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Climate Conversations: An Intergenerational Artistic Exploration with Family

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This cross-generational study explores perceptions of climate change through interviews and visual art from three generations: the author, their grandparents, and their aunt. Guided by questions such as “Whose responsibility is it to address climate change?” and “How has climate change affected you?,” the interviews were used to create three art pieces that explore different aspects of climate change. The first art piece, titled “Eco-Anxiety,” visually represents the author's anxiety about climate change through the detangling of hair in their hands that “pull” at relevant climate news articles in the background. The second piece, “Beauty’s in the Eye of the Beholder,” features the author's grandmother holding a flower, reflecting the older generation’s desire to hold onto an idealized view of nature. “Flowers in July,” the final piece, features the author's aunt handing a flower to their cousin, symbolizing the passing on of environmental problems to a new generation. Color (or lack thereof) in each piece represents hope and optimism for the future. This project highlights the personal nature of climate change and the intergenerational impact of environmental problems.

Introduction

Our interactions with nature are deeply formative and influenced by a number of social factors and unique upbringings. My intention behind “Climate Conversations” is to explore these intersections by weaving personal family narratives/interviews, art, and reflections from Environmental Sociology. I found this to be a viable model because I wanted to link academic discourse with creativity and expression. I interviewed different generations within my family to highlight how anthropogenic changes affect individuals at different life stages, followed by creating an artwork piece inspired by our discussions, and finally reflecting on how each of these conversations and artwork pieces tie into bigger discussions regarding climate change. I hope that these artistic expressions, personal narratives, and subsequent reflections serve as evidence that art and personal stories are powerful and underutilized tools for exploring environmental changes. By transforming complex issues of climate change to a personal and physical level, we can inspire others to reflect on their own relationship with the world. This can serve as inspiration for personal change or inspire research that focuses on how climate change transforms human relationships to the environment.

Before proceeding with my interviews and commentary, it is important to contextualize themes introduced in my research. Specifically, providing a definition of environmental sociology, exploring how our use of land changed, how this has shaped our connection with the environment, and emerging methods like biocultural restoration or eco-art that work to remediate our disconnected relationship to the environment. Deriving its roots from the New Ecological Paradigm that emerged during the 1960’s, Environmental Sociology is an interdisciplinary field dedicated to “research that challenges constructed boundaries among human society, nonhuman natures, and the built environment” (Pellow and Brehm, 2013). The breadth of Environmental Sociology covers topics such as the political economy, world systems theory, environmental justice, deep ecology, and environmental criminology (Pellow and Brehm, 2013). With development and urbanization on the rise, a new relationship between people and the natural world is emerging, paving new paths to explore within Environmental Sociology. One major driver of environmental change is development, such as urban sprawl in the US. “The Environmental Impacts of Sprawl: Emergent Themes from the Past Decade of Planning Research” highlights 4 environmental impacts of urban sprawl: air, energy, land, and water (Wilson and Chakraborty, 2013). Urban sprawl is linked to lower air quality, heightened energy consumption in less urbanized areas, a loss of farmlands due to development, and a decline in watershed health due to more impervious runoff from urbanized areas (Wilson and Chakraborty, 2013).

Social perceptions of land have large implications for its use. In the United States, early settlers claimed North American soils under their philosophical and social doctrine of Manifest Destiny. In a slow transformation of swaying grass meadows to fenced gridlocks of early agricultural communities, their practices established an anthropocentric worldview, where nature was

perceived and established as a commodity for humans to own and from which to extract resources. As “Landscapes: The Social Construction of Nature and the Environment” emphasizes, nature and the environment are a social construct that is dictated by how humans view themselves and their relation to the environment. Landscapes are often a reflection of cultural values, and symbols or other meanings are bestowed according to the social values of a particular community. Differences in knowledge, self-definition, and socio-economic background can elicit distinct relationships to the same landscape (Greider and Garkovitch, 1994). Evidently, early settler’s perspective of land as a commodity had lasting effects on how the natural landscape was utilized and transformed into a powerhouse of industrial development and urban growth. While this progress certainly hurled humanity into a new era, communities faced new challenges from industrialization or urban development. Recent examples of these consequences include Love Canal in New York, where a neighborhood was built on top of a waste site and community residents were left in the dark. Or the story of Warren County, North Carolina, where PCB-laced oil was sprayed along hundreds of miles of country roads without any residents’ knowledge.

