



Inequalities around fashioned bodies, style, and beauty: A seminar examining social injustices related to the apparel industry, discipline, and/or personal aesthetics

Kelly L. Reddy-Best, Iowa State University, Tameka N. Ellington, Kent State University, and Eulanda A. Sanders, Iowa State University

The seminar was centered around scholarship related to or addressing social justice or social justice issues in the apparel industry, our discipline, or personal and/or community aesthetics and styles. We focused on work examining underrepresented populations such as: (a) people of color, (b) the LGBTQ+ community, (c) people of a variety of abilities, and/or (d) other groups that have a history of oppression, discrimination, or power and privilege inequalities. The seminar had a non-traditional “arrangement” in the room with “exhibits” of scholarly work and “mini talks” from each presenter. Our goal was to initiate and encourage these discussions to go beyond the seminar session and for the participants to engage in dialogue at their home institutions and programs while building a network of people in the seminar to dialogue about in the future.

Seminar Organizers:

Kelly L. Reddy-Best, Iowa State University, Tameka N. Ellington, Kent State University, and Eulanda A. Sanders, Iowa State University

Seminar Participants:

Unapologetically Fat Online: Fat Women, Dress, and Destigmatization on YouTube, Arienne McCracken, Mary Lynn Damhorst, and Eulanda Sanders, Iowa State University

Transpeople and Issues with the Fit of RTW Clothes, Andrew Reilly, University of Hawai‘i and Mānoa Jory Catalpa and Jenifer McGuire, University of Minnesota

Health Disparities, Environmental Racism and Natural Beauty Products, Examining Beliefs and Health-Promoting Behaviors of Black Women, Melodie Davis-Bundrage, Johnson & Wales University University

(dis)ABLED BEAUTY: The Evolution of Beauty, Disability and Ability – A Curated Exhibition Featuring the Paradox of a Societal Dogma, Tameka N. Ellington, Kent State University and Stacey R. Lim, Central Michigan University

Adaptive Aesthetics, Tracy Vollbrecht and Tameka N. Ellington (faculty mentor), Kent State University

The Impact of Acculturation on Mayan Dress in Contemporary Yucatan, Ashley Kubley, University of Cincinnati

Unapologetically Fat Online: Fat Women, Dress, and Destigmatization on YouTube

Arienne McCracken, Mary Lynn Damhorst, and Eulanda Sanders,
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In contemporary mainstream United States culture, body weight is a central concern in people's everyday lives (Maurer & Sobal, 1999). Moreover, fat people often attract a variety of intensely negative reactions from others. They are scorned, shamed, and bullied. They are derided as morally deficient, lazy, ugly, and diseased (LeBesco, 2004). Fatness is also correlated with downward social mobility and lower socio-economic status (Crandall & Schiffhauer, 1998). The prevailing anti-fat ideology is mirrored and reinforced by a variety of channels, especially mass media. While in recent years there has been an increased visibility of a handful of fat women in mainstream media and advertising, this does not equate to the normalization of the fat body or the overall acceptance of fat people in society.

How can this anti-fat attitude be changed? While greater visibility of fat bodies is important, it may not be enough. One relatively new phenomenon in the realm of social media may be instructive. As a type of participatory culture, social media platforms have the potential to give individuals a more direct voice in societal conversations, instead of those conversations being filtered through mass media that is monopolistically controlled through corporate ownership. Cheng (2010) argued that marginalized individuals and groups who had a presence that included both their images and voices would be better equipped to combat their status and affect the wider culture.

The focus of this study is fat women who make YouTube videos about their love of fashion and beauty products. YouTube videos offer a platform for both the visual and the vocal. How do women who may have experienced profound stigmatization in their lives based on their physical appearance go on to become, in the parlance of YouTube culture, "beauty gurus," who are express their love of and expertise in fashion apparel and beauty products through the content of their videos?

To date there has been very little research on women at the confluence of size acceptance, dress, and social media. Therefore, this is an exploratory study that employs video content analysis to lay the groundwork for further work in this area. It analyzes the content of 100 of the most popular YouTube fashion or beauty videos created by women who self-identify as "fat" (or "plus size," another commonly used descriptor).

References

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Transpeople and Issues with the Fit of RTW Clothes

Andrew Reilly, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, Jory Catalpa and Jenifer McGuire, University of Minnesota, USA

Whereas some research has covered body image and body issues of transpeople, no known academic attention has been paid to the clothing fit and sizing needs of transpeople. Transpeople represent an estimated 1.4 million people in the US alone, yet are virtually ignored by the fashion industry, except for some niche brands. Clothing fit and sizing is a significant issue for the general population with researchers finding a majority of people are dissatisfied with the fit of their clothing and alter their ready-to-wear (RTW) clothing to fit their bodies. Yet, this research was conducted on presumable cisgender women. It is likely that transpeople have fit issues with their clothing, but their needs may be different as trans people strive to hide body parts that reveal their assigned sex at birth and undergo appearance management behaviors to create their ideal aesthetic.

