



Transcript of “Creating Digital Happiness with Anna Akbari”

Bulletproof Radio podcast #92



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Dave: Today's cool fact of the day is about gas. The reason for that is that if you read the blog, you know that I'm experimenting with something called resistance starch. Resistance starch is a kind of starch that is not digested in your stomach or in your small intestine. Instead, it goes almost like fiber to the large intestine, the colon, where it's supposed to be fermented by a bunch of healthy, happy microbes. This is a form of prebiotic, something to feed your healthy gut biome.

The only problem is that when you start eating that kind of resistance starch, you get a lot of gas. For normal people not on this horrible experiment, every time they pass gas it's about 9% carbon dioxide and 7% methane, depending in large part on their diet. Both of those gases contribute to global warming so the average person is passing gas 15 times a day. That means that in theory at least, you're contributing to melting the polar ice caps and maybe ending the world as we know it about 15 times a day, maybe more if you're still on one of those vegan diets.

As a side note since we're on the topic of gas in today's cool fact of the day, I found that when I switch to the Bulletproof diet and particularly Bulletproof coffee that gas became something that I never thought about and something that very, very rarely happens to me. In fact, Bulletproof coffee itself seems to me to be the absolutely cure for that particular social problem.

Hey, everyone, Dave Asprey with Bulletproof Executive Radio. Before we get started on today's show, I just like to take a second to thank you because you've helped this podcast reach number 1 on iTunes. We've got more than 3 million downloads, more than a million people a month see the Bulletproof content on the podcast, the blog, and social media. I just want to say thanks, I totally appreciate it and I appreciate it if you take the time to click Like on iTunes so other people can find the show. I can't thank you enough to be perfectly honest.

Today's guest is pretty darn cool. She has been teaching Digital Happiness, which is something that honestly I didn't know such a thing until I saw her work at TEDx Silicon Valley. I'm talking about Anna Akbari. She's pretty interesting. She's taught classes and online dating and actually tried it herself. She taught for 5 years in New York, but now she's relocated at Silicon Valley and grew up in Iowa. We have someone who is multi-coastal, comfortable with the flyover states, who teaches digital dating and a bunch of other cool stuff and who's given a TED talk. This sounds like a totally bulletproof conversation at least that's what I'm hoping.

Anna, welcome to Bulletproof Executive Radio.

Anna: Thank you. Thanks so much for having me.

Dave: What are you doing now that you've left New York and you moved to Silicon Valley?

Anna: I did, which is a big move for me. I am currently working down the valley with a tech incubator and I'm developing there entrepreneur education for universities, governments and international groups and different corporations.

Dave: How does that connect you with the sociology of style, because that's what you're well known for?

Anna: Yes. I think the main way is that it's through the sociology of style that I really learned about the start-up world and learned about what it means to be an entrepreneur and went through that whole process. That is actually still in existence. We're actually re-launching next month, which we were very excited about, so that's the connection because that's my background in tech entrepreneurship.

Dave: You just said something that doesn't make any sense to me, style and technology in Silicon Valley. Having spent like 20 years in my career, they are working for startups [in VCs 04:14], having seen Zuckerberg scandals up close like style, tell me more. What is this sociology of

style? Really, tell the people listening driving in their cars. They probably haven't heard about it.

Anna: That's one of the biggest, most striking differences I've noticed between New York and Silicon Valley would be the personal aesthetic choices of the inhabitants of those 2 regions. They couldn't be more different. In fact, just this morning I was messaging a friend while I was on the Muni on my way to Caltrain, saying, "This is so strange." I'm on this PAXTrain. I'm the only person wearing heals in the whole space, which in New York that would just be every person occurrence.

Dave: You're in San Francisco. There had to be at least 1 guy wearing heals.

Anna: There might have been in the city down there. There's a big a very big difference into the standard. Obviously, it's much more casual. It's much more of a permanent outdoorsy look. Even if you are going into the office, you always look like you're poised to go and scale a mountain or hike for the day, completely with backpack and the technical gear. It's sort of embodying that mentality in that lifestyle all the time even when you're in the office.

Dave: You're saying that's more of a New York thing versus a Silicon Valley thing?

Anna: No, that's a Silicon Valley.

Dave: That's what I thought. It was like when I spend time in those ... but even that that's a dressed up entrepreneur from a Silicon Valley perspective. If you're a coder like well in jeans like they're clean and this is stereotyped but honestly there's a little bit like, "I'm so good. I don't have to dress up."

Anna: That's right. That's right. I was just having this conversation with someone where if you did wear a suit and a tie to work or to give a presentation, you would be seen as actually be disempowering for you because it would be seen as you're not understanding the rules of game in this particular space and you would be seen as irrelevant. It would actually would not work in your favor.

