

**NOSTALGIACORE, ITS SUB AESTHETICS HOW IT INFLUENCES THE WAY
ZOOMERS AND MILLENNIALS DRESS IN THE MODERN DAY AND WHY
ARE PEOPLE CHASING THEIR CHILDHOOD**

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Extended Essay

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Abstract

In this Extended Essay I investigate what are some of the main the Nostalgia aesthetics such as Barbiecore, Bubblegum Bitch and Kidcore, the colour palettes related to this aesthetics. Their origins and influencers, how Nostalgia aesthetics are sustainable due to the consumers of said brand not only upcycling items but thrifting and reselling them for the true nostalgia value. I also investigate how dopamine dressing exists and the meaning and emotional connections this has on one's self-esteem and self-image. I also investigate how the Coronavirus Pandemic and the Lockdowns as self-isolation periods the pandemic influenced has then influenced an influx of Millennial and Zoomers to wear Nostalgiacore, I investigate why this is and what future trends could become in the future.

Contents

<i>Table of Illustrations.....</i>	<i>04</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>06</i>
<i>Chapter 1 What are Millennials and Zoomers</i>	<i>07</i>
<i>Chapter 2</i>	<i>08</i>
<i>i. Barbiecore</i>	<i>08</i>
<i>ii. Bubblegum Bitch (Bubblegum Bae)</i>	<i>09</i>
<i>iii. Kidcore</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Chapter 3.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>i. Sustainability</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>ii. Pandemic</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Chapter 4</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>i. Dopamine Dressing</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>ii. Nostalgia</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>00</i>

Table of Illustrations

Figure	Illustration	Page
Fig. 1	Jaap Buitendijk, Margot Robbie as Barbie (2022) [Image]. Available at: https://media.vogue.co.uk/photos/62690e5b5ff082f9adb4d986/2:3/w_1920,c_limit/rev-1-Barbie-InstaVert_High_Res_JPEG.jpeg [Accessed 29 th November 2022]	9
Fig.2	Vogue, Moschino 2015 Spring Runway (2014) [Image]. Available at: https://assets.vogue.com/photos/55c651c408298d8be2279ebd/master/w_1920,c_limit/001_AG18858.jpg [Accessed 29 th November 2022]	9
Fig.3	Vogue, Moschino 2015 Spring Runway (2014) [Image] Available at: https://assets.vogue.com/photos/55c651c408298d8be2279ec2/master/w_2560%2Cc_limit/006_AG18964.jpg [Accessed 29 th November 2022]	9
Fig.4	Glamour, Kasey Musgrave 2019 MET Gala (2019) [Image] Available at: https://media.glamour.com/photos/5cd0ccab72e2642cf5b588a4/master/w_2260,h_3000,c_limit/shutterstock_10229712al.jpg [Accessed 29 th November 2022]	9
Fig.5	Versace, MEDUSA AEVITAS PLATFORM PUMPS (2022) [Image] Available at: https://www.versace.com/dw/image/v2/ABAO_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Sites-ver-master-catalog/default/dw5400282c/original/90_1002005-DRA67_1PA4V_28_MedusaAevitasPlatformPumps-PlatformShoes-versace-online-store_1_6.jpg?sw=1440&sh=2000&sm=fit&sfrm=jpg [Accessed 29 th November 2022]	9
Fig.6	Versace, FW 22/23 (2022) [Image] Available at: https://img.businessoffashion.com/resizer/znWs6XnocVN-m2SEotczWZkuP74=/1024x0/filters:format(jpg):quality(70):focal(358x595:368x605)/cloudfront-eu-central-1.images.arcpublishing.com/businessoffashion/2CTFIVT2VZHS3MFTZGUU7RH2QM.jpg (Accessed 29 th November 2022)	9
Fig.7	MGT Entertainment, Bratz (2001) [Image] Available at: https://passion4bratz.com/2001-2/#jp-carousel-7552 (Accessed 29 th November 2022)	10
Fig.8	Glamour, Sandy Grease (1978) [Image] Available at: https://media.glamour.com/photos/62f2b8ac93c86a1dd4bf7bc5/master/w_1600%2Cc_limit/1189257844 (Accessed November 29 th , 2022)	10
Fig.9	Sandy Grease (1978) [Image] Available at: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/89/cb/83/89cb83f3d64b4a7f57d305da6a6a1496.jpg (Accessed November 29 th , 2022)	10
Fig 10.	Ariana Grande, thank u next video (2018) [Image] Available at: https://assets1.cbsnewsstatic.com/hub/i/2018/11/30/192aa2b2-996d-4034-863b-e660676a1681/screen-shot-2018-11-30-at-4-25-40-pm.png (Accessed November 29 th , 2022)	10

