

# DESIGN THINKING IN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PRODUCT-SERVICE COMBINATION THAT STIMULATES HAPPINESS-ENHANCING ACTIVITIES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an exploration of how knowledge drawn from the positive psychology domain can be used to design products and services that contribute to the happiness of the users. Two distinctions are proposed to structure initiatives in well-being driven design: activity- versus product-focus, and promise- versus problem-focus. A design case is reported in which a product-service system was created with the main function to stimulate people to actively increase their levels of happiness. Finally, an appeal is made for a further exploration of how design thinking can contribute to positive psychology; to investigate how creating products that deliberately stimulate people's subjective well-being can be a means for both validating and substantiating the current contributions of the positive psychology movement.

**Keywords:** happiness, positive psychology, persuasive technology, design case.

### INTRODUCTION

The last decade, the 'positive psychology' movement, the scientific study of optimal human functioning (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006), has produced a wealth of knowledge on both the manifestations and determinants of human happiness (see, Diener, 1999; Sheldon et al., 2011). Positive psychologists have shown that people are not necessarily 'born' happy or unhappy, but can successfully adopt strategies that increase their happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2007). In our view, this knowledge is of great value for conceptualizing consumption products with the intention to improve wellbeing. Positive psychologists, however, seem to be generally unconvinced that

consumer products can be a source of profound happiness (see Lyubomirsky, 2007). The belief that products do not make us happy and, in fact, more readily decrease than increase happiness is voiced not only in the domain of positive psychology, but also in the design domain itself. Morelli (2007), for example, explains that the traditional market-driven approach to product design typically results in products that are disabling rather than enabling people. Tasks that, in the past, we could handle by ourselves or within our social and family networks (our informal economy) are now performed by something (a product) or someone else (a service). For each problem, a solution is offered for a price, thus relieving the consumer from any physical work or responsibility. Manzini (2005) stated that this disables people because it deprives them of the capacity to solve problems in the future. Or, in the words of Morelli (2007, p. 6): "What customers now save in physical effort or time will be paid in the future in terms of lost knowledge and skills." As a disturbing consequence, people will need more and more services and products to find solutions they could easily find by themselves (Sen, 1999).

Results of studies that investigated the effects of material wealth on general well-being, provide additional fuel for this critical stance. Easterling (1995), for example, reported that although material wealth has doubled in the USA since the 1950's, the average happiness has remained at the same level. Moreover, design is often seen as an instrument of consumerism that stimulates a materialistic attitude. And materialism has, indeed, been shown to be a strong predictor of unhappiness: people with high materialistic aspirations are less happy than those with low materialistic aspirations (even if they are able to fulfil these aspirations, see Nickerson et al., 2003).

While acknowledging that consumer products do not necessarily contribute to (or sometimes even threaten) user happiness, we want to underscore that they also represent an important opportunity. In fact, the design discipline is now rapidly developing into a possibility-driven discipline that aligns with many of the values shared by positive psychologists. The aim of this paper is to provide some support for the proposition that product design and the design discipline can play a more substantial and constructive role than is sometimes assumed. We first propose a classification of four categories of ‘design for happiness’ activities to structure current developments and initiatives. Various examples of designs that actively and wilfully support human flourishing are provided. Next, the project ‘Tinytask’ is presented as an example of how theory developed in positive psychology can be used to design a happiness-increasing product-service system. In the discussion section we highlight some potential challenges and merits of happiness-driven design activities. With this paper we hope to inspire future cross-disciplinary initiatives of designers and psychologists – opening new opportunities for enabling, supporting, and inspiring individuals and communities in their pursuit of happiness.

