The Crime of Fast Fashion

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Deviance is a word to describe criminals, people who don't fit in with certain cultures, or traditions, people who cause trouble, people who have "something wrong with them". There are many ways deviance can be used, and it's only an umbrella that can cover a lot of topics, categorizations, and certain angles of crime. One significant branch of deviance is white-collar crime, a subcategory that focuses on offenses committed in professional and business settings.

The term of white-collar crime is a phrase used to describe crime that is used in a business setting, by those professionals. The term "White collar crime" was coined by Edwin Sutherland, and by his description; "a crime committed by a person of respectability and high social status in the course of their occupation". These people abuse their power in a workplace/business, for personal profit, or just to mess up someone else's situation. There are many times of white collar crime that can contribute to the criminogenic environment such as; wage theft, corruption, market manipulation, environmental crimes, and labor exploitation. A criminogenic environment is one that allows for these criminals to commit these crimes without any penalties. These environments allow these "criminals" to adapt and learn new methods of white -collar crime, and they will get smarter as time progresses. The industry that I will be writing about that produces these criminals that hurt the average civilian will be the fashion industry. There are 2 major instances of why the fashion industry is a perfect example of a criminogenic environment because of its negative impact on the Earth, and its constant and excessive labor exploitation.

The fashion industry came a long way from being just to protect humankind from the seasons and Earth. It became a way for some to express themselves and what they believe in. From religion and traditions to sexuality and hobbies. The original use of clothing was to protect the body from the seasons. Paleolithic humans, who were hunters and gatherers used to preserve the skin of animals they've hunted (their hide) to protect themselves. This was also used as an armor in a sense to defend themselves from other attackers, or while hunting. Jumping to the Greek Period, there were many ways where fashion was incorporated into everyday life. They way someone dressed, determined their social status. For example, the upper class consisted of wealthy landowners, priests, and high ranking officials. They were seen in loincloths, silk, wreaths, and wooden sandals; all while lower classes wore whatever they could find or make on their own. What started the fashion industry that we know of today, was the invention of the sewing machine and textile factories during the Industrial Revolution (thanks to Thomas Saint). This made the once limited materials and styles more available to the general public, which allowed the purchasing of these products and pieces of art cheaper. "Haute Couture", a term created and coined by Charles Frederick Worth during the mid 1800's, was used to desire the "quality" over the "quantity" of clothes. His designs were branded, and then used models to showcase his creations, starting a trend that would last decades. Further down the line in the 20th Century, sparked the popularity of Chanel, Dior, and the legendary Yves Saint Laurent. They revived the "haute Couture" while making their clothing affordable to the general public, along with bringing about a major influence to fashion; introducing "Luxury" to everyday clothing. At the end of this century, fashion capitals included: New York, Milan, France, Italy, and Tokyo. Now, in the 21st century, fashion is everywhere. Digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok are used to draw in the brand's audience, while being entertaining and showing their clothes in use. Fast fashion is a term used to describe the rapid growth and creations of these fashion products. Brands like H&M, Shein, and Zara are the top contenders in this category, using inhumane and unsustainable ways to produce these products. This paper will dig deeper into the methods used and their effects.

Labor exploitation happens in many ways, as well as in many different industries. The act of wage theft means that the company is constantly failing to pay employees minimum wage (they are paid way less), they want employees to work off the clock, underpay those who hit the qualifications of overtime, all while making their working conditions inhumane. The criminogenic environment in the fast fashion industry allows for all to occur. One of the brands that is strongly tied to mistreating their factory workers is Adidas. They are a company that conducts both examples I have stated above, and why the fashion industry makes a criminogenic environment. They have earned a profit of \$22 billion in the pandemic, which is a 15% increase from the year before, but stole \$11.7 million worth of wages from their workers. (CleanClothesCampaign 2022). To sum it all up, this shows how much money was taken from these employees. Let me break it down so it can be easier to see how much this can affect one single worker. According to Macrotrends, Adidas had 59,258 employees globally. The average pay then was around \$22.48 per hour. With that being said, their annual salary will be \$44,960. With the amount of wages that is taken above, their take home salary of one employee will be \$200 less than before; \$44,960. So with that being said, every single employee will be robbed \$200. That \$200 lost is worth \$226 today, because of inflation over the years. That is a 13% increase, and who knows when it will rise again. Vivian Tauchmann, the coordinator of the PayYourWorkers Campaign had stated, "The problem is systemic, and brands must be held accountable for wage and severance theft through а legally binding agreement." (CleanClothesCampaign 2022). Which is true. During the Fashion week event in L.A of 2023, there were rumors of malpractices in the industry, the underpayment of models, relations between large established brands and startups, and the fact that these models were part taking in certain events that will negatively affect their reputation. The U.S Department of Labor made an investigation of these factories that made these pieces, and they discovered that they are getting paid \$1.58 per hour. That state's minimum wage was \$15 per hour. (Rosalez 2023). Another example of wage theft and labor exploitation in the fashion industry can be found in the factories that create H&M and G.A.P clothing. This source stated a very specific example of power abuse and can happen more than we know. There was a woman named Radhika, who was employed at an H&M textile factory and was assaulted by her batch supervisor. He shouted, "you are not meeting your target production", and proceeded to touch her sexually, injure her, as well as physically assault her out of her chair and onto the floor. (Hitching-Hales, 2018). There are a lot of inhumane conditions caused by the people, as well as the physical environment itself. These are the many ways where the criminogenic environment of the fast fashion industry can cause labor exploitations. This goes to show the different sides of capitalism and who gets affected in many different ways. These 4 different sides are the wealthy, the brands, the factory workers, and those in poverty. These effects are positive for the wealthy and the brands, and negative for the workers and those in poverty. The brands always are positively affected. The profit that they make, the expansion of their brand, and the attention they receive. Any press is good press, so they will take advantage of it and gain more attraction and different kinds of audiences. The wealthy are positively affected because they get to own pieces of fashion. Also, from an economic standpoint, they can invest in these brands and their stocks. Selling these stocks as they increase in value, along with selling their own purchased product, will only bring more income in for themselves. The factory workers, those who make the

