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Flourishing Fashion:

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Wearing a Happy Outfit

BY REBECCA SMITH AND JULIA YATES

Abstract: Little research has been conducted into the relationship between fashion and psychology, even less on how individuals create wellbeing through appearance and clothing. In this study, the subjective experience of wearing an “outfit that makes you happy” was analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Six participants, both male and female, were interviewed wearing an outfit that “made them happy.” The semi-structured interviews highlighted the importance of “intentionally managing identity.” Analysis found subordinate themes: shaping identity, coping strategies, and social identity. These were broken down into “knowing who I am,” “matching my outsides to my insides,” “creating my best self,” “managing moods,” “resilience,” “fashioning positive relationships,” and “shared values,” and linked to the concept of flourishing in positive psychology (PP). The results suggest that how the participants dress plays an active part in their wellbeing through expressing positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA).

KEYWORDS

- fashion
- positive psychology
- interpretive phenomenological analysis
- dress
- wellbeing
- PERMA

Introduction

Fashion has been largely ignored by positive psychology (PP); only one paper has been published that addresses the topic explicitly. Masuch and Hefferon's study looked at dress and PP, connecting fashion to hedonic wellbeing (or "subjective wellbeing") and eudemonic wellbeing (or "self-actualization," "meaning making," and "authenticity"), and considering how experiencing dress in relation to the body, selfhood, and mood improves wellbeing (229). We accept anecdotally that the way we dress can make us happy. However, most literature infers that fashion, as a personal experience and as a system, is problematic; fashion is linked to depression (Howlett et al.), eating disorders (Trautmann et al.), narcissism (Larrain and Arrieta), over-dependence on others' approval (Freeburg and Workman), and loss of autonomy (Hardy et al.). As a cultural influence, it is seen as greed-inducing (Entwistle), environmentally destructive (Allwood et al. 42), and prioritizing profit above individual wellbeing (Beard). According to González and Bovone, contemporary psychology has generally viewed fashion enthusiasts as shallow and frivolous histrionic personality types who pay too much attention to others' opinions, and obsess unhealthily about creating a fashionable appearance (167).

Apart from Masuch and Hefferon, there is no theory to connect fashion and PP.

Searches failed to find a study that starts from the premise that fashion is good for our wellbeing. My rationale for undertaking this study is to fill these gaps. But it is also influenced by my positive affiliation with fashion and the relationship I have with my own way of wearing my emotions.

I am aware that the way I dress can create meaning, promote a sense of achievement, and strengthen interpersonal connections (**see fig. 1**). In this respect, I am intentionally positioning myself subjectively within the research framework; I am also aware that in choosing to use the word *fashion* rather than dress, or daily clothing, I align myself with the way in which my research participants viewed their style of dressing, as opposed to the academic use of the term.



FIGURE 1

The author feels that her own clothing choices positively impact her wellbeing. Photograph.

Fashion as an everyday practice is most easily accessed by engaging with the intersection between the garment (material dimension) and the assembling of clothing on the body to understand what it means and how it feels to “wear fashion.”

Entwistle describes this as an embodied material system. Hajo and Galinsky reinforce it with a theory of encloded cognition, where clothes influence the wearer’s psychological processes based on two variables: the meaning we create for particular clothing and the concrete somatic sense that wearing clothing has. Twigg argues that: “Identity and dress are intimately linked. Clothes display, express and shape identity, imbuing it with a directly material reality” (1). This view of dress, and its connection to identity in the context of ever-evolving choice, has been under-researched. Tseëlon questioned the lack of empirical evidence in women’s understanding of themselves through their clothes; when Guy and Banim conducted a grounded-theory study into clothing as a lived experience, they found participants exhibited strong connections between clothing and self-identity.

This relationship is an established theme in dress studies. Postmodernism’s focus on the constant options of “being” available to us through the choices we make has been explored by theorists looking at expressiveness, adoption of style, and agency (Finkelstein; Polhemus). The formation of a positive identity through clothing is highlighted in the findings of Masuch and Hefferon, though Clarke and Miller argue that postmodernism’s focus on constant change creates anxiety as much as pleasure. Cushman supports this but offers a contrasting manner of looking at identity, arguing against the positive value of a postmodern position in which a fluid identity is created from an abundance of choice, in that there is problematic dissonance between a desire for a coherent identity-narrative

and a dearth of external support to maintain that continuity (599). Thus, the pressure to experience fulfilment through identity merely encourages consumption of fashion, which never reaches the core of that need. From this angle, self-curating identity could be seen as detrimental to wellbeing. Hall and Du Gay consider identity as a way to traverse intrinsic and external need; postmodernity's focus on choosing identity is again implied to be harmful to wellbeing, as the challenge creates contradictions while individual identity becomes fragmented.