Fig 11.	Takashi Murakami Smile on Rainbow Flower (2002) [Image] Available at: https://images.stockx.com/images/Takashi-Murakami-Smile-On-Rainbow-Flower-Print-Signed-Edition-of-100.jpg?fit=fill&bg=FFFFFF&w=700&h=500&fm=webp&auto=compress&q=90&dpr=2&trim=color&updated_at=1618323014 (Accessed November 30 th , 2022)	12
Fig 12.	PBS, Sesame Street Cast (2015) [Image] Available at: https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/muppet/images/8/85/SesameStreet-Season46-ShowOpen-%28ZachHyman%29.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20151125022902 (Accessed November 30 th , 2022)	12
Fig 13.	Cath Kidson, Care Bear Collaboration (2022) [Image] Available at: https://www.cathkidston.com/dw/image/v2/BDHD_PRD/on/demandware.static/-/Sites-ckidst-master-catalog/default/dw0fa19bf2/images/hires/1079708_l2.jpg?sw=851 (Accessed November 30 th , 2022)	12
Fig 14.	Proenza Schouer (2022) [Image] Available at: https://imgix.bustle.com/uploads/image/2022/9/10/c6dea46a-50a3-4897-a184-777dd71e5d42-gettyimages-1422333866.jpg?w=900&h=1350&fit=crop&crop=faces&auto=format%2Ccompress (Accessed December 1 st , 2022)	17
Fig 15.	Unknown 1920s girls (1925) [Image] Available at: https://i.pinimg.com/564x/f3/86/44/f3864459bb01c793149cc7fb687ecc3a--vintage-fashion-photography-s-flapper.jpg (Accessed December 1 st , 2022)	17

Introduction

In this essay hope to research and display how the nostalgia of childhood and the media that was consumed by Millennials and Zoomers has helped dictate the current fashion trends and the revival of past ones that were once popular during the start of the new digital age, as well as how current events and culture has altered not only the way this nostalgic media is being consumed but also who is consuming it, I hope to look into the revival of not only “Barbiecore” which takes inspiration from Mattel's famous doll “Barbie” and her signature colour pink but also it's more jaded sister aesthetic “Bubblegum Bitch” (also known as “Bubblegum Bae”). Which takes inspiration from more sexy and adult looking dolls like Bratz, this aesthetic is like the early 2000's aesthetic “McBling” as well as “Bimbocore”. I also will try to aim to look into other aesthetics such as “Kidcore” which is more prominent with the inspiration childhood with the bright colours and childish toys and looks that scream innocence. The way people dress for themselves instead of others to make themselves feel happy about their body and minds, this is also known as “Dopamine Dressing.”

I also hope to investigate how taking inspiration from past trends and childhood nostalgia can be sustainable, thrifting, and reusing items that were once trendy and seen as the newest grandiose can not only help the environment but also help to make the nostalgic roots of the aesthetic more realistic and genuine by wearing items from those times.

Another point I hope to investigate into is what the future trends may be, looking at the cycle that always goes through and how every fashion item is a recycled idea from a past trends and movements, also how current events and the political climate may influence these fashion trends, for instance the recent coronavirus pandemic has influenced the way many people have changed their style and the ongoing trends that have been created due to lockdown.

Chapter One

What is a Millennials and Zoomers?

