

**THE
HAPPY
CLOSET**



WELL-BEING
IS WELL-DRESSED

ANNMARIE O'CONNOR



THE HAPPY CLOSET

Well-Being is Well-Dressed

Annmarie O'Connor

Gill Books

To women everywhere. Find the space to be yourself.

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Annmarie O'Connor. I'm a fashion journalist and stylist by trade. I'm also a reformed hoarder by habit. That's why I've written this book.

For years, I lived with the ironic dilemma of having a wardrobe full of clothes and nothing to wear. Much like a magpie, my brain seemed wired towards amassing the shiny and showy, with little regard for how it fit into my lifestyle. Despite endless vows to downsize, I found myself waving at the shadow of a groundhog weighed down in turbans and kaftans screaming that he didn't have the right shoes (vermin can be real divas).

Dressing became a chore, not least due to the vast volume of clothing I had accumulated. Sure, my closet was colourful (so is an acid trip), but it lacked synergy and flow. The only thread keeping it all together was the question 'Why?', which, if tugged at even slightly, would cause a drag-queen pile-up of sequins, glitter and studs. So I kept a wide berth of that frayed emotional hem, donned my military epaulettes and soldiered on.

That's the thing about hoarding. It's by nature self-perpetuating and rarely results in a cull. In fact, any decluttering I attempted just served to reinforce the prospect of loss and

emotional vulnerability, which led me to procrastinate and over-rationalise why I ‘needed’ so much. Until I got real.

What started as a simple act of tidying soon exposed a full-length mirror of emotional triggers. Like any clearing exercise, things had to get messier before they got better. Not only did the process shed a harsh glare on the person I was pretending to be (hot-shot influencer), but the naked bulb hanging over my shopping habits wasn’t exactly flattering (shabby impostor). I was a classic impulse buyer and I had the receipts to prove it – lots of them. Once I got clear about my personal pitfalls (the need to impress, the desire to be accepted), I was better positioned to confront my inner hoarder and reframe the persistent patterns that were creating war within my wardrobe.

This epiphany did more than just declutter my closet; it inspired me to create a system to identify the emotional hang-ups and habits that underpin our closet happiness. This is what I’m here to share with you – the secret to achieving closet zen. By combining mindfulness exercises with awareness therapy, *The Happy Closet* aims to help release the unconscious inclinations behind the nine core closet types: Impulse Buyer, Secret Shopper, Doomsday Prepper, Tired & Emotional, Black Widow, Split Personality, Martyr Mom, Sale Sniper and Perfect 9. By figuring out which you are, you’ll discover how to overcome your personal trip-wires, reframe shopping patterns and, more important, dress the person you are – *today*.

Let's be clear: this isn't a run-of-the-mill wardrobe clear-out. It's about sifting beneath the layers of confusion and finding out what's really driving our collective primal impulses – that hunter-gatherer DNA that insists on colonising every square inch of space. It's only in understanding what makes us tick that we can evolve from collecting to curating. Let the inside match the outside and watch the magic happen. If you've ever wanted to have more with less, then it's time to discover how happy your closet can be.



CHAPTER ONE

OPENING THE DOORS

THE BIG REVEAL

'If you can't get rid of the skeleton in your closet, you'd best take it out and teach it to dance.'

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

How do you feel when you open your closet? More to the point, how does your closet feel? Buried beneath those forgettable fads, questionable trends and 'oh dear, what was I thinking?' is a pile of useless emotional baggage. Bet you didn't see it. Well, guess what? You're not alone. Your closet is more than just a collection of clothes. It's a deeply vulnerable space containing layers of old energy, which, when coupled with an evolutionary gathering instinct, can create chaos. And let's face it: a chaotic closet is not a happy closet.

That's where I come in. Call it a closet intervention, but I'm here to help you confront your inner hoarder and address the behaviours that have led to your not-so-uncommon case of sartorial overwhelm.

Granted, mindfulness and fashion aren't the most obvious twosome: one commits to the soul's urge while the other commits to a pair of Charlotte Olympia calf-hair wedges when the rent is due. That said, their paradoxical pairing can

help even the most seasoned stockpiler distinguish between keepsakes and keeping something for the sake of it.

Old attachments, a fear of change, regret and compulsion are the most common psychological blocks that keep us locked into repetitive routines, such as how we shop and why we hoard. In fact, our habits are so unconscious, they tend to happen without our permission.

You can blame it on the basal ganglia – a group of cells in the brain that dates back to our cave-people days. Responsible for forming and storing habits, these little fellas act much like a zip file in that they help our brain's hard drive function more efficiently. Once we've mastered a habit, be it walking or driving (or shopping), it becomes ingrained or 'automatic' so that our minds are free to focus on other more immediate concerns.

A bit of bad news: habits never disappear. Ever. What's more, the brain can't distinguish between a good and a bad one. In other words, your penchant for green tea and your love of designer T-shirts receive equal billing. Those basal ganglia are non-denominational, equal-opportunities employers, bless them.

