

LIFE THROUGH T-SHIRTS: REPURPOSING CLOTHING AS CANVAS FOR PROCESSING
ATTACHMENT AND CHANGE

by

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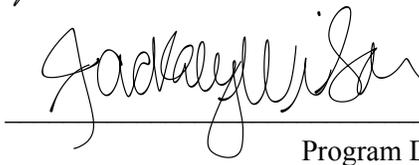
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Abstract

Humans are drawn to physical items due to lingering object attachment from childhood. Children will use transitional objects such as blankets to form secure attachments as they grow independent. Similarly, adults may have favorite jewelry or lucky pens. Through art-based research, this study explores attachment to T-shirts and the implementation of an art therapy intervention to promote narratives and processing of change. T-shirts of sentimental value were collected and transformed into canvases to be painted on. Narratives were stimulated through dialogues with the canvases and open-ended writing questionnaires before and after art-making. Results indicate the art therapy intervention was effective in stimulating written narratives and memory recall, increasing understanding of attachment, and processing change to move towards acceptance and growth.

Keywords: *Art therapy, T-shirts, attachment, canvas, transformation, narratives*

Chapter I: Introduction

Fabric has been used in art-making throughout history and across cultures. As with most other art forms, the use of textiles, such as embroidery and weaving, allows the maker to express narratives. This is especially true for women, as cloth and textiles are most often their chosen medium. Textile work has been seen in the villages of Guatemala, where clothes narrate the lives of the weaver, and in Palestine, where embroidered symbols can express both hope and dismay (Garlock, 2016). The use of fabric, especially that which is worn, is a universal form of self-expression. The clothing that an individual wears is an indicator of their identity in many ways: their interests, their cultural background, their career, and their socioeconomic status, among others. The way that individuals are perceived by others based on their appearance, particularly by how they dress, has been deemed of great importance in modern society. It is through clothing that people interact with the world and with others (Oberhagemann, 2023).

Just as Palestinians and Guatemalans have specific clothes that are unique to their cultures, a staple of modern American culture is the T-shirt. The T-shirt has roots in the military, where it originated as an undershirt for sailors in the Navy (Manan & Smith, 2014). Eventually, T-shirts became customizable, through different dyes, words, and images (Manan & Smith, 2014). As such, T-shirts became a medium through which individuals could express themselves. People may identify themselves through T-shirts that represent the bands they enjoy, vacations they have taken, or sports they play. T-shirts must also be considered within the context of both the wearer and the cultures at play, suggesting that even if a T-shirt has a message or image printed on it, new perceptions can still be applied to it each time it is worn and viewed by others (Manan & Smith, 2014). These applied meanings bring connections between the wearer and the T-shirt, creating an object-attachment. For an individual who places sentimental value on

T-shirts, they may have a difficult time parting with T-shirts that they have grown attached to. On the one hand, T-shirts act as a medium for expression. On the other hand, they act as a canvas to be projected onto.

Art therapy is a profession within the mental health field that integrates creative processes and art-making with psychological theories (American Art Therapy Association, 2024). In this way, psychotherapy can be offered in a new, enriching way to a multitude of individuals that may otherwise struggle with traditional talk therapy. Art therapists are trained to understand metaphors that are expressed through art which allow them to work with individuals who have experienced trauma, health crises, developmental disorders, and any other struggles (AATA, 2024). Art therapy is notably beneficial in relieving symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as allowing individuals to feel more in control of their lives (AATA, 2024). Art therapy can also be helpful in expressing narratives, especially those that may come to the surface during the art-making process that the individual was not previously aware of.

Textiles, as previously established, have a long history of use as a medium for expression of personal narratives. Fabric and clothing that individuals consider to be important or sentimental can be utilized as art therapy materials. Inspired by the Peace Paper Project, Meredith Lin McMackin studies the effects of papermaking using clothing of deceased loved ones. She found that the papermaking process reflects the grief process and allows for transformation and meaning-making while enabling individuals with an opportunity to honor their loved ones in a new, creative way (McMackin, 2023). Retaining the connection with the article of clothing while recognizing it as a new form of art proved to be significant in providing individuals with the opportunity to process their thoughts and emotions surrounding the death of their loved one and move towards acceptance.

Although not a death loss, there is grief that comes with parting with a beloved item such as a T-shirt. Therefore, this research will investigate the relationship between myself and my T-shirts, which I have struggled to part with. This research will be conducted through an extensive literature review and an art-based approach in which I will repurpose my T-shirts as canvases to explore the attachment and relationships I hold with them. Through this study, I will examine the effects of “Clothing as Canvas” as an art therapy intervention. More specifically, I will investigate its ability to uncover narratives and improve my ability to recognize the roots of my attachment, and express these through written narratives.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Clothing

Clothes and Identity

People are first introduced to one another through their physical appearance, which includes their clothing. The clothes that individuals choose to wear are often perceived as an indicator of their personality and who they are as a person. Socially, clothes are typically associated by groups, and thus norms are created. Within gender, young girls are expected to wear bright colors with glitter and ruffles, while boys wear simple designs and solid, darker colors (Oberhagemann, 2023). As they mature, women wear V-neck tops, blouses, and skirts while men wear darker, loose T-shirts (Oberhagemann, 2023). Socioeconomic status also affects attire; an individual who wears expensive brands may be treated better socially than someone who does not (Oberhagemann, 2023). Similarly, there can be bias towards various races and cultural backgrounds, such as black men being perceived as less competent when wearing casual attire when compared to a white man in the same clothes (Oberhagemann, 2023). It is evident that the clothing individuals wear impacts others' perceptions of them, especially when factoring in gender, race, and socioeconomic status.

Many people rebel against these social norms by dressing to represent their own identity. In the LGBTQIA+ community, clothing has become a signal of one's queerness and acts to unify the community (Oberhagemann, 2023). Some gay men will wear bright colors and tightly fitting clothes, while some lesbian women will wear button-down shirts and cut their hair short (Oberhagemann, 2023). By breaking these gender norms, queer individuals were able to take ownership of their identity through clothing in a new way (Oberhagemann, 2023). Alternatively,

conforming to social norms may be equally affirming for one's identity. Transgender individuals may find it validating to dress within the gender norms of their gender identity in order to "pass" (Oberhagemann, 2023). The LGBTQIA+ community has a history of expanding self-expression through clothing and has set an example of how to explore one's identity through the way an individual presents themselves. Although social norms regarding attire still stand, it is apparent that it has become easier to work through them to achieve individuality.

Clothing is often used by individuals as symbols to reflect their personal narrative, whether it is through indicating their gender expression, favorite sports team, or simply their style. Further, clothing becomes symbolic to an individual when it has a story behind it – that is, it can elicit a memory. Susan Schultz Kleine researched the relationship between individuals and their most cherished and least cherished articles of clothing, and the memories that they may or may not have attributed to them (2000). Kleine studied 28 participants between the ages of 20 and 28 years old, who completed a Q-sorting questionnaire about clothing they have found difficult to part with and why they have kept it. It was found that individuals would define themselves in one of two ways: through autonomy seeking or through affiliations with others (Kleine, 2000).

Participants who identified a most cherished item displayed three motivation factors of keeping the item: keeping memories of the self; connections of the present autonomous self; and fading memories of past affiliations (Kleine, 2000). Several participants in the first factor noted having worn it during special occasions; in the second factor, participants noted feeling and/or looking good in the clothing; in the third factor, participants noted connections to others, such as past girlfriends (Kleine, 2000). Participants who identified a least cherished item exhibited five motivation factors for keeping the item: ties to others; it being someone else's style; simply not

liking it; feeling uncomfortable, but it acts as a reminder of someone; and feeling that it used to be “me” (Kleine, 2000). Although picking what one would consider their least cherished item describes who someone is not, this information similarly affirms identity as describing who someone is. In both scenarios, participants identified themselves through their clothing and the affiliations said clothing has with the past, future, others, or the self.

Wearer-Clothing Relationship

Most individuals can identify their favorite article of clothing, whether it is a shirt, a pair of shoes, or a jacket. As we begin to identify ourselves by the clothing we wear, we become attached to said clothing and form bonds with them. Ana Neto and João Ferreira compared the bonds that people establish with their clothing to Gottman and Gottman’s Sound Relationship House Theory through open-ended surveys and discovered that individuals harbored an attachment to their favorite clothes akin to that of a romantic partner (2023). Participants in the survey wrote about the article of clothing that they have owned for the longest amount of time and still wear. Several participants identified caring for their clothing in specific ways and noted that this was important to keep the item in good condition (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). This was understood as the participants being willing to put in the effort to maintain their clothing just as they would to maintain a romantic relationship. This desire to put in effort is the foundation of a long-lasting relationship, both with another person and with items of clothing.

Participants in the survey indicated that they established a friendship with their clothing. First, many responses suggested that “love maps” were built, which for romantic partners include facts about them, likes and dislikes, fears, and goals; for clothing, however, this includes information about the item, such as how to care for and style it (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). Participants also indicated that they were able to build trust with their item, just as they would

with a partner, though consistent use of the item (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). Several participants noted that they used their items so often, that it had become a major part of their lives (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). In romantic relationships, with this established friendship and trust, individuals are often more inclined to resolve conflicts. The same was found to be true for individuals and their clothing. Participants who reported their item of clothing had been torn or stained noted that they continued to wear their item and would try to repair the item or remove the stain to the best of their ability (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). Romantic relationships who move through all these phases then continue to “the meaning system”; items of clothing that individuals have created a bond with goes through the same phase, and individuals will create meaning in relation to their clothing (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). Often, individuals will wear specific articles of clothing for special occasions and will associate good memories with what they wore during them, such as having their first kiss with their future husband, attending holiday parties, or studying (Neto & Ferreira, 2023). It is apparent that people often place significance on certain items of clothing, and they become attached to such items through an interpersonal relationship-like phenomenon.

T-Shirts

The ordinary T-shirt has had a long history prior to modern culture. It originated in the nineteenth century when it was designed for US Navy sailors to wear as an undershirt and was then used throughout the First and Second World Wars (Manan & Smith, 2014). By the 1980s, the T-shirt had become a mode of expression, with the shirt being cut, dyed, sewn, and inscribed with images and symbols with which wearers were able to utilize for self-identification (Manan & Smith, 2014). T-shirts eventually became a vessel through which people could communicate with one another. The article of clothing can be considered a *text*, by which it contains the military history, fashion, popular culture, and politics of its time, as well as a *techne*, in which it

is an art form (Manan & Smith, 2014). The T-shirt is a social object and does not stand alone; it is contextualized by the wearer, subcultures, and society at large (Manan & Smith, 2014). As much as the T-shirts may supply meaning through inscribed text or images, individuals apply meaning onto the T-shirts through their own perceptions. In this way, the relationship between people and T-shirts is one based on continuous dialogue (Manan & Smith, 2014). The act of wearing a T-shirt is a conversation with oneself and with the community, therefore it provides greater connections with the self and others.

