FASHION IS REACTION -
A HISTORY OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY AND INSIGHT INTO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry is a global powerhouse, dominating the workforce and consumer wallets worldwide. The industry employs approximately 75 million factory workers (Ross 2021) and is the fourth largest manufacturing industry in the world (Monet 2023). Apparel has always played a large role in society. However, consumer perceptions of clothing have drastically changed within the 21st century. Garments are viewed as increasingly disposable, and consumers continue to demand inexpensive, mass produced products. This trend is largely fueled by the fast fashion business model which propels the majority of modern apparel brands, and prioritizes rapid production and turnover rates. However, this fast paced, low cost model has profound and far-reaching effects on both the environment and society. This research study aims to uncover the patterns throughout history that have led to the current state of the fashion industry. How has fashion become the second most polluting industry in the world? (. In addition, this paper draws upon realized historical precedents and additional contemporary data to support the theory that the future of fashion lies in sustainability and add to the available literature on the topic. Finally, the paper proposes potential future studies to further understand how the industry will develop towards sustainability in the future.

Keywords: Sustainable, Responsible, Fashion, Marketing, Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion today is commonly characterized for cheap manufacturing and disposable products. Low costs and fast paced trends propel the industry and motivate consumers to keep buying more. There was a time when clothes were cherished and passed down through generations. However, modern consumerism has led to fast fashion taking over the market. Within the past 15 years, apparel production has doubled (Ellen Macarthur Foundation) and consumers are 40% less likely to wear an item before throwing it away (WEForum 2019).

Consuming clothing at such rates has dramatic impacts on people and the planet. Fashion is one of the most polluting industries, as more than 50 billion garments are sent to landfills within 12 months of being made (Ryan 2021). Currently, more energy is used to produce clothes than the aviation and shipping sectors combined (Cho 2021) and it is estimated that by 2030, the industry will use annual resources equivalent to two earths (McCoster 2023). Therefore, overusing resources by double what earth's capacity is.

In addition, the people behind clothing manufacturing are mistreated and undervalued for the sake of profits. While the garment industry employs 75 million people, less than 2% of those people earn a livable wage (Ross 2021). A large opportunity for supporting economic development abroad is being missed by companies who would rather benefit from low regulation and lacking labor laws. Garments and textiles are among the top five products with the highest risk of forced labor (Schulz 2023).

The fashion industry is more than just clothing; it is a product of interacting cultural, environmental, and economic trends throughout time (Lusty 2021). The clothes we wear and the reasons we do so change (Gilligan 2006). Newfound needs and wants have shaped new perspectives on clothing. Understanding this history is important to gain insight into the evolving nature of clothing preferences and the driving forces behind these changes. By recognizing these patterns, one can better anticipate future trends and demands.

Through an understanding and application of previous eras of fashion, this thesis suggests the future of the industry lies in sustainability. This thesis aims to suggest a proposal for the future of sustainability in fashion through (1) analyzing the history of the fashion industry leading up to modern consumerism and fast fashion, (2) discussing the consequences of the current state of the industry and (3) adding to the available literature supporting the hypothesis for the future of sustainability in fashion (4) and proposing studies for future scholars to explore further how this will come to be in the fashion industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purpose of this study, the history of fashion has been divided into five facets: physical necessity, modesty, power, artistry, and consumerism, which is further divided into pre and post fast fashion. These eras have been selected after thorough research of the trends throughout time, and are intended to create a more digestible picture of how trends have changed over time. It is critical to build an understanding of where fashion has been to understand where it may go.

FASHION HISTORY

PHYSICAL NECESSITY

In its earliest days, clothing's intention was to provide a barrier from one's external environment. During prehistoric times, neanderthals began to wear textiles like leather to stay comfortable and protect them from their climate (Collard 2016). Archaeological evidence suggests neanderthals were the first to manipulate textiles through techniques like skinning and hideworking which made leather smoother, softer, or waterproof (Campana 2021). Neanderthals are estimated to have covered 80% of their bodies in order to stay warm (Wales 2012).

