

Explore that claim that a consumer society is always a throw away society

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There is no doubt that our environment is becoming more polluted. An increase in the amount of waste people produce is one of the main causes for this issue. For example, households in the UK throw away approximately 30 million tonnes of rubbish a year. Our population is rising, therefore the amount of goods required to meet people's demands has increased. Living standards have improved, as have the qualities of products and the choice of them thereof, all of which is facilitated by the increasing demands of a growing market.

The subsequent waste that this increase in population, demand and consumerism creates provokes the question – is a consumer society always a throw away society? Rising affluence is a key factor in today's increase in waste and rubbish. In today's society the majority of people are able to afford the higher standards of living and more luxurious items. Take a television for example; in the 1950's televisions were regarded as a luxury. Those families that had a black and white television were regarded as wealthy or rich.

However, skip to today's society and everybody has a television and they are now seen as a necessity rather than a luxury item regardless of a families' or individuals' financial capacity. As well as the increase in households there has also been an advance in technology; we are now seeing plasma, HD or 3D televisions as the luxury item to be had in households (Making social lives, P. 109, 2010). Due rising levels of affluence people are able to buy

more products and replace them with new rather than paying for the old products to get fixed.

In today's society it has become normal to throw away broken items such as washing machines, dishwashers, DVD players, televisions or microwaves rather than getting them repaired. A lot of electrical items such as these are cheaper to buy brand new than it is to pay for them to get repaired. Since the 1st department store opened in 1869, Bon Marche, fashion and clothes shopping was sold to customers as a luxury, however department stores were able to produce products for the less wealthy clientele as well.

This was the beginning of mass produced items, which meant that the price was affordable for a wider range of the population. Clothes and accessories were being produced with new technology, which was able to produce these products a lot faster than if they were handmade. Department stores were also the central point in the movement of people expressing their individuality and personal character identities. Department stores had cracked it; seducing customers into buying what appeared to be luxury items produced at a low cost so a wider range of people were able to afford them (making social lives, P39, 2010).

If we skip forward a few years and look at today's shipping society we see the same problem I spoke about earlier, everything is now mass-produced from outside the UK. Such products are exceptionally cheap to buy and, unfortunately, this is an extremely influential point in the facilitation of a throwaway society. A lot of families that are fortunate enough to go on holiday to a hot country abroad will find themselves buying specific items

only appropriate for the holiday and then disposing them after one or two wears due to the low cost of the items.

As well as throwing away clothes after holiday there are a large number of clothes thrown away due to an increase in society's interest in fashion. Facilitated and accelerated by increased coverage by different media formats, demand for new fashion cycles from designers has emerged, for example, spring, summer, autumn, winter - all cycles that would not have existed at one point. Rather than people customising and adjusting clothes like they would have done years ago, old, 'unfashionable', clothes are thrown away to make way for newer, more fashionable, ones.

Supermarkets produce one of the cheapest clothing sources in our country, they buy mass produced items from places such as India, Bangladesh and China. This is due to the cheap labour and material costs that these countries provide. (making social lives, P87, 2010) Supermarkets are taking over our country. They have made themselves extremely accessible to all people, from all backgrounds and classes, with a huge range of different products, all sold at very low prices. Not surprisingly then, supermarkets are responsible for a huge percentage of our country's waste. Any food that is out of date or past its shelf life date gets thrown away, any food that is not cosmetically perfect gets thrown away as well. This, in my opinion, is unnecessarily wasteful and instead of throwing it away could be used in a more productive and resourceful way. As well as the amount of food supermarkets waste they produce a lot of rubbish through the packaging used to keep the goods safe and fresh for consumers. It appears that every

product you purchase is over packaged, it could be in a plastic tub, wrapped in plastic film, and surrounded by a cardboard advertising sleeve, this is again completely unnecessary waste ready to be thrown in the bin.

Although we have been a throw away society over the last century, recently the media have made a conscious effort to increase society's awareness of what is going to happen to the environment if everybody carries on being as wasteful and blase as they have been in the past. There has been a lot more advertising to create awareness with regards to recycling and looking after the environment. As a homeowner these days we are expected to recycle as many items as possible and are asked by the government to separate them into categories to help the country be able to dispose of the high volumes of rubbish produced.

There has been a significant rise in recycling and now 27% of homeowners recycle as before they would have been just thrown theses items in the bin. (Making social lives, P118, 2010). As well as recycling food, we as a nation are now beginning to recycle our clothes. Certain charity shops post refuge bags through people's doors, asking the owners of the household to fill them with unwanted clothes that are then re-sold in charity shops at a lower price for people who are not as wealthy to purchase. Some clothes are also sent to other countries that may need emergency clothing.

Supermarkets are also doing there bit for the environment; they now produce ' bags for life' which are designed to minimise the amount of plastic bags used and thrown away by customers. Supermarkets in some countries, such as Wales, have even begun charging for normal carrier bags, enticing

customers to make a one-off payment for a 'bag for life', save some money and help the environment all in one go. Supermarkets have also started distributing unsold food to homeless and needy people. Our rubbish can be given value again in many ways, for example - hand-me-down clothes, car boot sales or selling unwanted items on EBay.

Currently there are a lot of charities that are aware of how much rubbish we waste as a society and are helping society to do something about it. An example of how they are doing this is that currently all un-wanted tents that are left at festivals are sent to countries that need emergency accommodation after natural disasters or war. Another way of giving rubbish value is by transporting all our unwanted waste around the world to places with lower wage costs, who in return separate it, clean it, and process it into something usable again, for example using scrap aluminum to make bottle tops and food cans.

China are on board with recycling their rubbish into value items, they send their consumer goods over to England and take back our unwanted rubbish to be recycled in China (making social lives, P118, 2010). With the world's population increasing, consumer demand from food to electrical goods has increased likewise. Subsequently, society has evolved to adapt to this change in both positive and negative ways. Positively, cheaper, mass-produced foods provide us with a necessity.

Negatively, advances in technology are not as key to our survival, for example the HD TV. The media, and an increase in the world's general economic well-being, until recently have been partly to blame for the

facilitation of society's wasteful approach to life. Supermarkets have been beneficiaries not facilitators of the behavior of their consumer environment. However, the media have now turned full-circle and are promoting a more recyclable approach to life since we have learned the consequences of our wasteful tendencies.

Therefore, I believe the argument that consumer societies are always throw-away societies is false. I think the pivotal point in a society becoming a throw away society is in the education of the damage such an approach can do to their planet in the long run. Word count: 1283 Bibliography Martin Wainwright. (2012). hundreds of tents. Available: hundreds of tents. Last accessed 21st march 2013. Hinchliffe, S (2009). Making social lives. Milton Keynes: Latimer trend and company Ltd. 105-119. Staples, M (2009). Learning companion 2. Milton keynes: Bell and Bain Ltd. 1-29.