## DESIGN FOR HAPPINESS

Design does not necessarily contribute to well-being of users. As was described above, market-driven design thinking can even lead to products that produce the opposite. However, waiving design as a mere disabling discipline does injustice to the enormous potential this discipline has for promoting well-being. As Victor Papanek (1985) already stressed in his famous book ‘design for the real world’, design has the ability transform conditions to create wellbeing, it can embody the principles of good citizenship, and it can challenge, engage, and nourish culture and identity. The last few years, we have observed a growing group of designers in both practice and academia who is inspired by the possibility to increase the subjective well-being of individuals and communities. A prominent example is articulated in a vision document that was formulated in 2007 by a group of designers and design researchers (Boddington et al., 2008, p. 92): “In a fragile, complex,

world, designers must envision and realize the routes to wellbeing – wellbeing in which people's basic needs are assured and individual and collective aspirations are realized through a process of forethought called design. Design can transform particular conditions in order to create wellbeing – wellbeing that is contingent upon a healthy, harmonious and equitable world. Design is a potent tool through which to achieve this goal.” This vision voices the idea that the concept of well-being should serve as a fundamental principle in animating design efforts in the contemporary world. Boldly phrased as it is, it does highlight a growing need for an optimistic perspective on the responsibility of the design discipline: just as much as design can pull people down, it can lift them up, inspiring them to pursue their aspirations and enabling them in the process. Various design approaches have been proposed that align with this optimistic view, of which some are more explicit in their aim to contribute to happiness than others. To provide some structure, we propose two distinctions that combine to four basic approaches to design for happiness, see Table 1.

	ACTIVITY FOCUS
PROMISE focus	Products (or services / technology) that inspire and enable people to engage in activities that stimulate happiness. Example: Piet’s vegetable book
PROBLEM focus	Products (services / technology) that inspire and enable people to engage in activities that reduce causes of unhappiness. Example: Radio Contact
	PRODUCT FOCUS
PROMISE focus	Products (or services / technology) that stimulate happiness by creating pleasurable experiences. Example: Happiness tree
PROBLEM focus	Products (or services / technology) that stimulate happiness by reducing causes of unpleasant experiences. Example: Children’s’ wheelchair

Table 1. Four approaches to design for happiness.

The first distinction is between promise and problem focus, and the second distinction is between activity and product focus. Below the four approaches are

described, and each is illustrated with a design example.

### **PROMISE VERSUS PROBLEM FOCUS**

Design can promote happiness by either taking away sources of unhappiness or by introducing sources of happiness. A clear example of a design that was made to take away a source of unhappiness is 'Radio-Contact' (Van Schie, 2009; Figure 1). This product-service system was designed to increase the happiness of patients who are homebound because of chronic illnesses.

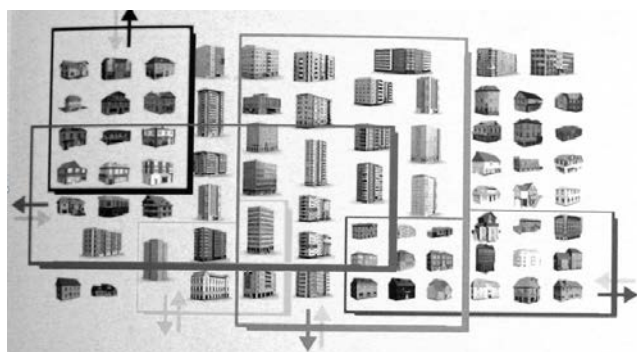


Figure 1. Radio-Contact; well-being enhancing radio service for homebound patients (adapted from Van Schie, 2009).

The Radio-Contact designer found that a key source of unhappiness for this user group was their sense of not being able to contribute to their community. Radio contact was created to broadcast communal projects to which these people could contribute within their homes. By broadcasting both project opportunities and requests, and project results, the users felt part of the community and regained a sense of contribution. As a result, their general happiness level increased. Inclusive design and usability-driven design generally focus on this approach: sources of displeasure, discomfort, pain or stress are identified, and products are designed or redesigned to take away these sources of unhappiness.

