Garbology Report

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Abstract

Archaeology is often portrayed as a field for treasure hunters and thrill seekers. In reality, however, archaeology is mostly a matter of digging through the material remains of past peoples; in other words, their trash. In the 1980's, William Rathje, from Arizona State University, decided to take this idea of archaeology and apply it to the material remains of modern society, or modern trash. With a group of archaeology students, they conducted multiple studies of the garbage from the surrounding community by conducting surveys and conducting digs in the nearby trash dump. Since then, this idea of studying garbage, or garbology, has taken hold in a number universities, companies, and businesses. This, in turn, has led a certain archaeology class at CSUMB, taught by Ruben Mendoza, to conduct their own miniature Garbage Project.

Introduction

Over a five week period, myself and four others (Brittney Quon, Akira Soto, Michael Campos, and Paige Guthormsen) examined the contents of a household's garbage in hopes of garnering as much information about the household as possible, focusing specifically on the diet of the household's inhabitants. In order to do this, a week's worth of garbage was collected by one member of the group, who kept the garbage donors anonymous from the rest of the group for the duration of the project. Each week the group would scour through the contents of the collected garbage and discern as much information as possible from it, from the number of inhabitants to what they ate.

Findings

Week 1

The first week's garbage was collected September 12, 2011. The recycling weighed 4.15 lbs and the trash weighed 6.5 lbs, coming to a total of 10.75 lbs. In the first week the garbage appeared to be that of an unhealthy household. There were a number of take out containers and bags, such as from Jack-in-the-Box and Carls Jr. There were also some frozen food containers and ice cream, which is processed and therefore not very healthy. There were also some beer cans and three wine bottles, but based off just this one sample it was impossible to say exactly how much they drank, since those may have been drank over a long period of time or in the matter of one or two nights. There was also a cigarette pack, but again, based off just this one week of garbage it was impossible to tell who was smoking or how much they were smoking. There was also a receipt for a woman's dress and something wrapped up in napkins that we believed to be poop.

Since this is only one week's worth of data, there is not enough data to come to a reliable conclusion. We can make some educated class, however. We guessed that there were two people living here, at least one of which was female, based off of the receipt for the dress. We also classified them as omnivorous and unhealthy, due to the fast food and junk food. We also suspect there may be a pet in the household, based off of the poop found.

Week 2

This week's garbage was collected on September 20, 2011. The recycling weighed 5 lbs and the trash weighed 7.25 lbs, coming to a total of 12.25. This week's garbage further suggested an unhealthy diet. There were more fast food and take out containers, and there were another three bottles of wine, suggesting that three bottles a week is normal. Also, there were two cigarette packs this week,

suggesting either they had friends over; they had some sort of social event, such as a party; or they simply had a stronger urge to smoke, suggesting a stressful week. There was also more poop(?) and a wad of hair that resembled that of an animal's, further suggesting that there is a pet in the household.

Based off these findings, we still believed there to be two people residing in the household, one female and one male. We also still classified them as being unhealthy due to the continued evidence of take out containers, fast food, and junk food. This is further suggested by the three additional wine bottles and the two cigarette packs. As stated above, we were a little more sure that there was a pet in the household, due to the additional poop(?) and wad of hair, possibly belonging to an animal.

Week 3

This week's garbage was collected on September 27, 2011. The garbage weighed 17 lbs. This week it appeared as though the residents were at least trying to be healthier. There were signs of vegetables, such as lettuce, and fruit. There were, once again, three bottles of wine, further strengthening the likelihood that this is habitual for the residents. There were also more cigarette packs again this week, but this time there were seven, instead of just one or two. We also found a broken pair of women's sunglasses.

We surmised, based off these findings, that at least one of the residents either cleaned out their car, had friends over, one of the other residents began smoking, or perhaps someone had a very stressful week, based off the seven packs of cigarettes found this week. It does appear that someone is trying to be healthier, based off the vegetables and fruits found; this may not be working so well, however, since it appears quite a bit is ending up in the trash. There is also an ample amount of junk food and fast food still, so they were still unhealthy. It also appears to be habitual to have about three bottles of wine through the week, given that this week means three out of three weeks have had at least three wine bottles. Also, our belief that at least one resident is female was further strengthened by

the pair of women's sunglasses we found. It was still not enough to say for sure, since it's possible that

the sunglasses from this week and the receipt for the dress from the first week belonged to one of the

residents, but it certainly was a possibility.