Using clothing to adapt and survive in the environment was vital. Numerous scholars support the theory that neanderthals eventually became extinct due to their limited advancements in clothing which hindered their ability to survive (O'connell 2006). During an extreme cold period, modern humans or homo sapiens survived over neanderthals with superior innovations in clothing to keep warm (Gilligan 2007). Homosapiens created the needle and thread, and were the first to connect pieces of leather together; thus making garments that could cover the whole body (Hermsen 2004). While the priority for physical protection has decreased, it remained a motivating factor in clothing for some time (Monet 2023).

The modern fashion world has seen prolific innovations in clothing's ability to shield humans from the environment (Lu 2022). Today, jobs like firefighters and construction workers benefit from life saving protective garments (Kuklane 2023). Raincoats and sports gear are sold to the average consumer with popular brand REI seeing 36% increased growth between 2020 and 2021 (REI 2022). Clothing may no longer be a limiting factor in survival, however it remains appreciated for its protective abilities.

POWER

Once clothing advanced enough to satisfy physical necessities, attire became a vehicle to establish power. In ancient Mesopotamia people began using clothing to satisfy a new need: status (Mark 2023). The elite realized their clothing could be a tool to assert power and found ways to differentiate their clothes from others (Michel 2021). One of the first techniques discovered was dying (Bishal 2023). Dyes were expensive, therefore more colorful outfits were a signal of wealth while natural fiber colors distincted average social status (Cardon 2010). Purple, was an extremely rare dye that became exclusive to kings and queens and remains associated with royalty today (Andrews 2023).

Such differentiation continued in the following Egyption, Greek, and Roman civilizations, along with inventions that widened the gap between what the 'common' and the 'elite' wore (Barber 1994). The Egyptian elite differentiated themselves with eccentric jewelry, and decorative wigs (Hermsen 2004). Attire of the elite in ancient Greece included hand painted patterns to signify status (Mark 2021). Romans were especially particular about dressing according to social class, with specific variations in stripes and colors depending on one's position within society

(Hermsen 2004). Each of these civilizations brought innovations that strengthened the association between attire and power.

By the middle ages, clothing had become a language to convey power (Lattanzio 2022). Taking after previous civilizations, the Byzantine empire fostered certain details in apparel as a symbol of wealth (Ouwerkerk 2011). Embroidery, for example, was a common signal of power among wealthy citizens. Lower class citizens could not afford the luxury, while higher classes wore small embroidered details, and royalty wore entire garments covered in embroidery with gold thread (Hermsen 2004). Citizens compared the attire of emperors and saw those with longer pendants and more luxurious fabric as a sign of a more prosperous ruling (Ouwerkerk 2011). Even barbarians who played a large role in the falling of the Roman empire placed value on various animal skins, popularizing furs such as Marmot as a sign of status (Hermsen 2004). Clothing was used as a symbol of power throughout the middle ages.

During the renaissance period, increased opportunity allowed for average citizens to accumulate wealth and improve social status (Goldthwaite 2016). Many began to save up and buy more expensive clothing in an effort to be associated with a higher class (Cecchini 2020). It became culturally appropriate for people to spend all of their money on clothes, in turn returning less to the court and churches (Wilson 2016). The growth of the bourgeoisie, or "middle class" meant social classes began to blur (Hanson 2010). To mitigate this, sumptuary laws were established by royal parties to legally restrict the clothing that citizens could buy and wear (Wilson 2016). Power in clothing peaked in the 15th century with an influx in sumptuary laws throughout Europe that prevented ordinary citizens from participating in lavish purchases (Freudenberger 1963). Punishments for citizens purchasing or wearing restricted garments included jail time, fines, and social harassment (Wilson 2016). Tailors were also inspected, imprisoned, and stripped of their occupation if found selling restricted garments to the wrong customers (Hanson 2010). Sumptuary laws heightened the association between fashion and power by regulating attire based on social standing, occupation, age, and marital status (Lattanzio 2022).

Power has continued to play a predominant role in the fashion industry (Bobb 2019). Many people continue to purchase name brand clothing in an effort to assert their status, a process called conspicuous consumption (AVCI 2021). Some designers arguably still participate in sumptuary laws to prevent unwanted individuals from purchasing their products (Walker 2021). For example, certain brands only sell a handful of sizes so their customers must conform to their ideal (Denby 2021). Luxury brand Hermes makes it extremely difficult to purchase their products, with year-long waiting lists and exclusive associates (Erikson 2021). For many, clothing remains to serve as a symbol for power and status (Bobb 2019).

