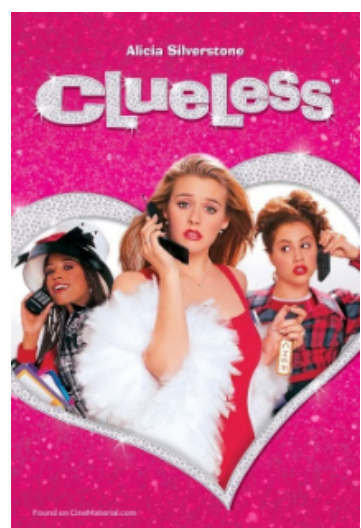


# THE 90S VS. 2000S — HOW NOSTALGIA WARPS OUR MEMORIES OF THESE ERAS

## Exploring nostalgia and cultural memories of the past - Born in the Wrong Generation

A sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past, the feeling of nostalgia enhances our ability to filter out negative memories and enhance the good ones. Creating a rose-tinted view of the past that brings us a sense of comfort and identity, building on possible false pretences and distorted memories. Looking back at a time before you were born or too young to remember, and yet feeling a sense of déjà vu and longing begs the question of why we romanticize these decades and erase their real struggles from our memories. It's as if we look at this era through a time capsule of a simpler time.

Were the 90s and 00s really as great as we remember, or are we blinded by nostalgia distorting the reality of these times?



A passionate group of Media Communications undergraduate students from Bath Spa University are bringing nostalgia to life with their upcoming exhibition (21st May in The Street on Locksbrook Campus), Born in the Wrong Generation. Through fashion, music, film, art, and key historical moments, they are crafting an interactive, immersive experience that explores the romanticization of the past.



Their goal? To spark conversation and gather new perspectives from fellow students on how these eras continue to shape our identities and hide what really was. Using artifacts from each era, they will be bringing history to life through, music represented through CDs, and curated playlists; film explored through DVDs, movie posters, and visual displays; and fashion showcased through Vogue magazines and mannequins dressed in iconic styles.

Using their own research, these artefacts have been carefully curated for this exhibition and are based on the evidence that indicates nostalgia is experienced as an overwhelmingly positive emotion. Effecting and boosting one's mood as well as increasing a sense of meaning in life and raising self-esteem. Researchers have also found that people are more likely to feel nostalgia when feeling sad or down, considering the complicated world we currently live in, it's no wonder people see the past so fondly and something that brings them comfort.

Knowing the power that nostalgia has, pop culture and marketing has capitalized on this with non-other than fashion. Low-rise jeans and ultra-miniskirts are back and more popular than ever! If your wearing 90's a Y2K fashion in 2025, you're probably seen as being pretty cool. Gone are the days of wearing skinny jeans, everyone wants ultra-short and ultra-baggy. Jumping on this idea of bringing back old fashion trends, Born in the Wrong Generation displays a number of iconic clothing items that can be found in the 90's and 00's. Displayed as a snapshot in time, one popular 00's outfit you can find is a khaki green ultra mini skirt, paired with a slinky black cow neck top.



The question is, why have these fashion trends resurfaced amongst the younger generation?

It's said that every 20 years there is a repeat of trending cycles, in this case the 90's and 00's aesthetic, which is why many predicted that this era would once again become popular amongst Gen Z. Largely driven by the rise of TikTok as a hub for fashion trends, the COVID-19 lockdown played a crucial role in accelerating the rise of these trends, as social media usage skyrocketed while people sought connection and distraction. Seeing record breaking engagement levels, with 318 million downloads outside of China alone.

Sparking a widespread sense of nostalgia, many turned to past interests, finding comfort in revisiting old music and TV shows. A UK study even noted a rise in "positive nostalgic music", which can be viewed and listened to when visiting the Born in the Wrong Generation exhibiton. Viewers can scan through a wide variety of 90's and 00's music, possibly re-visiting memories from their own lives or ones



that they weren't around for. However, this is not about blindly replicating the past; it was about reimagining it. This old aesthetic has been embraced by young people in a way that has felt personal and contemporary, integrating element of their own style making it unique to the new generation. When asked why this exhibition is relevant today, Ari, an original collaborator of Born in the Wrong Generation, described us as living is a “rapidly changing world, and many people are looking for anchors in the past. Plus, with social media, we’re constantly exposed to different eras, which can fuel feelings of longing or disconnect. I guess it’s the idea that sometimes people connect more to a time that they never experienced, rather than the one their living in now.”

