

CURATING THE SELF

Curating The Self: A Proposed Intervention for Positive Identity Crafting
Through Self-presentation and Clothing

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Abstract

The new field of positive psychology offers an opportunity to study what healthy people need in order to flourish. Just as eating, sleeping, and working are part of a fulfilling life, both how we experience ourselves and how others experience us, our identity, is a foundational pathway for creating relationships and producing well-being. Presenting oneself visually through the body and its adornment is a way in which we share ourselves and relate to others in the world. I argue in this capstone that self-presentation through the body and clothing is an omnipresent leverage point in shaping one's identity in positive ways. This capstone draws on relevant literature from psychology and sociology to propose an intervention designed to support identity crafting through self-presentation and clothing on an ongoing basis.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Know first, who you are, and then adorn yourself accordingly.”-Epictetus

Who Cares About How We Look?

I have been fascinated with clothing for as long as I can remember. One of my earliest memories of the power of self-presentation through clothing occurred in the fifth grade, when I started at a new school in a new town and had to make all new friends. On my first day, I wore a pair of gorgeous royal purple corduroy culottes and was so pleased with how distinctive and stylish I looked. However, the class bully, a girl named Red, decided that these pants were strange and ugly. She teased me in front of everyone, saying they were the ugliest purple shorts she had ever seen. At eleven years old, I was already obsessed with and versed in fashion and I even had my own sense of style, so I immediately accepted her challenge. I stepped forward, took a deep breath in order to appear as substantial and confident as possible, and asked her what she knew about Parisian fashion. She, of course, didn't know what *Parisian* meant, so I proceeded to school her on the facts: Paris is the center of the fashion world, culottes are Parisian, and hence they are fabulously stylish. I expressed my hope that she'd be able to travel to Paris someday to learn about true style and advised that until that visit she might want to do some research before offering opinions. No one had ever stood up to Red; in the eyes of my classmates I became an instant hero. I quickly made lots of friends, even Red, and had a great start in our new home. I believe this incident was critical in shaping my identity at age eleven, so I am curious about how some of the distinctions from this event are relevant to psychology today. Did I dress in culottes because I felt confidence and courage, or did the clothing *inspire* or *magnify* these character strengths of mine? Or was it a combination of both? Whatever the

answer, Red's reaction to me demonstrated how we present and adorn ourselves affects how we come to be viewed by others. Yet, my reaction to Red suggests that it may also affect our identities, perceptions, and experiences: our internal characteristics, emotions, thoughts, character strengths and tastes can be inspired, enhanced, and reinforced by how we present ourselves on the outside. Adornment and self-presentation afford opportunities to bridge and align our internal and external worlds and enhance well-being. My hope and belief is that a positive mindset, skills and behaviors regarding self-presentation and clothing can be taught and will produce dynamic increases in well-being. This capstone provides a beginning and foundation on the topic through considering what we do know, asking additional questions, and offering an intervention to apply current knowledge in world. In light of the exciting breakthroughs in research in the last several years, I also hope that this is a dawn of the inception of a new field of study on a broader scale.

In a recent lecture, one of the founding positive psychology researchers, Dr. Paul Rozin, explained that it is curious to him that some aspects of people's lives seem to be overlooked or even avoided in the psychology literature (P. Rozin, MAPP class lecture, September 28, 2012). He explained that the best introductory psychology textbooks have a chapter on sleep (a topic which is foundationally critical to human well-being), but no text on food or eating, which to him seem equally foundational and represents a large portion of our daily lives. He pondered explanations for this. One explanation he offered, also supported by Seligman (2011), reflects how the field of psychology itself has evolved, including the careers of research psychologists becoming dependent on selecting research interests that are measurable and seen as scientifically credible. This has left curious gaps in the literature regarding daily human behavior, what we actually think about, and how we spend time and energy. We know that people allocate

approximately 12% of their monthly spend on items associated with dressing our bodies and presenting ourselves, such as clothing, shoes, jewelry, bags and personal services (Statistic Brain, 2013). In addition to allocating financial resources, women spend an average of 399 hours a year shopping either on-line or live with 159 of those hours devoted to clothing, shoes, and personal care items (Yochin, 2011). In addition, the time we spend shopping does not include time spent thinking or speaking with others about this topic, which from personal and anecdotal experience, I would estimate, could easily double this reported figure. Gaps in the psychology literature can be illustrated by comparing available research through the PsychINFO database. For example, the search term *sleep* returns 51,329 reference citations; in comparison, the search terms *dress*, *self-presentation*, *clothing*, and *adornment* returned 1,454, 1,914, 3,683, and 117 cites, respectively. Given the amount of money and time that we invest, it seems that if we really want to understand human behavior and how and why to best spend our time and resources, then we ought to know more about our experiences of self-presentation and clothing. For better or worse, it is clear that we do think about and invest significantly in how we look so let's see how we can understand why and use these insights to support our well-being.

Although there is research on the negative impact of the media, the history of clothing and the fashion industry, and psychopathology related to appearance, there is very little work from a psychological perspective on the how healthy individuals produce well-being through self-presentation and clothing. Interestingly, this mirrors the positive psychology literature as it has developed as part of the broader field of psychology: few psychology researchers are interested in the impact of clothing, and some of those have admitted that they chose this topic because they felt a personal conviction, even though they were strongly advised against pursuing that interest based on career concerns (Tseelon, 2001). The topic is seen as being on the fringe

of academic respectability, even though it is clear that apparel and self-presentation consume a great deal of our attention, especially for women. In fact, only a handful of scholars have studied how women use clothing as a daily activity. In this capstone, I will argue that addressing this gap in the literature is likely to yield interesting and important implications for shaping human behavior and well-being.

Flourishing Style Crafting

In the United States and other first world countries, we are bombarded with advertising images about appearance geared to promote consumerism, always presenting the next best product or service designed to improve one's appearance. To this end, we have become a makeover-oriented culture with countless television shows, blogs and print publications that feature physical appearance makeovers. Makeover efforts are usually entertaining and certainly can be dramatic in the before and after images they produce; nonetheless, they are focused on the superficial changes that are needed to produce a particular look to the outside world. These interventions are designed to create a best visual version of the individual who is being made over, without much consideration of deeper dimensions such as the individual's personality strengths, personal tastes and aspirations. Were we to follow many of the recipients of these makeovers, I predict that many of them return to their pre-makeover style and behaviors of dress because these changes are not anchored through a deeper connection to their identities and aspirations, which is necessary to support them in incorporating these physical changes into their normal routines.

These superficial "transformations," as well as how we think about appearance in general, overlook two critical distinctions that are important to understand in order to produce sustainable well-being. First, I believe any consideration of appearance should focus on an

individual's personal assets, tastes, lifestyle and life aspirations. Second, I propose that we think about appearance not as a noun or an attainable state, but rather as a dynamic process, even as a *way of life*, which brings awareness and intention to how we see ourselves, and how others see and interact with us. Developing and evolving our appearance offers a pathway for one's physical or external experience to align to and magnify one's internal experience and vice versa. In fact, Coco Chanel, widely considered to be the founder of twentieth century conventions of modern style, supports my thesis. She stated that elegance of personal style cannot be found in a new dress, but rather emanates from one's deeper personal character, and experiences, and that this is then translated into the material world through the clothing basics of comfort, color, shape, fabric, and appropriateness (Lurie, 1992). To this end, I will offer a new way of thinking about appearance and ultimately a proposed intervention called *flourishing style crafting*, which I define as intentionally investing time and effort in presenting our strengths, aspirations, tastes and physical assets visually to the world. The following sections will offer a positive psychology lens to support the importance of incorporating personal strengths and aspirations in producing sustainable increases in well-being.

Consumer research would likely question this psychological emphasis and claim that it is ultimately advertisers and high-end fashion houses that dictate consumer behavior and buying. However, Campbell (1997) suggests that rather than advertisers dictating the rules of fashion, fashion can be and is positively influenced, especially, by middle class trends. According to Campbell, over the last two hundred years, higher status fashion reflects a constraining stoicism, which is at odds with the flexibility and playfulness of modern middle class sensibilities. In contrast to sociological notions of "middle status conformity" (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001), Campbell suggests that the middle class has *more* freedom to use creativity and novelty in

dressing and even has more authority to create and express style than those who belong to higher classes. Smith (1990) offers additional support for the idea that consumers can play an important role as creative agents by subverting and re-appropriating current clothing trends in order to support crafting a unique or authentic identity.

Enclothed Cognition

Considerable research suggests that not only do clothing and self-presentation reflect our identities and shape how others view us, but they even shape how we view ourselves and the attitudes and behaviors we come to embrace. For instance, identity scholars have theorized that wearing particular clothing contributes to generating certain behaviors for some time. For example, wearing large hoods makes subjects more likely to administer electric shock to others (Zimbardo, 1969), whereas wearing a nurse's uniform contrarily makes participants less likely to administer a shock (Johnson & Downing, 1979). In another experiment, after being asked to wear a bikini, subjects reported greater feelings of shame about their bodies, ate less, and performed worse subsequently on math assessments (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998). We also know this based on popular sayings in our culture such as *I'm having a bad hair day*, which usually refers to the fact that bad hair is leading to everything else going wrong in one's day.

Hajo and Galinsky (2012) recently integrated findings from the last hundred years and proposed a unifying framework about how clothes influence how we feel, think, and act. They call this theory *enclothed cognition*, the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer's psychological processes. Enclothed cognition proposes the co-occurrence of two independent variables: 1) the symbolism and meaning we create for particular clothing; and 2) the actual physical experience of wearing the clothing that has this meaning. Hajo and Galinsky (2012)

tested this theory using a white lab coat, which they established in a pre-test to be ascribed by their subjects with attentiveness and carefulness. Attentiveness and carefulness is the meaning or the narrative (schema or story) that people have about white lab coats in general. The researchers then divided the subject pool into groups with the intention of performing attention-related tasks, hypothesizing that groups who wore the coat would perform better. One group of subjects was asked to wear the lab coat but told nothing about it, another group was asked to wear it and told the lab coat belonged to a doctor, a third group was asked to wear it and told it was a painter's coat, and a fourth group had the coat placed nearby but were told nothing about the coat nor asked to wear it. The researchers found that wearing a lab coat described as a doctor's coat increased sustained attention, compared to wearing a lab coat described as a painter's coat. They also found no effect when the coat was merely placed near the subjects, which suggests that in some way, through wearing, the perceived attributes of the coat itself were transferred to the wearer. Hence, enclothed cognition theory asserts that the symbolic meaning one ascribes to a garment and the physical wearing of the garment both impact the emotions and cognition of the wearer. I think this is an important research breakthrough, as it suggests that what people choose (or are required) to wear could have similar effects, presumably both positive and negative, on their thoughts, feelings, and actions every day. My hope is that this research framework is a foundation and the beginning of an exciting new line of inquiry into the influence and impact that our bodies and clothing have on our identities and our interactions with others. How we present ourselves through our bodies and clothing are a tangible visual representation of links between our minds and our bodies. These early findings suggest vast new promising domains for future research, including how people ascribe meaning to clothing; and

how clothing and wearing clothing impacts our relationships, our ability to take action in the world, and in turn our access to opportunities.

Positive Interventions

I turn next to considerations of positive interventions that have the potential to utilize clothing and self-presentation as means of fostering increased flourishing. Producing sustained increases in well-being is complicated; were it easy and straightforward, someone would have already packaged the solution and we'd all be buying it. Fortunately, a strong foundation already exists on which to build: the field of positive psychology, which was founded for the purposes of increasing well-being for individuals, groups, organizations and institutions. I provide an overview of this body of work below.

