



★
FASHION
WEEK
OS42
COLLECTION
♡ BY FIE ♡

About the Work

For my final project, I chose to study how America's fashion industry has changed over the course of the last hundred years. While researching my topic, I came across a key turning point in the industry: when women stopped sewing, altering, and mending clothes for their families. This sudden shift from self-sufficiency to consumerism caused the ready-to-wear industry to boom, and without alterations and mending, it caused Americans to cycle through clothes quicker than ever. When coming across this, I decided making my own small collection of clothes would be the perfect art piece to coincide with my research.

I wanted each of the garments I made to be unique from one another, as well as trendy. I feel like they were somewhat inspired by vintage styles, but I wanted to keep them modern to show that while sewing your own clothes is deemed as a thing of the past, it's certainly still relevant. I wanted my work to have more of an empowering aspect to it through the idea of self-sufficiency. I had never sewn clothes before this project, I knew nothing about it, and I didn't use any patterns. While learning how to make clothes that fit me and actually looked good was certainly a challenge, I wanted to spread the idea that if you don't like the way someone else is doing things, do it yourself. I don't like the way the fashion industry is running nowadays, so I set out to run things my way, sustainably and stylishly.

I used all vintage, repurposed, or environmentally friendly fabrics, and I even naturally dyed some of my fabric with plants. I chose to use these materials because my research was centered around sustainability. My choice of old and reused materials contributes to the message that virtually anyone can make their own clothes-- it doesn't require a bunch of new, fancy fabric or tons of experience.



My process consisted of a lot of different steps: everything from sketching out my initial ideas, measuring myself and making up my own patterns on paper, pinning the cut fabrics onto myself, and sewing the pieces together. Teaching myself how to make this all work was a challenge in itself. There were many bumps along the way with things not working out how I'd originally intended. It took a lot of playing around with different materials and laying them out to get an idea of the work before sewing things together for my designs to fully take form. I think the development of new ideas as I worked on the project shaped my vision into a more unique and polished collection. Changing initial plans throughout the journey is all part of the artistic process.

I think each of my pieces works together nicely to create the collection as a whole. The colors and textures of the fabrics used in the work are very diverse, and so are each of the outfit styles, but they all work so well together, each bringing something new to the table. From my work, I hope that viewers take away one thing: if you don't like something that's going on in the world, do what you can to change it. The mistreatment of garment workers, the disastrous environmental pollution, and the downright waste of clothing in this country infuriates me. Instead of just complaining about it, I'm choosing to do what I can to lessen my own impact, as well as spreading the word so others may try to do the same. Sewing your own clothes can make use of old fabrics, minimize fashion waste, and give you a unique wardrobe. As you can see in my work, it doesn't take years of practice to create something fashionable-- all it takes is a little determination.

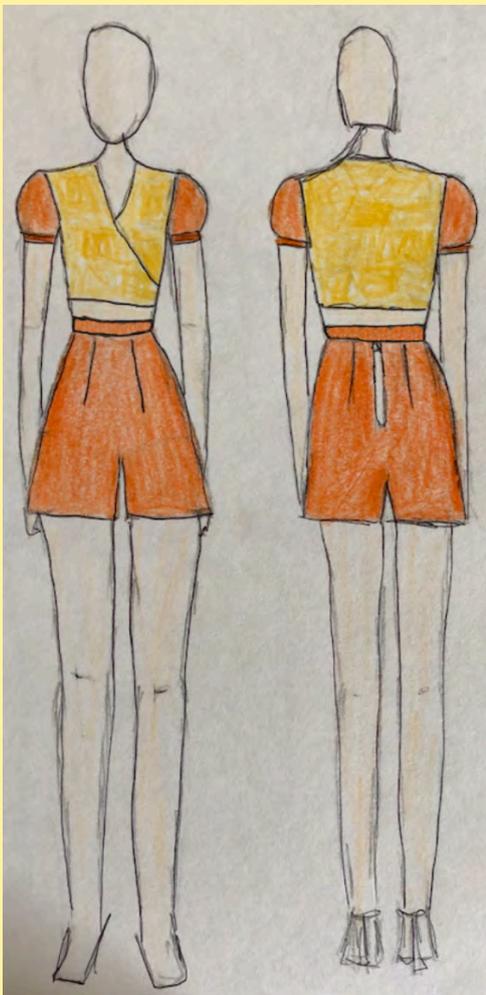


I wanted the clover sundress to be fun and flirty, yet simple. The vintage, lightweight, clover-print fabric was perfect for a springtime look. The design changed a bit as I neared the finishing touches. I played around with many neckline and strap combinations before deciding on the clovers and pink ribbon. I think the dress perfectly captures the feeling of the first warm day of spring--made for picnicking and tea parties.



