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# Why Fast Fashion is Destroying Our Planet... and Your Wallets

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I love shopping as much as the next person. I love digging through racks, finding the ugliest t-shirt I have ever seen, holding it up to my friend and saying "how cute is this!" I love spending all my money on articles I know I'm going to wear for years to come. What I hate though, is fast fashion. I hate seeing the same tacky designs over and over again with little to no creativity. I hate seeing microtrends holding the fashion industry in a chokehold, pumping out cow print pants after mesh covered long sleeves, making them at miniscule prices and jacking them up for profit.

My biggest problem is with Shein. Shein is an online shopping site, filled with hundreds of pages of clothes, almost all of it less than $20 to purchase, and definitely way less to make. They make incredible quantities of terrible clothing, made with the cheapest textiles they can find, using the cheapest labor they can find and sell it at a low price, which is why it's so popular. It's perfect for finding party clothes, easy basics you can wear anywhere, dress it up or down, you really can't go wrong! You can keep up with the trends, buy a whole lot, a few hundred dollars worth and rebuild your whole wardrobe. That lasts about six months. Then the clothes start falling apart, the seams ripping, you find holes in the collar of the shirt you just bought. I know it's easy to build the perfect cart with the cutest staples, but the quality of what you're buying is reflected in the price you're paying for it. A $4 t-shirt is $4 because it sucks.

When buying hundreds of dollars worth of clothes at less than $10 per piece, you're getting a lot of bang for your buck. It all sounds very appealing; but you're doing this over and over. Following the microtrends that trickle down through the fashion world from high-end designers until it reaches the trenches of Shein (cue "The Devil Wears Prada"), where it's barely even in style anymore. Microtrends are grabbing this generation by the throat, saying you're only cool if you follow along like everyone else. Shein thrives off this mindset, that people are going to continue buying and following trends rather than building a long-lasting sustainable wardrobe.

The integrity of their clothing isn't the only thing questionable about Shein. The biggest problem I have with fast fashion—which isn't just Shein, but they are a huge component—is the astronomical amounts of waste they produce. I don't mean just the clothes; the way they package and send out their clothes is entirely ridiculous and appalling for our planet. Each article of clothing is packaged in its own plastic bag, and every single bag you receive cannot be recycled. They make their clothing with materials that are not at all suitable or sustainable for the planet, including microplastics, elevated levels of lead and phthalates, which is not only unsafe for consumers, but even worse for the people manufacturing these clothes. The microfibers in the materials absorb all the toxins they meet in the waste system, creating hundreds of miles worth of clothing dangerous to ecosystems and strewn in landfills. Much of this product is the stuff thrift stores can't sell and have to throw away. That's right! Thrift stores have to throw out millions of articles of clothing every year! So just go there first; you'll probably find some Shein in the racks anyways.

If you ever find yourself on Shein's website, try scrolling to the end of the hundreds of pages worth of clothes they show you. You will never find an end. Everything you see on their site has been made already, and whatever they don't sell, they will throw out. Their profit margins are so enormous that it is cheaper for them to throw away outdated products and jump on the next microtrend than it is to keep old clothes in inventory. The reason Shein is able to do this is because they pay their workers per piece. This means that they only get paid for the products they've created, not for the amount of hours they've worked. A lot of Shein workers will work

double or triple shifts, up to 18 hours a day, to make enough money to support themselves and their families. These workers are not paid a liveable wage, while the company they work for makes billions. Shein is valued at $100 billion; as of 2022 they are the world's largest fashion retailer.

This is a scary thought. The world's largest retailer, shipping to over 150 countries, is so terrible and unsustainable to not only the planet but also the people who work for them, yet it is so widely consumed and readily available that some people feel they have no other option than to shop from Shein. However, alternative options are almost endless! Thrifting is the easiest and more sustainable way to start. Yes, it will take longer to find good pieces, but a lot of the pieces you will find will be a lot better quality than what Shein produces. Buying from Shein perpetuates a toxic cycle of capitalism, which has encouraged constant consumption over innovation. Buying new clothes every few weeks to follow the current microtrends, rather than slowly building a sustainable wardrobe that makes you feel good in your clothes, has been ingrained in our generation. We can break this cycle of overconsumption, but it will take discipline, mindfulness, and a moral grounding in sustainability.