

The Research on the Female Identity Construction under the Influence of Y2K Culture

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Abstract: In recent years, with the deep influence brought by the Internet application and the COVID-19 epidemic, Y2K style fashion which started in the millennium has come back again, thus forming the Y2K subculture. This culture has a profound meaning and a unique form of expression. In the Y2K fashion trend, women are playing a dominate role. Women's dress spans the dress itself, but also involves politics, culture, gender and other different fields. By studying the influence of Y2K culture on female, people can explore the ideas and changes related to female individual and group identity. Based on this, the author takes the Y2K style represented by Y2K clothing as the foothold, takes the identity as the basis of analysis, and at the same time takes the specific social, cultural and other comprehensive factors into the research perspective, puts the Y2K style under a broader social phenomenon and motivation, and explores the influence of Y2K culture on female identity. The author uses literature reading and in-depth interviews to explore the construction of female identity and the display of female consciousness under the influence of this subculture. Research shows that in terms of women's personal identity, it is mainly manifested in the display of personal aesthetics, pursuit of independence and self-consciousness. In terms of group identity, Y2K culture can highlight female self-choice consciousness, gather their solidarity and express their expectations for a better future.

Keywords: Y2K, female, identity, influence

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the extensive application of the Internet and the profound impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society in the world, Y2K garment, which started in the millennium, has come back again and resulted in the formation of Y2K style and even Y2K subculture. Y2K is the full name of Year 2000 Problem, from the computer "Year 2000 bug" extension. The Y2K style was born from the early 1990s to the early 2000s, with the year 2000 being an important point. As an aesthetic style, this trend is built from brightly colored, technological or metallic materials, with digital elements and lively and bold design styles. In the field of fashion design, culture and entertainment, there has been a great deal of creation and discussion about Y2K.

Some studies have shown that the change of garment is not only the change of people's clothes, but also the reflection of the deep changes in the overall social mentality, culture and economy [1]. Clothing is one of the most obvious symbols of social status and gender, as well as the main means to achieve identity in public space [2].

In the Y2K fashion trend, women are playing a dominate role. Women's dress culture spans the dress itself, but also involves politics, culture, gender and other different fields. By studying the influence of Y2K culture on female, this paper can explore the concept and change of individual and group identity of women. Based on this, the author takes the Y2K style represented by Y2K clothing as the foothold, takes the identity as the basis of analysis, and at the same time takes the specific social, cultural and other comprehensive factors into the research perspective, puts the Y2K style under a broader social phenomenon and motivation, and explores the influence of Y2K culture on female identity.

Studies on Y2K and identity are common, but studies that combine the two are rare. An important reason is that the Y2K style is now reincarnation of popularity, still lack of enough time to precipitate. In view of this, this paper intends to combine the two for thinking, from the individual and group dimensions to explore the impact of the rise of Y2K subculture on female identity issues, trying to enrich the research results in this field. The author intends to use a combination of literature research and empirical investigation, hoping to extract valuable views from the author's unique perspective.

On the basis of literature research, this paper adopts in-depth interview method to ask questions to 10 female interviewees about their understanding of Y2K style, the relationship between Y2K and women's personal aesthetics, spiritual connotation, discourse power, ideal and expectation, and how to view the influence of Y2K on themselves. According to whether they have tried Y2K style clothes in person, the author divided the 10 people into two categories: experience group and appreciation group, with the number of people in half. The respondents are all the author's classmates, friends and female relatives and friends under 40 years old. They all have different degrees of understanding of Y2K style.

In terms of chapter division, the main body of this paper is divided into four parts: introduction, personal identity, group identity and conclusion. In the introduction part, the research background, research significance, research objectives and main content arrangement are summarized, and the correlation between Y2K culture and the research on identity issues is drawn out. In the second and third chapters, the influence of Y2K culture on women's personal identity and group identity is studied in detail from the aspects of elements of dressing up, cultural spirit, discourse rights, group connection, and ideal support under the theoretical framework of identity. In the "Conclusion" section, the conclusion, influence and role of this research will be drawn, and the future research will be prospected, hoping to make some contributions to the authors in this field in the future.

2. Female Personal Identity Influenced by Y2K Culture

In the 1970s and 1980s, Tajfel put forward the social Identity theory, which later developed into a typical inter-group theory. This theory focuses not only on individuals but also groups, emphasizing that individuals identify with their own groups through social classification. Individuals identify their environment through social classification, and at the same time identify and classify themselves, so as to establish the corresponding social identity. This theory is one of the most influential theories on group identity so far [3].

In order to facilitate the discussion, the most simplified classification will be adopted in the following chapters, namely, in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the author will specifically analyze the construction of female identity under the influence of Y2K culture from the aspects of individual identity and group identity, aiming to explore how women practice their own consciousness through behavior. Then it further explains the way and social significance of female identity construction in this process.

In the chapter of personal identity, it is mainly elaborated from two aspects: elements of dressing up and cultural spirit.

