The Fashion Industry and Pollution

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The fashion industry is considered one of the top pollutants in not only today but throughout history. Methods that are used create a enormous amount of waste and pollution. I will discuss the major process that cause environmental harm, also stating the most harmful process. I will also state where most textiles and garments are produced. I will go through various issues with fibers, dyes, printing, and finishing. I will discuss alternatives for the fashion industry and how the government, manufactures and consumers/individuals can contribute and change the direction of the fashion industry.

There are major textile processes that cause a lot of environmental impact in the fashion industry. From harming land to farm natural fibers, which use pesticides and other chemicals to keep these fibers alive and bug free. To the harsh chemicals used to make regenerated and synthetic fibers. These process not only cause an impact on the environment but also irreversible damage to it. Most factories that manufacture textiles dispose the waste they create in land fills or water streams. These toxic pollutants such as pesticides, chemicals, and petrochemicals do easily wash away in water affecting aquatic life. They also seep into the land making it hard for it to sustain life and grow.

Dyeing is the most harmful process in the fashion industry and most dyes are created from chemicals. In fact, dyes make up twenty percent of wastewater. Which comes from factory plants that dispose of this in the water channels, which eventually lead to the ocean and spread globally. This process affects aquatic life, and life that lives by the water channel. Two hundred thousand tons of dye are lost to effluents every year. And most factories do not treat of filter the chemicals

before disposing it. In fact, ninety percent of dye wastewater comes developing countries and big corporations seek cheaper labor work.

Textiles and garments are produced everywhere in the world. But in Asia we see the highest number of producers in the world. China is the number 1 leading producer in textiles and garments. Making about 190,845,722 in 2016, Vietnam coming in second with 30,552,002 and India right behind with 28,563,131. These countries have the most production compared to European nations barely grazing 15-20 million dollars. And the U.S making about 16 million. Individually China, Vietnam, and India lead the world. But collectively by continent, Asia leads the world following Europe and then North America. The main reason Asia, particularly China lead the world in textile and production of garments is because the labor for corporations is cheap and regulations aren't strict.

The problem that comes from fibers, dyes, printing, and finishing is the way that it impacts the environment. We know that two hundred thousand tons of dyes are lost to effluents every year. Printing is harmful because of chemicals such as printing paste and needing the energy to power machines to print. Sand blasting and using acids and chemicals to add finishes to denim jeans pollute air quality and lead to very severe health problems. Fibers such as natural ones cause harm because of pesticides and farming. Synthetic and regenerated fabrics use harsh chemicals and petrochemicals to be created.

Alternatives to the fashion industry have already been implemented through out the world. To preserve the environment and make more conscious

manufacturing, many chemicals have already been banned. Nations such as the U.S and Canada have banned the use of dyes in the azo group. China has been stricter on its regulations, cracking down on many illegal and unorthodox business and labor practices. Corporations have been switching to more eco-friendly or organic materials. Farming techniques have changed to not only produce more natural fibers but better quality as well. Although change has happened to better the fashion industry, not enough has progressed. The fashion industry is the second highest polluter in the world behind the oil industry. Change not only starts with better practices, but with stricter regulations. The governments of the world can help by creating departments to monitor factories strictly and create regulations on how to dispose of waste properly and effectively. Manufacturers can create ways to reuse the waste they create and also switch to environmentally friendly techniques such as creating natural dyes instead of chemical ones. Using different types of finishes such as enzymes and lasering. Digital printing is a better practice than paste printing. Individuals have a lot of control over this as we control where we spend our money. Spending money wisely and investing in more quality and eco friendly products will without a doubt spark the change needed to reduce the pollution greatly. Instead of purchasing cheaply made clothes, investing in quality pieces will not only look better, but save money as well. Reusing old materials from worn down clothes or giving worn down clothes a second life, i.e. worn-down clothes becoming chore clothing or gym wear. individuals can do more for the fashion industry by doing a minimum effort.

Learning about textiles in class has changed how I view the fashion industry. Now being more conscious of things are made, it impacts my purchasing habits. It also changed my taste of garments, as I now shop for better produced quality items rather than cheaply made fast fashion. I also consider how textiles are made and if the chemicals and processes put into it affect me and my body. I learned to look at the care label and properly take care of my clothes to get the best life out of the product. I have changed a lot of habits I never realized I was doing because I learned so much from my textile class.

Appendix

Figure 1- Effluents from factories

Figure 2- displays where other factory waste and old fabrics end up in landfills

Figure 3 – harsh chemicals being released into the air.

Figure 4- the leading nations of textile and garment producing. China being the

number 1 in both categories.

Figure 5- Ecofriendly labels found in clothes or tags

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