MODESTY

Influx in the world's monotheistic religions altered the perspective of clothing by introducing the idea of modesty (Griffiths 2015). The rising acceptance of clothing as a means of modesty began in the 4th century and expanded alongside that of clothing as power. In early centuries of the Current Era, examples of modesty in scripture taught citizens to be ashamed of nudity. (Bond 2017). However it was not until the 17th century that modesty infiltrated fashion and culture most significantly (Williams 2014).

Before religion, people did not see their bodies as something to hide (Stillman 2019). The natural shapes of the body were appreciated and thought of as beautiful (Jess 2021). This perspective is exemplified in Greek art and attire when women typically exposed their breasts (Mark 2023). However, the introduction of the monotheistic religions such as Judaism, christianity and Islam began to educate members on how to present themselves before God in a pure and modest way (Sadatmoosavi 2016). In the 4th century Constantine was the first emperor to adopt christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire (Hughes 2023).

In the Byzantine empire, modesty dramatically changed women's attire. Dresses were lengthened to reach the floor, silhouettes became less form fitting, necklines became higher, and hair coverings were introduced (Ouwerkerk 2011). For the first time, members of society were expected to be clothed for a reason other than protection or status. Clothing became a tool to hide the body in a modest manner.

As modesty grew of concern, artwork was one of the first to be criticized for provocative ideas (Bowen 2017). While previous works displayed the natural body in an elegant light, the new modest perspective did not see nudity as something to be glorified (Bond 2017). In the 16th a council of the Catholic Church banned all nudity in religious art and Pope Paul IV mandated the use of fig leaves to cover any existing revealing art (Bond 2017). Christianity became integrated in culture and permeated social expectations by the 17th century (Williams 2014). In the 18th century female dress aimed to obscure the feminine figure with the use of petticoats and stockings to cover their skin. Another introduction, the Mantua was made to cover the chest and create a more conservative neckline (Cook 2023). Modesty became a social expectation as shown through 800 published writings between 1561 and 1800 that feature modesty in their titles (Williams 2014). In the early 1900s modesty continued to be an important aspect of fashion and society with dresses covering the body from the neck to the floor (Reddy 2020).

Modesty remains prevalent for many when making fashion choices today (Page, 2010). Fashion and modesty are connected predominantly due to religious reasoning (Williams 1970). Many religions have specific rules about what followers must wear or not wear including head pieces and covering skin (Tindle 2020). Modesty has also permeated culture outside of religious intentions (Viau, Busch 2023). In both private and public schools, dress codes are put in place to enforce modesty (Akter 2023). Modesty is also a social expectation in many professional settings, with modest dress expected for events like job interviews or court hearings (Miraglia 2016).

ARTISTRY

Pioneers such as Rose Bertin and Charles Fredrick Worth spearheaded apparel into an artform with clothing that created recognizable, fast changing styles (Hume 2018). In the 18th and 19th centuries most citizens had very limited wardrobes (Beer 2022). The average consumer wore their garments until they were falling apart, not until they were out of season (Beer 2022).

The differentiators of the elite lied largely upon the luxurious fabrics and accessories they included (Fox 2021). Styles lasted years or even centuries as they were inspired by larger social constructs of the time, not fast moving artistic ideas (Tortora 2020). For these reasons, clothing up until this point is considered "costume" (Andras 2021). Artists like Bertin and Worth introduced unique and creative styles that started "fashion" as we know it today (Eckerson 2012).

In the 19th century most people sewed their clothes at home. As of 1811, two-thirds of all garments worn in the United States were homemade (Thanhauser 2022). However, the elite contracted dressmakers to make custom attire (Higgs 2021). Rose Bertin, the famous dressmaker for Marie Antoniette, made over 300 custom dresses, and earned the title "minister of fashion" due to her impact on styles of the time (European Fashion Heritage Association 2018). Bertin was unique for her high prices as she was the first designer to charge as much for her talent as for the materials it took to make them (Nitschke 2021). Establishing her talent as a product worth a high price was the first step of introducing clothing as an artform.

