

Creative Fashion Design Inspired by Depression

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ABSTRACT

This creative research aims to explore the synthesis of psychological states and fashion through the collection "Creative Fashion Design Inspired by Depression." The objectives are to investigate the visual language of depressive symptoms and to translate these emotional complexities into wearable art. The research methodology employs a qualitative approach, integrating data collection from psychological literature and visual semiotics with experimental design processes, including fabric manipulation and silhouette construction. The findings reveal that the integration of somber color palettes, deconstructed textures, and restrictive forms effectively communicates the internal struggle of the human mind, creating a profound narrative through garment design. The study concludes that fashion serves as a potent medium for social commentary and psychological expression, recommending further exploration into the therapeutic potential of avant-garde design in contemporary art contexts.

Keywords: Fashion Design, Depression, Creative Expression, Textile Manipulation, Mental Health Awareness

Introduction

Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health issues worldwide, with a rising global incidence. According to the World Health Organization (2023), more than 280 million people are affected by depression. This condition significantly influences thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and daily life, reflecting an internal state filled with exhaustion, worthlessness, and hopelessness (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; Mayo Clinic, 2023). In today's competitive and pressure-filled society, many individuals experience emotional isolation and accumulated stress, making art and design essential tools for expressing and healing inner emotions (van der Kolk, 2014).

In the realm of contemporary fashion, the idea that "fashion is the language of emotion and culture" has gained increasing recognition (Entwistle, 2015; Barnard, 2014). Fashion is not merely an adornment for the body but a medium that reflects identity and psychological states (Davis, 2013). Particularly within Artistic Fashion and Creative Wear, fashion design has become a platform for conceptual experimentation, where materials, structures, and emotional techniques—such as stitching, patching, or manipulating fabric textures—serve as expressions of human feeling (Jirousek, 2019; Shinkle, 2012). This approach is rooted in Expressionism, an art movement emphasizing the transmission of authentic emotions through form and color, as seen in *The Scream* (1893) by Edvard Munch, which employs distorted lines and intense hues to portray fear, loneliness, and emotional instability (Black, 2021).

At the same time, structural tailoring and deconstruction in fashion design have been utilized to convey notions of “imperfection” and “inner pressure.” Japanese designers such as Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto have used these methods to challenge conventional beauty standards (Kawakubo, 2019; Yamamoto, 2015). Exposed seams, asymmetric cuts, and frayed fabric edges become tangible representations of psychological fragility (Fletcher, 2016). Traditional Japanese repair techniques such as Sashiko and Boro, originally used for mending textiles in everyday life, have been reinterpreted as metaphors for emotional restoration and healing (Guillen, 2021; Chen & Liu, 2020).

In this study, the researcher applies the concept of Deconstruction Tailoring to express the “structure of the mind,” which is filled with pressure, imbalance, and the effort of self-reconstruction. Color palettes based on Color Psychology—including blue, gray, red, and pale green—are used to depict emotional contrasts between sadness, fear, and hope (Lee & Chen, 2021; Nanda, 2020). The resulting fashion pieces not only illustrate the emotional dimension of depression but also embody the healing power of creativity (Payne, 2019).

Based on the study of world-class designers' works mentioned above, the researcher identified a research gap: there is limited academic focus on integrating emotional healing—through psychology and art therapy—as a core principle in the fashion design process. Consequently, this creative research becomes a “space for emotional interpretation and psychological restoration,” connecting creators and audience through the artistic language of structure, color, and texture grounded in a conscious design process.

Research objectives

This creative research titled “Creative Fashion Design Inspired by Depression” aims to explore how fashion can serve as a medium for expressing the emotional experience of depression and to develop a design process that leads to psychological healing through experimental and contemporary aesthetic approaches. The main objectives are as follows:

1. To study the interpretative process of transforming the concept of “depression” into both abstract and tangible forms of fashion creation by integrating perspectives from art, psychology, and contemporary fashion.
2. To design creative fashion works employing Deconstruction Tailoring and Color Psychology as mechanisms to express emotional fragility, imperfection, and healing.
3. To present insights from experimental artistic fashion design that reflect the dimension of Fashion as Emotional Healing, which can be further developed as a framework for contemporary fashion design in the context of mental well-being.

