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Dangers of Overconsumption

When Richard Arkwright designed and launched the first semi-automatic spinning machine 250 years ago, he did not know he set in motion to create one of the biggest industries in fashion today. The revolution of the textile industry was crucial to the dominance of the globalized capitalist system still in existence today and eventually emerging the culture of consumerism. The idea of consumerism encourages the consumption of goods and services in an ever-growing amount, sometimes exceeding one's means and that one's happiness is dependent on the possession of such consumer goods and materials (Investopedia Staff). Early adoption of consumerism appeared in the 20th century with a positive connotation with the idea of buying goods leads to an improvement in the efficiency in one's life (Investopedia Staff). Early uses of the term in the mid-20th century were intended to have a positive connotation, which would emphasize the benefits that capitalism had to offer consumers in improving standards of living and an economic policy that would prioritize the interests of consumers, but these meanings have fallen out of general use.

The presence of material goods and services dominates everyday life. Advertisements for the trendiest clothing pieces, the newest technology equipment, to the new famous plastic surgeon office, are everywhere. Consumers are blinded by the Cinderella Syndrome — where one wears an item once, and one never wears it again (ADD SOURCE). Unrealistic standards set

by society is the one of the causes for the deterioration of the state of the environment.

Purchasing a material good contributes to the increase of environmental footprint of a company from the delivery, packaging, production, etc. According to the United Nations, the total greenhouse gas emissions from textile production are currently at 1.2 billion tonnes annually which is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. Emissions are expected to rise by more than 60% by 2030 (United Nations). Not only the exuberant emissions are the cause of air pollution, but the textiles handled by the workers are causing wastewater to emerge from the factories. Recent studies have shown that the washing processes of synthetic clothes contribute to microplastic pollution, making up to 35% of the release of microplastics to the oceans (De Falco et al. #). Synthetic fabrics are composed of tiny plastic microfibers when washed, contaminate the water supply and food chain. Rivers in China, India, Bangladesh, once flourishing, can not be reversed (Malik Chua). Natural habitats are being destroyed to create more material goods and build more facilities affecting the natural landscape of a city. The environment should be maintained at a status quo and not be taken into a second thought (SHUKLA).

The acquisition of excessive material goods and services can cause important damage on psychological grounds. According to Richard Docwra, the Director for the non-profit Life Squared, elaborates on the negative emotions and stress associated with a life dependent on the competition for social status by increasing the consumption (Relajo-Howell). People focused on the values based on status, opulence and social status are exposed to a higher chance of anxiety and depression. The more one wishes for a good or service, the higher anxiety one will experience waiting for such an event to happen or not. In an experiment conducted by Galen V. Bodenhausen at Northwestern University, some students were asked to perform tasks exposing

them to images of luxury goods versus neutral tasks without any consumerist values. After completing a questionnaire at the end of the experiment, the ones who rated themselves higher in depression and anxiety and were least interested in social activities like gatherings and parties were those who were exposed to pictures of jewelry, luxury brands and high-end cars (Bodenhausen). Bodenhausen concluded the research by explaining those conditioned to certain words and societal standards felt more competitive and were the least likely to devote some time to pro bono work for the poor or marginalized communities (Bodenhausen). They report an increase in unhappiness in personal relationships, daily poor moods and general anxiety affecting their everyday life. It is natural to want and desire goods, but it should not consume and dictate one's life choices.

From an economic point-of-view, consumers spending money on goods and services is the key factor in the economic growth for a society. Nonetheless, over consumerism leads to irreversible effects on the environment and the psychological well-being of a person. The unceasing release of microplastics in the oceans and the production of greenhouse gas emissions will slowly degrade the current state of the environment permanently. If we continue to promote values surrounding overconsumption, there will be permanent damage to one's self-esteem and anxiety levels. The overconsumption of material goods and services should be taken with serious thought. Sustainable practices in consumption include shopping at second-hand stores, consignment stores and repurposing goods we already own.

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