The Clover Sundress

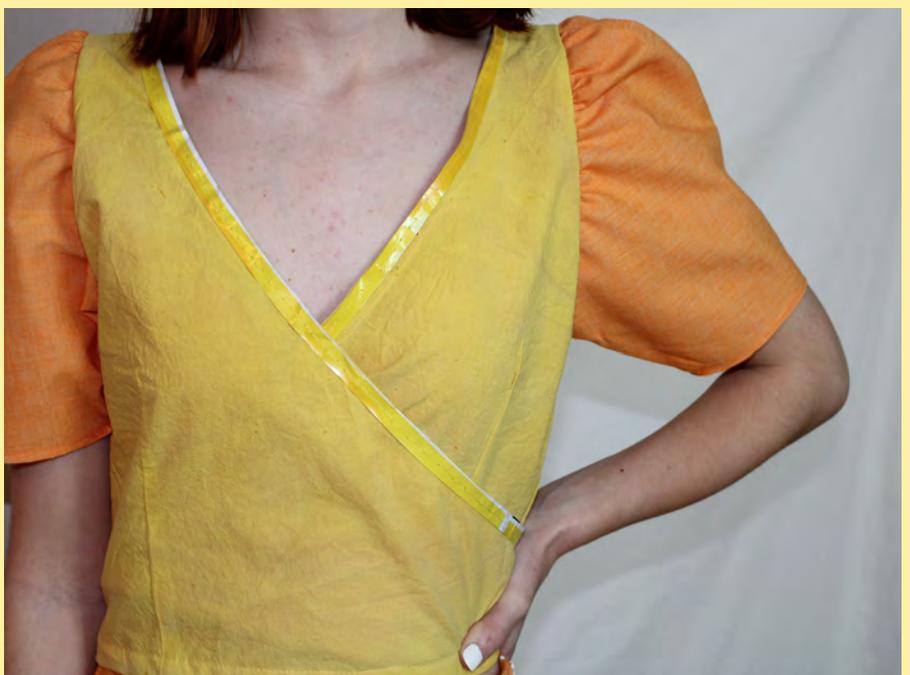




The Wrap(per) top, complete with snippets of chip wrappers as embellishments, is everything I'd hoped for and more. I naturally dyed 100% organic, unbleached cotton muslin with dandelions and tumeric to achieve the perfect golden hue. The puff sleeves, made of the same vintage fabric as the shorts, juxtapose the sharp lines of the wrap top neckline, and add a sheer sense of power to the piece. The Clementine shorts, tailored with clean lines, are simple, yet stunning. The bright colors of this top and short set make a bold statement.

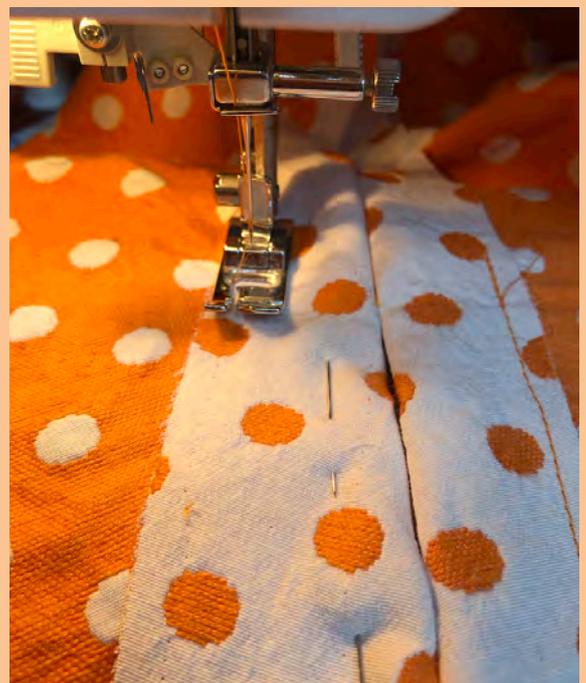


*The Wrap(per) Top +
The Clementine Shorts*





The dotted romper is the perfect playful outfit, from the beach to a barbecue. The lace-up back is the perfect detail to spruce up this cute yet simple design. The vintage, reversible fabric worked well for the removable belt, and the cuffs at the neckline and bottom of the shorts for a bolder pop of color.

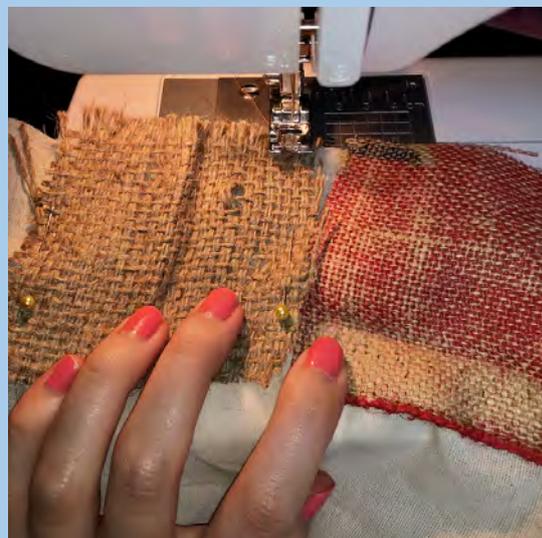


The Dotty Romper

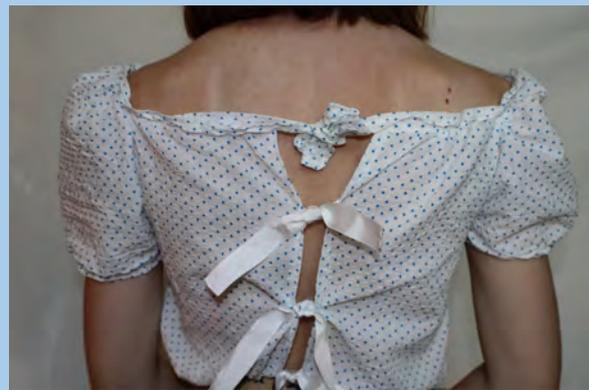




The Bubble top is the perfect airy, romantic piece, and the teeny tiny polkadots on the vintage fabric make it even cuter. From the ruffle around the neckline to the ties at the back, it's got just enough frill and flair to pair well with the simplicity of the skirt. The Burlap Patchwork skirt, made of scraps of burlap, also reuses the zipper of the ricebag. While the skirt is simple in it's design, the patchwork pattern, with the colors and textures of the burlap, make the skirt the statement piece that it is.