In the Masuch and Hefferon study, sameness was considered to be a positive effect of fashion, whereas creating difference as a way to increase wellbeing was not investigated. Previous studies that explore the tension between fitting in and standing out, as negotiated by daily dress practices, have seen this as an approach to alleviating identity crisis and conveying group belonging (Evans; Polhemus). These studies seldom focus on conventional society. In these, the relationship between the body, positive body image, and the way in which participants experienced hedonic pleasure from dressing was considered a key proponent to maintaining wellbeing, as was fashion's ability to regulate mood. Emotional self-regulation via clothing practices were highlighted as needing further research. Klepp discusses the relationship of clothing choices, comfort, and wellbeing, expressing her worries that we do not currently have the means to analyze what is meant when participants in research studies talk of a garment "feeling right." Klepp focuses on the link between comfort (feeling) and wellbeing as being a physical sense with little consideration of the emotional aspect of "feeling right" in one's clothes.

Craik advocated that as fashion creates choices, it offers multiple manners in which to perform identity, and this could be considered a manner in which psychological adjustments could be said to be negotiated through dress choices. This is supported by Goffman, who suggests that people in their daily routines organize their dress (amongst other things) to confer a dynamic, unstable impact based on social interactions, an idea that aligns with Bandura's social cognitive theory ("Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory" 1175). This model implies that identity happens because of an

active conversation between internal and external experiences and constantly changes as the wearer responds to the opinion of an observer, a feedback loop that adjusts clothing choices in response to the needs of identity formation.

Additional research proposes that not only does fashion communicate our identities and influence others' opinions, but that it also affects how we see ourselves, moulding our attitudes and actions (Fredrickson et al. 269; Zimbardo). Building on these themes and seeking to redress the lack of attention given to the relationship between clothing choices, identity, and wellbeing, this study will shed light on how fashion, mediated by identity, positively impacts the happiness of the wearer.

Method

Methodology

In order to achieve the desired understanding around "clothes that make you happy," IPA, which focuses on the ideographic lived experience of a specific topic (Smith 27, *Qualitative Psychology*), was selected as the methodology for understanding how individuals feel about wearing a precise outfit at a moment in time. IPA allows the researcher to take an active interpretative role in producing the knowledge that is acquired (Smith, *Qualitative Psychology*).

My position as researcher means I was as much a participant in the study as those interviewed. Aware of my vested interest, the reflexivity encouraged in IPA allowed me to acknowledge bias without it having a detrimental effect on the results.

IPA also recognizes that participants are the experts on their experience of the question. The relationship between the author and the participants was deliberately equal, with participants and authors as co-creators of what was discovered (Eatough and Smith 52).

Design

The data was procured through six semi-structured interviews with male and female participants aged between 23 and 74. The interviews, lasting between sixty and ninety minutes, were conducted in London, United Kingdom, over two months during the summer of 2016. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of East London. Each participant was given the option of where they would like to meet in order set a tone of equality for the process. Each interview was conducted in person. Dialogue was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants were sent information and consent forms prior to the interview. Debrief sheets were provided at the end of each interview. I memorized the interview questions beforehand, but in reality it was only ever the first question that remained constant throughout each interview; to have referred back to set questions would have stifled the conversational tone.

Participants

Participants were recruited via Facebook. I asked my existing network for volunteers who felt their clothes made them happy to take part in a research study. I had a social connection to one participant; the other five were unknown to me. All participants were linked to fashion through their careers. There was no intention to recruit within the fashion industry and this connection only became apparent once I began conducting the interviews. My interest in obtaining participants was based on the self-acknowledgment of their clothes making them happy; I was lucky to find willing participants who each had a distinctive and idiosyncratic visual identity and who provided me with a variety of perspectives: male and female participants from a wide age range. Participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms to maintain anonymity (see table 1).

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics Table

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS TABLE				
Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Profession
Janie	F	25	English	Theatre costume designer
Grace	F	42	Latvian	Vintage boutique owner
Sara	F	74	American	Wearable artist
Paul	M	25	Kenyan	Fashion blogger
Ray	M	30	Indian	Model
Frank	M	23	French	Womenswear designer

Source: Rebecca Smith and Dr. Julia Yates.

Data Collection

The participants were asked to wear, or bring, an outfit that made them happy in order to discuss how this made them feel. The rationale for asking participants to wear a specific outfit was that this would increase a connection to the research question by enhancing the interview and making it a tangible experience. This is supported by Chamberlain et al., who discovered that objects enhanced research interviews, especially the relationship between researcher and participant. The interviews were conversational and informal. I was aware of the influence my choice of clothes was likely to have on participants. Reflecting on how I chose to present myself at each interview furthered my understanding of identity projecting onto clothing decisions, and the impact of the researcher on the study (Frost). It was an unexpected discovery that participants were consciously dressing to create happiness for both themselves and the researcher. All six mentioned my dress and reflected that they had dressed in a manner they thought would generate a happy experience for both of us; they had a desire to make me feel as happy as they were in their "happy outfit." This made me very aware of my responsibility as researcher and of the effect that generating these conversations was having on how the participants saw themselves.