Although this is an important strategy to design for happiness, Desmet and Hassenzahl (2012) proposed a second approach that is equally relevant: one that is possibility- rather than problem-driven. Possibility-driven (or promise-focused) design focuses on a desired future state without framing this future in terms of a solved problem, and thus not starting from an obstacle in the current state. An example of design case that focused on a promise is 'Piet's vegetable book,' as described in Desmet (2011). This product

(Figure 2) was designed to enable and inspire the user (Piet) to share his knowledge on how to grow and prepare vegetables with the people living in his neighbourhood. The book is placed in the communal garden and each page represents a particular vegetable, and Piet can insert small notes with tips on how to grow and cook the vegetable, stimulating also his neighbours to add notes.



Figure 2. Piet and his vegetable-book, to stimulate happiness-enhancing activities (adapted from Desmet, 2011).

Although this product does not solve a problem, it does create a possibility for happiness by supporting the user in being an active and meaningful member of his community.

### **PRODUCT VERSUS ACTIVITY FOCUS**

The second distinction is between product- versus activity-focused design. Veenhoven (2011, p. 399), defined happiness as "the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her own life-as-a-whole favourably." In other words, happiness is an enduring life appreciation, representing the extent to which one is satisfied with the life one leads. It thereby excludes the short-lived moments that are considered to be moments of happiness in everyday dialogue, like the delight in a cup of tea at breakfast, the satisfaction of a chore done, or the enjoyment of a piece of art. This signifies an important difference between design for experience (or emotion) and design for happiness: design for experience generally

focuses on short-term experiences, whereas design for happiness focuses on long-term life appreciation.

Desmet (2011) proposed that design for long-term well-being requires a shift in focus from product experience to meaningful activities. His approach is based on four ingredients of meaningful activities: activities that have a high impact on our happiness are those that require and enable us to (1) use and develop personal skills and talents, (2) are rooted in core values, (3) contribute to someone or something, and (4) are rewarding and enjoyable in themselves. In this approach, designers first conceptualize activities that include these four ingredients, and then design technology or products that inspire and enable users to engage in these activities. Piet's vegetable book is a product that was based on this approach. The aim of this product is not to be pleasurable in itself (or create pleasurable interactions), but to stimulate the user to engage in happiness-enhancing activities.

Note however, that this does not mean that experience-driven design cannot also contribute to one's happiness. Veenhoven (2011) stresses that although momentary enjoyments are not the same as happiness, they can contribute one's happiness. Hence, products that provide pleasure or enjoyment, such as games, music, and other entertainment products, can enhance happiness. An example of a product that has been designed with this approach is the happiness tree, a tree-like interactive installation that is placed in open office spaces (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Happiness tree, an installation that provides brief moments of revitalizing tension relief.

The tree-like installation stimulates users to stretch for a brief moment, creating a playful illusion of a refreshing walk in the park. Since (using products) can be an important source of displeasure, a possibility for

increasing happiness is redesigning products to be more pleasurable. The wheelchair for children, designed by Eva Dijkhuis (see Desmet & Dijkhuis, 2003), was based on an extensive analysis the emotional impact of conventional wheelchairs. Negative emotions served as cues on how these conventional designs threatened happiness. One of the findings was that children experience contempt in response to wheelchairs with big handles: these big handles conflicted with their value of 'being independent' (i.e. having big push-handles expresses dependency). The new design (Figure 4) was created to eliminate the main causes of unpleasant usage experiences. The children can freely slide the handle behind the back side when using the wheelchair individually. By not being recognisable, the handle no longer expresses dependency, removing this source of unhappiness.



Figure 4. Wheelchair for children (from Desmet & Dijkhuis, 2003).

