Blog Post #4: Extending the Conversation

Have you ever wondered what the future of our planet would look like? Most of us imagine a world filled with robots, flying cars and perhaps crazy and unimaginable buildings. The only problem with this illusion is that we don't know if we would get that far. That is because we won't know if our planet would last that long to see those advancements.

The increasingly concern of becoming greener is one that is highly evident all around the world. We see ads and campaigns to increase the awareness of being eco-friendly in our every day lives. As a college student I constantly pass by tons of recycling cans, each for a different type of product such as aluminum cans or paper, throughout campus.

However, there has been numerous times when I've passed these recycling cans and see another student disposing of a recyclable product in a regular trash can when most of the time they are right beside each other. On one occasion a close friend of mine did the same thing. When I confronted him about why he did that, he said that the recycling can was further away than the trashcan. From what I can recall, the recycling cans were only but a few feet further away.

From this point on I started wondering if all these efforts just become useless since we are too lazy to even care. So is our comfort and selfish needs a big setback to becoming greener?

I started to explore and rationalize why it might be that Europe has always been a greener society than the United States. Might the social myth of Americans being lazy be one of the contributing factors to this? Or is it more than simply being lazy?

I found numerous sources showing the vast differences between eco-friendly aspects in the United States and Europe. These were in the form of amounts of waste we create, awareness campaigns, and recycling policies (which are non-existent in the United States). However, none of these confirmed why the differences where so big. Eventually, I stumbled upon one source from a person that experienced living in both regions and raised important points. One major point being cultural differences.

In European countries behaving in an environmentally manner is part of a social contract. Meaning that not doing eco-friendly things is sort of a taboo. So why might this be a taboo in Europe, when in the United States it is looked at as sort of an unnecessary action? Could it be because we are just so used to behaving a certain way? Where the constant reminders of the importance of

Mother Nature growing up not enough to make us feel guilty for taking better care of the planet?

I can't exactly say that I have done everything possible to be eco-friendly all the time. I recycle but that still isn't stopping me from buying bottled waters instead of refilling them. We are all unconsciously doing things that could potentially hurt the environment just for our comfort. For example we could simply walk to a place that is close to us but instead we choose to take the car because it would be quicker.

It's hard to change a complete life style but there have been a few changes that have somewhat contributed to aid in this change. For example we are all aware of new technology that would help our environment. This trend is not really something new. But a big contributor to this change is making eco-friendly cars. Yes, it may not be as good as riding a bicycle but for our culture it might be the best we could do.

But would driving a Prius and recycling be a big enough of a change to help our environment? One source explains that sometimes recycling doesn't make it out to the "re-using" stage. This is because plastics are harder to separate. So a waste management company found a solution to this problem. Their innovative solution was to create plastic pellets, which makes it easier to form new plastic products.

This source changed my perspective on this whole issue. That is because even if we all recycled it wouldn't be enough. It may take more than individuals and families to make a difference. It may also be that bigger steps need to be taken. As an architecture major, I see that creating sustainable and greener buildings has become a big design factor. So maybe other companies and industries also need to take these big steps to make a difference. But could it also be that we need to change our way of thinking? We are all knowledgeable on the theme of sustainability but maybe having knowledge to create solutions or on the importance of living a sustainable life could also be a big contributor. Who knows maybe it's our education that has failed at making us think differently.

There are simply infinite possibilities as to why we are the way we are. Why we aren't as "green" as Europe. However, I'm only trying to further implement into the "solution and reason" phase. There is no right or wrong answer to this but what *is* important is trying to get people to understand that any tiny effort is better than none at all. We could say we are too lazy but in reality we all know that if there is a will there is a way. Let's not wait until it's too late to change our way of thinking or changing how companies and industries work. Mother Earth has given us life and many opportunities to simply live and be happy, so why not simply raise more questions and act on them.