Dave: This is a really old story. Most people probably haven't heard it or maybe they have, but it turns out my mother was the first employee for the company that became Microsoft. No, she didn't get any stock. This is back in Albuquerque. There was a day when Bill Gates showed up in his, whatever, flip flops and jeans from the '70s and the IBM guy showed up and, of course, they're wearing suits. The next day the IBM guys show up in jeans and Bill Gates shows up in a suit, so they're like both trying to get themselves going.

In your courses, do you teach like how to not dress too awkwardly for your environment?

Anna: One of the things I do is that have my students engage in ethnographic fieldwork, where they actively have to transform some aspect of their physical persona and then test it out, see how people engage differently with them and how they feel different and therefore behave different in their social environment. I try to help them become aware of what they're taking for granted, because some people don't realize how attached they are to particular aspects of their physicality or certain elements of their personal aesthetic.

For instance, a woman with really long hair that may be completely embedded in her sense of identity and you put the hair up in a hat and suddenly she feels that everyone is staring at her or that she's not getting the same response that she usually does. Small things like that can be radically transformative for an individual.

Dave: This is actually like the PUA, the pick-up artist thing, but who weren't trying to just get late.

Anna: Yes, exactly.

Dave: Does it also work to get late?

Anna: I've not really had a student that has tested back out and particularly to my knowledge I didn't write about it at least from my [crosstalk 08:13].

Dave: I got funded and I've got another date. Okay, I get it.

Anna: Absolutely, yes. There have been studies done where ... There is 1 video of it where it was actually done in England. They put a guy in a window, like a shop window and they had women come by and rate him. They rated him on what his proceed income was, what they would guess his job was and if they're going to date with him. Then they took the same guy. They changed the way he looked and they put him back in the window and they had more women come by and they ask him. As you can predict, when they dressed him up and they put him in certain outfits, it completely aligned with the income level, the job and yes they wanted to date him in.

Dave: Wow. Random question.

Anna: Yes.

Dave: How should I dress when I want to get pass the TSA with minimum harassment at the airport?

Anna: That is a really good question and one that I had not figured out because I get patted down every single time.

Dave: You're screwed. You're an attractive woman. Anyone who can see you on the YouTube version of this knows you're totally getting like the fine-tooth comb every time. That's just how it works. I've noticed because I experiment. I travel way too much like 100 times a year. I get on a plane probably more than that honestly. I've noticed if you dress certain ways, it's just going to suck. If you dress in a sport coat, they'll probably leave you alone and lately I'm like if you dress like a scumbag but really nice scumbag clothes, they'll also leave you alone like they're looking at the weave of your pants to if they're like Walmart pants or like Nordstrom pants, I swear. That's what I think it comes down to.

Anna: I think the more you look like you are professional and you have somewhere to be and that you are somewhat that demand respect, they're going to treat accordingly.

Dave: Also like are you nice to them, like they're all just doing their job. They're working to protect everyone so if you're a jerk, you should

expect to be treated like a jerk, but it's funny. I just thought the difference is huge. You're doing this to teach people throughout their life to look different which helps people in business school and whatever else.

Anna: I work with people individually and I go into corporations, law firms and I talk to them about how the way they self present actively, transforms the way they're perceived to different context. It transforms their cling to power in public and ultimately it affects how much money they're going to make, who they're made it, all these really important factors in life which really elevates aesthetics beyond something that's just superficial.

Dave: Here's another confession. When I was 23, I wanted to get raises like anyone who is 23. I realized that old people get paid more so I went to the hairstylist and I'm like, "I want gray on my temples." Being 23, I didn't actually realized that there were differences between hiring stylist and once you barely like able to cut my hair and, I don't know, it was \$13 or something. They kept trying to dye my hair dark to keep it from being gray. I'm like, "No, I want my hair to be gray on the temples so then I'll get a raise," on as if that would have been true. Is that true?

Anna: There's a little bit of gender double stand.

Dave: Of course, that would be for boys, right?

Anna: Yeah that would be for guys. For women, it would have the reverse effect or inverse effect.

Dave: That's not fair.

Anna: No, no, definitely not.

Dave: I have 2 women over 60 working for Bulletproof and they both rock so that's cool.

Anna: Yeah, it's great. The unfortunate thing is that women are expected to look like they're in their 20s but have the experience of someone who's

in their 60s and so it's an impossible and very challenging standard. That's one of the things I work with some of my female clients on.

Dave: Are most of your clients women or men?