Charles Fredrick Worth continued this growth in 1858 when he opened his boutique in Paris and coined the term "fashion designer", introducing a new title to the repertoire of dressmaker and tailor. (Cook 2015). Worth contradicted previous dressmakers that were contracted to fulfill the expectations of the elite by bringing his own

creations to life with no client in mind (Krick 2004). He introduced fashion shows to display his designs and was the first designer to ever put his name on a tag and in a garment (Cook 2015).

Ten years later, Worth established the organization "La Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture" to serve as the gatekeeper of fashion and distributor of the title of haute couture (Boscio 2020). Haute couture, translating to high sewing, elevated the already exclusive world of clothing by establishing specific fashion houses as credible to introduce new styles (Bala 2020). Some of the first members of "La Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture" include Chanel, which was founded in 1909 and popularized 'casual chic' followed by Dior in 1946 which introduced the 'new look' (Wang 2023).

In 1966 established haute couture house Yves Saint Laurent shook the industry with high end clothes that could be bought right off the runway instead of needing to be ordered in advance. (Healy 2015). With this, a new type of fashion, "ready-to-wear", or "pret a porter" in French was born. The revolutionary concept quickly caught on with haute couture brands like Dior releasing its first ready-to-wear show a year later and Chanel joining in 1978 (Mahmoud 2023).

Ready-to-wear enabled customers to skip the lengthy processes that haute couture previously required. The pre-made garments were made in bulk, creating a lower cost for fashion houses and lower prices to customers (Blaazer 2023). Ready-to-wear opened the doors to consumers a little wider. However, it still had a remarkably high price point that made it inaccessible to most and maintained the artistry of the industry (Mahmoud 2023). Fashion today remains an artform for many. Luxury fashion brands continue to release new styles through their haute couture and ready-to-wear lines, seeing average shareholder returns of 33% compared to 6% in the mass segment (Mckinsey and Company 2023). In 2022, Louis Vuitton became the first luxury brand to make 20 billion dollars in sales (Rollinson 2023). As of 2023, Le Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture remains an exclusive organization and features a limited 32 fashion houses such as Chanel, Dior, Fendi, and Valentino (Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode 2023). However, today ready-to-wear has become more popular and claims a wider market than its counterpart, with thousands of self proclaimed ready-to-wear luxury brands (Cabigiosu 2020).

CONSUMERISM PRE FAST-FASHION

Simultaneous to the growth of fashion as an artform, the industrial revolution assisted in bringing fashion to the masses (Hermsen Vol 4 2004). Late 18th century inventions such as the power loom and the cotton gin increased speed at textile mills, making fabrics cheaper and more accessible (Monet 2023). Cotton exports grew in the US from less than 10,000 pounds in 1790 to 6.4 million pounds in 1800 (Linden 2016). "The fashion industry is the hallmark of the passage from guilds and manu-factured production to industrialized mass production" (MacGregor R. & Sani, M. 2023, 4).

Mass manufactured clothing first appeared to produce US military uniforms in the early 19th century after most other commodities had moved to factory production (McCarthy 2021). Mass production continued for men's wear after factories' proved successful in keeping up with demands (Hermsen 2004). However, mass production of women's clothing was made more complicated by form fitting patterns and ornate decorations (Maisey 2019). Therefore, most women's wear was still homemade throughout the 19th century (Thanhauser 2022).
In 1846 the invention of the sewing machine greatly improved efficiency and aided in the start of female mass produced clothing (Monet 2023). In the late 19th century female apparel manufacturing began with "jobbers" who bought supplies in bulk and contracted workers with sewing machines to make finished garments (Thanhauser 2022) Once complete, Jobbers would sell the products to department stores, which became a popular way to purchase clothes at lower prices (Glancey 2015).

Between 1880 and 1889 clothing production more than doubled and jobbers began to invest in properties and equipment to centralize production (Thanhauser 2022) These sites birthed the term "sweatshops" because they consisted of cramped and hot conditions that led workers to sweat (Linden 2016). Yet, the industry grew to employ 46% of the industrial labor force in New York by 1910 (Montero 2022).