According to Michael Dimock, the president of the Pew Research Centre, Generation Y is anyone born between 1981 and 1996, while there is not a definitive guide to how many years a Generation should be defined,, especially with some of the older demographic who will be turning forty-two in 2023 relate more to Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) as is the same for the younger part of the demographic, who will be turning twenty-seven in 2023 relate to Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), the marking system is used to help researchers and historians get an understanding of the different experiences each generation has, especially to historic events and cultural developments.

Generation Y are commonly known as Millennials, the name was coined due to fact that most of the generation came of age at the beginning of the new Millenium (the 21st century) as well as growing up during the of the rise of the internet and innovative technology. Most of the older Millennials have an experience with early chatrooms such as Skype and saw the introduction of websites such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace, they were the youngest generation to live through and remember the tragedy of 9/11, which historic influence is still being felt twenty-one years later.

Pew Research Centre defines Generation Z as anyone who was born between 1997 and 2012, the last generation to be named using the Latin alphabet, many nicknames have been given to Generation Z, from “iGeneration” to “Homelanders” the official name that is currently being used is “Zoomers” this is due to most of the generation spending their teens and early twenties on Zoom and other video conferencing websites such as Microsoft Teams during the Coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, lessons as well as jobs would be conducted in the isolation of their homes but monitored by superiors (mainly managers and teachers) on these websites.

Zoomers is also a play on “Baby Boomers,” a name given to post World War II babies that were born between 1946 and 1964. The Eldest of the Gen Z demographic will be turning twenty-five in 2023. However, in 2023 the youngest of the group will be starting to enter secondary school and turning eleven. Most of the Zoomers have lost out of important life events due to the Coronavirus Pandemic such as educational experiences and important birthday milestones due to being physically isolated from their peers and the limits that Covid-19 guidelines gave them to socialise.

While the age gap between the eldest of Millennials and the youngest of Zoomers is thirty years, the two generations overlap in the matter of growing up in the digital age and the increase of social media as well as online critics, from MySpace to Instagram, both generations are growing up in an expectation of being “Aesthetic.”

Chapter Two, examples of Nostalgiacore sub genres

What is Barbiecore?

In the early summer of 2022, the first film still of Margot Robbie on the set of Greta Gerwig's Barbie Biopic [Figure 1], where she plays the titular role was published. Since then, the revival of the sickly sweet, fuchsia-based aesthetic that is "Barbiecore" has become increasingly popular, making Uberfeminine back in style for young Millennials and old Zoomers.

Released in 1987, the Barbie House was a new creation of Mattel's popular doll line, what set this creation apart from their past bestselling dolls was the pink accents in the toy house that was divided into four segments, this Art Nouveau house would go ahead and leave an everlasting impression on the ever-growing generation that is Millennials, as the 80s turned into the 90s and then the Noughties. The cartoon aesthetic dream would evolve with the introduction of Disney and Nickelodeon shows such as "Hannah Montana," "Lizzie McGuire" and "That's So Raven," with the clothes and room aesthetics that the titular characters had, every girl (and some boys) wanted to not only look like them but to also be like them.

While the Barbiecore aesthetic lost popularity over time, it never truly died down, with Moschino having a ready to wear collaboration with Mattel for their Spring 2015 collection, the catwalk was full of mostly blonde hair, blue eyed models wearing outfits ranging from hot pink leather jackets and skirt sets [Figure 2] to baby pink tracksuits covered in the Moschino name in the infamous Barbie font [Figure 3]. In 2019 Moschino made a custom version of their 2015 Barbie Pink leather jacket for country singer Kasey Musgrave to wear at the 2019 MET Gala, that year the theme was "Camp", from her arriving to the Gala in a pink convertible to her accessorising with a pink hairdryer clutch bag [Figure 4], Kasey Musgrave's look was one of the most memorable for that year at the MET Gala.

Versace has followed Moschino's trend in using a solid fuchsia Barbiecore pink their runways in recent years, one of their most iconic shoes are the "Medusa Aevitas Platform Pumps" the signature heel mimics that of a doll's shoe with the chunky heel and straight edged design. [Figure 5]. In Both Versace Spring 2022 ready to wear collection as well as their Spring 2023 ready to wear collection they have included bold Fuchsia pink clothing in their catwalk shows.

