in silence to the degree possible.

Explain that we will also start with a simple still modeling and then add motion, sound/word, sentences, props, etc. to give more complexity to the responses.

\*\* If someone does not feel comfortable being physically handled the molder can verbally guide the clay into the position/shape that is the molder’s response \*\*

9. Choose the simplest of your selected mythologies, then:

- State they mythology out loud (Example: "You can buy your way out of any problem...")
- Ask the prompting question: What does this control mythology look like? How is this mythology manifested in the world?
- Instruct the molders to mold the clay to reflect their answer to your question

*Allow about 2 minutes for molding. Once everyone is done, let the outer circle walk around the inner circle so that everyone gets to see everyone else's clay*

10. Choose a second mythology:

- State they mythology out loud (Example: "Environmentalism is for white people")
- Ask the prompting question: How does this mythology make you feel?
- Instruct the molders to mold the clay to reflect their answer to your question, and add a motion to their clay

*Allow about 2 minutes for molding. Once everyone is done, let the outer circle walk around the inner circle so that everyone gets to see everyone else's clay*

11. Now have the 'inner circle' and the 'outer circle' switch places so the clay are now the molders & vice versa. Choose a third mythology:

- State they mythology out loud (Example: "Food comes from the supermarket")

- Ask the prompting question: How does this mythology connect to the work that you do?
- Instruct the molders to mold the clay to reflect their answer to your question, and add a motion and one repetitive sound to their clay

*Allow about 2 minutes for molding. Once everyone is done, let the outer circle walk around the inner circle so that everyone gets to see everyone else's clay*

12. Choose your fourth mythology:

- State they mythology out loud (Example: "Technology will provide the solution.")
- Ask the prompting question: How do you see yourself resisting this mythology in your life?
- Instruct the molders to mold the clay to reflect their answer to your question, and add a motion, a sentence and a prop (if available) to their clay

*Allow about 2 minutes for molding. Once everyone is done, let the outer circle walk around the inner circle so that everyone gets to see everyone else's clay*

13. Thank everyone for letting themselves be seen and doing a great job!

Explain that we'll be taking a 15 minute break. When we come back we will break into groups for some deeper discussion on these how these control mythologies affect us.

## 5 MINUTE BREAK

**PART 2****1 hour 30 min****Small groups**

1. Explain that we will create three rounds of small groups (5 or less) in which the groups are different every time. We will use counting-off, life-boats, or some other way to set up groups.

Each round will take 20 minutes (including the time to create the groups). The group will have ~15 minutes to discuss a different question. With each round, the questions will build on each other, and the last group will answer the last question with a creative report-back method.

2. Use a method of your choice to create 3 groups of 5 people or less. Once groups are established:

- State discussion question #1: How are you controlled by these mythologies (personally and politically)?
- Allow remaining time for group discussion. Give the groups a 5 minute warming and a 1 minute warning. When the 20 minutes for that round has passed, call everyone back together to create the next round of groups.

3. Use a method of your choice to create another 3 groups of 5 people or less. Once groups are established:

- State discussion question #2: How do these mythologies impact the sector/issue/area you work on: i.e. racial justice, economic justice, youth development, etc?
- Allow remaining time for group discussion. Give the groups a 5 minute warming and a 1 minute warning. When the 20 minutes for that round has passed, call everyone back together to create the next round of groups.

4. Use a method of your choice to create another 3 groups of 5 people or less.

Remind people that for this discussion question the group will come up with a creative way to present their discussion to the other groups. After having 20 minutes for discussion, they will have an additional 15 minutes to develop their report back. They can create a series of sound-bites, chants, a skit, a newspaper front page, political poster, or action role play that shares one way their group sees addressing the ecological crisis in the future.

Once groups are established:

- State discussion question #3: How do you envision integrating what you've learned into your life/organization/political work? (Understanding that there are many ways for us to engage these ideas, and that groups may form networks, or other formations outside of their existing organization).
- Allow remaining time for group discussion. Give the groups a 5 minute warning and a 1 minute warning.

At the 20-minute mark, let groups move around to get any supplies they need for their report-back.

When the 15 minutes for creating the report-back has passed, call everyone back to begin the presentations.

5. Let groups self select who will perform first, second and last. Cheer loud and congratulate everyone on their performances!

Remind people that this creative space can be the first step in planning concrete steps for their organizations (or wherever they do their political work) to begin integrating goals around ecological sustainability into their personal, organizational practice and their program plans.

## APPENDIX 1 – FACILITATOR’S LIST OF SOME CONTROL MYTHOLOGIES

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Humans are separate from nature.

Humans are more important than animals/nature.

The creativity of “the market” will solve the problem.

Technology will provide the solution.

(Economic) Growth is Good.

Progress is Inevitable. (here, progress refers to technological progress, as above, and capital-intensive industrial development, as progress)

There is nothing we can do about it - the crises are natural/normal part of the planetary life-cycle

Resources are infinite (Resources = minerals, metals, water, wood and so on)

You can buy your way out of any problem

Conscious consumerism alleviates the problem

Environmentalism is for white people

People of color don’t care about the environment

Food comes from the supermarket

The ecological crisis is FAR AWAY

Corporations will solve the problem

Humans have to dominate nature

The earth is in crisis (Rather than humans being the ones in crisis)

Poor people have too many babies — population is root cause of problem

It’s all China’s fault – if they’re not doing something, why should we?

Taxing the rich hurts the economy