

It's 2021 and everyone has heard of the practice of 'sustainability'. This particular word has become popular in the fashion industry, but what is sustainability really? To start, its exact definition is the "ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level or the avoidance of the depletion of natural resources to maintain an ecological balance". There are many ways to sustain that are not always environmental. There's societal and economic sustainability—but we are going to focus on the environmental aspect, particularly in the fashion industry.

In today's fast-paced world, everything is at our fingertips: from fast food restaurants to instant information from technology, Ubers, and of course, fashion. With trends coming and going at the speed of lightning, it may be hard to keep up and to be satisfied with the items you already have without being criticized for being out of style. Many trends are typically set by celebrities, but as average middle-class citizens, we can not afford Gucci and Prada unless we break the bank. Now, how do middle-class people afford to look like their idols and wealthy counterparts? In comes fast fashion. Fast fashion, by definition, is clothing made to replicate high-end fashion designs worn by celebrities. Although this may sound enticing because we have the opportunity to look like our favorite celebs, it is damaging to the environment. Let me explain.

To start, fast fashion companies market their items to the vast majority telling them to be like their idols by limiting their self-confidence and or esteem. Social media on its own is a powerful tool, especially when influencing others. So when you have fashion brands like Fashion Nova and Pretty Little Thing marketing clothing on models with tiny waists, huge breasts, and huge butts (it's not a common body type for most women, however, it does exist) it makes society believe that if you wear these clothes, then you can look like these models and only then you are beautiful. When in actuality it is not true at all. Everybody is beautiful and societal standards of beauty will always be flawed. This is one way this industry impacts the societal aspect of sustainability.

In terms of the environment, these companies are contributing a huge proportion to climate change. For one, there are tons and tons of waste that gets dumped into the landfills. According to "The Pretty Planteer", fashion companies and consumers produce

13 million tons of textile waste each year! Quite a number. Not only do fashion companies add to the landfills and burn any unwanted clothing or items that did not sell, but they also produce 20% of the world's water waste. Masses of water are needed to produce these clothes. According to "Attire Media" they said, "experts estimate that it takes about 2,720 liters of water to make one cotton shirt and a whopping 7,000 liters to make one pair of jeans"! When it comes to the material the clothing is made out of, they are typically cheap and are not made to be long lasting—hence it's quickly made and trends do not last long. One of the main materials used to make this clothing is polyester. Polyester is a synthetic fiber— a common plastic used in packaging and water bottles. Plastic is a compound that is not easily discarded, so the fast fashion industry is creating items that are not easily biodegradable and damaging to the environment.

Working conditions within these companies are harmful and not ethical whatsoever. The individuals making the clothing items are not paid a livable wage, meaning that they are getting paid under the minimum wage. They are also working in inhumane conditions. According to "SustainYourStyle.org", "Garment workers are often forced to work 14 to 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. During peak season, they may work until 2 or 3 am to meet the fashion brand's deadline". The workers work long, arduous hours without rest and are often forced to continue working despite their safety. So this can include if someone were to get an injury from a machine, they have to continue working despite the injury which is dehumanizing, especially to the rights they have as workers. Fast fashion companies often use child labor as well. Child labor is formed from families having such a low income that their children have to work to ensure that they can get a meal and basic needs in life. These children are also exposed to dehumanized environments and long working hours. Some of the safety concerns in such working conditions include verbal and physical abuse, no air ventilation, working in tight spaces, breathing in toxic chemicals, and many more.

So now you may be wondering, "what can we do to end this issue"? The sad truth is that fast fashion will likely not go away anytime soon, but there are practices and alternatives one can take to help the cause while also developing their style. One

practice can be limiting the amount of clothing you are consuming. How many times have you bought an item and only worn it a few times for it to be discarded? Instead of over-consuming, spend less so that you are saving money and it is not going to these corporations. Another thing you can do is invest in sustainable clothing brands. Yes, sustainable brands are not the most budget-friendly, but it is not without reason. If you buy an item from a sustainable brand, you are investing in ethical practices and receiving items that are of greater quality. So now instead of getting that 25-dollar shirt from Fashion Nova that wears down after a short period, you can have a shirt that is made to last long, no matter how many times you wash it (eventually it will wear down with washes and time, but it won't occur as quickly).

Another fantastic alternative to buying clothes would be to thrift your items! Thrifting allows one to discover unique vintage pieces and provides room for your style instead of following trends. Not only is it like digging through a treasure box, most times you are buying these items at extremely low costs, similar to some fast fashion brands like Shein, which offers clothing at a low price. However, beware of how much you thrift because overconsumption can always occur. In addition, when it comes to thrift stores, keep in mind that thrift stores are a resource for low-income individuals, so be cautious of what you may be taking from someone who may need something. But as always, thrifting is always a fun, and amazing alternative.

Now that we have discovered fast fashion and its many downsides, the choice is up to you to support these brands or not. For some individuals, fast fashion is the only option for them to receive clothing, but if you have an alternative way to purchase your clothing, do so! A small difference is a change in the environment around you.

Sustainability is a healthy lifestyle that allows one to use the resources around them and understand their impact on this earth. The sustainable journey is not a quick fix or an easy one but it is a solution to preserve this beautiful planet that we live on.