2.1. Elements of Dressing Up: Showing Personal Aesthetic

Clothing is the second skin of people, and the clothes of each person most directly show the individual aesthetic taste. Some scholars believe that the development of clothing reflects people's life style, aesthetic interest and different understanding and pursuit of fashion in different periods. In the context of economic globalization, the development of people's clothes presents diversified forms, which also shows the diversification of identity and culture [4]. Some sociologists also point out that people use their favorite clothes for self-expression and interaction with others [2].

Represented by European and American Diva Lady Gaga and Korean idols BLACKPINK and AESPA, the characteristics of Y2K style are vividly displayed. In general, Y2K style clothing and makeup is bold, romantic and personal. By summarizing the characteristics of Y2K clothing in movies, magazines, Internet and other occasions, it is not difficult to see that it has several distinctive features: firstly, sequins and metal materials are added to the material to highlight the sense of science and technology and the sense of future. For example: dress with metallic sheen, bright leather is used and so on. Secondly, the design style is grotesque and grandiose. For example, in order to reflect the texture, colorful radium ray is used in large area. The decoration of a single product is greater than the function. Thirdly, the color is strong and beautiful. For example, the bold use of fluorescent colors, bright pink, bright yellow, etc., which allows people to immerse themselves in a gorgeous color world, and forms a sharp visual contrast with traditional clothing and dress up.

The 10 interviewees who participated in this interview agreed that Y2K clothing is very new, with high color saturation, refreshing and completely different from traditional clothes. Women can show themselves in unusual forms by combining exaggerated makeup and clothing according to their own aesthetic ideas. A woman's individuality is fully asserted and respected, and that fills one with confidence. Others say Y2K is a step forward for the ages, breaking the stereotype that women must express themselves according to society's fixed standards. Leopard-print halters, tight midriff tops and color-contrasting accessories, which might have been considered as unusual in the past, are becoming more and more acceptable, allowing women to express their preferences by choosing what they wear. Celebrity endorsement and celebrity effect have also boosted ordinary people's awareness of Y2K.

2.2. Cultural Spirit: The Pursuit of Independence and Self-awareness

Some of the deepest core beliefs of people and the most basic structures of culture are built around gender, such as who "should" wear what clothes [5]. Clothing can show the positioning of people in different times in the social structure. Statistics show that women are more receptive to Y2K culture than men. In the process of rapid modern development, with the awakening of feminist consciousness, more and more girls have shown and advocated independence, courage and self-expression in the process of growing up. The style displayed by Y2K coincides with this trend. Bold color matching and unique styles are different from traditional women's clothes, which fully express the awakening of women's pursuit of independence. Female consciousness has also been further reinforced by the popularity of Y2K style garment.

In the interview, one interviewee provided evidence. She pointed out that Elle Woods, the leading actress in the American light comedy *Legally Blonde*, was impressed by her head-to-toe pink color. This was the first time she learned what Y2K style was. She said: "When people around see the heroine's dress, they are used to viewing her with colored glasses, thinking that she is a vase and nothing but beautiful. In fact, Elle was successfully admitted to Harvard University through her own efforts, and finally succeeded in her career, which changed people's prejudice against her. "Having the courage of our convictions and a strong sense of self is what allows us to face the world and believe in ourselves," Elle said in her commencement speech. According to the respondents, the

cultural and social meaning of Y2K style includes the following elements: pursuing independence and courage, advocating personality; asserting self-confidence to be yourself, not to give in to social prejudice; always working hard and struggling for their own life.

3. Female Group Identity Influenced by Y2K Culture

In this chapter, the construction of female group identity under the influence of Y2K culture will be discussed from three aspects: discourse rights, connecting groups, and ideal sustenance.

3.1. Discourse Rights: Highlighting Women's Consciousness of Choice

Simone De Beauvoir, a famous French thinker and writer, pointed out in *The Second Sex* that in history, women's traditional destiny was subordinate to men, and they had no right to speak and choose in the family and society. In order to gain independence, women went through many difficulties, as described in the book: “She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other[6].” In the past, women did not have the right to choose, and it was even considered against the expectations of parents and society for women to go out to work [7]. Women are required to be conservative, quiet, unable to express their views at will by society, and to be appreciated as “beautiful women” through certain feminine costumes. Women also have a weak awareness of fighting for rights.

Nowadays, traditional concepts still exist to some extent, hindering women's status to rise further. However, with more and more women participating in social and economic affairs, women's social status has been greatly improved compared with the past. In today's society, women can express themselves in various forms. From the influence of Y2K on women, the focus is gradually placed on women's choice of culture, image and spirit to express themselves. People will find that women have more and more power of discourse and choice. In this process, women's self-selection consciousness is also integrated, and women are becoming more and more active. Women are now free to choose expressions that suit their style. From Y2K's personality does not lose the female element style to more other aspects, even the independent choice in life, all reflect the female's right to speak and master their own life initiative. Y2K guides women aesthetically to choose clothes that are more personalized and break stereotypes. What women wear is not clothes, but ideas and attitudes towards life. This actually represents a collective awakening of female consciousness.