Anna: Overall, over the years it's been a pretty close split, 50/50. I would say maybe 60/40 women, but I do work with a lot of men. I work with a lot of people that are going through any transition. If you think about the moments in your life when you're undergoing a dramatic change, there's often physical catharsis that involves it or having a physical catharsis or transformation helps you to take on a new identity or to shed an old one. Those were also particularly right for advice. They're open to something new. They want to actively and mindfully adapt to new persona. They are particularly great to work with.

Dave: You find people who want to make a change inside. They make a change in how they look which changes how they act and how they feel and then it's part of ...

Anna: Looks good, yes.

Dave: Would it be fair to say that what you're doing is like image consulting or are you different like LA stylist people who people keep telling me I should meet because I dress like a biohacker.

Anna: I call myself the pinky-person stylist because I help people to understand their full sense of identity in a more holistic way and then, of course, there is a practical application to that. We do actually have to dig in and say, "Okay, so what are your tools," just like you have technical tools and you have supplements that you might take all these different tools that transform your identity and transform your body. We have to actively get into your closet eventually, but there is a lot of conversation about what are your goals, who do you want to be, how do you see yourself. Just by listening to them talk, I can start to piece together a future-projected persona for them and help to guide them toward that and to realize it physically.

Dave: That's really, really cool. I've not heard anyone explain the work of a stylist that way.

Anna: I'm a sociologist and I dipped into a lot of psychology as well and the intersection of the 2 that really are at play there.

Dave: That's pretty cool. You're basically working on that angle like how do you hack the people around you by looking a certain way.

Anna: That's right. That's right. How do you hack your own identity and therefore it will, for lack of a better word, manipulate the people around you into behaving differently toward you. We might think of that as duplicities, but really we're all doing that on some level all the time and it's just better if you're more aware of it.

Dave: A while back, I took a course called Urbanscape Innovation. We had to walk around after escaping from handcuffs, being handcuffed or we're handcuffed and kidnapped by a group of bounty hunters. Then you run around town for a day where they're trying to capture you and you have to totally change how you look and how you act, which was like maybe the final exam sort of thing.

I still remember dramatically this experience where I needed to walk past 3 bounty hunters who were looking for me. I got a cigarette and I had this hat and I walked like a guy seriously on drugs like just jonesing about ready to snap. People would part like leave a 20-foot gap around me and no one would look at me, including the bounty hunters. I walked right past them and got what I wanted.

It was so cool to just think like, "Oh my god," and there's this little girl who walks right toward me goes, "Hi." I'm like, "Shh, don't tell anyone," because [inaudible 15:33] that I wasn't exactly a threatening guy. That's an extreme example, but how do you dress if you don't want people look at you? What are the tricks?

Anna: There are different ways of blending in or pulling back. We're in a constant state of negotiation between sticking out and claiming our individuality and then demonstrating that we're part of a group and it's

always a delicate balance. You always need a little bit of both and the best way to not stand out is to really look like everyone else, to actually conform as much as possible and to conform in a way that is very muted. It can be conformity in a sloppy way. It has to be conformity in a very status quo expression. Does that make sense?

For instance, let's say you're in office, let's say you're in a locker room, so if you want to not stick out then you wear your brown loafers and your brown belt and a suit that fits you well, but it isn't the top-of-the-line suit but that isn't doesn't like you got it for \$50 and then get tailored. The color should be something that is mildly stylish but not French caps. There's a conservatism but there's not sloppiness. That is the best way to not stick out.

Why you would want to do that? I don't know. There are many incidents I supposed where one could want to shade into the background. For instance, if you know you need to observe in a particular way and you don't want to drive attention to yourself and you know you can get more information by being a silent person in a corner then that's a perfect opportunity to find that mix of conservatism and conformity.

Dave: Interesting. This sounds like something that you could totally play around with as a biohacker just to see what you're doing, so I love what you're doing in the course. I wished I have taken that at school and probably it would have taught me how to dress.

I've heard something else about you and I almost am embarrass to ask, but is it true that you make students turn off their computers and cell phones when you're teaching?

Anna: Yes, I'm an evil, evil professor.

Dave: You hate trees. Is that what this comes out there?

Anna: Yes, I hate trees and I'm a total Luddite. I do do that and I'm very upfront about that at the beginning of my classes and yet even though I announced that to them I still get complaints in the evaluations at the

end of the semester. I tell them, "This class might not be for you if you need to be permanently plugged in at every moment." I have students that will say, "My mother, my boyfriend, my internship needs to be able to reach me at any given hour," not because there's a specific emergency at hand. I said, "That's fine. I respect that then this class isn't for you."

The argument is that what do we gain when we turn out technology in a mindful way at a very particular time. My argument then is essentially that we have 20, 30 individuals who have hopefully read a particular text, who have thought about certain ideas for that day, who have come there with ideas and experiences and stories and questions. By engaging your technology, by focusing on the screen, you are putting actually a physical barrier in front of yourself and you're allowing all these external distractions to filter in.