While not every form of development has sinister outcomes, there are still noticeable impacts that development and industrialization have on communities. Every city and suburban area possesses its own defining qualities, but large portions of America share many similarities when analyzing social and environmental implications to growth. “Sustaining What Is Unsustainable: A Review of Urban Sprawl and Urban Socio-Environmental Policies in North America and Western Europe” explains the social and environmental implications of urban sprawl. In lower-density suburban neighborhoods, land quality and quantity has shrunk, water cycles have been disrupted due to intense water demand, and pollutant and gas emissions are increasing from car-dependent infrastructure. This, coupled with social effects such as decreased health and social participation, creates spaces that are unwelcoming for both residents and local ecology (Bueno-Suárez and Coq-Huelva, 2020).

A promising antidote to the effects of urban sprawl is confronting one’s relationship with their environment, and eco-art is an outlet for such inquisitions. While the forms of eco art can range widely, its main intent is to awaken people’s innate connection to nature, in addition to challenging present economic, social, and political aspects of western society (Greenlaw, et al., 2009). Personal narratives play a meaningful role in shaping our relationships with surrounding communities and land: I have found the most meaningful way to connect with the world around me is through visual art. However, I am not the first to formally connect personal narratives, art, and the environment. This idea of personal stories interwoven with climate change has emerged in recent publications like *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer. Her perception of the natural world, shaped by her identity as a classically trained ecologist and Potawatomi heritage, weaves together a story bound by imagery and inquisition (Kimmerer, 2020). Dr. Kimmerer’s work, laden with stories from her own life as well as others, serves to prove how

interactions with the natural world shape our care in prolonging its identity. Documenting

personal experiences with climate change is occurring at a regional level too, with publications like Mergoat Magazine. This Knoxville-based publication “provides a collective, interdisciplinary record of the ecological situation throughout Southern Appalachia and the border Southeast,” bridging modern science, storytelling, politics, and art in a place-based approach (Inman, 2024). Using these unique approaches to documenting climate change as inspiration, “Climate Conversations” was born.

As noted in the introduction, the structure of Climate Conversations consists of personalized interview questions I posed to myself and other family members, subsequent responses, my own commentary on how these responses are reflected in current Environmental Sociology discourse, and finally the artwork pieces I created inspired by each interview. Each of the three sections is titled after my artwork pieces, consisting of “Eco-Anxiety,” “Beauty’s in the Eye of the Beholder,” and “Flowers in July.” The following guided questions for each interview emerged from my own curiosity about the intersection of personal experiences and climate change. As an engineering student, I was trained to calculate answers, not question the origins of such numbers or equations. Humanities courses such as Environmental Sociology opened my eyes to the who, why, and how. It is indisputable that global temperatures are warming, and this has consequences for our world. Yet the vital step of understanding who is affected, why, and how is quickly bypassed in search of the next big scientific breakthrough that will lower carbon emissions or put a halt to fossil fuels. In order to demand change, we must understand why we care. This sentiment permeated not only in the questions I posed to myself and my family, but also my artwork. I selected themes of color and hands to represent these stories. Color (or lack thereof) is an accessible theme to pick up and analyze. Hands were chosen due to the lens they provide into the uniquely personal aspects of one’s life. Age, labor, creativity, love, anxiety, and more are all expressed through hands. I wanted to capture that essence, and its variability, among myself and other family members.

Before proceeding with each interview, I would like to provide some background about myself and the family members I interviewed. My name is Julia, I am 22 years old and recently graduated with a self-curated Bachelor’s degree called “Engineering for Sustainability” through the College Scholars program at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. The environment is a topic I am extremely passionate about, but I also love cooking, hiking, and creating art. My grandparents, Colleen and Anthony, were my second interviewees. Both are from Africa; my grandma was born and raised in South Africa and my grandpa grew up on a small farm in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. They immigrated to Knoxville, Tennessee about 25 years ago. My grandma is a retired nurse and data analyst, while my grandpa is a retired atomic physicist with over 40 patents to his name. I spend lots of time bonding in the kitchen with my grandma over recipes old and new. Meanwhile my grandpa and I love to debate over a cup of tea. Finally, I interviewed

my aunt Oly. She grew up in Victoria, Mexico. After obtaining her undergraduate degree in Mexico, she went to Europe and got her master's degree in Energy and Environmental

Engineering through a program called Erasmus Mundus, and eventually settled in Knoxville, Tennessee with my uncle. She is passionate about health, the planet, and our family. We have a mutual love for cooking, and Oly has kindly showed me how to make many Mexican recipes over the years. These interviews created three distinct yet unified art pieces, titled "Eco-Anxiety," "Beauty's in the Eye of the Beholder," and "Flowers in July."