Analysis

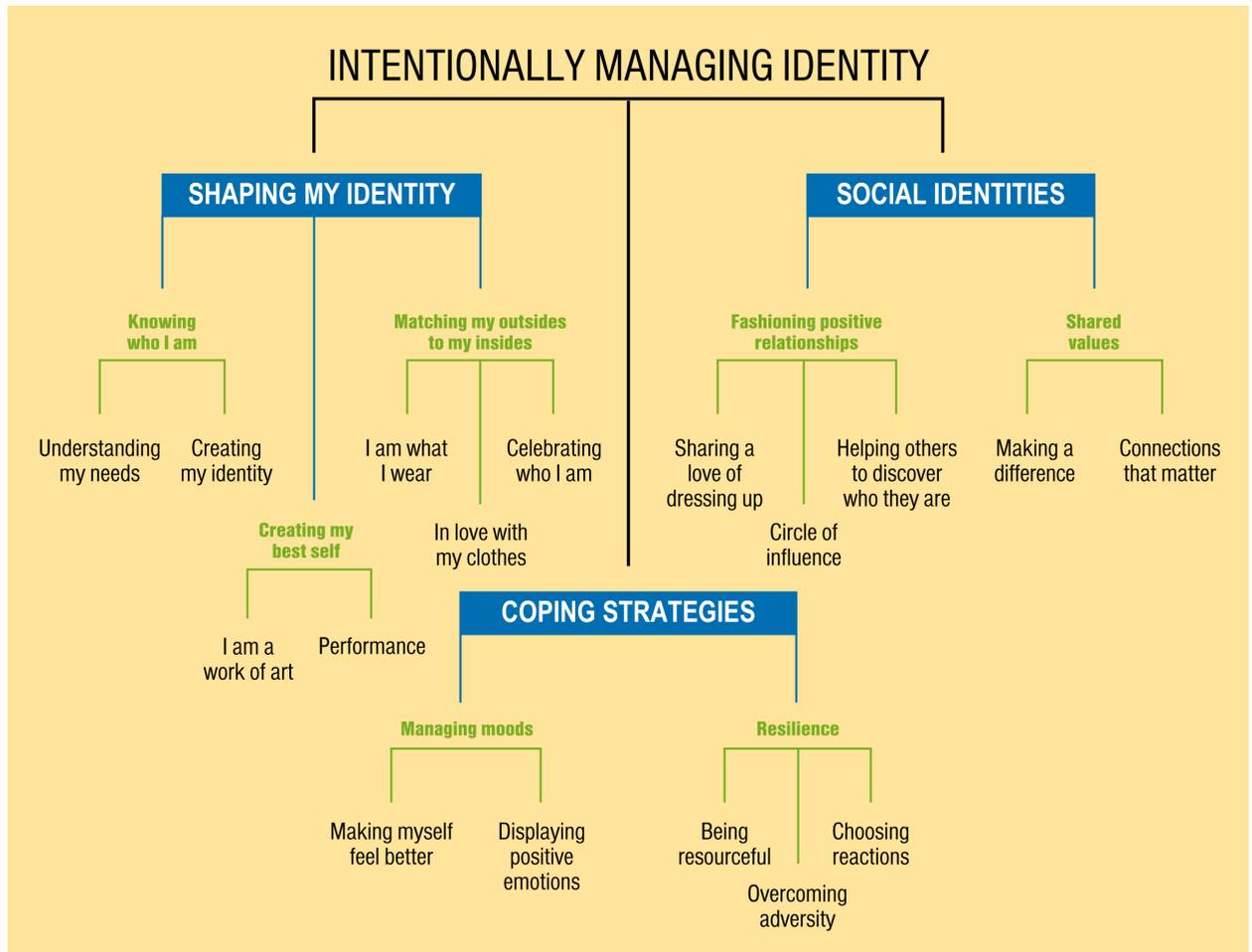
The guidelines on how to analyze IPA data are flexible. I applied a creative approach to viewing the data, initially following the "typical" method outlined by Smith (*Qualitative Psychology*): read, then reread, transcripts, note initial thoughts, develop emerging themes, look for connections, and make links for each set of data before moving on to the next transcript. I focused intensely on details, individual words, and sentences before analyzing each transcript. Smith talks of finding "gems" in transcripts ("We could be diving for pearls"). Each participant provided one gem that summed up their experience of the research question, and every theme

that emerged contained one gem from different transcripts that highlighted where that idea grew from. This feeling of expanding and contracting continued as superordinate and subordinate themes developed. The process of analysis was a constant appraisal of what was emerging by checking against original transcripts to clarify validity (Smith, *Qualitative Psychology*). The iterative process led to three main themes within the overarching idea of intentionally managing identity. These main themes, as well as supporting subordinate themes, were then clustered in line with the PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) framework in order to establish similarities and differences between the data obtained and the current theory.

IPA allows the researcher to take an active, interpretative role in producing the knowledge that is acquired (Smith, *Qualitative Psychology*). The position of "myself as a researcher" led me to understand that I was as much a participant in the study as those I interviewed. I was aware of my own vested interest in the research question, and the reflexivity encouraged in IPA allowed me to acknowledge my bias without this having a detrimental effect on the results. IPA also recognizes that the participants of the study are the experts on their experience of the question.

Results

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics Table



Source: Rebecca Smith and Dr. Julia Yates.

