

# Overdressed by elizabeth i. cline: an overview of fast fashion

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Fast fashion in Elizabeth L. Cline's book *Overdressed* is described as a radical method of retailing that has broken away from seasonal selling and puts out new inventory constantly throughout the year. Fast fashion merchandise is typically priced much lower than its competitors – Cline uses the clothing brand Zara as the prime example of fast fashion. Zara is able to take runway styles and put them into their online and retail stores in as little as two weeks. Not only is this process fast but it is cheap as well, the prices of these products are getting lower and lower as time goes on. Fast fashion continues to be encouraged through the consumer's behavior. Although consumers may benefit from such low pricing and fast shelf time, other people are not effected in such a positive manner. throughout the book Cline goes into detail over the negative impacts of fast fashion.

After understanding what fast fashion was I began to wonder how this trend began to grow in popularity. In chapter four page 84 Cline gives the reader insight on where the origins of fast-fashion came from. It is mentioned in the book that this habit began to come into first notable popularity after the World War I period. During this time Europe was going through an economic downturn therefore the clothes that were imported from those countries got cheaper and cheaper as Europe could not afford nice fabrics. The price of clothing has dropped so significantly that it began to encourage cheap clothes that last shorter amount of time rather than the high quality clothes that have the durability to last year's (page 82). Our start in fast fashion has since grown into the sensation it is now. Since the growth of fast fashion in the 1920's the negative effects have only become more and more apparent.

One of the biggest concerns that fast fashion brings with it is the labor conditions for international and domestic workers. A huge majority of all clothing is produced overseas. The reason companies in the United States go overseas to have their products manufactured is because it is significantly cheaper. The reason for such cheap costs is not only because of the materials used but also the undeniable low labor costs. Although raw materials- that is fabrics, thread, and dyes- account for a large portion of the costs, Labor accounts for the entire other half of the cost. And because labor costs are easy to manipulate, this is what the fashion industry tends to focus their efforts on reducing the cost of. Cline uses numbers to explain exactly how much less companies have to pay workers overseas than in the United States. Where the average pattern maker in the United States would make around \$1, 660 a month a worker in the Dominican Republic would only make \$150 a month (page 43). The reason garment companies are able pay their workers so little is because of the difference in economy of developing nations, compared to that of a more developed country such as the United States and other European countries. The way I see it, companies take advantage these workers that are desperate to work for any type of money. Not only are these workers getting paid small amounts, the conditions of a lot of these factories tend to be hot, crowded, demand unrealistic quotas (page 50). The companies that produce garments are motivated to produce a lot of items, in the fastest time possible, with the least amount of cost. This calls for cheap fabrics and less trained workers, resulting in low quality clothes, and as consumers continue to buy these products they continue to encourage these behaviors (57).

Another growing concern regarding fast fashion is the effect it has on the environment. Cline was able to take a trip to China, where the largest number of garment manufacturers are located. Here she noticed the concerning amount of haze in the air. The air pollution has grown to such drastic measures in parts of china that it becomes hard to see ten feet ahead of you (Page 124). This has become a result of the air pollution put out by the concerning amount of factories and manufacturers in the country. The source of the air pollution can be traced back to artificial fibers, which often happen to be the fibers found in the making of fast fashion (page 124). In order to make artificial fibers one must source the materials from plastic which sourced from oil and wood, and cotton treated with toxic chemical. The issue that this world runs into with these man made/treated fibers in the fact that oil is nonrenewable, plastic cannot be composed, and the chemicals are getting into our airway and water. Although any form of textile products - natural or manmade - have their negative impact on the earth, it is the scale and speed that these products are getting produced that becomes the problem. Fast fashion continues to promote air pollution, water pollution, and greenhouse gasses.

The only way Cline claims any of these issues concerning fast-fashion will be resolved is by having society move away from fast fashion and into the use of slow fashion. Although Cline does not specifically give credits as to what slow fashion is, there is a broad explanation of it in chapter 8. Slow fashion in comparison to fast fashion puts its focus in on bettering the quality, durability, and sourcing of garments. Just as the name implies, slow fashion

is produced and purchased at a slower rate. It tends to put its efforts toward ensuring the quality of the product is good, the environmental impact is minimal, and the correct labor conditions. Slow fashion encourages the use of recycling, paying attention to labels, making more of your own clothes, being educated on the history and sourcing of the materials used to create the clothes, and understanding what quality is when buying a piece of clothing. Our culture has gotten so used to the fast pace and low prices of fast fashion that many of us, including myself, believe that slow fashion is an unrealistic way to approach sourcing and buying clothing. Fast fashion has been a concept that has grown into popularity in the last century, therefore slow fashion is not an unreachable goal.