The Bubble Top + The Burlap Patchwork Skirt







About the Artist



Finley is an artist from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin who experiments across many different mediums. Having taken art classes since childhood, she spent this semester in Napa, California, studying arts and humanities at The Oxbow School. Recently, Finley has begun sculpting and using many different mediums to create a wide range of creative pieces including a miniature version of an artist's studio and a sustainable clothing line. She also enjoys creating graphite portraits and drawing colorful houses. She's passionate about the environment, fashion, and, of course, art.





An Industry That's Not Fashion-Forward

Exploring the Past, Present, and
Future of America's Fashion Industry





HALF OFF

A Fashion-Foreword

As a fashion-forward teenager whose favorite time of year is Fashion Week and favorite pastime is shopping, I urge you to cut the thread on shopping sprees and take some time to examine where your clothes really come from. About three years ago, upon finally bringing myself to research what was really happening behind the closed (closet) doors of the fashion industry, I discovered a harsh reality that meant I could no longer go on shopping sprees at Forever21 and wear the clothes for a few months until I was ready to replace them with the next season's hottest trends. Although at the time I had a hard time weaning off of my fast-fashion addiction, it had to be done: knowing how harmful the clothes were for the environment, seeing the awful conditions that underpaid workers were making garments in, and realizing I was part of the problem was justification enough for me to change my habits and make better shopping decisions.

The Current Trend

In the typical 'slow-fashion' that's been the norm since ready-to-wear collections made their way to store racks back in the early 20th century, there have been two collections produced per year by each designer: a spring/summer collection, and an autumn/winter. However, 'fast-fashion' companies, such as H&M and Zara, now put out anywhere from 16-52 collections of clothing every single year. To define the 21st century phenomenon of 'fast fashion' in short, it's a term for how quickly producers and consumers cycle through clothing. As the market demands the hottest new trends that will be in and out in only a mere month, consumers need products quickly, but since there's not much time to produce-- or wear-- the garments now only need to last that mere month of prime trendiness. In the world of fast fashion, you buy, you wash and wear maybe two or three times, and you throw it into a landfill. According to Nicholas Gilmore, in his article 'Ready-to-Waste: America's Clothing Crisis,' "[T]he average American throws away about 81 pounds of clothing every year...[W]hile 95 percent of used textiles can be recycled, 85 percent land in the trash."¹



¹ Gilmore, Nicholas, et al. "Ready-to-Waste: America's Clothing Crisis: The Saturday Evening Post." The Saturday Evening Post Ready-to-Waste Americas Clothing Crisis Comments, 16 Jan. 2018, www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2018/01/ready-waste-americas-clothing-crisis/.



The main concept of fast-fashion is that trends come and go quickly, so the clothes will come and go right along with them. With prices so low consumers feel it's not affecting their

wallets, the throw-away mentality is incentivized. Big-name brands such as Forever21, H&M, and Zara have been mentioned in most fast-fashion exposés since the early 2010s when the public was first shown the dark side to the industry. However, it's a lot more than just three brands who are at fault. In fact, an overwhelming majority of brands are unethical and unsustainable. Many consumers are unaware of what goes on in the industry, meaning all they see is a price tag, and Old Navy is looking a lot cheaper than Patagonia. Not only do we need Americans to become more educated on where their clothes come from, and at what non-monetary cost, but we need brands to become more transparent about their textile sourcing, worker rights, and ethics as a whole. Once consumers and suppliers better understand one another, we can make strides towards a better future for everyone in the industry. Within the past ten years or so, more consumers have become aware of the need for sustainability, and while some brands have listened and followed suit, many have not.



The Environment is Out of Style

As we've begun to throw away clothes faster than ever, textile waste has skyrocketed. The organization Sustain Your Style shares, "Synthetic fibers, such as polyester, are plastic fibers, therefore non-biodegradable and can take up to 200 years to decompose. Synthetic fibers are used in 72% of our clothing."² During the decomposition of textiles in landfills, greenhouse gases are emitted. Talking about the 'hottest' trends, the fashion industry accounts for 10% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions annually. As explained in the article 'How Much Do Our Wardrobes Cost to the Environment,' by the World Bank, "At this pace, the fashion industry's greenhouse gas emissions will surge more than 50% by 2030."³ That statistic can only be true though if the earth makes it to 2030... Anyway, where would these used textiles go besides straight to the landfill once worn out? Many companies (such as Madewell, H&M, and a good handful of others) have started textile recycling programs where customers can drop off any worn-out garments. Here, the fabrics are collected, recycled, and made into new clothes. Many fast fashion companies have begun lines of clothing made of these recycled materials, and many sustainable companies only make clothes of recycled materials. While programs like these are where Americans should be putting their used clothes to good use, there's a different reality. "Every second, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or burned," says the United Nations Environmental Programme.⁴



² "What's Wrong with the Fashion Industry?" SustainYourStyle, www.sustainyourstyle.org/en/whats-wrong-with-the-fashion-industry.

³ McFall-Johnsen, Morgan. "These Facts Show How Unsustainable the Fashion Industry Is." World Economic Forum, 31 Jan. 2020, www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/fashion-industry-carbon-unsustainable-environment-pollution/.

⁴ UN. "Putting the Brakes on Fast Fashion." UN Environment, UN Environment Assembly, www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/putting-brakes-fast-fashion.