This new field is based on studying the emotions, thoughts and behaviors of people, groups and institutions that experience higher levels of well-being, in order to understand how to replicate these favorable outcomes at large. One primary way this replication happens is through designing and implementing *positive interventions* (PI). A positive intervention is evidence-based (theoretical, experimental or evaluative) activity, which targets a change in client mindset or behavior, with the intent to increase well-being. In other words, positive interventions aim to offer clients a new and more positive lens through which to view their experience (past, present, or imagined future). Empirical evidence is a critical differentiator in order to understand and replicate results. In his groundbreaking work, Seligman (2002) offered a *happiness* formula that states: H (enduring happiness) = S (set range) + C (circumstances) + V (actions within one's voluntary control). In essence, a biological set range that each of us inherits accounts for approximately fifty percent of one's happiness, our life circumstances account for approximately twenty percent, and one's voluntary actions account for approximately thirty percent. A positive

intervention is designed to target the thoughts and actions within one's voluntary control along with and related to one's life circumstances. There are now about a dozen empirically validated positive interventions being applied across a variety of disciplines (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Drawing on foundational research on identity and positive psychology, I propose that flourishing style crafting is a conscious and intrinsically motivated change, and structure of habits, to produce or reinforce positive thoughts and behaviors using one's character strengths, aspirations, tastes and physical assets on a daily basis. This investment has the potential to increase both our positive feelings about ourselves, and the positive impressions we are able to generate with others. The following sections outline the key psychological concepts and theories, which are incorporated into the intervention proposed in this capstone's final section.

Positive Psychology

The field of positive psychology, founded by Martin Seligman in 1998, was established with the intention of applying scientific methods to the study of what mentally healthy people need in order to increase well-being. Before diving into an overview of the field, an interesting question to consider is why the addition of positive psychology was needed at all. The broader field of psychology grew based on relatively straightforward principles of supply and demand with the establishment in 1930 of the Veteran's Administration (now the US Department of Veterans Affairs) (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). There was a great need to serve many returning from World War I. In addition, in 1949 the National Institute of Mental Health was established and began providing large research grants to psychologists studying psychological pathology and disorders. This event caused a powerful shift in the focus of psychology from mental *health* to mental *illness* and promoted the perspective of a disease-investigating model. The new field of positive psychology seeks to redirect and rebalance a focus from mental illness to mental health:

what healthy-minded people need in order to flourish (Seligman, 2011). A foundational framework of positive psychology is offered through the acronym PERMA, which identifies five distinct and elemental aspects of well-being: positive emotions, engagement or flow in experience, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

I think of and often explain positive psychology as *a gym for your brain*, where you can develop and stretch your perspective and think in new and fulfilling ways. I explain that in the same way our bodies need movement, sleep, and healthy foods, there is also daily hygiene required for optimal cognitive, emotional and spiritual health and functioning. Positive psychology could be explained as strong and consistent energy, hope and resilience in life. It includes the ability to innovate and generate purpose, relationships and positive emotions such as joy, pride, hope and excitement. It can be seen as the skill and practice of expanding one's positive mindset and the ability to cultivate well-being in the world. The following sections offer an overview into the aspects of positive psychology, which are most relevant to my proposed conceptions of *flourishing style* and *flourishing style crafting*.

Positive Emotions

Based on the broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions serve as both a means and an end to increasing well-being through broadening our attention and offering us fuel to engage in the world (Fredrickson, 2009). Positive emotions are shown to correlate with increased creativity and problem solving (Fredrickson, 2009) and even serve as a reset for our minds through erasing the effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Given the nonlinear nature of positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner 2002), it is possible that through developing a positive identity via our clothing and self-presentation, we could influence not only our own emotions, but also the emotions of those with whom we come in contact. In

fact, North, Tarrang and Hargreaves (2004) found that people who have a more positive mood (listening to pleasant music) are actually more likely to help others. Altruism from these moods is thought to be generated by: an increase in empathy; a desire to want to prolong a positive mood (where not helping could deflate it); and turning our attention to our values and beliefs which tend to be altruistic (Aronson & Akert, 2010). I believe the process of dressing and intentionally choosing clothing based on our expected interactions in the world has the potential to generate positive emotions at the start of each day, which can produce a positive spiral that impacts others and the opportunities we are able to generate.

Emotional Intelligence

Flourishing style crafting also draws on key distinctions of the field of emotional intelligence, which relate to the effective integration of emotion and cognition (Salovey, Caruso & Mayer, 2004). It is both the capacity to reason about emotions as well as to use emotions to assist reasoning. Emotional intelligence is composed of four distinct and hierarchical branches which include one's ability to: 1) perceive emotions; 2) use emotions to facilitate and redirect thought for purposes of memory, problem solving and creativity; 3) understanding causes, effects and the interrelationship of emotions; and 4) manage emotions through reflection and monitoring, which includes regulation of engagement or disengagement and altering emotions in oneself and others. Evidence in this literature supports the claim that emotions function as both a lens for ourselves and a compass to use in orchestrating more complex interactions across people and environments (Salovey et al., 2004). The *flourishing style* intervention that I have designed, offers a way to develop awareness of and the ability to shift one's emotions through the process of dressing and presenting one's self.

Character Strengths

In addition to emotions, a fundamental lever in increasing well-being is activating character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). One of the most significant contributions to date in the field of positive psychology is the Character Strengths and Virtues Classification Handbook (CSV), a manual that presents twenty-four distinct strengths or psychological aspects that define morally valued virtues. This handbook was developed with the intention of providing a diagnostic and statistical manual to classify aspects of healthy human experience and behavior (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The manual provides a deeper understanding and orientation to positive traits that we carry into our behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (Park, Peterson, Seligman, 2004). Over the course of two years, along with a team of over fifty scientists, researchers embarked on the daunting task of a historic literature review of universal human virtues from around the world dating back several thousand years. This archive included narratives about events, motivations, contexts, successes and failures across literature, politics and cultures. This lens offered a rich perspective from which to compare and contrast our present culture and envision and design a bridge to the future of human flourishing. As a result of this foundational work, an assessment tool called the VIA Strengths and Character Inventory was created and validated in over seventy countries. The flourishing style crafting intervention uses this assessment as the core building block from which to create a personal style identity and brand that others will experience.

Self-efficacy

How one feels about the clothes one wears and the feedback on appearance that we receive from others have the capacity to either bolster or inhibit one's sense of efficacy in any given situation. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capability to produce desired effects or to

achieve one's goals (Maddux, 2009). Self-efficacy influences our physical health, our engagement, and our resilience and perseverance in the face of obstacles. It is believed that the capacity for self-efficacy develops over a lifetime as a result of feedback from primary sources of experience: performance experiences, vicarious experiences, imagined experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Maddux, 2009). *Flourishing style crafting* incorporates a ritual for thinking through one's current emotions, events and goals of the day, and how our body language and clothing can generate positive emotions and confidence as a foundation for interacting in any given situation.

Hope and Goal-setting

Aspirations, which I think of as both hopes and goals, are also highly relevant to increasing well-being. Hope theory concerns an individual's perception of his or her capacity to: 1) clearly conceptualize goals; 2) develop strategies to reach those goals; and 3) initiate and sustain motivation for using those strategies (Lopez et al., 2004). Hope is conceived of as malleable and as supporting the innate human needs of striving and development. Mechanisms for increasing hope include: the discovery of things that bring you hope; seeking social support for pursuing new goals; and increasing current levels of hope through stories of hope and solution-based thinking and behaving (Lopez et al., 2004). In addition, goal-setting theory states that goals direct our action both in terms of intensity and persistence over time (Locke, 1996). Goals have two distinct elements: an internal (abstract or idea) element; and an external (physical, concrete, and material) element lending insight into how both psychological and physical goals produce increased fulfillment. *Flourishing style crafting* is designed to promote clarity of aspirations and to generate motivation through creating stories about ourselves that generate hope and motivation over time.

II. Identity and Self-Presentation

An Agentic Constructionist Lens

“It is never too late to be what you might have been.” –George Eliot

To formulate effective intervention strategies for using apparel and self-presentation to promote well-being, I draw on psychological theory and research over the last hundred years examining how we see ourselves and how others see us: what is referred to in the psychological literature as *identity*. A theory that illuminates foundational concepts of identity and the importance of self-presentation is Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986) or the agentic socio-cognitive view. This theory contends that people are self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating organisms who are shaped by these functions as well as by external events. In essence, people have the power to influence their own motivations, their affect, thought processes, and actions in order to produce intended results (Bandura, 1989). A term used widely to describe this capability is human agency. Social cognitive theory conceptualizes three interactional, reciprocal and dynamic causal structures: personal determinants; behavior; and the environment.

One example of social cognitive theory can be seen in the reactions that people evoke within any social environment based on visual characteristics, their bodies and presentation, even before they say or do anything (Bandura, 2008). These social reactions, in turn, have the power to influence and affect our conceptions of others and ourselves in positive or negative ways. In effect, in their daily lives, people formulate courses of action, anticipate the likely outcomes from these actions, and in turn act on these anticipations or judgments in a dynamic manner. Social cognitive theory purports that personal identity is gleaned not only from how one lives,

but also from who one considers oneself to be, and how one reflects on both the self and one's lived experiences.

According to this agentic and constructionist view, we have a hand in promoting and producing ourselves and our environments through choices and actions, which are consistent with our character strengths (values and assets) and aspirations. Within this conception, self-presentation and our clothing are thought of as a substructure or branch within this larger structure. For example, on any given day, we anticipate and even foretell the situations, people, and audiences we will encounter, and we choose how to present ourselves based on this projection. In addition, during the act of presenting ourselves, we observe ourselves, learn, and modify simultaneously as we receive evaluations and feedback from others. If prospection is defined as ---an imagining or a hope about the future, which would otherwise not have occurred (Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2013), let's imagine how clothing prospection could enhance well-being for you and others.

A hypothetical example, which might illustrate this point, would be packing for a vacation. Let's say that someone who is good at or enjoys prospection and does research to understand and imagine the vacation environment in terms of the local dress for that geography, the weather, and the various activities they are likely to pursue. If you have imagined accurately it is likely that you are better prepared for the activities both psychologically and materially, and may even enjoy them more as a result. For example, let's imagine you are going to Mexico for whale watching. You read all about whale watching in this part of the world and envision yourself there: imagining that you will need swim trunks, a sun blocking swim shirt, good binoculars, and boat shoes, information about the whales in this area. Your swim trunks are worn out and don't fit well, so you invest in a new pair in your favorite color, red, and find they

fit nicely. On the first day of vacation, you are more comfortable wearing these swim trunks, which makes you more likely to swim, which turns out to be extra fun. The color of the bathing suit reminds you of one you had when you were in college, enjoying long days on the beach while working as a lifeguard. You notice that with this memory recall you feel virile and remember that you are a strong swimmer, and that you could save others if they needed help. As you recall this memory, your posture straightens out, your chest puffs out proudly, you smile and you lean forward as if ready to be of service to others. This memory, which was cued by the color of your swim trunks, inspires you to volunteer to sit in the front of the boat as a lead helping others on and off. As you meet the other people on your trip you have more enthusiasm and energy than before this memory; you feel both purposeful and ready for fun. This leadership role results in you meeting the people on the boat more quickly, including a very attractive person who is alone and seems to have noticed you. As the trip takes off you invite this companion to sit next to you and offer to share your binoculars; your offer is accepted, and the vacation is off to an amazing start. While this is a somewhat dramatic example, I think it illustrates how enclothed cognition and presenting ourselves is a powerful pathway, not only for how we consciously and unconsciously shape our own identity and sense of purpose (in this case self-presentation triggered positive memories and emotions of efficacy and confidence which had a domino effect leading to interest and excitement) but also for connecting to others in the world.

