

Lesson 3 Living Green: A Guide to Sustainable Choices

Why Fashion Needs to Be More Sustainable

Jessi is a fashion blogger who loves unique, vibrant clothes. But guess what? She does not buy new clothes. Instead, she buys them secondhand. You may think secondhand clothes are old fashioned, but by buying them, Jessi can try different styles. She also does not get too attached to any style or brand because there is always another exciting outfit waiting to be discovered. Jessi's clothing habits are not just about creating a style; they are about saving the Earth. The reason is that her actions help reduce the production and consumption of clothes.

Worth over \$3 trillion and making up 2% of the world's GDP, the fashion industry today has an almost entirely linear approach. The process moves in a straight line from design to consumption to disposal. Material extraction, textile manufacturing, the supply chain, design, sales, marketing, and other steps are guided by the aim of maximizing garment consumption without considering other issues.

Due to linear fashion, the fashion industry negatively affects the environment. 85% of textiles go into landfills, only 1% of the material is recycled, at least 500,000 tons of microfibers end up in the ocean (equal to 50 billion plastic bottles), and 93 billion cubic meters of water is required for textile production annually. Alarming numbers like these will keep increasing if producers maintain the old system. It is clear that waste and pollution from the fashion industry must be reduced. Linear fashion must change, and this could happen through circular fashion.

Circular fashion is inspired by the principles of a circular economy and sustainable development. A circular economy is based on limiting waste, keeping resources and materials in use, and reusing them. In a circular model, we make, use, and reuse materials for as long as possible to extract their maximum value. Therefore, clothing and textiles are produced, used, and reused to minimize waste. It is a renewable approach to reduce the fashion industry's environmental impact.

Circular fashion provides numerous benefits. First, extending the lifespan of fibers significantly reduces textile waste, benefiting the environment. Second, circular processes utilize chemicals and materials safe for human health and the environment. This practice protects the environment and consumer health. Third, materials are regenerated instead of being disposed of, which enables their long-term use.

The rise of circular fashion is facilitated by new technology and ideas. Materials commonly used in clothing are not eco-friendly because they require considerable resources and often break down slowly. This creates a need for eco-friendly textile alternatives. Currently, companies are developing recycled fibers and fibers extracted from agricultural waste products like leaves, peels, and seeds. One company uses nanotechnology to make soft material from orange peels. Another makes fabrics from kapok tree seeds. The trees grow well in poor soil without needing much water. These new fabrics produce less waste, last a long time, and break down easily.

In addition to these manufacturing techniques, technology will improve in such a way that it may become normal to produce clothes only when people order them. This "make-to-order" method will cost more, but then less money will be spent on maintaining offline stores. And 3D technology will enable people to see how clothes will fit online without trying them on in a store. In the long run, innovation in production and sales will facilitate sustainable fashion and considerably reduce material waste and logistics emissions.

Another key to making fashion sustainable is the consumer: us. If we want the fashion industry to adopt more sustainable practices, we must care about how clothes come to us. We should then demonstrate our concerns through what we buy. The market, of course, will respond. We can also reduce waste by discarding clothes responsibly. To be specific, we should buy only what we need and pass clothing on to someone who will wear it or to a thrift shop when discarding it.

Circular fashion will not solve every problem in the fashion industry overnight. However, small steps in the right direction are better than nothing. Keeping things in the supply chain for as many cycles as possible is really important. By making small changes to our clothing habits today, the fashion industry will gradually improve. After all, nothing is more fashionable than saving the planet.