Ninety participants were recruited through community centers, support group meetings, and listserves geared towards transpeople. The participants were from eight cities in the US, Canada, and Ireland, and represented a range of ethnicities (11% Irish, 4.5% Canadian, 48% U.S. Caucasian, 15% Latino/Hispanic, 12% African American, 8% American Indian, 5% Asian, and 4% another ethnic/racial background), and gender identities (37% male to female, 32% third gender, 31% female-to-male). Ages ranged from 15-30.

Participants were interviewed for one to three hours and interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were then coded ($k=.90$) into three themes: fit, cut, and size problems with RTW clothing in general; hiding the body with clothes; and revealing the body with clothes.

The social justice issue is that mass produced clothing is not designed for the changing body of transpeople. The trans community has unique needs for their clothing that is not being met by the current industry at large, and if one wants to create new clothing or alter RTW clothing it requires additional money or skill.

Health Disparities, Environmental Racism and Natural Beauty Products: Examining Beliefs and Health Promoting Behaviors of Black Women

Melodie Davis-Bundrage, Johnson & Wales University

This study aims to determine the likelihood of black women's purchase intention toward natural and organic products as a health-promoting behavior. The study offers a critical analysis of the beauty industry as a racialized space that offers fewer options to black women in the green beauty sector. Qualitative methods were used to examine the influence of Health Belief Model constructs on purchase intentions toward natural beauty products.

Two focus group sessions were conducted with 11 female African-American participants. The results indicate that each construct of the Health Belief Model relates to the participants' lived experience and a common theme of "blackness" influences consumer behavior. The severity of and susceptibility to various health issues do impact participants' desire for healthier products. However, various barriers, such as environmental racism often block access to a healthier lifestyle.

This study suggests that beauty product manufacturers and retailers need to better address the specific needs and skin tones of black women. The findings provide valuable insight into black women's consumer behavior and offers marketing recommendations to the beauty industry that could impact the level of health disparities of black women.

(dis)ABLED BEAUTY: the evolution of beauty, disability and ability – A curated exhibition featuring the paradox of a societal dogma

Tameka N. Ellington, Kent State University and Stacey R. Lim, Central Michigan University

(dis)ABLED BEAUTY: the evolution of beauty, disability and ability is an exhibition's whose purpose was to engage audiences with a unique experience showcasing assistive devices along with extensive public programming which sparked discussion and innovation in deconstructing the paradox of what it means to be disabled and beautiful. In the process, the show dismantled stereotypes about those with disabilities by featuring items that make its wearers "superhuman" and "fashionable." The Kent State University (KSU) exhibition featured hearing devices, prosthetic limb devices, adaptive clothing, extraordinary wheelchairs, and walking sticks. Not only did the exhibition spark discussion and change, but the *(dis)ABLED BEAUTY: the documentary* added unique voices to the discussion. This documentary played in a continuous loop in the exhibition space and featured a variety of persons living with disabilities discussing their perspectives on Americanized beauty standards and how they see themselves in that realm. The exhibition was open from July 2016 through March 2017, with an opening gala September 29, 2016 kicking off disAbility Awareness Month at KSU. An extension show and guest lecture took place in Akron, Ohio in February 2017. The goal of this extension show was to continue the conversation about disability and beauty in the greater community. ALLELES Design Studio, Ltd., founded by Mr. Ryan Palibroda and Ms. McCauley Wanner of Victoria, Canada, were the guest speakers for the show. They transform prosthetic limbs from medical devices into fashion accessories.

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Adaptive Aesthetics

Tracy Vollbrecht and Tameka N. Ellington (Faculty Mentor), Kent State University



Figure 1. Conversion of an existing adaptive shirt into a more fashion style with similar functionality

In the above visual representation, I've taken an existing garment from Adaptive Clothing Showroom (Women's Adaptive Clothing, 2017) and drawn a simple, more stylish variation of a sleeveless shirt on top of the existing garment. The variation I have drawn accomplishes the same tasks as the existing garment in a much more fashionable way. The existing garment has snaps on the back to make putting the garment over one's head easier, whereas my garment has a wide boat neck with a Velcro closure that allows for ease in getting the garment over the head. The existing garment also has a cutout to reduce the amount of bulk sat on by a wheelchair user. My garment, with its overlapping, curved edge back, similarly reduces the amount of bulk sat on by the user and allows for ease and give in the shoulder/back area.