A Dramaturgical Lens

Sociology offers another important and interesting conception of identity. In his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (2002), sociologist Erving Goffman argued that each of us, in every minute and in each encounter in the world, is performing and shaping the

impressions we give off according to a shared set of guidelines about how we are supposed to act. Goffman pioneered *face-to-face interaction*, or *micro-sociology*, and he used the framework of the theater or *dramaturgy* to explore human and social interaction. Like Shakespeare, he proposes that we are all actors on the stage of our lives, playing out performances for various audiences, and that the meaning of people's actions is dependent on how people interact and is also influenced by the environment. Goffman argues that people both *give* impressions, involving verbalizations designed to create an intended impression, and *give off* impressions, which include non-verbal actions. He believed people had less control over non-verbal actions. He posited that the goal and success of any presentation is based on acceptance from the audience and being viewed as the actor wishes to be viewed. Assuming Goffman's view, that each of us has a conscious and unconscious goal to be accepted by the audience and convey our intended impression, there is an opportunity to consider that we may be underutilizing the power of consciously managing our physical cues through body language and clothing in order to achieve these goals.

One way to understand the lived experience of managing our presentation is through Goffman's distinction between front *stage* and *back stage* behaviors. Front stage actions are visible to the audience; back stage behaviors occur when no audience is present. Front stage involves two necessary components: setting and personal front. Setting is the scene that must be present in order for the actor to perform. Personal front is divided into appearance (status) and manners (body language and actions). Both the actor's appearance and manners tell the audience what to expect from one's performance. For example, with a restaurant as the setting, a food server is likely to appear and have particular manners in front of customers (front stage behavior) and quite differently if in the kitchen (backstage) following a shift. I will offer parallels in

section five between these conceptions and how people think about different audiences, settings, and functionality of clothing and how these can support *flourishing style crafting*.

Goffman (2002) contends that like actors on the theatrical stage, people in their everyday lives manage settings, wardrobe, words and scripts, and nonverbal acting in order to give a particular impression. Based on dramaturgical theory, and in alignment with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989) and symbolic interactionism (Soloman, 1983) Goffman posits that one's identity is not a stable or an independent psychological entity, but rather is dynamic and constructionist in nature based on the person's interactions with others. Goffman believed that staging was a critical element to any performance, which he defined as the development and manipulation of symbols such as physical appearance, props, artifacts and one's esthetic environment. Goffman (1976) believed physical appearance---including grooming and one's wardrobe---to be among the most conspicuous yet intimate forms of self-presentation and an extension of one's personality. For example, clothing and adornment is ubiquitous throughout the entire historical record of human existence, yet it is not clear why clothing has always been used (Lurie, 1992). Many have argued that it was for protection, but from an anthropological perspective there are too many instances in which climates are hot, and there is no clear need for warmth or protection. The best argument for why we wear clothing, and consistent with Goffman's perspective, is that we use clothing as a communication mechanism through which we send messages about ourselves. We send this message through our *bodies* (evolutionary theorists might surely argue that we use clothing to attract mates) and our *character* with the hope of making connections with others in the world (Lurie, 1992). When we wear clothing, while we are covering our skin, it could be thought of as a second skin in which we are either hiding or in contrast displaying and highlighting the shape of our bodies and our apparel as a

feature of who we are (Baumgartner, 2012).

When considering Goffman's (2002) perspective, one might question the degree of authenticity, or how much of one's self presentation is originating from the individual and how much is pushed down based on social norms or set by the fashion industry. The work of Harre (1979) and Bandura (1989) can offer that identity crafting is not a contrived but rather a healthy pathway for identity development. Harre (1979) distinguished between an *attitude of detachment* versus *stultifying self-consciousness*. The former is defined as the power of admitting the possibility of agency or expressive control of one's style of the presentation; in contrast, the latter is thoughtlessly conforming to one's environment when presenting one's self. *Flourishing style crafting* is a process through which to activate choice in presenting one's individual style (strengths, aspirations, and tastes) to support the agentic and constructionist conceptions of identity crafting rather conforming to cues from an outside influence.

Guy, Banim, and Green's work (2001) also supports my proposed thesis that *personal style* as a state is a faulty conception. This concept assumes clothing meanings are stable; when in reality, they are always evolving, based on the contexts of the wearer, the perception of the audience or observer, and the dynamics of larger structural systems such as the fashion industry. In addition, it is a faulty conceptual assumption that there could be a "true or authentic" use of clothing originating from the wearer's side. Maybe this is true at any given moment, but from Bandura (1986) we know that identity happens through a dynamic exchange between one's internal and external experience and socialization. For example, wearing one outfit to work on one day might work great as a unique and authentic statement, and then the next time you wear it, the woman next to you is wearing the same outfit, and instead of a feeling that you are wearing a unique and interesting garment, you are now the twin of a person who perhaps you

may not wish to be associated with. Identity through visual image is thought to be a composition and work in progress- similar to art, where meanings are formed and embodied based on the self we aspire to, while also simultaneously incorporating feedback from the outside world (Bandura, 2008). I offer that a stronger conception of style could be achieved through this proposed process of *flourishing style crafting*, which incorporates one's current emotions, strengths and aspirations and tastes along with the influences that external factors have on our conceptions, and the process of managing both on an ongoing basis. In addition to the complex conceptions and influences of identity offering that it is dynamic and constructed socially through roles and settings, we will now consider the importance of the interpretation or meaning we give to objects and actions (more specifically related to self-presentation and adornment) or symbols.

Symbols

Another important foundation in making the connections between how self-presentation and clothing can produce well-being can be found in symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism assumes that individuals understand their world through interpreting actions based on the meaning that they ascribe to the action, which is based largely on symbols (Solomon, 1983). A symbol is any stimulus with a learned meaning or value. Symbols acquire their meaning through a socialization process that begins in childhood and is specific to particular cultures. For example, a pencil is a simple example of a symbol; without the meaning we have internalized in our culture, we might conceive of it is a weapon, or eating tool rather than as a writing tool. Or an example of a symbol of clothing is a woman's suit, which likely sends the message that one works in a formal work environment. Uniforms are symbols of various work environments (school uniforms, kitchen whites, a fire fighter's suit). These symbols both unify individuals by providing a shared identity, and also have meaning associated

with them that often prescribes specific rules and standards around behavior. Symbols allow us to assume various roles within differing social contexts. The roots of this concept can be traced back to William James (1890), who many believe was the first modern psychologist. James believed that each of us has as many selves as we do social roles through the use of symbols. Additional foundations of this theory are seen in the work of George Herbert Mead (1934), who argued that we assign meaning to ourselves in the same way that we ascribe meaning to objects. He asserted that we have a separate and complex self (*the me*) for each of our roles, and in combination, these *me*'s form a total self-conception, which Mead terms *the I*. For example, if we think about how this relates to our clothing, I might have certain garments or outfits that support my role as a wife such as a sexy blouse for date night, or a more professional yet fun dress for attending dinners with work colleagues. Various clothing pieces support the wife, *me*, along side other roles I own, such as mother *me*, and entrepreneur *me*, and friend *me* and sister *me*, which are combined to create a self-conception of *I*. I will describe later in this paper clothing pieces that serve multiple roles, or cross-over pieces, which are key in crafting our presentation as we toggle between roles. If my outfit supports multiple roles, my day is simplified and requires less of my energy and thought about my presentation, which can bolster my confidence and allow me to be more focused on whatever task or experience is at hand (Guy et al., 2001). For example, a casual outfit that is comfortable could also make a positive impression to any potential clients I might happen to run into in my leisure time, then this supports several dimensions or roles within my identity. I personally can imagine the joy that cross-over pieces can bring by not having to change as often and through feeling dressed appropriately for myriad roles.

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) contributed another central conception of symbolic interactionism and coined the term the *looking glass self*. He posited that an important aspect of the self is an individual's imaginative process that occurs during interactions with others. Through these, we imagine our own appearance from the other person's perspective and also imagine what the other person's judgment is of our appearance (Cooley, 1902). In alignment with Bandura's (1989) conceptions of social cognitive theory, our identity is also shaped by what we imagine others are thinking about us, which includes what we imagine they think about our bodies and how we present ourselves using clothing.

It is clear from these foundational explanations of our understanding of identity and self-presentation that both are complex and dynamic processes, shaped both by how we see ourselves, how others react to us, and even how we imagine others are reacting to us. As we integrate these conceptions, I will layer on two additional critical aspects, which I believe, are particularly relevant to the process of self-presentation and dressing on a daily basis and they are how we use material things and also how we use stories.

Self-presentation Through Things

Soloman (1983) proposed that the various roles we play are facilitated or inhibited by material symbols or products, such as clothing, which are culturally associated with a particular role. According to this view, individuals must estimate the effect that symbols and communication will have on the recipient. In addition, one's attitude about one's self-image is in part determined via role-taking through estimates of how we perceive that others are evaluating us. Soloman (1983) proposes that product symbolism is shaped both by society ascribing meaning (as symbols) and by the individual ascribing meaning (as signs). Most consumer research explains products as acquisitions geared to support impression management. However,

Soloman (1983) contends that an important side of the story of consumer behavior has been overlooked: products can play an a priori role as stimuli and are antecedents to behavior. In other words, we can use products to motivate ourselves and others to act. An example of this could be gleaned from setting running shoes out the night before a run and as a result of setting them out, one might be more likely to remember to run and actually go for the run.

In a similar vein, Csikazentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) assert that objects in our material world evoke consistent responses over time and as a result are more permanent than conceptions in our minds. They posit that products are particularly salient in human consciousness as they are double encoded with meaning: first, at the *coding* or creation of meaning process; and then second at the *decoding* or consumption of meaning process.

Interestingly, one's existing role knowledge and role confidence are inversely proportional to the probability that a product will exert a priori influence on behavior (Soloman, 1983). In other words, our strategic use of products such as clothing can influence how we see ourselves and how we are seen especially during transitions or when new roles are assumed. For example, preparing one's outfit for an interview or first day of school may be important not just for the impression we give off to others, but also for the meaning we ascribe to the clothing, which in turn supports our own conceptions of self and our ability to take action. For example, if I love the color of a blouse I choose for an interview because I think it naturally enhances my eyes, which are one of my assets, then I am likely to feel more confident and convey this confidence through my actions, which in turn impacts the impressions I convey.

Stone (1962) argued that every social transaction can be broken into two parts: appearance and discourse. In alignment with Cooley (1902) and Mead's (1934) theories of self, Stone suggests that material objects trigger anticipation behavior. In considering appearance and

the example of clothing, appearance may be weighed more heavily in our assessments of others as it is thought to be less easy to manipulate or change than what we say. Especially in the case of initial impressions, appearances are weighted more heavily than verbal discourse in setting the stage for the interaction (Stone, 1962). According to this point of view, products can help define the self through evoking a specific self-image, triggering anticipation behavior for both the self and the audience, and providing heavily valued data to such an audience. Through this process, objects such as clothing can be used to make conscious adjustments in order to optimize the image presented to others, ultimately managing one's identity (Soloman, 1983).

Sheridan and Chamberlain (2011) suggest the importance of things in how social scientists conceptualize and design research. For example, in a study that interviewed women who had lost significant amounts of weight, it was found that when women were asked to bring artifacts (such as a journal, photographs or pieces of clothing) to help document and explain the weight loss process, the interviews were vastly different in offering new descriptions, additional details and richer narratives. Sheridan et al. (2011) found specifically that things enhanced the research interviews by: 1. Providing proof of the past; 2. Uncovering previously forgotten experiences; 3. Enhancing the narrative; 4. Shifting and recoding a memory; and 5. Enhancing the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. By challenging and changing people's narratives, material things have the power to reconstitute the past, alter the present and even change the future. From this research, it would seem that the tangibility of the artifacts are evoking beliefs and feelings in powerful and consequential ways.

