

Why we should embrace the joy of dressing 'outside of the lines' like Gen Z

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Have you seen that [cargo pants are back](#)? Young people are once again swishing down hallways and they might even be wearing [Crocs](#) on their feet, because these are cool now too. For many this could be seen as

dressing "badly" but Y2K (2000s fashion) is all the rage at the moment.

Fashion has long been one of the most creative playgrounds to express yourself and also define your personal identity and status. Gen Z take this very seriously. However, they are no mere followers of fashion but are adventurously carving out their own trends and styles—joyfully playing with the way they dress and express themselves through their clothes.

Gen Z are rejecting everything from outdated gender tropes [to curated color schemes](#) and [the idea of the "perfect" body](#).

For several hundred years, it was the [fashion industry](#) who controlled what was on trend. It was [in bed with](#) the media, style icons, designers and the tycoons of the industry. This relationship has enabled trends to be predicted and for aesthetic movements to be planned and consumers to be catered for. The masses watched and waited to be told what was new and "hot."

This [relationship](#) is now being short-circuited by a [generation of digital natives](#) who live in a world where the distinction between the digital and the physical is blended.

Gen Z will not be dictated to, they are not anxiously waiting to be told they are on [trend](#), on social media they are making their own trends by breaking rules, embracing creativity and finding joy in dressing bravely.

The democratization of fashion

Each generation has changed fashion. The [baby boomers](#) brought us flower power in the 1960s and 1970s using free love in contrast to their parents' [clearly defined social and gender roles](#).

Boomers' younger siblings brought us "punk" in the 1970s and 1980s, a subculture dedicated to using the symbols of the state against itself and deliberately playing with the obscene and vulgar. This was amid a global political climate of conservatism and repression.

Then [again in the 1990s](#) we saw grunge, Gen X's response to a futureless world post-cold war.

Well, Gen X have had children and those kids have decided that they find joy in dressing outside of the lines (so to speak), you can be anything, you can be everything and you can be nothing.

Gen Z (and even millennials) have witnessed the ever-increasing democratization of fashion through [social media](#) sharing and the global reach of online platforms. They have seen thousands of tiny subcultures formed online where they undergo a near constant cycle of evolution, explosion and reformation.

Take the early [2000s "emo" trend](#). Once a big subculture, it was thrust to the corners of the internet where everyone thought it would languish and die.

However, emo is experiencing a revival with people wearing all black, corsets becoming cool again and heavy eye makeup being sported by the likes of Gen Z darlings [Willow Smith](#) and [Olivia Rodrigo](#).

But Gen Z are not sticking to one style. Fashion has become a pick and mix of trends and ideas where an individual can use the ingredients to create and recreate identity as often as they desire. There is joy in dressing, not fear. There are no rules.

No rules

As new fashion consumers gleefully reinvent notions of good taste and beauty, the traditional trickle-down effect for trends has been replaced by a bubbling up from new sources defining what's new and what's next. From Instagrammers to icons, vloggers and TikTokkers, the [sources for trends are broad and varied](#).

Young people are creating [their own place in a new world](#). A world where crocs are high [fashion](#) and what "goes" is in the eye of the beholder. Boxers as a headdress or leggings as scarf? sure. Why not even wear a [keyboard](#) as a top? [Maximalism](#) is being taken to new extremes as clothes are layered over more clothes and no color, object or pattern is out of bounds.

These are the COVID kids, a generation that came of age during a global calamity where the only form of communication was digital and two-dimensional.

The loudest and boldest and most insane outfit is the one that will get you most attention on screen. For kids used to consuming media through TikToks rather than glossy editorials, [only the most dramatic, fun and playful will do](#). Fashion has taken itself way too seriously for way too long. A cleansing fire of young, [creative people](#) is exactly what is needed right now. We should all take a page out their book and find joy in dressing in whatever we want.

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