T-shirts have become a form of self-expression, especially within youth culture. The ability to identify oneself visually through wearing a T-shirt, such as from your school or from a concert, is a common desire in adolescents. This is specifically true in sports. Clive C. Pope attended New Zealand's Maadi Cup, a major rowing competition, and found a sub-culture defined by the importance of T-shirts, identity, and trading (2010). The student athletes who participated in this cup were well trained and highly competitive; they spent the week in their athletic attire, with the only moments of individuality seen through T-shirts adorned with puns, slogans, and comedic phrases (Pope, 2010). These T-shirts were used as a means for the rowers to communicate with one another, and allowed for identity formation (Pope, 2010). The wearers became identifiable by their T-shirts, and thus a sense of self was established (Pope, 2010).

On the last day of the cup, all of the athletes engaged in a trading of their T-shirts, seeking out the peers whom they remember having a shirt that they particularly appreciated and would like to have (Pope, 2010). Despite being a competitive sport, this natural desire to engage suggests that youths have an intrinsic need to socialize with peers. This social networking provided a means of creating a collective identity, while simultaneously allowing the athletes to explore their own individual identities (Pope, 2010). The athletes created and identified their

own experiences in the shirts, related to one another, discovered new perspectives, and began to understand themselves as having shared experiences as rowers. By trading T-shirts, they reinforced this collective identity, and established a community based on sportsmanship.

T-Shirts as Canvases

While T-shirts can be utilized for expression on their own, they can also be used as the canvas for creative expression in order to facilitate great conversations. Just as many of the student athletes at Maadi Cup created their own T-shirts, many artists have found T-shirts to be an accessible medium through which they can make statements about the larger society. The painting *Untitled (Jimi Hendrix)* by Richard Prince is one such example. Prince used a stretched T-shirt as his canvas on which he painted the image of Jimi Hendrix. This decision evokes identification with the cultural phenomenon of Americanization (Manan & Smith, 2014). Both T-shirts and Jimi Hendrix are staples of American culture, so by combining the two, Prince invited viewers to question how the two connect beyond this (Manan & Smith, 2014). Prince utilized a non-traditional medium with the T-shirt, which creates an accessible piece for viewers to relate to (Manan & Smith, 2014). The typical American is not a fine artist and can more easily see themselves in the everyday T-shirt. The use of a T-shirt as a canvas creates an intimate connection with the art that is painted on top of it and allows for extensive exploration by both the artist and the viewer.

Object Attachment

Children often adopt transition objects, such as blankets or soft toys, that aid in forming a healthy attachment to their mother and gaining independence. The term was first coined by Donald Winnicott in 1953, and has been expanded upon since. Carole J. Litt outlined and examined several theories of transitional object attachment. Litt first discussed Winnicott, who

viewed an attachment to transitional objects as essential to the development of the ego and establishing a sense of self (1986). Winnicott suggested that object attachment indicates that the child and mother have a good satisfactory relationship, as without one, the child would not transfer the mother's soothing nature onto an object (Litt, 1986).

Litt went on to describe Marian Tolpin's theory, which differentiates from Winnicott's. Tolpin believed that children begin to self-soothe as they grow too big for the mother and transfer the soothing properties onto an object during this process (Litt, 1986). Sylvia Bordy, alternatively, proposed that infants viewed transitional objects as a part of themselves rather than as a part of the mother, and that this attachment formed during the beginning of the infant's exploration of their immediate environment (Litt, 1986). Regardless of the theory, it is apparent that transitional objects serve some purpose for infants and children. Common objects are blankets, cloth, and soft toys (Litt, 1986). Although typically associated with the mother, feeding, or the crib, less than 10% of children had transitional objects that were consistently in the crib, and only a small percentage more had objects that were used in feedings (Litt, 1986). There is no apparent determining factor of what the transitional object will be, and each child is different.

As individuals grow older, attachment to objects changes; one may have a favorite shirt or a lucky pen, but this attachment does not serve the same purpose as it did in infancy. Adults tend to harbor increased sentiments for their items, which increases their attachment to the items and makes it difficult for them to be discarded (Dozier & Ayers, 2021). Often, such items are used to recall memories. Various life events can impact the way we view objects, such as inheriting items after a loved one's death (Dozier & Ayers, 2021). Adults will often hold onto such items to stay connected to their loved one and will experience a new sense of grief if the item is lost or destroyed (Dozier & Ayers, 2021). Individuals will also hold on to items from

specific times in their lives to not forget about said times, such as items associated with military service (Dozier & Ayers, 2021). Milestones, such as retiring or becoming a grandparent, may cause an increased attachment to items related to their career to family heirlooms that an individual may wish to pass down to relatives (Dozier & Ayers, 2021). Additionally, adults who can no longer engage in activities they once enjoyed may hold onto items to maintain a sense of self (Dozier & Ayers, 2021). The items that people hold on to become a part of their identity, and in becoming attached to these items, people become attached to their way of living. Individuals who become accustomed to holding on to items may eventually become attached to this action itself, becoming more sentimental and struggling to part with material belongings. Holding on to sentimental items allows for individuals to maintain their identity, connections to their past, and to their loved ones.

Saving Belongings

Many people find it difficult to part with their belongings, especially those items to which they have attached sentimental value. An individual may have a multitude of different reasons for keeping an item, and each of these reasons may originate from different intrinsic needs. Individuals who do not have a strong support system are more likely to acquire a comfort item, suggesting that they have a need to self-soothe just as a child needs a transitional object in infancy (David et al., 2021). Other times, people become attached to items through continued use. One may place sentimental value on a book through repeated readings and become more attached to it, or a person may grow fonder of a bracelet or necklace as they continue to wear it and receive compliments on it (David et al., 2021). Through this continued use, the item becomes a part of the individual's identity.

Other items are reflective of memories, such as a bag with a college logo that now acts as a container of one's special moments from the duration of their education and is a reflection of the self that they were during that time (David et al., 2021). It has been suggested that individuals who are excluded in social groups will become attached to their belongings more quickly than those who feel included in their social groups (David et al., 2021). For people in this scenario, it is possible that such items act similarly to a transition object and provide a sense of comfort as they navigate through society and belonging. Many who save objects do so for sentimental reasons, such as for retaining memories, and due to a sense of responsibility, such as preventing waste (David et al., 2021). It is evident that there are a multitude of reasons for saving items, and it appears that they may overlap and affect each other. Thus, the reasons compound and make it difficult for individuals to discard their items.

Art Therapy

Canvases as Beings

Often, artwork such as paintings, sculptures, or tapestries are objects that are talked about. They may be used as a topic of interest between friends or coworkers, but artwork is not as often spoken to as if it were a person. Shaun McNiff proposed the importance of dialoguing with an image in his practice as an art therapist. Speaking with an image in this way can allow an individual to gather more information than they would by talking about the image. One can learn how an image influences their life, uncover stories from the image, and identify feelings within the image that they relate to (McNiff, 1992, p. 108). Each image's story, or narrative, is unique and can create a deep connection between the image and the viewer or artist. "Storytelling is the soul's speech..." and it is through dialogue with images that we can uncover the narratives that

need to be told (McNiff, 1992, p. 99). Accessing these narratives allows an individual to make deeper connections with themselves and the world around them.

McNiff facilitated this purposeful dialogue in art therapy sessions, both with individuals and groups. He claimed, "Image dialogues differentiate states of consciousness and connect inner experience to external objects" (McNiff, 1992, p. 109). In this way, the artist can externalize subconscious thoughts or concerns onto the canvas to process them. This is possible because the canvas acts as a safe container. In speaking with the image, individuals may be able to express thoughts and feelings that they would not otherwise because it is either not socially appropriate or they fear verbalizing those thoughts (McNiff, 1992, p. 110). The process of conversing with an image can lead the artist in several paths: the artist can ask the image questions, the image can offer advice, or the image could confront the artist. Ultimately, the image is intended to be seen as a person, or another being, to whom the artist can relate on an emotional and cognitive level.

Barbara E. Thompson, who is a social worker and a professor in the occupational therapy department at the Sage Colleges, implemented a three-hour expressive arts workshop for her graduate students to explore personal loss. This workshop was greatly inspired by McNiff's work in dialoguing with images. Throughout the workshop, participants were invited to converse with their canvas, which could be done in a variety of ways. One such way was to have the artist describe the painting and become acquainted with it (Thompson, 2014). The artist may then answer questions as if they were the painting, such as what the painting's name is, what the painting wants the artist to know, and things the painting has learned (Thompson, 2014). This process personifies the painting and allows for the artist and the canvas to form a bond much like a friendship. The questions and responses provided may also suggest that this bond has preceded

the painting's existence. Participants reflected that they felt deeply connected to their loved one whom they created the painting about (Thompson, 2014).

Through conversing with the canvas, the participants were able to receive messages in relation to their grieving process. Others uncovered new concepts about themselves and their mental health struggles. One participant initially insisted that her painting was a mess of orange, red, and black, although she knew her painting wanted her to look more closely at the strong blue and yellow. (Thompson, 2014), She later reflected in a poem that she needed to open herself up to the resources around her for help (Thompson, 2014). This suggests that, through the process of conversing with the canvas, she was able to move into acceptance. It is apparent that holding conversation with one's canvas, whether verbal, written, prompted, or unprompted, deepens the insight gained from the experience and establishes a deeper connection between an artist and their work.

Transformation of Clothing through Papermaking

Often, those who have experienced the loss of a loved one will become attached to objects owned by or associated with that person. The clothing worn by a loved one is typically seen as too special to donate or otherwise part with, but many may not know what to do with these after an individual has passed. Art Therapist Meredith Lin McMackin utilized the art of papermaking to process her son's death, and thus began to explore the transformation process of pulping the fabric of sentimental clothing and creating paper to navigate the grieving process. She found that the papermaking process mirrors the emotional process of grief: confronting loss, releasing, and transforming whilst retaining connections with the deceased (McMackin, 2023). Meaning-making is an important part of this process. Through navigating loss, especially

through creative means, one can gain both strength and insight into their past experiences, their current situations, and their new lives ahead of them post-loss (McMackin, 2023).

McMackin held several workshops where groups were invited to create paper from the clothing of lost loved ones. She remarked that the most difficult part of this process is letting go of the clothing, as many fear losing the connection to their loved one (McMackin, 2023). However, this release allows for the beginning of transformation. Once the cloth is cut and processed through a Hollander beater, it is changed into a pulp-like consistency that is ready to be pulled into paper (McMackin, 2023). At this stage, individuals are able to establish new connections with the fibers. Some chose to use a photo silkscreen of their loved one or special events to pulp-print the image, which allowed them to create a personalized artwork (McMackin, 2023). In this way, their connection to their loved one is maintained in a new form. Individuals who attended the workshops remarked that it was a meaningful experience that allowed them to safely explore feelings associated with the deaths of their loved ones (McMackin, 2023). The fibers, therefore, act as a container to hold space for the therapeutic process. Others shared that they found benefit in the group aspect of the process, acknowledging that it offered support from others who had common experiences and provided an opportunity to share stories that they may otherwise reserve to themselves (McMackin, 2023). McMackin's proposed method of papermaking for grief and loss not only stimulates meaning-making and internal processing but also creates community. The art-making process enables individuals to honor their loved ones in a new way that engages their mind and body to promote well-being.

