A World Made of Plastic

Plastic Pollution Podcast Review

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This past week my group conducted research for a podcast about plastic and the rising awareness of how humans use plastic. Our society has become addicted to plastic, and this comes with major consequences that our environment is suffering from. Our group highlighted the effects of plastic with calling attention to issues such as effects on marine life, our society’s throw-away culture, and the pollution of plastic. My focused research for the podcast was alternatives to plastic and what people are doing to help cut back on such a convenient resource.

 During our podcast, our group covered the main discussion points regarding plastic pollution and the effects it has on our environment. We began by introducing the idea of how our society has a throw-away culture, which is very wasteful and has such a negative impact on our environment. We are constantly using plastic products without thinking about how wasteful they are. It is seen as a convenient, yet quickly disposable product that harms more than we realize. This is where my group transitioned into discussing the effects of plastic on marine life. These marine animals are ingesting the plastic materials and it stays in their systems, and can eventually lead to their death. In our podcast, we used the example of a whale that washed up onto shore with 88 pounds of plastic in its stomach. This is an alarming effect that plastic has on our marine life, and it has a direct effect on humans as well. Any time someone consumes seafood, they can never be sure on what they are really eating. That animal might have eaten plastic, which will now be consumed by the person as well. Not only is plastic a problem to marine life when they consume it, but it can also be a larger problem. Jenna R. Jambeck reports that about 8 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year, which puts marine life at a great risk of extinction, (Jambeck 2015). These are problems that are that are serious and can seem overwhelming, but things are being done to make a difference. Products are being made as alternative options to plastic. Things like paper straws and reusable bags are becoming more popular in our society and are also being heavily advocated for. These are changes that are being incorporated more and more into our everyday lives because more people are realizing the harm that plastics can cause.

 With the research that this podcast required, I was able to gain insight on a topic that I previously did not know much about before. While our podcast gave many facts and statistics on different problems plastics cause, one limitation in the podcast was being unable to show visuals. Plastic has several impacts on the environment that could be shown with images, such as polluted waters or washed up marine animals. This could have been used to invoke emotions out of the listeners.

 Within the podcast, my role of research was focused on the alternatives to plastic. One very popular switch being made is from plastic straws to paper straws. Plastic straws are being used once and thrown away, and they eventually make their way into our oceans. Not only do they pollute the water, but they are ingested by sea animals, especially sea turtles. To help decrease on the disposal of plastic straws, restaurants have been switching to paper straws. During the podcast, we played a clip from 1 News in New Zealand about paper straws that reported “They fall apart in the sea, they start breaking apart in three days, and they’re completely biodegraded in a few months,” (1 News 2018). This is a much better aftermath of disposal versus the plastic straws. Paper straws function the same way as plastic straws, and when they end up in the ocean, they break apart before causing damage that plastic would. Animals do not deserve to suffer at the hands of a straw that has only been used once. If a majority of restaurants, especially the large chains, made this change, our oceans and marine life would benefit greatly. With it recently becoming a popular change, it would not be difficult to globalize the idea. This is an easy change that would lead to a significant and helpful difference in our oceans.

 We’ve all seen grocery stores and other places of business show their desire to move away from plastic bags by doing things like providing bags that are made of a different material or urging the customer to bring their own reusable bags. A statistic from *The Renewable Planet* stated that “Some estimates suggest that purchasing a single set of reusable shopping bags and using them every time you go shopping could eliminate the disposal of as many as 20,000 disposable plastic bags,” (2019). Reusable bags are proven to be very beneficial to our environment. They go against our throw-away culture, which is what is ruining our planet. Reusable bags are easy to use and are a simple act that would go a long way. If people were required to only use these bags instead of plastic bags, the impact on pollution would be vast.

One side of the plastic alternatives discussion that I hadn’t heard much about before was children’s toys. I only realized it was an issue after reading an article about how a mom in Houston wouldn’t let her children play with plastic toys, and her main concern was that the toys mainly come from China and that the paint has high lead content, but she also felt better about buying toys that don’t have as much of an environmental impact. This has prompted companies like LEGO to try and find alternatives to satisfy parents like this, (Settembre 2019). This is a part of plastic pollution that deserves a greater amount of attention. Things like small toys in kid’s meals at fast food restaurants or plastic pails being left at the beach and washed into the ocean are all factors of plastic pollution. If we were to move to things like wooden toys, although the cost may be higher, the investment would be worth it in the long run.

Plastic is all around us. Although alternatives are becoming more popular, it’s very difficult to imagine the kind of commitment that everyone would have to make to even see a difference. Sandra Ponce de Leon wrote in the Grit Daily “even if you are a conscious consumer and making efforts to reduce your consumption of plastics, you’ll soon come to realize that plastic is everywhere you look and next to impossible to escape,” (Ponce de Leon 2019). To put an end to plastic pollution, it is going to take everyone making changes, and the way to start is with alternatives. They are rapidly becoming available in a variety of popular products that makes saving the planet easy and convenient. It cannot just be a group here and there that wants to make a difference, it is going to take everyone to make a commitment to cutting back on plastics.

Overall, I enjoyed the podcast assignment. It allowed us to bring life to topics that can be difficult to discuss, especially if you do not know much about it. I was able to see the true impacts that plastics have on our society, especially the toll it takes on the environment. To everyone in my group, as well as everyone who listened, it was a wakeup call that this is a real issue and that humans are not doing enough, and if we continue down this road, then the problems will only grow. We must act now and keep the future of our environment in mind each time we use plastic.

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