

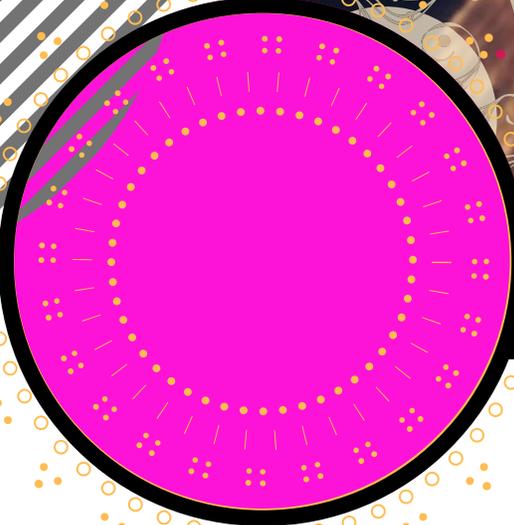
PsychoSocial

When
FASHION
&
MENTAL HEALTH
Collide!



Exclusive
Photoshoot

INTERVIEW WITH - *LaTianna*



"MEET LATIANNA, A THERAPIST & AVANT-GARDE FASHIONISTA"

➔ Strike a Pose



When LaTianna isn't in a Therapy session, she's out looking for the perfect pose!

➔ Day Fashion



LaTianna finds inspiration in nature for her fashion ideas.

"My sadness turns into joy as soon as I give myself permission to express myself with the performing arts. From my life experiences, I became a firm believer in creative art outlets for all. I provide others space for that as a Dramatic Art Therapist, and now I want to reveal more of my artistry in performance and fashion."

- LaTianna

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WHEN THERAPY MEETS HIGH FASHION!

By Luis Cornejo, LMFT & Founder of *PsychoSocial*

"*Fashion is a lifestyle*", these words could not ring more true for the fashion icons of yesteryear and today. But, when it comes to fashion, many of us don't particularly associate it with mental health. Yet, it doesn't seem farfetched that dressing up can make us feel good and increase our mood. This is because when we feel good about ourselves it boosts our self-esteem. Having a strong sense of self has many benefits such as increased mood, confidence, and motivation to name a few.

Fashion isn't only about what we wear, it's also about creativity and freedom of expression. Our outfits can say a lot about our mood, beliefs, and personality. But don't take my word for it. I reached out to LaTianna, a practicing Creative Arts Therapist in Los Angeles who uses fashion and other creative outlets to help heal her clients. LaTianna describes her work in the following way, "I merge creativity, fashion and mental health together to help others flip their life script, one outfit at a time."

THE INTERVIEW!

1. Tell us about the role fashion has played in your personal life.

Fashion made me realize how I used to hide from the world. It all started with my hair. I was always teased for my hair when I was growing up, and I was even called a boy a few times in elementary school. My thing back in the 90's was wearing my hair like Aaliyah and blocking my face with those long bangs. I also kept my hair in front of my face as that was the thing with emo rock bands. I thought it was cool at the time. Looking back now I can see there was a deeper meaning into how I saw myself. Truth is I did not really like myself and it showed by how I put no intention or thought into what I was wearing. I would wear things that did not fit my body type, and I tried to blend in with everyone. I valued others' opinion over mine and dressed accordingly. I did not take any fashion risks and I would question everything I did and wore by asking: "Will this outfit help me avoid being teased?" It took over a decade to change my view of fashion. I grew to have an appreciation for it. I allow fashion to be my personal tool to demonstrate my personality to the world. It was almost like taking a stance on how I want to operate in the world: full of confidence, fun, sass, and self-acceptance. Fashion is my self-love weapon.



2. Who are your fashion faves, roles models, and/or inspiration?

Well, my role model is definitely Kelis, the fashion icon! She was the first person who really told me about body confidence through the use of fashion styles. I worked for her back in 2012 as a nanny, traveling to a few countries. At first, I did not realize how big of a fashion icon she was until I searched her name on the internet, and I saw how others interacted with her and followed her trends. I became in awe to have a Black role model that took on so many creative ventures: music, culinary arts, and fashion. She talked to me about my hair and how I use it to hide. She hated it! Lol, I was like dang I got called out... for the better though. I got a free personal makeover from her. When my friends saw me, they were like "Okay fashionista, I see you." From there I bloomed.

From seeing the freedom and fun Kelis had with fashion, I got inspired in the same manner. I try to find beauty and fashion in everything I see. It may be something as simple as the colors on a leaf that can spark a memory or a thought that will turn into a production or editorial photoshoot.