In the 1930s the invention of synthetic fabrics such as Nylon and Polyester significantly increased efficiency and reduced costs in production (Wolfe 2018). Simultaneously, fashion was growing as an artform with haute couture houses releasing seasonal collections (Eckerson 2012). In 1955 industrialisation and fashion began to converge when couture houses Chanel and Dior used synthetic fibers in their runway collections (Wolfe 2018).
A little over a decade later, Yves Saint Laurent released the first ready-to-wear collection in 1966 (Healy 2015). This became a more accessible version of haute couture and arose in part due to innovations in production and consumer expectations (Blaazer 2023). Consumers became accustomed to seasonal ready-to-wear and haute couture collections that introduced lasting styles (Mahmoud 2023).

Fashion became a part of society and mass production scaled as demand grew to purchase trends for cheaper (Thanhauser 2022). In the 70s, some brands saw an opportunity to reduce costs further and cut out competitors by moving production abroad (Liquori 2021). By 1980, imports accounted for half of all clothing in the country and cheap clothing became an expectation from consumers. (Montero 2022) "In the twenty years from 1970 to 1990, the number of 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" (ILA 1996).

However, due to many factors, cheaper options in the 80s were still recognizable as such. For one, it took longer for styles to diffuse. In order to become trendy, or even to be noticed, styles had to be worn by celebrities and written about in magazines (Suriarachchi 2021). Once becoming a trend, it took 6 months to a year to design and produce a replicate product (Bhardwaj, V & Fairhurst, A. 2010). This gap from when the elite could buy the trends off the runway to average consumers buying them off the racks created a clear discrepancy. It was rare for a brand to produce a trendy item for a cheaper price because they had to be able to predict the trend before being on the runways (Bhardwaj, V & Fairhurst, A. 2010) Therefore, most mass produced clothing was associated with being behind the trends until the late 80s (Suriarachchi 2021).

CONSUMERISM POST FAST-FASHION

Eventually, increased innovation, and standardization improved efficiency within the supply chain and decreased production time ten fold (Monet 2023). Brands began differentiating themselves based on their speed, with popular brand Zara able to replicate a garment from the runway to their racks within 15 days (Idacavage 2015). The term "fast fashion" was first used in 1990 by the New York Times to describe Zara's ability to produce a garment so quickly (Idacavage 2015). The differentiator shifted from being able to predict trends at a low price, to being able to replicate trends quickly at a low price (Bhardwaj, V & Fairhurst, A. 2010)

The 21st century pushed this speed further with digital technology that distributed trends instantly. Demand increased as a new wave of social media and influencers enabled consumers to keep up with fast moving trends and encouraged them to continue buying (Cohen 2021). Additionally, digitalization gave power to consumers and took it away from fashion houses and the elite. Consumers became able to watch fashion shows instantly, and decide which styles they preferred; whereas before, the elite were the only ones with access to see such shows and the power to distribute trends to the masses (Girod 2022).

Fast fashion brands such as ASOS and BooHoo entered the market and saw immense success with 2020 reve-

nues of $4.6 billion and $1.6 billion respectively (mcCormick). Haute couture and ready-to-wear brands began to release styles quicker in order to avoid knockoffs, and by 2011 brands they averaged five collections a year compared to the original two (Remy n, Speelman E, Swartz S. 2016). This cycle perpetuated and what used to be season long trends became weekly fads until fast fashion brands dominated market share. (McCormick 2021). Modern consumerism has led to fast fashion taking over the market. Within the past 15 years, apparel production has doubled (Ellen Macarthur Foundation) and it has become 40% less likely for consumers to wear an item before throwing it away (WEForum 2019). The goal has shifted from predicting the trends consumers will want, to recreating what consumers want immediately and as cheaply as possible (Bhardwaj, V & Fairhurst, A. 2010). Today Zara releases 24 collections a year (Cohen 2022) and H&M receives new products every day (Monet 2023). In 2020, Shein was the fastest growing ecommerce company in the world (McCormick 2021). Speed has become essential.