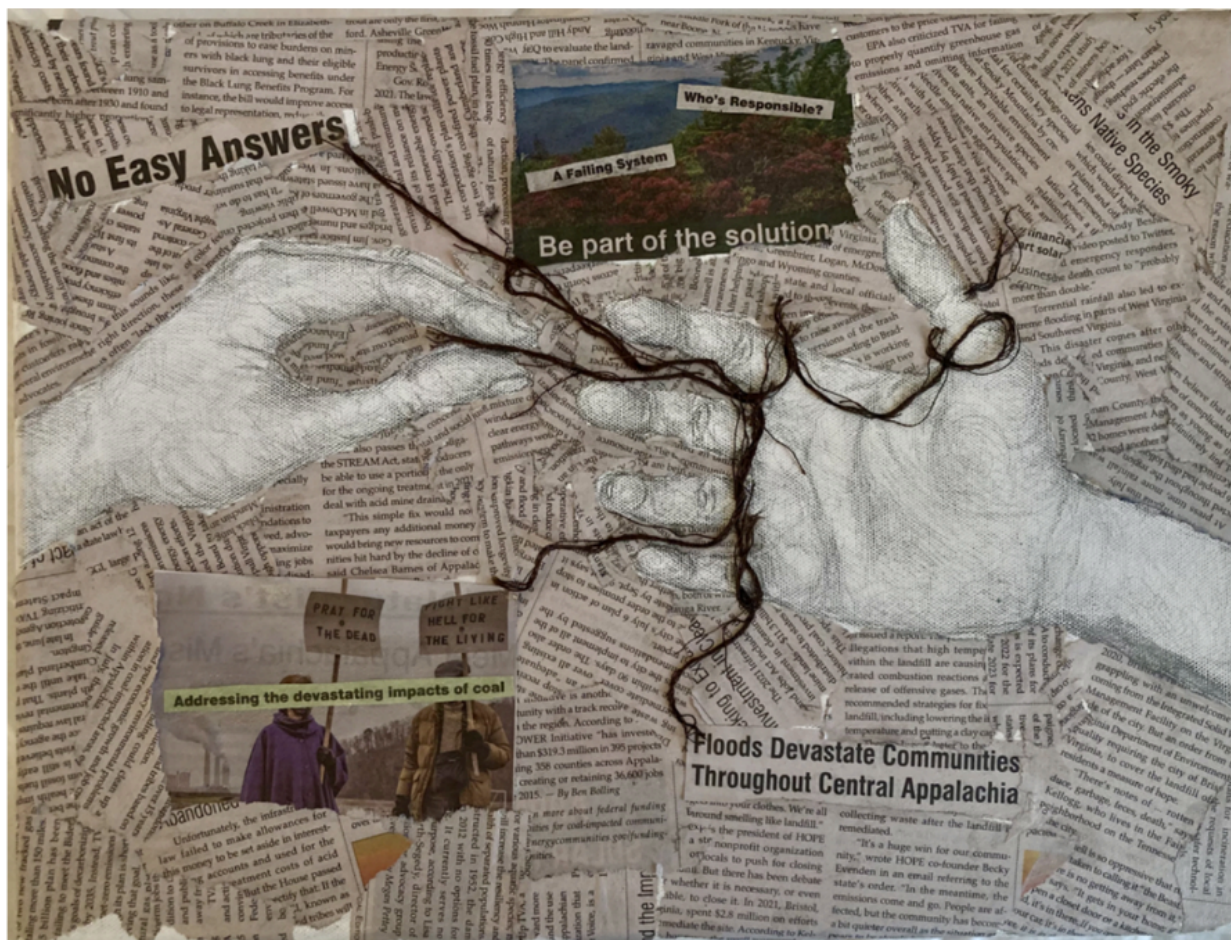
"Eco-Anxiety"

My personal reflection below was inspired by these three questions:

1. When did you become concerned about climate change? Why?
2. How does climate change make you feel?
3. Whose responsibility do you think it is to address climate change?

