

Climate Change and Fast Fashion

In this research project, we interrogate fast fashion in the 21st century in the context of a changing climate, by assessing emergent trends in sustainable fashion as an alternative consumption pathway through the annual ‘Trash the Runway’ event in Boulder, Colorado. We interviewed and surveyed designers and analyzed workshops and activities that led up to their annual fashion show. We also surveyed and interviewed students at the University of Colorado Boulder who worked with designers to produce short films about them and their work. The project provides youth – who are often marginalized in decision-making processes – a literal stage to suggest policy and behavior changes to address climate change and sustainability. We found that designers expressed reticence before the workshops and events to speak about climate change in everyday life, yet their design work creatively spoke powerfully for them, and they expressed less discomfort after the experience while they advanced their skillset as climate communicators. Moreover, we found that both designers and student partners reported that they think climate change will impact people greatly in the future, yet fewer respondents reported that climate change impacts them personally. While engagement with sustainable fashion helps to de-fetishize production processes and link consumption habits with awareness of climate and environmental change, more creative work should be done through fast- and sustainable-fashion endeavors to draw out temporal considerations of climate change threats here and now.

Trash the Runway is an annual independent study workshop for Boulder, CO students in grades 6-12 in which participants design, troubleshoot & create original garments from found materials, as well as present them in a professional runway show & competition. The workshop provides youth with a stage to suggest policy and behavior change and works to redefine the relationship of youth to adults. The CU/TTR partnership featured in this research focuses on establishing near-peer mentorship models instead of relying solely on perceived authority figures for expertise. It also critiques one of the most deeply enshrined colonial systems: fast-fashion and the production of clothing as an extractive and exploitive enterprise that deeply impacts both humans and the other-than-human world.



“If the garment business were a nation, it would be the fourth largest climate polluter on Earth”
- Lucy Siegle



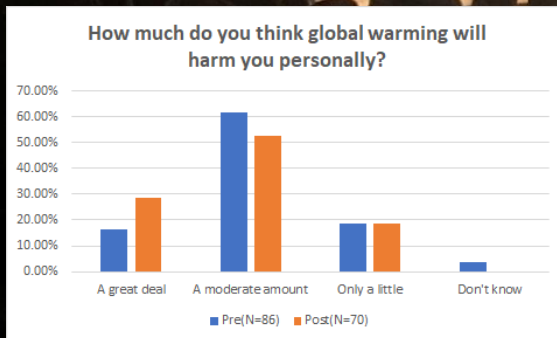
Max Boykoff (CIRES, CU ENVS, Inside the Greenhouse)

Patrick Chandler (CIRES, CU ENVS, Inside the Greenhouse)

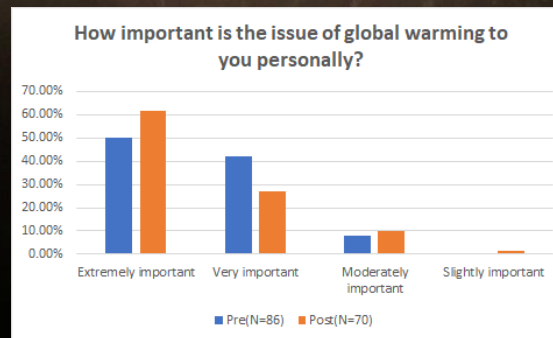
Presley Church (CU, Inside the Greenhouse)

Beth Osnes (CU THDN, Inside the Greenhouse)

For more information see: Boykoff, Maxwell, et al. “Examining Climate Change and Sustainable/Fast Fashion in the 21st Century: ‘Trash the Runway.’” Oxford Open Climate Change. Pending (May 2021)



Pre and post project survey responses from project participants (both university and grade 6-12 students)



Trash the Runway 8 participants as winners are announced. Photographed by Dylan Crossley 2017.



A word cloud depicting frequency of words (4 letters or more) used in qualitative responses by ITG students and TTR designers in pre- and post-surveys.