Even if you turn off the internet, you're still looking at your Google docs or Microsoft Word page and you're taking notes and you're editing it, you're making it look nice and you're missing things and you're not looking at each other in the eye and the eye contact makes it huge difference and the communication that you're having and information that you're receiving in processing. I ask them to think about at times in their lives when they really have a moment like that. They're paying an extraordinary amount of money to be in this class and yet they're certain mentally opting out of they're on their technology.

Isn't it wonderful to have this hour to 3 hours where you can really just be present with each other and it's all about the exchange of ideas? That may sound antiquated and that's fine, or too idealistic. Honestly, I really noticed the difference in the level of engagement and the kinds of conversations that we have when there's no technology present. I would argue that there really is a sort of lost of conversation and a lot are just extrapolating about ideas. This is 1 way that we can carve out small period of time each week to have that.

Dave: Sorry, I was just using the phone. If you're just listening on the radio, sorry, I just held up my iPhone like I was checking my text but I wasn't actually doing it.

I hear what you're saying. I taught for 5 years in the University of California. A lot of times I don't talk about that, but I did that while I was working full time in one of the companies that created the modern club computing thing, so I teach almost every night. It's a constant struggle because part of me is like if I'm not engaging people as an instructor and they wanted to do something else on their phones like who am I to tell them no. On the other hand, it's easier to be an instructor when people are paying attention because you have them stuck, so I ended up because largely I was teaching technology stuff like, "Okay, use your phones."

Then I would certainly give myself a pat on the back if I made most people not check their phone too often, but phones have changed since I taught. That wasn't more than 8 years ago or something, so they're just more addictive.

Anna: I think it also depends on the nature of the class. If you're in the kind of class that I was in, it didn't mean technology. It wasn't necessary. It wasn't a design class and it also wasn't a large lecture class, where you have 300 students in it. Some of them also say, "I can take notes faster." I know that there will be some things that maybe you don't scribble down as quickly, but the step you do right will be thoughtful. If you do go and rewrite it and type it up, you're going to understand it differently and you're going to have a different relationship with that content.

I'm yet to find a compelling argument that would convince me to allow technology. That said I do allow it at the breaks. I always give them a break and it's this media technology frenzy. They're like, "Oh."

Dave: Do you actually talk about creating a tech-free environment outside the classroom?

Anna: Yes.

Dave: What's your take on that? How do you define a tech-free environment today anyway and why do people do that?

Anna: I don't make enough people do it first of all. For instance, I was just at brunch this weekend and I walked past this table of probably 6 women who were all sitting together and all on their iPhones. Everyone is seeing that. Everyone is seeing dinner-drinks gathering where the iPhone is right here or maybe right here and they're conversing. What is lost, again, in that? Why does that matter? Why is it matter that we actually have a meaningful conversation with someone?

If you think about it from the happiness perspective, you're building a stronger relationship. You're creating a stronger connection and you're also more likely to go into a flow state and that's the thing that I didn't mention also about the classroom, which I think is really important. I feel it when I'm in there and I'm talking with them and we're discussing and I can ... You've been in situations where you can feel that flow state of a conversation and that makes work more enjoyable. It creates more long-lasting, enduring happiness. I think those are all reasons but it's important.

I also think crating tech-free environment is important because we're thinking about what is the value of being alone and what does it even mean to be alone in a hyperconnected world. It's about being alone with your thoughts, carving out time to perhaps meditate to clear your mind and all the cognitive benefits that one can get from that quiet time from quieting the mind. I know you talked about on your show before the values of meditation and controlling the mind and it's very, very difficult or impossible to do that when you are constantly bombarded with technical distractions as well.

Dave: It's a fair point. I went and I spent 4 days fasting in a cave outside Sedona with no technology just because I'm like, "Let's play with no technology and just being alone with your thoughts and see what happens." That was generally relaxing and a little bit boring to be perfectly honest, but anytime you meditate for days it's boring so it's part of meditation.

Anna: It's a lot more of that kind of stuff, Digital Detox retreats and tech-free or cell phone-free parties. I'm an advocate for basically people just finding whatever day, whatever moment that they can work into their lives in

any regular way, even if it's just about limiting technology so maybe it's about going to the movies and so technically it involves technology but it's still an isolated time. You're not multitasking. You're not on call.

Dave: There's also a stress effect that a lot of people have and I realized I really had this terribly ... I was one of the early email guys. I think I got email in 1991 and I literally would feel like I was going to die when my email was down, which happened all the time because they didn't really have ISP to send email and all that stuff. It would happen and I'm disconnected and I just wasn't very self-aware back then. I realized that the response most people get even like very successful people when an email comes in you get a little ding whatever your device is, your iPhone. If you have that alert set on, you can see it in your brainwaves like it's a stress response and it will mess with you.