All it takes is a trigger to access the habit from our memory – which explains why we drove to the shopping centre instead of our mother's after work last Thursday (late-night shopping, anyone?) and why even the sight of a shoe sale requires blinkers and/or heavy sedation.

Over time and with repetition, habits detonate with even the smallest persuasion and, in turn, disable our ability to make

careful and considered choices. Before you know it, you've fallen down the rabbit hole, taken advice from a caterpillar smoking a hookah and are experiencing one hell of an identity crisis. You can blame it on some questionable tea or you can get your butt out of wonderland before you totally lose your head.

Feeling a bit exposed? Of course. Closets are the seat of our deepest, darkest shopping secrets. By opening the doors, you are effectively revealing your biggest weaknesses and the state of your self-esteem at a given moment. Is everything folded, orderly, neat? Hidden in boxes with the tags still intact? Balled in a corner, mismanaged, badly in need of repair? Or are you operating more of a floordrobe-style operation – bags of swag strewn carelessly in a Lindsay Lohan-meets-Tracey Emin homage?

Before launching into ambush mode, it's time to get an insight into your closet personality – the hidden behaviour that got you here in the first place. Read on to find the nine closet types, each with their own traits to help you identify the common tics feeding your inner pack rat. It's only by identifying these hang-ups that we can successfully modify the pesky practices that have your closet in a pickle.

Grab a cup of tea, a comfy chair and prepare to get honest. Trust me, this is the easy part. Once you've admitted to going off the rails, that's when you can start cleaning up your act – one skeleton at a time. Bye-bye dread and indecision; hello thoughtful dresser. Prepare for some straight talking. Every

closet has a story to tell. It's time to discover what yours has to say about you.

THE NINE CLOSET TYPES

'There are women in my closet, hanging on the hangers
– a different woman for each suit, each dress, each pair of
shoes.'

MARYA HORNBACHER

Impulse Buyer

Impulse Buyer is an emotional creature. Socially driven and highly image-conscious, she is more inclined to resort to retail therapy than Facebook for a status update. Shopping is strictly a hedonistic pleasure: often spontaneous, never planned and with little regard for the consequences. That would explain Impulse Buyer's closet: a hot-bed of conflict where belligerent occupation by half-baked trends has supplanted time-honoured basics.

Much like a commercial radio station, Impulse Buyer has a set of clothes on heavy rotation, despite having a huge back catalogue. One of the most random things in her wardrobe is a pair of simple black trousers that look desperately out of place among the studded shoulder pads and sequin hotpants, not to

mention that fringed Day-Glo leather jacket which she once spotted on Cher at Caesar's Palace. Cue buying frenzy ...

Her recurring online shopping habit, which she blames squarely on a combination of wine and Wi-Fi, doesn't help matters much. But those crystal-embellished Christian Louboutin ballet flats might actually survive more than two wears, thus validating her €745 splurge ... *she hopes*. Aspiring to a look modelled by a 16-year old Brazilian waif has its own set of issues – especially when she discovers (not so shockingly) that a bandage dress looks a tad different wedged over a pair of 36DD boobs. And yet she hoards, convinced one day her curves might comply.

From time to time, she'll open the wardrobe and panic that her motley clothing crew might make a break for freedom and smother her during the night. But this does little to dissuade the Impulse Buyer, who keeps a mental lock on the closet door until buyer's remorse becomes too much and a massive cull ensues. With that, everything that isn't nailed down or zipped onto her body is dumped into black bags. Of course, all this does is make space for new clothes to collect.

Secret Shopper

Secret Shopper doesn't believe in sharing. Like an MI6 agent, the Secret Shopper intelligence operation is purely clandestine. She doesn't like witnesses, especially when it comes to how much she spends. Shopping is done alone and with separate credit

cards, online parcels are sent to a PO box and all references to newly acquired purchases remain highly encrypted.

To avoid interception, Secret Shopper stashes that feather-trimmed leotard in a labyrinth closet so stealthily arranged it risks never being found. When she does remember to retrieve it (if she can find it), her back-story is legit. No one can argue with the fact that she bought it ages ago – especially not her husband. That's how she likes it.

There really is no need for him to know how much she shops. Come to think of it, *she* doesn't even know how much she shops! Some would consider that a bad thing, but she likes to think ignorance is bliss. There is a reason she keeps everything under wraps, of course. A lot of her clothes haven't even been worn and people just can't understand why she continues to buy when she already has so much.

So her stashing technique serves her well – except the last time Secret Shopper took a good look at her closet, it was like seeing things for the first time. She does cringe at having forgotten about that Carmen Miranda dress with the life-size pineapple appliqués, but that doesn't change the fact that she still intends wearing it ... one day. Should her cover be blown (along with her budget), she keeps those swing tags intact and receipts at the ready for a swift emergency exit. Hey, it's all part of the job.