Found Objects

Although many art therapists will offer found objects such as pinecones, paper towel rolls, and fabric, clients may not feel a significant connection to these materials. Julie Brooker,

an art therapist in the United Kingdom, proposed to instead offer clients to bring in found objects to their art therapy sessions. The intention was to stimulate memories, emotional or physical responses, or otherwise inspire recognition of the self or past experiences within everyday objects (Brooker, 2010). In a case study of a female client, Brooker highlights the effects of implementing found objects into sessions and expands upon its use. The client, who had experienced sexual trauma, neglect, abuse, political asylum, and stigma due to a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder, was enabled to share about these experiences and process feelings associated with them (Brooker, 2010). The client expressed that the act of looking for found objects allowed her to feel more connected with the outside world, stating that for the first time she had been “...looking and thinking outside of herself” (Brooker, 2010). The task of finding objects offers an accessible way for an individual to connect with the world around them.

Objects chosen by this client were often empty bottles, packages, twigs, and other objects she found to be discarded. This was associated with her own feelings of being discarded by others (Brooker, 2010). It is evident that individuals can project their own beliefs, thoughts, and feelings onto found objects, particularly those that are about the self. Through these objects, the client was able to express what she previously had been unable to share with the art therapist. In this way, the implementation of the found objects offered her a new language (Brooker, 2010). While this client was originally resistant to art materials, she was more inclined to use art materials in conjunction with the found objects. In the first session that she brought found objects to, she “... spontaneously moved to the art making...”, using thread and wool to sew her junk mail together (Brooker, 2010). In another session, she set up her objects as a still life to draw with pencil (Brooker, 2010). Although traditional art materials may be intimidating to some

clients, it is apparent that introducing found objects that are brought in by clients eases this resistance and increases a client's openness to art therapy as an intervention.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study follows an art-based research structure, as proposed and developed by Shaun McNiff. As such, the researcher is the primary participant. Since I am the researcher of this study, I will be the only individual participating in any questionnaires, surveys, and art-making. At the beginning of the study, I developed an intake form to be filled out to gain information about the T-shirts, which would better inform which T-shirts I would include in the study (see Appendix A). The research continued with art-making using the selected T-shirts, utilizing them to create canvases and painting directly on them. After this was completed, I answered a post-art survey about my experience for each painting (see Appendix B).

T-Shirt Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

T-shirts included in this study were all owned by me and held some sentimental value or were otherwise difficult to part with. There were originally 9 T-shirts and 5 of these were included in the study. Inclusion in the study was based on the written component of the intake. T-shirts that evoked strong responses (i.e., sentimental value, memory recall, length of response) indicated a need for them to be included in the study. T-shirts that did not elicit strong responses during the intake were excluded. Additionally, during this process, prominent words from the intakes were recorded (see Appendix C). These words prompted the discovery of five preliminary categories: Connection to Others, Future/Self, Childhood, Guilt, and Traditions. I decided to include one T-shirt per category.

Procedure

Each T-shirt was given an intake, which was made up of seven open-ended writing questions. Once the T-shirts were chosen for the study, I deconstructed the T-shirt in order to stretch the fabric onto a wooden base to create the canvas. Options for the canvas included an

11"x14" rectangle or an 11.5"x15.7" oval. I decided the shape based on what I felt each shirt needed. Once the shirt was stretched, I used clear gesso to prime the canvas to be painted on. The use of clear gesso ensured that the T-shirt would still be visible. I used acrylic paint for each T-shirt painting, and did not necessarily have a plan prior to beginning each painting. Upon completion of the paintings, I filled out a post-art survey about each one. This survey followed a similar structure of the intake, with seven open-ended written response questions about the art-making process and the artwork itself.

Chapter IV: T-Shirts as Canvases

My creative journey took place over a period of four months. In December of 2024, I went through my T-shirts and picked out 9 that I had been struggling to part with, despite no longer wearing. In January of 2025, I decided to use 5 of these shirts for the art-making process. To determine which T-shirts to use, I created an intake form that I would fill out for each T-shirt. The intake was structured with 7 open-ended written response questions. These provided me with information including the length of time I have owned the T-shirt, the way the shirt came into my possession, the reasons for no longer wearing it and for holding on to it, and about any strong memories attached to the shirt. By completing the intakes for each T-shirt, I was able to gauge the importance of each T-shirt beyond what my initial reaction would be.

To help myself determine which T-shirts to use, I made a list of the most prominent words throughout the 9 intakes. Seeing the same or similar words in multiple intakes prompted the discovery of themes that correlated to my attachment. Many of the words related to valuable connections, such as “family”, “friends”, and “grateful”. Others indicated feelings of obligation, such as “feel bad/guilty”, “money”, and “need/supposed to”. Through reading the intakes and highlighting these words, I created 5 preliminary categories and picked one T-shirt for each: Connection to Others, Future/Self, Childhood, Guilt, and Traditions.

Upon completion of the paintings, I answered a post-art survey. This was compiled of 7 open-ended written response questions. There were two purposes of this survey: the first was for me as the participant to be provided with a space for written reflection; the second was for me as the researcher to see if there was growth in both my understanding of my attachments to and my ability to express narratives. The survey gathered information on the development of the artwork, difficulties during the process, and discoveries made. The survey also included a question that

invites the participant to think about what the painting would say to the artist. In this space, I wrote as if I were the painting, which allowed me to connect to the T-shirt once more.

Connection to Others

Holy Family Swimming



Fig. 1. Holy Family Swimming

I have what feels like a million Holy Family Swimming shirts. I was on this team from ages 5 to 18, so I have shirts from 2007 through 2020. This shirt is from the season when I was 8 turning 9 years old, meaning I have had it for about 14 years. I no longer wear this one because it is too small. I have plenty of shirts from before 2007 and after 2020, as well, because this was my dad's team. My dad was the head coach of this team, and he started as an assistant coach when my oldest sister joined the team about 28 years ago. He only stepped down as head coach last year. Growing up, my house was "Holy Family Swimming Central" – our living room was a staging area for swimsuits, caps, and goggles waiting to be picked up by swimmers, and for the hundreds of ribbons that needed to be set up for every meet.

I have had a hard time letting go of any of my Holy Family shirts because they feel like such an integral part of my life. In the intake, I stated that parting with them “...feels like letting go of a part of me and a part of my connection to my dad” (see Appendix A, Figure A3). As I grew older on the team, I was made a captain, which meant I would start coaching the younger swimmers during practices. My favorite part of being a captain was leading the team cheer, which was a job passed down to me from my older sister. I remember taking that responsibility very seriously. My sister eventually became a coach for the team with my dad, and I would continue to help to coach with practices and meets during my college breaks. I remarked in the intake that “...I wasn’t a good swimmer, but being on the team made my dad happy” (Figure A3). Seeing my dad happy made me happy, and I loved the feeling of making him proud. To this day, anytime my mom comments that I sound just like my dad, especially when it comes to talking about the team, I feel grateful to come from him.

Generational Legacy

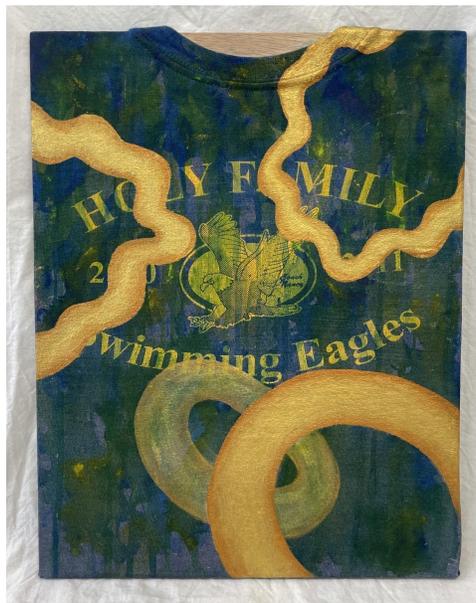


Fig. 2. Generational Legacy

I chose this shirt to start with because I already had an idea and I believed that this would be the easiest shirt for me to transform, since I have many more of them. When I was stapling the shirt onto the board, I thought it would be interesting to leave the collar showing to preserve the idea of it being a T-shirt. This ended up being the only T-shirt I did this with. I appreciate that look for this canvas because I wear my Holy Family shirts so often. I would wear them to swim meets and swim practices, of course, but they were also my shirts for volleyball and basketball practice, for gym class, and they are still the shirts I wear to bed. For me, they are so versatile, so having the collar show is a way to pay homage to that.

I originally intended to have three interlocking gold chains that would represent my dad, my sister, and myself. I wanted to show how my sister and I ended up following in my dad's footsteps as coaches, although I never got the chance to be a full-time coach for the team. I painted the background with drips of green, which is mine and my dad's favorite color, and yellow, which is my sister's favorite color. When I started painting the chains, I realized that I didn't like the composition of them all being in the bottom right-hand corner, with the rest of the canvas feeling so blank. For a while, I felt lost with this painting; looking back on it, I recognize that there was a sense of wanting to do right by the T-shirt, and, by association, to make my dad proud.

I tried to use water and a paper towel to erase the link that I painted coming from the first one, but I was unable to erase it fully. This left me with a faded image, as if in the background. After sitting with it for a while, I embraced it. As I reflected in the post-art survey, "...I discovered that it felt like it belonged to my grandpa" (see Appendix B, Figure B2). My grandfather was my dad's coach growing up, just as my dad coached me. By my sister becoming a coach and myself doing the same one day, we're not only following in my dad's footsteps, but

my grandpa's, too. I discovered this growth in the wonky shapes of myself and my sister. I reflected that "I wonder if we're just still growing into solid coaches" (Figure B2). My painting responds, "A coach is someone who listens and guides, who encourages others to be their best". It tells me, "Be proud of yourself. You are a coach" (Figure B2). I realized my painting was right; I was recently given a coach shirt for the team with my name on it, which felt really special. I am a coach.

Future/Self

Camp Good Grief



Fig. 3. Camp Good Grief

Camp Good Grief is a children's bereavement camp on Long Island, NY that is run through East End Hospice. I began volunteering with Camp Good Grief in July 2022. Last summer, I was lucky enough to have a practicum placement with East End Hospice and facilitated art therapy groups at camp with other interns. This shirt is from my first summer volunteering, so I have had it for about 3 years. I have several camp shirts, but I don't tend to

wear any of them out of concern for confidentiality. Several of my shirts are signed by campers, who always love to engage in the end of camp tradition of signing everyone's shirts, although this one is not.

My camp shirts feel very important to me. I began volunteering at Camp Good Grief because I wanted to gain some more experience with art therapy and facilitating art-making outside of school, especially since I was still in my undergraduate education at the time. I was passionate about my major and wanted as much experience as possible. I believe that my experiences at camp solidified my desire to become an art therapist. My first summer there, I was the youngest person volunteering in the art therapy section. Despite this, everyone not only accepted but sought out my input, which motivated me further. My interactions with campers were equally as motivating and taught me how to be flexible. Over my years with Camp Good Grief, I have seen my growth as an aspiring art therapist, and I am grateful for that opportunity.

Growth & Growing



Fig. 4. Growth & Growing

To develop my idea, I sat with the canvas for a while before I began painting. I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to paint, but I knew I wanted to represent the idea of growth. To me, growth is always shown through nature, especially flowers and trees. I decided to paint irises, which are my favorite flowers. We have irises outside my house which bloom every year. They came from an original iris plant that belonged to my maternal grandfather, who was an expert gardener. I wanted to reflect on this theme of growth because that was what I felt the most during my time at Camp Good Grief. This is also what I want to have moving forward. I'm at the end of my graduate program, so I know that entering the field will come with challenges that will encourage new and unexpected growth. I had a similar difficulty with this painting to my previous one with a ghost-like image of a flower that I sketched and ended up moving, but I embraced this much quicker in this painting. I accepted this as seeing the "artist's hand".