## TINYTASK DESIGN CASE

When using the activity- and promise- focused approach, the designer is challenged by the fact that different people require different meaningful activities. The 'ingredients of meaningful activities' are highly context and person dependent: the vegetable book was tailor-made for Piet, and will not necessarily make anyone else happy. An interesting question is if this approach can also be used to design products that appeals to a broader user group. In this section we describe a design case in which we aimed to design a



product that stimulates happiness-increasing activities for people in general. The design, which was created by the second author in 2011, was based on (1) happiness enhancing strategies and (2) persuasive technology theory:

### **(1) HAPPINESS-ACTIVITIES**

Lyubomirsky and her colleagues (2005, 2007) found evidence that the key to happiness lies not in changing circumstances (i.e., seeking wealth or attractiveness or better colleagues) but in changing our daily intentional activities: in order to become happier, we must adapt our daily actions that are under our voluntary control. Building on this evidence, Lyubomirsky (2007) introduced a set of twelve happiness-increasing strategies that specifically aims to stimulate people to adapt their behaviour.

Examples are 'cultivating optimism,' 'nurturing relationships,' 'taking care of your body,' and 'practicing acts of kindness.' It is possible to conceive products and services that support people in following each of these strategies. An example is the activity-monitor marketed by Philips, a product-service combination that stimulates and supports people in having a healthy life style ('taking care of your body'). Another example is a 'gratitude journal' (popularised by Oprah Winfrey) that stimulates the users to increase their life appreciation ('cultivating optimism'). The current aim, however, was not to support one particular strategy, but to design a product that stimulates users to adopt all of these strategies in their daily routines.

### **(2) PERSUADING BEHAVIORAL CHANGE**

Because the happiness strategies of Lyubomirsky revolve around changing one's intentional activities, the main design challenge was to create technology that inspires and enables people to change their behaviour. Although all design influences behaviour, developing technology that wilfully stimulates behavioural changes has been shown to be particularly difficult (see Tromp et al., 2011). In the domain of persuasive technology, Fogg (2009) described three conditions for successfully stimulating behavioural changes: motivation, ability, and well-timed triggers. First of all, the users must be receptive to the intended behavioural change; they should be motivated (i.e. it will be difficult if not impossible to

design a product that stimulates people to stop smoking if they are not *motivated* to do so). Second, the users should have the ability to change their behaviour (i.e. technology that motivates people to adopt a healthy lifestyle will only work if people know *how* to do so). Third, they should be triggered to change their behaviour. Self-help books may motivate people and offer practical tips to enable people to adopt these strategies, but once the book is read, it does not trigger behaviour anymore. The design aim was therefore to: (a) motivate people to change behaviour by offering direct rewards in the form of pleasure and a sense of achievement, (b) enable people by simplifying general and abstract strategies to smaller (tiny) and comprehensible tasks, and (c) create direct and concrete triggers to stimulate the desired behaviour.

### **TINYTASK CONCEPT**

The project resulted in 'Tinytask,' a product-service system that is basically an extensive set of key chain coins, which are gradually distributed to the users. An impression of the Tinytask product-service is shown in Figure 5. When signing up for the service, the user receives an envelope with six key chain coins. Each coin represents a small assignment. They have inscriptions that give a hint on what the assignments are about, such as: 'early bird' or 'improvise your meal'. The back of the coin has a marker. With this marker, the user can read the full assignment on his or her profile page on the Tinytask website. The user selects one coin to commit to, and attaches it to his or her key chain. It should stay there until the assignment has been completed. Once completed, the user can confirm this on the website, and make notes in his or her personal diary. When five out of six assignments are completed, the user will automatically receive a new set of coins. For a more detailed explanation and an extended visual scenario, see <http://designinghappiness.wordpress.com>. A short explanatory movie can be found on: <http://www.vimeo.com/35682922>.

Tinytask users receive several small assignments that persuade them to do new things in daily life, and thereby develop an attitude of active experimentation and reflective observation. The key chain coins trigger active experimentation and reflective observation,

either by reminding users of their commitment, or by instigating a conversation about Tinytask with other people.



Figure 5. Tinytask scenario: first the user receives an envelope with a set of key chain coins. She selects one task (in this case: take a moment to find some seclusion in a natural environment), and checks on her profile page what the task is. She attaches the selected coin to her key chain and is reminded about the task. Once she has fulfilled the task, she can make a note (if she wants) on her profile page, remove the coin from her key chain, and add a new one.