Research Methodology

This creative research aims to (1) explore depression through emotional and aesthetic perspectives, (2) develop a fashion design approach integrating Deconstruction Tailoring and Color Psychology as a means of emotional expression, and (3) establish new knowledge under the concept of “Fashion as Emotional Healing.” The research process consists of four main stages, each aligned with the study objectives, as follows:

Step 1: Related Studies and Emotional Analysis

The researcher conducted a comprehensive study of literature, academic research, and theoretical frameworks related to depression, emotional art (Expressionism), Deconstruction, and Color Psychology to understand the mechanisms of emotion that can be transformed into fashion symbols.

This stage also involved analyzing examples of contemporary fashion works that reflect psychological vulnerability, such as the designs of Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, and Ann Demeulemeester.

Step 2: Concept and Design Development

Based on the theoretical findings, the researcher developed a conceptual direction for fashion design using Deconstruction Tailoring and Color Psychology within the framework of Fashion for Emotional Healing.

Three primary emotional phases were identified — Sadness, Acceptance, and Recovery — which were expressed through contrasting design elements such as muted and vivid color palettes, loose and structured silhouettes, and rough and smooth textures.

This stage also included sketch development and material selection based on the emotional effects of color psychology.

Step 3: Prototype Creation

The creative production phase involved designing and constructing six prototype fashion pieces representing the emotional spectrum of depression and healing. The designs utilized Deconstruction Tailoring techniques combined with Japanese Sashiko and Boro stitching methods to symbolize traces of “repair” as a metaphor for emotional recovery.

Color pairings such as blue–red and gray–light green was employed to convey emotional contrasts between sorrow and hope.

Each prototype was tested through wearability and sensory evaluation to assess the effectiveness of emotional communication through form, texture, and color.

Step 4: Summarizing Experimental Findings

In this stage, findings from the creative experimentation were synthesized to analyze and reflect on the overall creative process. The goal was to conceptualize how fashion could function as a medium of emotional healing. This stage involved three sub-processes:

4.1. Expert Evaluation and Consultation:

The prototypes were presented to academic advisors and experts in fashion and creative arts for assessment and selection of the designs most effectively communicating the concept of Fashion for Emotional Healing.

4.2 Reflection on the Creative Design Process:

The researcher critically analyzed each design stage — such as using deconstruction techniques to represent mental imperfection, exposing seams to signify healing traces, and applying color contrasts to express emotional transitions from sadness to hope.

4.3 Synthesis of Experimental Data:

The final synthesis led to the establishment of a conceptual model of Fashion for Emotional Healing, illustrating the interrelationship between Emotion → Structure → Color → Healing.

Findings

The findings of this creative research titled “Creative Fashion Design Inspired by Depression” are summarized according to the four main stages of the research process, as follows:

1. Related Studies and Emotional Analysis

From the review and analysis of related literature, it was found that depression represents a complex and highly variable emotional condition composed of three primary elements: sadness, isolation, and hope for emotional recovery. These components reflect the dynamic nature of emotion that can be powerfully conveyed through art and fashion design. Based on these insights, the researcher applied three conceptual foundations: Expressionism — to communicate feelings and emotional intensity; Deconstruction — to reflect mental imperfection and fragmentation; and Color Psychology — to employ color as an emotional language, symbolizing internal conflict through contrasts such as muted versus vivid tones or gray paired with red. An example of the conceptual summary for Expressionism is illustrated in Figure 1. An example of these color palettes and Interpretation of Depression Symptoms into Fashion Design Elements are presented in Figure 2.

Analysis of the fashion works of Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, and Ann Demeulemeester revealed that techniques such as garment deconstruction, visible seams, and asymmetrical forms effectively express the notion of “Imperfect Beauty.” This aesthetic approach aligns with the concept of acceptance and emotional healing of human vulnerability, which forms the theoretical foundation of Fashion for Emotional Healing proposed in this research.



Figure 1. Concept of Expressionism
Source: The Authors (2025), adapted from Expressionism theories

Symptom	Characteristics	Form	Color	Detail	Material
Hopelessness	Lacking hope for the future, feeling trapped or having nothing to look forward to.	Straight silhouette		Uneven proportions, imbalance	Wrinkled fabric, denim
Lack of Confidence	Seeing oneself as inferior, unable to express oneself, constantly comparing with others.	Smaller than normal, body curves inward or larger in some areas		Uneven stitching, asymmetrical sleeves, imperfectly sewn cuffs	Cotton twill
Self-Harm	Using objects to harm oneself intentionally.	Sharp, angular, layered form		Metal straps, bindings wrapping arms/legs, reconstructed parts	Faux leather, metal
Aggression	Easily irritated, loud voice, lack of emotional control.	Tense, unstructured, shapeless		Twisted cords and tangled lines	Faux leather
Fatigue / Weakness	Lack of energy, frequent tiredness, abnormal sleep.	Elongated or drooping shape		Wrinkles and folds giving a sagging, tired appearance	Cotton fabric
Instability	Lack of focus, restlessness, emotional fluctuation	Scattered, irregular shape		Patchwork pockets, irregular color blocks, uneven layering	Cotton, faux leather

Figure 2. Interpretation of Depression Symptoms into Fashion Design Elements
Source: Researcher (2025) *The Authors (2025)*.

