

Our Responsibilities for Our planet

Elijah Luoma

Department of English, Anoka Ramsey Community College

English 1121-18: College Writing and Critical Reading

Prof. Chris McCarthy

March 1st, 2025

While some may argue that individual actions don't have a large impact on climate change, the reality is that this is simply not true. There have been many conscious decisions

made in my life in order to benefit the quality of the world we live in. This has been as small as recycling cans after I'm finished with them, or taking shorter showers. If we all make positive choices like this, surprising results will surely come from it. In Cassandra Roxburgh's article "Individuals Are Not to Blame for the Climate Crisis" (Roxburgh, 2022) States, "Meaningful progress has been obstructed by fossil fuel companies' intentional obfuscation of responsibility for the climate crisis." As far as facts go, this is partially accurate, but what Roxburgh leaves out of this entire article is the fact that our failure to take personal responsibility is just as harmful as the negative impacts caused by the oil industry. Carbon emissions produced by millions of cars everyday as well as the excessive energy use from individuals worldwide have further amplified greenhouse gas emissions. She explains throughout her article that the general public is being blamed for large oil companies that present themselves as environmentally friendly. What she's implying is that it's not actually us who are damaging the planet—it's the greedy, unethical corporations that pretend to be eco-friendly while doing the real damage. Most of her statements are not inherently false, there is truth behind the action that need to be taken from the government's side. The issue is that she does not acknowledge our own responsibilities and the consequences for our lack of care towards this planet.

(Roxburgh, 2022) states, "The 2020 carbon majors report identified 90 companies, mainly fossil fuel companies, that are responsible for two-thirds of carbon emissions. Despite this, global leaders still somehow conclude that individuals are to blame." Although the 2022 carbon major report states that mainly oil companies are to blame, it is individuals who still have a key role to play in the climate crisis through everyday choices. The extended use of fossil fuels, such as driving vehicles powered by gasoline and diesel as well as, using nonrenewable power sources will all be potentially connected to big corporations with high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. By continuing to increase requirements for fossil fuels, you indirectly help push up

the amount of greenhouse gases. Due to our current structure in society, individuals only control a small portion of the activity that drives global warming. However, as a group, their consumption habits together majorly influence the market demand. This results in products and services that perpetuate climate change issues. In the article [“It starts at home? climate policies targeting household consumption and behavioral decisions are key to low-carbon futures. Energy Research & Social Science.”](#) the leading global STM company, Elsevier (2019) states, “Household consumption contributes to 72% of global greenhouse gas emissions (with the remainder coming from public and nongovernmental and financial sources). Household behavior therefore is an essential component in climate policies, especially in high income countries such as those in Europe, Australia and North America” It's important to understand that household consumption is also one of the many factors individuals need to take responsibility for.

(Roxburgh, 2022) says, “Individualizing the responsibility is an insidious weapon within the fossil fuel industry’s arsenal, which includes greenwashing and woke washing.” Though companies use strategies like this, all they are doing is trying to put more heat on the individuals who already worsen the state of the planet. Although it's important to understand that some people in the fossil fuel industry will use tactics such as greenwashing, it's just as essential to understand that individuals have a role. We have the power to influence the demand for fossil fuels and environmentally damaging products not only through what we consume but also bought. For example, instead of purchasing 40 packs of Kirkland signature water bottles, we should instead invest in reusable cups. (Bloomberg, 2019). Steve Westlake (2019), a PhD Researcher in Environmental Leadership claims in his article that by changing our behavior on even a local level, individuals can create changes big enough to make a real impact. Corporations will also be pressured into adopting cleaner behaviors and policies. Although the fossil fuel

industry always tries to put the blame onto individuals, history shows that change at societal levels often begins with individual action. Small movements are capable to raise awareness that could potentially inspire others to join it, this in return, can lead to law changes that could better our environment. To sum it up, even though we now understand oil companies use tactics like greenwashing and woke-washing, this should not deter the common individual from making an effort towards cleaning up our planet because even the smallest efforts can make a huge difference.