In addition, between 1990 and 2018 US prices have been cut in half, and UK prices have fallen by three quarters (Ryan 2021). In 2021 U.S. consumers spent just 3% of their disposable income on clothing, compared to 10% in the 1960s (Ryan 2021). The percent of American clothing made in the US has gone from 95% in 1965 to 2% today (Liquori 2023). While the fashion industry used to be supplier-driven by advertisements and shiny new collections, consumers now hold the power in driving suppliers to produce more, faster (Bhardwaj, V & Fairhurst, A. 2010).

REPERCUSSIONS OF THE FASHION INDSUTRY

Clothing production has doubled since the 90s and continues to grow by 2% every year (Niinimäki, et al., 2020). This fast paced growth has not been backed by an equal growth in natural resources, workforce, or economic opportunity. Therefore resources are becoming depleted in order to supply the fast fashion model.

PLANET

The garment industry is now the fourth largest manufacturing business in the world (Monet 2023). The rapid production of inexpensive clothing for fast fashion depends on environmentally harmful practices that are unsustainable in the long run (Payne 2022). Resource Depletion, Waste, Pollution, and Microplastics are just some of the environmental consequences. Still, low prices and new inventory motivate consumers to buy more than they need.

RESOURCE DEPLETION

The fashion industry uses a massive amount of resources. It takes 700 gallons of water to produce one cotton shirt and 2,000 gallons to produce a pair of jeans (Maiti 2023). The industry consumes 93 million metric tons of clean water every year, which is about half of what the American population drinks annually (Levy 2021), and one tenth of all the water used industrially (Le 2020). More energy is used to produce clothes than the aviation and shipping sectors combined (Cho 2021) and it is estimated that by 2030, the industry will use annual resources equivalent to that of two earths (McCoster 2023).

WASTE

Consumerism has led to extremely wasteful habits. In 2017, it was estimated that 41% of young women felt the need to wear something different every time they left the house. (Cho 2021) and studies show that consumers treat their lowest priced garments as essentially disposable (Remy n, Speelman E, Swartz S. 2016) As a result, more than 50 billion garments are sent to landfills within 12 months of being made (Ryan 2021). Today, 90% of garments end up in landfills due to quick styles and cheap clothing (Levy 2021) and less than one percent of clothing is recycled to make new clothes (MacGregor R. & Sani, M. 2023). In 2018, over 11 million tons of textiles ended up in landfills, a number growing exponentially since 1960 (Environmental Protection Agency 2020).

POLLUTION

The process of producing textiles and garments at such an extreme speed relies on the use of toxic chemicals that pollute the environment. In 2017, the total greenhouse gas emissions from textile production was more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017), and in 2019 the fashion industry accounted for 10% of global carbon emissions (UEP 2019). It is estimated that over 8,000 synthetic chemicals, some which may cause cancer, have been found in the production of fast fashion clothing (Ross 2021). Harvesting cotton at such fast rates uses 6% of the world's pesticides and 16% of our insecticides (Wanduragala, S 2024). After fibers are turned into fabric, the treatment and dyeing process is responsible for about 20% of global industrial water pollution (Cho 2021).

MICROPLASTICS

To cut costs and keep up with inventory, synthetic fabrics like nylon and polyester have taken over the market. Today, about 60% of the material made into clothing is plastic (UEP 2019). Unfortunately, when synthetic fibers break down they produce methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. (Cho 2021). Additionally, when washed, they shed tiny plastic fibers called microfibres. In 2019 it was estimated that humans had contributed 1.4 million trillion plastic fibers to the ocean (UNEP 2019). Water treatment plants are unable to filter the small fibers and let up to 40% into lakes, rivers and the ocean. (UEP 2019). These fibers are then eaten by animals and eventually make their way up the food chain through the food we eat. (UEP 2019). One study found that Americans eat 74,000 microplastic particles each year (Cho 2021).

PEOPLE

Cheap apparel prices have lasting repercussions. Due to an extreme focus on lowering costs and increasing margins, the people behind production have been severely overlooked and undervalued. In 2014, there were about 70 million people employed in the textile, clothing and footwear industry (Duke 2017). Skilled labor remains vital in the production process as "innovation in the way clothes are made has not kept pace with the acceleration of how they are designed and marketed" (Remy, Speelman, Swartz 2016)

There is no such thing as automated clothing production and few machines have improved the process. Therefore, even the cheapest clothes are made by someone behind a sewing machine. But, in order to maintain the low margins that propel the fast fashion business model, minimal rates are forced upon suppliers that lead to inhumane wages and conditions for workers (Remy n, Speelman E, Swartz S. 2016).