2. Concept and Design Development

The researcher developed the design direction of the collection under the conceptual framework of “Fashion for Emotional Healing.” The emotional journey of individuals experiencing depression was categorized into three progressive stages, each translated into distinct fashion design characteristics as follows:

2.1 Sadness:

Expressed through loose and draped garment structures that convey a sense of weakness, emptiness, and emotional fatigue. The use of gray–blue tones symbolize melancholy and internal stillness.

2.2 Acceptance:

Represented through Deconstruction techniques such as cutting, reconstructing, and exposing seams to reveal the beauty of imperfection — a metaphor for self-acceptance and emotional resilience.

2.3 Recovery:

Illustrated through light green and silver hues combined with more structured silhouettes, symbolizing the renewed strength of healing and the emergence of hope.

During the design and sketch development stage, contrasting color palettes—between muted and vivid tones—and textural oppositions—between rough and smooth surfaces—were intentionally employed to create emotional tension and visual depth. These contrasts effectively represent the psychological complexity and inner conflict experienced by individuals with depression. An example of the conceptual sketches is presented in Figure 3.

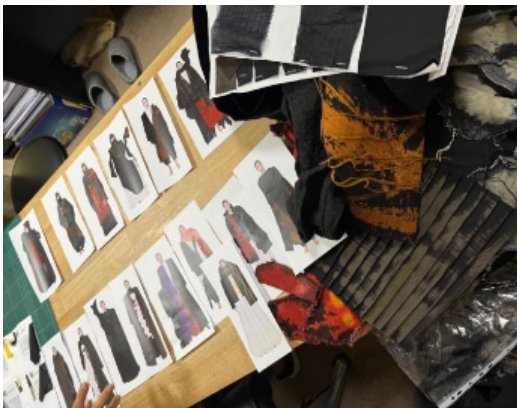


Figure 3. Development of Design Sketches

Source: The Authors’ illustration (2025).

3. Prototype Creation

The researcher created six prototype fashion outfits using the process of Deconstruction Tailoring, combining techniques of traditional Japanese craftsmanship — Sashiko and Boro — to form visible traces of “repair,” symbolizing the human process of emotional healing.

Different types and weights of textiles were carefully selected — such as combining heavy and lightweight fabrics — to establish a tactile and symbolic balance between strength and fragility. The movement of the garments themselves communicates emotional states: for instance, looseness evokes feelings of emptiness, while visible stitching represents acceptance of inner scars and vulnerability.

Through these design decisions, the prototypes embody a “Fashion Experience of Depression,” where structure, texture, and motion collectively express the inner emotional landscape of the human mind. An example of the prototype collection is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Prototype Outfits
Source: The Authors (2025)

4. Summarizing Experimental Findings

The experimental results from the creation of six prototype fashion works led to the development of conceptual insights that can be extended as new knowledge in creative fashion design, offering a concrete explanation of the process of “Fashion for Emotional Healing.” The key findings are summarized as follows:

4.1 Structural Interpretation

The application of Deconstruction techniques transformed the garments into a form of emotional language that reflects the psychological state of the human mind. Through asymmetrical structures, exposed seams, and layered stitching, the clothing embodies the human endeavor to accept wounds and restore oneself.

These visible and tactile elements function as metaphors for vulnerability, recovery, and resilience, allowing fashion to communicate beyond aesthetics toward emotional depth and psychological meaning. An example of this structural interpretation is illustrated in Figure 5.