The first superordinate theme, “shaping my identity,” is concerned with how participants understand their needs and express them through dress. Three subordinate themes — “knowing who I am,” “matching my insides to my outsides,” and “creating my best self” — expand the ideas of understanding, expressing, and taking control of identity through clothing choices (**see table 2**).

The “coping strategies” superordinate theme is concerned with the way fashion is connected to handling emotional responses to external circumstances; “managing moods” relates to emotions expressed in dressing; and “resilience” deals with how situations may be responded to through dress practices.

The final superordinate theme, “social identities,” looks at relationships created through the way we dress. “Fashioning positive relationships” uncovers the duality of sharing fashion as a common language, whilst “shared values” is about meanings that bond participants to others.

TABLE 3

Occurrence of Themes within Participants' Transcripts

	Janie	Grace	Sara	Paul	Ray	Frank
SOCIAL IDENTITY						
Fashioning positive relationships						
Sharing a love of dressing up	X	X	X	X	X	X
Circle of influence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Helping others to discover who they are	X	X	X	X	X	X
Shared values						
Making a difference	X	X	X	X	X	X
Connections that matter	X	X	X	X	X	X
SHAPING MY IDENTITY						
Knowing who I am						
Understanding my needs	X	X	X	X	X	X
Creating my identity	X	X	X	X	X	X
Matching my outsides to my insides						
I am a what I wear	X	X	X	X	X	X
In love with my clothes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Celebrating who I am	X	X	X	X	X	X
Creating my best self						
I am a work of art	X	X	X	X	X	X
Performance	X	X	X	X	X	X
COPING STRATEGIES						
Managing moods						
Making myself feel better	X	X	X	X	X	X
Displaying positive emotions	X	X	X	X	X	X
Courage	X	X	X	X	X	X
Resilience						
Being resourceful	X	X	X	X	X	X
Overcoming adversity	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Rebecca Smith and Dr. Julia Yates.

Shaping My Identity

This theme deals with the relationship participants have with themselves through the way they dress (see table 3).

All expressed an awareness of their emotions, emotional intelligence, and how they can dress to reflect what they are feeling or to change their feelings from negative to positive. Shaping identity seemed to take three steps: mindful self-awareness, acknowledging emotions before choosing what to wear, and making decisions based on internal processes.

KNOWING WHO I AM

All of the transcripts show an intention to think before dressing. Paul states it most explicitly: "Know yourself and start from there, match the situation with your feelings. Take the space to think about yourself before you get dressed." Grace had been going through a challenging time and spoke more than any other about self-knowledge as a foundation to getting dressed; understanding her needs was fundamental to her choice of outfit for the interview: "... That's who I want to be. And I want to feel better. I have had few days of being down and today I want to wear my shiny shoes and, OK, sad is part of life... but today I need to take control." Frank acknowledged his need to be "true to myself" and to "have to know how I feel."

Phrases such as "feeling right" and "this is me" were widely used. This self-knowledge allowed participants to create an identity that fitted their feelings.

Matching My Outsides to My Insides

"Matching my outsides to my insides" was the second part of shaping identity; once needs were recognized, decisions surrounding dress could be made. All participants expressed an intense relationship with their clothes, to the extent that Janie said "I am what I wear ... I put myself together. A version of Janie." For Sara, this way of matching internal needs with dressing "became how I was. All about colour. And joy, so much joy." Ray connected his sartorial choices with his need to express his "free spirit."

The participants' relationship with their clothes was seen through expressions such as being "In love with my clothes" (Janie) and "this makes me happy because I have a deep relationship with this suit" (Paul). Sara's clothes indicated she was "still alive."

The relationship to the outfit also reflected self-love; looking after a garment was an extension of being good to oneself.

