

# What Children's Toys Tell Us About Our 'Brave New World'

Why do children today have so many toys?

Like most parents, I'm working hard to keep my kids entertained indoors during quarantine. A new [report](#) shows online sales of toys and games have increased by 182 percent due to the coronavirus.

Here's the problem: my children already have too much stuff. I can't possibly buy them anything new.

These days, toys are omnipresent. Everywhere I go – be it the gas station, the pharmacy or the post office – someone is trying to sell something to my kids. Virtually any product you can think of has a kid-branded version. “[N]early everything a child might need or use is now marketed as a toy: flashing shoelaces; transforming soap; character-driven school supplies, vitamins, and bandages; books with musical microchips; even scratch-and-sniff clothing,” writes Kim John Payne in his book [\*Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids\*](#).

I don't think it was quite this bad during my childhood in the 1980s. I had plenty of toys, but the volume was not overwhelming.

The 1980s were hardly an era of asceticism and frugality. But I believe the proliferation of toys is an indicator of how far our consumption-based economy has advanced in just 30 years.

In his new book [\*The Decadent Society: How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success\*](#), Ross Douthat singles out Aldous Huxley's classic dystopian novel [\*Brave New World\*](#) as a mirror of our times. The parallels are undeniable. Opioids and

marijuana are our “soma,” the perfect drug that keeps the citizens of Huxley’s fictional World State happy and passive at all times. However, Douthat admits that our drugs “aren’t so consciously designed; they’re more dangerous, more unevenly distributed and less universally desired.”

World State has “feelies” (a kind of virtual reality sex) and Violent Passion Surrogate (which is described as “the complete physiological equivalent of fear and rage”). These are comparable to modern America’s pornography and video games, respectively. Douthat writes, “Our society doesn’t repress youthful lust and aggressions much as it stimulates them safely through video games and smut.”

However, there is yet another parallel that Douthat fails to mention: consumption. From a young age, the citizens of World State are conditioned to consume as much as they can. Their leaders know this is critical to keep the economy running. While they sleep, children are brainwashed with whispered messages like, “We always throw away old clothes. Ending is better than mending,” and “The more stitches, the less riches.”

In our world today, this is what Pope Francis famously called “throwaway culture.”

Have you tried repairing any children’s toys lately? It is almost impossible. When toys break, they need to be thrown in the garbage.

Like many parents, I want to teach my children to take care of their belongings. They should learn that objects have value and should be treated with respect. In a perfect world, repairing broken toys would be part of that lesson. But the modern economy usually makes that impossible for parents.

I’ve researched high-quality toys made of natural materials that could probably be repaired if they break. The price difference between those and the usual plastic fare is often

staggering. Thus, ironically, rich parents can teach their children about repairing broken toys so they can continue to be used. Everyone else just has to throw them away – and then buy a new one, which is the whole point.

In the wake of this coronavirus, we are having a national conversation about the consequences of globalization. We receive an endless supply of cheap goods, but is it worth outsourcing so much of our supply chain to China? I hope that conversation will eventually encompass the need for higher quality products, not just cheaper ones.

For my part, I'll know society is heading in the right direction when I can take my children into a gas station or pharmacy without toys being shoved in their faces.

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