In sum, a growing body of scholarship highlights the analytical power of things, not only in enhancing research, but also in enhancing life. This research supports my argument for

considering our bodies and how we present them using clothing is a lever for influencing others and ourselves.

Self-presentation Through Stories

Symbolic interactionism also emphasizes the importance of stories, which are the threads of hundreds of symbols that we string together in making sense of the world and of ourselves in it. If we were to put our conscious brains on loudspeaker, it is as if we are always telling a never-ending story, based on the meanings we have gleaned from our experiences to date, and the situations in our current consciousness. Anthropologist Joseph Campbell discovered that people around the world from diverse cultures and religions create a similar story of human striving over a lifetime, which he referred to as the *hero of a thousand faces* (Osbon, 1991). Campbell believed that our stories are our power: they are the ascribed meaning created by ourselves and others to make sense of our lives and connect to others. I would argue that the most important stories are the ones we tell to ourselves *about* ourselves, which shape our identity, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. They have the power to imprison us and also to free us. The stories of whom and what we love create our legacy. I believe this is important because at the beginning of each day, we begin to think about the tasks that are in front of us, the commitments for which we are responsible, and the people with whom we expect to interact. Our stories about the day begin long before the first appointment on the calendar. It is almost as if the choices we make about our outfits function like the choice points in a *Choose Your Own Adventure* story. They alter the direction of the story through their implicit and explicit meaning and the ripple effects this creates. Therefore, I believe there is an opportunity to use the current conceptions and empirical research about how our minds create and use stories to support *Flourishing Style Crafting*. I believe the positive stories we tell ourselves at the beginning of the

day are a critical foundation for positive identity crafting and fostering increased daily well-being.

This perspective on the nature and role of internal storytelling is supported recent research in psychology. For instance, the field of Narrative Therapy was established to better understand storytelling and identify opportunities to use it to increase well-being (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative Therapy is an approach that uses a client's story of what happened in his or her life as a medium through which change can be effected. This therapeutic process supports clients to deconstruct relevant narratives they tell (to themselves and to others) and search for new meaning and insights that best support their identity, sense making of the past, and aspirations for the future. Over the last thirty years, application in clinical therapeutic settings has shown great promise for increasing well-being (White & Epston, 1990). This field has produced research that suggests storytelling is a primary mode of human learning, influence, and experience (Tomasulo & Pawelski, 2012).

The process of retelling one's story in written interventions has also been shown to be a powerful mechanism for change and healing. Specifically, through an intervention called *Three Good Things*, subjects were asked every night for one week to write down three good things that happened to them and also to explain what caused those events to happen. In this research, subjects showed significant increases in happiness and a decrease in depressive symptoms for six months (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

It is reasonable to consider our self-identity stories as existing in a depository or memory bank. This bank provides temporal coherence to life and acts as a guide for belief and value commitments that link the present to the past and even hold the power to shape the course of the future. In any given individual, identities are likely to include various self-stories emanating

from nationality, social position, political affiliation, ethnic composition, occupation, and familial aspects of life based on one's value commitments. One may exhibit various constellations of identities, such as a strong ethnic identity combined with a less strong occupational identity. An example offered by Soloman (1983) is an African American professor who chooses to wear an African costume to work, rather than conforming to a norm of dress within the academic institution with which they are affiliated. An individual's story that might drive this behavior is that loyalty to culture is stronger or produces greater pride and trumps professional affiliations or alliances, with clothing being chosen to help communicate this to others (Soloman, 1983). In this example, clothing is not only the key mechanism for creating the story, but it is also how people remember the story or how it is encoded in our memory. For example, she might be referred to as the professor who wears regalia. Another example of how we use appearance to encode memory is at the scene of a crime, when police often question witnesses about the details of dress that they can recall such as hats, color of garments, personal features like scars or tattoos.

For example, I have a neighbor who dresses like she is homeless and or mentally ill. She wears pajamas and dirty sneakers and a baseball cap on her morning walks and is very reserved almost appearing paranoid in avoiding others and rarely making eye contact or offering a hello. I made an assumption from these brief interactions, both from her body language and dress that it is likely that she keeps to herself and doesn't interact in the world. I also created a story and assumption that even her functionality on a daily basis might be in question; perhaps she suffers from depression or another psychological disorder. As a result, in our brief interactions, I never inquired about her life or her work. I actually felt nervous about asking any questions and avoided any personal topics but focused our discussions primarily on updates about the

neighborhood. I found out from another neighbor about a year after we had moved in, that she is a world-renowned class-action attorney who does fascinating work primarily from home but is far from homeless or mentally ill. From this example, we don't know why she is this way and what is perhaps the chicken or the egg of her strange presentation. What are the stories she tells herself about herself? Is she aware of or does she care that others might fear her or be concerned? Is she prohibitively reserved and socially awkward and did this lead her to the work she now does primarily in isolation, or did this work and her isolation over many years shape her lack of attention to how she presents herself and actually produce her visual identity today? Either way, we can imagine the ways that her visual presentation limits her interactions on a daily basis both social and professional in the short and long term. If these ideas are interesting to her, she could be a great candidate for *flourishing style crafting* which could further align her strengths, emotions and tastes with how she presents herself visually.

III. Self-Presentation Through the Body

“The body is a sacred garment. It’s your first and last garment; it is what you enter life in and what you depart life with, and it should be treated with honor.” –Martha Graham

Embodied Cognition

How we think, feel, and shape our identities is influenced not only by objects, such as clothing, shoes and accessories, but also by our bodies and the process of embodiment. We can wear the right clothing that is flattering and even appropriate, but our bodies can still send a negative or incongruent message, which will also be used in assessing us visually. In fact, Mehrabian and Weiner (1967) found that seven percent of the message we convey in live interactions is based on the words we use, versus thirty-eight percent based on feelings and attitudes we use in speaking, and fifty-five percent based on our facial expressions. In this

section I survey the literatures offering insight into how our bodies can support crafting a positive identity in both how we see ourselves and others assess us.

Maclachlan, Mhaille, Gallagher and Desmond (2012) conceive of embodiment as how people sense themselves internally and externally; it subsumes the experience of being perceived as well as the experience of actual perceiving through one's body. Additional evidence for the importance for considering the body can be found in the field of somaesthetics, or the study of how we create performance through perception, cognition, action, aesthetic expression, and ethical self-fashioning - in essence, the relationship between body, mind, and culture (Shusterman, 2006). Somaesthetics suggests that our bodies and how we present them are a basis for understanding every day experience---a basis for understanding ourselves.

The literature on Embodied Cognition (Freedberg & Gallese, 2007) also offers important insights into how our minds and bodies are connected. Embodied Cognition is the idea that cognitive experiences are based on perceptual content we receive through our perception (vision, auditory), action (movement, proprioception) and introspection (mental states and affect), which we in turn schematize as stories in our memory. It is the physical experience itself that shapes cognitive representations of abstract concepts and the mental acquisition and simulation of symbolic meaning. For example, Niedenthal (2007) asked participants to rate the funniness of cartoons while simultaneously holding a pen either (a) in their teeth without touching their lips (which forced an anatomical smile) or (b) with their lips but not touching their teeth (preventing a smile). Participants who smiled reported finding the cartoons funnier. Persuasion has also been shown to relate to cognitive embodiment; for instance, smelling clean smells makes one more likely to trust and offer help to others (Liljenquist, Zhong, & Galinsky, 2010). Things we observe about the body can influence our information processing and how we assess others.

Power Poses

Recent research by Carney, Cuddy & Yap (2010) identified predictable poses or body postures that convey confidence, which they call *high-power poses*, or a lack of confidence, which they term *low-power poses*. This research question arose as a result of observing MBA students in classes and noticing that the male students tended to literally take up more space, for instance, by sitting in expanded postures, keeping shoulders extended and parallel on a vertical plane to their bodies, stretching more, and draping their arms and legs in expanded ways even when at rest. Women, on the other hand, tended to hold body postures that made them appear contracted and smaller; their arms often touched their torso, were held close to the body, or were even wrapped around themselves, or they held their own wrists in what could be interpreted as protective or vulnerable poses.

Understanding this connection is especially important in competitive environments, where men and women would like to be poised to assert themselves and to produce the impression of confidence or competence. These researchers wondered if body posture could actually make a physiological difference in producing greater levels of testosterone (known to produce assertive behavior), and lowering cortisol stress hormones (known to exist in higher power individuals). They found that holding a high-power pose for two minutes caused neuroendocrine and behavior changes for both women and men (Carney et al. 2010). There was also a condition, which tested low-power poses and found the inverse pattern. This research suggests that merely by assuming particular body poses for two minutes, people can consciously influence their physiology in ways that could impact their ability to respond to and influence others in important ways. These findings thus suggest that embodiment goes beyond cognition and emotion and can have immediate and actionable effects on physiology and behavior. This

presents opportunities in the world of designing interventions using physiology and psychology to support positive increases in well-being.

Cuddy, Fiske and Glick (2007) also studied the dynamics of power in introductory situations and found that trying to be more dominant often makes it harder for someone to get accurate information about the other person. Dominance often elicits a defensive or threatened response whereby the other party may feel compelled to counter with more assertiveness than they would have otherwise. This research suggests that in first encounters, it may be better to try to establish trust by letting the other person speak first or have the floor. It is hypothesized that particularly in first encounters, people make the mistake of over-weighting the importance of expressing strength and competence, at the expense of expressing warmth and trustworthiness (Cuddy et al., 2007). They find that people tend to jump into conversations as if they are negotiations, with no warm up to make the other person feel heard. This research suggests that establishing this trust opens others up to what you have to say, to your strengths and confidence, and is the conduit through which ideas travel. Through sending the message that we trust others, we ourselves can experience an increase in positive emotions such as hope, optimism, and serenity; these emotions influence how we feel about ourselves, but, in turn, how we act and then how others perceive us. This research presents interesting implications for future research and intervention designs regarding embodiment in self-presentation and the potential for positive identity crafting.

The importance of embodiment and the mind-body connection is also evident in the work of legendary actor and dramatist Constantin Stanislavsky (Stanislavsky, 1964). Stanislavsky (1989) believed emotions were formed in our subconscious minds, and he founded a technique, which allowed actors to consciously target and control their subconscious emotions through

movement. For example, if an actor needed to weep, he could train himself through a physical action, such as a sigh and holding his head in his hands, to trigger an emotional response. On stage, if an actor experiences either internal feelings or physical actions but not both, then the performance is flat or dead to the audience. Internal experiences and their physical expression must be united in what he called psycho-physical union (Stanislavsky, 1964).

Stanislavsky introduced a system of acting, which can be explained as an actor's learned ability to subordinate inspirational creativity to one's conscious control until it becomes a conditioned reflex or tendency (Stanislavsky, 1964). Stanislavski developed the *method of physical actions*, through which an actor performs a physical action to create the desired emotional response for one's character. This presupposes a reverse of the human reaction system, in which an emotion leads to action. *Method* actors use actions to control their emotions. This allows actors to use silences or pauses in the dialogue of the script along with the words and remain in character, striving to use the body to outwardly express what the mind is inwardly experiencing. The correct physical action does not come automatically for every psychological response; consequently, actors need to experiment through improvisation until they determine what works best for them and for the character they are trying to portray. The best improvisers are those who can intuitively act and behave onstage as though they are in a real situation.