Valentino's recent Fall and Winter 2022/ 2023, named "Valentino Pink PP Collection" runway show included forty-eight full pink looks [Figure 6] on an all-Fuchsia pink catwalk, some of these looks have been debuted by celebrities such as Sebastian Stan, this collection includes multiple looks that are inspiring the maximalism of Barbiecore and Dopamine Dressing.

Alongside the vivid colouring and aesthetic that is wearing shades of pink, Barbiecore also takes inspiration from Mattel's Barbie movies and the fashion that the characters in these films, from princess dresses to ballet costumes, there is over 40 movies that tell different stories with Barbie either being the main character or playing the main character, for many Zoomers (like myself) and Millennials these movies were a core part of their childhood. Overall, Barbiecore is the definition of pink and girly.



[Figure 1]



[Figure 2]



[Figure 3]



[Figure 4]



[Figure 5]



[Figure 6]

What is Bubblegum Bitch (Bubblegum Bae)?

Bubblegum Bitch, also known by its far cleaner name "Bubblegum Bae" is the darker sister aesthetic of "Barbiecore" however it lacks the hard partying and drug use culture of the second sister aesthetic which is much sexier and wilder than the "Mcbling" Aesthetic. Bubblegum Bitches main inspiration is Bratz Dolls, released in 2001 by MGA Entertainment by ex-Mattel employee Carter Bryant (his job at Mattel was designing the clothing that Barbie and her friends wore), Bratz were promoted as "the girls with a passion for fashion", in fashion-forward clothing such as miniskirts, leather pants,

crop tops and chunky heels, these outfits were also presented alongside accessories such as mini purses, sunglasses and berets that helped enhance their bold makeup for young children across the western world these dolls were seen as the inspiration for teen and adulthood, their outfits were sexy, these fans were dubbed “Bratz heads”.

What set Bratz dolls apart from Barbie was that the friend group that consisted of Jade, Yasmine, Sasha and Cloe [Figure 7], with them all being of different ethnicity and none of them were dubbed the leader of the group, these dolls were the representation for a lot of girls who rarely saw themselves in the media, especially in 2001, it showed that race wasn’t an afterthought but also each doll wore similar clothes, they were not stereotyped or divided, their personalities and style was the important factor of their characters instead of their skin, these dolls are similar to the British girl group The Spice Girls .

Movies such as Grease (1979) Clueless (1995), Mean Girls (2004) and Heathers (1988) some of the core Bubblegum Bitch inspirational media, these movies are based in American high school with the characters who are all teenagers usually wearing tight clothing, crop tops and short skirts, their faces are full of makeup and spend every day wearing high heels (similar to Bratz dolls), the dream, nothing a minor who is sixteen or younger should be wearing (the characters in these movies went to actual high school they would get dressed coded for indecency). All these movies have famous “Makeover scenes” where usually the main character goes from a drab, boring look to a sexy eye turning individual that makes the boys go crazy for them, usually these characters are seen as innocent until the makeover where it is seen as the clothes change them and they turn into massive bitches who abandoned most of their values.

See for instance Sandy (played by Australian actress Dame Olivia Newton-John) from the cult classic movie musical Grease, her before look and personality is an iconic look for those into Barbiecore, she wears long skirts and pastel colours, her hairs in a tight ponytail and she is on the cheer squad [Figure 8], however at the end of the movie she transforms into a Pink Lady, suddenly her hair is blown out, she is smoking cigarettes from her royal red painted lips, wearing all black, her pants are skin tight and her heels are to die for [Figure 9], that look is one of the embodiments of the Bubblegum Bitch look.

Music artists such as MARINA (who in 2009 released a song called “Bubblegum Bitch”), Ariana Grande and Katy Perry who sing about being sexy and seducing men are considered icons for those who are Bubblegum Bitch, they also sometimes present themselves in clothing are outfits that link back to the inspiration of Bubblegum Bitch, for instance in November 2018 American musician Ariana Grande released a music video for her song “thank u, next” which took and recreated a lot of scenes and looks from many of the films mentioned above, for instance a major inspiration was Mean Girls (2004) and Ariana played a version of baddie “Reginia George” and had her own version of the clique “The plastics”. [Figure 10].