I have always gravitated towards nature since I can remember. As a child I would spend hours outside climbing trees and observing all the little critters who made tree branches, leaves, and bark their home. There was one particular tree in the front of our yard that I absolutely loved, perhaps because of its imperfect trunk or branches that were worn from the years of existence. During elementary school, my dad sat down with me one afternoon and explained to me that my beloved tree was very sick, and it was only a matter of time before it would have to come down. Despite my begging and persistence to keep my trunked treasure standing, I came back one day from a trip to my grandparents to a stud almost ground to pulp. That was the first of many moments in my life when I became certain that I wanted to dedicate the rest of my life to helping our environment, and fight for living creatures who cannot speak for themselves in an anthropocentric world. My sentiment of saving trees was largely reflected in *The Lorax*. When I watched this movie for the first time in elementary school, I was shocked and saddened to see that humans are harming the environment at a scale much larger than I could have ever imagined. I began to learn and read more about our environment and realized there were many systemic problems besides deforestation. At the age of 12, shortly after learning about the ethical and environmental problems of meat consumption, I chose to become fully vegetarian. It felt like a small yet impactful step I could do as an individual to help the earth. Although I have learned about so many stories of people protecting our planet over the years, they began to feel futile compared to the scale of pollution, deforestation, and more. This has culminated into an anxiety that I still struggle with today: how am I supposed to make any difference as one person? As soon as I began to tug on one environmental problem, a myriad of new topics would emerge, akin to running my hands through my hair in frustration or anxiety. I wanted this feeling to be at

the forefront of my first art piece, since tackling any environmental problem can feel overwhelming or challenging. My Environmental Restoration professor handed out a local newspaper entitled *Appalachian Voices* to us before class one day; I used this as the background and article titles integrated in the piece. I chose to collage the backdrop full of newspaper clippings to represent how the constant discussion of climate change can begin to feel like white noise. I chose to have four strands of my hair ‘tug’ on four articles to express how news about the environment is often not optimistic in my generation, and these topics often have deeper issues that extend beyond just one news story. Even climate change stories that sound optimistic at an initial glance quickly dissolve after further research. For example, Keep America Beautiful, an organization dedicated to cleaning up litter, was established by Coca-Cola to shift environmental pollution and responsibility to the consumer rather than the producer. This is just one example of how the public is manipulated not only into believing that they are the problem in systemic issues such as pollution, but also that more is being done to address these problems than there is. With the rise of social media and technology, it is much harder for companies to hide their complacency in systemic environmental issues, and I hope this public exposure will drive further change in helping our planet. Ideally, corporations responsible for environmental disasters play a heavy hand in its cleanup. My mind turns to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, where an Exxon oil tanker crashed along the Alaska shoreline, releasing an overwhelming amount of oil into the environment that affected fishing communities and wildlife alike. Exxon spent copious amounts of money to shirk punitive damages, establishing a notion that corporations can pay their way out of being held responsible for environmental damages. It is imperative that we hold companies responsible for these disasters. However, systemic changes necessary to address climate change extend beyond the corporate sphere and to our local collective efforts. We must make an effort to engage with environmental stewardship: go out on hikes in nature, support organizations that are tackling intersectional environmental issues like food insecurity, and elect officials that will support policies and infrastructure which benefit our planet. Admittedly this is a hard line to walk. We can only do so much as individuals compared to larger systems like corporate greed, wealth inequality, economic structures that emphasize only profit, and more that got us into our present situation. Yet making a difference as individuals has the power to curate a collective resistance, perhaps turning the tide in our favor. At least that’s how I choose to soothe the sometimes uncontrollable anxiety I get when I reflect too much on this topic.



“Eco-Anxiety,” the first piece in an artwork set created by Julia Craven. Pencil, string, and newspaper.