The Tinytask assignments are small, concrete and original, ensuring a high level of ability. Upon deciding to commit to an assignment, the user attaches the related coin to his or her key ring, acting as a reminder to his or her commitment. The assignments are designed to be fun, and the act of selecting a coin,

attaching it to the keychain, and removing it once the task has been done is enjoyable and implicitly rewarding, increasing the motivation of users to exercise the behaviour. Moreover, the system of sending new small batches of coins at a time also increases motivation because receiving a new envelope is like a small and exciting gift.

Every assignment is a tiny execution of a happiness strategy, brought down to a very concrete and low threshold activity. The twelve strategies of Lyubomirsky (2007) were adapted, using the validated interventions from her experimental studies, and downscaling them to fit in people’s daily lives. Some examples of tasks can be found in Table 2.

Strategy	Tinytask
Expressing gratitude	Is there a company whom you think delivers a good service? Write them a thank you letter to display your gratitude.
Cultivating optimism	Write a poem about your favourite animal, dish, or holiday destination.
Taking care of your body	Try to do all your traveling by bike for a week.
Savouring life's joys	For lunch, take your time in composing the ultimate sandwich that is both healthy and tasty.
Practicing acts of kindness	Pay five people you encounter today a genuine compliment.

Table 2. Tinytask examples

CONCEPT EVALUATION

The Tinytask concept was evaluated to test if it inspires and persuades the desired behavioural changes, and to identify opportunities for improving the design. Fifteen participants, aged between 21 and 60 (six women; nine men), were recruited through social networks. Most participants did not know (or communicate with) each other during the study. Nine were students, four were working in various professions, and two were retired. Each participant was given a three-week subscription to Tinytask. An envelope with six coins was sent to them. When five

of six tasks were done, a second envelop with coins was posted. Respondents had access to a personal profile page on [www.tinytask.nl](http://www.tinytask.nl), where they could add and confirm assignments. They were allowed to complete assignments in their own preferred order and pace. Their online activities were monitored during the study, tracking confirmed task completions and counting the amount of completed tasks. After completing the three-week usage period, participants provided feedback in individual interviews with the first author of this manuscript. They discussed how they experienced various aspects of the procedure, how they behaved, and the perceived effects of the procedure on their wellbeing. Discussed aspects were: receiving and using the key coins, committing to, remembering, confirming and performing the assignments, and the general procedure of the task.

## RESULTS

Below the results of the interviews are reported; some illustrative participant quotes are added.

### ASSIGNMENTS

Participants completed 77 assignments over the course of three weeks, varying between 4 and 8 completed assignments per person. On average, 1.7 assignments were completed each week. In the feedback interview, all participants reported having experienced no difficulties in incorporating the assignments in their daily routines. However, not all provided tasks were done. The less challenging tasks (e.g. get your hands dirty; time out; flowers for you) were done by all participants, whereas the more challenging tasks were not done by everyone (e.g. early bird; work for charity). Participants expressed some differences in how they had committed to assignments. Some selected one specific assignment on which they focussed all their attention, whereas others were more flexible: although carrying one coin they also kept an eye open for opportunities to complete assignments of the other coins they kept at home.

*"I selected one coin, and from that point onwards did not concern myself with others in the letter."*

*"I carried all of them with me so that I could choose."*

*"I carried two coins with me at the same time, so I could see which opportunity arises first."*

### THE COINS

All participants mentioned that the tangible aspect of the design, including receiving and opening the envelope with the coins and using these coins, created experiences of surprise and enjoyment that motivated them to commit to the assignments. The coins were described as friendly, fresh, fun, playful, clear, challenging, and having a strong appearance. Participants mentioned that they appreciated receiving the physical key coins through the mail: receiving a chunky envelope was experienced as exciting; some respondents mentioned it felt like a receiving a gift.

*"Receiving a thick envelope, that doesn't happen very often."*

Fourteen participants mentioned that using the coins was a helpful reminder for the assignments.