Additional evidence for the power of how one 'wears' the body and carries oneself is found in studying one's *body dispositions*: how one moves, walks, and talks (Bourdieu, 1994). Bourdieu proposed that the body is a mediator of information through signals we send through inscriptions, tastes and practices, and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). These body dispositions, or habitus, employ both a dramaturgical and constructionist lens to examine people's relationship with their clothing related to status and how the body has come to be the bearer of social status

(Bourdieu, 1994). He argues that in signaling status through our clothing, we face an ongoing tension between setting one apart versus also signaling that one is similar enough to others and should be accepted as one of a group. Craik (1994, p. 4) also supports the importance of the body in identity and suggests the following relationship between the body and our clothing:

Women wear their bodies through their clothes. In other words, clothing does a good deal more than simply clothe the body for warmth, modesty or comfort. Codes of dress are technical devices, which articulate the relationship between a particular body, and it's lived milieu-the space occupied by bodies, accented by bodily actions, in other words, clothes construct a personal habitat. (p. 4)

I believe that Bourdieu and Craik's work supports the argument for *flourishing style crafting* as a method through which to connect how we think and feel (our internal experience), and how we present ourselves visually (interact in the world). If our internal experience is congruent with the signals we send to others, it is likely we will be perceived as more authentic and possibly more trustworthy, which would support building high quality connections with others (Dutton, 2003). In the proposed intervention, building daily from one's character strengths, emotions, and short and long term aspirations offers a foundation for authenticity through presenting one's self visually.

Neuroesthetics

Embodied cognition has led to the branch of research called neuroesthetics, which examines specific embodied mechanisms involved in the simulation of action, emotions, and corporeal sensation. Essentially, neuroesthetics examines our neural reactions to and processing of everyday images. Using brain-scanning technology, researchers have studied what happens when the brain contemplates visual images, such as works of art, clothing and other designs.

Freedberg and Gallese (2007) hypothesize that an embodied simulation occurs, whereby we empathize with others by enacting others' behaviors and experiences in our senses. Embodied simulation is a functional mechanism through which the actions, emotions, and sensations we see activate our own body state. For example, the recently popular septum piercing might produce interesting conscious and unconscious empathy responses in a brain scan showing pain and shock in the observer's own body in the region of the nose. I am hopeful that future research in the field of neuroesthetics might consider clothing and body adornment as topics of interest in understanding how self-presentation may influence and be influenced by embodied simulation.

IV. Clothing as a Lived Experience

"It's odd when I think of the arc of my life, from child to young woman to adult. First I was who I was. Then I didn't know who I was. Then I invented someone and became her. Then I began to like what I invented. And finally I was what I was again. It turned out I wasn't alone in that particular progression." Anna Quindlen

The Woman I Am and Want To Be

An interesting question that has garnered little research attention is how women actually use clothing. Applying cultural psychological analysis and synthesizing empirical and theoretical material, Tseelon (1995) argued for a dialectic discourse in women's understanding of themselves through their clothing relationships. Her work suggests that women's identity is realized through the presentation of many selves and that clothing is a critical element of this self-realization. To my knowledge, Tseelon (1995) was the first to suggest that women acquire, reflect on, and transfer created meanings from clothing to themselves as wearers in shaping and developing their identities. Noteworthy foundations leading to this contribution can be found in

the work of Wilson (1987), who coded the fragmentation of fashion meanings and called them *crevices*. He suggested that wearers use crevices in a variety of ways, ranging from gratification and pleasure to acts of resistance and subversion. For example, the punk rock movement of the 1980's is an example of a subculture formed largely based on dress and music, in opposition to the conservative zeitgeist (Lurie, 2003). Another important contribution is Craik's (1994) work, which uncovered the fluid nature of the relationship between women and their clothing and suggested that clothes open a world of diverse choices in identity.

In thinking about and using clothing, women tend to organize their wardrobes into four distinct categories, based on the intended occasion (Guy & Banim, 2000). The first category could be thought of as *duty-invisible (off-show work)*, examples of which might include answering the door unexpectedly for the postal carrier or running errands to the pharmacy or grocery store. This category could even include going to work but knowing you are working in isolation rather than interacting with others. This dimension is least conducive to personal care and presentation considerations but rather requires a 'functional unselfconsciousness,' which can be associated with tasks involving the care of others. The second category of clothing is called *duty-visible (on-show work)* and includes one's formal work environment and other settings in which one is interacting with and influencing others, such as a parent-teacher conference or visiting a colleague in the hospital. Within this context, presentation is considered in terms of the intended audience and through displaying personal care but not an excess of personal care. A third category, called *pleasure-invisible (off-show pleasure and rest)*, involves settings where women feel sheltered from judgments of appearance. Pleasure can actually be gleaned from a story one creates about *winding down, letting one's hair down*, and various forms of pampering and self-care. Examples of such settings include going to a movie, taking a walk in the park, or

hanging out at home with friends and family. Finally, a fourth category is called *pleasure-visible (on-show/pleasure and entertainment)*, including such endeavors as hosting a party or dinner for friends or family, attending a wedding or holiday event, or taking part in an after work event with colleagues such as meeting for drinks. Rituals, which contribute to increasing one's attractiveness when preparing for on-show occasions, include baths, grooming and cosmetic altering. Special occasions or events could also be an instance where *flourishing style crafting* would bring attention and intention to integrating one's strengths, such as love or gratitude, and one's emotions, such as excitement and pride, into the process of selecting clothing and even dressing. An example of this could be seen in offering coaching to a client who is getting married and is looking for help finding a wedding dress. Steps one through four of the flourishing style crafting process (see appendix B) would support this bride to bring her strengths, aspirations and personal brand forward as she considers the event and her choices.

Baumgartner, an applied psychologist, coaches clients on how to shop and dress to support psychological health (2012). She similarly finds that women tend to group their clothes into four categories, including: formal (special events and parties), night out (out to dinner etc.), office (what we wear for work), and weekend casual (not working, relaxing and leisure activities). She finds that women often have clothing that they believe is too formal or too *fine* to wear on a regular basis, and as a result, it sits in their closets unworn. She defines anything that sits in our closets and isn't worn at least three times a season as being in what she calls in-active status. She offers that women can increase well-being and their return on the economic investment in clothing by upgrading or wearing items we might otherwise believe should be saved for a nicer occasion. Examples of upgrading might be wearing a cocktail dress, which would have been reserved for a special occasion, for a more regular night on the town. Another

example could be selecting a silk blouse, which we typically save a night on the town, to work. Baumgartner (2012) also advises that investing in more *cross-over* pieces or pieces that could be worn across categories and roles can be a valuable investment, both emotionally and economically. For example, a particular sleeveless blouse might not be work appropriate on its own, but when worn under a jacket at work and then worn alone after work supports both occasions and saves one from needing to change clothing. She explains that in modern times when most of us run from one event and role to another, that there is an advantage to dressing to be prepared for a range of scenarios. This allows us to focus on the task at hand and to not be distracted by whether what we are wearing is appropriate. Baumgartner believes that through purchasing and selecting clothing that accentuates our personal assets, and knowing what clothing is appropriate in various social situations, we will increase our confidence and our ability to produce well-being through self-presentation and clothing. The intervention that follows offers a process for selecting outfits that will function across situations in order to incorporate these distinctions. In addition, I believe that additional research studying the influence of cross-over pieces and outfits would be valuable in understanding the nuances of acquiring clothing and selecting outfits that produce well-being.

An important contribution in the literature was made by Guy and Banim (2000), who embarked on a novel grounded-theory research study looking at clothing as a *lived experience*. They sought to find the clothing-related reasons, habits and experience that women wearers have on a daily basis. The researchers followed fifteen women and used three distinct techniques: 1) a personal account through an unstructured and audio-recorded interview about “*what clothes mean to me*”; 2) a daily log and diary about clothing choices and experiences for two weeks; and 3) a wardrobe interview employing a semi-structured format investigating women’s current

collections of clothing. One of their most important findings concerned how subjects connect clothing to their self-identity. Specifically, the women they studied displayed three distinct and interdependent perspectives for how they conceive of their self-identity through their relationships with clothing. First, subjects described *the woman one wants to be* or an aspirational or a strived for self. The second perspective, conversely, is *the woman one fears she could be*. The third and final perspective was that of *the woman one is most of the time*. Increases in positive well-being through clothing use were reported to be achieved in two ways: 1) as a result of an increase in positive emotions from a subjective self-assessment of *looking good*; and 2) feeling that one is capable and efficacious in achieving *looking good* through clothing selection. While each of these three perspectives is important, I will focus the next section on exploring insights from the first and third self-identity perspectives, proposing an intervention for positive identity crafting through self-presentation and clothing.

Creating the Click and Using Distinctiveness

In exploring more deeply what *looking good* meant to the women they studied, Guy and Banim (2000) discovered that the self-assessment of looking good creates a bridge between *the woman I want to be* and *the woman I feel that I am*. The women also reported that their primary goals of using clothing included positively influencing and shaping their identity for themselves, along with shaping their identity as seen by others. This perspective was not limited to the realm of reality but instead was extended into imagination and fantasy about potential clothing or outfits that could increase positive self-projections. The woman I want to be encapsulated both realized and aspirational images. One of the most important elements of creating *the woman I am and I want to be* is realized through what is called the *click*. The *click* is defined as the ability to generate appropriate clothing choices based on: (1) item quality and fit (both actual form or

silhouette and fit to one's body type and assets); and (2) the intended occasion, environment and audience. Phrases women use to describe success included when *one's outfit clicks* or when one is able to *pull it off*. For example, a woman who has a beautiful long waist finds a *click* in a rushed garment, which hugs and highlights the curves of her waist.

This research revealed that *click* could also be achieved in two ways by choosing pieces based on the item's quality. First, women recognized that higher quality pieces were more stylish and more detailed in the finishing (such as the seams, the pockets, the color or print and material, and the buttons and closures). Second, women recognized that quality garments would wear better and last longer. In fact, Baumgartner (2012) recommends that when purchasing new pieces, women should divide the cost of the piece by the number of times they believe they will wear something, as a way to understand getting the most from a purchase. In their interviews, Guy and Banim (2000) found that women reported that as they matured, they had learned it was better to invest in higher quality; that might mean sacrificing and buying less, but this was viewed as a worthwhile trade (Guy & Banim, 2000). They also reported that conforming to norms of dress was often most important in work contexts, where confidence and being in control were key aspirations. Most women had designated "work" clothes and described that they appreciated most the items that projected qualities about themselves that were valued in that environment. In addition, projecting competence was also highly valued and spoken about as a way to produce freedom from thinking about appearance in order to be able to focus on the job at hand.

In the last thirty years there have been many popular press books published on "power dressing": how to dress in order to be judged favorably and or even excel in a work environment. While how we dress for work is certainly important in shaping our identity for ourselves and

others, it is possible to imagine that it is also important to find a balance between dressing appropriately for the level you are currently at while also weaving in risks or stretches of clothing, which send the message that you are ready for advancement. However, this is a tricky balance as one could imagine, say for example, you show up at a company meeting and your outfit is more professional and more expensive than that of your boss, which then could make your boss feel uncomfortable and even threatened. Understanding where the line is between current status and aspired status is critical in creating *click* in a professional setting.

Creating *click* from choosing pieces based on the occasion, environment and the intended audience was also found to bring positive self-image and well-being (Guy & Banim, 2000). A fascinating theme was how women balanced or juxtaposed what they see as conforming and acceptable against what is seen as more deviant and controversial. Walking this line between the two offered a playful and creative space from which to push current identity conceptions and form new ones. Distinctiveness and deviance were also reported or reflected as a positive way to experiment and even rebel. Positive deviance was found especially rewarding in circumstances which involved “special events or occasions,” where women reported that they felt they had considerably more latitude to deviate, express themselves, and potentially venture into more aspirational and fantasy spaces of identity. An example can be seen in the popularity of Las Vegas as a fantasy mecca and the amazingly diverse array of clothing choices, which are acceptable there. There are multiple objectives that self-presentation and dressing can serve, including both achieving an aspired look and being ready and appropriate in varying environments.