Anna: It's a tricky one, because there's a stress response but that it also triggers your pleasure center then you get pains. It makes you feel loved, connected, important but at that momentary I'm not the first person to ever describe it as an addiction, something that mimics, addictive or addiction in the brain and that's essentially what's happening.

It is something that is very difficult to pull away from but when you do ... If you have someone reflect on a time when they are without technology and this is one of the reaffirming notes that I often receive in my course evaluation is that students who originally experienced or meant anxiety at the thought of disconnecting from their technology come to find that it is a respite for them that they feel like it's the only time when they don't have to be on duty, where their mom or their boyfriend or whomever had not pain in every 5 minutes and demanding their attention. They relish in it, not all of them but at least a few.

Dave: I feel that way about airplanes. I'm totally opposed having Wi-Fi in airplanes. It's evil.

Anna: It's one of the last great places to do some wonderful reading.

- Dave: Exactly. That said, I don't have to go to the bathroom without a cell phone, so if I put on my cell phone I'm going to have problems but [inaudible 28:06]. Someone posted that on Facebook the other day and I was just laughing. It feels like that little respite is gone.
- Anna: There probably is a Tumblr that's all about iPhones in the bathroom or something like that.
- Dave: I think 2% of Apple's tag price has to do with iPhones falling in toilets or something like that. Let's talk about happiness. You're TEDx talk was about Digital Happiness and I'm a quantified self like I like to measure what I hack, this is why I'm hacking it. How do you measure happiness? How do you think we should go about hacking it?
- Anna: Happiness is difficult to measure though there are certain individuals, groups and even countries that are working toward measuring it. Bhutan for one ...
- Dave: I love that.
- Anna: ... is dealing with a Gross National Happiness. [Inaudible 29:09] what's called Gross ... Yes. Denmark is always ranked at the very top as well. They really are interested in how do you measure well-being, how do you check in with people and really it's about prioritizing it, making sure that people feel like they're living a good life.

I think it's difficult. I think that the quantified self-component is really interesting because on the one hand, the more we measure things about ourselves the more aware we are and the more aware we are the more we can find tuning and the more we can find tuning in general we can optimize our lives and we become happier. However, the downside is that self-tracking and the quantified self is really about control and efficiency. I think those things have their limits and so it can overreach to the point where you can become constantly living for that long-term record instead of just being present in the moment. I think that takes a lot of self-awareness and self-regulation to know when to go into those [new modes 30:21].

- Dave: That is something that you don't hear very often talked about but I couldn't agree more. Is the difference between sending letters being a stamp collector? I know people like, "I have 15 years worth of data," and I'm, "What did you do with your data?"
- Anna: That's right.
- Dave: Like the underpants gnomes from South Park. They just look around going, "We don't know why we're doing it. We just do it. We're collecting." It doesn't serve a purpose in that point at least, none that I know of.
- Anna: No, it doesn't. We can even move that back where our previous conversation about self-presentation when you look at the collecting that goes on across social media in the form of mostly images. You really have people who were collecting image as proof of existence, proof of happiness as opposed to, "I'm getting caught up in the flow state of this moment and I'm just enjoying myself." You have the Facebook facelifts for instance, which is an actual thing, where people are getting facelifts so that they look better in their Facebook photos.
- Dave: That's Photoshop work. Come on, people.
- Anna: They didn't tell me that they Photoshop every single photo that goes up on Facebook. There's something that's incredibly anxiety inducing that is counter productive to happiness. The mentality is if I maintain this image, I'm going to be happy because this is the record of who I am and my value really.
- Dave: Wow. It seems like the least you could do as a biohacker if you're going to do that is like use fibers. You don't waste your time, go shopping or anything have someone do it.
- Anna: I think the effects of biohacking on the appearance of the body and how that then gets captured across social media is very interesting.
- Dave: Also at the same time we're on social media now, like I'm recording this video. It's going to go up on YouTube on the Bulletproof Executive channel. You've got on nice lip gloss. Your hair is up like you look really

professional and appropriately dressed for this. Your necklace is nice but not too big, not too small, not too ostentatious. You followed your rules nicely so there'll be lots of people going, "This is a great video," and me, I look slightly less than homeless, more than homeless, whatever. No, I'm kidding. I did my hair, too. I've done a little of Spritzer, whatever it is you do, but I'm a guy who don't have to.

What's the difference? Someone uses chemicals and make-up. You did a good job. You look nice. At the same time, if you could have Photoshopped this in the little video filter, wouldn't I just have saved you time?