During the painting process, I was still very focused on the idea of growing as an art therapist. However, in my reflection during the post-art survey, I realized that my choice of painting irises was symbolic of a deeper attachment. In my survey, I stated, "I want to return home after I graduate to work, because it's what I know" (see Appendix B, Figure B3). I have a hard time with change, and while I have slowly been allowing myself to envision living somewhere other than Long Island, I continue to struggle with that concept. This is where I feel most comfortable because it's all I've known. Most of my siblings are settling down here, so I feel drawn to being near family. I also feel a sense of obligation to stay here, because my grandparents and my uncle are buried here, and I know how important it is to my parents to take care of their headstones. If my parents ever move, I feel like it is up to me to do that for them. I state in my reflection, "I wonder if I can do something challenging like move away from home and grow more than I would at home". My painting responds, "You don't belong to Hicksville.

You belong to the universe. Give yourself more than just home. You can find home again”

(Figure B3). I think my painting is right, but I wonder if I can take small steps to get there.

Childhood

Plain White T's



Fig. 5. Plain White T's

I got this shirt at a Plain White T's concert about 12 years ago. It was one of my first concerts and I went with my childhood best friend Elaine (pseudonym). Elaine and I had been best friends since kindergarten when I skipped over to her and yelled excitedly in her face. I practically lived at her house, and her mom and siblings became like a second family to me. This shirt has been too small for me for a long time, but I've kept it in one of my memory boxes for years. I always intended to make a pillow from it, so using it for this research study felt perfect. Elaine and I aren't very close friends anymore, as she went to a different high school than I did. Despite this, she was such an important part of my childhood that I never wanted to part with this T-shirt.

I don't really have many strong memories of the actual concert. However, I remember that I was the only one out of the three girls that went to the concert that slept over at Elaine's house after because my parents were out of town. Sometimes there would be malicious intent behind a secret sleepover, but this was truly the only reason. For me, this T-shirt represented the innocence of girlhood and true friendship. In my intake, I stated that it reminds me of "...a time where everything is genuine, and your friends are in your life because they truly want to be" (see Appendix A, Figure A9). When we got older, friendships became more complicated as people became preoccupied with popularity. This was when Elaine and I first started to drift away from each other. Even with those changes, there were still parts of us that were the little girls that played together and loved each other. I feel like this T-shirt is proof of that.

Meet Me Halfway

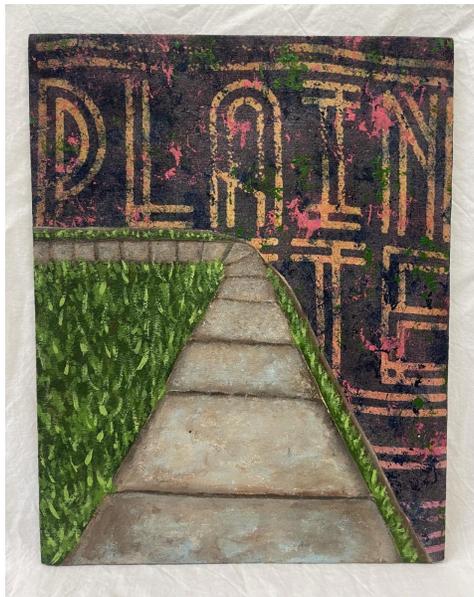


Fig. 6. Meet Me Halfway

For this painting, I didn't know what I wanted to depict. As I mentioned previously, I didn't have any strong memories about the concert itself. Realizing I needed to let the canvas,

and therefore the shirt, tell me what it needed, I gave myself time to be with it. Eventually, I started to reminisce about my friendship with Elaine and the times we would spend together at her house. She lives only a few blocks away, but when we were little that was a bit too far to walk alone. To work around this, we would call each other on the landline to make plans to meet in the middle and walk the rest of the way together. I decided to paint the sidewalk on my side of the halfway point. Just beyond the curve of this sidewalk is where Elaine would appear, and we would turn around to walk back to her house. Many times, I ended up walking further than halfway, which I would complain about. In the end, that didn't matter; I was just glad to be with my friend.

Through the process of this painting, I discovered just how much I miss not only my friend Elaine but being young. There's something so easy about a childhood full of friends, play, and laughter. I find it difficult to think about the future at times knowing that I may not live near my friends and, as a result, might not be able to see them as often as I would like. It has already been a struggle to get together with them, even living in the same town. In my painting and my post-art reflection, I discovered that "I needed to connect with my inner child" (see Appendix B, Figure B4). I wondered how to do that when time always seems to escape me. My painting (Figure B4) reminded me:

Little Jillian is still in there, and you need to take care of her. She wants to play, to laugh, and to sing. She wants to dress up. She wants to buy ice cream from the ice cream truck.

She wants a hug. Be nice to her, because one day she is going to feel so lost.

I understand now that my painting wants me to take care of my whole self. When I look at my painting, it feels like kindness and the hope that Little Jillian might meet halfway with Little Elaine again one day. It feels like reassurance that Little Jillian will be just fine.

Guilt***Family Reunion***

Fig. 7. Family Reunion

I received this shirt in 2019 for my family reunion. My paternal grandfather is one of eight children, and this was the first time in many years that the majority of the extended family was able to be together. Although it was a great time, I do not feel particularly attached to the T-shirt because of the reunion. Rather, I feel obligated to hold on to it for a few reasons. One of these is that my parents spent money on the shirt. I feel a sense of guilt at the idea of parting with this shirt as this seems like I would be wasting their money, which they work hard for. My obligation also stems from a sense of familial loyalty. Parting with this shirt instills feelings of betrayal, although I know this is not what I would be doing. Despite this, I am not sure if I feel a strong connection to my family through this T-shirt. I believe that I should feel this loyalty to them and, thus, the shirt, which is why I have struggled with parting ways with it.

I ultimately decided to include this T-shirt because I believed that it needed my attention through art-making. Although the intake did not elicit a very strong response, I continued to return to it when I was physically looking through the T-shirts. In this instance, I trusted my body's reactions which pulled me to this T-shirt, which allowed me to further process familial bonds and ties to my hometown.

The Carroll Family Home



Fig. 8. The Carroll Family Home

My intention for the painting was to honor my family. I knew I wanted to retain the claddagh ring emblem that is printed on the shirt at the top right, which would have been worn over my heart. I originally planned to paint my hands cradling the emblem, perhaps with other hands holding onto my arms. I soon became frustrated with painting this, as my hands were not proportionate and did not seem to convey the message I intended, which was that I felt an obligation to save the shirt to uphold loyalty to my family name. I decided to part with this concept and think about what feels most like family to me. Through my process, I decided to

condense my concept of “family” to my immediate family of my parents and siblings rather than the broad concept of my family name. With this, I was drawn to the imagery of my home.

I used an old photograph of my house as a reference picture to paint from. I took this photo when I was about 6 years old after spending the day in New York City with my oldest sister. She is 13 years older than me, and she had already moved away for college by that time. I remember how happy I had been to spend the day with her; it had felt so special. My siblings and I have significant age gaps, being 13, 9, 8, and 5 years apart, respectively. Although I was in the same home with most of them for most of my life, my middle siblings were much closer in age to each other and, therefore, spent more time together than with me. I often enjoyed my time alone, but I always wanted to connect with them.

When I was 17 years old, my parents had my house painted gray, which I was very upset about. For my painting, I wanted my home to look the way it does in my memories, which is white with a blue roof and a bright blue door. I have a difficult time accepting change, and I often tell my mom that she should paint our front door blue again. When I think about my parents moving one day, I become worried about what will happen to my connection to my siblings. In some ways, it feels like our connection is through our home; this is where we grew up, where we fought, where we sang, and where we laughed. When I look at my painting, it knows my fear. It tells me, “The memories will be there long after the house, and so will your siblings. They won’t leave you once the starting point is gone” (see Appendix B, Figure B5). I know my painting is right, and I think I should call my sister to catch up.

Traditions

Lake Wally What?



Fig. 9. Lake Wally What?

My family has been taking our vacations at Lake Wallenpaupack in the Poconos since my maternal grandfather was about 8 years old. Over the past almost 90 years, my family saw our vacation spot through expansions and name changes, yet our love for the lake persisted. My mom is the youngest of 7 siblings, so when I was growing up our summer vacation was full of aunts, uncles, and cousins. My immediate family would also go in the winter during our February break, and it was during one of these trips that my parents bought this shirt for me. I was about 4 years old and needed an extra shirt. My parents bought this, which was a youth large and much too big for me. Over the next 19 years, however, it became my favorite shirt.

When I was a teenager, I would wear this shirt on the last day of our vacation. It was my own little tradition to honor my time at my favorite place. A few years ago, my parents decided to buy me an adult sized version of this T-shirt because they felt that it was ridiculous that I still wore a shirt they bought me when I was 4 years old. However, I never felt as connected to that shirt; plus, I liked the feel of the fabric of this one better. Last summer, I forgot to pack this shirt to go to the lake. I wondered if that meant I was growing apart from it.

I feel strongly attached to this shirt. In the intake, I wrote that “This shirt just feels like home to me” (see Appendix A, Figure A2). This shirt feels like a channel through which I can access all of my most favorite memories. Being at the lake with my family growing up was full of laughs, love, and sunsets. We would swim in the lake all day only to take breaks to eat or skip rocks. I played shuffleboard with my older siblings and cousins, and bragged about their antics to my friends when I got home. This is the place where we brought friends who became family, like my sister’s boyfriend who became my brother-in-law and one of my favorite people in the world. I believe that Lake Wallenpaupack is where my grandparents’ spirits live. I reflected, “This T-shirt is all of that love, from all of my life” (Figure A2). I struggle to part with a shirt that embodies so much of who I am.

Return, Return, Return

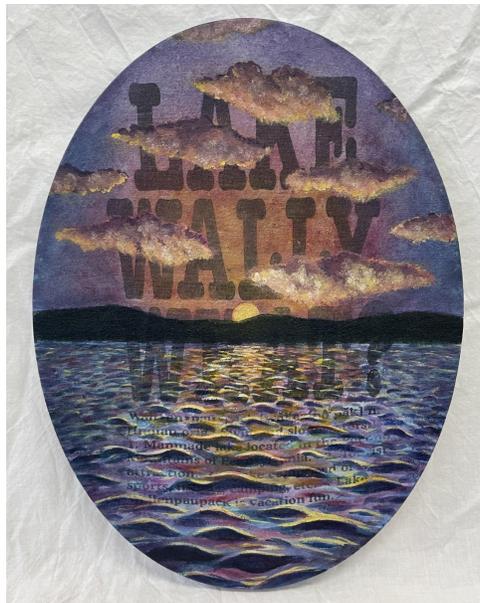


Fig. 10. Return, Return, Return

As soon as I conceptualized painting on my T-shirts, I understood that this shirt needed to have a Lake Wallenpaupack sunset. Watching the sunset is my favorite part of my family vacation; this is a pastime I would often do with my grandparents growing up, typically accompanied by ice cream or my grandmother's harmonica playing. Now, I share this tradition with my nieces, who enjoy ice cream just as much and request to listen to music from their favorite artists. When I was younger, my days at the lake were filled with running, playing on the playground, swimming in both the lake and the pool, collecting rocks, and reading on my favorite bench. My days at the lake now look much the same, except now I get to play with my nieces and share my traditions with them. I feel lucky to have grown up here and to know that not only have my favorite activities remained the same, but they have also been passed down.