Another way that women reported creating a positive relationship with clothing was in creating freedom to produce their own style. They did this by choosing pieces they felt were

aligned with their particular personality and that actually enhanced their personal body shape and assets. Interestingly, women report that the more experience they have with dressing, the more they report that they know and have learned how to successfully walk this line and feel that their personal style represents them as an individual. One could even imagine that it is only through a process of trying different *looks* and experimenting that one is able to refine a style that is deeply personal and unique. I love the Anna Quinlan quote at the start of this section and would offer that based on the conceptions of identity in this paper, the process she describes of reinventing and knowing ourselves happens both at a micro level over days, weeks, and months, and at a macro level over years as we deepen our knowledge of ourselves and have experience composing ourselves over time both psychologically and physically. In essence, our personal style is a type of wisdom, which is refined overtime and evolves to employ the right balance of strengths, in the right amount, at the right time, and in the right context. Otherwise, it's not a strength but rather an excess, opposite, or absence of that strength.

Given this situational dependence and given the goal of increasing positive *identity*, I propose that the experience and opinions of the wearer are paramount and should be more heavily weighted and also considered first during the process of clothing selection. Stated differently, focusing on how others are likely to perceive me should be secondary to who I believe I am and who I wish to become. In alignment with the literature on identity reviewed in previous sections, identity is always evolving as a result of social interactions, and can be actively crafted. To this end, I offer that there is an opportunity to consciously and explicitly craft one's identity building from positive psychological features such as one's strengths, emotions, aspirations and tastes, and then bring this forward through our bodies and clothing visually.

Closet Congruence

Part of crafting the identity of *the woman I am and want to be* includes having a good foundation of clothing and developing the skill and creativity with which to compose them into outfits. Having the raw materials or the foundation of great pieces in your closet is a critical foundation for crafting positive identity through clothing. Again, the research of Guy et al. (2000) suggests that one of the primary ways in which we increase positive subjective experience is through both clothing acquisition based on quality and fit (accentuating of body type and the parts we deem as assets), and appropriateness to the occasion or environment. It is important that we are able to attract enough of, as well as the right kind of attention interacting with others. This research suggests that our relationship with clothing is one that requires time, attention, and investment, such as any relationship. I will offer two key processes that are fundamental in curation a wardrobe intended to support *flourishing style crafting* which include: 1. clearing, organization, maintenance 2. shopping and acquisition.

Clearing

Baumgartner (2012) has worked with hundreds of clients who are looking to increase their well-being through clothing and finds that in most women's closet, there is a fifty to seventy-five percent excess inventory in their wardrobe. The surplus in our closets is likely clutter, which actually inhibits the functionality and creativity of composing outfits. She recommends that women who are looking to launch a wardrobe makeover start by eliminating fifty percent of what is currently in their closet. She explains that before embarking on shopping or acquiring new pieces, this is a critical step in seeing what staple pieces one has, identifying gaps in the current collection and eliminating items which are outdated, are not congruent with the client's current style and goals, need mending, or are beyond repair. I would add that ideally,

all items that are not clothing or dressing related should be removed from the dressing closet to promote additional focus and clarity in the environment.

Organizing

Regardless of what you own today, there is an opportunity to bring increased congruence and in turn empowerment through your wardrobe without adding anything. In fact, I will argue that before adding new pieces, an audit is needed in order to yield the highest return from investment in new items. The following intervention outlines a process to ensure that one's clothing or external appearance is evolving and representing one's internal aspirations and experience. Again, just as our internal identity is dynamic and evolving on a daily basis, at it's best, we can attend to aligning the outside to the inside. How often one can benefit from an audit is personal, however, a good sign that an audit is in order, is that you are not using, or benefiting from your current clothing in terms of confidence and or esthetic enjoyment. This audit is about understanding where you are where you are going and ensuring that the "story" or meaning you are ascribing to your clothing creates a powerful positive identity that will support your aspirations.

An important distinction Baumgartner (2012) has discovered through her work with clients is that we naturally develop clothing favorites or *go tos* that we wear regularly (at least five times a season). She considers these *active* pieces and explains that we build a trust with these items based on how they predictably perform for us while we are wearing them. In order to produce and replicate positive identity through clothing, one of the surest pathways is through identifying these *go to* items, understanding how and why we choose them, and using this or similar criteria to add additional pieces to our wardrobe.

The proposed intervention is designed to efficiently and powerfully align one's

flourishing brand to your current inventory of clothing. The goal is for your closet to become a place you desire to go in order to create the positive emotion, strengths and confidence you want to activate for any given day and occasion. As you embark on letting go of items, have some fun and be able to revel at and laugh about how far you've come. Remember with every breath and in each moment, you are evolving. You are a composition and work of art, always in progress. Just as a coat that you bought ten years ago may not *fit* in many ways today, styles, which have served us in the past, may not reflect our flourishing brand and where we wish to go in the future. As a general rule, in order to maintain a fresh and active inventory of clothing, we should divest one piece each time we acquire one.

Shopping

Just like any relationship, creating and maintaining a wardrobe requires that we invest time and attention. The following pages will outline general insights and best practices for creating a positive shopping experience on any budget. Guy et al. (2000) identified that one strategy in acquiring new pieces is to invest in quality over quantity. She found that as women age they develop a practical wisdom that supports spending more on higher quality items from designers that they recognize have traditionally served them well in order to increase the chances for acquiring great new pieces. Women explain that the higher investment pays off both because the garments have better lines and are more thoughtfully detailed, and because the materials are of higher quality which wear better and last longer. It is reported that over time women develop heuristics for selecting clothing by aligning and prioritizing specific designers, stores, and websites in order to short-cut to the style and fit that will likely perform with consistency to previously acquired items.

As we embark on curating wardrobes through our positive relationship with clothing an aspect of particular importance is setting a budget. We live in a consumer culture where anything; essentially any possible clothing item we can conceive of is available at our fingertips through the Internet. It is also widely recognized that shopping can become an unhealthy practice where one avoids situations or feelings by replacing them with shopping (Baumgartner, 2012). It should not be overlooked that money can influence our positive well-being, especially as it relates to essentials such as: providing a roof over our heads, food to eat, even safety; but research shows that beyond the essentials, consuming goods does not increase long-term happiness (Rath, 2010). There is only one pathway to buying short-term happiness and it's not luxury goods but rather the luxury of time and the luxury of increasing our choices for how we spend it (Rath, 2010). For example, short-term increases in well-being can be gained through the ability to spend more time with friends, or live closer to work, or purchasing experiences (Rath, 2010). However, the prospects of producing sustainable well-being from a traditional trip to a retail mall are limited. Alternatively, I recommend applying strategies such as sourcing from consignment stores, and thrift stores (especially in the higher socioeconomic areas) and leveraging online retailers such as eBay and Craig's list for estate sales. High-end designer items can be acquired on any budget and often, shopping online can save time and money. In addition, the thrill of the *hunt* and the *find* can offer positive experiences that a trip to the mall may not offer. Another modern day trend is to do clothing swaps with friends and family (Baumgartner, 2012). This offers an incredibly economical way of both having the experience of shopping with other women and also acquiring new pieces without spending any money.

One personal example I can offer is when I did a recent style makeover with a friend, we visited the Goodwill Industries store in Westport, Ct. and acquired a seventeen hundred dollar Escada business suit, in her size, with the retail price tag attached, for fifty-nine dollars.

An important finding in the research is that auditing one's current wardrobe and acquiring new pieces can be particularly valuable both heading into and coming out of a life transition. Examples of transitions included a change in work, change in romantic relationship, or a move to a new city or state, all of which bring myriad changes. It is shown that during these transitions, applying more attention to aligning the outside with internal aspirations can foster positive growth and experiences (Guy et al., 2000). Many women know which styles to avoid and which look best on them but worry about retaining this awareness as they age and their bodies change. In fact women report that they do not fear the changes in their bodies but rather they fear losing the skill and ability of positively manage one's image through the changes. This skill involves having an awareness of how our ideas of style change against the concept of an evolving aspirational self. This requires flexibility, innovation and experimentation in finding new images and pieces, which symbolize and convey a new intended identity. During significant life transition it is an ideal time to invest our attention and financial resources in wardrobe curation.

Another fascinating aspect of shopping occurred not only from finding great new pieces, but also from acquiring items at less than full price. Research subjects often described shopping as a challenge and a game or hunt. In addition, one's shopping prowess was touted not only at the time of purchase but also extended into the wearing of the discounted item (Guy & Banim, 2000). These findings could be explained by the PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011) by both engagement and flow experience, as one is actually challenged by the hunt, and the A, or

accomplishment as one is successful in acquiring a hard to find item or a superb deal. I would offer additional anecdotal observations that this pleasure is enhanced even further by sharing the actual amounts of the purchase price or the amounts of savings against the retail price.

The experience of shopping is also place to use one's imagination and creativity. According to Campbell (1989), modern fashion is informed by *Romanticism* which celebrates the individual indulging in the senses and seeking pleasure and a modern hedonism and consumption. Romanticism values change, diversity, individuality, imagination and the ability to create oneself. He explains that modern department stores are romantic spaces that open a dream-like world where shoppers indulge in the fantasies of owning objects that support an aspired identity. This Romantic spirit and indulgence in dreams and fantasies, is part of what inspires and drives fashion. Woman can play dress-up like they did as children and this can be a source for inspiring new stories and imagining new self-projections and identities in our lives (Guy et al., 2000). These aspects of self-presentation and adornment relate to the PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011) in that positive emotions (P), and meaning (M), can be activated by the stories and fantasies from new visual identities.

Finally, one of the ways that we know shopping can be a source of positive well-being, which aligns to the (R) *relationship* dimension of the PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011), is as an source for building friendships. Guy et al. (2000) found that the experience of shopping is an experience which bonds and reinforces friendships. During shopping trips with friends, women use each other to test new ideas about identity. Research shows that women tend to trust the opinions and advice of other women about purchasing new clothing, where they do not always trust the opinions or advice of men (usually significant others) in their lives, Men are believed to have limited knowledge of the complexities involved in selecting good purchases (fit, form, price

value, appropriateness). Also, offering feedback to one's significant other can put one in a double-bind situation, where honest opinions about clothing can be misinterpreted as a statement about one's general attractiveness, so men tend to offer less than candid opinions (Guy et al., 2000).

Conclusion: Flourishing Style Crafting Through Self-presentation and Clothing

Building on the previous sections of this paper highlighting positive psychology, identity theory as a dynamic and constructionist process, and the power of symbols and our bodies in influencing social interactions, I offer the following intervention. This intervention is called *flourishing style crafting* and is based on theoretical distinctions of Guy et al. (2000) and is intended to support increases in well-being through how we imagine, perceive, present and dynamically craft our identities using our bodies and clothing. It incorporates our: character strengths, bodies, tastes, lifestyle, aspirations, and goals. It also takes into account our current wardrobe and builds from there. The one-page worksheet entitled *Flourishing Style Guide* (Appendix C) is intended to capture key learning and insights, whether we are longing for a boost of new motivation and an updated *look*, or navigating a full blown life transition and identity reinvention. *Flourishing style crafting* is a process for generating positive emotions and stories that support who we are, who we want to be, and who we are becoming. It is designed to build our self-efficacy and confidence and to anchor us to hope and purpose daily. It supports the discovery of authentic potential in aligning the internal experience of our thoughts and emotions with the visual message we present in the world. Let's use our minds, bodies and clothes to be fabulous from the inside out. Let's carry ourselves with the confidence we were each born to hold. Let's share and inspire the strengths and gifts that we each have to give. Let's all play dress up and recall that perhaps, this was how we first learned to connect to our

own sense of self, and hope, and to imagine possibilities. Let's craft ourselves in ways that powerfully bring us forward, into the world to flourish.

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Appendix A: List of Positive Emotions

Fredrickson (2009) identified the following as the ten most common positive emotions. This list and these descriptions are based on research showing that these ten emotions are found to influence peoples' lives most often (Fredrickson, 2009).