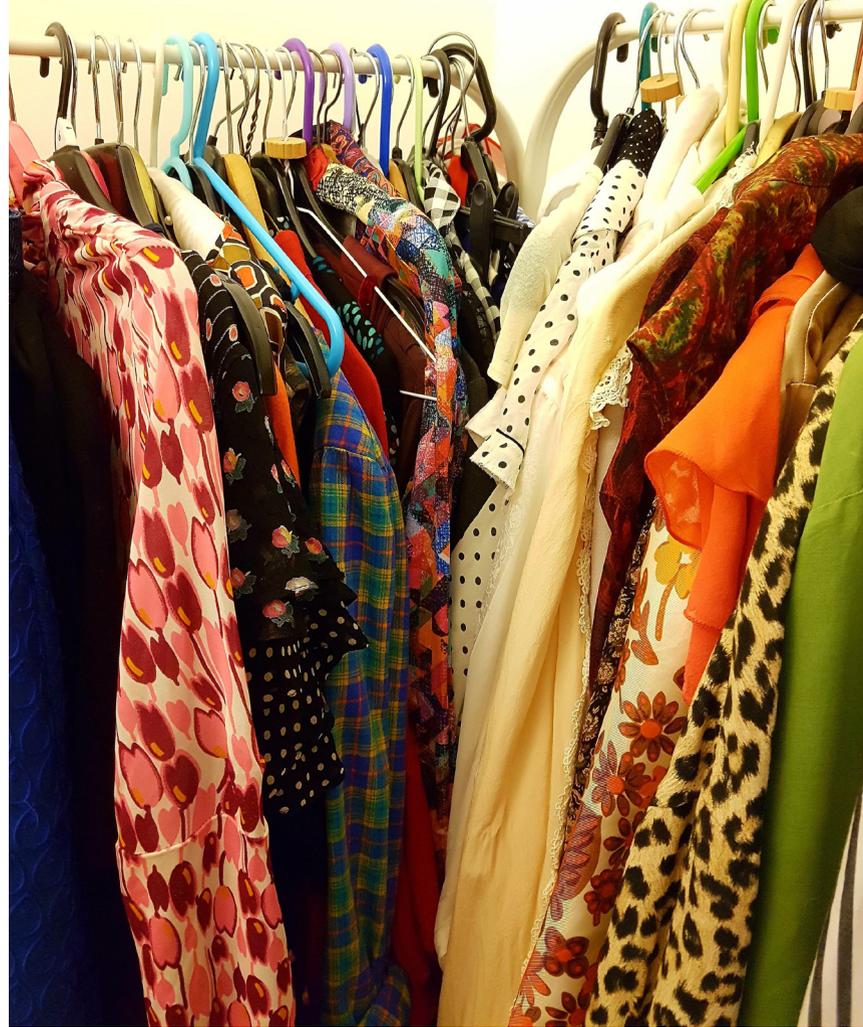
This respect both for personal needs and for clothes was evident in the care taken with their garments (**see fig. 2**). The participants suggested, "my clothes are special and therefore so I am. My clothes are respected and I don't allow others to disrespect me" (Paul).

CREATING MY BEST SELF

Every participant expressed playful creativity in shaping their identity, in having fun forming who they wanted to be: "I am a work of art" (Sara), "I create the look" (Ray), "I make me the project" (Frank). As well, once the best self has been created it can be performed; for example: "I can perform my best if I feel right..." (Ray). Another example of this is Janie, who dresses to present the view of herself as glamorous and sophisticated: "...So she occupied this suit to be someone else. Someone more than who she is really... And now I occupy it."

FIGURE 2

The author's own wardrobe shows the duality of personal needs and the care taken with her garments. Photograph.



Coping Strategies

"Coping strategies" was situated between "shaping my identity" and "social identity," as it appeared to connect the two elements of intentionally managing identity.

MANAGING MOODS

This encompasses reflecting feelings and changing feelings, especially making oneself feel better: "...That human being has to make the intention to feel happy, to want to feel that getting dressed matters" (Ray). Sara said, "colour is my Prozac," suggesting that dressing "keeps me sane." Displaying positive emotions through dress was expected to be part of all transcripts — the idea of courage as a positive force was unexpected:

It takes a lot of confidence to go out like this ... I can't let other people determine who I am. I am going to be carrying on being exactly who I am. This is what I want to be. It's my choice, what's it got to do with anyone else anyway? But it does take guts to stick to it sometimes. (Janie)

Conversely, Sara considered: "For me it would take terrific courage not to dress this way, it would make me ill. I am what I am; I'm not pretending this is what I am."

RESILIENCE

This is the second theme from “coping strategies”; being resourceful with dressing was expressed by everyone. For Grace, it was a response to her financial situation: “It was necessity that I dressed from car boots and charity shops. I couldn’t afford otherwise when the children were little. But now it’s part of me.” Frank had experienced abuse in the street because of his clothing but, as with Ray, felt that he could react to it positively: “Say someone says, ‘Oh mate you look weird,’ then you just smile. It’s OK, it doesn’t affect who I am or how I feel about myself. Always a conscious choice.”

Social Identity

The third superordinate theme connects how participants dress to their relationships and shared values. Wearing the outfit they had chosen to discuss increased casual friendships, including connecting with the researcher; Frank declared: “I have worn this today for you ... it is my gift to you. But I will never wear it like this again. I wanted to be happy today, I wanted to make you happy.” Finding an exterior fit, a tribe, a subculture, where participants were able to be authentic and share values, was a need that fashion filled, allowing strong bonds to be created.

FASHIONING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The participants dress in unusual ways; this can add positivity to chance encounters. Janie put it simply: “people do smile at me ... they do but I’m so used to it I don’t always notice it.” She was smiling as she spoke and was clearly happy to make a difference, however small, to strangers’ lives. Paul commented on the duality of those small connections: “...it’s an amazing feeling for me to give that compliment and they like it too. Win-win.”

Friendships are created through a love of dressing up, providing positive experiences for all: “I’ve found a sense of community with that. My tribe” (**Sara; see fig. 3**).

FIGURE 3

The author frequently finds new friendships are created thorough the common connection of clothing. Photograph.



These friendships form a circle of influence: "This has brought more into my life as we all become friends, we are a group. I get to know them, we wear for each other" (Frank).