I had a difficult time beginning this painting. I had anticipated starting this as the third painting. When I felt ready to make the canvas, I chose to call my mom to let her say goodbye to the shirt. During this call, she began to reminisce about when she and my dad bought the shirt for me. This deterred me from working with this T-shirt, and I suddenly no longer felt ready. Ultimately, I avoided starting this painting for weeks and it became the last one completed in my study. I discussed this with my peers, sharing my struggles and feelings of falling behind. One classmate asked me if I felt bad for the T-shirts, which caused me to realize that I do. I reflected on this in my post-art survey, writing, "I feel very deeply for my T-shirts, as if they are sentient beings with whom I hold friendships" (see Appendix B, Figure B6). Despite this setback, once I made the canvas, the painting came together within two days, unlike some of the others that took a week or more.

Just as I had a difficult time with transforming this shirt into a canvas, I have always had a hard time accepting changes in my life. I have this deeply rooted belief that I must uphold my

traditions. However, these include consistencies that others would likely consider to be routines rather than traditions, such as driving a specific way home. I believe that my little traditions make me who I am. When my family began discussing potentially looking at new places to take our family vacations, I became fearful and would avoid those conversations. As I reflected, “I feel like this is where our memories and traditions live... this feels like home” (Figure B6). I worry that I should be more accepting of change, but this one feels too drastic. I confess this to my painting, and he reassures me that I am right to hold on to this place. “There is change that we must accept, like parting with a T-shirt that no longer fits,” he says. “Some change is simply too big, like letting go of an almost 90-year-old family tradition” (Figure B6). I know that I must cherish this place that holds my favorite memories, as it is the heart of my family and where my grandparents’ souls reside. Despite my fears, I realize that my family feels the same way.

Chapter V: Dialogue with the Results

The intent of this study was to explore the use of transforming T-shirts into canvases and its benefits as an art therapy intervention. I hypothesized that this process would stimulate written narratives and allow an individual to gain a deeper understanding of their attachment to sentimental objects. Through examination of the subject matter chosen for each painting, the written narratives in the intakes and post-art surveys, and the overall process itself, the benefits of this intervention proved to be greater. The use of “Clothing as Canvas” stimulated the production of narratives and memory recall, supported an increase in understanding of attachment, and allowed for safe processing of change and a shift towards acceptance and growth.

Stimulation of Narratives & Memory Recall

The intention of implementing an open-ended writing questionnaire prior to and after the art-making process was to stimulate the flow of narratives throughout the process. Additionally, the two can be compared to evaluate the extent to which the art-making stimulated the engagement with the narratives. Upon evaluation, 2 out of 5 paintings have narratives written during the post-art survey that are considerably different from their associated intake. The narratives written in the intake for the T-shirt *Camp Good Grief* discuss the feelings of gratefulness associated with the work done at this camp and passion for a future career in art therapy. After this T-shirt was created into a canvas and its painting *Growth & Growing* was completed, the narratives written for the post-art survey indicate a similar hope for the future, but one that is rooted in uncertainty and a need to return home where it feels “safe”. In the intake for the T-shirt *Family Reunion*, the narratives written are detail-oriented and factual, without much emotion attached to the event from which the T-shirt is associated. The narratives after the

painting *The Carroll Family Home* was created differ in affect and content; the painting has now been associated with attachment to the home, to connections with siblings, and to the fear of being unable to maintain strong relationships with the immediate family.

Memory recall was also stimulated through the process of writing narratives and art-making. For the purpose of this study, memory recall is defined as the ability to bring forth events or knowledge that was not at the forefront of the mind at the beginning of the process. The use of found objects in art therapy has been posited to "...stimulate and connect with childhood memories" (Brooker, 2010). The T-shirts used in this study illustrated similar effects. Out of the 5 paintings, 3 exhibited the ability to incite memory recall. Both the intake for the T-shirt *Lake Wally What?* and the post-art survey for the correlated painting *Return, Return, Return* indicates a strong recollection of memories. The painting *Generational Legacy* was originally intended to represent the connection between myself, my sister, and my father. However, during the process of painting, I remembered that my grandfather was my father's coach, suggesting that this leadership quality is familial. The art-making process enabled me to bring forth knowledge about my family history to make a deeper connection with my artwork.

Similarly, the process of painting the piece *Meet Me Halfway* allowed for reflection on a specific place and activity. I painted the sidewalk that was the midpoint of mine and my friend Elaine's houses. In the post-art survey, I reflected on how the two of us would meet in the middle so neither of us would have to walk the entire way alone. I remembered, "We would start shouting to each other across the street" (see Appendix B, Figure B4). I also recalled how the bleach-dye effect that I painted in the background reminded me of the many crafts her mom would help us with. This memory was equally important, since Elaine's family had been like a

second family to me. Both the art and writing process stimulated memory recall and encouraged reconnection to pleasant experiences.

Increased Understanding of Attachment

Although I initially determined there to be five categories that explained the underlining attachment to my T-shirts, this art-making process suggested two alternative reasons. These two reasons that were uncovered are Trepidation Towards Change and Need for Security. I am careful to not refer to them as categories, as I found that the two often overlapped in the narratives and experiences for each T-shirt. Through examination of my art process, the chosen subject matter of each painting, and the similar themes throughout the written narratives, it is apparent that I am currently working through an internal conflict: understanding the necessity for growth while maintaining feelings of safety to alleviate my struggles with change. Although the five preliminary categories (Connection to Others, Future/Self, Childhood, Guilt, and Traditions) were disproven, it is evident that these are contributing factors to avoiding change and/or establishing feelings of safety.

Trepidation Towards Change

Evaluations of the paintings as well as post-art survey responses compared to the intakes indicate that the art-making process evoked uncertainty surrounding the future and retrospective dismay at past changes in life. Out of the 5 paintings, 4 exhibit characteristics of these emotions and thought processes, whether in the painting process, the intake, or the post-art survey. These paintings include *Generational Legacy*, *Meet Me Halfway*, *The Carroll Family Home*, and *Return, Return, Return*.

Through looking at the imagery, one can notice a preoccupation with the past. In *The Carroll Family Home*, the house is depicted as it was prior to 2017. There appears to be a need

for the home to be depicted “correctly”. In the post-art survey, I reflected that my home stands in the painting “...like it does in my memories”, as opposed to how it currently looks to the world (see Appendix B, Figure B5). This suggests a belief that my inner world’s view of my home is the correct version. This may indicate an avoidance of accepting changes. The subject matter chosen for *Meet Me Halfway* likewise suggests a fixation on the past. The perspective of the sidewalk invites the artist and the viewer into the painter and, by extension, the past. The painting, therefore, acts as a vehicle for transportation to the artist’s childhood and gives access to the memories that come with being in that place during that time.

The written reflections prior to and post art-making provide greater insight into this trepidation towards change and the way the artwork reflects this. My reasons behind the connection to the *Holy Family Swimming* T-shirt indicate an ongoing struggle to part with my childhood swim team, which I then associated with the team T-shirts. In the intake form, I reflected that since my dad was the head coach for over 25 years, “...it feels like a part of my dad’s legacy that I need to uphold” (see Appendix A, Figure A3). The painting produced on this T-shirt evokes an understanding of the shaping process, during which the two shapes at the top are becoming more akin to the shape at the bottom. This is likely associated with affiliation seeking, which “...involves a person's motives to connect with others and define one's self relative to them” (Kleine, 2000). Although I am my own person, I identify myself with my father’s traits. As I continue to find it difficult to let go of this team, I grow in my own abilities and passions while maintaining the hope to one day consider myself a coach like my dad.

The whole process of transforming the *Lake Wally What?* T-shirt into the *Return, Return, Return* painting reveals great trepidation regarding change and letting go. I originally wondered about using the replacement shirt that I bought a few years ago for this study rather than the

original shirt. This indicates avoidance of processing change, especially those that threaten sentimentality. This was also noted with the depiction of the house in *The Carroll Family Home*. This avoidance was continued through a delay in creating the canvas by several weeks. The anxiety that came from the canvas creation was alleviated by painting a familiar subject matter: a sunset on Lake Wallenpaupack, which I have painted or drawn several times. By defaulting to a familiar subject matter, I relied on a symbolic transitional object to ease this transformation process.

Need for Security

The imagery depicted in the paintings in combination with the written reflections indicate an intrinsic need for security. Upon evaluation, 5 out of 5 of the paintings present characteristics of this drive to ensure feelings of safety with the self, others, and the environment. This includes a desire to protect connections with loved ones, preserve family traditions, and to ensure a good future. Each of these appears to be factors that contribute to the overall wellbeing and feelings of perceived safety of the author.

Several of the paintings and their associated written reflections indicate an overarching need to connect to loved ones and maintain this connection throughout the lifetime. The painting *Generational Legacy* represents my connection to my father through his swim team, both as a swimmer and eventually as a coach. It includes my sister who I swam and coached with, and my grandfather who coached my father and taught him through example.

While this painting offers a positive connection, others express concern. I demonstrate worry about my connections with my siblings in my reflections about *The Carroll Family Home*. I stated, “I realized that I’ll never get to be a kid in my home with my siblings again, and that I haven’t for a very long time” (Figure B5). Being that my siblings are all much older than me, I

often worry that we lack a close relationship that cannot be established in adulthood. In a study on object attachment due to perceived unreliability, it was found that individuals who experienced unreliability from close others had increased object attachment (Keefer et al., 2012). This suggests that individuals who feel that they cannot rely on those closest to them for comfort or safety will instead turn to objects. With uncertainty about my connections to my siblings, establishing connections with material items, such as T-shirts, or places, such as my hometown or our vacation spot, has become crucial. This is likely the reason for the strong attachment to my family home, which I refer to as “my safety net”. With a universal returning point, my siblings and I will have something that permanently connects us. I also speak to my desire to preserve our family traditions with *Return, Return, Return*. Just as our home would connect us, our vacations would continue to bring us together every year.

I found that there was a significant need to take care of myself within my paintings. To do this, feelings of safety must be established. During the dialogue with the canvas for *Meet Me Halfway*, I noted that the canvas instructed me to take care of “Little Jillian”. Through this dialogue, I uncovered the need to “...tell her she’ll be okay” (Figure B4). This suggests that in order to move forward, such as after graduation and starting a career, I must practice self-care to a greater degree. As established, I struggle with change; being that this will be a period of many changes, I must ensure that I am in tune with my needs. The painting *Growth & Growing* also leads to this conclusion. In the post-art survey, I reflected, “As much as I have such a desire to grow and keep growing in my career, a part of me knows that I will always feel safest at home” (see Appendix B, Figure B3). I currently intend to return home after school to begin my career, although I am not sure if this will be the best long term. In a similar sense to the delay of starting

the canvas, this may indicate an avoidance of change. However, returning to a comforting, safe place could also be beneficial to alleviate the stress of multiple changes at once.

