

FIX YOUR
FASHION

Laura Strutt

HOW TO
CREATE
AN ETHICAL
WARDROBE

Change your mindset without compromising your style



CHAPTER 1

**WHAT'S
WRONG WITH
FASHION?**

WHAT IS FAST FASHION?

We all want to look our best without breaking the bank. But, at the same time, we don't want to support an industry that doesn't respect our planet or its workforce.

'Fast fashion' is now the most common way people buy clothes. So most of us are already playing a part in supporting practices that we would rather not be encouraging. But we aren't here to play the same game. The concept that evolved into today's fast fashion business model has been around for decades. It redefined the industry to such an extent that it is now difficult to avoid.

We can trace the roots of fast fashion back to the launch of a number of household brands, which introduced collections of limited availability to keep the production costs down. Shoppers were encouraged to snap up clothes as they came in store and to pop back more frequently to check for new items. To keep up with this fast turnaround, brands often took control of the entire supply chain, from overseeing the sewing to running the shop floor. New designs were hitting the racks as often as every two weeks. Many brands started to offer the latest trends at lightning speed and, importantly, at purse-friendly prices. This quick-response style of making and selling clothes took off and soon became the norm.

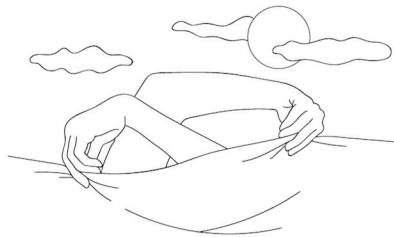
Before this, clothing was made in a very different way and the entire process was much slower. It could take months to create a design, source the fabrics and produce the finished piece. The fast fashion business model sources cheap materials and uses low-cost labour to turn high-end style into inexpensive garments in record times.

With new collections being promoted more frequently, consumers were encouraged to shop for clothing more often, making purchases based solely on trends rather than our needs. We have been told to 'shop til we drop' from an ever-changing selection of affordable collections. And of course when you look great, you feel great, so it's no wonder that the phenomenon caught on and changed our shopping habits.

If it has crossed your mind that having affordable new clothes each month sounds too good to be true, then you are right. According to United Nations News, the fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world and is a supporter of unsafe working practices. Fashion consumption has changed rapidly in recent years but by making an effort to change our habits, we can make a positive impact on the fashion industry.

SPEEDY SERVICE

In December 2019, the Financial Times noted that Zara's super-fast supply chain could take products from design to sale in just four to six weeks, developing a whopping 24,000 products a year.



PLANET PROBLEMS

Looking at your favourite pair of jeans, it can seem strange to think that the trousers that never fail to make you feel fabulous might be having a negative impact on the planet. Figures reported in 2018 showed that the fashion industry was responsible for emitting an estimated 1.2 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e) per year. This is more carbon than is produced by all international flights and maritime shipping combined. As reported by the UN Environment Programme, the fashion industry is responsible for a staggering 8 percent of global carbon emissions.

The key to solving the entire climate crisis may not be stuffed inside our closets, but one look at our bulging collections might act as a catalyst to bring about positive change. Glossy magazines and catwalk shows give us a sense of wall-to-wall glamour, showcasing perfectly coiffed models and collections that inspire, excite and ignite our senses. So it's no wonder we are practically picking our jaws off the floor when told that this is one of the most polluting industries, with the fast fashion sector being a primary contributor.

DID YOU KNOW?

It takes around 7500 litres of water to make a single pair of jeans. That equates to the average amount of water we drink over seven years.

So why are our clothes such big culprits when it comes to climate change? The production process impacts the environment at every stage. Most garments require vast quantities of water to produce and many fabrics use harmful chemicals in the production process. There are also huge amounts of energy and resources needed for garment production, transportation into stores and, ultimately, the disposal of clothing at the end of its short lifespan. It's true that almost everything we do has an environmental impact of some sort, but the big problem here is the rate at which the production process has been growing.

Activists have been challenging us to think in a new way with 'circular fashion' in mind. Circular fashion means designing and producing clothes in an ethical and sustainable way, using them for as long as possible, before disposing of them without harming the planet. Some fashion designers and brands are now following suit, thinking of innovative ways they can become more sustainable.

PEOPLE MATTER

As well as having an impact on the planet, fast fashion affects people, too. The fashion industry is one of the most labour-intensive sectors and the statistics are mind blowing. There are more than 40 million people working in garment factories worldwide. Some 85 percent of those workers are women and the lowest reported wages are just \$3 a day. With eye-opening statistics coming to light in recent years, it's no wonder people are coming together to make a change.

No matter what your style is, you will be familiar with the term 'sweatshops', which refers to garment factories that are cramped to the point of overcrowding and pay workers a tiny wage. Fast-paced schedules and barebones budgets call for

teams that can produce garments at speed, where safety is often of little concern. Those working in unsafe conditions are risking their lives to make our clothes. These workers are part of communities who often find themselves locked in a cycle of poverty, as they need to earn money but have very few options other than the 'opportunities' presented by global fashion labels.

Sweatshops are most common in South East Asia, China, India and parts of Central and South America, but they also exist in Europe and the UK.

In garment factories in the UK, there have been reports of workers earning hourly rates well under the National Minimum Wage, as well as non-COVID-19 safe environments. Allegations of this type show that we shouldn't confuse a label that says 'Made in the UK' with ethical production methods.

Now is the time to ask the question, 'Who made my clothes?'

Tragic Timeline

In the last decade alone, there have been several disasters that have rocked garment workers.