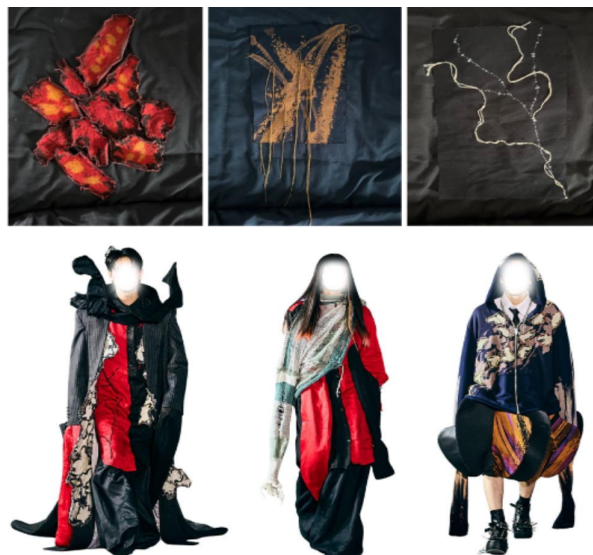


Figure 5. Example of Experimental Results: Techniques and Details
Source: The Authors (2025).

4.2 Detailing and Textile Surface

The experimental results revealed that stitching, patchworking, and fabric painting techniques contribute significantly to bringing life and emotion to the surface of the garments. The “traces of the hand” left by these manual processes—through layered stitches and brush-applied pigments—serve as symbols of healing and restoration, representing the act of giving new value to what was once fragile or broken.

These tangible marks and tactile textures evoke a sense of intimacy and authenticity, transforming fashion pieces into expressive artifacts of emotional recovery. The process demonstrates that craft-based detailing can become a visual and emotional language of healing, bridging human touch, memory, and aesthetic experience.

An example of this detailing and surface experimentation is illustrated in Figure 6.

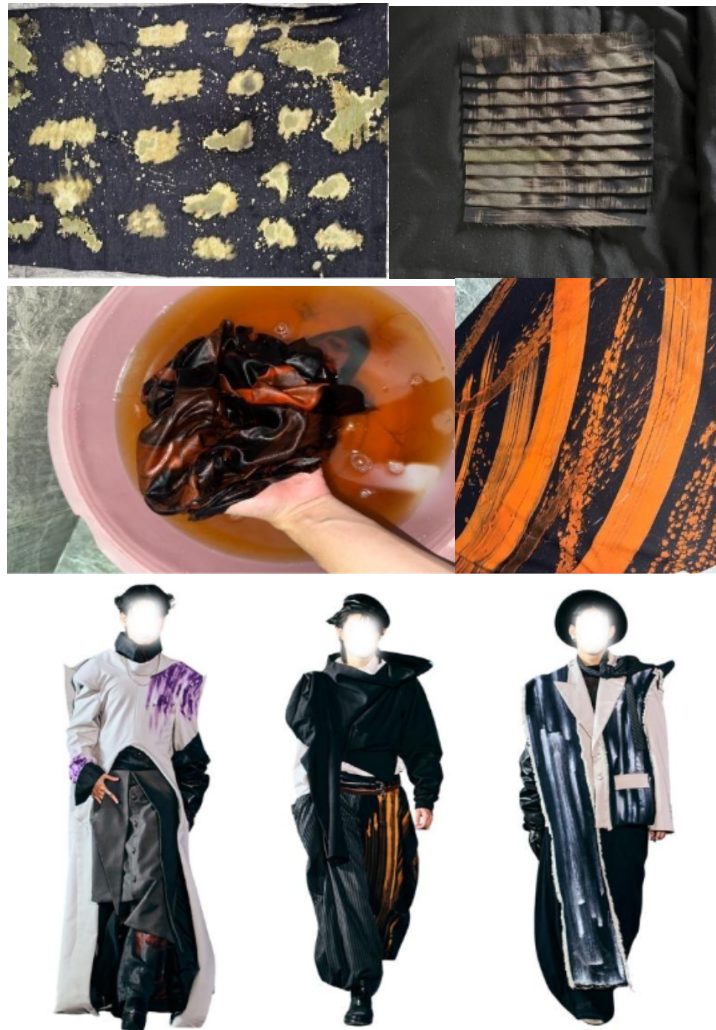


Figure 6. Example of Experimental Results: Stitching and Surface Details
Source: The Authors (2025).

4.3 Color Psychology in Fashion

The experimentation with contrasting color combinations—such as gray blue (sadness and calmness), red orange (pain and renewal), and silver–green (healing and hope)—proved effective in communicating emotional transitions and establishing a balance between melancholy and optimism. Each pairing was intentionally chosen to represent the fluctuating states of the human psyche during depression and recovery.

