

# ENVIRONMENTAL FEMINISM

*an essay on being a woman amidst the climate crisis*

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Lately, an increasing number of movements are arising in the battle for climate activism and action. Not only is it no longer kept on the down-low by big corporations, but individuals and small organisations are able to fight back against global warming and climate change. People like Greta Thunberg and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are being paid to talk about and to take action for the climate movement. More interestingly, the BAFTAs 2020 dress code was "sustainability", McDonalds have included a "McVeggie" burger in their menu, and Pune has banned the use of single-use plastic, among other very notable achievements.

On another social activism front is feminism. #MeToo, the Equal Pay Movement, etc. are only being fuelled by the technological advancements of the world. We live in the most socially and culturally liberated period ever, with women not only allowed to earn, do, and think as they please, but to have an identity and life independent of men. Radical feminism especially highlights the fact that our society needs to validate women independent from men.

I think its safe to say that men and women are not the same. We are equal, or rather, should be equal, but we are physically and socially different, and I feel that the climate movement needs to reflect the setbacks that women face when trying to go green compared to men. This essay aims to explore the intersectionality of femininity and the climate, and how normal women can reduce their gender-based impact on the environment.

## PART ONE: *fashion*

The fashion industry contributes to 10% of global carbon emissions, and 20% of wastewater, and has understandably been on the worse end of climate activism lately. At every step of clothes' production, there is some form of pollution and/or carbon footprint generated, not to mention that disposed garments are filling up water bodies and landfills. Additionally, with each season, consumers are pushed to buy more and more clothes to keep up with trends, which forces excess production and disposal.

Women are at least 9% more likely to purchase a fashion item than men, and up to 30% more likely to buy undergarments and nightwear, which is the highest selling category for both men and women. Additionally, most fast fashion, which is cheap, low-quality clothing made to keep up with trends, is tailored toward women.

To reduce the amount of carbon emissions and other pollution that fast fashion and the fashion industry in general creates, there is only one answer.

The solution involves a revamping of the entire industry, and this is to shift fashion from a linear economy—take, make, throw—to a circular economy. The hallmarks of a linear economy is excess production, excess disposal, and an obsession with generating profit, while a circular economy is defined by the reintroduction of products which no longer can be used into the economy in a different way.

The issue with this solution is that it is next to impossible for the average woman to cause such a gigantic upheaval of a \$527 billion dollar industry, and we must make amends with the fact that fast fashion, trends, etc. will exist no matter what we do.

What we can do, however, is to make small alterations to our personal fashion.

To do so, we must first consider that the clothing that fast fashion is characterized by is generally of low quality and doesn't have a very long lifespan. Instead of spending money in these cheap, rapidly changing trends, it is better to invest in clothes that are long-lasting, versatile, and can be paired with many other items in your wardrobe.

The easiest way to do so is to create a capsule wardrobe. A capsule wardrobe is a collection of clothing (generally 25-40 pieces), all of which fit the woman's personality, lifestyle and body, and a maximum number of pieces of which match each other.

Attached below is a helpful graphic which describes the "essential" pieces that can be included in a capsule wardrobe. Of course, this depends, from woman-to-woman, but the important part is that all these pieces are high-quality, to prevent the need for disposal.



The advantages of a capsule wardrobe include saving time and money, reducing personal waste (and therefore personal carbon footprint), and looking put together no matter what the occasion. This formula for a capsule wardrobe can also be adapted for women who work different jobs or have different personal styles.

Once the item of clothing has been outgrown, worn, or the woman is bored of it, she can simply donate the item of clothing to someone in need, or reuse it for something else. For example, women can use their old shirts as washcloths, old dresses as materials for patchwork quilts, etc.

Women's fashion always has and will continue to follow the model of a linear economy, but that doesn't mean we have to participate in it. By investing in high-quality, long-lasting pieces, we are saying no to the cheap, rapidly changing trends that fast fashion is. If enough women do so, then maybe the economic landscape of fashion will alter significantly, but until then, every woman must play her part.

## PART TWO: *cosmetics*

While the fashion industry has got a bad reputation for being very polluting, cosmetics, though there's less of them, are more dangerous than fashion. Avobenzone in sunscreens deplete coral reefs. Microbeads and microplastics including glitter and the scrubbing beads in face wash are basically impossible to remove from the ocean and cause many issues with aquatic life. Volatile organic compounds, also known as VOCs in hairsprays and perfumes contribute to air pollution.

Additionally, 70% of cosmetics use palm oil, which is known to cause deforestation.

There is a very simple solution to this, although it may cost more and be less convenient. This is to choose cruelty-free and vegan companies for cosmetics over popular brands. For example, Axiology sells palm oil-free lipstick, Dab Herb Makeup offer a wide variety of eco-friendly makeup, Nudi Goods sells their makeup in tins or cardboard packaging, and many more. These can be found using a simple Google search (although Brave is a better search engine for the environment) and can be purchased through online order.

Another solution is to make your own cosmetics. A large part of my childhood was watching my mother make soaps twice a year, which she would then send in newspaper packaging to all our friends and family, and we'd keep a couple for ourselves under the bathroom sink. Not only have I started selling these soaps in my community, but recently, I have begun making my own shampoo, conditioner, and lotion.

### HOMEMADE LOTION

4 PARTS *jojoba or almond oil*  
2 PARTS *coconut oil*  
2 PARTS *beeswax*  
1 PART *shea butter*

The recipe provided above has to be mixed in a glass jar and then microwaved in 30 seconds bursts until the entire thing is melted, at which point essential oils of choice can be added, and it should be allowed to cool down until it resembles petroleum jelly.

Mainstream cosmetic products are generally bad for the environment, and to solve this problem, women have to make an effort either to purchase cruelty-free and eco-friendly products, or to create their own.

## PART THREE: *menstruation*

The average woman loses 27 litres of blood in her entire life via her period. Menstrual waste in India alone is said to be 113 thousand tonnes annually due to the use of sanitary pads and tampons and is continuing to grow every year.

My grandmother probably used cloth pads for her periods, but those are not only very difficult to clean and inconvenient to use in today's fast-paced lifestyle, but as mentioned earlier in this essay, it is better using as less cloth as possible, because the disposal of cloth today is not done responsibly.

Instead, the answer to this problem is a contraption called the menstrual cup. The menstrual cup is a flexible cup made of medical-grade silicone, made to be worn as a replacement to sanitary pads and tampons. A single cup can be used for up to 10 years, and since the average woman has 40 years of periods, every woman can be attributed to 4 cups in her lifetime. This is vastly better than the 16,000 sanitary pads or tampons' worth of plastic waste generated in the average woman's life.

According to various sources, these are also way more comfortable to wear, easier to clean, and are attributed to substantially less health issues compared to pads and tampons. Although they may be difficult to fathom using, they have been shown to be a much better alternative to the various polluting sanitary hygiene products used today and are economically friendlier than their counterparts.

## *in* CONCLUSION

Women have learnt the hard way that the people in power are generally rich, white and male, and they often only care about another scheme to get more money. What we don't realize is that as the consumers, we always have the last say. We can choose not to invest our hard-earned money with companies that do not rise to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Men and women are fundamentally different, and being a woman brings with it many unique challenges, especially within the context of the climate crisis and the environment, but we must steadily practice safe, versatile and cruelty free femininity. By doing so, we are not only making a statement, but a difference. Pass on the word.

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