

The Ramifications of the Overconsumption of Goods by Our Modern Society

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The signal most important conservation issue of our lifetime is the overconsumption of goods by people in developed nations. We've become dependent on single use items to help simplify our busy lifestyles, we buy into seasonal fashion and beauty products that we throw out or donate after only a couple uses, and we're dependent on technology that was intentionally built to slow down and need replacing after only a couple of years. This is such a serious concern because the existence of these unnecessary goods has ramifications in every single branch of climate change. The production and transportation of these goods requires fossil fuels, produce greenhouse gas emissions, and increase demands for unethical labor in third world countries. Once these items have served their purpose, they're usually improperly disposed of and end up overcrowding our already problematic landfills, or worse yet, floating throughout the oceans. We are our own worst enemy in the battle against climate change and we're currently dragging our feet on making some very minor lifestyle changes that will have serious positive effects on the environment. By purchasing fewer, more sustainably manufactured, high quality goods, we will drastically reduce the devastating effects our lifestyles are having on the environment.

The average person tends to see climate change as an untouchable issue that needs to be taken care of by the government and big businesses. I would actually argue that individuals have the greatest ability to combat climate change because we are the ones shaping the market and shifting supply and demand curves. Big businesses are pumping out cheap goods because that's what consumers are currently demanding and government regulations are designed to accommodate for the production of these goods and support economic activity. There are a handful of businesses doing it right and supporting conservation efforts and if we start supporting those businesses more and start purchasing high quality reusable items, other large corporations will have no choice but to conform to our new societal norms or go out of business.

Now, the question becomes how do we shift consumer mindset and get people to stop purchasing cheap, unnecessary goods? We need better conservation education in our k-12 schools. We need to teach elementary aged kids about the recycling system and the differences and concerns about the various types of plastics. We should teach middle-school students about fossil fuel extractions, greenhouse gas emissions, and sustainable alternatives. We should teach high school students about injustices in labor in third world countries, personal sustainability habits, human relationships with the environment, and how to be an informed voter. We have already seen almost sixty schools in the United States become certified sustainable and these schools have

implemented 289 sustainable initiatives into their curriculum and hopefully we will continue to see this program grow. Going beyond k-12 schooling, all colleges that require elective courses should offer and require students to take at least one course on sustainability. I think by incorporating environmental awareness and sustainability into the core curriculum of the next generation we will naturally see much more thoughtful consumers.

That being said, the current population has grown up without such a curriculum and the natural world doesn't have the time to wait around for the next generation to take over. We also need to be able to influence the current generations of consumers. To do this, I think we simply need to make some noise. There are still a lot of people concerned about the environment out there and I think they need to take responsibility and make their voices heard if they want to invoke change now. Peaceful protests, sustainable clubs and organizations on campuses and within communities, and speaking your mind at public forums and community meetings are all ways to spark peoples' interest in conservation and getting media attention. While doing this, it's important to remember that everyone's opinion is valid and we must advocate and not argue or we'll risk turning people away completely. The current generation will be very slow to transition to a more sustainable lifestyle, but we need to appreciate that any change is positive change.

If you take anything from this essay please understand that your actions as an individual are meaningful and impactful on a global scale and taking action to save our planet cannot wait any longer. Interact with the general public and the older generation and address your concerns peacefully and thoughtfully. Educate the younger generation and ignite their passions so they grow up environmentally aware. Our society has somehow shifted into the mindset that single use items are a necessity and possessing material goods adds value to our lives, but it's not too late for us to take control and become more environmentally conscious. If we can act as a nation to reduce our consumption of unnecessary goods we'll be reducing the need for fossil fuels and the rate of greenhouse gas emissions and we'll provide developing nations the opportunity to build their economy by reducing the demand for cheap and unethical labor. We'll reduce our generation of waste which will give us the time we need to start properly managing our recycling system and eventually eliminate waste pouring into our oceans. All of these issues will be combatted if we collectively said no to unnecessary goods and became more thoughtful and intentional consumers.

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