In the research, the author also noticed a discriminatory statement on the Internet. Some netizens think that the choice of Y2K dress up is to wear a group of weird monsters, Y2K is not the mainstream alternative subculture. This also reflects the deep-rooted prejudice in society. There is a long way to go to improve women's independence, and it will not happen overnight.

3.2. Connecting Groups: Gathering the Power of Group Solidarity

The identity of the same culture arouses the resonance of individuals. This identity will unite the individuals who recognize a certain culture, enhance the strength of the group, and also enhance the sense of belonging of individuals to the group. This sense of belonging and identity is no longer directly determined by the identity of a specific economic class, social group or race, but is actively constructed by people themselves. Erikson proposed a similar view from a psychological perspective [8].

Nowadays, in first-and second-tier cities in China and other countries, it is common to see people who love Y2K culture gather together to promote the corresponding cultural connotation. For example, people go to parties dressed up in Y2K style makeup and costumes. Famous musicians also organize regular offline concerts to showcase Y2K style pop music culture and attract a large number

of people who love retro fashion and Y2K culture to attend. The corresponding retro exhibitions have always attracted the attention of those who love this cultural group. Through participating in such activities and online network communication, the audience can feel the joy of meeting the same type of people when communicating with each other offline, and feel the support from the group in the process of conversation and interaction. Individuals can feel accepted and inspired in the group, and the courage to face unknown difficulties brought by the strength of women in the group.

One respondent said: “By dressing up in Y2K style garment with friends or taking part in offline activities, I feel accepted by the group. I am no longer alone. There are more people like me and we can support each other. Inspired by the strength of the group, I feel I have more courage to face the difficulties and the future.” It can be seen that people gain useful identity resources by participating in Y2K related actions. Y2K culture embodies women's expression and pursuit of fashion and aesthetics, and carries a sense of belonging and social identity [9].

3.3. Ideal Sustenance: Good Expectations for the Future

Around the millennium, Y2K style showed people's imagination on the vision of “digital technology will bring a better future”. Now, after 20 years, Y2K style is more about people's retro and nostalgia for the old fashion.

At the beginning of the rise of Y2K style, it was the period of rapid development of electronic technology and Internet industry. People can express themselves freely and fight for their rights on the Internet [10]. The Y2K style symbolized good expectations for the future. In 2000, because of computer technology problems, two decimal numbers could not continue to recognize the year 2000 and later dates, which caused a technological paralysis in various industries, thus causing people's psychological panic. This global event gave Y2K an exaggerated flavor and gave the millennium a magical flavor.

The reason why Y2K is making a comeback at this point in time may be due to a similar context. There are also unknowns and uncertainties, and people seem to have to deal with difficult situations more often, which makes it easier to mentally identify with Y2K at the moment [11]. The post-pandemic era, like the millennium, is at a turning point of change. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the international situation has undergone major changes. The world economy is sluggish, and human society is faced with many new difficulties, challenges and uncertainties. Self-focused Y2K women began to miss the past era of unlimited possibilities, free expression of personality, and full of color, thus adding nostalgic elements to the current Y2K style, making it more diversified. At the same time, this also embodies their desire to overcome difficulties and meet the “utopia” like a beautiful world. It indirectly reflects women's expectation for a better future.

This point was also confirmed in the interview. Most interviewees mentioned that the return of Y2K style clothing during the pandemic is not accidental, reflecting the attitude of women who do not retreat and respond positively to difficulties. Although the global COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted the pace of people's lives, they believe that the difficult time will pass. They should keep a positive attitude, motivate themselves to actively solve problems, and still strive to achieve the set goals.

4. Conclusions

A certain style of garment is the epitome of a particular era and culture. Y2K culture has profound meaning and unique forms of expression. By studying the female identity under the influence of Y2K culture, people can explore the construction of self-cognition and the display of female consciousness. Through research, this paper finds that, in terms of personal identity, women mainly show their consciousness of personal aesthetics, pursuit of independence and self-consciousness. In terms of

group identity, Y2K culture can highlight women's consciousness of choice, gather women's solidarity and express their expectations for a better future.

Y2K culture and female identity are two important topics in different fields. The combination of the two is a highlight of this research. It not only expands the depth of the former subject, but also endows the latter subject with a fresh sense of The Times.

Y2K style has not been formed for a long time, and the relevant theoretical research is not deep enough. It needs to be raised to the artistic and academic level in practice and further cultivated. The author believes that the theoretical research on the combination of Y2K culture and identity needs to be further sublimated. In addition, the interviewees in this study are all high school girls and young ladies under 40 who live in the author's city of Beijing. Although their views represent the recognition of Y2K style by contemporary young ladies in first-tier cities, the diversity of views is affected to some extent due to the undiversified age and urban distribution. Therefore, the author suggests that scholars should pay attention to how men view Y2K and female identity issues from their perspective when conducting research in related fields in the future. It is hoped that this paper will help to further improve the comprehensive conclusion and expand the depth of the research.

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