product are mistreated by their managers, while being severely underpaid by the companies who make a majority of the profit. They put their lives at risk to make next to nothing, keeping them in the poverty range. With that being said, these factories are being built where these factory workers live. They are evicted, homes are destroyed and families are separated. These new factories are causing pollution to the earth, along with deforestation and destruction of wildlife.

The second reason why the fast fashion industry can be a perfect example of a criminogenic environment is the harm done to the Earth. There are a lot of nonbiodegradable and unsustainable substances in fashion, such as nylon, polyester, leather, and rubber, which are the most used and synthesized in fashion. But before I get into that, we must start off where they start off, in factories. To process and create these materials, factories use energy (which are mostly nonrenewable like fossil fuels). These fossil fuels cause so much emission, that it is predicted in 2030, that the emissions from textile factories alone will be up 60%. Also, water pollution is another large effect of fast fashion. This industry alone is at the number 2 spot in water pollution, and use. A pair of jeans at these H&M factories use 2,000 gallons of water, and a cotton shirt 700. (Maiti, 2024). The dumping of these dyes is what leads to the pollution of the water, streams lead to rivers, rivers lead to oceans, and oceans lead to the faucet in your sink. Now, with this, we can talk about what happens to these garments and items after they are used. 34 billion pounds of textiles are thrown away after use, or the use to create these clothing items. That averages 100 pounds of textiles per person a year, (Lundberg, 2022). The more income someone has, the more likely they are to litter as well. The wealthy discard 76 percent more waste than those with a lower income. (Lundberg, 2022). With this amount of pollution, there can be more than one way where this can affect the daily citizen. Matilda Lartey is an environmental activist in Ghana, and she has done research on how the US factories that are in these third world countries affect everyone. One way it affects them is that there are multiple pieces of low quality clothing that cannot be recycled or reused, so it ends up in open air dumps. Open air dumps are where gas and chemicals are used to forcefully decompose these clothes, polluting air, land and water (Lundberg, 2022). The EPA suggests adding another "R" to the phrase "reduce, reuse, recycle", which is "refuse". They blame consumerism for the excessive need of buying clothes and items one doesn't need. They also believe that this is a large impact of the emission from factories. The "want" for more product calls for a larger and quickly produced supply. Another instance can be where these clothes end up after improperly discarded, the sewers. They can prevent water flow and cause flooding. That then leads to the creation of waterborne diseases. (Lundberg, 2022). Lastly, they can burn unwanted clothing or burn them to make room for newly made items. These fires can harm the air, impacting respiratory and cardiovascular health (Lundberg, 2022).

There isn't any punishment given to these individuals, other than a fine so small that won't change any day-to-day routines for them. The reason behind it is because of the way these companies are prosecuted, and what happens after. Corporate fault is when held legally for any kind of malpractice, or crime. Anyone within the company, from a manager to factory worker to executives, can cause Corporate fault. One major example of this being in play is the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal. Volkswagen installed software within their vehicles to deceit the emissions test, making it seem like they are producing less emissions than they actually do (40 times more to be exact). They lost the legal battle, and had to pay billions in fines, recalled their vehicles, and had to pay all of their lawyers. But they have quickly gained back the money that they have lost within the next few years because of the new found investment in electric vehicles. As described above, the CEO's, presidents, or chairmen of these brands are not held accountable for these crimes, but are rewarded when they release a new product, rewarded when they increase the product they made a year, and rewarded when they made a profit; all while sacrificing the safety and pay of innocent workers trying to make a living. To combat this issue, there should be a strike system, so when all the strikes are tallied, the company will inevitably show down, or go bankrupt. Many laws are broken, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the Consumer credit protection Act. These acts all protect, in order, the safety of all workplaces ensuring the health of workers, equal and reasonable wage (all people are to be required to be paid more than minimum wage), and the regulation of these wages. These laws are clearly overlooked, as profit and the amount of clothes these people have are worth more than the health and pay of human beings. As mentioned above, the majority of these brand's profits come from wage theft, and it gets worse every year (the adidas examples I have cited earlier in the paper). There isn't any standard held to these factories. No set of rules, regulations, or limits were set, therefore allowing these criminals to keep mistreating and underpaying these workers, as well as harming the environment that we live in. This is because of the "free market" these companies have. The

term free market describes the unrestricted competition between any company, whether they are private or not. They have the free will to expand their company into whatever territory their money can buy. For example, in Brazil there are companies such as JBS, Marfrig, and Minerva, that are causing a large deforestation of the land because of their expansion. They are destroying wildlife, getting rid of native species, and increasing the emissions that are created yearly. There are many ways to solve this issue while solving many more. Since there is a 70% reported job shortage, there should be more people located in these places acting as a "police", upholding these labor laws. There could also be courts dedicated to these issues alone, making handling them swiftly with nothing to pull them away from the problem at hand. These courts could also teach people how to run factories the right way, and in a humane way where no one gets hurt. There should also be psychologists and therapists specifically for this department, since there is no other like it. These struggles of these conditions should also be written about more. This can also lead to more protests and awareness of these issues.

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