



Special Topic: Adaptive apparel: Evolving disability trends with industry, government, and NGO's

Dawn Michaelson, Ph.D., Auburn University, Auburn, AL
Kerri McBee-Black, Ph.D., University of Missouri, Columbus, MO

Summary Description: Learn about the latest evolving trends in adaptive apparel and disability movements from industry specialists, NGO's and government offices so we can broaden our knowledge beyond academia.

Panel of Presenters:

Dana Zumbo, Adaptive Business Development Manager, Zappos Adaptive
Mindy Scheier, Founder of Runway of Dreams and Founder/CEO of GAMUT Management
Grace Jun, Chief Executive Office, Open Style Labs
Dr. Jo Gooding, Diverse Talent Networks and Adaptive Fashion Collective (UK)
Erica Cole, Owner/Founder, No Limbits
Kyla Hovda, Senior Accessibility Compliance Manager, Microsoft
Billy Price, Owner/Founder, Billy Footwear

General content of session: Globally, an estimated 1.3 billion people live with disabilities (World Health Organization, 2022). Over the last decade, PWDs have seen the growth of a disability rights movement, increased visibility in society, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and advances in assistive technology, including adaptive apparel (DisabilityIN.org, 2022). Large apparel retailers, such as Walmart®, Target®, Kohls®, and Zappos® have entered the adaptive apparel market. This reflects a growing acceptance and inclusion of PWDs in society, and an increasing emphasis on independence and empowerment for individuals with disabilities. ITAA has also seen growth in research, creative scholarship, and special topic sessions related to adaptive apparel (McBee-Black et al., 2021).

However, there is a gap that exists between academia, government, NGO, and industry. This gap has manifested in several ways, such as academics not having access to resources or real-world data that would be useful for their research, or government, NGO, and industry not being aware of or utilizing the latest research findings. Bridging this gap can lead to more effective solutions to real-world problems for PWDs and more efficient use of resources. In the context of adaptive apparel, academics are working on improved fit, donning, and doffing options, along with developing new technologies and materials to improve the function and comfort of adaptive clothing. Government organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also play a role in the adaptive apparel industry. Government organizations such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education may provide funding for research and development in the field, while NGOs such as the National Multiple Sclerosis Society may provide support and resources for people with disabilities.

The adaptive apparel industry, government organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) all play important roles in advancing the development and availability of adaptive clothing. With these groups working together, academia could see an increase in funding for research, internship opportunities for students, and improved adaptive clothing. Collaborations can form between academics, industry, and NGOs to provide improved adaptive apparel. Overall, the collaboration between academia, the adaptive apparel industry, government organizations, and NGOs can lead to improved design and functionality of adaptive clothing, greater awareness of these products in society, and increased access to adaptive clothing for people with disabilities or special needs.

Benefit of session to members: This special topic session will bring industry, government, and or NGOs together to discuss current trends with adaptive apparel, ADA policy, disability movement, employment opportunities, etc. for PLWD. Some panelists will join the special session virtually; therefore, Wi-Fi access is needed for this special session. It is our hope that this session can lessen the gap between these organizations and academia. In addition, conversations during this session may lead to collaborations in adaptive apparel research. Further, hearing from industry, government, and NGOs can improve how adaptive apparel is discussed and taught in apparel design, merchandising, and retailing sectors. Students attending will be exposed to new information on disabilities, adaptive apparel, and even career opportunities. Overall, we hope ITAA members will gain additional knowledge on adaptive apparel research so we can continue to improve adaptive apparel for PLWD or special needs.

References

- DisabilityIN.org. (2022). Disability Equality Index 2022 Report: The most comprehensive benchmarking tool for disability inclusion in business. DisabilityIN.org. <https://disabilityin.org/2022-dei-report/>
- McBee-Black, K., Lee, Y., Morris, K. D., & Michaelson, D. (2021). Mapping Adaptive Apparel Scholarship in the Clothing and Textile Discipline. International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings
- World Health Organization. (2022). Disability: Fact sheets. Retrieved January 16, 2023 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>