ILLEGAL AND UNLIVABLE WAGES

The fashion industry employs approximately 75 million factory workers. Yet, only 2% of those workers make a livable wage (Ross 2021). A livable wage differs from a legal wage because the legal wage may not be enough to actually survive on (Oxfam 2021). In some countries such as Ethiopia there are no minimum wage laws, allowing factories to pay whatever they choose and claim a legal rate (Walk Free 2023). Workers in Ethiopia earn as little as 12 cents an hour in addition to experiencing wage deductions, verbal abuse, and forced overtime (Walk Free 2023). In order to sustain themselves and their families, garment workers take long and grueling shifts. In Bangladesh, 99% of workers say they regularly work overtime, and 65% work overtime regularly in Vietnam. (Oxfam 2021).

Poor wages are not exclusive to poor countries. In 2018, fast fashion brand Missguided was found guilty of paying factory workers illegal wages in leicester (Wanduragala 2024) and in 2020 in the UK, fast fashion brand Boohoo was caught for paying factory workers as little as £3.50 an hour (Duncan 2020). There have even been incidents of Zara factory workers writing on tags to tell consumers that they have not been paid for making garments (Suriarachchi 2021). Still, fast fashion companies continue to exploit and push poorer countries for lower costs, perpetuating inequality and driving people farther from economic freedom.

"The living wage gap averages 40 per cent, meaning that on average these workers need to earn almost 40 per

cent more to meet their basic needs. Despite this, it is estimated that the price of a final garment would need to increase by only 1 per cent for all garment workers to earn a living wage" (Walk Free 2023).

FORCED LABOR

Forced labor also remains in practice in the industry. In 2013, the Uzbekistan government was partaking in forced labor to increase their production of cotton. Over one million people were forced to leave their jobs every year to go pick cotton. (Mirovalev 2013). A 2021 survey among cotton farm workers in Pakistan found that 27% could not leave work on the farm if they found another job and 20% had seen children below the age of 15 working on cotton farms during school hours. (Walk Free 2023). The Walk Free Foundation, a non-profit committed to ending modern slavery, found garments and textiles among the top five products with the highest risk of forced labor (Schulz 2023).

CHILD LABOR

Though banned in most nations, child labor remains a concerning issue in the fashion industry (Moulds 2022). Often, the money that parents bring home is not enough to support a family so children work to provide additional income (Oxfam 2021). Children may work over 12 hours a day doing sewing, embroidery, leatherwork, and other tasks (James 2022). Factory and textile mill recruiters in India often negotiate with parents using manipulative advance payments that the child must then work off (International Labour Organization 2022). In addition, recruiters promise comfortable accommodations, and nutritious when reality shows that kids are shipped away to experience the worst forms of child labour (Moulds 2022). According to the international labor organization child labor has increased by over 8 million the past 4 years, the first increase in 2 decades (International Labour Organization 2021).

SAFETY RISKS

Since the beginning of manufactured clothing garment workers have struggled to receive basic rights. In 1911 a tragic event known as the triangle shirtwaist fire led to the death of 146 workers in New York City (Montero 2023). Managers had locked factory doors from the outside to prevent workers from leaving early, but an accidental fire forced employees to be engulfed in flames (Wagner 2021). Hundreds of workers ran to escape but were kept in by the locked doors (Montero 2023). The incident shed light on the working conditions in the industry, with an ensuing strike in 1909 known as the start of the modern garment labor movement (Montero 2022) Still, many apparel factories in poorer countries lack proper safety standards, putting workers at extreme risk. In 2013, the collapse of the Rana Plaza complex in Bangladesh killed over 1,100 and injured over 2,500 garment workers (Wanduragala, S 2024). Safety requirements had been pointed out as expired, but were ignored. Structural concerns were even found the day prior, but managers threatened to fire staff who did not attend work (Payne 2022). The situation again highlighted the dangerous factory conditions in the industry yet little changes were made (Ross 2021).

