

SHIRT
\$39.95 at Gap
Made in Indonesia

T-SHIRT
\$19.99 at American Eagle
Made in Indonesia

PANTS
\$23.96 at Old Navy
Made in Bangladesh

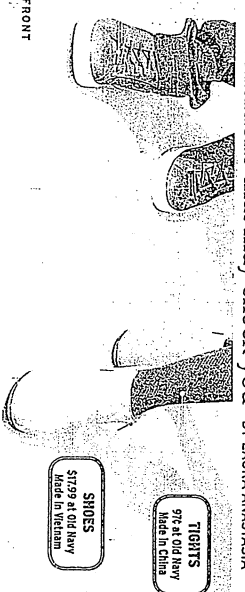
JACKET
\$39.90 at Zara
Made in Bangladesh

DRESS
\$14.37 at Old Navy
Made in Cambodia

The Real Cost of CHEAP FASHION

Many of our trendy, inexpensive clothes are made in places like Bangladesh, where workers—including children— toil under conditions that may shock you

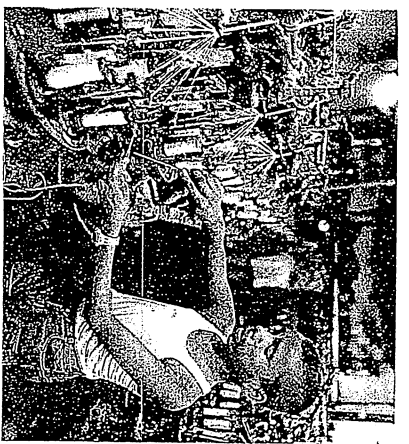
BY LAURA ANASTASIA



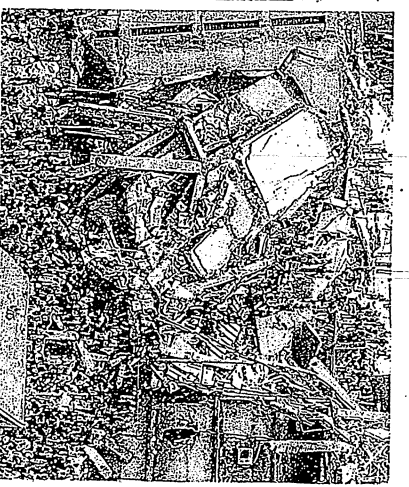
SHOES
\$109 at Old Navy
Made in Vietnam

TIGHTS
\$7.94 at Old Navy
Made in China

SWEATERS
\$19.99 at American Outfitters
Made in China



A 13-year-old in a textile factory in Bangladesh; the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory (right) in Bangladesh in 2013 killed more than 1,100 people.



Young women hunch over sewing machines in a windowless workshop in Bangladesh. Elbow to elbow in the stifling heat, they assemble jackets. Together, the women must sew hundreds of jackets an hour, more than 1,000 a day. Their daily wage is less than \$3.

Just a week or two later, these same jackets will be labeled fall's hottest back-to-school item, selling to teens for \$14.99 each at malls across the United States. The jackets are just one example of what is known as fast fashion: trendy clothes designed, created, and sold to consumers as quickly as possible at extremely low prices. New looks arrive in stores weekly or even daily, and they cost so little that many people can afford to fill their closets with new outfits multiple times each year—then toss them the minute they go out of style.

Chains such as H&M and Zara first popularized fast fashion in the early 2000s. It has since spread throughout the entire clothing industry. As a result, global clothing production has more than tripled since 2000. The industry now churns out more than 150 billion garments annually.

Long Hours & Little Pay

Fast fashion items may not cost you much at the cash register, but they come with a serious price: Tens of millions of people in developing countries, some just children,

work long hours in dangerous conditions to make them. In the kinds of factories often labeled sweatshops, most garment workers are paid barely enough to survive.

Fast fashion also hurts the environment. Garments are manufactured using toxic chemicals and then transported around the globe, making the fashion industry the world's second-largest polluter, after the oil industry. And millions of tons of discarded clothing piles up in landfills each year.

"A lot of what we're throwing away hasn't even been worn that many times," says Elizabeth Cline, author of *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*.

"Clothing has become a cheap form of entertainment." Until the 1970s, most apparel worn by Americans was made in the United States. Then clothing production, like a lot of manufacturing, began moving overseas, where labor costs were lower. As recently as 1990, half the clothes sold in the U.S. were made in the U.S. Today, it's just 2 percent.

Most American clothing companies now manufacture their merchandise in developing countries in Asia (see map, p. 10). Workers there earn a fraction of what U.S. workers make—and have fewer protections. The lower labor

costs translate to lower prices for shoppers (who then buy more clothing) and higher profits for retailers. That's helped make fashion a \$3 trillion global industry. Today, many of the world's 75 million garment workers live in China and Bangladesh, the top-two clothing producers. Workers often earn just a few dollars a day. Many are women in their teens.

"They're sometimes the first one in their families to have a real job, so the family is eager to get them into the factories as quickly as they can," says Michael Posner of New York University's Stern Center for Business and Human Rights. "It's a very tough existence."

Indeed, garment workers often toil in windowless rooms thick with fumes from the chemicals used to manufacture and dye clothes. If they dare miss a day because they're sick, they risk being fired.

For Taslima Akter, that wasn't an option. The 23-year-old couldn't afford to lose her job at the Whicky Apparel factory in Bangladesh, so when her manager refused last year to give her time off to see a doctor about a persistent fever she accepted it. Weeks later, Akter passed out at work. After she was revived, her boss sent her back to her sewing machine. Shortly

Watch a video on fast fashion at UPFRONTMAGAZINE.COM