Roxburgh (2022), says, “Suggesting turning off the lights or driving less loses sight of the global severity of the climate crisis and shifts the focus off those with the greatest capacity and responsibility to make meaningful change.” The climate crisis requires major changes in our systems, but individual actions are also important. Choosing to consciously make environmentally friendly decisions on a day-to-day basis, like deciding to ride your bike instead of drive short distances, may not seem important now, but collectively it can make a huge difference. Personal choices are important to take into consideration in order to develop the condition of our climate. When individuals act responsibly, those around them are inspired to do so as well. They inspire their communities and influence businesses. This change can lead to sustainable products being further sought after and companies and governments adapting to it. With their purchase decisions, consumers have great power. By supporting companies which have good environmental values, they can bring the whole corporate world towards more environmentally friendly methods and create a sustainable society. As mentioned by (Bloomberg, 2019) smaller movements and the combined voice of normal people can create significant changes in many ways. Recognizing the responsibility you have as an individual empowers others. While corporations and governments still take partial responsibility for climate

change, everyday activities are important and can influence others' behavior. Individual efforts can and will bring awareness to others which has the potential to create larger movements.

(Roxburgh, 2022) explains, “The solutions to climate change are complex. Many solutions, like implementing multilateral instruments to hold corporations liable for failures to set out realistic targets for emissions reductions.” Though the point of this essay is to expand on how individuals may be more responsible for climate change than you'd think, it's still important to look at the bigger picture and search for all possible variables that could potentially worsen the state of the climate. As we all know, regardless of the individual's responsibilities, oil industries have hugely led to our current condition as a planet, and it is crucial to figure out to solve issues regarding it. [Holding the government as well as large corporations liable for their own failures is a great way to create a more united effort towards slowing climate change.](#) This would prevent those companies from making empty promises that could severely hurt our current condition. Due to most of these companies being fairly large, taking acting towards ensuring the target numbers are reduced will push them to adopt greener practices and figure out how to do business in a more environmentally friendly way, which in return, will ensure a healthier future.

Although Roxburgh's article does a good job towards the importance of exposing the fraudulent messages that are derived from the oil industry, she fails to mention how it is not just those companies who have severely affected our climate, but also the individuals lack of action that has brought us to where we are. Furthermore, I have gained more knowledge on this topic than I realized by critically researching and replying to this information. This makes me think about how I used to be inconsiderate of many things growing up. I let the shower run for too long, I neglected using my bike and was eager to start driving as soon as possible, and I never thought too deep into recycling. But as I get older, I realize if I had only been more considerate of the planet I live on earlier in life, I would've made a bigger difference than I thought.

References

Bloomberg. (2019, December 5). Small actions can make a big difference on climate change.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/company/stories/climate-lifestyle-swaps/>

Cohen, S. (2021, May 14). The role of individual responsibility in the transition to environmental sustainability. State of the Planet. <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/05/10/the-role-of-individual-responsibility-in-the-transition-to-environmental-sustainability/>

Elsevier. (2019, March 2). It starts at home? climate policies targeting household consumption and behavioral decisions are key to low-carbon futures. Energy Research & Social Science. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629618310314#:~:text=Household%20consumption%20contributes%20to%2072,the%20Paris%20Accord%20%5B8%5D.>

Hiller, A. (2011). Climate Change and Individual Responsibility. <https://www-jstor-org.accarcproxy.mnpals.net/stable/23039149?seq=2>

Roxburgh, C., & Roxburgh, C. (2022, January 31). Analysis: Individuals are not to blame for the Climate Crisis. YES! Magazine. <https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2022/01/31/climate-change-fossil-fuel-industry-individual-responsibility>

Westlake, S. (2019, April 11). *Climate change: Yes, your individual action does make a difference*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/climate-change-yes-your-individual-action-does-make-a-difference-115169>