*"You are triggered when you see the keychain."*

*"It's your own key ring, but every time it is different, because of the changing colours: a good reminder."*

Eleven participants had attached the coin to their key chain (as was intended), and the other three carried the coin with them in another way (e.g. in their wallet, attached to their laptop). An interesting finding was that six respondents mentioned that people approached them when spotting the coin and asked questions about it.

*"Others approached me: 'What are those round things?'. Somebody who I ran into later on even asked me whether I had completed my assignment already."*

Fourteen respondents enjoyed talking about the Tinytask with other people. However, not all respondents wanted to share their personal experiences of engaging in the tasks; some appreciated the notion of an individual quest and would like to keep their profile to themselves.

*"It is begging to be shared. It is a positive conversation starter right away. A positive vibe that you want to share."*  
*"I explained the principle to other people, but not exactly what it did for me. I became sceptical about the possibility of Tinytask to make me happier."*

After finalizing an assignment, some participants held on to the coin as a reminder, while others passed it on hoping to give someone else an interesting experience. Some participants mentioned that they

were not sure what to do with the coins after completing the task.

*"I've left 'time out' on my key ring, as a reminder, and as an incentive for me to take a time out more often."*

*"I would like to use them again."*

*"I put them in an envelope and sent it to my mom."*

*"I gave them away because I liked them."*

## ONLINE PERSONAL PROFILE PAGE

Eleven participants added the assignments to their profile page right after having received the coins.

*"The inscription on the key chain made me curious. After receiving the envelope I went to the website to find out what the assignments were."*

Participants typically confirmed assignments on the day of completion. The majority mentioned that they would confirm assignments directly after completion because that generated a pleasing sense of accomplishment. Note that most participants mentioned that they would have liked the possibility to comment on the website about their achieved tasks, or to have some insights in the experiences of other people.

*"I always went straight to the website after completing an assignment. A kind of mission accomplished. I also went there for the overview."*

*"Things you want to get off your chest. Write about the experience. It would be fun if that were possible."*

*"To be able to see what other people are doing, a kind of feed. But only the cryptic assignment description, just to feed my curiosity."*

## EFFECT ON HAPPINESS

Eight participants claimed to have experienced an increase in their level of happiness as a result of using Tinytask; five people claimed that Tinytask had altered their perspective on everyday experiences by pushing their limits. Participants generally agreed that Tinytask had generated 'happy moments' - small moments of positive experiences that brightened up their day. About half of the participant group mentioned that they felt that these happy moments were of fleeting nature, whereas the other half of the group mentioned that they felt that these moments contributed to their general level of happiness.

*"I think it has made me happier. Little new things make your day more fun. You can brighten up boring days. Although just a little bit, in total, you become happier."*

*"Happiness is a big word, but it made me feel good."*

*"It is the contemplative attitude that made it enjoyable."*

*"You are confronted with your habits. It makes you think."*

*"Sometimes the assignments were trivial, but because you approach them with a certain attitude, they turn into something different."*

Note that also some negative experiences were reported. For example, participants could feel guilty about not completing an assignment, disappointed about not experiencing an effect when completing an assignment, or frustrated when they felt they did not have the resources (e.g. time) to complete an assignment. Some assignments also had the risk of generating negative side effects. For example, one participant realised that she hardly had contact with her family when one of the assignments required her to involve a family member.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The evaluation study indicated that Tinytask is potentially successful in inspiring and persuading people to commit to happiness strategies. Using the tangible coins generated a presence that triggered participants into doing the assignments. By not emphasizing that Tinytask would or should make people happier, participants were not pushed into a quest to find happiness, but were able to enjoy the assignments, occasionally stumbling on a moment of happiness as an intended side-effect instead. These behavioural results were all positive in the sense that they were intentionally designed to happen. In addition, the study has revealed some interesting ways of use that were unforeseen, and add to the complexity of the user experience. Some people preferred to share their achievements, others preferred a more private/personal experience. Some appreciated by the concreteness of the assignments, and made it their goal to stick to the description as much as possible. Others interpreted the assignments much more freely. For some people, completing the total set of tasks gave a lot of satisfaction. Others focused much more on stretching the experience of one particular task they liked. Some people held on to the key chains after using them, and started a