Anna: You're absolutely right. You make a great point and it's not about saying that there should be no virtual biohacking, because that is the first to consider, especially if you look at second life which I find incredibly fascinating. For a while, it made all of my students in one of my classes participate in second life, which they thought it was absolutely crazy for.

It's really interesting because it challenges so many things. When you get to designing your body, which is currently what biohackers are trying, and so when you actually get to design it from scratch what choices do you make. The norm interestingly in spaces like second life and in many video games is this state of perfection, and so some of my students have done experiments where they make less than perfect choices and do they look "more real" as an experiment and the other avatars are very eager to help them because they think they just must be so misguided that they would make because ... Given the choice, we all look perfect.

Dave: I was going to ask you about hacking your virtual identity, but I didn't quickly get the realm of science fiction. When you get into transhumanism and maybe it isn't that much science fiction anymore, the perfect people, the smartest people but there's also like the odd person who has 4 arms and a joint hole in their abdomen just because it was cool. I love hanging out in San Francisco. In fact, I've often said if you want to find like the best coffee in the city, you want the most tattoos, stretched ears and piercings because that correlates nicely with

people who care about coffee. That's one vanguard of frankly body modification.

Anna: Absolutely, yeah.

Dave: How do you explain that? I don't know if I even tie back toward identity, but how do you explain that "less than perfect" from one idea? Why the diversity that we see now that we didn't see a long time ago?

Anna: I think that goes beyond the realm of the philosophy of aesthetics and beauty. That's a biological preference that we like symmetry, we like pretty things. These are part of our innate preferences. What's interesting is that we layer that with culture and so culture is all about signs and symbols. It's all about the semiotics of culture and that's what at play when you have tattoos and piercings and particular subculture styles. If you're giving off a symbol and that symbol it only registers with someone if they're familiar with it.

If you think about an alien who comes down and they see someone who is pierced and tattooed, whatever those things don't mean anything to someone who has not been taught with the rules of that game mark. That's true actually for any subculture, where you have to be taught what each thing means. You have to have a certain level of experience to then be able to judge it accordingly, grade it accordingly, privilege it accordingly.

What's changed is that the culture perception of those things has evolved enough so that it's now in the forefront of our culture and it has become desirable among certain subcultures, not desirable in others and it's a way of marking this outfit. It's intended to mark what your preferences might be, how you might respond to something, how much money you might make, what your profession might be. All of these components of identity and your cultural identity are marked in your body in a lot of different ways.

I would say it's interesting if you go to a new beach and you observe people there. Even there, you will have bodies that have been

biohacked to a certain extent, whether it's through exercise or the sun or tattoos, interesting piercings. You see a lot of interesting piercings.

Dave: You've been, too.

Anna: Yes. There are still symbols that people are giving off and there are different codes that people are operating on accordingly. Those codes are actually really important because they actually keep social order. They help us to know how to relate to each other. Again, they're not nearly superficial.

Dave: I have to ask this question, beards. What about beards? Virtual or non-virtual? What do they say?

Anna: It's interesting. I just didn't interview for a news station that was running a piece on special hair. Hairiness is actually in general the resurgence of male hairiness and they're tying it into American hassle and different '70s inspired [boutiques 38:20].

Dave: Wolverine, the ultimate biohacker. There you go.

Anna: You have the hipster, Brooklyn-scrappy look. I think my stand on it is that the resurgence of beards and male hairiness is a backlash to the ... I wouldn't say the feminization of men but this new cultural imperative that men engaged in grooming rituals just like women and that they're held to a new standard just like women and so there's a backlash. Men say, "No. I'm going to be hypermasculine. I'll just go ahead and be manly." Some would argue that the facial hair is also a reaction to do-it-over feminization of men to masculinization of men in a more genderless society, if you want to call it that.

Dave: All I can say is that my chest waxed once, so electrodes would stick better and come off more easily from biohacking and oh my god that hurts so bad. I am never wax my chest again and I don't really care if it's masculine or feminine or whatever else but that hurts.

Anna: [Inaudible 39:34] how it feels when women have other body parts.

Dave: After that experience, I just assumed that women are so much better handling pain than me that I'm just not into that waxing thing for myself anymore.

Anna: No, but I think the beard phenomenon is very interesting and then, of course, you could throw in an ironic-mustache trend which is internet mean for a while. I think [inaudible 40:02] has been interesting in establishing and being a physical way of speaking out about gender norms and expectations.

Dave: I'd love that we got to talk about that. There's 2 more questions I really wanted to ask you about before we run out of time in our show today. One of them is about our relations with our technology devices like our phones and things like that and you're against them in some ways anyway and in other ways you're talking about hacking your online identity. You make people use a second life. Are these like duties sometimes improve our relationships in connections or they generally a bad thing?

