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## Adaptive Fashion: Access, Advocacy, and Occupational Therapy

Tiffany Truong

*University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, T.Truong1@usa.edu*

Susan MacDermott

*University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, skmacdermott@gmail.com*

Karen Park

*University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, kpark@usa.edu*

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# Adaptive Fashion: Access, Advocacy, and Occupational Therapy

Tiffany Truong OTDS; Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L; Karen Park, OTD, OTR/L

## BACKGROUND

Adaptive apparel is specially designed to make the dressing experience easier for individuals with disabilities (Azher et al., 2012). These garments are developed to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, and helps improve independence, ease of dressing for the caregiver, and promotes inclusivity (Antonela et al., 2014; Hall, 2018). Some barriers to accessing adaptive apparel include limited retailers, limitations in design, and affordability. Inability to participate in dressing impacts individuals from engaging meaningfully in their life; this includes social participation, work, religious expression, perception of self, and self-expression (Esmail et al., 2020). Though dressing is an occupation within occupational therapy's scope of practice, there is limited research, programs, and projects defining occupational therapy's role and presence in adaptive clothing.

## Purpose

The purpose of this project is to conduct a needs assessment of individuals with disabilities related to challenges in apparel to develop occupational therapy's role in adaptive apparel.

## QR Codes



Scan for 5F Framework



Scan for References



Scan for 5F Data



Scan for Deliverable

## METHODS

Research Question: What are the experiences and perceptions of fashion/apparel for people with disabilities (PWDs)?

Data collection using unobtrusive methods

### Inclusion Criteria

- Publicly accessible written or audiovisual records
- Contains stories, perspectives, recommendations relating to apparel for people w/ disabilities

Thematic analysis

Use 5F framework checklist to sort data

## Results

Themes	Quotes
Difficulty finding apparel connected to person and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Styles change massively within fashion so it depends what the style is within the fashion and to how easy it is for me to find clothes that fit me</li> <li>To go from wearing whatever I wanted to wear to then being really really restricted I definitely feel like over the years I've had some challenging times especially with it comes to dressing on my bottom half.</li> </ul>
Humanizing who we are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breaking down barriers of fashion and disability is a simple way of humanizing who we are and making people realize that we are more than just our mobility devices, our illnesses and our disabilities and abilities</li> </ul>
Fashion for environment expectations increase demand for varying apparel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Something that really makes me nervous is when I go to an event as an artist for example or to an autism event then people say okay you have to wear this</li> <li>The last time I wore long pants was 6.5 years ago...semi-formal? At best, I do well to appear semi-human</li> </ul>
Flexibility of self-expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aesthetics is part of my masking to fit in.</li> <li>I feel like how I'm presenting myself to myself to the world doesn't reflect what I want it to be</li> </ul>
Perceptions influence desire and engagement for apparel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I want to be a walking contradiction of those stereotypes and that starts with how you dress because for better or worse what you are wearing is the first thing that people notice when they see you</li> <li>I always wanted to wear exactly what my friends were wearing but now I've come to terms with that yeah I have a different style because I cant wear the same things and I should just embrace the difference and it'd be unique</li> </ul>

## Discussion

- Findings reinforce the literature regarding lack of accessibility to apparel for PWDs and the connection of identity and apparel
- Findings indicated the need for increased accessibility, variation, and mainstream options of adaptive apparel
- Limitations due to the use of unobtrusive methods to collect data and lack to data on adaptive apparel specifically
- Call to Action: future research on perceptions and experiences of adaptive apparel from non-sponsored consumers, advocate for occupational therapy role and presences in the fashion industry, advocate and educate increase accessibility and involvement of PWDs in the fashion industry

## Implications for OT

**Advocate** for disability accessibility in all areas related to adaptive fashion (i.e. in-store accessibility, online accessibility, inclusive marketing etc.)

**Educate** and consult designers and mainstream companies on a more holistic view of the individual and the occupation of dressing

**Support** clients and caregivers in the occupation of dressing with resources and alternative approaches (i.e clothing adaptations)

**Research** adaptive apparel considerations and interventions. Incorporate information in CEUs and OT curriculum