Processing Change

Transformation

Transformation is the process of creating meaningful change in a therapeutic setting. In art therapy, both internal and external transformations can be reflected in artwork. Individuals can take an existing object and alter it to symbolize this transformation. In this way, "...the new [artwork] is externalized and personalized, resonating with the individual's growth, goals, and life" (Jacobson-Levy & Miller, 2022). The art-making process is intuitive and ever-changing, reflective of the current needs of the client. "Transformation is a continuous process of becoming" (Jacobson-Levy & Miller, 2022). As such, the work done in this process is often powerful yet difficult.

It was through this lens of transformation that such processing of change could occur. Since there was an understanding that the T-shirt material would remain to exist, if only in a new form, feelings of safety and acceptance were established. All of the paintings preserved or incorporated aspects of the T-shirts. This may suggest an attempt to embrace change into the "new normal". Through accepting these changes, I was able to reclaim these T-shirts in their new state of being. The act of reclaiming may provide emotional regulation, reconnection with identity, and acceptance (Jacobson-Levy & Miller, 2022). An example of this preservation is seen with *Return, Return, Return*. Although the words remain visible, I originally did not intend to include clouds so that they could be easily legible. However, through conversing with the canvas and attuning to the painting's needs, I eventually understood that I should include clouds. This indicates not only the transformation of the painting, but also the transformation of the self.

It appears that I became more open to change throughout this process and acquired the skills to feel safe enough to engage in making changes on my own.

Dialogue with the Canvas

The act of engaging in conversation with the paintings aloud throughout the painting process as well as in writing during the post art-survey proved to be beneficial in processing life changes. In looking at the question that asks, “If your painting could speak now, what would it say?”, several of the paintings indicate successful processing of change. Specifically, 3 out of 5 paintings exhibit themes of processing future changes and 1 painting demonstrates processing past changes. Only 1 painting does not indicate processing change; the painting *Return, Return, Return* suggests a distinctive decision to accept consistency and traditions.

The concern that was originally presented with the *Holy Family Swimming* T-shirt was an attachment to the swim team that offered a familial, specifically paternal, connection. There was an indicated desire to make my father proud through swimming and coaching. Through the art-making process and dialogue with the canvas, it was concluded that, “[I] make him proud by making [my] own way in the world and by applying what he’s taught [me] to do it” (see Appendix B, Figure B2). Further, I understood that I could be a coach for any team or in any way. It appears that I had moved into acceptance of this change, and was seemingly able to let go of the concept of needing to be a part of this team.

For *Growth & Growing*, I presented with uncertainty about the future in terms of moving away from home. In conversing with the canvas, I was able to accept the possibility of moving one day. The canvas urged me to move, stating, “You can leave. I know that it’s hard for you to change, but there is more out there. What’s easy isn’t always what’s right” (Figure B3). Although I continue to be concerned about maintaining my home roots and my connections to my siblings,

I am opening myself up to the idea of broadening my horizons. Through this writing, “the canvas” was able to tell me what I have been afraid to tell myself, which is that I could be restricting myself by staying put. This response further reveals a continued pattern of avoidance, although suggesting a recognition of this pattern and steps towards change.

I reflected that my biggest concern when painting *The Carroll Family Home* was maintaining valuable connections with my siblings. I expressed worry that without a “homebase” if my parents were to move, my siblings and I would not have anything to keep us together. The dialogue with my canvas guided me to understand that this is not true. I realized that my siblings “...are the true starting point, and they will be with [me] until the end to build new memories” (Figure B5). Through projecting my thoughts onto a third “person”, I was able to recognize my fears about my siblings not wanting a relationship with me and process through how to mitigate those fears. This process enabled me to move forward with a different mindset surrounding this concern.

For *Meet Me Halfway*, I was able to utilize the conversing with canvas technique to process past changes. Through the painting process, I had discovered a need to connect with my inner child. The imagery combined with the narratives exhibit a struggle to accept growing older, which includes growing apart from friends. Through the conversation piece, I was able to explore the growth that I have witnessed in myself over the years. As the canvas, I reflected on a period in my life when I felt lost due to not fitting in with friends. I was encouraged to remind my inner child that, “...it's okay that people grow apart... she'll feel so much love from so many people” (Figure B4). Engaging in dialogue with the canvas enabled me to process the emotions associated with a difficult period of isolation and distress and to find peace in the present.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

The transformation of sentimental clothing into canvas may lead an individual to process attachment concerns and obtain a deeper understanding of the self. As T-shirts are already an expressive medium, they translate easily into canvas. The artist can implement the elements of the T-shirt into the painting, such as any logos or text, which can mirror the acceptance of change and moving forward. The painting and writing processes allowed for the recollection of memories associated with the T-shirts. While some of these memories were at the forefront of the mind, many were uncovered during the process, such as family histories and small rituals with friends. The act of conversing with the canvas offered deeper engagement in the artistic process and further stimulated the creation of written narratives. These narratives spoke to processing and accepting change as well as navigating the future.

The findings of this study suggest a need for person-centered choices around materials within art therapy settings. When sentimental objects are used as materials, a client may be able to convey more meaning into the piece and, therefore, obtain more insight and greater growth from the session. Allowing a client to bring in materials that they would like to use in session, especially those that are meaningful to them, is likely to be conducive to productivity and building greater therapeutic alliance. Additionally, the use of sentimental objects as materials may mitigate any resistance to engagement in art therapy if a client harbors a belief that they do not have artistic skills. Allowing clients to bring in found objects may also allow for "...an extension to a vast and deeper range of associations compared to mass-produced art materials usually provided by the therapist" (Brooker, 2010). Materials that are not considered to be fine art materials may be more accessible skill-wise and processing-wise. While the focus of this

study is T-shirts, other sentimental objects may include photographs, jewelry, seashells, and buttons.

Further research to expand this study may include the implementation of this art therapy intervention with individuals who have experienced a significant loss. Current creative interventions for palliative care and bereavement counseling often incorporate the use of a loved one's belongings in memory projects. Found objects are often used in art therapy sessions to process a loved one's death, such as using photographs to create a scrapbook or collage, or special trinkets to create a diorama that can be interacted with (Brooke & Miraglia, 2015). Often, families will create pillows, blankets, or teddy bears from the clothing of their lost loved ones. Although there is current research on the transformation of passed loved ones' clothing through papermaking, the process of papermaking may prove to be too extreme for some clients. Utilizing clothing as canvases, however, may offer the right amount of transformation necessary for internal processing while maintaining the valuable connection to their loved one and honoring that relationship.

Additionally, this intervention could be effective with individuals and families impacted by natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Research suggests that "...emotional connections, or attachments, to the home can be as important to residents as the physical structure or condition of a house" (Woodhall-Melnik & Weissman, 2021). Many people affected by floods reported not leaving their homes due to a strong connection to their homes, communities, and material items (Woodhall-Melnik & Weissman, 2021). This prompts further research into the extent to which an individual's attachment to their items increases or decreases

after a natural disaster. Through art therapy utilizing sentimental objects and this specific intervention, this question may be explored.

Although it is evident that this art therapy intervention was effective in processing change and encouraging growth, it is important to recognize bias in this study. Art-based research utilizes the researcher as the sole participant. Therefore, the sample size is not only small but also biased in that the participant has extensive background knowledge in art, art therapy, and likely has an established openness to the transformation process. This study should be replicated with a larger, random sample to reduce bias. Additionally, it may be beneficial to implement this intervention in a group setting to explore the effects of community building and sharing personal stories. With the increase in memory recall and stimulation of narratives, it is likely that the “Clothing as Canvas” intervention may be effective in a group setting as well as with individuals.

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Appendix A
T-Shirt Intake Forms

Figure A1

Blank Intake Form

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM / / 01

Your Name:

Name of T-shirt:

How long have you had this T-shirt?

How did this T-shirt come into your life?

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?

The form is enclosed in a grey border. It features a title 'T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM' in bold black text. To the right of the title is a date input field with slashes and the number '01'. Below the title are three rounded rectangular input fields for 'Your Name:', 'Name of T-shirt:', and 'How long have you had this T-shirt?'. To the right of these fields is a square illustration of a landscape with a blue sky, a white cloud, and green rolling hills. Below the input fields are two larger rounded rectangular text areas for 'How did this T-shirt come into your life?' and 'Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?'.

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM / / 02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

Figure A2

Intake: Lake Wally What

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 21 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Lake Wally What?"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 19 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
My family has gone on vacation on Lake Wallenpaupack in Pennsylvania for over 80 years. One winter while we were there, my parents needed to buy a shirt for me for some reason. They bought this shirt, which was a youth large, and my mom recalls that it was huge on me. She believes I was about 4 years old at the time.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I actually did not intentionally stop wearing this shirt. I would always wear this on our last day at the Lake during the summer, as my own little tradition. A few years ago, my parents bought me a new shirt with the same design because they felt that it was a little ridiculous to be wearing a decade old, child-sized shirt. However, I kept wearing this shirt, because I liked the feel of the fabric better. It wasn't until I got home from the Lake this past summer that I realized I didn't even pack it, let alone wear it. I do think that it is too small on me at this point.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 21 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I believe that I've held on to this shirt because I have had it for so long. Going to the Lake is my favorite family tradition, and especially now that both of my grandparents have passed away, I feel that it is important to continue going. Having this T-shirt feels like a part of that. My family will often talk about looking at different places to go on vacation, or during different weeks, and the thought of that really hurts me. What I want most is to have a future where I continue spending time with my parents, my siblings, and my nieces, and I get to raise a family with my traditions.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

This shirt just feels like home to me. It is full of skipping rocks badly until I get the perfect skip, collecting rocks with my nieces to paint, watching sunsets on the dock with music playing, and making s'mores by the fire. This shirt is fishing with my grandfather, then my uncle, then my brothers. It's shuffleboard and playing on the playground late at night. It's waiting by the window to see if my family friend was out to play. It's going in the pool with my cousin and waiting for the bell to ring telling us to come for the cook out, and being so excited for sherbet after. It's my brother accidentally catching a duck on his fishing line. It's feeding the ducks and falling into the lake at 5 years old so my sister has to jump in to save me while her boyfriend stood frozen. He eventually became my brother-in-law, and he's one of my favorite people. It's my grandma playing the harmonica for everyone while my grandpa smiles in adoration. This T-shirt is all of that love, from all of my life. I think it's my favorite shirt.

Figure A3*Intake: Holy Family Swimming*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 21 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Holy Family Swimming"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 14 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
This shirt is from my 2010–2011 swim season, when I was 8 turning 9 years old. Every swimmer on the team gets a shirt with registration, but because my dad was the head coach, my siblings and I always seemed to have the extras. I think we still do, and I have been off of the team for 5 years now. The Holy Family shirts just always make their way back to me.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I don't wear this shirt anymore because it's too small. This shirt is a youth large, and when I went to college I decided to only take adult smalls or mediums. Eventually, this changed and I started to only take mediums or larges. I wear my Holy Family shirts for almost anything, but mostly I sleep in them, so I need them to be comfortable.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 21 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

My dad, my sister, and I have all had a hard time letting go of the team in general. My dad was head coach for 25 years before he finally retired after last season, and he is still helping out. I continue to help coach when I'm home from school, and my sister was an assistant coach for the last few years. I think it feels like a part of my dad's legacy that I need to uphold. All of my siblings were on the team at some point, although not everyone continued until their senior year like I did. The team is a K-12 team, so I truly grew up on this team, and letting go of any of my Holy Family shirts, even the ones that don't fit, feels like letting go of a part of me and a part of my connection to my dad.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

The funny thing is that when I think back on my time on the swim team, I remember how anxious I felt before practice. I wasn't a good swimmer but being on the team made my dad happy. I also knew that I was his last child on the team, and I felt the need to continue to the end. What I loved about being on the team was the friends I made and getting to grow up with them. I also loved coaching younger swimmers during practices and leading the team cheer during meets. I think my favorite part of being on the team, however, was being with my family. When I was little, my brother and sister were on the team with me. I remember my sister getting mad at me because she reached down to catch my head when I was doing backstroke and she dropped her brand new Blackberry phone in the pool; I told her I didn't need her help. When I was older, I still had my dad, who would come up to me after a race to high five me and say, "You got third!" I would then have to remind him that there was only three people in the pool, but he didn't care, because I still swam, did my best, and helped the team. I just liked seeing him happy.

