

Fast Fashion

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“Half a million tons of plastic microfibers are dumped into the ocean every year, which is the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles.” (Algamal, 2019). Microfibers are one of the main components used in the fast fashion industry. They say that the fast fashion industry doesn’t really harm the environment too badly, and that we don’t have to worry about it right now. I do understand the desire and want for easily accessible fashion, and not believing what you hear on the internet. However, I say that the fast fashion industry isn’t just the cheap brands, it has some of the worst effects on world pollution, and the workers also face consequences. Everyday there are plastics and pollution being dumped into our oceans and cities, which will ultimately end up affecting us. There are things we can do to help save our planet from the pollution and cruelty and mistreatment the workers face.

Some say fast fashion isn’t harmful to the environment, just to the economy. Fast fashion has been proven to cause pollution that has detrimental effects on our Earth and its atmosphere. In “New shocking facts about the impact of fast fashion on our climate” Armanos Algamal (2019) Oxfam retail team member, writes, “polluting the oceans, entering our waterways and contaminating our food chain. Wastewater contaminated with toxic dyes and the use of harmful chemicals also contribute to the industry's devastating impact on the planet.” Algamal(2019) goes on to say “We are seeing unprecedented wildfires spreading across the Amazon rainforest, the lungs of our planet, producing 20% of the world’s oxygen. Greenland’s ice sheet is melting so fast it has caused global sea levels to rise 0.5mm in just one month.” The air we breathe is currently and consistently being polluted even if we aren’t noticing. Fast fashion doesn’t just have an effect on nature, it also affects us, and things in our everyday lives. The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe. It is happening all around us, whether we see it or not. In the article “These facts show how unsustainable the fashion industry is,” Morgan McFall-Johnsen

(2020), a senior science reporter, writes, “The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of annual global carbon emissions. Overall, microplastics are estimated to compose up to 31% of plastic pollution in the ocean.” A large percentage of the world's pollution comes from the fast fashion industry, and the materials it takes to make them. It also comes from overconsumption, and not recycling them properly. All of which play a huge role in the climate change problem we are facing as a planet today.

It’s not just the cheap, easily accessible brands you should be worrying about either. Oftentimes, the more expensive and luxury brands still use harmful materials, such as synthetic fibers and traditionally grown cotton. Synthetic fibers come from plastic, which isn’t biodegradable, and therefore harmful to the planet if not recycled properly. They are especially harmful when they’re being produced in mass amounts. In the article Ethical fashion myths: Debunking 6 harmful misconceptions: Sustainable fashion blog: Project CECE, Giada Nizzole(2021), an author from Project CECE, wrote, “Traditionally grown cotton, for example, requires around 2,700 liters of water to make a single t-shirt, involves lots of pesticides, and leads to soil degradation.” Although some brands may label themselves as sustainable, there's lists of factors that go into it that say otherwise, such as materials used, how they were made, what it took to make them, etc.

Along with its harmful products, the longevity of fast fashion clothing is foolishly short. Each brand follows the fashion trends at the current moment, which a lot of the time go out of style in just a couple months, leaving people to discard their easily accessible cheap clothes, in a not-so-friendly eco way. In the article “Why you should buy clothes to last (almost) forever,”

Michael J. Coren(2023), a Climate Advice Columnist, writes that, “fast fashion moving from design to retail rack in less than 15 days — and often lasting no more than 10 wearings.”

Michael(2023) also goes on to write that, “fast fashion’s sartorial sugar rush fades fast: 11.3 million tons of textiles ended up in landfills in 2018.” The short life-span of fast fashion is causing the brands to have to make more clothes, way faster and in more mass productions. They are trying to keep up to date with the current trends, which is ultimately hurting our planet.

Michael(2023) gives some ways to build your closet with sustainable fashion, “Learn to recognize quality and value, find your personal style, avoid the temptation of ‘sales’, and set a price.” Each tactic can help you stay sustainable, while still enjoying your fashion style.

The workers are often forgotten about in this gigantic business, their struggles going unnoticed by the public. A lot of the production happens in the more poor, 3rd world countries, In the article “Fast fashion | History, Definition, Brands, Companies, Environmental Impact, Waste, & Facts,” Dylan Kelleher(2024), a freelance contributor, wrote, “Most clothing production is done in the Global South, including postcolonial countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, where laborers have few protections against long hours and unfair wages. Garment workers also labor in unsafe conditions, including windowless spaces, dangerously high temperatures, violent managers, and harmful chemical exposure.” The workers are often exploited, and they don’t make nearly enough money for the work they do. They also face physical and mental consequences, such as working with the dangerous materials, and mental abuse from their employers.

There are various things we can do to help limit the damage from fast fashion. Consumerism plays a big role in the fast fashion industry, so that could be a big first step. Some can start practicing “slow fashion” which is defined by Dylan Kelleher(2024) as, “purchasing

fewer and higher-quality pieces of clothing. Although more expensive, such clothing can last longer.” Another idea that some have started is “Mindful manufacturing, an idea championed by 3D printing company Stratasys, is the concept of developing more efficient production, sound chemical and solid waste disposal practices, reusable materials, and recycled packaging.”(Hayes, 2024). Limiting the giant hauls, the cheap clothing stores, and researching your brands before buying all can help influence the impact of fast fashion. Recycling your clothes properly also can have positive impacts. Getting yourself educated on these harmful brands can also help.

Fast fashion isn't just limited to the cheap brands, and it has lasting impacts on the environment, the workers, and our everyday life. There are many ways to help stop, or limit the dangerous effects it has on our planet. Researching this topic gave me a whole new insight on the dangers that come from the fast fashion industry. I had no idea how much pollution was created from a single piece of clothing. I want to reduce my personal carbon footprint and help save our environment for our future generations. Thanks to my research, I now want to look more into brands before I buy, and really look at the impacts this kind of clothing has. Greta Thunburg said, “I believe that one person can make a difference.” Be that person, set the curve. If not for us, then for the future of our planet.

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