SHARED VALUES

These reflect participants' needs to make a difference — a common need is to reflect values of caring and sharing alongside a desire to show that being authentic is available to all. Sara says: "I assemble myself. People say 'I couldn't do that' as if there is something different about me [laugh]. I'm a slightly overweight old lady, come on, you can do it." Inspiration, influence, and collaboration were goals to aspire to: "It's inspiring people in hope when I am daring. Not only dressing, but energizing people with my motivation..." (Frank).

Making a Difference Can Lead to Connections That Matter

I think I can make people strong by giving them the confidence to dress differently. I can make people feel better ... It's like when the girls that come into the shop say "Oh I couldn't wear that!" But then they try it and feel great and change. It gives them a sense of freedom ... I like that. (Grace)

The oldest member of the study, Sara, was very aware of having a position of authority, because her style and way of dressing connected her to others: "And the secret is you have to make it work for others as well. You have to make it happen for them. It's the most wonderful life. I love the young people around me, I'm very lucky."

The last word in this section goes to Ray, who summarized intentionally managing identity in his own flourishing manner: "It's intentional, this version of me. It's comfortable and I feel good and I have created this look for myself ... I am good at this stuff that makes me happy."

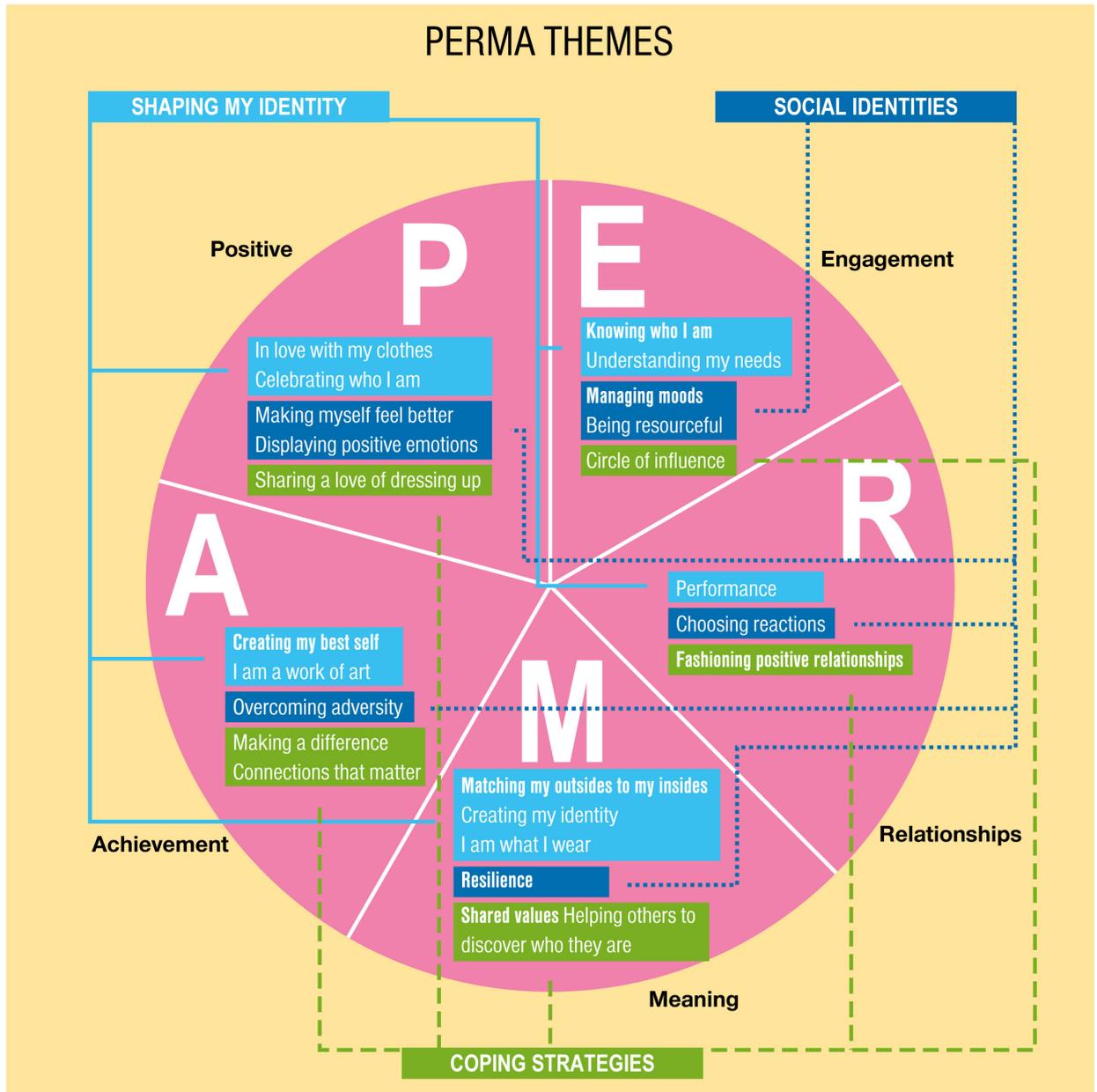
Discussion

Relationships Between Intentionally Managing Identity and PERMA

Connecting my data to existing PP theories of flourishing highlights an important relationship between fashion and wellbeing. The aspects of intentionally managing identity from this study coincide to produce flourishing as explained by PERMA (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) — the five features that create flourishing as authentic and sustained happiness and wellbeing (**Seligman; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi; see table 4**).

