



Sugar Coated

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Keywords: Truth, Corset, Hoop, Transparent

Mentor Statement: This student is a second semester freshman, and created this outfit in response to a thought-provoking but difficult conceptual challenge that I proposed to my draping class. In this class I teach patternmaking and construction skills, but I have found that challenging students to think conceptually about their designs helps them to focus their work. They tend to rise to the challenge, and the best students then make design decisions guided by the need to communicate their understanding of the concept. The student had some skills when she came into our program and has developed into a stronger designer every day. She is thoughtful, intellectually grounded, and willing to listen thoughtfully to her teachers and peers.

I am nominating this design because it is very strong conceptually in every detail; the silhouette, proportions, fabric choices, construction methods, and historical references all support the concept. At the same time it also stands on its own, with great surface design, fit, proportions, and variety.

Student Statement: The design challenge I address in this outfit was to design a garment that: “expresses how you recognize and define truth.” This challenge was made in the context of the recent epidemic of fake news, and the public discussions of what constitutes ‘fake news’. I researched confirmation bias, selective exposure, and desirability bias, which are all concepts that explain how people only see the truth they want to see, and how they reject anything that does not conform to what they want to believe. In an article by M. Mitchell Waldrop, I found a diagram that showed seven different types of fake news, ranked by increasing intent to deceive. To my surprise, only one of the types of fake news contained fabricated content. The other six were made with genuine content that was manipulated to deceive. I wanted to express the idea of this deception and people’s desire to see the truth they want to see.

In my design, the tightly laced corset manipulates the body shape of the model, and represents the manipulation of truth. The hoop skirt creates an exaggerated shape unrelated to the true body. The dress that sits on top of the corset and hoop skirt represents the desire to accept this version of the truth. It has beautiful floral embroidery and sits over the shape of the manipulated truth, creating a simplified, attractive form. The dress is sheer to show that if we choose, we can see into the manipulation and therefore understand its relationship to real truth. However, some people only want to see a pretty dress in an ideal shape, and will choose to ignore the manipulation, thereby accepting it as truth. The corset also represents the harm done by the manipulation of truth. Corsets can cause long-term physical damage if worn constantly. In the short term they can cause discomfort, and make it difficult to breathe, to eat and to participate in everyday activities. The hoop also interferes with movement, limiting the activities of the wearer. This dress shows how people choose to create the

image of their ideal truth at the expense of health and comfort. They are creating an illusion, and not making their 'ideal truth' true.

I created the corset using a pattern digitized from *Corsets and Crinolines* and scaled up to my model's size. I made a prototype corset of canvas and altered it to fit my model the way that I wanted it to. I made it small enough so that when laced tightly it would compress her ribcage, reduce her waist measurement, and shape her bust line. I then transferred the alterations to Optitex and laser-cut the pieces from black cotton coutil. I used flat steel bones where the boning was straight, and spiral steel boning for areas where the bones curved around the body. I lined the corset and finished the top and bottom edges with bias tape made from coutil.

The hoop skirt uses steel boning on the bottom edge for extra support and plastic boning for the top two tiers. I suspended the hoops with eight straps made of black twill tape, evenly spaced, between each tier and the waistband, which is fastened with a single large snap. The waistband is adjusted to match the laced-in waist measurement of my model.

The dress is made from purchased floral embroidered mesh sewn together in a simple, elegant silhouette that emphasizes the narrow waist and full skirt. I used a combination of draping and drafting to create the pattern, which was also digitized and trued in the computer. Pattern pieces were carefully placed to optimize the embroidery motifs on the body, making use of some areas that are less densely embroidered than others. Since the fabric is sheer, I achieved a clean finish using French seams for all construction including the darts. Working out a method of sewing the darts smoothly with a French seam took some calculation. I left the neckline, armholes, and hem unfinished because the fabric does not fray and I wanted the edges of the dress to fade into the body. I used small, white hooks and eyes to fasten the dress, making the closure as subtle as possible, and showing the lacing of the corset underneath.

This outfit is a concept or runway piece, designed to communicate my thoughts about the perception of truth in a world where it is an elusive commodity. This piece expresses the internal fight between recognizing and accepting the truth and submitting to our fantasies about the truth. Sometimes the truth isn't pretty and we apply a little sugar coating.

References:

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