

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

*Mean Girls* (2004) has become a cult classic due to its sharp satirical take on high school social structures and its lasting impact on fashion trends. The way that the 2000s fashion known as Y2K (shorthand term for the year 2000) is portrayed in the movie, complete with velour tracksuits, designer logos, and apparel dominated by brand names, wonderfully reflects the style of the early 2000s. Through these fashion choices, the movie highlights how clothing can symbolize social identity and status. *Mean Girls* contributed to the revival of the aesthetic by popularizing Y2K. Fred Davis (1992) asserts that fashion constantly vacillates between innovation and nostalgia, reflecting and influencing societal values. By showing how fashion can reflect and influence cultural ideals, *Mean Girls* emphasizes fashion's dynamic role in developing cultural identity.

This thesis will analyze how the film's depiction of fashion reflects and shapes societal values. Through the lens of George Lipsitz's cultural memory theory and the sociological approach to literature, this analysis will investigate how *Mean Girls* contributes to the construction of fashion identity, highlighting its role in reflecting American cultural value within the diegetic world of the film.

## **1.2 Research Problems**

1. How is fashion identity represented in *Mean Girls* (2004) through characters and costume design?
2. How does *Mean Girls* (2004) contribute to the representation of cultural memory?
3. How does the representation of fashion in *Mean Girls* (2004) correlate with Cultural Memory Theory in illustrating the construction of fashion identity?

## **1.3 Objective of the Study**

1. To analyze how *Mean Girls* (2004) constructs the aesthetic representation of the Y2K fashion through costume design and characterization.
2. To examine how *Mean Girls* (2004) reflects the idea of cultural memory in the representation of fashion.
3. To examine how fashion in *Mean Girls* (2004) correlates with Cultural Memory Theory in shaping fashion identity.

## **1.4 Previous Studies**

There have been numerous scholars studying fashion's role in shaping film stars' images, spanning from the silent era to the present day.

The first journal written by Taylor Ussher (2023) entitled “*A Study of Nostalgia, Fashion, and Covid-19*,” published by *Toronto Metropolitan University*, discusses the comeback of Y2K fashion and the cultural reasons behind it, especially how social media plays a significant role. Ussher explains how the Y2K style, primarily popular in the early 2000s, has returned strongly after the Covid-19 pandemic. Ussher also discusses how the Y2K style, once a hallmark of the early 2000s, has found a new audience in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. For young folks, it is not just about bringing back old trends; it is a way to connect with a more comfortable time in the past. Ussher argues that this is not just a trend revival but a response to the chaos of the pandemic. By looking at how groups like NewJeans use social media, Ussher shows how fashion and online culture blend together, giving the Y2K look a modern update that speaks to today’s generation.

The second previous study is a journal conducted by Irina Ugrekhelidze (2024) at the Akaki Tsereteli State University, published in *Interdisciplinary Cultural and Humanities Review*, entitled “*Vintage Revival: Exploring Nostalgia and Retro Aesthetics in Contemporary Fashion*,” discusses the broader context of retro fashion revivals, with a particular emphasis on the Y2K aesthetic. The author explains that fashion from the late 90s and early 2000s is making a comeback, and it is all about nostalgia. People want to revisit the cultural moments of their past. Ugrekhelidze looks at how these old styles are being reinterpreted for today’s world, with all its

changes in culture and technology. The paper examines why these retro trends are becoming so popular again, showing how past fashion is updated to match modern tastes and needs.

The third previous study is conducted by Hang Zheng (2023) entitled “*Fashion Reincarnation of Design and Clothing Industry Under the Concept of Retro-Futurism*,” published in *Communications in Humanities Research*, analyzes how fashion constantly recycles itself, focusing on the Y2K aesthetic and its connection to retro-futurism. Zheng argues that the Y2K style mixing early 2000s nostalgia with futuristic touches has become a massive part of today’s fashion scene. The paper shows how this fusion of past and future influences shapes modern design and becomes a key feature of how fashion evolves. Zheng’s research points out that retro-futurism is one of the driving forces behind the current resurgence of Y2K fashion.

The fourth previous study is conducted by Jiaqi Li (2023), in his paper “*The Journey from Niche Styles to the Mainstream Trend*,” published in *Communications in Humanities Research*. The author explains how the Y2K aesthetic, which used to be popular in small subcultures, has now become a big mainstream trend. Li explores how social media and celebrity culture helped push this style into the spotlight. He focuses on how certain styles go from niche to mainstream, especially how platforms like Instagram or TikTok make it easier for smaller trends to reach a wider audience.

Li's work gives us a deeper understanding of how fashion trends move from underground communities to becoming part of popular culture.

The fifth previous study is conducted by Lucas Vantier Alves Pereira (2017), in his thesis "*Tendências Socioculturais e a Reutilização de Conteúdos Estéticos da Era Y2K na Moda Contemporânea,*" at *University of Ceará*, explores the resurgence of the Y2K aesthetic in modern fashion. Pereira focuses on how the Y2K aesthetic, which was formerly connected to a specific period, has been modified for the modern fashion market. In order to provide a sense of cultural continuity and a new outlook on the past, the study examines how these nostalgic aspects are reinterpreted for a new generation. Pereira's work demonstrates the Y2K aesthetic's ongoing relevance, especially in light of its influence on modern fashion and its ability to connect with modern consumers.