I am also inspired to be a rebel... a good one at least! I don't want to follow the fashion rules of society. If I like it... I'll wear it! It doesn't matter if it was 'so last year.' Style is how you want to communicate the article of clothing you possess. My fashion faves are definitely thrift shop finds, express, Lola's, my mother's and my grandmother's closet. DSW shoes are my obsession. I'll leave with 3-4 pairs every time I go shopping there!

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INTERVIEW

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3. Do you have a favorite color and what does it represent for you?

Hands down purple!! PURPLE= ROYALTY. I have a thing for crowns ever since I began living in my castle style apartment complex. My name also means princess (Tianna). Royalty is in my blood.

4. What is your process when selecting pieces of clothing to add to your collection?

This is a hard one to answer! Lol! Hm, I think the way something is shaped or the way the color hits my skin tone influences my clothing choices. My favorite fabric styles are ruffles and lace. My second process will be to base an outfit solely on what heels I want to wear (no pun intended).

5. How would you describe your style?

My style is modern Victorian, feminine, and bold. I'll definitely wear other things, but it always goes back to these three things. My obsession with lace and ruffles will never end! I work and play in a variety of working environments, and they all require a different wardrobe. I try to add a touch of "pizzazz" to each outfit. Like I said earlier, I wear crowns and tiaras and people ask me if it's my birthday. I wear it whether or not it's my birthday. One of my friends once told me, "Only you can get away with that."

6. What is your most memorable outfit (describe it) and why?

My most memorable outfit was a gold lace mesh dress with metallic appliques designed by Camille La Vie. It's my most memorable as it was my first couture piece. For one thing, it is the most expensive outfit I own. I love the mermaid-styled fit and it had dark gray ruffles and fluff at the bottom. It also has pearls and some bling on it. I love the contrast because I would never think to mix dark grey and gold together.

7. What led you to become a therapist?

I kind of fell into it. In high school, I got college credits in psych, so I figured it was for me. I never strayed from it since. Now I incorporate improvisational theatre, theatre games, and other creative art activities as a form of therapy to add to my interest in psychology.



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8. How do you use fashion in with your clients?

Well, I currently use it a lot with my improv. group and with my psych patients. We create fashion shows and do a lot of character building. They are able to design a character together and have specific details, from the way they dress to the way they speak. They love to create and bring these characters to life.

I notice a fashion change in my clients as they make progress in their counseling sessions. Sometimes their clothing changes and they begin to take fashion risks. One of my clients started with a disheveled appearance and progressed to clothes that are tidier. They even tried a new bold hair color. Seeing the smile on their face was everything!



9. How do you believe fashion plays a role in our mood and self-esteem?

I believe fashion plays a huge role in our mood not only because I've experienced this firsthand, but also because I see it in my clients. Non-verbal communication speaks volumes, and styling yourself demands a presence that needs to be honored.

I can recall back in 8th grade a boy called me ugly on picture day. I thought I looked cute, but that really got me angry and brought my mood low. People judge us on how we look, and sometimes they will speak with the intention to hurt our feelings. This fear of being judged can really affect your worth if you don't work through your need to be accepted by everyone or to please everyone.

Our fashion should not play into our mood, but it happens. If there are days in which I do not want to talk or processes some things, I will show it by the way I style my hair. One time I changed my hairstyle 5 times within a month! People were wondering what's going on with me!? LOL. But this can go the other way as I used to get upset if my hair was not cooperating. If I thought my hair looked terrible, I would have a terrible day and it was hard to get out of that kind of funk. It used to control my emotions. Who would have thought fashion can be a mood changer? My self-esteem is pretty healthy now as I am able to appreciate myself when I take the time to dress up. I love the way my outfits can make me feel, and it helps me come to life. It has to do with your mindset, and not necessarily changing up your fashion to build your self-esteem.

My clients tend to have a strong emotional tie to their appearance and fashion style. They have self-esteem issues and

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INTERVIEW CONTINUED...

tend to have a lot of anger and sadness living in long term care. We have a beauty group at my job and their mood shifts to joy and excitement as soon as the staff paint their nails or put lipstick on them. A few of them even get creative and take risks with their looks. I remember once a client asked for a beauty mark above their lip so they could look like Marilyn Monroe. This is one way fashion could influence your mental well-being.