1. **Joy** - Think of the most positive and memorable experience you've had, perhaps a time when you felt safe, happy, and comfortable. This was probably a moment where you experienced joy. Joy comes from delightful and cherished experiences, and raises our well-being where we feel light and vibrant.
2. **Gratitude** - This entails an emotion or attitude of appreciation where we acknowledge some benefit we have received. Gratitude can revolve around anything you feel great appreciation for, and occurs during the times when you feel thankful for someone or something in your life.
3. **Serenity** - This emotion comes along when things are going just right. You may experience a state of peacefulness and tranquility. Your mind isn't flooded with worries, and you're able to just sit back and relax. Serenity comes from those moments of stillness and calm where you can just "*be*" in the present moment.
4. **Interest** - This emotion is experienced as desiring to learn more and uncover new fascinating things. Interest comes from being curious or engaged in something. It's a state of intrigue and wonder, where you want to know more and are pulled toward an object of interest. When feeling interested, you are more open to new experiences and have a desire to explore the world around you.
5. **Hope** - This is a belief and feeling that things will turn out for the best. It is knowing that your current problems aren't permanent and that the future is still promising despite tough

circumstances. A hopeful person will believe that what they want will be obtained, and no matter how dire the circumstances they have faith that things will turn around and they will be able to do something about their situation.

6. **Pride** – This comes from feeling dignified and important in what you do or have accomplished. It's not about having an overwhelming sense of self-satisfaction, but having accomplished something that is socially valued and feeling proud about this. It may come along from a sense of purpose and meaning in our accomplishments, and offers an increase in confidence to expand the belief in our potential to do greater things.
7. **Amusement** - Whenever you experience fun, humorous, and playful situations with others we are being amused. We can get amusement from laughing with others at a funny joke, watching a puppy frolic, or playing a fun game or activity. Amusement helps us build connections with others.
8. **Inspiration** - This comes from experiencing a very moving and emotionally uplifting experience, such as those times in life when we see true goodness or where someone goes above and beyond the ordinary. Amazing feats of intellect, strength, and agility can lead to inspiration. A moment of inspiration draws us in and really stands out as an instant of excellence.
9. **Awe** - The notion of being awestruck comes from feeling wonder and reverence toward something powerful and admired. This may come from experiencing a natural phenomenon, such as the Grand Canyon, a beautiful sunset, or the crashing of ocean waves. It can also come from amazing creations of art or highly impressive developments. These are moments when we realize how small and ordinary we are compared to the vastness of the world around us.

10. **Love** - Love is the compilation of all of the above emotions. In general, love is related to a feeling of strong affection and personal attachment, where we have a very positive feeling of connection toward another person. This feeling may be enhanced from watching someone achieve an amazing feat, laughing and having fun together, or from kind and selfless acts they commit. Love is an amalgamation of all the emotional states coming together throughout our life.

Appendix B: Flourishing Style Crafting-A Proposed Intervention

Step 1: VIA Character Strengths Inventory [VIA Institute on Character Website]

Complete the VIA character strengths assessment at www.viacharacter.org, the VIA Me! report is also available and provides a analysis regarding the specifics of your strengths and how to leverage these strengths in your in action in your life. Now consider what the next twelve months hold for you in terms of your aspirations and goals. Debrief these results on your own or with a friend or coach. Identify the top five strengths and the top three goals in the coming twelve months. Record both your strengths and goals below.

Go to your *Flourishing Style Guide*: Fill in what you believe are your top five strengths and top three goals in the next six to twelve months in the section titled Step 1.

Step 2: *On My Game*

Take thirty minutes and reflect on the highlights from this report and imagine a day when you are at your best, consider the phrase *on my game* to describe you at your best. *Being on your game* includes creating a cadence throughout the day where you are activating your strengths and losing track of time through passionate engagement. You are accepting stimulating challenges and experiencing accomplishment. You are confident and feel a sense of purpose through your contribution. Record your reflections below.

What are the key elements that you notice about this day?

Who are you interacting with and what are you doing? What do you think is important to capture?

What's your mood or the combination of your emotions (reference Appendix A for a list of positive emotions)? What does your energy level look and feel like? How do you carry your body, how do you move, and what does this convey to others? What does your body look like as you interact with others?

Now imagine what you might be wearing. What outfit do you choose and why? What do you notice about your posture and your movements in this outfit? What parts of your body do feel hold the most pride for you? How does your outfit serve you?

Go to your *Flourishing Style Guide*: Fill in what you believe are your key highlights from this visualization under Step 2.

Step 3: Style Anthropology (60-90 minutes)

Choose one of the following exercises, which are designed to help translate your strengths, aspirations and personal tastes into images and stories for how you present yourself in the world.

As you go through this experience, take notes of what you think is important or surprising and capture these notes in your *Flourishing Style Guide* under Step 3.

Style Anthropology Exercises

1. Internet: Sit down at a computer with a notebook and create a Pinterest board of images that resonate and reflect a style you most want to create and embody. Entitle this board *Flourishing Brand*. See if you can translate the meaning and stories that are underlying your selections.

What are the stories you identify, perhaps about the woman you want to be, that might be underlying your selections?

2. Closet: Go to your closet and select your ten favorite pieces. Think of how they make you feel when you wear them and why. Consider, the color, material, quality, fit, what body part does this piece accentuate? Does the item have a history that is meaningful to you? How do these pieces generate positive emotions and serve you? What are the stories you identify, perhaps about the woman you want to be, that might be underlying your selections? Record key insights.

3. Shopping: Walk through a mall or shopping district and identify images that attract you, what

do you notice. What stories are behind the images that speak to you? Consider what colors, materials and forms are attracting you? Which pieces call to you from the displays?

Hypothesize about why you think these items attract you? How does it connect to an image or emotion that you wish to convey? What are the stories you identify, perhaps about the woman you want to be, that might be underlying your selections? Record key insights.

4. Magazines and a Flourishing Style Collage: Peruse magazines and catalogues looking for images that resonate to you. Cut out these images and arrange them in a way that you find meaningful on a poster board. Consider what colors, materials and forms attract you. Which pieces just jump off the page? Hypothesize about why and how it connects to an image or experience that you wish to convey? What are the stories you identify, perhaps about the woman you want to be, that might be underlying your selections? Record key insights.

5. Role Models and Memories: Think of someone you admire who embodies a style or way of being that you aspire to create. This could be a celebrity or a family member, someone with whom you have worked or a character in a book or movie. Write about this person and why you have chosen them as an inspiration. What are the connections you can make between their style and the style you wish to convey? What are the stories you identify, perhaps about the woman you want to be, that are inspired by this individual? Record key insights.

Insights regarding how meaning and stories connect to my selection. Key insights, connections and themes include:

Step 4. My Flourishing Brand

Building from Steps 1 and 2, considering your strengths, your *on your game* identity, and the style anthropology insights, let's synthesize. In ten words or less, using adjectives and a short call to action, craft a *flourishing brand*. This statement should capture your strengths, aspirations, and your personal taste. It should capture both the woman you are and want to be, and the impression you want to convey to others. Your flourishing brand is you at your best, and the embodiment you want to project in the world. Appendix D offers a list of style stories, which may be a pool from which to select, however, this list is not exhaustive so feel free to use any descriptive words or phrases that inspire you. In approximately ten words or less, craft a statement that will guide your internal and external identities on a daily basis and over time.

Some *Flourishing Brand* examples include:

- Tailored, Feminine, Natural, Smart, Funny, Surprising, Brings Zest to Life!
- Bold, Courageous, Confident, Practical, Warm, Comfortable, Knows Her Stuff!
- Classic, Adventurous, Generous, Fun, Smart, Sporty, Spontaneous, Go For it!
- Graceful, Kind, Confident, Individual, Exotic, Earthy, Love, Poised for the Future!
- Credible, Sexy, Direct, Fun, Colorful, Sociable, Empowered, Impact through Action!
- Flowing, Easy, Feminine, Romantic, Flexible, Connected, Joy through Relating!
- Ethnic, Grounded, Passionate, Courageous, Sophisticated, Charmed by Life
- Comfortable, Functional, Tailored, Colorful, Carefree, Fun-loving, Freedom through Presence!
- Interesting, Curious, Thoughtful, Polished, Colorful, Grateful, Prowling for Sparkle!

My flourishing brand (10 words or less)

Go to your *Flourishing Style Guide Step 3: Write your Flourishing Brand through the middle of the page within the section entitled *My Flourishing Brand**

Step 5. Seizing the Closet Moment

The following questions are designed to help translate your flourishing brand into outfit choices on a daily basis. Building from the foundation of positive emotions, strengths, your *on my game identity*, goals and *flourishing brand* it is now time to consider external factors such as the occasion, environment, and audience. These considerations may go back and forth as one negotiates and this ambivalence is a sign that agentic crafting is at play, so trust this process, and know it will become more fluid with practice.

1. On this day, the positive emotions I want to activate include (see Appendix A for a list of emotions): _____
2. One thing I am particularly grateful for today is: _____
3. The strengths I wish to activate today include: _____
4. Something I am most excited about today is: _____
5. The hopes and goals I have for today include: _____
6. My flourishing style brand is: _____
7. As I consider my goals and expectations for today, the people and situations and environments (including physical activity and the weather) I expect to encounter include: _____
8. I will create an outfit *click* by recognizing and blending my items that are personally inspiring to me with choices that are appropriate. I choose _____ (clothing item), which is a symbol of _____

to me and likely a symbol of _____ to others. I will use this clothing choice as a reminder of _____ as I go through my day.

9. My current emotions include: _____

10. Something I notice about this process is: _____

Seizing the Closet Moment example:

1. Jane stands in front of her closet and reflects on her emotions. She realizes she didn't sleep very well and is tired and feeling edgy and short tempered.
2. She take a deep breath and before looking at her clothing, reflects on one thing she is particularly grateful for and realizes it's her significant other who has been especially patience and supportive with her lately. Jane goes to him and offers a kiss on his sleeping head. She shuts her eyes and takes a few deep breaths.
3. She returns to her closet and reflects on her via strengths of both creativity and zest are strengths she wants to activate today.
4. She thinks about what she is most excited about today and realizes that she has a presentation at work that holds promise for exciting future work and that she is also looking forward to going out for dinner with her family that night.
5. Jane identifies that the hope and goals for the day include offering a creative and collaborative agenda in her staff meeting and rocking her presentation, and transition from work in order to be completely present so she can savor the time with her family at dinner.
6. She breaks out her flourishing style brand which is: tailored, classic, fun, smart, functional, simple, confident, collaborative, get 'er done!

7. Jane expects to interact with her boss, her direct reports, and people from throughout the organization who will be at her presentation. She also plans to go out for dinner with her family straight from work. She has a long day ahead so realizes that she needs to acknowledge comfort as a requirement. She checks the weather and finds that there is a 40% chance of rain in the forecast.
8. Jane chooses a suit that has a comfortable as she anticipates it will be a long day, she starts by choosing shoes that she finds comfortable and distinctive. Then she chooses a grey lightweight suit that has stretch in the material, which allows for flexible body movement. The suit has a flattering and comfortable fit, and the grey color is softer than a black or navy which communicates professionalism but isn't too formal, stiff or restrictive. She decides that wants to anchor on her strength of zest and chooses a bright yellow blouse that to her screams energy. She decides on makeup that is a natural look that simply enhances her features, a bit of concealer, bronzer and mascara and a neutral lipstick. She doesn't want it to be noticeable but rather wants her audience to just see her and a radiant glow. After looking up the weather she decides that based on the forecast she will pin her hair back. She also decides to wear a statement necklace, which imbues creativity. She thinks about her strength of creativity and imagines that in her presentation it looks flexible, and improvisational. She imagines herself having fun with her audience through this improvisation. She also grabs a pair of jeans and flats to change into for dinner.
9. Jane does a final check on her current emotions at the close of the closet moment and finds that she is still a bit anxious but it is accompanied by feelings of excitement, confidence and hope that she can craft and utilize an on her game identity for the day.

