

FAST FASHION

IT HURTS MORE THAN JUST OUR WALLETS

BY XXXX XXXXXX

Icons: \$, 30° wash, no bleach, no dry clean, iron

Fast fashion is an an increasingly popular high fashion trend that involves mass production of catwalk replicas. Unfortunately, this cheap, trendy production largely impacts the environment and many following consequences.

Sewing machine after sewing machine, fluorescent lights glare down onto the workers, their eyes droopy and hands aching from hours of repetitive, damaging work. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a thrilled teenager purchases her second \$7 top of the week, the wave of dopamine washing over her again.

Fast Fashion- a term many of us are familiar with, but let's admit it, we don't often consider its effects when buying clothing. You're only buying one cheap t-shirt, what's the damage? Really, fast fashion is much more harmful to our environment and garment workers than to our wallets. With the advancing technology, clothes are becoming easier and faster to make, and are less valued than when they had to be time consumingly hand sewed at great expense.

However, the difference between the slow fashion where materials were hand sewn and fast fashion is that companies forfeit the quality of their materials in order to make their products cheaper. Worldwide, fast fashion is affecting us all, whether you contribute to the craze or not.

Unfortunately, by forfeiting the quality, this means the clothes wear out easier, and lots of them are thrown out after new ones are bought, creating mountains of waste. [redacted] textiles teacher [redacted] is an expert in this field, with years of experience in the textiles area. When second hand shopping, she has noticed that many of the clothes are "simply made and not always made well". Because of this, she chooses not to buy them and these low quality produced clothes remain in the store. She keeps in mind the low wages the workers earn and tries to buy New Zealand made clothing as to not support fast fashion.

The appealing prices of clothes causes overconsumption- resulting in increased production with little reuse of the clothing. Research by the movement WorldCleanUpDay states "we now buy 400% more items of clothing than we did just twenty years ago", and around 52 micro seasons (new collections) are produced a year by fast fashion brands- that's about one per week (Timeline, TheGoodTrade). Popular brands such as H&M, Zara and TopShop also



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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP:

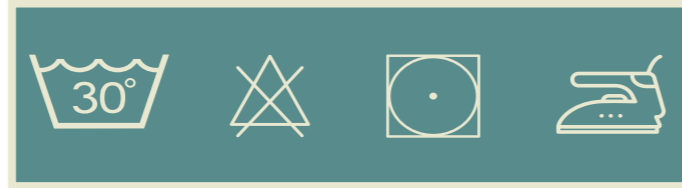
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- Buy less or from sustainable brands
- Buy quality made clothes to prevent breakage and discourage cheaply made clothes
- Repair old clothes or repurpose them

contribute to the pollution created by fast fashion. Many synthetic fabrics contain microfiber plastics. These are small threads of plastic that get stripped off our clothes in the washing machine and travel through wastewater, destined for the ocean. Through these fossil fuel based fabrics; polyester, nylon, acrylic and more, waterways are polluted with toxic dyes, and oceans are filled with microfiber plastics.

When I ask what are the common ways to get rid of your clothes, what comes to mind? Recycling, taking them to a second hand store or a clothes bin spring to mind for me. However, according to the World Clean Up Day movements website, their information shows that for some clothes, recycling processes are not very efficient because fast fashion has become so extreme.

Donating is an eco-friendly way to dispose of unwanted clothes. Despite this, and perhaps due to the constant new trends created by the 52 micro seasons, only around 10-40% of these donated clothes find a new home. Recycling your clothes is not very effective either. Worldwide, only 12% of clothing material is recycled, causing 92 million tons of fabric waste each year and only 1% of this recycled material is used for clothing. The rest is used as insulation, furniture stuffing or cleaning cloths. Flanagan also mentions that some stores the amount of clothes going to the landfill.



History

Because the term 'fast-fashion' has only been coined in recent years, the concept seems fairly modern, and this may be why its effects can be overlooked. However, the first patent of the sewing machine in 1755 rapidly increased the production time of clothing from previously hand stitching and tailor made clothes. The time period after World War Two is often seen as the beginning of the worldwide eruption of consumption, and in 1920, production in the United States of America was around 12 times more than in 1860, despite the population only increasing by three times.

Prior to the industrial revolution, clothes were more valued due to the process being more time consuming. Workers had to source the raw material before hand sewing each garment. Because of this, the garments were more treasured and were repaired as much as possible instead of immediately thrown out.

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In 1966, a US paper company went viral for creating paper dresses to promote their products- marking the beginning of fast fashion. The \$1.25 dresses, which were originally produced as a joke, ended up selling 500,000 units in only eight months, ultimately proving the US was ready for fast fashion. Soon enough, marketers jumped at the opportunity. Paper slippers, jumpsuits, gowns and more flooded the market, making over \$3.5 million by the end of the year.

Garment Workers

Fast fashion also contributes to the exploitation of garment workers, who often have to work unbearably long hours in dirty working conditions, only for insufficient pay. For example, in Bangladesh, there is a large leather industry that exports \$1 billion worth of leather per year. However, in order to achieve this the country blatantly ignores their labour and environmental laws, so much to the point where waterways are blue because of the harmful chemicals in the 21,000 cubic metres of untreated water that is dumped daily as stated by news website PBS.org. The leather is also processed without protective equipment from these chemicals. Inside these chemicals are carcinogenic agents such as Chromium, and being exposed to these chemicals can lead to lung disease, lung cancer, bronchitis and many more.

An estimated 2% of the 75 million garment workers earn a living wage, and of these, 75% are women between the ages of 18-24, reports [LowestWageChallenge](#), a foundation combined of two ethically sourced clothing companies. These statistics greatly contribute to systemic poverty and keep these workers in the poverty cycle.

The concept of fast fashion seems fairly intimidating and one clothing item doesn't seem like it does much. And on its own that's right, it doesn't. But globally, if we all took a moment to consider that what we are supporting may be much more than one low quality top, maybe working conditions would increase. Maybe parts of the environment could heal and garment workers may be able to break the poverty cycle. Yes it can be inconvenient, and in the moment that could be the top of your dreams, however, with the ever changing trends, this will likely change by next week. Consider second hand shops and websites first- it's better for everyone.

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Second hand store “ ”