Sometimes clients can get upset after beauty group. They choose to take off their makeup and mess up their hair. All that work that went into the pampering is now gone. It's sad to see sometimes, but I enjoy that they are still finding ways to express themselves. It provides choice and choice is freedom.



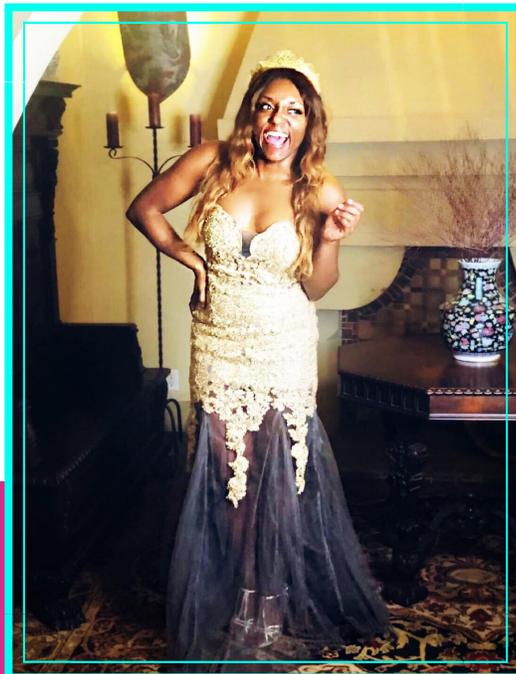
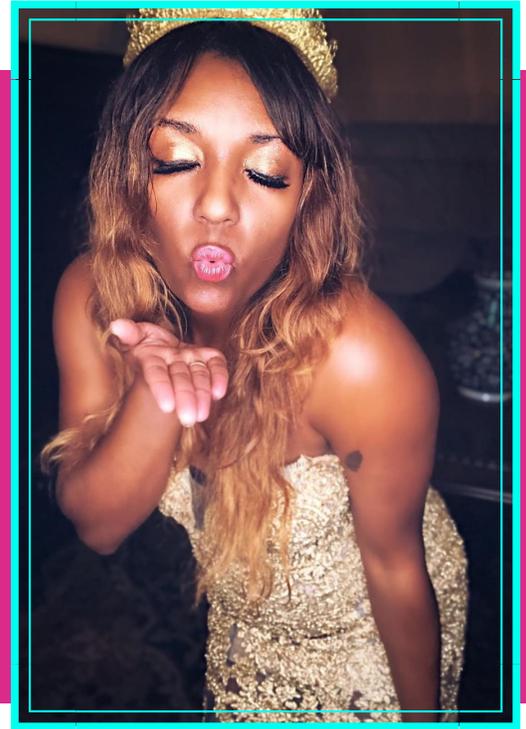
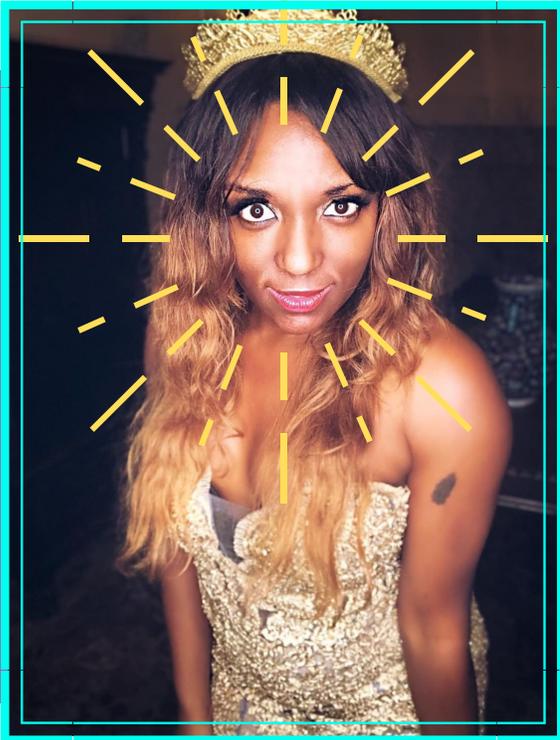
10. The fashion world has lost some huge names to suicide like Alexander McQueen and Kate Spade, both of whom dealt with mental illness. There are also other designers like Yves Saint Laurent who was addicted to substances. What are your thoughts about the pressure and expectations put on designers in the fashion industry?