Figure A4*Intake: Luke's Diner*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 22 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Luke's Diner"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 4 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?

I got this shirt as a Secret Santa present from my friend. My friends and I have been doing Secret Santa for years, and we always make lists of things that we would like as inspiration. I always enjoy getting these gifts, but I love when I get gifts that aren't on my list because it feels like my Secret Santa is saying they knew something special about me. This specific year, my friend had said he knew how much I loved the show Gilmore Girls.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?

I don't wear this shirt anymore because there is hole in it. I wore it to my jewelry class and I must have gotten the flux on it, which eats away at fabric. I continued to wear it then because I was still in studio classes and didn't mind wearing a shirt that could get dirty or have more holes in it, but now I would rather not wear it out during a regular day.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 22 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I think I have held on to this shirt mostly because I feel bad getting rid of it. Since it was a gift, I don't want to throw it out knowing my friend not only spent money on me, but put thought into what I would like, as this wasn't something I specifically asked for. I also feel bad because, other than the hole in the front of the shirt, it's a good quality shirt. I think if the hole was in any other place or if it were just a bit lower, I would still be wearing it.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

Aside from reminding me of my friend, this shirt kind of became my "art shirt". I embraced the hole in it because ultimately it was my fault that it was created. I wore this shirt throughout my undergraduate days, going into the studio and getting clay, paint, and chalk pastels all over it. I mostly wore T-shirts throughout college because I would often go from a lecture to a studio to another lecture, so it was important to me to be comfortable. This one was a staple in my rotation.

Figure A5*Intake: Tie Dye*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 23 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Tie Dye"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 8.5 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
I made this T-shirt in 9th grade during an art class. I actually had forgotten to get a white T-shirt for class, and I went into my sister's room to find a shirt at the last minute. I don't think she knows that.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I believe I have just gotten out of the habit of wearing this shirt. I also have other tie-dye shirts that are newer and in better quality. This one is loose and flimsy, especially around the collar.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 23 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I feel weird getting rid of tie-dye shirts because they remind me of my mom. My mom has always loved tie-dye and this design has acted as her identifying trait for most of my life. When I wear tie-dye, I don't feel like I'm being a "hippie" like other people might, I just feel like my mom. My mom is the person in my family that I am closest with; I go to her with all of my concerns, funny stories, and complaints.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

I have a picture of me wearing this shirt at Lake Wallenpaupack taken by my best friend. I think this picture is from when I was about 15 years old. At the time, I didn't like the picture, but now I look at it and think about how happy I look. I got to be with my best friends and my family in my favorite place. When I see this T-shirt, that's what I think about: happiness. I also feel that happiness knowing that the tie-dye is a visual connection to my mom. Even if I don't wear this shirt as much anymore, when I wear any tie-dye, I feel like it makes my mom happy.

Figure A6*Intake: Hicksville Volleyball*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 23 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Hicksville Volleyball"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 7.5 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
I got this shirt as apparel for my sophomore year volleyball season, during the fall of 2017. This was my last year playing volleyball for my school after playing two years in middle school and two years in high school. I had been playing volleyball since fourth grade for CYO teams, and this was the end of my time playing, although I'm not sure if I knew that at the time.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I no longer wear this shirt anymore because it is too small on me. I also didn't want to wear it on campus because it seemed odd to me to wear a shirt from a high school sport that I no longer played in college.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 23 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I think I've held on to this shirt because I felt like I was supposed to. I think about how my parents paid money for my apparel, and I would feel guilty not holding on to it. I also loved my time on this team, so it feels like I should have a reminder of it.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

When I was a freshman, the sophomores on the team weren't very nice to us, so I wanted to make sure I was nice to the freshman when I was a sophomore. This shirt is from my sophomore year season, and I truly feel like I became good friends with everyone on the team. We weren't just playing to play, but we were playing because we loved the sport and loved playing together. We were all supportive of one another and would laugh on the bus together, do each other's hair, and talk about each other's lives. They were the friends that I didn't necessarily hang out with outside of volleyball, but they were just as important to me during that time.

Figure A7*Intake: Family Reunion*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 24 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Family Reunion"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 6 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
I got this shirt for my family reunion in 2019. This was the first time in many years that grandfather's whole family was getting together, including all of the 8 siblings, their children, and the many grandchildren.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I don't wear this shirt anymore because its a bit too small and I didn't love the fit of the shirt to begin with. I also didn't love how bright the green was. We had the option to pick green or black, and I remember wishing I had chosen black.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 24 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I've kept this T-shirt because I feel bad getting rid of it knowing that my parents spent money on it for me. I also feel like I should have a sense of loyalty to the shirt since it represents my family, but I don't know if I feel strongly about it being a link to my family. This T-shirt was only worn the one time, as opposed to the shirts that I wore coaching with my dad or on vacations with my family, so the shirt itself doesn't feel like it is a part of my family. However, a part of me wonders if it's supposed to.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

I only wore this shirt during the reunion, which was a nice time. I got to see a lot of relatives that I hadn't seen in years, some since I was very little. I was able to see my dad's aunt, who is Deaf, and communicate with her through ASL, which I had been taking in school. I also got to play with my nieces, which is always my favorite part of any vacation. I remember making friends with one of my dad's cousin's kids, who invited me to go play volleyball with her. Other than that, I mostly kept to my immediate family.

Figure A8*Intake: Camp Good Grief*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 24 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Camp Good Grief"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 3 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
I got this shirt during my first summer volunteering at Camp Good Grief, which is a children's bereavement camp through East End Hospice on Long Island, NY. I decided to volunteer because I wanted to get more experience with art therapy during my undergraduate studies, and I was fortunate that I was placed in the art therapy section of camp. I was an art therapy volunteer for two summers and last year I was able to be an intern with East End Hospice and help to facilitate the art therapy groups at camp.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I don't wear this shirt because I've never wanted to have my name displayed to the world. Additionally, as I moved into graduate school and learned more about ethics and confidentiality, I became concerned about showcasing that I was a part of camp in public when people could recognize me. I also have several shirts that have the campers names signed on it, which I would never wear, although this is not one of those ones. The only time I may wear this shirt is at camp or if I need a shirt to sleep.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 24 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I still have this shirt because of how meaningful of an experience being a part of camp was to me. I first volunteered simply to start getting some more experience with art therapy outside of school, but the interactions with the campers made me love the work. As much as my undergraduate education gave me information and experiences that made me excited about my future, camp is what really made me passionate about this work.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

My first year of camp, I was the youngest volunteer in art therapy, with most of the others being older women. I was nervous, but everyone was so kind to me, especially one social worker who would make sure to include me in lunch and would show me around camp. Camp is four days long, and we see all of the campers throughout the day. The social worker who was in charge of the art therapy section of camp wanted my input on everything, which made me feel not only valued but respected. On the last day of camp, the campers make stepping stones to represent the person they lost. There was one camper who wanted put a photograph of her and her dad in her cement stepping stone but I was worried that it might ruin the picture, so I found a wooden craft frame that she was able to decorate for the picture. There was another camper who loved rock music because his dad did too, so I brought him to the music therapy area so he could ask for a guitar pick to include in his stepping stone. I had the opportunity to work with the organization that runs Camp Good Grief this past summer during my second practicum, and I feel so grateful to be able to look back on my growth through Camp Good Grief.

Figure A9*Intake: Plain White T's*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 26 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Plain White T's"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 12 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?

I got this shirt at one of my first concerts, which I went to with my childhood best friend. It was an outdoor concert and we sat on the lawn. Her mom took us and two of our other friends. I think I remember finding this shirt funny because it was the opposite of a "Plain White T", so that's why I picked this one.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?

This shirt is too small for me, and it has lived in my memory box for several years. I remember that there was also a time when I decided I couldn't wear black shirts with black pants, so when I got into wearing leggings more I wonder if I phased this shirt out of my rotation. I'm not so concerned with that anymore, but it's too small, anyways.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 26 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I've kept this T-shirt because I always intended to make something with it. For a while I planned to make it into a pillow, but that never happened. My friend and I aren't as close anymore, but she was such a big part of my life for such a long time. Her family was like a second family to me. So having something that is a reminder of when we were kids feels important to me.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

For a long time, I told people that my first concert was the Plain White T's because I wanted to seem cool. That was actually a lie; my first concert was Hannah Montana & Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds. It's so funny how important other people's opinions can be, even at such a young age. This shirt reminds me of that because my childhood best friend ended up becoming popular in school and I didn't as much, but I remember that feeling of wanting to be liked. When I look at this shirt, I remember being 11 years old and going to a concert with my best friend and two of our other friends, but being the only one going back to her house to sleep over because my parents were out of town. That was the only reason why; not because it was a secret, or there was a competition between friends, but because of course I would stay over at her house. I always did back then. This shirt feels like that girlhood innocence of pure friendship, a time where everything is genuine and your friends are in your life because they truly want to be.

Figure A10*Intake: Fifth Grade Graduation*

T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 26 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: "Fifth Grade Graduation"

How long have you had this T-shirt?
I have had this shirt for about 12 years.

How did this T-shirt come into your life?
This is the shirt my fifth grade class got for our graduation in 2013. It has all of our names on the back. I don't remember if we needed to pay for the shirt or if the PTA gave it as a gift.

Why do you no longer wear this T-shirt?
I haven't worn it because I never thought to. I always assumed it was too small and I thought it would be weird to wear it out. Eventually, I forgot about it and it just lived in my drawer.



T-SHIRT INTAKE FORM

01 / 26 / 2025

02

Is there any reason why you have held on to this T-shirt?

I never really thought of this shirt in general, so I didn't have a specific reason to keep it at first. When I came upon it recently, it almost felt like I had kept it for this long, I owed it to the shirt to keep holding on to it. I suppose I feel some loyalty to my hometown and to my elementary school, which I believe is the best out of the seven in my district.

Do you have any strong memories attached to this T-shirt?

In fifth grade, I really solidified my friendships with my two best friends. The three of us are still best friends to this day. Some of the other friends I had in elementary school went on to become popular kids, but these two friends were more interested in the same books, music, and TV shows that I liked, which didn't make us popular but made us have fun within our own little group. We would make home movies and play video games, and we went on to go to concerts together as we got older. I'm not sure how much I loved fifth grade itself, but I'm grateful for finding my two favorite people.