“Beauty’s in the Eye of the Beholder”

There is no doubt that our environment has changed significantly over the last few generations. Even in my upbringing, I have observed rolling hills being overtaken by suburban neighborhoods and endless miles of road in my community. However, when I talk to my older family members about climate change, I often feel that they observe the environment through an immortal lens. That is, no matter how much change humans bring to this planet, Mother Nature will still prevail. This led me to reflect on how each person’s view on the environment is largely dictated by their upbringing and life experiences. People like my grandparents have held onto an idealized view of nature, perhaps influenced by the lack of visible environmental degradation or constant iterations of climate change in the mainstream news as they grew up. The second piece in my collection is called “Beauty’s in the Eye of the Beholder” to reflect these sentiments. I decided to leave the flower in color to highlight my viewpoint that older generations will hold onto one view of the environment, even if the rest of the world is suffering, which I communicated via a grayscale background. This perceived mindset is the next hurdle to jump with any environmental issue: how can I make a difference if older generations will deny or resist change instigated from younger generations? I aimed to gain a better understanding of my grandparent’s viewpoints on the environment and climate change through a series of questions. Below is a synthesized version of their responses:

1. Tell me your perspective on climate change. Do you think humans are responsible for This?

Colleen: There are many, many cycles associated with climate change. Is this current period of climate change part of a natural cycle that we exacerbated? If so, it’s difficult to determine to what extent humans are to blame for this. Pollution is the ultimate contributor to climate change. (I interject on her comments about natural climate change cycles and explain that we learned in my geography class that the Holocene, the current time period, is marked with much less climate variation compared to the late Pleistocene. The Milankovitch cycle has been the best indicator of long-term climate change; according to these cycles the earth should be in a state of cooling rather than the rapid warming the planet is currently experiencing. Thus, it is unlikely that we are exacerbating a cycle that would have naturally occurred without human intervention, since there has been a clear mark in global warming since the Industrial Revolution that departs from scientific indicators like the Milankovitch cycle).

Colleen: I’ve heard of Milankovitch cycles but didn’t know much about them.

(At this point in the interview, my grandpa emerges from his nap and decides to give his two cents on each question).

Anthony: This is a very difficult question to answer because there’s the politically correct answer that everyone’s been conditioned to believe, but when you look around has anything truly

changed? The answer is you can't tell. The climate is constantly changing, there's more hot, cold, rainy, etc cycles that are almost never consistent. Thus, this is a very difficult thing to determine. There's a definite long-term trend of melting ice caps. However, terrible storms have always existed. Without any real data, you can't really tell if global warming is making storms worse. For example, when I was a kid there was a cycle of 11-22 years of total drought and rain. Some people could point to the dry seasonal period and say "Hey! Humans are driving climate change! Don't you see this?" but in reality, these cycles persisted long before human intervention to the Climate.

2. Has climate change affected you personally? If so, at what point did you begin to see these changes?

Colleen: I can't say it has. I personally can't relate to the shift in TN weather that some people comment on, since I only immigrated here 25 years ago and haven't had a lifetime's worth of experience here to say that there's been definite signs of global warming. However, I do see storms affecting water levels more significantly. Additionally, pollution is more prevalent. In South Africa, I grew up seeing bad use of resources, which led to the erosion of soil and alterations in vegetation; deserts started forming in places that didn't used to exist. These behaviors have consequences beyond burning coal. For example, in Durban, the consequences of a strike led to no refuse removal and created disgusting harbors. Overall, I'd say pollution has affected me more than climate change. There are confounding factors that create the degradation of the environment besides climate change. For example, cutting down forests in the Amazon leads to roads and thus exacerbates habitat destruction.

Anthony: No.

3. Do you think younger generations bear a greater responsibility in helping the environment?

Colleen: It's everyone's responsibility, but younger generations bear the greater burden.

Anthony: No it's everyone's responsibility. There's not much we can do because we don't know what to fix. The problem is carbon dioxide and methane and finding a way to reduce that. There are multiple ways of attacking the problem, but trying to unravel natural causes only confuses and separates the issue. It does make sense that we're putting too much carbon dioxide in the environment, and we need to fix it.

Colleen: Younger generations don't have the financial capability to address this, but they do have the passion and adaptability to new technology. Everyone has their role to play.

Anthony: The whole problem with climate change is it's too political. Get politics out of it and stick to facts and science to deal with it. Climate change is the symptom, not the cause. The cause is pollution. The root cause is carbon dioxide and methane.

