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Consume With Care

On a fine Saturday, you are scrolling through the “For You” page of TikTok, where influencers are showing off the piles of clothes they got from stores like Shein and Forever 21. You think to yourself: *I have to buy what they're wearing; I need to follow the new fashion trends or I will feel like an outcast*. 400 dollars later and an arduous two-week wait, you find your package at the doorsteps, only to scroll through TikTok again and realize that no one wears these pieces anymore. You sigh, and start scrolling through Forever 21 for new clothes to buy.

This scenario is a prime example of over-consumption in fast fashion, which is buying excessive amounts of textiles and surpassing the “sustainable capacity” of the environment. To understand how over-consumption came to be, we have to go back to World War 2. During WW2, unemployment reached a record low of 1.2 percent—still the lowest in the history of the nation—as opposed to the 25 percent during the Great Depression (History.com). Decades after WW2, the US continued its economic surge by giving people more jobs and skyrocketing the level of production. This also puts more money in the hands of the people, allowing disposable income—usually wasted on unnecessary fashion products. This contributed to the rise of malls and shopping centers, and more recently online shopping services. Since then, the U.S economy has grown steadily, largely thanks to our overconsumption.

The fashion industry takes advantage of this insatiable consumption, putting out thousands of new styles daily to keep up with the trends. But what is the cost of manufacturing and distributing millions of garments daily? According to the EPA Office of Solid Waste, a department of the environmental protection agency, “Approximately 85% of the clothing Americans consume, nearly 3.8 billion pounds annually, is sent to landfills as solid waste, amounting to nearly 80 pounds per American per year” (Ehjournal.com). To put that into perspective, think about a full tank of gas. Would you spill 85% of the gas in the tank you just filled onto the ground? Probably not; it's essentially throwing money away. Yet somehow, people are willing to throw away the clothes they bought a few months ago, even though it has never been worn.

Not only is overconsumption wasteful and contributing to landfills, but it is also detrimental to the environment. The Earth is getting landfill at a faster rate than it's decomposing them; fast fashion brands generally use materials like polyester, viscose, and nylon, all of which contain plastic, which takes hundreds of years to decompose. Even when plastic finally breaks down, “they end up in the human food chain