

## Pathfinder

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According to the latest public health report from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), an estimated 17.3 million adults in the United States (NIMH, 2017), representing 7.1% of all U.S. adults, have had at least one major depressive episode. This number has increased by 6% since 2016. Although universities are traditionally considered low stress environments, in recent years, a large number of academics are impacted by mental health issues like depression and anxiety (Levecque, et al., 2017; Shanafelt et al., 2009). A growing line of research has examined mental health problems in graduate students (Levecque et al, 2017; Mousavi, et al, 2018). One report from UC Berkeley (2014) found that 47% of Ph.D. students were clinically classified as depressed (University of California, Berkeley, 2018). A survey from Emory University (2014) found that 7.3% of graduate students had thoughts of suicide and 2.3% reported having plans for suicide. Noble's (2015) study indicated that women (21.3%) are approximately twice as likely as men (12.7%) to be diagnosed with depression.

Art interventions are being introduced into self-management in depression (Boehm, Cramer, Staroszynski, & Ostermann, 2014; McCann, 2013), with art forms including music, visual art, and dance (Schneider, 2018). In 2000, Reynolds explored the role of the textile arts for self-care in depression. The study stated that textile arts allow women to cope with depression in order to express their illnesses, while concurrently experiencing joy and confidence (Reynolds, 2000).

Considering the upward trend in depression exists in graduate students, as an apparel designer and recovering depressive female scholar, the designer explored and experimented with how textile and apparel design could serve as a method for therapy depression and how she could demonstrate the aesthetic of fine art through textile and apparel design to create an interesting and complex visual form of wearable art. Thus, the purposes of creating this piece of wearable art were to: (a) explore the role of textile and apparel design for self-management in depression, and (b) combine digital textile printing and surface manipulations to create a piece of wearable art by experimenting with the concept and colors of Barnett Newman's work.

Aesthetic inspiration for this design project stemmed from the works of Barnett Newman, an American abstract expressionism artist (Cernuschi, 2012). *Onement I* (1948) is considered the artistic breakthrough of Newman's work (Newman & Shiff, 2002), representing the first time Barnett applied a vertical band to define the spatial structure of his work (Newman & Shiff, 2002; MoMA, 2006). After Newman created *Onement I*, he destroyed all of his previous work and created a new series that applied vertical bands. When the designer saw and learned the story of *Onement I* by Barnett Newman, she felt the painting spoke to her heart. Newman applied a large amount of dark red-brown tone to the background and placed an unevenly painted straight yellow-orange line in the center (see *Figure 1*). This dark red-brown background illustrated the entangled and depressive



*Figure 1.* Onement I, Barnett Newman

heart of the designer of the current project; the unevenly painted straight yellow-orange line seems an outlet during the depressive circumstance, which resembled the only remaining hope for the designer. The designer wanted to find a way to rise from the depression, so therefore created this piece of wearable artwork and named it as *Pathfinder*.

The designer wanted to create a comparison effect of her intrinsic feeling regarding self-struggling and self-striving during the depressive circumstance by the inspiring artwork Newman. As such, the designer used a color scheme similar to Newman's work to create the prints for digital textile printing. Emphasis, unity, and texture were used as the design principles in *Pathfinder*. To reflect the feeling of comparison in *Pathfinder*, different volumes and colors of 100% polyester yarn, beading, paillette sequins, and velvet shimmer fabrics were utilized. The designer stitched various volumes of yarn on the garments to form an unbalanced asymmetrical surface. Also, the massive yarns on the top front met the considerable volume of the lantern sleeves of the current project to create a comparison effect. To make sure the variety of colors, fibers, and fabrics combined seamlessly, the designer stitched and sewed analogous colors and similar textures of yarns, beads, and sequins together (e.g., red-yellow, dark purple, dark brown, and black yarns; yellow, orange, and red beadings and paillette sequins). The design elements included dots, lines, and shapes. Various yarns shaped several uneven lines on the garment to reflect the uneven line in Barnett Newman's work *Onement I*. To achieve the goal of creating the uneven line using fibers, the designer hand-stitched beadings, embroideries, and paillette sequins around the edge of the yarn. Various beadings and paillette sequins also symbolically represented the feeling of the designer's intrinsic depression and anxiety.

During the whole design process, the designer completed the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) each week to record her mental health status. For the prototype design process, *Pathfinder* was initiated using draping and flat patternmaking techniques. After the designer examined the accuracy of the paper patterns, the final paper pattern pieces were digitized into a Modaris system and converted into DXF files to be opened in Adobe Illustrator to achieve the engineer print (see *Figure 2*). Before sewing each piece together to form the ensemble, the designer embellished the garments using hand stitching, embroidery, hand beading, and paillette sequin techniques. During the design process, the designer experienced a sense of physical relaxation and the feeling of self-capability all vital factors for coping with depression and anxiety (Boehm, Cramer, Staroszynski, & Ostermann, 2014; Sin & DiMatteo, 2014). Depression and anxiety scores on the PHQ-9 captured by the designer during the design process showed a gradual downward trend, reflecting a positive impact on the design process in this textile project.



*Figure 2.* Digitized top front and lantern sleeve pattern pieces with engineer print

This design project contributed a new way of approaching depression therapy by introducing the potential positive impact of creative design with textile fabrics. The method of using textile and apparel design as mental therapy may inspire other scholars' study of depression treatments and encourage those individuals with depression to practice self-management using textile arts. Moreover, *Pathfinder* demonstrated one means for combining digital textile print with surface manipulations to create a wearable art inspired by fine art.

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Image A: Front View



Image B: Side View



Image C: Back View

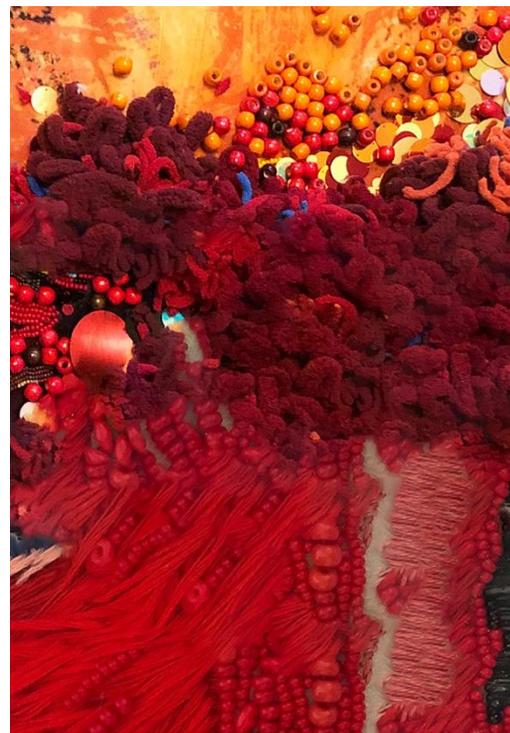


Image D: Details View