collection. Others have them away to friends and family as a recommendation. Because some were not sure what to do with the coins after completing the assignments, some examples can be provided to inspire Tinytask users. Another possibility for improving the concept is to develop a procedure to test assignments. Some were not done by the participants because they found them to be too challenging, and some did not generate the intended positive effect (or created unwanted side-effects). These observations will be used to refine Tinytask in future design iterations.

The Tinytask project explored possibilities of transforming insights of positive psychology into tangible designs. As a next step in the development, we are now running an experimental study to assess the added value of using the coins to giving people a list of small tasks. Note that other similar initiatives have been reported. An example is Boom Boom Cards (Scott, 2009), a product that stimulates altruistic behaviour (not unlike the strategy “Practicing Acts of Kindness” by Lyubomirsky, 2007). Users buy a pack of Boom Boom Cards and can ‘play’ the assignment on every card to set off a chain of altruistic events. The product provides the cards as a physical trigger, very concrete assignments, and an uplifting tone of voice. Another example was Akoha (Eberts, 2008), a mobile application (available until 2011) that linked offline activities to an online game. Akoha let people share experience positive emotions by completing ‘missions’ and sharing their stories with other people. Akoha worked by providing rewards for completed missions, by providing users with concrete and original missions, and by creating a low threshold for sharing stories.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

In 1999, Sheldon, Fredrickson, Rathunde, Csikszentmihalyi, and Haidt published a ‘Positive Psychology Manifesto’, in which they defined positive psychology, and explained its objectives, applications, and implementation goals. In the last part of the document, the authors discussed their vision of what the optimal conditions are for the flourishing of positive psychology. One of their advices is to produce “useful and inspiring products, such as articles, books, and effective interventions” (Sheldon

et al., 1999, p. 1) In relation to this, they explicitly promote to spread positive psychological principles and perspectives to a broad audience. Indeed, the potential audience of positive psychology is broad: it represents a body of knowledge that is relevant for all people. All communities and individuals deserve to flourish and thrive. But how can the positive psychology movement reach that broad audience? People who do not suffer from ill health, adversities, or disorder, will generally not invest time, money and effort in working with coaches or therapists. Perhaps in response to this, many of the most influential positive psychologist have written books that aim to reach a broad audience. But even these books do not reach all people – they are mostly attractive to those who love to read (Wilson & Cash, 2000). Moreover, it is not clear if these books are effective. In a review paper, Bergsma (2007) concluded that although there is some evidence that reading problem-focused self-help books are helpful for people with specific problems, there is currently no evidence for the effectiveness of reading growth-oriented books. In this paper we aimed to demonstrate that articles, books and interventions are not the only ‘products’ that can be used to reach a broad audience. There is an additional type of promising products: consumer products. Products form the context of our daily lives. Products affect us; they inspire us, frustrate, delight, and annoy us. They can demobilize or inhibit us, but also uplift and enable us. In this paper we propose that products (and the design discipline that creates them) represent an untapped potential for bringing positive psychology to the everyday lives of many people. In the words of Margolin (2007, p. 4): “As creators of models, prototypes, and propositions, designers occupy a dialectical space between the world that is and the world that could be. Informed by the past and the present, their activity is oriented towards the future. They operate in situations that call for interventions, and they have the unique ability to turn these interventions into material and immaterial forms. Granted that others usually define the conditions of their work, designers still create the artifacts that are put to use in the social world.” Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p.5) purport that the social and behavioural sciences can play an enormously important role: “They can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while

being understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals and to thriving communities.” We propose that in line with this thought, the design discipline can play an equally important role by materializing the vision of the good life, enabling and stimulating actions that lead to well-being and thriving communities.

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