There are other kinds of pollution from the industry to take into account as well. Fashion Revolution, an organization dedicated to creating a more ethical and sustainable fashion future for the globe, shares that “Every time we wash clothes made from synthetic fibres, they will shed approximately 700,000 individual microplastic fibres.”⁵ If you’re unfamiliar with microplastics, they’re essentially microscopic pieces of plastic that come from fabrics composed partially or entirely of synthetic materials. They’re released during washing, or just general, everyday wear. However, these microplastics tend to find their way into our waterways, which can impact natural life as well as potentially harm the lives of humans, through ingestion. Microplastics cannot be filtered out of water, and they tend to make their way up the food chain. Studies have shown that when plastic accumulates in the body after recurrent ingestion, it damages the immune system and can upset the gut’s balance.⁶

5 “WHY DO WE NEED A FASHION REVOLUTION?” Fashion Revolution, www.fashionrevolution.org/about/why-do-we-need-a-fashion-revolution/.

6 Gibbens, Sarah. “You Eat Thousands of Bits of Plastic Every Year.” The Average Person Eats Thousands of Plastic Particles Every Year, Study Finds, 5 June 2019, www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/06/you-eat-thousands-of-bits-of-plastic-every-year/.



Another source of water pollution is chemicals, through pesticides when growing cotton, and dyes when coloring textiles. Environmental Health Perspectives shares, “[Cotton] accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United States, the largest exporter of cotton in the world.”⁷ Due to the toxic chemicals in pesticides and insecticides used in the growing process, there are various detrimental health effects that cotton farmers and people near cotton fields are faced with: miscarriages, birth defects, cancers, diseases, etc. These pesticides and insecticides used on the cotton crops are unregulated, meaning the adverse health effects aren’t fully known, and despite their apparent toxicity to humans, they’re still commonly used in cotton farming across the globe. “Twenty percent of industrial water pollution comes from textile treatment and dyes,” says the organization Sustain Your Style. “In most of the countries in which garments are produced, untreated toxic wastewaters from textiles factories are dumped directly into the rivers.”² This means not only are workers breathing these chemicals at work, but their entire communities are impacted by the water pollution as well. Aside from that, clothing production is extremely water-intensive as well, with a single pair of jeans averaging 1,800 gallons of water to produce.

⁷ Claudio, Luz. “Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry.” Environmental Health Perspectives, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, Sept. 2007, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1964887/.



Who Makes Your Clothes?

Corporate greed and a rise in consumeristic values in America are what most people would pin the blame on for how our country has fallen so hard for this harmful fast fashion. Labor got cheaper and so did products, meaning consumers could buy more and more for a lower price, and companies were profiting from it. "In the twenty years from 1970 to 1990, the number of [textile, clothing, and footwear] workers increased by 597 percent in Malaysia; 416 percent in Bangladesh; 385 percent in Sri Lanka; 334 percent in Indonesia; 271 percent in the Philippines; and 137 percent in Korea," explains the International Labor Organization.⁸ During these years, textile, clothing, and footwear labor also significantly decreased in developed countries. Outsourcing of labor has allowed companies to get dirt cheap labor and increased productivity from other countries, and their lax labor laws, nonexistent worker rights, and extremely low minimum wages made the countries we outsource to easier and cheaper for American companies to do



business with. If manufacturing was still primarily in America, workers would legally have to be paid minimum wage, they would need rights and safe work environments, and they would also have

⁸ "Globalization Changes the Face of Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industries." Globalization Changes the Face of Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industries, ILO News, 28 Oct. 1996, www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_008075/lang--en/index.htm.

maximums on how many hours per week they could work. This would mean they would cost more and get less done, whereas in developing countries there would be more profit to be made at less of a cost to a company. Despite our country's widespread use of outsourced labor, many people are unaware of who makes their clothes, as well as the workers' hardships. In Dana Thomas' book, *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes*, she writes, "Between 2006 and 2012, more than 500 Bangladeshi garment workers died in factory fires."⁹ Most garment workers come to work everyday in unsafe conditions for unlivable wages. The organization Sustainable Brands did a study on Cambodia, Bangladesh, and India, surveying garment worker's wages to determine how much they were paid on average. In Cambodia, they worked roughly 48 hours per week and made the equivalent of \$2.53 per hour in purchasing power parity. In Bangladesh, they worked roughly 60 hours per week and made the equivalent of \$.95 hourly in PPP. In India, they worked roughly 46 hours per week and made the equivalent of \$2.27 hourly in PPP.¹⁰ With labor this cheap, it's no wonder we can get \$15 shirts from just about any store at the mall. If they were American made, the labor alone would probably cost \$15.



⁹ Thomas, Dana. *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion & the Future of Clothes*. Apollo, 2020.

¹⁰ Muscati, Samer. "Garment Worker Diaries Reveal Working Conditions, Wages in Bangladesh, India, Cambodia." Sustainable Brands, 22 Feb. 2018, sustainablebrands.com/read/marketing-and-comms/garment-worker-diaries-reveal-working-conditions-wages-in-bangladesh-india-cambodia.

Despite the destruction occurring in every aspect of the industry in this day and age, people are still buying fast-fashion clothes like they're hotcakes. Sustain Your Style shares the statistic that we now produce 400% more clothing than we did twenty years ago.² With the rise of social media and general use of the internet, we're being marketed to more than ever before, and online shopping has never been so simple. Most of the flashy advertisements on your Instagram feed are meant to lure you into the concept of 'looking cool for an Instagram photo,' and, with how cheap the trendy styles are, why not buy them all? Just because buying clothes is easy and affordable, it doesn't mean we should fill our closets to the brim with the newest trends and things we probably won't wear more than a few times before tossing. Many people are unaware of the non-monetary price of producing clothing. We're being marketed products while we're blinded to the issues behind their production.