Anna: Yes, absolutely. I don't want to give the impression that I'm anti-technology but use the example of long-distance relationships. I think there's an instance where having technology to facilitate keeping in touch and being to see each other, be on video, can be really a wonderful way of actually having a relationship that otherwise might deteriorate given geographic distance.

That long-distance relationship could be amorous or it could be a familial relationship as well, getting to see parents or grandparents that live or to interact with them on a regular basis. You really want to [inaudible 41:31] even something like words with friends, I think that's what it's called, the scrabble game that people play. Asynchronous relationships are often facilitated by technology. Email is an example of an asynchronous exchange.

Those can actually be great because even though you might not be connecting at the same moment, you still are thinking of each other and engaging periodically in a casual fun, playful way. Another example would be something like Farmville. I don't personally play Farmville,

but just the act of fertilizing someone's fields can actually create a sense of happiness and connection between the individuals. I'm not saying that those are substitutes for human interaction. Again, I think it's about that balance and creating opportunities in space to have meaningful face-to-face embodied interaction but when that's not possible then the virtual surrogates can be really great.

Dave: Got it. It's not good or bad. It's somewhere in the middle of it.

Anna: Yeah, how you use it.

Dave: Sure, fair point. It's true. It's just about everything, including drain cleaning. It can be good or it can sure stand the curtains. Closet catharsis and strategic shopping, what are those and why do you do those?

Anna: That is part of the services component of sociology of style. Essentially, we named it closet catharsis because if I were to work with you, we used to go through your closet. We would talk about every single item that's in there, pretty much everything, unless you have an exorbitant number of items then we wouldn't have talked that, but we would talk about pretty much everything that's in there.

All of those items have a story and they have a relationship to you. You have experiences that you tied in them. It might even be just, "Oh, I got a deal on that," and you felt really excited that you didn't pay very much for that, or maybe something monumental happened in your life during that time. We took a parse out this emotional attachment that we have to those items and then we try to look at it from the more objective perspective, what actually serving you and how are you perceived in relationship to each of those items.

We basically make piles and say, "This is something that doesn't serve you. There's no justification for this." One of the ways that I do that is I say, "You shouldn't hold on things," because of the emotional value. I always say, "When you're getting dressed, is this ever going to win? Is this ever the best you can do," should it ever win. If the answer is no, then it's usually described. After we go that process, it's interesting

because it's a very anxiety-inducing process for people. It might seem like it's just this thing where you [inaudible 44:44] positively.

When you really think about these terms and you do a mask, discarding of really stuff that has become part of your life and your identity because as we wear clothes it becomes our second skin for us. When you discard that, a lot of individuals initially have this real sense of loss and absence and then that pretty quickly becomes a really cathartic feeling. Where they feel that, they open themselves to letting in new things and not settling for that particular person or identity that they were hanging on to and it creates an enormous amount of clarity. Eliminating choice, as you know, is a really powerful tool.

Dave: That is really funny. I think about this. I have a lot of tech T-shirts from Silicon Valley and I only wear a T-shirt if the company has either been acquired or gone out of business. I'm like, "I'm going to wear a T-shirt coming from that like doing something that would be just uncool." Honestly, I live in small town in Canada. I want to travel and I don't really wear T-shirts like that anyway so you just sit there so I guess I should just toss them. I get that.

Then all the T-shirts that I invented, because I used to run a T-shirt company many years ago. I was like the first company that's selling online. I still have the original T-shirt I made, but who wears 25-year-old T-shirt. It's yellow anyway. I think I have to keep that one.

Anna: I would say I think that your listeners are about optimization, clarity, and so you think about what you have to do every single day. You have to get dressed pretty much every single day. Eliminating choice or eliminating things that only cloud your judgment and aren't optimal for you are key so that means you have 10 pieces that you wear all the time but that are great and you may be spent a little more money on, do that. Create a uniform for yourself.

Dave: Who's probably the most bad ass of all about that no matter what you think about is politics. Obama has a down on the suits and someone gave him a hard time and he's like, "I have the gray and I have the blue. In that way I don't have to think about it. I wear the one I didn't wear

the day before and I don't pick up my own ties." I'm like, "Oh my god, I could wear suit under those rules otherwise I'm not going to deal with that." That is the cleanest answer I've ever heard so I thought that was cool.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. It's a little bit easier for guys. Again, they can really create a uniform, a very narrow uniform that can look great and they can replicate pretty much everyday. Women it's a little more complicated, but we can do a variation on that as well.

Dave: That is awesome and you made me think about that quite a bit now. I have to go throw away half of my closet, damn you. Strategic shopping, what's that?