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*As a future marketer, I find the concept of nostalgia and the feeling of belonging to the wrong generation incredibly fascinating. I want to understand why people have a sense of belonging for eras they were not a part of. I want to understand its relationship with identity and societal influences - it’s become a reflection of a generations desire to reconnect with the past while redefining it on their own terms – Ari.*

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However, what was the reality of the 90’s?

Whilst most have memories of grunge music, colourful fashion and VHS tapes, many aspects of this decade were far from perfect, with significant limitations and social changes. Mental health was a

taboo, conditions like depression and anxiety were either misunderstood or dismissed all together. Meaning people seeking therapy were stigmatized, resulting in many people not receiving the help they needed.

Also promoting unattainable beauty standards, the media glorified images of very thin models through magazines such as vogue and Cosmopolitan. Further fuelling toxic ideas on not only mental health but dieting too. As part of the Born in the Wrong Generation exhibition, there are a number of magazines published in the 90’s that can be viewed including a vintage vogue magazine published in 1999. Where you can see for yourself the standard of beauty they were promoting as well as how fashion icons used this when it came to clothes.



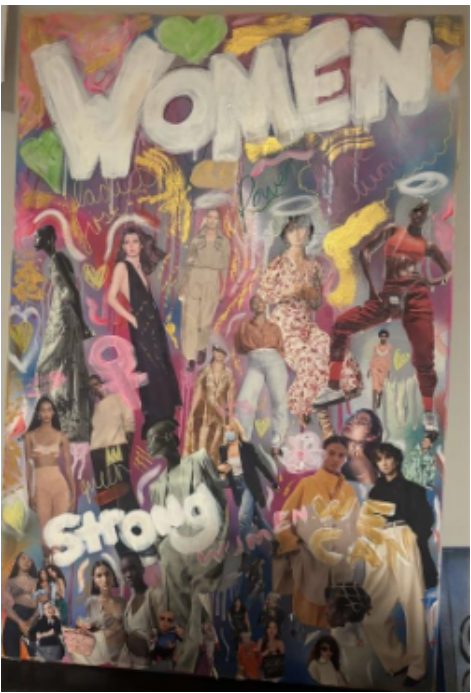
With many beloved sitcoms like Friends and Seinfeld running the 90’s, it’s clear now they were lacking in diversity. As well as many of these shows often reinforcing outdated gender stereotypes that went unchallenged at the time.

Displayed alongside a variety of other popular 90’s TV shows and movies, the friends’ seasons on DVD can be found when visiting the Born in the Wrong Generation exhibition. Katie, an original collaborator of this exhibition, hopes that by interacting with this the artefacts and activities will invoke audiences to think about what makes them nostalgic as well as questioning themselves as to why they believe this era to so great and if it ever was.

What was the reality of the 00’s?

Becoming more accessible, social media platform like Myspace were on the rise, encouraging competition, with the “Top 8” feature sparking friendship drama outside the realm of online. At the same time, the idea of cyberbullying became extremely common, all whilst the topic of mental health impact remained minimal. We also saw the rise and birth of influencer culture, reality TV shows like Americas Top Model and YouTube creators. All promoting unattainable lifestyles, through trends, aesthetic videos and beauty standards. The development of software such as photoshop further made it easier to manipulate videos and photos, resulting in the rise negative body images amongst younger audiences. To highlight this, Hallie Holyoake, a local art student at

Bath Spa University, will be displaying her beautiful artwork during the Born in the Wrong Generation exhibition.



*"These pieces I have worked on explore the complexities of womanhood addressing themes of abuse, body image and vulnerability. Presented in a vibrant hyper-feministic way, the artwork reflects bold, playful colours, giving it Y2K aesthetic that I lean towards. This creates a striking contrast to the deeper themes hidden within my piece."* - Hallie Holyoake.

This exhibition aims to bridge the gap between nostalgia and reality, all whilst encouraging visitors to immerse themselves in both the joy and the challenges of these decades. Beyond the displays of fashion, art and DVD’s, the exhibition encourages interaction and debate. Visitors can share personal reflections, vote on cultural discussions and contribute to a collaborative timeline. Through these activities, it challenges the way we remember and romanticise the past, questioning whether nostalgia is rooted or an idealised version of history that is longed for.