The Rise of Mass Production

In 1920, the mass production of clothes really took off in America with industrial sewing machines being easier to use than ever before. This was when New York City's garment district evolved. Just nine years later though, the Great Depression wiped out roughly a third of clothing manufacturers in the United States. Before the 1930s, most textiles were produced in England and imported to America, but by 1934 two thirds of cotton textiles were produced in the south since cotton crops were fruitful and America had many cotton mills. However, many people were laid off from cotton textile jobs during the Great Depression, so the remaining workers had to work harder for lower wages. This led to the Textile Strike of 1934. Lasting twenty-two days, the strike of cotton mill workers from across the country was centered around issues of unfair wages and working conditions, and lack of recognition in workers unions.¹¹ In the months leading up to the strike, many workers had been forced to have their hours reduced as well as hourly pay reduced, and they were expected to put out more product. The strike was said to have been influenced by "communist planners," and the strike ended with many picketers being shot and killed by everyone from police officers to the National Guard. There were no labor rights advancements that resulted from the efforts of the strike. In fact, the issues carried on well into the forties.¹² There was injustice in garment worker rights since the beginning of mass-produced clothing in America, and unfortunately, it remains unjust today.

11 "Today in Labor History: 1934 Textile Workers Strike Begins." People's World, 6 Sept. 2019, www.peoplesworld.org/article/today-in-labor-history-1934-textile-workers-strike-begins/.

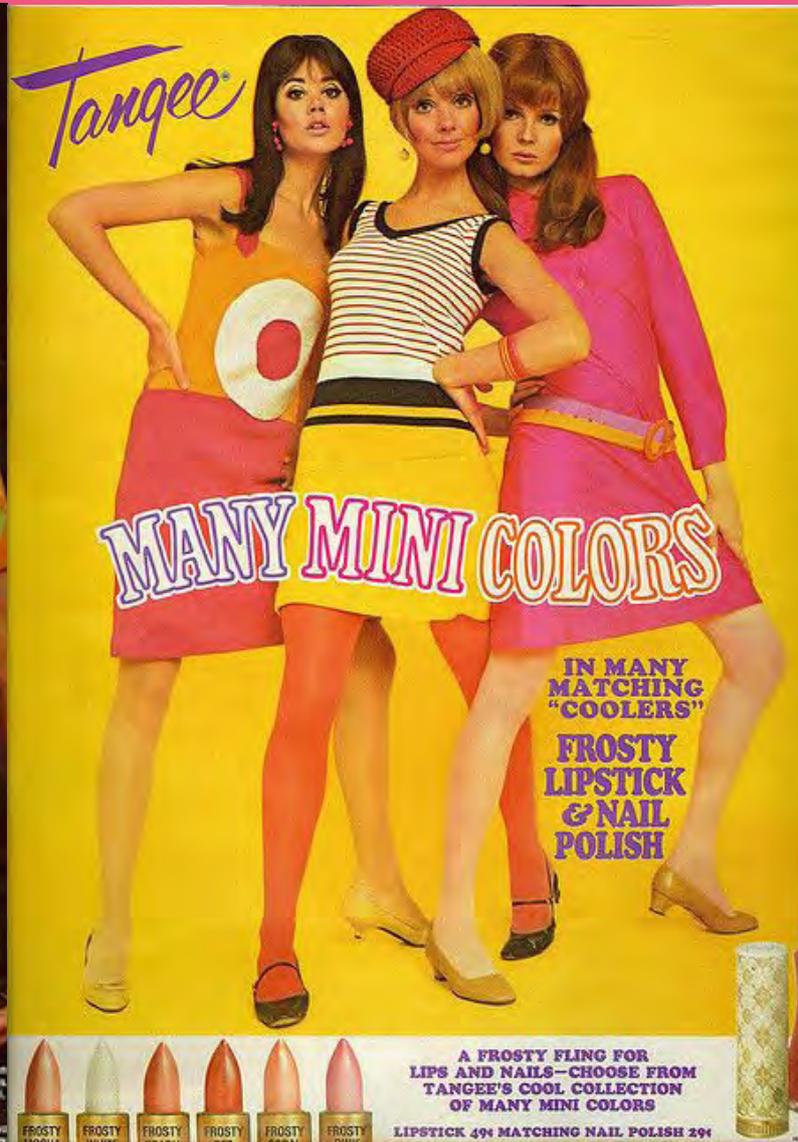
12 Brecher, Jeremy. "The US National Textile Workers' Strike, 1934." Libcom.org, 4 Sept. 2013, libcom.org/history/us-national-textile-workers-strike-1934-jeremy-brecher.

Hang your hat on Avril rayon



VICKY VAUGHN does. Fashions for frolic from the "Surfbird" collection! New interpretation shorts ensemble just made to go picnicking, to a beach party, to follow the fun wherever it goes to keep the colors bright, the mood fresh, crisp, irresistibly young, with practically no care at all.

Manne: Anthony's dress of Avril rayon and cotton. \$100; skirt \$15. Top, orange, gold or green. About \$12. Shorts ensemble with matching apron-like skirt: sizes 8-12, orange, gold or pink. About \$10. \$100 with pants: sizes 8-12, gold, orange, green or red. About \$12.



Tangee

MANY MINI COLORS

IN MANY MATCHING "COOLERS"

FROSTY LIPSTICK & NAIL POLISH

A FROSTY FLING FOR LIPS AND NAILS—CHOOSE FROM TANGEE'S COOL COLLECTION OF MANY MINI COLORS

LIPSTICK 49¢ MATCHING NAIL POLISH 29¢



There's a great future in plastics.