Anna: A lot of people purchase things because it's on sale or because they find something that they just like it and those are 2 fineries for making a purchase. Again, if you're into optimizing your life and not clouding your future judgment on things, then you want to approach every purchase from a holistic perspective, how's that going to work into your larger sense of identity, how is that going to contribute positively to the persona that you're constructing, and how does it literally figure in to everything else that you own. I advocate for at least 75% of what you own all working together. If you need to throw everything in a bag and pack in 5 minutes, you can pretty much do that because it's all complimentary. You just don't have to think about it.

Some people want a different extravagant outfit for everyday but most people they don't. People don't want to look fashionable. They want to look right and feel confident.

Dave: Steve Jobs had it right.

Anna: Yes. He had uniform. He branded himself. There are a lot of huge figures who have really branded themselves aesthetically and so I think that is a major part of optimizing who you are and making the most out of, whatever situation that you're in is having a visual mark.

Dave: Very cool. I guess my orange glasses count for that.

Anna: Yes. Yes, they would.

Dave: They don't always mess my shirt though. Here's the last question, the question that I asked everyone in the show and that is, is it true that your mom drinks Bulletproof coffee? That's not the question but is it true?

Anna: It is true. She is now a devotee, yes, so my mom in Iowa.

Dave: That is so cool. You mentioned that right before the show. I just had to say, "Hey, that's awesome. Hi, Anna's mom." The real final question on the show is what are your top 3 recommendations for people who want to perform better, people who want to kick more ass whatever their domain in life is? It doesn't have to be style or sociology, just your wisdom distilled to 3 things.

Anna: I think the number 1 thing that comes to mind for me is to find a way to be present as often as you can to the people you're with, to yourself. I think that being present and giving someone your attention, your focus is one of the greatest gifts that we can currently give other individuals and I think that it's very much rewarded and noted. I had people that I spent an hour with tell me they can't remember the last time that someone didn't check their phone during that time and so they feel very special. They feel like they have a connection with you and you feel that as well as a result.

Being present to yourself, creating a meditation practice or learning to find moments where you can unplug, whether it's for a few minutes a day or if it's 1 day a week or however it is that it works into your lifestyle, so being present.

Then I would say take an active interest in your self-presentation in both your physical self-presentation and your virtual self-presentation. Both are extremely important. You can't have one and then just ignore the other so you have double duty now. Thanks to technology and the internet, you really have 2 selves that you have to maintain. That image management is a lot of work and that's why I advocate for this streamlining of things so that it doesn't have to be a stressful activity.

One activity that I would challenge all of your listeners to do is to do ethnographic experiment that I have my students do, where they change 1 thing about their personal self-presentation and then go out about their day and see how they feel, see if they feel differently, see how people respond to them differently. They could do it over the course of the week and change number of different things and it sort of reflect on that. It tends to be a very enlightening experience and you really start to see how attached you are to different aspects of your physicality. I would say be cognizant and aware and mindful of your self-presentation.

Then the third one I would say is to take advantage of the abundance of technological tools that keep emerging that either track your happiness or facilitate ways of unplugging. A few of those would be there's a track of your happiness project and if you'd ever done that and that's a sort of ... It's a survey that's sent to you a couple of times a day for I think about 2 weeks and you see graphs when you're happiest. It's a great tool for quantified self and then it will repeat it 6 months or a year later you can set it. You really start to see patterns in what makes you happy.

The same thing with unplugging. I subscribed to a newsletter called the UNDO Lists, which I think is really terrific and every week it give you prompts of things to do and think about while you're disconnecting and unplugging and plugging into individuals and nature and other aspects of life. I'd say find ways to use technology ton facilitate happiness and mindfulness practices.

Dave: Awesome. That came to 3, right?

Anna: That's 3.

Dave: I was like making sure I counted them. Would you also let people know where they can learn more about the things you're doing now, Twitter, Facebook, URLs, stuff like that?

Anna: Yes, absolutely. They can go to my website, which is annaakbari.com. That's A-N-N-A-A-K-B-A-R-I dot com and my Twitter handle is just @annaakbari.

Dave: Awesome. We'll include those links in the show notes and when we publicized the podcast so if you didn't get those or you need the link to the happiness thing you just talked about, we'll put that in there as well.

Anna, I wanted to send you some of our chocolate-truffled espresso beans or coffee beans, but they sold out so you're going to have to wait. I'll be back in in just a week, so they're not ...

Anna: Happiness spiked. It didn't fit.

Dave: They were really popular. I ate a whole bag of them yesterday on an airplane and it was a very happy airplane. Let's just put it that way. We'll send you some as soon as they're back and just to say thanks for being on the show. I really appreciate you taking your time this evening, the first ever night recorded podcast, so you set a record. Have an awesome evening.

Anna: Thank you so much.

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