You know, I wish I can answer this question with more certainty. I do have which may or not be right is that the fashion industry thrives off of designer's creativity and they demand it no matter the psychological cost it can bring to someone. I read about Laurent's drug use and how it increased due to the pressures of needing to release two fashion lines a year. Designers are forced to seek out new ideas so we as consumers can buy to our own heart's desire. Designers produce a lot of jobs, and they rely on them to come through. I do believe we all play a role in this pressure. In becoming consumers we also become the greatest critics. Designers are the participators and we are the spectators. We always want to see the new thing, the new trend, and the new style of fashion. I truly feel for designers, because a lot of hopes, dreams, and profit depends on their ability to create, and creativity cannot always flourish in a structural time frame. A connection is the most important thing out of all of this because we are not our jobs, that should never be our identity. When you become famous, you automatically become a participator. You get the remarks, appreciation, and criticisms from consumers, fans, the industry, I mean pretty much the world.

Looking at Kate's life, she left the industry to pursue other things, and she focused her attention on raising her child. She was trying to live her life in a more meaningful way and appeared to have a desire to shift from the identity the industry gave her. In research, we can heal from connection and relationships, but if we stay busy in work we may forget the importance of this and shift into emotional and relational consequences. No one is exempt from mental illness, it doesn't matter if you are rich and famous. As humans we all go through challenges and struggle from time to time.

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PsychoSocial PhotoShoot



- *LaTianna*

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11. Creative people are often associated with mental illness. What are your thoughts on this?

Funny you say this, I was just thinking about it the other day. My actress friend had a post on social media about the mental struggles of being an artist. We have seen so many creative people in the world, and celebrities who are in the spotlight struggle. We often attribute creative people as being associated within mental illness because it's all out in the open for us to see their suffering. Whereas a lot of us are quiet about it. Media is very influential and shapes our attitudes. Robin Williams, Kanye West, Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Monroe... I mean there are so many people in the entertainment/fashion industry who talk about their struggles with mental illness or who show symptoms.

I believe we all have the ability to be creative, and some of us are unfortunately genetically and circumstantially vulnerable to some form of mental illness. There are some of us that may be afraid of vulnerability and this keeps us from sharing our creativity and mental suffering. I love Viola Spolin, the founder and creator of American improvisational theatre. One of my favorite quotes from her is this:

"Everyone can act. Everyone can improvise. Anyone who wishes to can play in the theater and learn to become 'stage-worthy.' We learn through experience and experiencing, and no one teaches anyone anything. This is as true for the infant moving from kicking and crawling to walking as it is for the scientist with his equations. If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach. 'Talent' or 'lack of talent' has little to do with it."

We either keep our creativity silent, or we speak up and act on it. For me, I don't want to associate creative people with mental illness. I've come to find it can happen to anyone, and that there is unlimited potential in us for creativity. We can all tap into it and you don't have to be celebrity status to get there.

My career has been focused on creating space for individuals with mental illness to engage in their creative sense of self. My clients feel they are more of who they truly are when they are given non-judgmental space to play and perform. We ought to do the same and use creativity as a way to become more of who we are.

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12. Fashion is obviously very personal and it varies from person to person. Do you agree? And how does this belief help others who may feel they can't be fashionable?

Oh yes, it really does! There are two mindsets: "I'm going to wear whatever I want because it's for me" or "I need to wear this because this is what's expected of me." It's important to review your life script (the unconscious mindset we grew up with that was observed from those around us) and realize how it plays out in your life. This provides an opportunity to make changes in how you see yourself and your personal fashion. We all have our own story to tell and our own chapter of fashion to create.



13. Representation is important, there is no doubt about that. Do you believe the fashion industry is inclusive? Why or why not?

It seems to be changing, but sometimes change takes time. For the longest time, it has been very exclusive. You needed to be a certain height, weight, color, etc. It is so specific! Talk about the pressure to fit in that box! Our eyes are a sacred and a special gift that picks up messages rapidly. We would be doing the next generation a disservice if we do not widen the representation shown in the fashion industry and the media itself. We are so culturally diverse, and everyone deserves to feel included. It makes me think about the physical ability privilege we often neglect. I have yet to see a large magazine cover with someone with physical barriers, such as being wheelchair bound. And if there ever was, it might only be from a 'bucket list' perspective where things are done simply to make people feel represented in media for a moment. Then back to the usual business. What does that say about them? Subliminal messages can lead to many thoughts that are positive or negative. The lack of representation for individuals of different physical appearances could lead people to feel 'less than.' From a personal standpoint, I felt the 'less than' syndrome growing up. Many magazine covers I saw growing up had a lot of black women with lighter skin. If they were darker, they would be found in the smaller publication of Jet magazine which was usually found at the bottom of the magazine shelf. Currently, I see all shades of individuals on magazine covers, and I am hoping to see this manifest more- especially with my Asian and Latinx brothers and sisters.