These chromatic dialogues evoke not only aesthetic harmony but also psychological resonance, enabling the garments to function as emotional narratives that mirror the process of healing. An example of these color palettes is presented in Figure 6.

From the synthesis of these experimental results, a new conceptual insight emerges fashion can serve as an emotional medium that facilitates psychological healing through a systematic design process connecting

Emotion → Structure → Color → Healing.

This framework demonstrates how emotional expression, material construction, and color symbolism can interrelate to transform fashion from a visual art form into a therapeutic medium for emotional restoration.

Conclusions and Discussion

The creative research “Creative Fashion Design Inspired by Depression” aimed to explore depression in emotional and aesthetic dimensions, as well as to develop a fashion design approach that meaningfully expresses psychological states through structure and color. The essential findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Conceptual Insight

The study reveals that depression is not merely a negative emotional state but can serve as an artistic driving force leading to healing. Fashion design becomes an emotional medium through which individuals can understand and communicate their feelings using symbolic representations of structure and color.

2. Design Development

The integration of Deconstruction Tailoring and Color Psychology generated a design process that reflects “beauty in imperfection.” Through deconstructed forms, exposed seams, and contrasting color palettes—such as muted versus vivid or warm versus cool tones—the designs convey sadness, fragility, and hope with profound aesthetic expression.

3. Experimental Findings

The six prototype fashion pieces synthesized a conceptual framework demonstrating that fashion can serve as a medium of emotional healing through the aesthetic interplay of structure, texture, and color. This body of knowledge introduces a new perspective to the field of creative fashion design by establishing a systematic connection between art, psychology, and fashion.

The creative research titled “Creative Fashion Design Inspired by Depression” demonstrates that fashion can function as a language of emotion, capable of aesthetically expressing the depth and complexity of depressive states. The application of artistic concepts focused on emotional expression (Expressionism) enables garments in this collection to transcend their role as mere clothing and become emotional media that convey sadness, isolation, and hope through the use of expressive lines, asymmetric silhouettes, and fragmented structures (Barnard, 2020; Entwistle, 2021).

This design approach aligns with van der Kolk’s (2023) psychological perspective, which suggests that artistic expression allows individuals to perceive and heal emotional pain at a deeper level. Similarly, the incorporation of deconstructive methods—derived from Derrida’s (1967) theory and interpreted by Kawakubo (2019) and Yamamoto (2018)—introduces a new dimension in fashion where “the beauty of imperfection” emerges. Exposed seams, reconstructed patterns, and asymmetric forms become metaphors for the human process of healing and self-acceptance (Fletcher, 2020).

Furthermore, the application of Color Psychology enriches the emotional depth of fashion pieces. The use of contrasting color pairs, such as gray–red or blue–orange, effectively communicates emotional tension between sadness and hope (Lee & Chen, 2022; Nanda, 2020). Color thus operates as a bridge between the psyche and aesthetic experience, while textile textures and traditional techniques like Sashiko and Boro symbolize emotional repair and recovery.

Collectively, the six prototype designs illustrate that fashion can function as a process of healing—a holistic integration of art, psychology, and design (Black, 2022; Payne, 2019). The findings contribute new insights to contemporary fashion discourse, emphasizing that imperfection can be the foundation of true beauty, both in artistic expression and within the human spirit.

Recommendations

Integrating psychology and fashion through creative design into Healing Fashion Wearable Art serves the purpose of emotional healing, particularly within wellness activities. This integration aims to enhance the wearer's emotional quality of life and function as contemporary art centered on emotional experience. To enable researchers and educators in other disciplines to build upon these findings, the researcher has compiled the following applied recommendations:

1. *Health Recommendations* - Collaborate with community partners and networks to publicize knowledge. This involves engaging museums, wearable art galleries, mental rehabilitation centers, or schools to participate in creative showcases, practical workshops, and exhibitions. These initiatives should focus on improving the quality of life or emphasizing the value of user experience, establishing a foundation for future wellness fashion research and product development.

2. *Academic Recommendations* - Form partnerships with psychological experts, such as psychotherapists and social workers, to develop validated toolkits for measuring psychological healing outcomes. Additionally, analytical evaluation documents should be prepared to demonstrate the value, cost-effectiveness, and social impact of these designs.

3. *Social and Policy Recommendations* - Disseminate research findings for policy implementation by collaborating with communication scholars and community public health professionals. This includes advocating for art and health funding, supporting wellness fashion design projects, and establishing inclusive aesthetic standards that cater to all groups.

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