

CONNECT

FAST FASHION: EDITORS ERIN T & BETHAN D



4 HOWELL'S CO-ED COLLEGE
Llandaff

WEEK BEGINNING 4TH OCTOBER 2021

What is fast fashion?

'Fast Fashion' is used to describe mass manufactured clothing, typically at a low cost. This clothing is generally produced by low wage workers in developing countries. Fashion is an industry that frequently changes, with new trends, styles, and seasonal ranges. To meet those needs, the industry must keep the supply chain working constantly to produce and distribute new fashions.



Environmental Impact

Fast fashion is allegedly one of the largest polluters in the world. With people buying increasing amounts of clothes, the impact on the environment intensifies with statistics showing that on average one consumer in the UK sends 30kg of clothing and textiles to landfill each year. One of the biggest issues surrounding the fast fashion industry is that the many sweatshops and warehouses where the product is made often dump oil, unwanted fabric, dyes, and pesticides into their local rivers. These then make their way to the ocean, having a large impact on our dying coral reefs and growing garbage patches.

Most clothing is made of polyester, which is a petroleum-based fibre and isn't easily recyclable, therefore it normally ends up in landfill once its fashionable lifecycle is over. This requires fossil fuels for manufacture and can take up to 200 years to biodegrade. Polyester is often the main culprit of microplastics in ocean.

Workers: Fast fashion companies can also be responsible for serious ethical problems. Many companies steal ideas from independent designers and use sweatshops to manufacture their products. Today more than 40.3 million people across the world are victims of modern-day slavery, with women and girls making up 71% of this statistic. Sweatshops are found all over the world from Leicester to Los Angeles to Bangladesh. Only 2% of garment workers earn a living wage and 80% of clothing sold in the EU ends up in landfill. Many of our clothes are made in conditions where workers rights are limited or non-existent, with garment workers often being required to work 14-16 hours a day, 7 days a week. Employees often work with no ventilation, breathing in toxic substances and inhaling fibre dust in unsafe buildings. Accidents, fires, injuries, and disease are also very frequent occurrences in textile production sites.

Worst Offenders: Brands such as Shein, Primark, Missguided, Wish, H&M and Nike are considered to be the worst fast fashion brands. For example, it appears that Shein finds popular designs from other retailers and makes cheap copies of them. Sometimes the item on the picture is the original and when your item arrives, it can often look very different from the picture. Therefore, Shein is often accused of deceiving customers and destroying the environment, by using hazardous chemicals, microplastics and high carbon emissions.

Another example is Nike; statistics have shown that their high consumer demand leads to them selling over 25 pairs of shoes a second which is more than 2 million pairs a day. In addition, the use of toxic chemicals in shoe production causes damage to the environment and can be hazardous to the workers.

Overconsumption: In the US, the average person buys a new piece of clothing every 5 days; overconsumption and increase in consumer demand leads to excess clothes being manufactured which are disposed of irresponsibly. 80 billion new pieces of clothing are consumed each year worldwide, causing textile production to have doubled in the last 15 years. To transform this amount of fabric into 80 billion pieces of clothing it takes one-thousand and seventy-four billion kilowatt hours of electricity, for which we need 132 million tonnes of coal and between six and nine trillion litres of water.

- 100 billion items of clothing are produced each year
- 3 in 5 fast fashion garments end up in landfill within a year of purchase
- The fashion industry is responsible for an estimated 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions
- Over 1/3 of all microplastics in the ocean come from synthetic textiles
- Only 13% of clothing and footwear is recycled
- It takes over 1800 gallons of water to make one pair of jeans
- 1 in 6 people in the world works in a fashion related job

Greenwashing

Greenwashing is the act of conveying a misleading impression about a company's environmental policies. It is seen particularly in brands such as H&M and their 'Conscious' collection. This marketing strategy is used to mislead customers into believing companies are more ethical and sustainable than they really are.

Films and documentaries to watch:

- The True Cost
- Stacey Dooley Investigates: Fashion's Dirty Secrets
- Made in Bangladesh: The women behind the label
- Alex James: Slowing down fast fashion



Books to read:

- The Conscious Closet
- Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes
- To Die for: Is Fashion Wearing Out the World?

Alternative options

We can help in several ways such as buying from sustainable and ethically conscious companies. These clothes can often be more expensive due to the quality of the item, however they last much longer than a garment from, for example, Shein or Primark. Buying second hand is a popular option for those trying to be more environmentally conscious, as it reduces consumption and manufacturing.

Ethical brands ensure that their workers are treated fairly across the supply chain. This includes policies and practices on child labour, forced labour, worker safety, the right to join a union and payment of a living wage. An ethical brand also cares about its use of resources and energy, reducing its carbon emissions and impact on our waterways, as well as using and disposing of chemicals safely. Finally, an ethical brand uses no or very few animal products, like wool, leather, fur, angora, down feather, shearling, karakul, and exotic animal skin and hair. Ideally the brand is 100% vegan!

Apps such as 'Good on You' can be used to judge how ethical clothing companies are and rates the impact on their workers, the planet, and animals.

Try not to buy clothes unless you need them! Always think of alternatives first but if you are interested, here are some sustainable and ethical shops to buy from:

- Depop
- Thrift+
- CHNGE: Fairtrade fashion

Also, we can support second-hand clothing shops and charity shops – giving a piece of pre-loved clothing a new home and raising money for a good cause at the same time! Think carefully about how you dispose of clothing. Can it be reused or repurposed? We would love to hear your ideas for combatting these issues!