[Figure 7]



[Figure 8]



[Figure 9]



[Figure 10]

What is Kidcore?

The much more innocent aesthetic that is based off Nostalgia is “Kidcore.” Kidcore centres around bright rainbow colours, nostalgic themes from the 90s, 80s and 70s, kidcore started to rise in the early and mid 2010s, the key value of kidcore is the idea of relieving your childhood, for people who grew up in strict/abusive or poverty households kidcore is also a chance of living the childhood they wished they had, or their parents could have been able to afford for them.

Major motifs that are used in Kidcore include Worms on string, Mr Men, cartoonish animals such as frogs and cats, Haribo gummy sweets, glitter stickers and flowers in a similar style to Takashi Murakami's Smile Flower [Figure 11], this flower was created in 2002 and has been popular in the colour community since, it is one of the most famous imagery that is connected to Kidcore, another motif is the font that is used on building blocks and letter fridge magnets, this font is bold and big which makes it easy to read for children.

The charisma and playful energy of the aesthetic is inspired by kids shows such as Barney and Friends, Sesame Street [Figure 12], The Muppet Show as well as My Little Pony and Teletubbies, these shows target audience is early years (children aged from six months old to ten years old of age) and have much more bright simpler sets and storylines, the characters are more friendly and look more inviting, this is one of the key values that entices those who are into Kidcore getting inspired by them, this is much different to the shows that have inspired Barbiecore and Bubblegum Bitch, however one thing they all have in common is childhood.

Brands whose imagery is being seen at the forefront of the Kidcore trend have used this as a chance to exploit customers and start fast fashion collaborations with many clothing brands, take for instance Care Bears, the brand has been around for over forty years and in the last decade have collaborated with brands such as Typo, Snag tights, Skinny Dip, PrettyLittleThing, Shein and even Cath Kidson [Figure 13], these collaborations are aimed at both adults seeking the nostalgic value and aesthetic as well as children who are currently consuming the media during their childhoods.

What all these aesthetics has in common is that during one's childhood they are limited by price, time and their parents and guardians, children are allowed to explore but at a limit of what the adults in their lives want them to explore, anyone's creativity at an early age is limited to a budget, self-expression is hidden under school uniforms and clothes bought by parents, grandparents as well as aunts and uncles, most children will end up playing the part of “daughter” or “son” for their peers and families pleasure, being able to wear and live the way they wished as a child is good for their self-esteem and mental health.



[Figure 11]



[Figure 12]



[Figure 13]

Chapter Three

Sustainability and Nostalgia.

While the biggest issue with the popularism of Nostalgia based aesthetics is that like any new trend fast fashion brands are churning out thousands of low-quality garments and jewellery to fill the demand of the consumers. However, it does help sustainability as parents are starting to clear out their attics that are filled of items from the late nineties and early noughties, these items are those that are wanted by the Barbiecore, Bubblegum Bitch and Kidcore aesthetic, these items are usually resold, hidden in car boot sales, or donated to thrift and charity shops.

Another thing people are doing is reusing items that may have been hidden in their childhoods bedrooms or have been handed down by siblings or cousins, these items however are usually in bad shape, the solution to this is upcycling or renovating them, many are given an updated look that stills brings the essence of the childish nostalgia that is wanted by the owner of the item. Some of the items are also altered to fit the intended owner, an increase in thrifters and charity shoppers learning how to sew has happened due to them wanted to alter items or remake them into something more fitting, adding pins and patches or painting and printing onto t-shirt's, jeans and bags at home has increased over the last few years as its seen as a cheaper and more fulfilling task for young people to do instead of buying from new. the idea of doing it yourself is something that has inspired the creative minds who live in the nostalgia core aesthetics.

Thriftng and Charity shop hunting can also help the hunter/ thrifter relive happy memories of their childhood, it is also a good chance of learning stories that items hold and what memories people have of them, alongside this these items can be conversation starters and help us bond, something as simple as talking about a pair of second hand shoes can start a lifelong friendship and appreciation of the history of that item, even if the history is not life changing or a major event that has changed the world. As long as it has changed someone's personal world for good and it is still a warm nostalgic feeling that is good to investigate and share the stories it holds, no matter if it is a small item of clothing or a large interior object.

