



Refashioning Accessibility - Creating Vintage Inspired Fashion Accessible to Individuals With Limited Mobility

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Design Mentor Statement

This design is part of a three ensemble collection created as part of the student's honors research project. I have worked with the student as her honors mentor for the last three years. The student grew immensely as a designer and a researcher and set themselves apart from their peers. During this time the student has shown great dedication to learning about accessible design through extensive literature review and also by conducting IRB approved interviews with women using mobility aids. This research was then analyzed for multiple aspects one being design related desires for their clothing. I chose to sponsor this student and their work because of the dedication, thought, and concern that has been put into the design. Every aspect including the digital textile print has been designed to empower the wearer. Overall this design includes significant attention to functional design features that can enhance the wearer's experience and is original in concept and unlike any accessible garments available on the market.

Design Statement

Statement of Purpose: One in 4 people (85 million) in the United States has been diagnosed with a form of a disability, with 13.7 percent (44 million) having a mobility-related disability (CDC, 2020). Despite being the largest disability minority group in the US (CDC, 2020), the availability of clothes for people with disabilities is larger than the selection for people with disabilities (Ryan, 2018). While selections of adaptive clothing exist, they are largely marketed as medical equipment, leading people with disabilities to be dissatisfied with these garments (Sarcone, 2017). Because of the lack of options, many people with disabilities feel alienated from the fashion industry (Freeman, Kaiser & Wingate, 1985-1986).

The purpose of this design was to create a vintage-inspired garment tailored to the needs of people with disabilities. This design is part of a larger collection based on interview data from 13 women who use mobility aids. Donning and doffing, access to medical devices, and ready-to-wear garment discomfort were main findings of that research. Taking clothing on and off, also known as donning and doffing, is a pertinent problem of those who use mobility aids due to seated position and dexterity limitations (Stokes, 2010). Garment fit poses an issue in both attractiveness and comfort (Lee & Jin, 2019). Bulky seams and abrasive fabrics can cause pressure sores on sensitive skin causing physical discomfort (Na, 2007; Ruteledge, 2017). Many people with disabilities have difficulty accessing medical ports or monitors hidden under clothing. Access to medical devices can increase independence and ease of care (Todd & Norton, 1996). My goal with this design was to create a design that considers and includes a population that often feels excluded, minimized, or "othered" (Sarcone, 2017).

Aesthetic Properties: Refashioning Accessibility was inspired by 1940s women’s sportswear day dresses (Shrimpton, 2015; Springs, 2015) which pushed the boundaries of creativity, femininity, and utility due to the strain and rationing of World War II (Kay & Storey, 2018; Reddy, 2020). Vintage fashion has been found to be used by women to construct a “distinctive look” and stand out amongst current trends (Armstead, 2018). My aim was to bring attention to disability in a positive way and to empower the wearer to embrace their disability identity.

This dress is an a-line style dress with an adjustable magnetic sash to create a more flattering silhouette. The skirt is a high low style to allow for an improved seated position fit. The custom print was created in Adobe Illustrator as a modern take on “ditsy floral” prints of the era (Springs, 2015). I wanted to bring attention to disability in a positive way so that a wearer would feel empowered by their mobility aid use. It incorporates disability related symbols (like a wheelchair wheel, cane, and walker) amongst other graphic motifs (Figure 1). The accent print of the necktie and sash is a tire track trail inspired by the marking of wheelchair wheels. Print mixing adds an additional visual element to the garment in a way that does not add design elements that impede mobility aid use. In addition, it creates a more visually flattering silhouette in both a seated and standing position (Figure 2). The combination of silhouette, custom print, and bold colors create a unique look to empower the wearer.

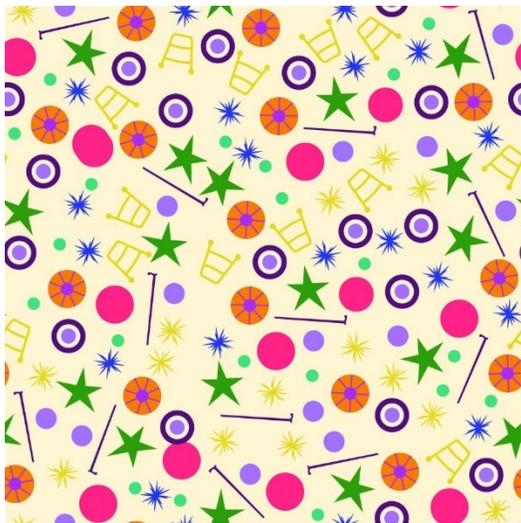


Figure 1



Figure 2

Process, Technique, and Execution: Refashioning Accessibility was created using flat-pattern pattern making methods. This ensemble can be fully donned and doffed in a seated position because of the shoulder snap openings and keyhole neck tie opening. This dress can be adjusted to multiple sizes and styled two different ways with the magnetic sash at the waist. The bodice has an invisible zipper to allow access to medical devices at the chest. Pockets are located in the upper torso seams of the dress to be accessible in a seated position. The ensemble was constructed with rayon challis to remain soft, comfortable, and reduce bulk at the seams

(Kadolph & Marcketti, 2017). The sleeves have a larger armhole and flared construction to increase comfort for muscular arms and to add drape and movement when the wearer manipulates a mobility aid.

Cohesion, Originality and Innovation: Overall, my goal was to bring attention to the lack of clothing options for people with mobility issues by creating an eye-catching garment that accommodates the needs of people with disabilities without sacrificing aesthetic qualities. Simple design changes, such as shoulder snaps, adjustable magnets, and waist-accessible pockets, can be implemented into a variety of garments to provide more garment choices to people with limited mobility. As a designer, my desire is to empower those with limited mobility by providing autonomy and femininity and bring attention to the fact that the fashion industry cannot ignore over 85 million people any longer (CDC, 2020).

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