Brands that demand fast production at the lowest cost contribute to unsafe environments by squeezing suppliers. Reports of poor ventilation, blocked fire exits, and a lack of equipment training are common (McCoster 2023). In June of 2023, 6 garment factory workers were killed in a factory collapse in casablanca. The factory did not meet minimum health and safety requirements, however workers felt voiceless and continued to work (Industriall 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This thesis aims to contribute research that supports the theory advocating for sustainability in the fashion industry. This will be achieved through three main objectives:
(1) analyzing the historical trajectory of the fashion industry up to consumerism and fast fashion,
(2) discussing the social and environmental consequences of the current state of the industry
(3) Applying realized findings to support research on sustainability in the fashion industry and
(4) Propose potential future studies for future scholars to further understand how sustainability will develop in fashion
By addressing these objectives, this thesis seeks to contribute to the knowledge base on the future of sustainability in the fashion industry as well as provide potential exploration of the pathways towards a more sustainable future in the industry.

RESULTS

By 2030 the global apparel and footwear industry is expected to reach 102 million tonnes in volume and 3.3 trillion USD in value (Boston consulting group 2019). However, this exponential growth can't continue with the finite resources we have. As seen throughout time, the fashion industry has a history of radical change stemming from cultural, environmental, and economic shifts (Lust 2021). Such changes impact consumer preferences and lead to vastly different priorities in consumer purchasing decisions. For example, the transition from artistry to consumerism saw a dramatic shift in values.

"According to Bauman (1996), the postmodern era is seen as a period of individualism, changing values, freedom of consumer choices, changing lifestyles and new social movements. Society is constantly going through a change process, and this change is also transferred into the cultural meanings of artifacts. McCracken (1988) argues that designers and producers therefore gather this meaning to change process up and achieve its transfer to consumer goods." (Niinimäki 2010). As the consequences of unsustainable actions reach a tipping point, the history of the fashion industry supports the theory that the fashion industry will enter a sustainable era and reject the values of fast fashion. As said by Niinimäki in The Environmental Price of Fast Fashion, "Ultimately, the long-term stability of the fashion industry relies on the total abandonment of the fast-fashion model." (Niinimäki 2020). It's time for a change. The idea of a slow, or sustainable era of fashion has been a growing topic of discussion among research papers and fashion journals. Many predict that sustainability will begin to overtake a growing market share.

As awareness of the consequences of fast fashion is rising, a growing number of consumers are seeking out sustainably made products to support a better future. Many research studies support the theory that the future of fashion lies in sustainability. However, the majority of brands continue to support a business model that prioritizes profits over people and the planet. In addition, a "attitude behavior gap" prevents most consumers from actually making sustainable fashion purchases.

While research shows the industry will transition to a sustainable environment, such a radical change requires dramatic changes. Most fashion brands today do not possess fully sustainable strategies. Research remains unclear as to how this transition will occur and how sustainable fashion brands will achieve market share. Future research should explore this question through the following proposed studies:
(1) What marketing strategies allow sustainable fashion brands to reach mass market share?
(2) What business level strategies create the most value for consumers?
(3) What segmentation information is most telling of sustainable fashion purchase decisions?

DISCUSSION

The research added to the current knowledge base on the future of sustainable fashion. The results support the conclusion that the industry is headed towards a complete remodeling in light of sustainability. Such insights are useful for any fashion brand intending to stay ahead of the curve and remain relevant with changing consumer demands in the future. It is also interesting to note that such consumerism insights are not exclusive to the fashion industry, but are actually a part of the growing consciousness of consumers in the digital age. In other industries as well, consumers are growing more demanding of sustainable practices that promote a better future for everyone.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of historical trends, coupled with current data in fashion suggests that the industry is moving towards a more sustainable business model. Future research would benefit from uncovering insights into how this will actually happen, and how fashion brands can leverage this information to stay relevant. Potential future research topics include, (1) What marketing strategies allow sustainable fashion brands to reach mass market share?, (2) What business level strategies create the most value for consumers?, and (3) What segmentation information is most telling of sustainable fashion purchase decisions?. This study not only validated the feasibility of sustainability in the fashion sector but also empowers brands to proactively develop business and marketing strategies that resonate with consumers, ensuring they stay at the forefront of this shift.

WORKS CITED

To be completed...