One way that I was able to analyze my shopping and buying practices is by creating a closet inventory. This was able to easier show me what type of clothes and shoes I owned and how much I spent on them. The detailed chart of what I found in my closet is found below in the index. The thing I was most surprised by was the amount of t-shirts I owned. I have t shirts from every event, every place I have gone, organization I have been involved in, and every logo I can imagine. I own t-shirts with cute saying and fun embroideries. The reason I found this most interesting is because t-shirts are actually the item that I wear the least of. I mostly wear nice blouses, a dress, or a tank top. I also discovered that I spend the most consistent price on. This is because the times I was at an event or putting in an order with an organization the likelihood of the t shirt going on sale was slim. I typically buy it at full price whereas other categories I often wait until they get

marked down low. Coming into college I have had a lot more opportunities to wear them, and I do admit I wear them more than I used to. T-shirts are staple items in a college students wardrobe because most of the time they are the comfiest to walk around in and study in. One item I was not as surprised about was the amount of shoes and the amount I spent on them. Shoes tended to be a bit more on the expensive side because they need to be more sturdy than a regular piece of clothing. I keep shoes around for longer and wear them more often, therefore I find investing in a high quality pair of shoes important. Another reason I think I had the willingness to pay more for shoes is because of the brand. Brand has never been a huge factor in the buying process of an item, unless it is shoes. Knowing the brand of shoe is an easy way to know the comfort or it and the durability of it. Because quality in shoes is easier to notice than the quality in a shirt, I have the desire to spend more for that quality.

The different styles of clothes I bought became more clear after the inventory as well. A lot of the clothes in my closet were fairly basic therefore will stay in style longer. Although I do have a few, I wish I had more statement skirts and pants and trendy tops. I have plenty of clothes that I love but a lot of times I avoid spending money on a shirt that would only match with one or two other pieces. I was also surprised to find so many items that I loved when I bought them but since then have only worn them once. After this inventory I ended up making a list of the items I rarely wear in order to make a point to wear them some time soon. The items I don't wear that often I also noticed I spend a lot of money on as well.

I also did notice that the average price I pay for clothing is very low. The majority of my clothes, not including shoes, I only paid \$10-\$20 dollars on. This became concerning for me after reading Cline's book simply because I know with low dollar amount spent on clothes comes the concerns of fast-fashion. I have always been a thrifty person, searching for the best deal around and the cheapest I can find a shirt for. I have always hated spending more than what is necessary on a piece of clothing. The idea of spending \$20 on a shirt seems ridiculous to me. I believe the reason I got into this habit is because I began shopping for myself as a pre-teen with little to no money, therefore had to find my items for less. I realized how easy it was to get clothing for a low price, but that looked just as good as a full price piece of clothing. I am today limited to clearance racks, second hand online shops, and discount boutiques. Because I buy clothing for so cheap I buy it very often, once or twice a week. After reading *Overdressed* I came to realize I am the poster child for fast-fashion consumption behaviors.

The clothing challenge was one I was interested in. It challenged me to pick out four pieces of clothing and wear them for five days. This was really fun for me. I absolutely love being creative with the recourses I have, so the clothing challenge allowed me to do just that. The items I chose were based on what items I thought could best be worn a variety of different ways and match with a variety of different items. Slow fashion is being able to thoughtfully choose what to buy and wear. In a way this activity promoted slow fashion. It allowed me to recycle clothing styles in order to last five days. This challenge did not limit me but encouraged me to be more creative

and pay attention to what I am wearing. In the five days I worked with a white basic tank top, green leggings, jeans and a dress. My personal style is all based on layering and putting two things together that normally would not be put together. This was my opportunity. I was able to pair my dress with jeans and my tank with my dress. The biggest struggle for me in this was having to see the same person for five days in a row and have them ask why I was wearing the same item I wore the day before. I explained to them the reasoning but the comments I would receive highlights the norm of wearing a new thing every day for weeks on end.

Although fast-fashion has become norm today I believe there are specified actions consumers can take in order to combat the use of fast-fashion. First and foremost, I have realized consumers must be thoughtful in buying. As I noticed in my closet inventory, consumers often buy textile products because of what a “ good deal” they are but may rarely or even never end up wearing them. This saves consumer’s money and a product that could have not been manufactured. Recycling more styles and purchasing less also helps to avoid fast fashion. Becoming educated on the topic is another number one priority. The more consumers learn about this subject, the less likely they are to agree to the behaviors that fast fashion bring along to it.