The Graduate, 1967

Introduction of Synthetics

By the 1940s, World War 2 had started. With few imports, U.S. producers had to work with the few materials they could get-- this meant what was available was being rationed. Wool and nylon were reserved only for military use, and silk had been banned since the attack on Pearl Harbor. Rayon had just newly been introduced to the market in 1930, and it got its time to shine during the war, as it was sort of a substitute for silk. Rationing of fabrics continued into the late 1940s even after the war had ended, but by the 1950s, more synthetic fabrics were on the rise. DuPont company had just invented acrylic fabric and had gotten the rights to produce polyester in America. Towards the end of the 1950s, they also created spandex.¹³ However, there weren't many styles that needed to use spandex at the time, so it was stored away in the back of the industry's closet until a later decade. By the mid-1960s, the material Kevlar was produced, as well. In 1968, for the first time ever in American history, synthetic material production surpassed the use of natural materials in textiles. It's often thought that the overwhelming use of synthetic materials in America's fashion industry at this time was to show off the technological progress the country had made. However, they were also a cheaper alternative in comparison to natural textiles. The sixties were also when screen printing of fabrics began, meaning patterns could now be printed onto fabrics using synthetic dyes, another notability of America's technological advancements. The development of synthetic dyes during this time was one of the reasons why bright colors were a trend of the decade.¹⁴ The 1980s brought about the growing trend of athletic wear made of synthetics, which are still big today. 72% of our clothing today is made of synthetic fibers.²

¹³ "1950s Textiles." Study.com, 6 September 2016, study.com/academy/lesson/1950s-textiles.html

¹⁴ "1960s Textiles." Study.com, 28 June 2016, study.com/academy/lesson/1960s-textiles.html

A Booming Ready-To-Wear Industry

Throughout the 1960s, the women's liberation movement sparked a growing need for ready-to-wear fashions for the whole family. Women had previously stayed at home, doing most of the family's sewing, as well as mending garments to increase their lifetime. As feminist movements of the sixties encouraged women to get jobs and reject housewife rituals, ready-to-wear garments were in higher demand than ever before. The baby boom of the fifties was also an impact on this since a growing population required a growing number of clothes.



Labor Goes Global

The percentage of American-made clothing has decreased as follows: ^{15 16 17}

1950s and Earlier -

Many goods were made at home, but what was sold was basically only U.S. made, as patriotism was very strong during and after WW2. Strides had been made for a basis of garment worker rights in America.

1960s - 95% of apparel in U.S. households was American-made

1970s - 75% of apparel in U.S. households was American-made

A number of large textile mills and factories began opening up in developing countries throughout Asia and Latin America. Most clothing owned by the average American during this time was still made in America.

1980s - 70% of apparel in U.S. households was American-made

Larger companies began outsourcing labor to other countries where it was cheaper, including Latin America and Asia. Retail chains such as Gap and JCPenney were pioneers in outsourcing labor, and their production took place in many countries in order to get the cheapest labor for each step of the process.

¹⁵ Vatz, Stephanie. "Why America Stopped Making Its Own Clothes." KQED, 24 May 2013, www.kqed.org/lowdown/7939/madeinamerica.

¹⁶ Muzquiz, Albert. "A Brief History of Garment Worker Labor Rights in the United States." Heddels, 17 May 2018, www.heddels.com/2018/05/brief-history-garment-worker-labor-rights-united-states/.

¹⁷ "Evolution of the Fashion Industry." LoveToKnow, LoveToKnow Corp, fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-clothing-industry/evolution-fashion-industry.

1990s - 50% of apparel in U.S. households was American-made

More and more companies hopped on the trend of outsourced labor. The North American Free Trade Agreement established in 1994 successfully made outsourcing of labor to Mexico easier, since there were no longer tariffs raising the cost. By the late nineties, the U.S. had developed enough worker rights that companies could not afford to continue producing American-made apparel. Companies such as Gap were given lots of backlash for their use of sweatshops in foreign countries but claimed it was “not their fault” that other countries had such relaxed laws on labor.

2000s - 29% of apparel in U.S. households was American-made

More and more labor was outsourced to Asia. The sweatshop conditions were unregulated and workers were grossly underpaid. American workers must be paid approximately 38 times more than their Bangladesh counterparts, and they produced less clothing in the same timeframe.

2010s - 2% of apparel in U.S. households was American-made

In April of 2013, the collapse of Rana Plaza garment-factory in Bangladesh made history, killing more than 1,100 people and injuring nearly 2,500 workers. Rana Plaza was an unregulated sweatshop, where workers had reported noticeable cracks in the building and had felt it was unsafe to work in prior to it collapsing with thousands of workers inside. It made national news and sparked the film *The True Cost*, a documentary about the harsh realities of fast fashion, as well as evoked the formation of tons of organizations such as Fashion Revolution, with goals to help make the fashion industry more ethical. As awareness has begun to spread about the concern of unethical labor across the fashion industry, many companies have begun making strides towards better practices and worker rights.



2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh

Quantity Over Quality

With the rising demand for a wider range of styles and sizes throughout the past hundred years, production for clothing had to speed up in order to meet consumer demands. Throughout this, quality decreased, as there was less time for quality inspection between every step of the manufacturing process.¹⁸ Consumers used to purchase less clothing, spending more on products that would last longer. However, the outsourcing of labor is not the only reason our clothes have become cheaper over the years. Sure, cheap, outsourced labor with faster production rates sounds like a smart business deal, but the faster the production, the lesser the quality. Buying something for more money that is made to last long vs. buying several cheap items that are made to last for a few wears are the two options shoppers are presented with nowadays. Fast fashion is produced fast and worn fast...



