# **Fast Fashion and its Effects**

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COM 1010: Composition and Critical Thinking

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October 5, 2024

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Globally, each year, there are about 92 million tonnes of textile waste. However, only 12% of textile produced is recycled (Igini, 2023). With the influence of social media, clothing trends seem to come and go within months. Because of social media’s pressure to keep up with fashion trends, perfectly good clothing gets thrown out and replaced with the new. Rapidly changing trends demand that consumers are consistently buying new pieces of clothing to keep up. However, the average consumer cannot afford to replace their wardrobe every few months, resulting in cheaper, non-brand alternatives rising in popularity. The thrift stores available to low-income communities have increased significantly in price due to their rise in popularity. Non-name brands of clothing still need to make a profit, which leads to the employees who make the clothing taking the brunt of the cut cost. Emma Barnes wrote a small entry in the book *They Say / I Say*, which touches on the subject, leading to one fact: Fast fashion is bad for both the environment and humanity.

## Discussion

Fast fashion is bad for humanity because of the growing demand and non-changing wages for children whose labor goes into the manufacturing of the clothing. So-called “cheap alternatives” to name brand clothing may give cheap options to consumers who do not want to go through the process of thrift shopping, but the production of the cheap alternatives has a detrimental effect on the people who have to make those clothes, as well as the landfills once the clothes are no longer seen as useful. Non-name brand clothing is sold for a significantly lower price than its name-brand counterparts. However, in a greedy attempt to increase profits further, the corporations who make them pay their laborers even less. “Because of this poor compensation, employees must work ‘12 to 16 hours a day, and regularly 80 hours a week’ (Alam and Hearson 4)” (Barnes p. 480).

A staggering amount of inexpensive clothing ends up in landfills within just a year of purchase, creating a significant environmental issue. Numerous statistics and witnesses of landfills illustrate just how large in volume fabric waste has become, a problem that has only intensified with the rise of fast fashion. The fast-fashion industry prioritizes rapid production and consumption, leading to the now unsustainable cycle of clothing. In the last 15 years, the number of times a garment is worn before being discarded and replaced has decreased 36% (Igini 2024).

The consequences extend beyond waste management; they also impact the rights and working conditions of those involved in the fashion supply chain. As noted by Barnes, “Our maladaptive notion of fast fashion is debilitating both worker’s rights and environmental safety, after which these clothes occupy landfills with as little as one year” (Barnes p. 480). This calls attention to the urgent need for a shift in our consumer habits and industry practices, as the true cost of fast fashion is reflected not only in the mountains of discarded clothing but also in the lives and livelihoods affected by this relentless cycle.

The solution is not only buying secondhand clothing, but researching ethical, sustainable brands and building better habits. A large influx in thrift culture results from shopping secondhand becoming more “trendy.” Before its rise in social media popularity, it was seen as dirty and was looked down on. Those who depend on secondhand clothing now struggle with the rise in prices because of people that shop second hand purely because it has become trendy, not because they need to buy their clothes at a lower price point. The purpose of secondhand clothing options is not to be trendy, it is to provide low-cost clothing to those who need it from an ethical source.

“The sale-hungry consumers also possess the ‘time-flexibility’ of being able to visit these stores soon after they are restocked, which working individuals simply do not have,” further infringing on the opportunity of low-income shoppers (Nair)” (Barnes p. 483). People who have the means to buy sustainably and ethically sourced clothing have a responsibility to do so. The result of people purchasing clothes second hand excessively for trends is a significant price increase, which makes it inaccessible for those who need it. Besides thrifting and buying from moral companies, clothing sustainability relies on how long a piece can last before being thrown away.

## Conclusion

Emma Barnes makes many good points in her essay. From carbon emissions and humanitarian rights in making clothing, to pollution after it has been discarded. The key to creating a better world for many is educating oneself on the brands people buy from, and to only buy what is needed. The best thing we as people can do to help in this situation is checking our own biases and habits. Behind every piece of clothing is a number of employees who put work into it. By understanding the impacts of fast fashion, consumers can uphold ethical fashion brands, make informed choices, and save money by taking care of their clothing. Fashion is a staple in most people’s lives, and it gives a first impression of what their personality is like. Let that personality be your own and not the new season’s trend, because cutting down on fast fashion use is only one of the keys to saving this planet.

## References

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