Week 4

This week's garbage was collected October 4, 2011, and came to a total weight of 12.25 lbs. This

week they appeared to be getting a little healthier. There were still signs of fast food, but there were

also more signs of fruit, such as watermelon shells and cutie skins, and vegetables, such as lettuce and

mushrooms. The mushrooms did not look like many were used, however, so it was hard to say just how

much vegetable they were eating. There were four bottles of wine this week, further strengthening the

likelihood that it is a habit for the residents to have three to four bottles of wine a week. There was also

more cigarette packs, suggesting that at least one resident is a frequent smoker. There was also a large

bag of untouched Peet's Coffee pastries and a work schedule for Peet's Coffee.

Based off these findings, we still believe there are two people living here, at least one of which is

female. They did appear to be getting a little healthier, but we still classified them as unhealthy. We

believed that at least one resident was a frequent smoker, due to the continued appearance of cigarette

packs, and it appears to be a habit to have three to four bottles of wine a week. Also, we have firmly

established that at least one resident works at Peet's Coffee, due to the untouched pastries and work

schedule. There were no signs of an animal this week, so we were not sure of what that meant. Either

there are no pets or the pet is better trained, or perhaps the pet was sick before and was no longer sick.

There was not enough evidence at this point to determine the answer.

Week 5

This week's garbage sample was collected on October 11, 2011, and weighed a total of 10.25 lbs. For the final week we found there were the usual three wine bottles, along with some beer bottles. Also, there were more signs of the residents trying healthier options, there was ample amount of evidence of fast food and take out. There were also six packs of cigarettes this week. The biggest find for this week, however, were the two sixteen-pound bags of cat food. This confirms our hypothesis that there is a pet; this week we were able to confirm that it was a cat.

Based off our findings for this final week, it appears that it was habitual to have about three bottles of wine a week, along with some beer. Also, although their eating habits did improve a little bit, they are still eating too much junk food, fast food, and take out to really be classified as healthy. The presence of six cigarette packs this week suggests that the most likely scenario is that either another resident began smoking or the same person is increasing their smoking, possibly due to stress. As stated above, the biggest find of this week were the two sixteen-pound bags of cat food, allowing us to safely assume that our hypothesis was correct and there is a cat in the household.

Summary

For five weeks, we collected the garbage of a single household. Based off our findings, we were able garner a number of insights about the household. Every week there was some sort of fast food present, usually either McDonalds or Jack-in-the-Box. Also, there was almost always some sort of frozen meal, such as Hot Pockets. Throughout the five weeks the residents did, however, attempt to eat healthier, by adding various fruits and vegetables to their diet. We were also able to surmise that it was habit for the residents, or at least one of the residents, to have about three bottles of wine throughout the week. Another habit presented by the garbage is that there was at least one smoker in the

household. We were not able to determine, however, whether the sudden increase in cigarette packs between week three and week four was due to another individual smoking or the same individual increasing their smoking habit.

The most important findings, in my opinion, were the receipt for the dress and the broken sun glasses, the Peet's Coffee work schedule, and the bags cat food. Based off of the receipt for the dress and the broken women's sunglasses, we were able to surmise that there was at least one female resident. The Peet's Coffee work schedule showed that at least one of the residents was working at Peet's Coffee. Finally, the cat food confirmed our earlier hypothesis that there was a pet in the household, and further told us what that pet exactly was.

In summary, our most concrete findings are as follow: there are likely at least two residents, based off the amount of food found each week. At least one of these residents is female, based off the receipt for the dress and the broken women's sunglasses. At least one resident is twenty one or older and at least one resident drinks, based off the wine bottles found every week and the occasional beer bottles. The residents did not eat particularly healthy, based off the amount of fast food, junk food, and take out found every week. At least one resident was attempting to eat healthier, based off the increase of the increase in vegetables and fruits. There was at least one person smoking, based off the cigarette packs found every week. And there was a cat in the household, based off the poop(?), wad of hair, and the two sixteen-pound bags of cat food.