TABLE 4

PERMA and Theme Connections



Source: Rebecca Smith and Dr. Julia Yates.

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions underpin wellbeing. Masuch and Hefferon (2014) found that hedonic pleasure was part of daily dress practices. Positive emotions were referenced most overtly in “shaping my identity,” but occurred in managing mood in “coping strategies” and sharing a love of dressing-up in “social identities.” Fredrickson’s “broaden and build” theory cites positive emotions as increasing wellbeing through expanding interests and engagement, whilst positive emotions correlate with creativity and problem solving (218) and are able to nullify the effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson and Levenson). Fredrickson also supposes that it is possible to influence not only personal feelings but the feelings of others (218); all participants believed how they dress improves their wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others.

Engagement

Engagement is about being totally absorbed in a task, in flow (Csikszentmihalyi). Emotional intelligence has been linked to engagement and flow in musicians by Heller et al. (1901); the current study shows that emotional intelligence displayed as emotional awareness, using emotions to enable problem solving and creativity, understanding the relationship of emotions to others, and managing emotions with observation and adaptation all occur when the participants choose how to dress.

Relationships

When we sustain solid affirmative relationships, we are happier; this is considered to be one of the fundamental aspects of wellbeing (Guay et al.).

Data from this study unambiguously links the way we dress with the aspect of ourselves as “social beings,” for whom it is essential to connect with others.

Cohn et al. highlight the significance of micro-moments of a chance encounter in the street (361) and Wong discusses the importance of finding one’s identity in a community, aspects of which can be seen throughout the participants’ relationship to dress. Guy et al. found that shopping for clothes creates connections and enhances friendships; this research shows positive relationships can be formed without consumption but through shared values and a love of dressing up.

Meaning

Discovering a purpose in life can be crucial to wellbeing; to establish a meaningful life that fulfils an existential need is necessary for flourishing. Resilience as expressed by all the participants is linked to meaning and flourishing by Ryff and Singer.

Every participant felt a sense of purpose by being involved in fashion in a way that supports and helps others.

Fashion as an expression of values is discussed by Entwistle, linking sustainability, respect, and responsibility as personal beliefs that can be shown through the way we dress. Participants all felt that setting an example for others is important to the way they dress.

Achievement

Having and attaining goals encourages flourishing (Butler and Kern). Participants took pride in the way they presented themselves and felt a sense of achievement. Maddux believes that self-efficacy has an impact on health, engagement, resilience, and persistence in overcoming adversity. Coping strategies displayed by the dress practices of the participants could be linked to the aptitude for self-efficacy to cultivate from feedback generated with performance of identity, resourcefulness, and making a difference.

Ambition, hopes for others and the likelihood of achieving goals have also been shown to be relevant to wellbeing. Hope theory emphasizes the importance of unearthing things that bring joy, finding social connections that support values, and growing hope through resolution-based narratives (Lopez et al.).

The results selected for discussion are only one possible interpretation of the experiences of the participants in response to a conversation generated by wearing their “happy” outfit. I acknowledge that other potential readings of the data could well have developed alternative themes.

While the interviews began with one outfit, the conversations felt more universal; the data produced dealt with the participants' broader view of how they dressed and their feelings surrounding identity.

This process echoes the narrowing and widening of the analysis of IPA, from specific to general.

The results endorse Masuch and Hefferon's findings on the impact of clothing on wellbeing; the idea of negotiating selfhood is echoed in the findings of "shaping identity," whilst managing mood resonates with "coping strategies." There is some crossover in "social identity" and shared identity as expressed by group style within the negotiating selfhood category. Whilst current research is consistent with the claims made by Masuch and Hefferon — their study generated data that led to the category of befriending the body — this was absent in my interpretation of data produced by my participants.

Identity and Flourishing Fashion

This study has produced results that strengthen identity issues as a legitimate exploration of how PP connects to fashion. Participants' relationships with choosing who one wants to be, what they wish to communicate, and how that meets psychological needs are all encountered in a positive manner, which expands Guy and Banim's claim of a distinct connection of clothing to self-identity as a way to negotiate autonomy. The participants' intentional management of their identities, awareness of the intrinsic processes occurring, and decision-making about their response to those feelings depending on external conditions reflects social cognitive theory (Bandura, "Human Agency in Social Cognitive Theory" 1175), as well as supporting Hall and Du Gay's self-curating identity as a way to balance internal and external needs.

Intentionally Managing Identity and Consumption

Identity as performance (Craig; Goffman) reflects a playfulness and sense of choice that could be seen as a positive aspect of postmodern identity. However, the participants in this study have chosen to communicate a stable identity. To some extent they have side-stepped the postmodern problem of profusion of choice (Cushman 599; Goffman) and replaced it with an articulate identity-narrative. The pressure to experience fulfilment as fashion consumption is negated; fragmentation is replaced with insight and emotional intelligence (Mayer and Geher), something transferred to clothes as objects of consumption that become *love objects*. Garments take on existential energy, creating a meaningful relationship with the self and others as they communicate core values.