Appendix B
Post-Art Survey

Figure B1

Blank Post-Art Survey

POST ART SURVEY / / 01

Your Name:

Name of T-shirt:

Artwork Title:



How did you develop your idea for the artwork?

Did you have any difficulties during the art-making process?

POST ART SURVEY

/ / 02

Did you discover anything during the process?

If your painting could speak now, what would it say?

Figure B2*Post-Art Survey: Generational Legacy*

POST ART SURVEY

03 / 04 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: Holy Family Swimming

Artwork Title: Generational Legacy



How did you develop your idea for the artwork?
I went into this painting with the idea of two gold links coming off of one larger one. I wanted these to represent my sister and I following in my dad's footsteps. I painted the background with blues, greens, and yellows; the blue is for the team color, the green is mine and my dad's favorite color, and the yellow is my sister's favorite color. Through the painting process, I realized I didn't like how it looked with the circles actually linked to each other, and I decided I wanted to have the other two gold shapes in different parts of the canvas. I also made them a wiggly shape because I liked how this made them unique.

Did you have any difficulties during the art-making process?
I struggled with this painting for a while because I didn't know how to achieve what I pictured in my head. When I realized I didn't like the links, I tried to use water to erase the second shape I had painted. This didn't work, leaving a ghost-like image on the canvas. For a while, I needed to walk away from this painting and work on a different one.

POST ART SURVEY

03 / 04 / 2025 02

Did you discover anything during the process?

I eventually embraced the ghost-shape, and I discovered that it felt like it belonged to my grandpa. Just as my dad coached me in everything growing up, from swimming to basketball to volleyball, my dad's father coached him. When I'm older, I know that I want to be a coach, too. My intention with painting the shapes for my sister and I as wiggly, wonky shapes was to show that we are making our own way in life, but when I look at it now, I wonder if we're just still growing into solid coaches. She's a bit further along than I am, but I'll get there. I have some good role models to look up to.

If your painting could speak now, what would it say?

"You do make him proud. You make him proud by making your own way in the world and by applying what he's taught you to do it. You've always been a coach, and you can be a coach anywhere you go. A coach is someone who listens and guides, who encourages others to be their best. You have always done that, and he has always seen that. Be proud of yourself. You are a coach."

Figure B3*Post-Art Survey: Growth & Growing*

POST ART SURVEY

03 / 04 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: Camp Good Grief

Artwork Title: Growth & Growing



How did you develop your idea for the artwork?
I sat with this canvas for a little while before I started painting. I knew that the theme I wanted to convey was "growth", as that was what I felt during my time at camp. I decided to paint irises, which are my favorite flower and my go-to symbol. I have irises at my house that once belonged to my maternal grandfather, who loved to garden. The irises bloom every year, and it's always my favorite part of coming home from school. I made sure to paint these irises like the irises I have at home, because irises will vary in color based on the pH of soil. My uncle even has irises from the same original plant as ours that look completely different!

Did you have any difficulties during the art-making process?
I didn't have many difficulties with this painting. The only issue I had was while I was sketching the flowers with paint, I ended up moving one of them. You can still see the original flower if you look closely. Usually this isn't a problem because I paint the background, but because I left the background visible, you can still see it. I was more easily able to embrace it this time, seeing as being able to see the "artist's hand".

POST ART SURVEY

03 / 04 / 2025 02

Did you discover anything during the process?

I don't believe that I discovered anything during the painting process, but now that I'm writing about it, I am. As much as I have such a desire to grow and keep growing in my career, a part of me knows that I will always feel safest at home. That's why I want to return home after I graduate to work, because it's what I know. I wonder if safe isn't always what is right. I wonder if I can do something challenging like move away from home and grow more than I would at home. Either way, my roots are the same; I'll always have my irises.

If your painting could speak now, what would it say?

"You can leave. I know that it's hard for you to change, but there is more out there. What's easy isn't always what's right. You could move upstate, you could move to the city, you could move out east, even though these sound scary. Home will always be here, even if it isn't here physically. If mom and dad move, that doesn't mean the world will end. You don't belong to Hicksville. You belong to the universe. Give yourself more than just home. You can find home again."

Figure B4*Post-Art Survey: Meet Me Halfway*

POST ART SURVEY

03 / 05 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: Plain White T's

Artwork Title: Meet Me Halfway



How did you develop your idea for the artwork?

Like the last canvas, I decided to sit with this one for a bit. I wasn't sure what I wanted to paint that would depict the memory of going to the concert with my childhood best friend. However, as I sat with it longer, I realized that I didn't care so much about the concert specifically, but about my childhood growing up with her. I decided to depict the halfway point between our two houses, where we would often meet up so that neither one of us had to walk the entire way by ourselves.

Did you have any difficulties during the art-making process?

I don't think I had any difficulties with this painting. Actually, I really enjoyed this one. I loved creating the almost bleach-dye effect in the background, which reminded me of crafts that my friend's mom would do with us. I loved painting the texture of the sidewalk and balancing the warm and cool tones. I think the most difficult part was figuring out the angle of the sidewalk, but once I got started, I really got into the process.

POST ART SURVEY

03 / 05 / 2025 02

Did you discover anything during the process?

As I got older, I drifted apart from this friend. In painting this sidewalk, I remembered how I used to round the corner and see her face, and we would start shouting to each other across the street. Sometimes I would leave my house before she would leave hers, so I'd end up walking further. I would complain that we didn't actually meet halfway. This happened more often than not. When we got into middle school, we were finally on the same bus and this corner was my bus stop. During this process, I discovered that I needed to connect with my inner child and remember being a little girl on her way to spend the day with her best friend, because I don't get to do that very often anymore.

If your painting could speak now, what would it say?

"Little Jillian is still in there, and you need to take care of her. She wants to play, to laugh, and to sing. She wants to dress up. She wants to buy ice cream from the ice cream truck. She wants a hug. Be nice to her, because one day she is going to feel so lost. She going to feel like she doesn't have anyone. Tell her about all of your friends, both new and old. Tell her how you got to grow up with some of the best people in the world. Tell her it's okay that people grow apart. Tell her she'll feel so much love from so many people. Tell her she'll be okay.

Maybe you should reach out to your childhood best friend, and tell her how much you miss her. Tell her how you remember being girls together. Little her is in there, too, and maybe she needs to hear it."

Figure B5*Post-Art Survey: The Carroll Family Home*

POST ART SURVEY

04 / 08 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: Family Reunion

Artwork Title: The Carroll Family Home



How did you develop your idea for the artwork?

I went into this painting with the idea of hands cradling the claddagh ring emblem and text at the top. As I was painting the hands, I struggled with depicting them and realized they didn't feel right. The more I worked with the t-shirt, the more I understood that my connection to it was the desire to reinforce a connection with my siblings. I decided to paint my home as it was when we grew up, before my parents had it painted gray. The Carroll Family Home stands here tall with a blue roof and a bright blue door, like it does in my memories.

Did you have any difficulties during the art-making process?

I think my greatest difficulty with this painting was staying motivated. Each time I painted a section and matched the colors incorrectly, I became frustrated and put off finishing the painting. I love my home so much that depicting it well felt important to me.

POST ART SURVEY

04 / 08 / 2025 02

Did you discover anything during the process?

As a reference picture, I used a photo that I took at about 6 years old after my oldest sister took me into New York City for the day. She had already moved out to go to college in Albany, and she eventually moved there permanently. During this art-making process, I realized that I'll never get to be a kid in my home with my siblings again, and that I haven't for a very long time. I tend to struggle with change; when my parents had the house painted during my junior year of high school, it made me cry. I'm terrified to think about what will happen to my home if it is no longer ours. If and when my parents decide to move, the idea of not being able to come home feels as if I'd be losing my safety net.

If your painting could speak now, what would it say?

"Your memories live in you. They live in the stories shared across dinner tables and cars. They live in songs poorly sung with your brother while your sister pretends to know the words. They live in the laughs as your mother uncovers a truth she never realized. They live among the friends that stick around long enough to memorize them. The memories will be there long after the house, and so will your siblings. They won't leave you once the starting point is gone. They will stay. They are the true starting point, and they will be with you until the end to build new memories."

Figure B6*Post-Art Survey: Return, Return, Return*

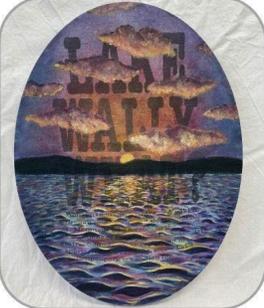
POST ART SURVEY

04 / 13 / 2025 01

Your Name: Jillian Carroll

Name of T-shirt: Lake Wally What?

Artwork Title: Return, Return, Return



How did you develop your idea for the artwork?

From the beginning of my research, I knew that I would paint a sunset at Lake Wallenpaupack for this T-shirt. I also wanted to use the oval base for this painting. I have a love for oval canvases and I felt like this T-shirt needed the gentleness that comes from the round shape. I believe that shape of the canvas also gives the impression that the environment extends beyond what you see, rather than being cut up by abrupt borders.

Did you have any difficulties during the art-making process?

The most difficult part for this painting was letting myself start. I had intended to start this painting after *Growth & Growing* and had even facetimed my mom to have her say goodbye to the shirt. However, when I called her, she started reminiscing about when she bought the shirt for me, and I no longer felt ready to cut the shirt to create the canvas. Instead, I worked on creating the canvas for *Meet Me Halfway*. I told my peers about this roadblock and was asked if I felt bad for the T-shirts, and I realized that I do. I feel very deeply for my T-shirts, as if they are sentient beings with whom I hold friendships. This one was the hardest to part with because of how long we've been together and all of our memories.

POST ART SURVEY

04 / 13 / 2025

02

Did you discover anything during the process?

My favorite part of our vacations to Lake Wallenpaupack is watching the sunsets. When my grandparents were still alive, I would often go to their room to sit and watch the sunset with them. Being that I go to school so close to the lake, when my grandma was passing away, I was able to drive to the lake to watch the sunset the night before she died. Now, I get to watch them with my nieces. I often worry about if my family will one day stop going to the lake. We once filled several cabins with aunts and uncles and a multitude of cousins, but now it's just us and sometimes an aunt and one cousin. My parents and siblings have discussed going somewhere else on vacation due to expenses, but I feel like this is where our memories and traditions live. I don't know what I would do without coming back here, to this place; this feels like home.

If your painting could speak now, what would it say?

While my other shirts encouraged me to let go, to grow, to move forward, this shirt seems to pull me back. "I am the waves," he says. "I pull you in, push you back. I am a cycle. Skip a rock and I'll bring it back to you one day. I am the sun. I rise and I set, and I warm your skin every day because that is my nature. I am the earth. I turn, and turn, and turn, and I will continue to do so forever. Your traditions are important to you. You come back to the lake every year with love in your heart and family and friends in tow. That is important, not to be given up or forgotten. There is change that we must accept, like parting with a T-shirt that no longer fits. Some change is simply too big, like letting go of an almost 90-year-old family tradition. That must be cherished. Do not allow others to make you feel childish or stubborn for believing this fact."

Appendix C

Prominent Words from Intakes

1/28/25

PROMINENT WORDS FROM INTAKES

tradition	1
family	
home	1
love	1
connection	1
need	1
feel ^{guilty} bad	
money	
happy	
friends	
supposed to	1
loyalty	1
meaningful	1
passionate	1
growth	1
genuine	1
important	1
grateful	