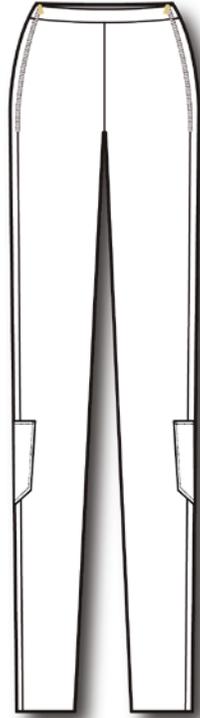


Figure 2. The conversion of jeans to an adaptable style.

In the above representation, I have shown a technical flat of a standard pair of jeans (left) compared to an adapted pair of jeans (right) incorporating solutions to problem areas. As one wheelchair user stated, “Regular pockets near the waist are never used. They will always be hidden because of the sitting position and can also rub and cause pressure sores. I end up using my boots for pockets” (2017). Taking this into consideration, I have removed all pockets at the waist as well as the additional seaming. I have repositioned the pockets to the sides of the calves, too, which replaces her need to use her boots as pockets. In addition, instead of a center front fly, the pants have a zipper on each side. However, the zipper is slightly more forward than the side seam in order to prevent irritation for seated wearers. All wearers benefit from the side zippers, as the double zippers allow even more room than a standard fly when getting into the pants.

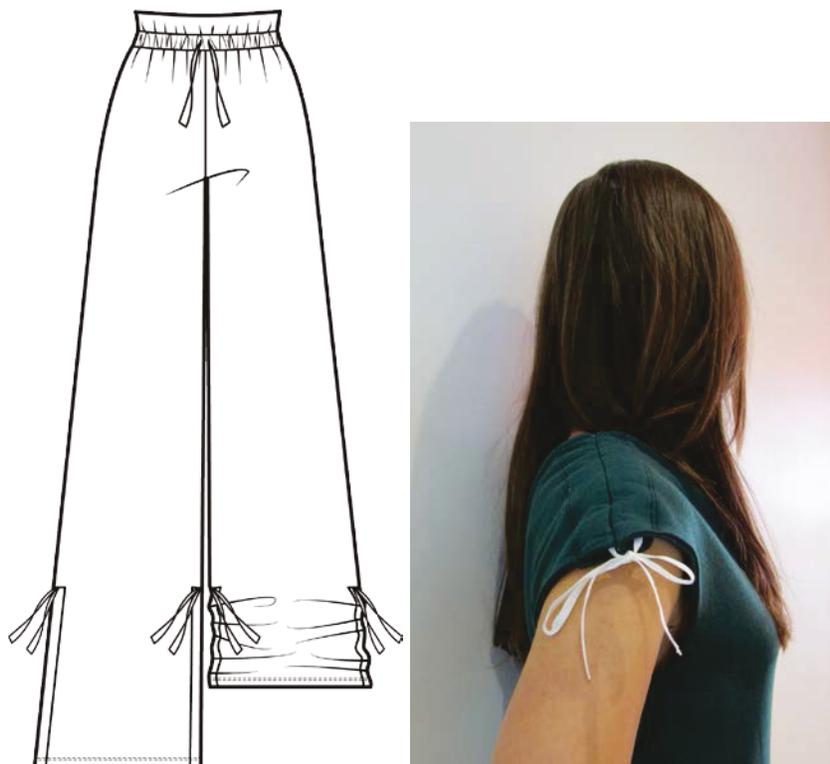


Figure 3. The adaptivity of length in knit pants.

In the images above, a pair of knit, wide leg pants have adaptations added to make them even more user friendly. One of the biggest issues faced by people with disabilities is there is no standard sizes – each wearer is unique. “Often the length of sleeves and length of pants are an issue” (Personal Experience, 2017). The cinched waist is created by a drawstring that is easy to adjust to any waist size. The length of the pants, which is often a troublesome area as there are no “average” sizes, can be adjusted by each user. This same principal and idea can be applied to the forearm portion of a top, the lower pant leg, or anywhere else where adjustability is needed. The right image shows a sample of the drawstring and casing.

The last approximately one foot of the pants includes a drawstring and casing on each side seam. The ties are at the top of the casing, as opposed to the bottom, which make them easier to reach for the self-sufficient user and the drawstrings do not run the risk of dragging on the ground or getting caught.