Ahuvia and Friedman advocate that, ultimately, (fashion) consumption is an unsatisfactory exercise; materialism studies also fail to show a connection between income and happiness (Kasser and Ahuvia). The care and affection that this study's participants show towards their clothes illustrates that their love for fashion is emotionally rewarding (Cushman 599).

Richins finds that love is a shared emotion, frequently expressed when participants talk about material possessions. My participants were explicitly "In love with [their] clothes" (Jane; Paul; Frank) This finding has potential ramifications for sustainability in fashion; the participants had a bond with their clothes that surpassed the need to replace. As far back as 1989, Schultz et al. asked consumers to list feelings about objects they had an emotional attachment to; happiness was the most common emotion, with love coming second.

**It seems that when we love our clothes
they influence our sense of self.**

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton linked identity-as-consumption to loving exceptional owned objects; this study's findings suggest fashion garments can be an example of this.

Cushman's perspective on postmodern consumption supposes a need to personalize the meaning of owned objects (599). That need spans internal meaning, incorporating them into one's life story, and outward-looking meaning as a shared experience or through cultural connections. This study shows that personal fashion-as-flourishing can challenge contemporary forms of consumption to enhance a meaningful life and generate sustainability-as-flourishing.

Study Limitations

The small sample size of any IPA study is a possible limitation; however, Hefferon and Gill-Rodriquez endorse a sample size of three to six participants in order to enable enough data to produce themes that link while also maintaining distinct voices that do not overwhelm the researcher.

Another possible limitation could be the heterogeneity of the participants, which owing to age, gender, and cultural influences brought such a variety of background experiences to the data that it could have been difficult to create cross-theme reflections (Lyons and Coyle). My data could have been analyzed in many ways, not only by a different researcher but also by me at another time with different experiences; the interpretation of this data is particular to a certain time frame and mind frame (Shaw).

Personally, as a researcher I was frustrated with the limitation that this particular study imposed on my own desire to share the experiences of my participants. I would have liked to have incorporated a visual record of the outfits worn at the time of interview; unfortunately, ethical considerations intervened. Barry has highlighted the problem within academic writing of pointing out what the reader ought to think rather than letting them experience the data in order to reach conclusions of their own. I would have liked the readers of this paper to have seen the outfits that produced happiness within this study, alongside the written data produced.

Relevance and Implications

Future research could test the hypothesis that when we learn to “match our outside to our insides” we create longer-lasting bonds with our clothes, when mindful dressing changes the relationship we have with consuming identity imposed from external sources. This link of emotional contentment to personal needs via daily clothing practices could be a response to the growing call for a consumption pattern of flourishing-as-sustainability as expressed by Niinimäki (3). Another possible avenue is a study that extends the idea of flourishing personal fashion to intentionally managing the identity of the business of fashion.

Links to dress and flourishing could be explored using social media, especially visual platforms such as Instagram; for example, analyzing hashtags that correspond to the themes of PERMA. There is also the possibility of applying IPA findings to design and exploring how data could be used to create garments that reflect identity needs. Using research on how we feel when we dress rather than how we look would be a novel approach to a design project for fashion students who could call on their own experience of wellbeing as well as creating garments that embedded PERMA-wear.

A quantitative study, which measures flourishing before and after intentional dressing, could provide evidence to support the outcomes of this study, as could combining a study of this kind with a diary project to gauge the effect of dressing daily to match feelings.

Conclusion

William James linked fashion with wellbeing in 1890 (Watson 211). He understood that our clothing was an extension of ourselves that could lead to psychological happiness. Over time, research within psychology focused on the pathology of fashion (Masuch and Hefferon), while within fashion using psychology to explore how dress and feelings are connected has received little attention (Ruggerone).

The findings in this paper suggest that fashion plays a significant role in flourishing among the six participants. The results generated questions requiring further exploration, including: is the manner in which my participants intentionally manage their identity relevant to other groups? How can this help us to understand the way in which dressing connects to wellbeing? Do all the themes need to be in place for flourishing to occur? Exploring how the participants experienced wearing an outfit that made them happy has contributed to the possibility of viewing fashion from a positive psychology position, which could impact further research. This includes whether having a relationship with our clothes, a deep attachment to knowing who you are and how you express yourself sartorially, can affect the amount of clothes we buy.

If we are satisfied with how we feel in our clothing, then would we consume less? Does individual flourishing fashion translate to a way in which the fashion system could change? What would it take to create a ripple effect of thriving throughout the fashion industry?

This small study doesn't begin to challenge the prevailing position of extensive overconsumption of clothes (Fletcher and Tham). My hope is that continued research will emphasize how certain fashion consumption practices, which may be currently viewed as negative, create wellbeing, and convince those responsible for creating fashion that flourishing is good for business as well as for individuals.

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