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ENGL 110
Research Essay

Fast Fashion is Out of Fashion

As students attending a CUNY, many of us come from working-class or low-income families who do not have access to high fashion/good quality clothing, nor do they have the money to constantly shop for clothing they like. Nowadays, fashion trends change by the week, people purchase an item of clothing only to replace it with another the next month. Products are being produced and consumed and not being used for more than a few days. Although this lack of commitment to a certain product or style may seem enjoyable, it's not as ethically sourced. I want to explore how fast fashion contributes to harming the world on a global scale and dive deeper into what is being done as intervention. By examining the efforts at reform, I want to identify which groups of people face the consequences. With my research I strive to reinforce a different attitude towards shopping from certain brands and the mindset in which we purchase our clothing.

As fast-fashion takes over the marketplace, people are turning a blind eye to how it may negatively be impacting the world on a larger scale. In today's society, when people have events to attend, they shop for new clothes each time whereas in the past, our parents and grandparents passed down their clothes for decades. When trends are constantly changing, and consumers are given the opportunity to make choices that are not of high-cost, making a mistake isn't consequential. As the time gap between production and distribution gets smaller and smaller, the amount of clothes going to waste escalates. In an article explaining the historical rise of fast-fashion and what it actually is, The Good Trade predicts we will reach 160 million tons of clothes by 2050. The ability to ignore the global consequences of mass production and the

pollution that results from it is a privilege those in the west possess, but there are communities and environments that are vulnerable to these issues. This can be explored by looking into the unforeseen problems and the consequences of reform.

As businesses in the industry continue to contribute to fast-fashion by mass-producing fashion trends at a low cost and small gap between production and distribution, many clothes continue to go to waste and the production of them proceeds to pollute the neighboring rivers. Trying to meet production levels with ever-changing trends, has become very consequential to communities and the environment around the textile factories. While the production of such items can be accessible and affordable clothing globally, the damage being done is far greater. Mass production and the pollution of water is an injustice to our environment and people across the world-who sacrifice their communities and the right to general nutritious needs, to provide the world with the newest, top-trending, and affordable clothing. After recognizing the consequences textile industries are having on surrounding communities and environments, many countries around the world have implemented different laws and interventions to address the mass production and water pollution in impacted countries.

In the United States, the Clean Water Act(CWA) in 1972 was a direct effort to address water pollution in the country, establishing federal regulations in order to protect the nation's water supply. Over the course of the years, this act was amended and enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Their job is to do what they can to protect the environment. The EPA administers programs aiming to improve water quality, such as the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, providing financial support towards better water infrastructure. According to the EPA, the CWA required a permit in order to discharge any pollutant from a point source into navigable waters. The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination

System(NPDES) was the permit program created under the CWA, where the EPA would regulate the sources of water pollutants in the US. Since the 1940's, industrial chemicals known as PCB's been used in two General Electric(GE) facilities in New York. GE quickly became responsible for the polluting of the Hudson river. The factories were dumping biodegradable chemicals into the river next to the plant, soon killing off large numbers of fish in the river. PCBs were building up on the river bottom for miles being consumed by the fish, making any contact with the river harmful to humans. As a result, from 1975 to 1995 New York banned fishing in the upper state Hudson. However, they then switched to a catch and release policy. Soon, the EPA got involved and GE was held responsible for the pollution and spent over \$1 billion for a process called dredging. According to GE the crew was able to remove over 300,000 pounds of PCBs from the Hudson. Once the PCBs were removed it was replaced with fresh fill and planted vegetation underwater to make the river healthy again. The EPA was responsible for this ongoing process of reform in the Hudson and the regulation of water across the country.



When looking at the case of the Citarum river in Indonesia, the country attempted to limit the pollution by creating new laws. According to The Diplomat, at least 20,000 tons of garbage and 340,000 tons of wastewater are dumped into the Citarum on a daily basis, the polluter being over 2,000 textile industries. In order to hold such polluters accountable, laws were to be

enforced by government agencies and programs were initiated to help clean up the water. Programs like the Asian Development Bank, provided a \$500 million loan to finance a cleanup plan for the River basin. The Bekasi river was identified as one of the most polluted parts of the river, so the ADB financed an engineering project that had the canal water run beneath the Bekasi River in order to reach the capital, clean and safe. Environmental activists also pushed for the regulation of global water testing levels. The government involved agencies such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Environmental Impact Management Agency to be responsible for controlling the pollution in the water. ADB partnered the Ministry of Health to support community initiatives, showcasing the devolution of power and need for collaboration once again in order to reach a sustainable level of wastewater treatment throughout the country.



The consequences of these interventions have aided in reducing the water pollution across the world. In both cases, significant investments were made in terms of hiring agencies, consistent advocacy, funding new plans, and setting new regulations. In order to have such reform, the devolution of power was a necessary asset. The collaboration of environmental organizations, citizens, government agencies, and the overall industry, was necessary in making

these changes. It's important to highlight that reform and intervention looks different across the world. The process called dredging that was done in the Hudson could not possibly be done to the Citarum. Knowing the length and cost of such a process, the Indonesian community cannot afford such a process-both financial and agriculturally. The country relies on the river for their water supply for drinking, bathing, cooking, cleaning, and farming. Not many people relied on the Hudson for their daily meal. If Indonesians are to stop using or interacting with the river, like the people near the Hudson were during the fishing ban, where will they source their needs from? People rely on the river for water According the DW documentary "The world's most polluted river", regardless of how filthy the water is, 30 million people depend on it to farm and supply themselves with food.

Overall, the efforts at reform and attempts to address water pollution in Indonesia and the US have had positive impacts in terms of improved water quality and reduced pollution in some areas. The devolution of authority was a crucial asset for such reform to occur, as the process required the collaboration of government, citizens, advocacy groups, and environmental organizations. However, such reform came with challenges including funding and inadequate enforcement of regulations. Indonesia is not as wealthy as a country like the US, who faces more political pressure to create a sustainable environment, therefore it is much more difficult for them to push for better regulation and wastewater treatment. This factor of privilege in western countries hinders the effectiveness in addressing the problem of mass-production and the pollution of our water but nevertheless, intervention and reform has led to the improvement of the cause. If one cannot find affordable, ethically sourced clothing, therefore want to continue to shop from stores like H&M and Zara, go in with the mindset of purchasing for the long run. Fight the urge to participate in every trend. Ask yourself, will I like this or be able to use it in a

year? How about two? If not, It's not worth your money. Fast Fashion is something we actively participate in our daily lives. Learning about how we are affecting our environment and other people we can't see across the world is very important if we want to create a better planet for all.

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