

## Fabricating Change

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**Design Mentor Statement:** This design was created in a junior-level apparel draping course. Students were tasked to design an ensemble using draping techniques to make a statement about a contemporary social movement of their choosing. The purpose of this mentorship relationship was to guide the student through the steps of the research and design process and provide feedback at each step to push the student's design ideas and construction techniques further. I chose to sponsor this student's work due to the attention to detail in construction techniques, incorporation of the social movement to each design element, and exceptional craftsmanship. I was impressed by the student's thoughtfulness and intention when using embellishments to connect to the inspiration.

**Statement of Purpose:** Heroin was initially introduced in the early 1900s as a solution to combat morphine addiction (PBS, n.d.). However, its distribution has led to a proliferation of addiction, with the increasing purity of the drug exacerbating addiction rates and overdoses (PBS, n.d.). In fact, drug overdose deaths involving heroin peaked in 2016 with 15,469 deaths in the U.S. (NIDA, 2024). To address the opioid crisis, governmental bodies, non-profits, and legislative efforts have introduced harm reduction programs. These programs aim to mitigate heroin and opioid overdoses by providing sterile injection equipment, fentanyl test strips, and Narcan, among other methods. Such harm reduction initiatives are crucial as they provide essential, life-saving assistance.

Harm reduction strategies have proven to be effective in aiding recovery and promoting safety for those battling heroin addiction. In fact, since 2016, the number of deaths due to heroin overdose in the U.S. has trended downward with 5,871 deaths reported in 2022 (NIDA, 2024). On a larger scale, there were more than 100,000 drug-involved overdose deaths in 2023 in the U.S., which is a 3% decrease in deaths since 2022 and the first annual decrease in drug overdose deaths since 2018 (Kekatos, 2024). This progress may be attributed to the approval of Narcan, the overdose reversal drug, for over-the-counter use in March 2023 (Kekatos, 2024).

The purpose of *Fabricating Change* is to convey the sense of entrapment experienced in addiction and to reflect the impact of heroin use on the wearer. It simulates the experience of using heroin, depicting the toll it takes both physically and mentally. By sharing this understanding, this garment aims to educate observers on the significance and legitimacy of harm reduction methods for those who are struggling from heroin addiction.

**Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact:** The design elements within this garment depict both the process of using heroin and its profound impacts on the user's body and mind (Figure 1). It is

designed to make the wearer experience the constraints and challenges like those faced by individuals struggling with heroin addiction. Heroin can lead to a range of physical and mental effects, such as collapsed veins, a sensation of heaviness, itching, slowed breathing, social isolation, and an overwhelming inability to cease drug use (Caron, n.d.). This design incorporates features that symbolize these harmful effects, including belts wrapped tightly around the arms and along the skirt, representing the unbreakable grip of addiction and the user's loss of control. The center of the bodice is constricted by a corset tightened with a leather rope, illustrating the entrapment within addiction. This design choice reflects the harsh reality that even after overcoming addiction, many individuals struggle to remain clean due to a lack of resources or support networks.

In addition to exploring the effects of heroin, the garment also visually represents the act of heroin use. Belts mimic the tourniquet used during injection, while steel beads and spikes on the sleeves and belts evoke the imagery of needles (Figure 2). Red beads along the center of the arm symbolize the track marks left by repeated injections (Figure 3).

Fabric choice was also critical in conveying the experience of addiction. Dense denim was used for the sleeves to depict the heaviness felt by addicts and to create a sensation of discomfort on the skin, reminiscent of the itching and discomfort associated with drug use. The use of red fabric with thin black lines illustrates the appearance and consequences of collapsed veins, a common complication for those who inject heroin (Figure 4). The combination of these design elements educates viewers on the debilitating effects of heroin use and the importance of harm reduction strategies.

**Process, Technique, and Execution:** The design process for this garment began by draping pleated fabric over the dress form to draft the bodice pattern. This was a careful and labor-intensive stage, with the pleats intended to mimic the wrinkling of skin that often occurs as a result of drug use. The pleats not only emphasize the body's natural curves but also serve as a structural element to ensure a precise fit. Each pleat was meticulously hand-tacked to enhance durability, followed by sewing in a lining to complete the bodice. The garment was designed with minimal ease, aiming for a snug, form-fitting silhouette. Subsequently, the skirt was draped, and the sleeve was patterned to achieve a leg-of-mutton style. The garment features extensive hand embellishments, including red beads on the sleeves and steel beads along the center of the chest, each carefully stitched in place.

**Cohesion:** This garment features a snug silhouette, minimal ease, belts, and a corset, all designed to evoke a sense of confinement and entrapment. The black and red color palette further enhances feelings of violence, anger, and mystery. Together, the fit and color scheme are intended to create an unsettling experience not only for the wearer but also for the observer.

**Originality and Innovation:** Few garments in the industry are designed to highlight the struggles of those fighting the uphill battle of addiction. *Fabricating Change* provides wearers an opportunity to feel the constraints imposed by addiction. Instead of using traditional methods like darts to perfect the garment's fit, horizontal pleats are used on the bodice, a technique not

typically seen in apparel, especially in this area. The garment features an unconventional placement of belts designed to impose constraints on the wearer.

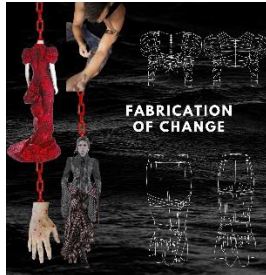


Figure 1. Mood Board.



Figure 2. Needle Spikes.



Figure 3. Track Marks.



Figure 4. Print Design.

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