The reusing of items from the late 90's and early noughties is nice as during those years a lot of items were made from plastics due to the dangers and lack of research given to the public about how plastic is not eco-friendly and how it does not decompose slowly and will probably be around forever, reusing these pre-existing plastic products helps the stop of creating more of those plastic products and ruining the environment.

The Coronavirus Pandemics effect on Nostalgia

In March 2020, the world was put into a life changing lockdown, this was due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, since 2022 some places still have strict rules over the virus and self-isolation. The biggest issue of the lockdowns was nobody knew how long they would last, with nowhere to go people were trying to entertain themselves, learning new crafts, playing games with those you were living with as well as creating items.

In a time of such fear and uncertainty a lot of people went back to media from their childhoods, from online games, to tv shows and movies, some even went back to collecting items that once brought them so much joy. The main reason people did this was to try escape the daily news reports of hundreds dying and the cabin fever that came from not being able to go outside, going back to these medias help the memory of a happier time and for a lot of people their childhoods were happy, indulging in this media helped awaken serotine and was a distraction from sadness, luckily as time was unlimited when stuck in your house 24/7 people had the time to rewatch and relive their childhood media.

Some even divided into shows and movies they never were allowed or had the time to watch. The same went with people dressing and exploring their style, when you are not seen by the outside world, you can evolve without judgement, with social media being the main way of communication the ability to share only what you wanted others to see helped create the illusion of a perfect life, for some that perfect life is what they dreamt their childhood would have been like so making that longing into a reality is a key factor of the development of their personality and sense of self.

During the pandemic, the rise of dressing for your own self-image and self-esteem has increased and with that fact the increase of maximalism and colour has appeared, this trend has been dubbed “Dopamine Dressing.” While the lockdowns have ended after many years and the world is slowly learning to dress happier.

The way we dress has been linked with historic and political events as well as recessions and inflation, when we as people can afford to feel and look the way we feel we are more likely to look more outgoing and self-expressed.

Chapter Four

What is Dopamine Dressing?

Dopamine Dressing is a mix of self-expression as well as mindfulness. To understand dopamine dressing you first need to learn about dopamine. Dopamine is a type of neurotransmitter; the nervous system uses dopamine to send transmissions to the NeuroSystems. When dopamine is produced in copious quantities it creates an addictive feeling of pride and pleasure which promotes to the brain to repeat the behaviour responsible for the dopamine rush. This behaviour could be anything from the physical feeling of wearing an item of clothing or how someone feels about themselves in an item of clothing, it could also be from the positive memories that item hold, for instance a wedding dress or a dress someone wears when they go on nights out on the town.

Some colours have universal association, for instance yellow is connected to happiness and joy. The association for colour has been embedded into the English language with phrases such as “blue with envy,” “seeing red” or “green with envy.” The hues and shades of the colour is also a crucial factor, the association with tones is also important, especially with blue tones being seen as cold and red tones being seen as warm. The real question many people wonder is “which is the happiness colour?” that is very subjective and changes from person to person due to the personal connection they have with colour.

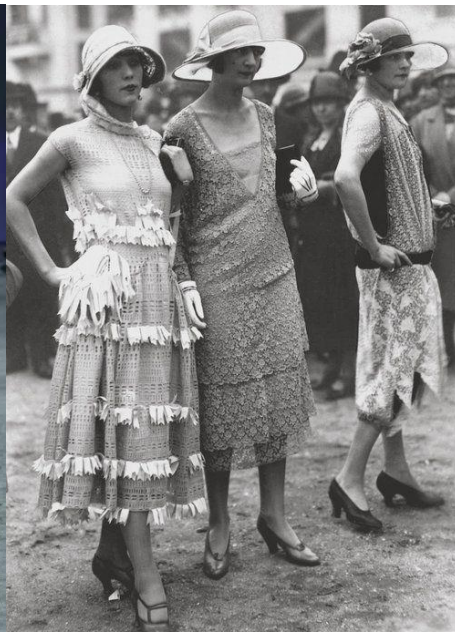
The style of clothing can also alter the self-confidence of the wearer, the way an item of clothing can do this is based on the personal association, with this ability one can embody a confidence in any style or item of clothing. The idea is subjective as it matters on the person, for some bright colours such as yellow and pink is the gateway to their self-expression, for another it may be wearing head to toe black.