The sixth previous study by Andrea Castro Bestilleiro (2022) examines how Y2K aesthetics are integrated into personal branding strategies, especially by fashion influencers. In the article "*Fashion and Personal Branding: User Perception,*" from *UDC*, the author discusses how fashion shapes a public image, emphasizing how influencers utilize the Y2K style to establish their identities and engage followers. The Y2K aesthetic serves as a means for self-presentation and identity building in addition to being a fashion statement, as demonstrated by the paper's examination of the relationship between fashion, branding, and social media. This article offers

valuable insights into the commodification of fashion and how aesthetics are used strategically to build a personal brand in the digital age.

The seventh previous study entitled “*Bad Bitch, White Witch: A Study of the Crossover Star Personas of Supermodel-Actors Devon Aoki and Abbey Lee,*” from *Diva Portal*, written by Aléks Forsenberg (2023), explores how Y2K aesthetics are essential to the public personas of models who have transitioned into acting. The flamboyant, varied fashions of the Y2K era are reflected in the fashion choices of celebrities like Abbey Lee and Devon Aoki, according to Forsenberg. The study emphasizes how these celebrities embodied the rebellious spirit of the Y2K style by using their wardrobe choices to solidify their celebrity status further. Fashion, celebrity culture, and the shaping of contemporary cultural narratives may all be viewed through the prism of Forsenberg’s studies.

The eight previous study is conducted by Gengfu Li (2024) at *Auburn University*, explores how the Y2K aesthetic has impacted footwear design in the journal “*An Approach of Applying One Specific Culture to Footwear Design Through Function and Fashion.*” The author examines how the Y2K aesthetic has influenced footwear design. Li explains about how today’s footwear design is influenced by the daring and avant-garde fashion of the Y2K period. The study investigates how footwear designs that combine fashion and functionality are created by incorporating aspects of the Y2K aesthetic. Li’s research advances our knowledge of how the Y2K aesthetic affects accessories and other facets of the fashion business besides apparel.

The ninth previous study entitled “*The Contemporary Aesthetics of Adolescence: How Euphoria Uses Style to Spectacularize Representation of Modern Youth in the Articulation of a Teenage Gaze,*” from *The Motley Undergraduate Journal*, written by Lana Coles (2023) examines how the television series Euphoria draws on the Y2K aesthetic to depict the experiences of contemporary youth. Coles looks at how the show’s Y2K-inspired wardrobe choices illustrate its teenage protagonists’ emotional and psychological realities. In order to demonstrate how the Y2K aesthetic is a potent means of expressing one’s individuality and negotiating the challenges of puberty, the study addresses the significance of fashion in adolescent culture.

The last previous study is conducted by Lynnanne Chao, Xingqiu Lou, and Ting Chi (2024), entitled “*Exploring the Modern Qipao Through the Lens of US Generation Z Consumers,*” from *International Journal of Fashion Design*, discuss how the Y2K aesthetic has influenced traditional garments such as the qipao. The authors explore how Generation Z consumers in the United States have adopted the qipao by incorporating Y2K fashion elements, creating a fusion of modern and traditional styles. This paper examines how global fashion trends, like the Y2K aesthetic, influence how traditional garments are worn and perceived in contemporary culture.

These ten studies support this thesis by exploring the recurring nature of fashion trends and the impact of nostalgia in contemporary style. Though most earlier

research has focused on fashion trends in general, this thesis takes a new approach by analyzing the connection between fashion identity and visual portrayal, particularly in *Mean Girls*. The focus of this study is to evaluate the relationship between fashion representation in *Mean Girls* (2004) and cultural memory theory by George Lipsitz (1990) which has never been studied before.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study analyzes the role of *Mean Girls* (2004) in expressing fashion in film and fashion as an identity. The discussion will center on how identity development, cultural nostalgia, and fashion trends across generations are influenced by the film's depiction of fashion.

### **1.6 Method of the Study**

#### **1.6.1 Method of Research**

This study employs a qualitative research approach, drawing on secondary data obtained through library research, including books, academic journals, and scholarly works related to media, fashion, and cultural studies. The 2004 film *Mean Girls* is used as the main source of primary data, with a specific focus on how costume design contributes to character identity and cultural representation.

#### **1.6.2 Method of Approach**

This study takes a sociological approach to literature, drawing particularly on the ideas of Robert Escarpit. Escarpit views literature as a form of communication that mirrors the society from which it emerges. Using this lens, the author explores how the film's narrative and character dynamics reflect broader social structures and the construction of identity.

The study also applies George Lipsitz's Cultural Memory Theory (1990), which views memory as a collective construct that shapes identity by connecting past cultural symbols with the present. These two theoretical frameworks are brought together through a combined textual and visual analysis, with a focus on the film's internal structure.

### **1.7 Organization of the Writing**

This research is divided into four chapters with the following organization:

#### CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the background of the study, research problems, objectives of the study, previous studies, scope of the study, method of the study, and organization of the writing.

#### CHAPTER 2 INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses fashion representation's intrinsic and extrinsic elements, including Cultural Memory Theory.

### CHAPTER 3 EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter introduces the external theories and socio-cultural context relevant to the study. It includes the sociological approach to literature, cultural memory theory, and the cultural background of early 2000s American youth and fashion culture.

### CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

This chapter provides analysis and interpretation of how fashion in *Mean Girls* (2004) functions to represent identity, cultural memory, and character development based solely on the film's content.

### CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This chapter contains the conclusion or inference based on the study's results.