

Sustainable Innovation 2010

The Impacts of the Apparel Industry

Kimberly Guthrie, Virginia Commonwealth University, USA

The apparel industry is one of the largest global industries. The impacts of the industry are obvious, but it has the potential to greatly reduce its environmental impact and promote a new perspective about an industry with ecological and cultural systems that can support it.

To best prepare young designers entering an industry that faces many challenges to be sustainable, innovative ways of thinking about textiles, fabrics, and product design based on sustainable values need to be identified. Many designers who work in this niche market own their own company and are trying to employ as many sustainable business approaches as possible and still be profitable, which is one of their biggest challenges. Analyzing the complex relationship between fashion design, textiles, sustainability, and profitability will help determine resources and create frameworks for educational and business models. Reviewing the literature and getting feedback from practicing designers and design educators will inform the development of course structures that encourage the understanding of sustainable design philosophies and attitudes as they apply to fashion design problems. The aim is to determine the interconnected factors that influence overall product sustainability, so it is imperative that the next generation of fashion designers is provided with a sustainability perspective that will affect the design and production decisions they will make every day. As Kate Fletcher writes in her book *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles*, "We must design with a more pluralistic, decentralized and diverse view of what our industry can be."