One notable comment that stuck out to me while interviewing my grandma was her inability to perceive climate change happening in Knoxville since she didn't grow up in this area. "Place attachment: How far have we come in the last 40 years?" notes that newcomers to a particular space will have a different, sometimes inauthentic connection to their new community (Lewicka, 2011). Although my grandparents are thriving after their immigration to the U.S. over 25 years ago, I think this idea is applicable to environmental change they observe in our community. Without a benchmark, it is hard to quantify how much Knoxville has changed and therefore it influences the level of urgency my grandparents give to both local and international environmental problems. My grandpa's perception of the world is heavily reliant on analytical or scientific data, which is understandable given his educational background. Yet maintaining one worldview, such as applying a purely analytical stance to any societal issue, ignores the immense hardships climate change places on communities. Interpreting climate change through an analytical perspective perpetuates logical reasoning; ignoring the emotional hardships that come with rising temperatures or greater droughts. This approach threatens our ability to recognize and empathize with individuals or communities suffering the effects of climate change. "The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality" explains that post-colonial societies are already feeling the pressure of climate change, while leaders in other countries continue to debate over politics, statistics, and make empty promises (Ultana, 2022). Do we really have time to depoliticize the climate crisis?



“Beauty’s in the Eye of the Beholder,” the second piece in an artwork set created by Julia Craven. Pencil and acrylic.

“Flowers in July”

A powerful image from any climate change protest is young children holding up signs such as “no action, no earth” or “global warming isn’t a prediction it’s happening.” These are weighty statements after one realizes how much the current inaction against climate change will affect future generations. I often wonder how parents perceive the idea of “passing down” environmental issues to the next generation, especially in the context of my own family since many of my cousins are over a decade younger than me. I wanted to represent this in my final piece entitled “Flowers in July,” where my aunt hands a flower to her daughter. The title is intended to reflect how the warming of our planet is leading to drastic changes in seasons, and one day we might observe springtime flowers blooming well into July due to compounding environmental shifts resulting from our own inaction. Both of their hands, in addition to the flower, are left in color to represent hope. The grayscale background is a collage of images that my aunt took while she was visiting her home in Mexico over the summer. Another notable concept that I encounter when reflecting on how to help the earth is how our actions will impact the next generation. I turned to my aunt, a mother of two young children, to answer a series of 3 questions to better understand her perspective. Her answers are synthesized below.

- How do you see climate change affect your children compared to your own childhood?

As a kid, I wasn’t really aware of climate change. It was ingrained in my upbringing not to litter, treat things nicely, etc. I don’t think at my children’s stage of life they notice a big effect. This may be due to the city they’re brought up in. Knoxville is a smaller city and there’s no big factories nearby, which may contribute to this. I grew up in a similar environment despite being in a different country. However, younger generations seem to have more awareness about environmental issues, as it’s incorporated into technology and daily language. I wasn’t conscious of environmental change because I always liked the environment. But (my son) knows about wind power at a much younger age, compared to when I learned about it in high school/college. Overall, I don’t see a big difference. When I go back to Victoria (Oly’s hometown), it gets drier and drier. I remember the ranch being greener for a longer period of time, but I haven’t noticed a huge difference because my kids don’t grow up there. In Tennessee it’s even harder to see these effects. If you pay attention, you’ll notice blooms are happening earlier, water levels are rising, and more. But I really only know this because of my involvement in Ijams I wouldn’t say these really affect the overall daily life of most people.

1. Do you perceive climate change as a concern for the next generations’ current/future Wellbeing?

I guess so. (Oly looks around her living room, full of Christmas ornaments, then gestures to the boxes) Look at all our stuff, where does it all end up? There’s only more stuff being offered too (in her children’s generation). Programs like recycling aren’t utilized as much in the states, and

there's a large lack of education too.

2. What environmental issues do you think your generation is “passing on” for the next generation to address?

Trash (chuckles). Boxes. How do you recycle boxes? I don't know, learning a better balance of consumption? In regard to energy, it's slow but getting there. One positive thing is I think there's laws to get people educated, but this has to trickle down. Someone told me that in Europe, people are civilized (for example, they won't run a red light), compared to the third world where people will take risks because there's no repercussions. The government needs to hold the responsibility of passing things onto the surrounding community culture, such as encouraging people to recycle through implementing laws. However, in the third world, there's more pressing matters than recycling. For example, systemic factors like food, violence, job security, and more need to be addressed before people even think about where they're going to put a plastic water bottle. It's a matter of people's hierarchy of needs.