¹⁸ Nemy, Enid. "Declining Quality in Clothes: The Makers and Sellers Tell Why." The New York Times, The New York Times, 10 Dec. 1974, www.nytimes.com/1974/12/10/archives/declining-quality-in-clothes-the-makers-and-sellers-tell-why.html.

A Look Into Labor



Outsourcing labor in the fashion industry has made clothing cheaper for consumers and companies. It's also generated jobs for developing countries, which is important because many of them have growing populations and not enough employment opportunities. However, even in countries like the U.S., which has minimum wages, worker rights, and factory standards, there's still a lot of (illegal) mistreatment and wage theft in the apparel manufacturing industry. In 2019 garment workers in Los Angeles, CA (where the majority of America's clothing manufacturers are located), went on strikes for being underpaid, making only about five dollars an hour. Although the U.S. has laws against this, it's best put by the Los Angeles Times: "For garment workers, filing a wage theft claim with the state's labor commissioner or in Superior Court represents a terrifying risk. They will almost certainly experience retaliation: firing, threats of violence or deportation, blacklisting from future employment." For something that's often not reported, it's a pretty common practice. "After a three-year comprehensive study, [a U.S.] Labor Department report revealed that 85% of garment industry employers studied were violating federal minimum wage and record-keeping laws."¹⁹ Americans tend to view the 'Made-in-America' tag as being a sign of fair labor, which is misleading when uncovering truths such as these.



¹⁹ Kornberg, Jessie. "Op-Ed: In L.A.'s Garment Industry, 'Made in the USA' Can Mean Being Paid \$3 an Hour." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 14 Dec. 2016, www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-kornberg-garment-industry-wage-theft-20161214-story.html.



While big-name brands get fingers pointed at them when it comes to underpaid garment workers, they're not the ones at fault-- wages are set not by the companies, but by the owners of the clothing factories where the labor occurs. While companies like H&M or Zara had set goals around 2015 to make sure their workers were getting 'fair living wages, they soon discovered this was out of their control and not possible through any of their efforts.²⁰ As explained simply by *The Business of Fashion*, "Brands can't unilaterally raise wages because they usually don't own the factories that make their clothes. Even the very largest companies often represent only a portion of a manufacturers' customer base."²¹ As garment factory owners call the shots on working conditions and wages, there's not a simple fix to the issue. "[E]ach factory is often "shared" by many fashion brands. So, in practice, H&M could go to a factory and say, 'We want you to pay your workers more, so we will pay you more for the clothing you make.' Then, the factory has to figure out how to increase hourly wages while the workers are sewing H&M shirts, then drop them when they switch to sewing Walmart shirts.

²⁰ Chua, Jasmin Malik. "Why Is It So Hard for Clothing Manufacturers to Pay a Living Wage?" *Vox*, *Vox*, 27 Feb. 2018, www.vox.com/2018/2/27/17016704/living-wage-clothing-factories.

²¹ Kent, Sarah. "Why Fashion Doesn't Pay Fair." *The Business of Fashion*, *The Business of Fashion*, 2 May 2019, www.businessoffashion.com/articles/news-analysis/why-fashion-doesnt-pay-fair.

That's if it's an honest factory. The factory owner and managers could decide to pocket that extra money for themselves," explains Aiden Wicker in his article 'How on Earth Will We Ever Achieve a Living Wage for Garment Workers?'.²² Knowing this, what could be the world's answer to fairly paying garment workers? Most workers cannot simply just get a different job. However, they can also not survive off of their current pay. It is ultimately up to factory owners collectively to raise what brands are paying them to have work done.

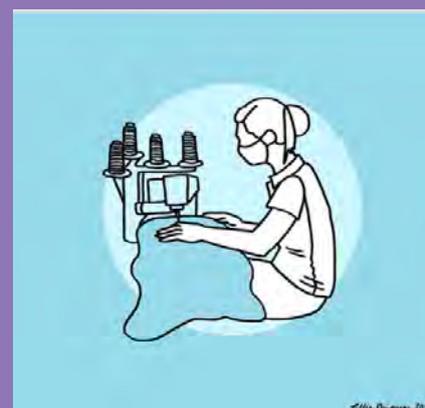
In conclusion, the fashion industry as a whole needs federal law to crack down on garment worker rights, and they need unity within factory standards, no matter the borders. While each country sets its own standards in this realm, changes need to be made globally to ensure garment workers are being paid fairly and have safe working conditions. As factory owners break the law, as mentioned earlier in the case of L.A., punishments need to be dire enough to greatly dampen the likelihood of illegal activities harming garment workers. It is up to governments to set the industry standard and enforce it. Organizations such as Fashion Revolution and Labour Behind the Label are working towards creating a fairer industry by advocating for garment worker rights, spreading the word about injustice and inhumane practices in garment factories, and reaching out to brands, factories, and governments to take necessary steps to move the industry forward.

As for what you can be doing as a consumer: educate yourself and others on current issues in the industry, urge brands to take steps forward in the fight for fair and ethical labor, and purchase apparel from companies that are transparent on their practices. Within the last ten years or so, more brands have begun sharing where their clothing is made. Allowing customers to access this information is a step in the right direction.

²² Wicker, Aiden. "How on Earth Will We Ever Achieve a Living Wage for Garment Workers?" Ecocult, 7 Mar. 2019, ecocult.com/to-lift-up-international-women-we-need-to-focus-on-a-living-wage/.