10. Something she notices is that it was easy to pick this outfit and she loves it so she adds it to her *click outfits log* and snaps a picture of herself with her phone. She will note that she wore it for this presentation and any insights from wearing it.

Go to your *Flourishing Style Guide*: Record your key highlights from this exercise under Step 5: Closet Audit (Clearing, Organization and Shopping)

Write the following titles on 5 pieces of paper which will be the areas to sort clothing items: 1) Flourishing brand 2) Donation charity 3) Donation resale 4) Neutral/undecided 5) Needs work. Create five distinct areas outside your closet where clothing piles can be sorted based on these categories. I also recommend that you invest in both white plastic hangers and clear and clamped metal pant hangers to replace and create consistency with all hangers (usually less than fifty dollars).

1. Remove items that are not clothing or dressing related.
2. First cut, go through each item and clear out anything that is of poor quality, stained, worn-out or stretched out of shape and that you do not wish to wear again. Sort into a donation pile.
3. Second cut, go through all items again and judge them against the criteria of fit in terms of size or style from the past to which you do not wish to return and sort into resale or donation piles.
4. Third cut, with the remaining pieces, go through each one and separate into 3 piles: 1. Flourishing brand (aligned to your flourishing brand, great fit and inspiring), 2. Donation (does not align to your flourishing brand, is flat and lacks meaning or holds a negative meaning or memory), sort these into donation or resale 3. Neutral and undecided *not sure* or neutral about these pieces and sort into appropriate piles.

5. Fourth cut, within the positive pile: find pieces you rarely wear (less than 5 times a season) and ask why...then decide if they should stay or go. It is possible that you have other pieces that you are more of and it may be time to divest them.
6. Fifth cut, within the positive pile:
 - a. Identify any pieces that “need work” mending, hemming, alterations, button replacement and place them in the needs work pile.
 - b. Identify excessive duplicates, for example, if you have 4 pairs of black pants that are of a similar cut, this is an opportunity to focus and choose your top 2 favorites and move the others to your resale or donation pile. See Appendix E for a list of *flourishing basics* that compose appropriate (based on most people’s needs) numbers of foundational wardrobe items.
7. Reflect on the items that have made the cut against flourishing basics list in Appendix E. Record any gaps that you recognize or any additional items based on your style anthropology exercise that you would like to acquire. With any items that were sorted in the neutral pile, if you are still unsure, put them in a box for two weeks and see if you find they are missing from the collection. You may find that they are aligned to your flourishing brand and keep them. If not, donate or resell them.
8. Go through all shoes and rigorously decide if they are aligned to your flourishing brand. Make sure to re-evaluate any pairs you have kept for the sake of one or two outfits, this may or may not be a good use of closet real estate. If there are shoes or purses that need work, place them in the needs work pile. Many women find that they have too many pair of black shoes and gaps in other basic colors like navy, taupe, tan, or red. Make notes about colors and styles that you know would support your flourishing brand.

9. Finally, if possible, have jewelry, belts, and scarves someplace where you can see them from your closet and use them in conjunction with clothing to create your flourishing brand. Some women even like to prominently display them at a dressing table or basket where they will be remembered.
10. As you replace your clothing, I recommend hanging them all on white plastic hangers, which can be purchased at target which generally cost about twenty cents each for plastic and seventy-five cents for pant hangers. The visual esthetic of all one color and of white is important to creating balance in your closet. In addition, metal hangers attract dirt and get caught and don't always slide easily on a closet bar. Replace the items in your closet grouped tops, then formality then color. So all casual shirts should be together and grouped by color. Then blouses and jackets grouped by color. Then dresses, casual to formal then by color. Finally pants casual to dressy then by color. Jeans and cotton pants can be hung or folded ideally as close as possible to your closet. The items that remain and the organization by functionality and color should provide a new foundation for innovative and creative outfit curating.

You may notice that the time you have invested in these items and this environment have instilled new feeling of pride and self respect from caring for your clothing investments. Pieces that have been hanging around and not worn dilute or drain our energy. There may be good reasons to hold onto things that hold positive or precious memories for you. However, I recommend that you put them in a respectful place of storage or choose to display them elsewhere. It is analogous to having a vase of dying flowers displayed, it is almost as if they hold a negative energy of their own as they yell to you to remind you that they must be removed. Women also report new level clarity and excitement about in how you see different pieces and

the meaning they hold for you. This is a good time to see if you can compose ten new outfits blending different pieces that you may not have composed before. Write these outfits down and keep the list in your closet. This list can help produce positive emotions and creativity on days when you feel depleted.

Go to your *Flourishing Style Guide*: Record your key highlights from this exercise under Step 5. Record any items that you would like acquire in order to strengthen your clothing foundation of basics or build on your collection of favorite, or *go to* items.

Appendix C: Flourishing Style Guide

Flourishing Style Guide

Name: _____ Date: _____



Step 2: On My Game

Key Insights and Reflections:

Body Language and Emotions that support this:

Step 3: Style Anthropology

Key Insights and Reflections:

Stories that inspire me:

Step 1 & 4:
Step 4: My Flourishing Brand:

Step 1: Top 5 Strengths:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

4. _____ 5. _____

Aspirations/goals next 6-12 months:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 5: Seizing the Closet Moment

Key Insights and Reflections:

Element of this exercise I want to incorporate daily include:

Step 6: Closet Curation

Themes:

Go tos-Favorite pieces/brands:

Flourishing Basics I need:

Appendix D: Style Stories Reference List

1. **Urban-Chic:** Though aware of fashion, this style relies heavily on classic looks, emboldened to come off as smart and striking, utilizing only the most resonant current fashion trends as appropriate. A city dweller who is comfortable in spandex, or motorcycle leathers, or both, and doesn't care what you think. Urban chic includes well-tailored pieces and well-chosen accessories in restrained, modern and bold compositions. Clean, sharp, polished lines, and never afraid of intense colors. This style knows what to buy and how to wear it, incorporating many cross-over pieces and styles in order to support many roles and an on-the-go lifestyle. *Brands: Hugo Boss, Theory, J.Crew, Diane Von Furstenberg*
2. **Preppy-Tailored:** This *girl- or boy-next-door* style insists on quality and time-honored pieces, such as navy blazers and crisp oxford shirts. Quality fabric and uncluttered garment lines provide a sense of permanence and stability. This style gains confidence by upholding simple elegance and moderation, which are immune to fads. This style is as comfortable in a pea coat or a plaid flannel shirt as in a classic black dress. *Brands: Tory Burch, Faconable, Ralph Lauren, Dooney & Bourke, Carolina Herrera*
3. **Sporty-Natural:** This style is energetic, uncomplicated and approachable. Relaxed and at ease with a ready-to-go manner. Windblown hair, minimal makeup and an often athletic and outdoor sensibility requiring freedom of movement, such as running, hiking, biking, and swimming, often with a dedication to exercise and fitness. Durable denims, leathers, earth tones, and natural materials that breathe, such as cotton, silk, and wool, which embody a down-to-earth nature. *Brands: Lucky Brand, C.P. Shades, Patagonia*
4. **Exotic-Boho:** This style has a flare for all things foreign and excitedly different, relishing

the most intriguing styles the world has to offer. This style usually enjoys adventure, travel, and exotic food, music, and events. Often characterized by rich and smoky colors, long flowing lines, ponchos, elaborate beading and embroidery, ornate and hand made garments, jungle prints, paisleys, and mosaics. Accessorizes with a profusion of eye-catching and conversation starting pieces that recall far away lands.

Brands: Anthropologie, Free People, Haute Hippie, Etro, Dolce & Gabana

5. **Glam Dramatic:** This style is striking, theatrical, memorably bold and even over-the-top, featuring strong focal points, high contrast and high impact. This style story is told with broad strokes and grand flourishes. Irrepressible magnetism exudes from a volatile combination of sexy, flirtatious, elegant, and confident. Delights in stopping traffic by baring skin and choosing form-fitting pieces. Dazzles with a refined drama and a subtle allure that transcends both dramatic and sexy. *Brands: Chanel, Diane Von Furstenberg, Elie Tahari, Gucci, Giorgio Armani*
6. **Edgy-Artistic:** This style is creative, fun-loving, energetic and even spunky. The wardrobe serves as a canvas, and the clothes express love of picturesque and inventive esthetics. Characterized by asymmetrical or exaggerated lines, fringe and designed finishing and embellishments, prints, and intensely bright colors that grab and hold attention. This style eschews the conventional in favor of the distinctive and unique, savoring one of a kind or hand-crafted creations. *Brands: Akris, L.A.M.B, Eileen Fisher, Nanette Lepore*
7. **Romantic-Vintage:** This style is demure, often soft-spoken, gentle, even wistful, and its wearer is a dreamer. She is idealistic, often to the point of being unrealistic, and cherishes all the fanciful nostalgia and exalted trappings of idealized romantic love. Delicate hearts

and flowers, flouncing and ruffles, and soft fabrics in gently curved lines are found in this wardrobe, with sentimentality often underscored by locket, cameos, and lace of every kind. *Brands: J. Peterman, Sundance, Soft Surroundings*

Appendix E: Flourishing Basics***All Season Tops:***

Black and white or cream tank
Short-sleeved black, white and colored T-shirts (some embossed or patterned)
Long-sleeved black and white and colored T-shirts
Short and long-sleeved tissue t-shirts for layering
White button-down shirt (one cotton, one silk)
Crewneck sweater (wool or cotton, the thinner the more versatile for layering)
Skin colored camisoles
Tunic blouses
Light-weight cardigan
Crew or v-neck sweater in wool or cotton
Fitted light-weight wool jackets
Leather jacket
Zip-up sweatshirt

All Season Bottoms:

Blue Jeans: straight, skinny, boot cut and full
White and Black Jeans (other colors for variety)
Boot cut light-weight wool
Tuxedo pant
Khaki pant
Circle skirt or mini
Pencil skirt
A-line skirt
Black, grey or wool pantsuit with some stretch
Black cotton legging

Other Basics:

Little black dress (cocktail and professional)
Sun or professional dress as layering piece
Column dress
Wrap dress
Grey, navy, black suit (light wool with stretch)
Black suit
Linen Suit
Jean Jacket or shirt
Trench coat, rain proof

Accessories:

Everyday purse
Tote
Gold and silver hoop (different sizes)

Sporty man's watch
Bangle bracelets
Statement necklace
Pearl necklace and earring stud
Sparkle stud earrings
Statement earrings (chandelier)
Favorite scarves
Basic and statement belts

Shoes:

Black and natural flat
Black, navy, nude pump
Open toed pump
Thong sandal
Black and neutral sandals (lower height)
Clog
Leather riding boots (black or brown)
Ankle boot
High-heeled boot
Funky sneaker
Statement pump
Dressy pump
Snow boot
Rain boot
Cowboy boot
Ballet flat

Spring /Summer Basics:

Linen separates (pants, jacket, dresses)
Shorts of varying lengths
Sun/maxi dress
Cotton skirt
Cotton cardigan
Swimsuit
Beach cover up
Straw bag
Straw hat

Fall/Winter Basics:

Blanket sweater or poncho
Black cashmere turtleneck sweater
Wool *schoolboy* blazer
Velvet shirt or blazer
Crisp white blouse
Crewneck sweater (wool or cotton, the thinner the more versatile for layering)
Down vest

Berets
Heavy sweater
Opaque tights
Sweater coat
Long heavy down or wool coat
Winter White Suit or pants
Cotton turtlenecks
Tweed jacket or suit
Full palazzo pant

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