I understand that not everyone can represent one fashion brand, but let's not monopolize. Let's get other brands out there, and have them open that door for those who feel underrepresented. I know designers and brands should be able to have that freedom to make inclusive decisions, but damned if you do damned if you don't. I see it from both sides, but I'm siding for the those who do not feel represented. Which reminds me about bridal magazines. I have yet to see any person of color

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or ability being decorated on those covers. Maybe it happens once in a blue moon. Anyway, that's a whole other topic. I truly hope things open up for people with various sizes and physical abilities to rock the runway and to have their designs inside the pages of mega magazines.

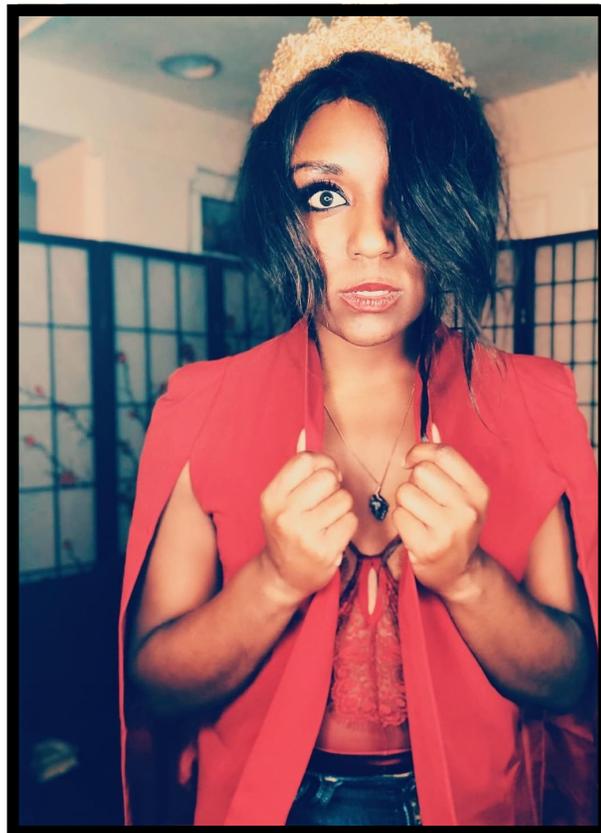
14. As a creative person, how do you cope when you get in a creative funk?

The funny thing is, when I'm in a funk, I create. But if I'm stuck, I just let go of the project and accept it for what it is at that moment. Setting it aside helps me calm down. Sometimes the timing is off when you are working on something, I like to reconnect with my family and other relationships to help me deal with my frustrations I need to remind myself that creativity is always there, but tomorrow is never promised. My last coping skill is my gym life. I do kickboxing, dance, weight lifting, the works!

15. Can you share a bit about your process when creating and has there been something that you worked hard on, but didn't work out in the end?

My brain thinks a mile a minute. I can be leading a group and all of a sudden I have an idea for next week's drama class or a photoshoot idea. When I am in a state of mindfulness in the present moment, my ideas come through. I use the world around me to create. My issue is that I'll forget ideas because I don't write them down all the time.

One thing that has not worked out for me was directing the Vagina Monologues last year. I wanted to direct this production as an effort to raise awareness about domestic violence and human trafficking. I was finishing up graduate school and I was unable to start the project. I had ideas with the costume design, who would speak about domestic violence, and I was about to put money down for the venue, but the timing was off and I needed to finish my intern hours as well. I was really bummed out.



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INTERVIEW

Finalé

16. What are you looking forward to in 2019?

It's a secret lol! Naw, okay I am thinking of doing some type of event that will involve what I would like to call 'the new wave of healthcare' I truly believe in the creative arts, and I want to make a theatrical event that will encompass a variety of individuals who are creating new ways of delivering healing to communities.

Editor's Note: We want to thank LaTianna for taking time off her busy schedule to chat with us about her passion and dedication to healing. If you would like to learn more, get in contact with her, or follow her on social media, you can do so at...



Her website www.latianna.com or Instagram [@latiannas.world](https://www.instagram.com/latiannas.world)

"Don't be into trends. Don't make fashion own you, but you decide what you are, what you want to express by the way you dress and the way to live." —Gianni Versace