Females in Fashion

While most women in the U.S. locked up their sewing kits and threw away the key during the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s, developing countries have not reached this point. 80% of the world's garment workers are female. Many women in third world countries have to make the choice between taking their children to school, or going to work to get money to feed them. Jobs in sweatshops are virtually the only jobs available to women there, since they often don't have the money to get a higher education which would open doors to better career opportunities. Many workers do not make enough money to support themselves let alone their families, despite the long shifts with no more than a short lunch break per day. While these women need jobs, they also need rights in the workplace, safe working environments, and livable wages. One in three female garment workers has experienced sexual harassment in their workplace. The abuse these women have to endure at work ranks the industry as the second most likely form of modern day slavery in the world, second to human trafficking, and 71% of textile workers are victims of sexual or verbal harassment and abuse. Not to mention, in some countries the wage gap between women and men is as high as 85% in the garment industry.⁵ The next time you go to buy a feminist t-shirt from Forever 21, remember that the woman who made it for you needs feminism in her life more than ever.



Is Sustainable, Ethical Clothing too Expensive?

Sustainable, ethical brands are popping up a lot more lately in response to consumer demand. However, the cost of their products is often significantly greater than that of a fast-fashion brand. Most Americans would frown upon this-- 'Why would I pay \$50 for one shirt when I could pay \$50 for five shirts?' My response to this would be: 'Do you really need five new shirts at once?' Many people cannot afford to regularly buy a whole new wardrobe, but a big aspect of sustainable, ethical fashion, or, 'slow-fashion,' is that it's meant to last you longer, and, therefore, there's no need to buy a whole new wardrobe all at once. There will always be people who cannot afford to make investment clothing purchases, but, quite honestly, most of us can, and when the comparison arises between more pieces for less quality vs. fewer pieces for better quality, ultimately that's your decision...



A Fashion-Forward Future

Fast fashion was on the rise since the 1980s when America really began to cycle through trends quickly and increase the amount of outsourced apparel labor. However, within the last two decades it reached its lowest point, with nearly all American fashion brands being part of the problem. Companies have begun facing backlash from consumers as the media has begun publishing more and more about what was really going on in the industry within the past ten years. This has helped bring about greener initiatives from apparel companies, formed organizations that advocate for a greener and fairer industry, and impacted consumer choices. Although more and more shoppers and producers are both hoping for a greener future, there's still a lot to be done.

As the media has exposed big-name fast fashion brands, many consumers boycotted the brands in response. Actions such as this have led to the bankruptcy of Forever21 and sustainability plans/targets from companies such as H&M and Topshop. While these companies have developed goals, it's still some time away from us seeing if the goals will actually follow through with their plans to reduce environmental impacts and implement more ethical labor. It's important for the public to realize that many companies will use greenwashing as a means to persuade customers that they're ethical and sustainable, but just using the word sustainable on their website doesn't really make a company fit the definition of sustainable. It's important for brands to be transparent in their practices, and for customers to evaluate if their 'ethics' promises are a marketing scheme or not.

Going forward, the world of fashion needs to shift systemically in order to be greener and more ethical, with companies being transparent in their practices and the entire industry making advancements together. However, consumerism as a whole needs to change as well. When customers stop demanding constant new trends at unreasonably cheap prices, the industry will listen to our demands. Consumer trends are dictated by the usage of marketing, but what consumers need to see more than ever is what the truth behind the fashion industry really is: injustice, environmental destruction, and downright waste.

As I look back on my days of fast fashion shopping sprees, I realize that my only regret was not quitting the vicious cycle sooner. My wardrobe now lasts longer, is made up of more things I actually wear, and, I must add, my vintage pieces are much cooler than anything Urban Outfitters could ever try to recreate. While there are major systemic issues that are out of our hands, there are some things we can do to reduce our individual impact and encourage companies to make better decisions. Consumerism is ultimately up to the consumer.



Here are some ways you can make a difference!



GET EDUCATED: It's important to understand what's really happening in the industry. Educating yourself and others about environmental impact, ethics, and what you can do to help is the first step to change.

BUY SMART: When buying clothes, ask yourself: *Do you really need an item? Does it go well with the things you already own? Will you wear the piece enough to justify buying it?* Also consider the ethics of the store you're buying it from, what materials it's made from, and how well it's made. Asking yourself these things before you buy something will help you to make smarter shopping decisions and value your morals in the process.

REDUCE: Reduce your overall consumption of new clothing. When purchasing new pieces, it's better to buy fewer things, less often, that are made of quality. Mend old garments instead of throwing them away. Also, reduce how often you wash garments. 700,000 microplastics are released every time you wash something. If you wash your clothes only when they truly need it, you can help to minimize the total amount of microplastics in our waterways.

REUSE: Buying second hand, renting, or swapping clothes are all ways to wear new styles without having to contribute to the production of new garments.

RECYCLE: Donate clothes when you're tired of them. Not good enough to give away? Donate it to a textile collection bank, where the materials will be reused in the production of new pieces.

DO IT YOURSELF: Make your own clothes! Using old fabrics from curtains, sheets, or clothes can help you to cut back on textile waste and create something one of a kind.

From now on, I hope your fashion statements are not only stylish but thoughtful. The next time you grab a t-shirt off a clearance rack, consider it's journey: from cotton field to weaving mill, from dye bath to the hands of an underpaid and mistreated worker, to the rack of a store-- It's up to all of us to change the future of fashion for the good of the people and the planet. 🌸

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