The post pandemic catwalks have reflected this in the hope of trying to entice consumers back into living life to its fullest, for instance Proenza Schoulers Spring 2023 runway collection was filled with gold metallic skirts, turquoise lace dresses, frilled sleeves, cornflower blue jackets as well as lemon yellow mini dresses [Figure 14], the mix of the colour and stilettos of the clothing means there is a hopeful modern story told in a maximalist dream garment.

For many after spending months sacrificing aesthetic for the comfort that is loungewear, being able to express yourself in your clothing post lockdown is a god send and as it has been seen many are going for maximalism, history has shown that after great tragedy and challenging times the fashion of the nation goes into a powerful wave of flamboyance, for instance after World War I the roaring twenties was filled with flapper dresses [Figure 15] and partying, it was a time of celebration and trying to forget about the horrors of war.



[Figure 14]



[Figure 15]

How does nostalgia play into all of this?

It seems that for many Millennials and Zoomers who has lost two years of their developing life to a pandemic, after spending isolation scratching for a chance of reliving their childhood via television, music, movies, and online games. For many Zoomers they ended the pandemic as adults and have missed core milestones due to having to have stay inside. This event has led to them to finding comfort in fashion and portraying their nostalgia for their childhood in what they wear and surround themselves in. That dopamine is connected to the nostalgia and the best way to make happened is using the way they portray themselves to others.

Also, for the wo generations who were unable to make new friends due to mask mandates and social distancing, portraying your personality in your clothing means that others can branch out and try befriending you from a safe distance or contact you online to talk about your hobbies and style, people now ask one another about iconic items of clothing, those items are usually the bright ones or the peculiar looking ones that catch the eye and intrigues both strangers and friends alike.

Many people find the use of layering (better known as Maximalism) a way of gaining another attention, due to some people dressing in their eye catch aesthetics (which include Barbiecore, Bubblegum Bitch and Kidcore) it can produce dopamine for others which then inspires them to get into dressing for dopamine instead of for the acceptance of their peers. The post pandemic environment helps with this accidental mission as many spent a lot of time alone and with their mind, this has caused two problems, a series of people who now have self-confidence issues and need a dose of self-love, and the opposite of people who spent time working on their inner self, practicing self-love, and accepting their bodies and minds as the best for them.

Overall, the Pandemic has caused a domino effect on post-pandemic fashion and what we have people are feeling comfortable in consuming and wearing, it has reminded us of better times and simpler dreams where all a child wanted

to be was astronaut barbie or the ability to dress like Yasmin from the Bratz in her beret and thigh high stockings, for others they have reverted to their first memories and first experience of being happy and carefree.

The Conclusion

In conclusion Millennials and Zoomers are starting to lead a new trend of bright colours, the colour pink and achieving the dreams you wished you had done when you were seven years old. 2021 onwards is about self-identity and looking the way you feel. Only you know what you feel looks like.

A Recession and Energy crisis are due to take the United Kingdom by storm and if other trends are to go by then the trend of dressing happy may end soon due to the dark mood that overlays the country, however if there is ever a time to make yourself feel happy a recession is that. Another thing that may affect future fashion trends is the political climate.

In the United Kingdom the climate is terrible, with a new Prime Minister every few years (and sometimes every month) the country faces a major uncertainty in its future and fashion seems to be a leading factor in the self-soothing that the nation gives itself. People try to make themselves feel better by distracting themselves from disaster, especially disaster they lack control of.

Fashion is a cycle that always churns out old trends in new ways, a few years ago older Millennials joked about how tube tops and low-rise jeans would make a comeback and now Zoomers are bringing back low-rise jeans, sometimes the trends are recycled time and time again, take bell bottom jeans, they seem to make a comeback every few years until they fade away for a while.

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