My aunt touched on an important note that we discussed in my Environmental Sociology course: there's a close connection between systemic issues and willingness to make environmental change. There is little room in people's lives to be concerned about how their habits impact our planet without addressing people's basic needs like hunger and shelter. Several Global North nations are committing themselves to greener development, aimed at curbing the effects of climate change. However, “in the process, core nations may appear to be greening their industrial policies whereas peripheral nations might seem to be less committed to ecological sustainability, but this relationship actually reveals continued global inequalities among nation-states and regions whereby the core has the power and capacity to outsource its most ecologically injurious practices abroad” (Brehm, 2013). One such example of this is exporting waste, such as recycling, to countries that possess less stringent environmental regulations. Power imbalances such as these place new pressures on designated third world countries that are extracted for their resources, while wealthier nation states can claim more “sustainable” progress. Yet turning to the private sector to solve inadequate policies may not be the golden ticket either. Environmental Governance explains the concept of Ecological Modernization, where the private economic sector, rather than the government, can be the solution to environmental crises. As my aunt pointed out though, governments can be large proponents of social behavior and change. If it is left to the private sector to address environmental problems such as waste, will this really get to the root cause of over consumption among individuals? Discard Studies digs a bit deeper into the intricacies of Ecological Modernization and systemic waste, and suggests that systems of discarding are the problem rather than individuals (Liboiron, & Lepawsky, 2022). These are all important topics to consider as humanity comes to terms with the state of our environment, and no one solution will fill systemic gaps.



“Flowers in July,” the final piece in an artwork set created by Julia Craven. Acrylic and paper.

One benefit of constantly mulling over the climate crisis is posing questions that may inspire future change. Upon completing this project, a particular question that stuck out to me is ‘what are potential solutions to altering these entrenched systems within our world that perpetuate anthropogenic climate change?’ At its core, I believe we must heal the relationships we hold with the environment. Our current relationship to our land is complex; if it’s not reflected in the multitude of environmental sociology topics, then at the very least we can turn to our own experiences. In the last two decades of living in the same place I have seen sun-stretched meadows with grazing cows transformed into neighborhoods with new grocery stores and restaurants, all for the sake of development. While this serves as an important function of providing new places for people to live, industrialization still has consequences for our environment that we either intentionally or unintentionally turn a blind eye to. The interviews with my family serve as evidence for how nuanced this topic is for each individual too. Some worry about the environmental consequences of development and effects of urban sprawl, while others rely on global scale environmental trends as a method to analyze anthropogenic impacts. Regardless, these are issues of our modern times that we must grapple with one way or another. Turning from theoretical analysis to practical change, what are some ways we can make a difference in transforming the way we perceive the environment?

One such proposition is Biocultural Restoration, which emphasizes not only ecological restoration of the environment, but also altering the surrounding culture in its transformation. Ecological restoration can be defined as “an intentional activity that accelerates the recovery of an ecosystem with respect to its health, integrity, and sustainability” (Greenlaw et al., 2009). Its applications are wide, from restoring the Kissimmee River in Florida to Onondaga Creek in New York. This process of Restoration is now extending to suburban areas, such as the Font Hill Tributary in Howard County (Bubczyk, n.d.). With development and suburban sprawl having such a profound impact on our land, it is important to promote and uplift projects that attempt to restore nature to a healthier state. However, it is just as vital to heal the relationships people have with their environment, as our species is the original culprit of such transformations. We all have unique relationships to our world, as my family interviews show. Biocultural restoration projects aim at healing both of these relationships, and one example is the Onondaga Creek restoration project (Greenlaw et al., 2009). This initiative engaged students from Elementary to University levels with the ultimate goal of achieving more green infrastructure in their community (Greenlaw et al., 2009). This not only supported their local ecosystem, but allowed community members to engage and physically see their nature restored in their area (Greenlaw et al., 2009). In the Southeast, the Tennessee Riverline project can serve as an example of a biocultural restoration project due to its vision of a more connected river and, subsequently, southeastern communities (Tennessee Riverline, n.d.). Through these projects it is important not only to document ecological change, but also cultural shifts that occur from people living nearby these places of environmental transformation. How might people turn to care for rivers, meadows, and forests if they have a direct stake in their sustainment through projects that emphasize

environmental restoration? Much like how the First Peoples of North America passed down stories like the Haudenosaunee Creation Story from one generation to another, is it possible to rekindle a culture of storytelling shaped by the state of modern-day nature? I aspire for Climate Conversations to open that door just a little more, to invite individuals to integrate more personal and cultural discussions within this era of profound environmental change. These stories of anxiety, indifference, fear, optimism, and uncertainty are necessary in guiding our work of addressing climate change.

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