Figure 4. Muslin pants with waist adjusted for seated wearer

Shown above is a pair of pants sewn in muslin that take into consideration the seated position of a wheelchair user. Because a person in a wheelchair is seated almost constantly, any bottom garment must take this into consideration. The pants shown above are higher in the back to accommodate this. Any lower waist would make the pants slip down and would be uncomfortable for a seated wearer.



Figure 5. Transformable jacket

The jacket shown above incorporates a few key solutions to problems faced by those with disabilities. First, while the jacket is structured, the fabric is soft and flexible, preventing any sharp creases. The jacket's sleeves are removable through the use of zippers to allow the wearer a second length option. The hood is also removable. While in this model zippers are used to detach the sleeves and hood, the zippers could also be swapped for Velcro, which requires less fine motor skills of the user. The triangular shaped created on the center front and center back allow the jacket to spread and have ease when worn in a seated position. The length of the jacket is also key for a seated wearer.

The Impact of Acculturation on Mayan Dress in Contemporary Yucatan

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in collaboration with the Najil Tucha artisans of Punta Laguna, Quintana Roo, MX

Characteristics of ancient Mayan heritage are visible today in the anthropometry, language, and dress of the indigenous people living in the Yucatan Peninsula region of Mexico today. Historically, this ethnic group has been stigmatized and socio-economically depressed by Euro-Mestizo society as the lower class. Status is immediately recognizable in differences through the dress styles worn by many Mayan women today.

Amidst oppression, the Yucatec Maya have retained much of their cultural identity, expressed through language and oral tradition, however, technology, tourism, and cultural change have brought global acculturation to today's indigenous Mayan communities. These influences have initiated a shift in the consumption and use of traditional garments among indigenous women today. Widely recognized globalized dress styles, a desire for separation from the stigma of rural Mayanism and the low price and widespread availability of mass market clothing are just a few of many factors contributing to this shift in dress practices, especially among younger generations. The *huipil*, a foundational garment in the traditional costume of the Yucatec Maya, has been created and worn daily by indigenous Mayan women for centuries. Despite adaptations to the style and decorative elements of this garment over time, only now have indigenous women begun to altogether forego the use of traditional dress worn by their mothers and grandmothers for westernized, contemporary clothing styles.

The spread of the tourism industry has created an opportunity for young artisans in this region to “sell” the Mayan cultural experience. Particularly by creating artisan-made embroidered blouses in the style of the traditional *huipil*, which are designed for, sold to and worn by tourists and travelers who visit this region. Only within the past 20 years has the *huipil* become primarily used as a commodity, and less a cultural expression of Mayan identity. Commodified *huipil* designs are often devoid of traditional symbolism, and have little connection to the material culture and textile craft heritage from which they evolved. In the modern day, popular interest into social justice and cultural conservation efforts abound, however I would argue that this attention in effect is only further depleting cultural authenticity, and perhaps artisans are subconsciously adapting their designs to protect cultural integrity by editing out the symbolism imbued in these garments, knowing that they will be consumed and worn by users outside of their culture. With a new social paradigm shift towards female empowerment, the Hecho en Mexico makers movement, a new appreciation of indigenous heritage is growing among young female artisans. Mayan youth are beginning to see the value in continuing to make and wear the artifacts of cultural dress with pride, adding yet another level to this complex issue of dress identity for this region's indigenous people, with commodification and social entrepreneurship as a driving force.

How then will the newest generation of indigenous Mayan women temper their own individual/postmodern expression with expectations of cultural heritage and dress in an increasingly globalized and connected world? This study investigates the expressions of appearance and feelings towards dress from the vantage point of the youngest and oldest generations of the Najil Tucha textile artisans in the village of Punta Laguna, Yucatan. Here, the traditional *huipil* was still being used as the everyday standard of dress for the majority of females until about 2 generations ago. Through interviews and visualization exercises, I have begun to understand the impacts of these factors on the current dress practices across the last three generations of artisans within this community, and learn that culture is not created in a vacuum. The idealized, commodified, westernized version of traditional dress is not in actuality a realistic construct.

The future goal of this research is to help female Mayan youth re-imagine what it means to embrace cultural heritage in the current age. I am investigating how globalization and modern technology have affected this community's dress, the local tourist economy and craft production practices,

How then can craft traditions, techniques and oral traditions can be preserved and reshaped in a modern way before those skills are lost with the last living generation of traditionally observant women? Next steps in this project are to work with communities across Yucatan to connect young and old indigenous artisans together, so that they may exchange the traditions, symbolism and processes of traditional craft making. Workshops will take place over the summer with artisans, and a documentation of interview with young artisans on their perceptions of dress will also be included.